



Delicately restored

The new Taj Cape Town occupies a site originally housing three buildings. Its architecture echoes the delicacy, elegance and craftsmanship of the originals while still being true to its new functions, creating a synthesis between the historic fabric and contemporary interventions

The Taj Cape Town old-world luxury hotel is a combination of rich history and elegant contemporary architecture. Situated at the top of Adderley Street with direct access to the Company's Gardens and frontage onto Wale and the top of St. George's Mall, the site forms the second phase of the mixed-use Mandela Rhodes Place development, a bold urban intervention undertaken by Eurocape Holdings in joint venture with Taj Hotels. In the centre of the historic Cathedral Precinct, the Taj Cape Town occupies a site originally comprising three existing buildings, two of which are of considerable historic importance and have been incorporated largely intact. Murray & Roberts Construction was responsible for the construction, @Vantage Project Managers were the principle agents and Project Managers for the endeavour, while dhk Architects and interior designers JPA Design did the design.

Arguably the most significant building, the old Reserve Bank, was designed by notable Cape Town architect James Morris in 1932. Inspired by the Palazzo Pitti in Florence and beautifully detailed with bronze window grills and ornate front doors, this robust, well-proportioned and preserved building with its heavy rusticated base holds the corner

of St. George's Mall and Wale Street.

Many of its beautiful interior spaces, including the old Banking Hall (in the plan of a Greek cross) with barrel vaulted skylight and fluted columns, have been retained and restored as the natural focal point of the building, becoming the graceful lounge of the new hotel.

On the Adderley and Wale Street corner is the BoE Building (formally Temple Chambers). Originally completed in 1896, this building by GM Alexander underwent alterations in 1923 when a three-storey addition was made, and again between 1929 and 1931 when the building was extended laterally. It remains a largely-intact example of 1930s architecture, with an interesting fusion of styles and some fine detailing.

Conceptually, as much of the existing integrity and fabric of the two buildings has been maintained and reused, and external intervention on the facades was kept to a minimum.

The third relatively modern and unremarkable building on St. George's Mall



was demolished to make way for the small contemporary intervention which picks up on the heights of the old Reserve Bank building and neighbouring ABC building, with the rear of the historic group being demolished to provide the space for the new hotel tower at the centre of the city block.

Martin Kearns, CEO of Eurocape, said in an interview, "One of the main attractions of this superb location is the beauty of the old structures. We are preserving the historically significant parts of the building as far as possible, while still providing a modern, world-class hotel and spa experience for our guests. Leading architectural firm dhk have ensured that the project will be an exciting combination, fusing the deep historical character of the existing buildings' heritage with contemporary interior design by JPA, a Singapore based company."

The major vehicular arrival route is down Wale Street, with the main guest access through an existing entrance in the old Reserve Bank, feeding directly into the hotel reception and on into the historic Banking Hall which becomes the hotel lounge. A minimal glass-and-steel porte-cochere

constructed over the sidewalk provides weather protection and is the only intervention on this facade. Direct pedestrian access to the Banking Hall from St. George's is through the existing main entrance with the hotel reception beyond.

Service access is located on St. George's Mall through the new infill building, with vehicles approaching from Church Street. In line with sustainable principles, no attempt has been made to provide on-site parking. Parking is located in the adjacent Mandela Rhodes complex with valet service to the front door. The lift cores have been relocated to the demolished area to the rear, locating them centrally in relation to the new tower extensions and allowing many of the gracious original spaces to remain intact.

The new built insertions start with the small St. George's Mall steel and 'spider fixed' glass infill building which remains simple in architectural form. Responding to the general height datum of the podium and the proportions of adjacent historic fabric, it provides a transparent and light counterpoint to its neighbours. Above the podium level, the building steps back to form an intermediate tower before integrating with the main

60m tower, with its stepped, articulated massing forming a comfortable, non-competing backdrop to the old buildings at the street edge.

The 176-room hotel offers a selection of 11 room types, including a split level, two bedroom presidential suite and 10 heritage suites. A club floor is served by a dedicated butler team. The restored heritage buildings house 20 luxury heritage units with views of the mountain and 10 overlooking the city. The 17 tower floors accommodate rooms with panoramic views and walkout balconies. On the first floor of the BoE (Temple Chambers) are the banqueting and meeting rooms, whose magnificent interiors have been restored to their original opulence, complemented by state-of-the-art technology.

In the architectural expression, the challenge was to celebrate the old and the new equally, creating a synthesis between the historic fabric and the contemporary interventions, an architecture that echoes the delicacy, elegance and craftsmanship of the originals while being true to its new functions. The new tower is uncompromisingly contemporary, using both traditional materials, such as stone, as well as more modern steel and glass. Together, they create a delicate, layered facade that incorporates solid walls, large windows looking out over the city and towards the mountain, balconies and privacy screens, together with integrated sun control devices for environmental control.

The integrated sunscreen panels, either vertical or horizontal depending on orientation, are held within clip-on lattice frames, and together with

the balconies provide sun shading to the glass facades of the tower while breaking up and animating the facade. These highly articulated and layered facades complement, rather than contrast with, the existing buildings.

The hotel also houses two world-class gourmet restaurants on the ground floor, which will serve to further enhance active street edges and enliven the public realm. Additional facilities include cocktail lounges and bars, 24-hour concierge, full room service and housekeeping, business conference facilities, and stylish and select international retail opportunities. The hotel also offers access to a health and beauty spa, swimming pool, gym and wellness centre. Together the old and the new combine to create a harmonious composition at once comfortable in its historic setting while injecting new life into the expanded Cathedral precinct and Gardens node. 

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