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NORVAL FOUNDATION

WESTLAKE, CAPE TOWN



## PROJECT FEATURE

# THE NORVAL FOUNDATION

**THE NORVAL FOUNDATION**  
Westlake, Cape Town

**CLIENT**  
Norval Foundation

**ARCHITECTS**  
dhk

**QUANTITY SURVEYORS**  
NWS Quantity Surveyors

**TOWN PLANNERS**  
Planning Partners

**STRUCTURAL, CIVIL, MECHANICAL,  
FIRE & WET SERVICES**  
Ekcon Consulting Engineers

**ELECTRICAL ENGINEERS**  
Converge Consulting

**ELECTRONIC ENGINEERS**  
Delpont DuPreez & Associates

**ACOUSTIC CONSULTANT**  
Subsonic Designs

**INTERIOR DESIGNER**  
Reddeco (Restaurant and Bar)

**LANDSCAPING**  
Keith Kirsten Horticulture International

**ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANTS**  
Ecosense

**LAND SURVEYOR**  
Tony Vroom

**LIGHTING CONSULTANTS**  
Pamboukian lightdesign

**FRESHWATER ECOLOGISTS**  
Freshwater Consulting

**INTERIOR DESIGNER**  
SpaceLIFT & Black Canvas (Gallery Shop)

**MAIN CONTRACTOR**  
WBHO Construction

**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Dave Southwood  
Wieland Gleich (Bottom of Page 38)

The Norval Foundation was envisioned by the architects as a modern pavilion for art, set against a dramatic mountain and vineyard landscape

The Norval Foundation opened to the public on 28 April 2018 - a multi-sensory celebration of art, architecture and landscape. The project provided a unique opportunity for the architects through a client brief with the aspiration to create a world class art and cultural centre in an exceptional location that would be open to the public.

dhk was initially approached by Louis Norval in 2011 to design an art gallery and sculpture park on a neglected agricultural site in Steenberg, Cape Town. A lengthy approvals process in effect put the design process on hold for several years, culminating in rezoning approval in 2015. This also coincided with a change in aspiration for the project and the brief for a world class facility to exhibit local and international visual art was launched.

The Norval family are the founders and initial funders of the foundation, whose vision is to create a self-sustainable centre for the arts with the support of future donors. Designed to international standards it is expected to become a significant space for art both in South Africa and globally.

### Location and Site

The Norval Foundation is located in the Steenberg area on the slopes of the Constantiaberg Mountain, surrounded by vineyards and residential estates. The site is bounded by Steenberg Road on its northeast boundary, by the vineyards of Steenberg Farm and











**EAST ELEVATION**

Silwersteen residential estate on its north western boundary, and by a conservation area on its south eastern boundary. Opposite the property is the US Consulate complex and Reddam House School, with various other residential estates in the surrounding area. Access to the site is via Steenberg Road, an important local distributor road and part of the scenic drive network which carries high volumes of traffic.

The original farm dates back to the 17th century, and was known as Klein Steenberg. In 1959 a poultry farm was established on the site, until its closure in 2002 and the foundations of the demolished hen houses were still visible on the site. Various small scale commercial enterprises operated in the farm buildings, but were no longer in use by the time the site was acquired by the client in 2011.

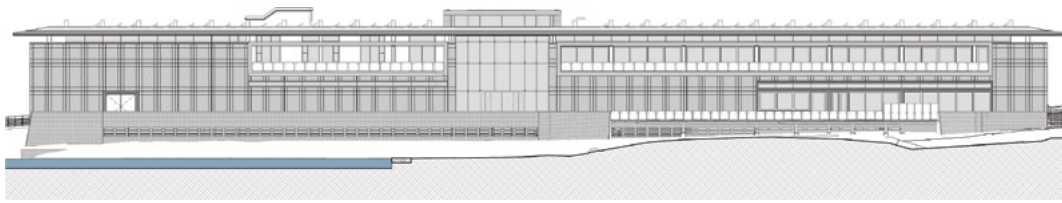
### **Wetland and Landscaping**

The site was quite wild when the project started and numerous snakes were caught and released. A porcupine continued to visit the site throughout the construction process, eating newly planted bulbs much to the landscape designer's frustration. A pair of spotted eagle owls reside in the oaks trees near the original farm house.

The site incorporates an incredibly sensitive existing wetland ecosystem that had been historically neglected. The wetland was completely rehabilitated, with alien species removed and embankments shaped to improve the water course. The wetland and its surrounding buffer zones have been revived and replanted with locally indigenous fynbos, enhanced by other indigenous plants and naturalised species, and has already attracted a multitude of insects and birds onto the site.







**WEST ELEVATION**

The wetland is also one of the last known breeding sites of the Western Leopard Toad, an endangered species. In order to allow the toads' safe passage, concrete culverts were constructed underneath the road, and the slope of embankments carefully designed to allow the toads to traverse them. Earth ramps were also incorporated on the upper reaches of the estate to allow the toads to move easily to the breeding ponds.

The extensive rehabilitation programme was well established by the time the art gallery opened.

#### **Design Concept**

The Norval Foundation was envisioned by the architects as a modern pavilion for art, set against a dramatic mountain and vineyard landscape. It is a pure expression of form; a bold rectangular mass,

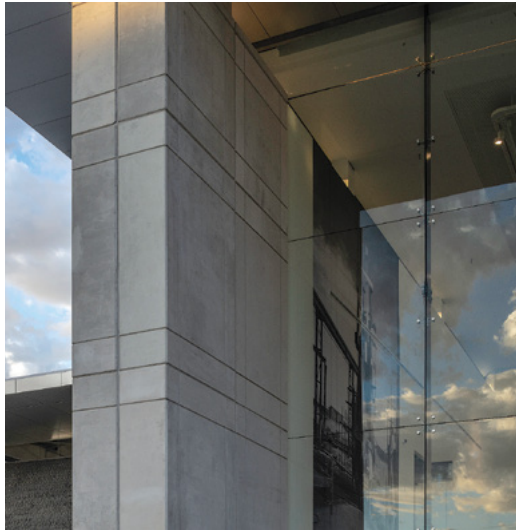
delineating its heavy walled enclosure and light, over-sailing roof.

The building is constrained by the linear site, between a busy road and an existing wetland; turning its back to a neighbouring embassy compound. The linear circulation spine is positioned along this edge, with the galleries and public spaces facing the natural landscape, capturing framed views of the wetland, vineyards and mountains beyond.

The building sits in an elevated position, and shields the wetland, creating a private space for the sculpture park and 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.







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 the gallery shop and into the generous reception which calmly directs guests to the central atrium that introduces the main galleries. A terrace along the western 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, children's playground, and picnic area.

The gallery spaces comprise a large environmentally-controlled exhibitions space, and a series of six small galleries, culminating in a triple volume sculpture gallery - a dramatic setting for large scale pieces with Table Mountain as a backdrop. All of the gallery spaces are column free, allowing for maximum flexibility in displaying all forms of art and they can be treated as separate experiences or create a sequential journey.

The very specific technical requirements for the gallery spaces in terms of environment control take into account careful control of light, temperature







and humidity, acoustics and fire prevention. To create the minimal spaces required for the display of art, all of the services are concealed in the wall and ceiling cavities to create a seamless appearance.

The programme further dictates the building form, which is split vertically between the ground floor galleries and public spaces, and the first floor where the more private spaces are found; offices, library, bar, a further gallery space and artist's residence. Art storage vaults are positioned below ground level, with the highest level of security as well as state of the art temperature and humidity

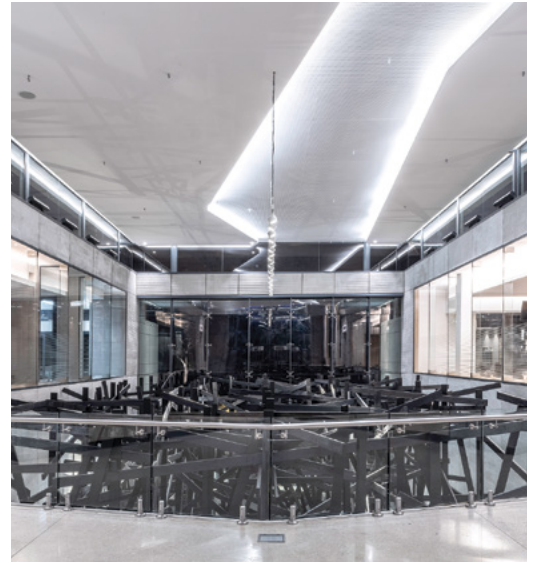
control. In addition to 32 parking bays at grade, minibus drop off and a tour bus embayment, there are 124 parking bays below ground, with 8 bays set aside for electric car charging stations. A LPR parking payment system was specified.

#### Sustainability

In addition to the rehabilitated wetland and indigenous landscaped sculpture park, sustainability features include solar photovoltaic panels on the roof, a building management system to optimise performance, water saving measures,







grey water purification system, return of storm water to the wetland system, and energy efficient glazing and solar shading on the façade. Wherever possible, natural light to the internal spaces has been maximised, with large full height and clerestory windows throughout, with the exception of certain galleries, further reducing energy requirements.

#### Materials

The material palette is raw and honest, primarily pre-cast concrete, natural timber, granite and

glass. These materials provide contrast with the natural landscape, and take inspiration from the work of Tadao Ando. The clerestory windows allow the roof to float above the heavy walls, like the lid of a box concealing treasures within and allowing soft indirect natural light to penetrate the interior spaces.

Externally, the precast 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 architectural design strikes a balance between two motivations: to protect the artwork within, and maximise the views to the outside, in a rational response to the specific context and the functional requirements of the brief.

#### The Skotnes Restaurant

Name after renowned South African artist Cecil Skotnes, The Skotnes Restaurant, along with its upstairs bar and conference space, was designed by Reddeco and takes advantage of the amazing views of Table Mountain and the surrounding fynbos

belt. The design of the restaurant interior was created by approaching it as a minimalist exhibition space. The restaurant becomes an extension of the gallery and respects the architecture of its host building. Furniture pieces and lighting are designed and selected to become sculptural pieces within the space. South African industrial and furniture designers were supported in this regard.

The 'Amoeba Chandelier' by Ashlee Lloyd was commissioned as a feature installation piece and was inspired by the contours of the surrounding mountain range and geography of the area.











This Spread:  
The Skotnes Restaurant

Art pieces by Cecil Skotnes were specifically selected to be showcased in the interior. The texture and delicate nature of the fynbos also inspired the selection of material finishes, upholstery and floating laser-cut timber ceiling panels, which generates a layer of warmth within the otherwise minimalist space.

Kumalo and Ezrom Legae, shown alongside an exhibition of Edoardo Villa. Serge Alain Nitegeka was commissioned to create an immersive installation in building's atrium, and the other inaugural exhibitions include Spectrality, Sorcery and the Spirit; Pulling at Threads and US, THEM & I.

### Art and Exhibitions

The Norval Foundation is the custodian of the Edoardo Villa Estate Collection, the Alexis Preller Archive and contemporary art collections, and also hosts the Gerard Sekoto Foundation.

The Homestead Art Collection, housed at the foundation, is one of the leading collections of 20th-century South African art assembled by the Norval family over the past two decades. The collection includes work by artists such as Deborah Bell, Peter Clarke, Dumile Feni, Sydney Kumalo, Maggie Laubser, Ezrom Legae, Trevor Makhoba, John Muafangejo, George Pemba, Alexis Preller, Gerard Sekoto, Cecil Skotnes, Irma Stern, Edoardo Villa and Anton van Wouw. It also incorporates Bruce Campbell Smith's Revisions Collection and a significant collection of publications on South African art.

In addition to the sculpture garden, the foundation hosted three opening exhibitions. The first, Re/discovery and Memory features major retrospectives of the work of both Sydney

