

Art house

The Norval Foundation, a world-class art and cultural centre in the Steenberg area in Cape Town, was designed by dhk to strike a balance between protecting the artwork within and maximising the views of the natural landscape outside.

PHOTOGRAPHY DAVE SOUTHWOOD

The site of the Norval Foundation - on the slopes of the Constantiaberg Mountains, originally a farm dating back to the 17th century - is set against a backdrop of vineyards and a conservation area. It was envisioned by the architects as a modern pavilion for art in this dramatic landscape.

It has been designed to turn its back to a neighbouring US consulate complex and nearby residential estates, so that the galleries and public spaces face the natural landscape. This enables the structure to capture framed views of the wetland, vineyards and mountains beyond.

The Norval Foundation is a pure expression of form. It stands as a bold rectangular mass, delineating its heavy, walled enclosure and light, over-sailing roof. The materials palette is raw and honest, consisting primarily of pre-cast concrete, natural timber, granite and glass - thereby providing a contrast with the natural landscape.

Clerestory windows allow the roof to float above the heavy walls, like the lid of a box concealing treasures within, and allow soft, indirect, natural light to penetrate the interior spaces.

Externally, the pre-cast concrete is finished with a chamfered tartan grid, which draws the eye upwards and lengthways, and emphasises the scale of the building. Internally, timber panelling is used to bring warmth to the spaces.

The building sits in an elevated position and shields the wetland, creating a private space for the sculpture park. In this way, it forms an inhabited threshold between public and private zones.

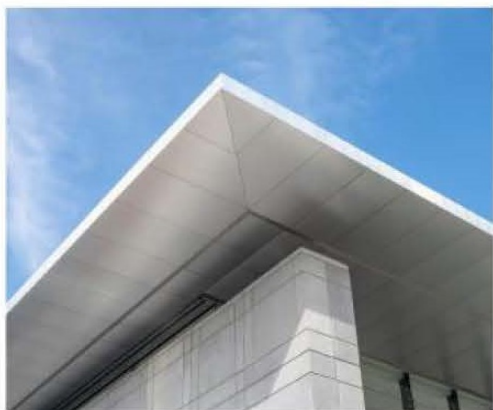
A triple-volume atrium establishes a deliberate visual connection between these zones - one urban, the other natural - and provides a physical transition between these contrasting environments.

One's arrival at the Norval Foundation is experienced in a linear sequence. A curved wall that extends into the entrance court draws visitors past the double-volume restaurant and gallery shop, and into the generous reception area. This area directs guests to the central atrium and introduces the main galleries.

A terrace along the length of the building incorporates a timber deck serving the restaurant, and connects to walkways on either side that lead into the sculpture park.

The grounds also include an amphitheatre, a children's playground and a picnic area.





Opposite page A curved wall extends into the entrance court and draws visitors past the double-volume restaurant and gallery shop, and into the reception while a terrace along the length of the building incorporates a timber deck serving the restaurant, and also connecting to walkways that lead into the sculpture park.

This page, clockwise from top The building sits in an elevated position and shields the wetland, creating a private space for the sculpture park; the galleries and public spaces face the natural landscape, capturing framed views of the wetland, vineyards and mountains beyond; clerestory windows allow soft indirect natural light to penetrate the interior spaces while floating above the heavy walls, like the lid of a box of treasures.