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2008 PICA AWARD WINNER

House of Learning

Harare Square, Khayelitsha, Western Cape

The House of Learning forms part of a broader intervention under the Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading Programme (VPUU) in Harare, Khayelitsha. VPUU is a partnership between the German government (German Development Bank), South African National Treasury, Provincial Government of the Western Cape, City of Cape Town, civil society organisations and the residents of Khayelitsha. The vision of the programme is to build safe, integrated communities in low-income neighbourhoods to overcome economic, cultural, social and institutional exclusion.

The House of Learning is an example of partnership approach. The City of Cape Town Library Information Services successfully accessed a grant by the Carnegie Corporation to co-fund two libraries in Khayelitsha.

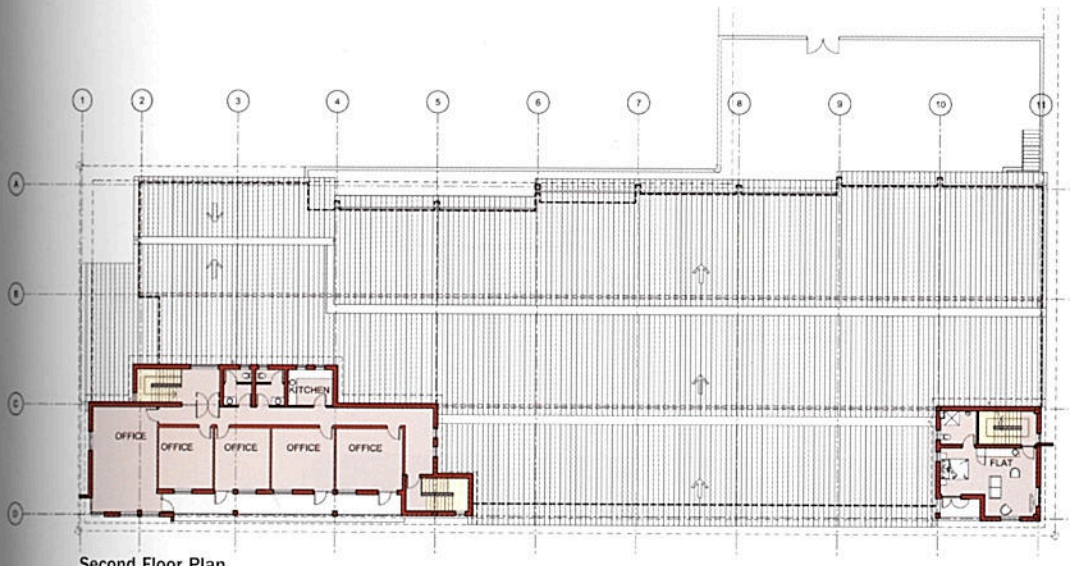
The community dialogue extended the brief from a community library into a House of Learning that would incorporate elements of learning at various stages of a person's life.

The building is the landmark civic building on Harare Square. The multifunctional use encourages long operating hours, activating the edge of the square and supporting surveillance of the entire precinct. The diverse nature of the brief allowed the generation of a multiplicity of scales and volumes, introducing a sense of topography into an otherwise fairly flat terrain.

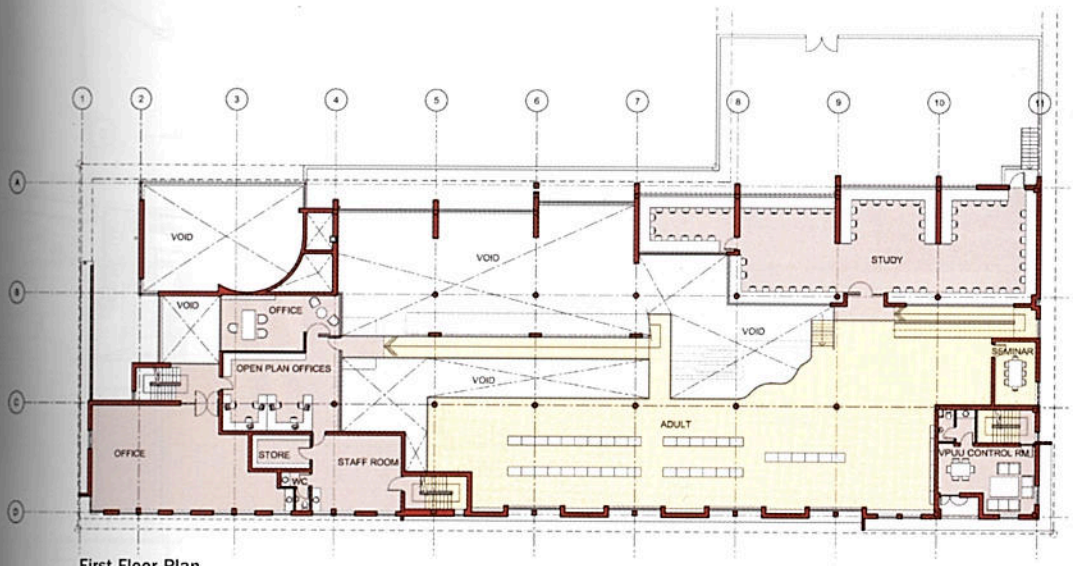
A concrete stringcourse element acts as a sunscreen to large northern windows overlooking a pedestrian walkway, where low seating and trees add to the notion of place and canopy.

The stringcourse sometimes interrupts the massing of the building to reinforce the human scale, and at other times supports it, recognis-ing the hierarchy of the public square end of the building.

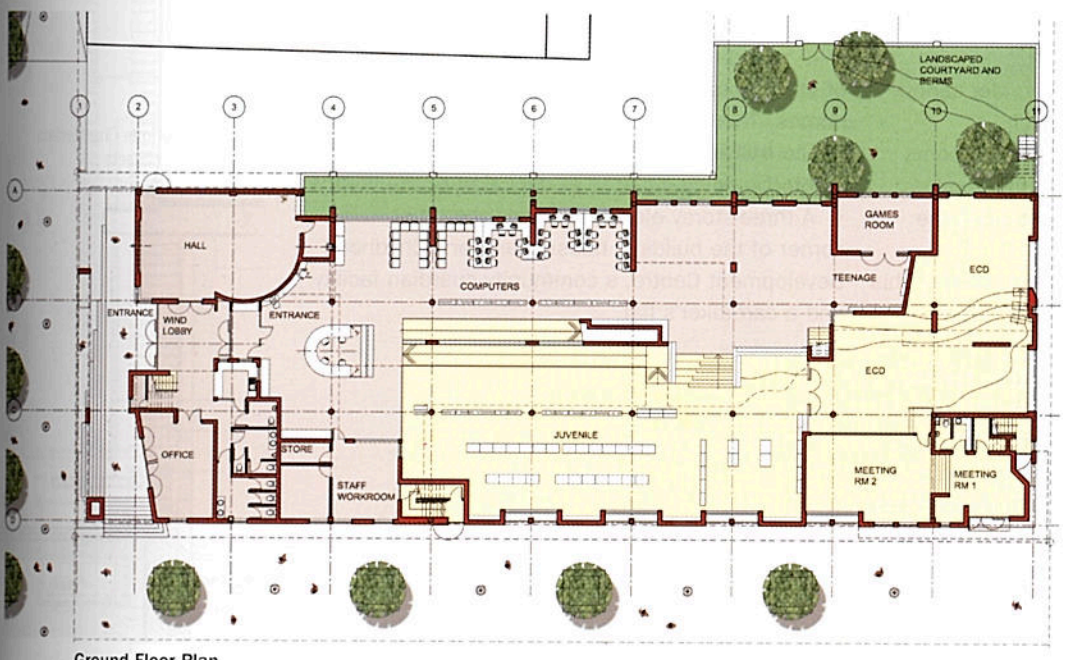
Architects: Charlotte Chamberlain Nicola Irving Architects
Project Manager: Sustainable Urban Neighbourhood
Structural Engineers: Naylor Naylor and van Schalkwyk
Mechanical Engineers: Naylor Naylor and van Schalkwyk
Electrical Engineers: 4 em Consulting for Naylor Naylor and van Schalkwyk
Landscaping: Tarna Klitzner Landcsape Architect
Quantity Surveyors: Talani Quantity Surveyors
Contractor: Stefanutti Stocks Construction
Acoustic Engineers: Mackenzie Hoy Acoustic Engineers
Interior Design: Charmaine Davenport Interior Designer
Photographers: Ashvind Beetul and Nicola Irving
Text: Nicola Irving with Michael Krause



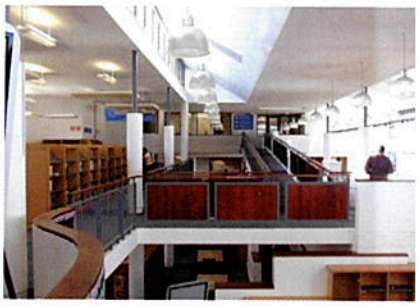
Second Floor Plan



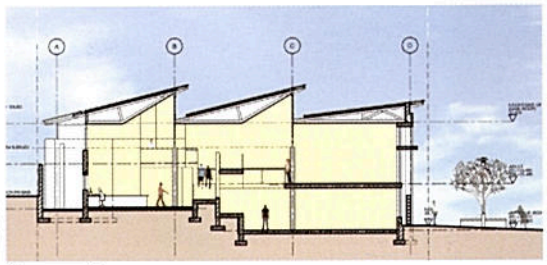
First Floor Plan



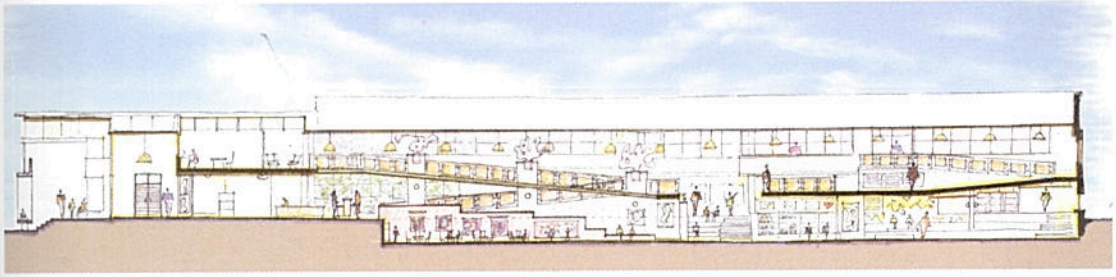
Ground Floor Plan



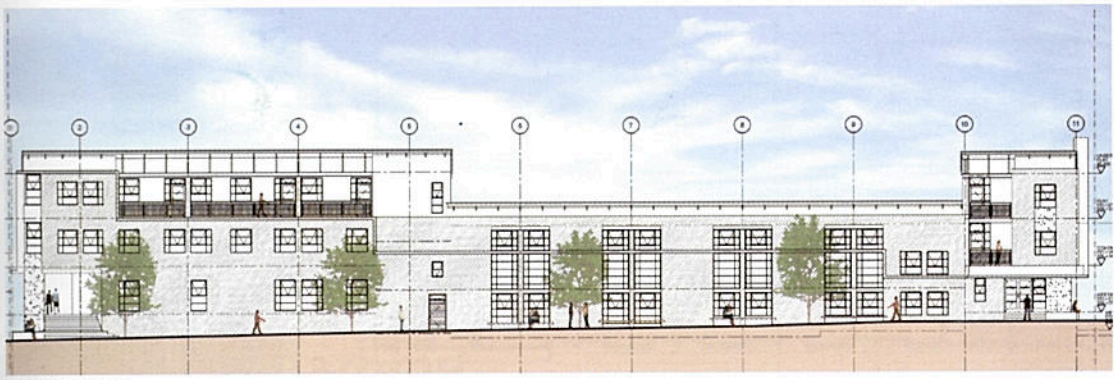
East Elevation



Cross-section



Longitudinal Section



North Elevation

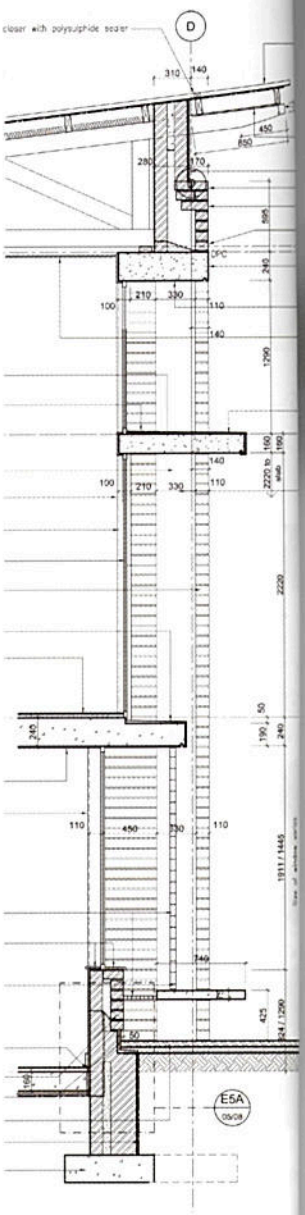
From the square, one progresses under canopy into a double-volume space from which a community hall, library, offices and classrooms are accessed. The brick paving from the square takes one into the library. This 'street' links the various areas of the library.

Direct sunlight activates the high volumes of this spine, with fin walls breaking the linear nature of the plan.

The library is seen as the 'sitting room' of the community, so care has been taken to ensure that the internal climate allows for comfort. The slabs are hydronically heated during winter via a heat pump, while the high level of internal thermal mass aids heat absorption during summer, assisted by high-level windows that can be opened for the night-flushing of hot air.

A particular need that became apparent during discussions with the community was the lack of study space for high-school learners in their homes. This resulted in a suspended box – which is acoustically and thermally designed for quiet and comfort – being situated at the heart of the library.

A three-storey element defines the other corner of the building, housing an Early Childhood Development Centre, a community guardian facility and a caretaker's flat.



Detail Section through North Wall