



**Location:** Battery Park, Dock Road, V&A Waterfront, Cape Town.  
**Client & Developer:** V&A Waterfront  
**Size:** +- 1.2ha  
**Timeline:** 10 months  
**Cost:** +- R4 2 million

# PROJECT ONE BATTERY PARK

Battery Park is the new 1.2-hectare urban park situated at a key entranceway to one of Africa's most visited tourist destinations, the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town. This site has been developed as the nucleus of a rather exciting and larger urban vision for the district. dhk Architects completes this inspiring urban park that references the historic Amsterdam Battery. Planning Partners developed the landscaping design with implementation by Contours Landscaping (commercial division).

## The Site

This site includes a park and piazza that effectively conceal a 1 206-bay parking facility as well as new pedestrian routes to invigorate the precinct with activity. The site is of archaeological importance as it contains the remnants of one of the city's oldest structures, coastal fortification the Amsterdam Battery. This provided a unique opportunity for architecture and urban design firm dhk – to pay homage to the historic landmark whilst incorporating a parking facility and providing spaces for leisure and recreational activities.

The project forms part of an urban design framework created by dhk for the V&A's previously underutilised Canal District that facilitates the reconnection of the historical city centre and De Waterkant to the V&A. The aim was to create a publicly accessible park which lies at the nexus of a multitude of new pedestrian routes stitching the new district into the surrounding urban fabric and thereby helping to invigorate the area.

The Amsterdam Battery was erected by the Dutch along Cape Town's coastline in 1784 to defend the city from seaborne and land attacks. In the 1800s the building was used to house prisoners; and was later remodelled and strengthened by the British but eventually abandoned. In 1905 the battery was largely demolished to make way for railway connections to the port, leaving behind only a small portion of its rear curved walls. The historical remnants are now perched eight metres above the new canal running through the site at a lower level.

Following on From The Site's Original Footprint During construction of Battery Park, archaeological excavations revealed former datums which were used to inform the design. The raised park has been kept at the battery's original inner courtyard level whilst planted edges above retail units on the piazza represent the estimated natural ground level that fronted the battery. Various architectural and landscaped elements reflect the structure's original footprint, such as semi-circular curved pathways, concrete additions to the rear ramparts, splayed canal-facing walls and concrete-clad structures - giving visitors an authentic sense of the battery's former size. An axial visual connection to Cape Town's Noon Gun on Signal Hill has also been retained, thus preserving the site's historic sightline.

The requirement to respect the original inner courtyard datum and create a lower-level piazza





Planting list

- *Arctotis acaulis* 'Pink'
- *Asparagus densiflorus* 'Mazeppa'
- *Carissa macrocarpa* 'Green Carpet'
- *Diets grandiflora*
- *Tulbaghia violacea*
- *Agothosma ovata*
- *Aloe arborescens*
- *Aloe ferox*
- *Bulbine frutescens*
- *Euryops pectinatus*
- *Helichrysum petiolare*
- *Kniphofia uvaria*
- *Metalasia muricata*
- *Pelargonium betulinum*
- *Plumbago auriculata*
- *Searsia crenata*
- *Strelitzia reginae*
- *Watsonia pyramidalis*
- *Pelargonium peltatum*
- *Gazania rigens*
- *Helichrysum teritifolium*
- *Dymondia*
- *Acmadenia mundiana*
- *Agathosma apiculata*
- *Agathosma capensis*
- *Agathosma ovata*
- *Asparagus densiflorus mazeppa*
- *Athanasia dentata*
- *Blechnum gibbum glabrum*
- *Chasmanthe floribunda*
- *Cineraria saxifraga*
- *Cotyledon orbiculata*
- *Coleonema pulchellum*
- *Crocasmia aurea*
- *Elegia tectorum*
- *Eriocephalus africanus*
- *Erica baccans*
- *Erica baueri white*
- *Erica discolor*
- *Erica versicolor*
- *Euryops virgineus*
- *Felicia echinata*
- *Helichrysum cymosum*
- *Kniphofia praecox*
- *Lampranthus hoerleinianus*
- *Lampranthus specabilis*
- *Leucospermum cordifolium*
- *Leonotis leonorus*
- *Osteospermum moniflora*
- *Phylla ericoides*
- *Portulacaria afra*
- *Plectranthus neochillus*
- *Rumohra adianthiformis*
- *Salvia africana lutea*
- *Senecio elegans*
- *Thamnochortus insignis*
- *Watsonia barbonica*

Tree List:

- *Syzigium guineense*
- *Brachylaena discolor*
- *Tarchonanthus camphoratus*
- *Ekebergia capensis*
- *Ilex mitis*
- *Syzigium guineense*
- *Vachellia xanthophloea*
- *Sideroxylon inerme*
- *Celtis Africana*



resulted in an elevated park with views across the V&A and CBD but with the challenge of managing the transition between the two levels. Therefore, a large part of Battery Park’s design concept was manifested in breaking the barrier between the park and piazza and bringing them closer to one another. As a result, the park level has been designed to gradually lower towards the canal edge providing a closer connection to the piazza, and in turn, the piazza gradually steps down towards the canal. The vision was to create scale between the two levels and provide visual cues to visitors; offering a glimpse of the park while they meander along the canal edge. This was also achieved by means of various soft and hard landscaping elements such as a grand concrete staircase leading from the piazza to the park, sloping and folding walls, and plants to draw the eye to the park above.

The Elevated Park Level

On the elevated park level, visitors can explore landscaped gardens with trees and stone-clad planters, meandering walkways with built-in benches, a concrete skatepark, basketball court and new pedestrian routes. Throughout the park and piazza cantilevered steel pergolas scale the design and provide much-needed shade.

The Lower Piazza Level

The lower piazza level contains 11 boutique retail units that line the splayed canal-facing walls and form an active eastern edge to the new canal pedestrian route. The intention behind the piazza was to activate the canal via a range of water sports and provide a link between the V&A and the CBD - encouraging a pedestrianised environment. Referencing the battery’s original façade, loosely packed stone-filled gabion walls shroud the parking facility and stone-clad planters contain fynbos and waterwise plants. All stone used throughout the park and piazza was excavated from the site during the construction process. These antiquated elements juxtapose contemporary insertions that reference the battery rather than replicate its heritage.

The Materials

The materials palette includes a selection of hardy materials that suit the robust nature of the park, namely, concrete, stone and steel. Concrete was chosen as a “material of our time” for new structures as it can be clearly distinguished from historic elements, ensuing little misinterpretation. A precast concrete panel structure dubbed the interpretation pavilion has been built to the estimated height of the battery’s original walls and links the park, piazza

and parking facility via internal elevators. To resemble cannon embrasures, three small openings form part of the structure’s canal-facing wall. Historic cannons from Amsterdam Battery found scattered throughout the V&A by the Cannon Association of South Africa and preserved for the development of the park are now on display inside the interpretation pavilion. The artefacts sit on top of precast concrete plinths, made to resemble old timber cannon carriages, allowing them to protrude through the embrasures and overlook the canal.

Director at dhk and lead architect on the project Pierre Swanepoel says, “The intention was to facilitate a new hub of activity within the V&A district whilst being respectful to the heritage of the Amsterdam Battery, once a place of exclusion and incarceration, but now a public space designed to support and engage the greater Cape Town community”.



SUPPLIERS

**Nurseries:**  
New Plant - 044 889 0055  
Nonke Plants - 021 887 6972  
Trees SA- 021 842 0003  
Just Trees - 021 871 1595

**Turin Benches and Drinking Fountain:**  
WilsonStone = 021 701 7655

**Lighting:**  
Regent Lighting Solutions - 021 552 7622

**Artificial Lawn:**  
Belgotex Grass - 033 897 7500

**Bera Edging:**  
BERA - 0834493954

**Pavers & Cobble Edging:**  
Revelstone - 021 761 9739

**Irrigation:**  
Rain Bird

**Bins and Housing:**

**Cycle Track:**

**Wooden Elements:**

**Pony Rockers:**

**Photographer:**  
Dave Southwood & Theo Gutter



Planning Partner’s Project Landscape Architect, Alistair Turrell, explains that their brief was to create an urban park, on top of a parking garage, that recognises and respects the remnants of the surviving battery rampart walls, situated in a key junction and arrival point to the V&A Waterfront. The key goals of this undertaking were to not only highlight the historical significance of this colonial part of Cape Town’s history, but to activate and revitalise this important part of the City and the V&A Waterfront.

As previously stated, Battery Park sits prominently in a precinct which stitches together the V&A Waterfront and the city of Cape Town and provides a pause point for pedestrians along this major circulation route. It was therefore important to provide a tranquil people friendly landscaped space to entice visitors to experience and interact with the park space.

The surviving battery walls form a fantastic backdrop to the park, the mountain, city scape and Signal Hill completing this vista. The park flows from the historic walls towards the active canal edge.

Hard landscape responses

The level of the landscaped park was dictated by the one remaining gateway, more importantly the two curved granite gate travellers with steel inserts. The paved

park walkways are all set to this level. Paving design was conceptualised and detailed by dhk Architects and materials (as before mentioned) are sympathetic to the historic context while remaining durable and appropriate.

The lawn terraces and embankments within the two remaining walls were formed to respect and roughly portray the original profile, a level portion on the inward side and a symbolic earth berm to illustrate the location and thickness of the original defensive edge.

An intact British period clay brick channel was uncovered adjacent to the inner walls, these beautiful findings have been celebrated as the edge between the level lawned area and the walls and also act as conveyors of storm water.

The hard landscape design further responds to the curvature of the remnant walls by creating pathways which run directly adjacent, allowing visitors access to the hewn stone inner walls. This pathway extends as a faceted walkway over the multi-purpose lawn area to indicate the original outline of the demolished structure as a memory line.


A gun platform was uncovered by the archaeologists and many designs ideas were tabled to include this in the landscape, but being from a very early Dutch period, it was much lower than current levels and it proved impossible to display, and as such it was

MEET THE TEAM


**Architects:** dhk Architects (Pierre Swanepoel, Martin Lardner-Burke, Theo Gutter)

**Landscape Architect:** Planning Partners (Alistair Turrell)

PLANNING PARTNERS  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS



**Landscape Contractor:** Contours Landscapes (commercial division)



**Irrigation Design:** Controlled Irrigation

documented and covered over, left intact. A historic canon will be informally placed in the position to commemorate the location.

It is important to understand that a large portion the park occurs over the parking garage slab – making soil depths a challenge, planters were designed to provide enough growing medium by raising them in places to create soil depth. These planters are dressed in hand hewn ‘Blue Stone’ in sympathy with the historic nature of the precinct.

The park has been designed to provide a diverse range of amenity and has been activated with the inclusion of sports facilities situated in the south eastern portion of the park, namely a multipurpose ball sports facility (basketball/5’s a side soccer) and a skatepark designed by California Skate Parks.

A level lawn area provides the canvas for a range of uses including informal football games, an open -air theatre, summer markets, exhibitions and passive recreation. The space provides a welcome respite in this urban node.

Soft Landscaping responses

In the context of the Park’s fortified history, it is a lot more ‘green’ than what one would have found at a military, war machine. The philosophy was to avoid recreating the original, instead a lush green landscape on the roof and in pockets along the canal edge was created.





The multi-purpose open lawn area is located over parking garage slab on the north west. Locally indigenous fynbos shrubs and ground covers are planted in the raised stone walled planters referred to above, creating a showcase of the Cape's beautiful flora.

No trees are planted over the 'slab portion' of the roof as soil depths do not allow this. Trees form an integral part of any park, without the wonderful shade and other microclimatic improvements, the space will be hostile to any user. Indigenous trees are situated in natural ground areas, beyond the slab, towards the surviving battery walls. A combination of extra-large specimen trees and smaller tree sizes gives a sense of a semi-established garden.



Trees are planted well clear of the historic remnants to prevent root damage and will be pruned up to allow clear views of the walls. The symbolic earth berm has been planted with low shrubs and groundcovers, all with non-aggressive roots.

On the canal level, raised tree planters with integrated seating along the generous promenade provide shade and spaces for people to pause, meet and eat.

Suspended gabion walls designed by dhk Architects form part of the building façade and these have been planted with fast-growing creepers which will add a layer of vertical greening.



#### ABOUT DHK ARCHITECTS:

**dhk**

dhk has a firmly established reputation as a design led multi-disciplinary studio which incorporates architecture, urban design, landscape design and interior design. More than 130 people contribute to the success of the company across these disciplines making dhk one of the largest architectural practices in Sub-Saharan Africa. dhk's integrated approach to design in the built environment, coupled with innovative solutions, has garnered international recognition with projects spanning four continents and offices in Cape Town and Johannesburg.