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a
thoroughly
modern
man.

Architect Derick Henstra's 'less is strikingly more' approach to design invariably results in award-winning contemporary classics. Phase Two of Melrose Arch is one of them.



Derick Henstra is no stranger to the lens, nor does he flinch when I rush over to powder away a gleam that's appeared on his temple this particularly muggy spring day in Cape Town. "I used to model you know, back in my varsity days – I'm used to all this," he says. Today, his black jeans and long-sleeved polo shirt create a striking foil to those signature untamed blond locks, and bathed in the photographic lights, he's just a doublet and hose away from a classic Johannes Vermeer portrait. In fact, he shares a heritage with the painter, his parents are both Dutch, and while growing up, he travelled with them to the Netherlands every few years. Derick says his design influences certainly stem largely from the European design culture as well as the modern contemporary home he grew up in. "I knew by age 13 or 14 that I loved the concept of building. I was always sketching designs, but I vacillated between becoming an architect or a vet – I'm a dog nut." After matric, Derick went to a technikon where he embarked on a course in building. "I knew after a short while that it wasn't for me. I didn't want to build other peoples buildings. My dad and I made a pact – if I completed the course, he'd pay for a degree in architecture. It was the best move. I enjoyed the tech course more since the pressure was off and I knew I wouldn't be doing it forever. When I got to the University of Cape Town (UCT), I had the practical construction background to draw on and it complimented my understanding and execution of architectural design."

Derick started dhk in 1983, barely two years after graduating. "I wasn't making any money, though. My wife was working and she put food on the table." He says it was only in 1989 that the practice could finally stand on its own two feet.

"It's more like a hobby because I love it. I live for architecture," says Derick.

With 27 years under its belt, and awards too numerous to mention, dhk has carved a niche for itself both locally and internationally. Operating from offices in Cape Town and Johannesburg, the company comprises dhk Architects – the main body, dhk Urban Concepts, focusing solely on urban design and dhk Thinkspace – the interior design arm of the group. Derick oversees each leg of the creative tripod and is the

Original artist's impression of the Melrose Arch Piazza.



The intersection of Cross and Slip Streets.

leader of a collective he cannot speak highly enough of. There's co-design director, Peter Fehrnsen as well as partners, Paul Krynauw, Peter Stokes, Renske Das and Anette Potgieter. "I largely conduct the orchestra," he says, "The symphony is a marvellous group endeavour."

Derick's approach revolves around creating clever design with a minimum of brush strokes. This comes through clearly in dhk's designs of Phase Two, Melrose Arch, which incorporates the area above Crescent Drive up to and including the Piazza. The brief from Melrose Investment Holdings was to provide a more extensive retail offering and to include a public space. "Our point of departure was to ascertain what makes a successful shopping street, so we looked at streets all over the world, tracking their lines and their flows, for instance, Oxford Street is straight, Regent Street is curved – we delved into how these paths draw people along and influence the shopper's experience. It all comes down to desire lines."

With this in mind, the dhk team allowed natural desire lines and natural view lines to determine the composition of Phase Two. "It really took its shape organically," says Derick. Slip Street with its high fashion retail outlets creates a natural movement line between the existing Melrose Square, the existing retail on High Street and the new retail precinct northwards culminating at the Melrose Piazza. A further desire line is created by the intersection of Slip Street with Cross Walk which takes pedestrians from High Street into the two-levelled Galleria which forms the traditional retail race track pedestrian route



The award-winning Galleria roof lets in light and air, thus maintaining the outdoor feel of the precinct while allowing for rainy day shopping.

from faceted performance glass and tubular steel, it keeps the rain out but allows for a natural flow of air, while reducing wind. Mounted on the office inner courtyard deck, a full level above the upper retail floor, the roof lets light in all the way down through the double volume shopping area. The design scooped the tubular structures prize in the tubular category at the 2009 Steel Awards.

Possibly dhk's most notable achievement is the creation of an entirely new section which has its own unique personality, yet remains sympathetic to the structural and material expression of Phase One, which incorporates the old Square up to Crescent Drive. The continuation of street paving patterns and materials, as well as bollards, maintains a seamless flow and holds the design as a whole together, as does the careful use of similar brick types and the blend of first world and natural materials. dhk introduced new external plastering and attractive architectural details in steel, glass and timber, lending each building a unique character, but the underlying motif remains clean, uncluttered and stylishly measured. Phase Two is definitely a class act, and a huge part of its design success is that it doesn't attempt to upstage Phase One. The Taj Hotel at Melrose Arch is just one of the new developments to look forward to.

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of shopping and leads back onto the Piazza – the nucleus of the precinct.

"Good public space is the glue that holds it all together," says Derick, who drew his inspiration for this particular space from Italian Medieval Towns, particularly Sienna, which is home to the Piazza del Campo, which lends its shape to Melrose Piazza, where colonnaded retail edges house restaurants, and subtle tiering forms an open air theatre for performing arts such as opera, music festivals and plays. Those lucky enough to work in the spaces above the retail outlets can witness the action in the Piazza from opera balconies. Ultimately, when the planned Taj Hotel is erected, the Melrose Piazza will have its own tower or *torre* just like the Del Campo.

While desire has shaped the beaten pedestrian tracks, form has followed function in the structures – and in a rather spectacular way, particularly in the design of the Galleria roof. Inspired by the Second World War Vickers Wellington Bomber, and constructed

Looking northwards over The Piazza to where the Taj Hotel and additional retail and offices are to be erected.



dhk is involved in huge master plans for large urban waterfronts in Maputo, Accra in Ghana and on the foreshore in Cape Town, as well designs for changes in the older sections of the city of Johannesburg. "There's going to be a sudden surge of development in SA – its all bottle-necked at present like corked champagne," says Derick, who by the sounds of it is going to be around for the bubbly shower. "I'll be like a Norman Foster – I don't see myself retiring, unless I lose my marbles." 🇷🇺