

NATIONAL TREASURY

Cape Town has gained another major cultural asset in the form of the *new Norval Foundation*, a remarkable destination *museum of art*

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To try to express the magnitude of the Mother City's new Norval Foundation in Tokai by simply cataloguing its many parts would be doing a great disservice to the whole. It's not simply a high-profile art museum adjoining a sculpture garden, restaurant and bar, amphitheatre, gift shop and research library. There is something much bigger and more significant at play here: a unifying thread rooted in custodianship and conservation – of art, of nature and of heritage.

It's a cultural and ecological sanctuary of sorts, and you sense this from the moment you step inside the foundation's monumental pavilion, flanked on one side by the urban whirl of a main road and the other by the surprising stillness of a revived wetland. 'When I visited for the first time, there was something about the lay of the land and the sensitivity of the building that struck me,' says Elana Brundyn, Norval Foundation's executive director. It was enough to pull her in – straight off the back of years spent preparing for the launch of Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (MOCAA) in the Silo District of the V&A Waterfront – to help local businessman Louis Norval realise his dream of making art more accessible to the public.

In line with this vision, everything about the design of the institution is geared towards facilitating a positive visitor experience – one that's as relaxed and inclusive as it is empowering. As chief curator Owen Martin puts it, 'Every step of the way, the public must feel like they are being enabled to engage with what's in front of them.'

A solid, rectilinear concrete form was dhk Architects' response to the challenge of crafting a space of international standing that also champions absolute simplicity, so as not to overwhelm the senses. Walls of glass enclose both ends,

lending a feeling of openness to the structure and inviting in wetland and mountain views as a constant reminder of the setting.

Within, an intuitive, linear layout guides guests past the shop and eatery into the triple-volume atrium, and on through eight purpose-built exhibition venues (a ninth sits upstairs). The last of the lot, the 10m-high Gallery 8, is the climactic showpiece of the museum. 'It's just incredible,' says Brundyn. 'There's never been a gallery of its scale here before.'

This means that Norval Foundation can display iconic sculptural works that no other museum in the country is equipped to exhibit. In fact, familiarising audiences with the lesser-known riches in Africa's cultural vaults is part of the foundation's exhibition strategy. 'We're aware that art history has been written from a specific perspective, so we consider how we can add another lens to it,' says Martin, referencing the opening retrospective show featuring work by Sydney Kumalo and Ezrom Legae.

While the focus of the foundation – which is fortunate enough to have access to the Norval family's extensive Homestead Collection, alongside the estates of Alexis Preller, Gerard Sekoto and Edoardo Villa – is on 20th- and 21st-century art from South Africa and Africa, its scope will extend beyond this to incorporate international works that relate to the local context. Patrons can also expect the exhibitions to change over time, which, next to a curated programme of talks, workshops and live music, makes for an intriguing, evolving offering worth a second visit.

The almost 4ha sculpture garden, on the other hand, will remain fairly permanent. Stretching out alongside the children's playground, this open-air gallery tucks towering▷



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The opening exhibition in Norval Foundation's triple-volume Gallery 8 in Tokai, Cape Town, showcases works produced by the late Edoardo Villa between 1958 and 1968. The highlight of the show is his colossal steel

works by the likes of Wim Botha, Brett Murray and William Kentridge in and among the reeds and slopes of the wetland. It's a delicate merging of art and nature that delights at every turn, transforming a simple stroll or picnic into an other-worldly adventure.

Gazing out over this scene, and directly connected to it by way of a sizeable deck, is the Skotnes Restaurant. Named, of course, after the great Cecil Skotnes, the contemporary space does for small-scale farmers and boutique wineries what the museum does for artists: support and nurture their craft, the results of which are turned into a menu that's at once familiar and imaginative. 'I have started delving into South Africa's culinary heritage,' explains executive chef Phil de Villiers, the man formerly behind acclaimed steakhouse Primal Eatery. 'I believe that presenting guests with a version of the flavours they grew up with evokes memories that make dishes taste even better.' It's an approach that puts mains such as confit duck leg with umngusho and sweetcorn risotto with braaiid corn on the dinner table – local masterpieces of their own kind.

Though not part of the same physical space, the Skotnes Bar upstairs is a natural extension of the restaurant. Chic and moody, it is prime sundowner real estate. 'I imagine it as one of those places where artists and art lovers get together to talk, like a breeding ground for ideas,' says Brundyn. 'I love that concept. I hope it becomes that.' □ norvalfoundation.org dhk.co.za



LEISURE pinpoint



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'City of Moscow' mohair tapestry by William Kentridge and Marguerite Stephens; another Edoardo Villa sculpture, 'Industrial Figure'; Kenridge and Gerhard Marx's steel 'Fire Walker' commands attention in the sculpture garden; Igshaan Adams' 'The Path of the Upright'; 'Form Ephemeral VII' by Serge Alain Nitegeka; chief curator Owen Martin; Brett Murray's 'Again Again' in bronze; 'Volition' by Michele Mathison.

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Buttons and bugle beads make up most of US artist Nick Cave's 'Soundsuit'; moss-green upholstery in the Skotnes Restaurant speaks to the natural palette outside, visible through expansive glass panes; a deceptively dessert-resembling starter on the restaurant's menu: duck-liver parfait, Cape vintage and plum jelly; and mosbolletjie toast; a view of the foundation's main building from the sculpture garden.





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Wim Botha's 'Prism (Flush)' installation looks right at home amid the indigenous vegetation of the rehabilitated wetland; executive director Elana Brundyn stands next to Edoardo Villa's 'Homage to Maillol'; 'Riding the Bull I' by Speelman Mahlangu, Japie se Gunsteling: roasted naartjie, marmalade caramel, burnt honey and macadamia ice cream dessert; an installation view of the Edoardo Villa opening exhibition; panels from Cecil Skotnes' 'The Progression'; a main feature in the chic upstairs Skotnes Bar; 'Mother and Child' by Villa; Serge Alain Nitegeka's monumental 'Structural Response III' installation fills the museum's atrium; visitors immerse themselves in the work in order to pass through to the other gallery spaces.

