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Incorporating Urban Management

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INSPIRATION

CLASSIC REVIVALS MAKES A STRONG URBAN STATEMENT

The retail showroom of Classic Revivals, furniture designers and manufacturers of note, has relocated to the largely residential suburb of Parktown North, Johannesburg. The building is a 'recycled' suburban house and, although it has been converted into a commercial enterprise, it retains a residential flavour, on the one hand, and makes a strong, interesting, urban statement, on the other. It is almost bound to become known as the 'Classic Revivals Corner' located, as it is, at the intersection of the two through-roads, 1st Avenue West and 7th Avenue, and because it is not easily forgotten.

In the *Urban Green File's* opinion, one of the most striking and memorable aspects of this 'corner development' has been the retention and positioning, in relation to the showroom and the 'marketing tower', of the magnificent old tree aloe, *Aloe barberiae*, which has been in full flower for a number of months this winter. Another important feature is that the whole site is open and can be appreciated by the passer-by. It is a truly public space.

The property has an interesting history, as it belonged to Jimmy Green who founded the Jimmy Green School of Swimming there and was considered to be, according to Astrid Rech of Classic Revivals, the father of swimming in South Africa. He was the first person to teach the 'crawl'

stroke in South Africa and he was invited to teach the famous Johnny Weismuller, the original Tarzan, the crawl stroke in the USA. His daughter Jill-Mary Stagmann took over his teaching role, and she sold the house that she was born in to the Rechs, owners of Classic Revivals, in the winter of 1999. The Rech brothers come from a long line of Italian artists and craftsmen and the family immigrated to South Africa in the early '50s.

The architect of the Classic Revivals building is Gardiol Bergenthuin and she explains her design motivation as follows: "The found object was an overgrown old house with two huge pools belonging to South Africa's oldest swimming school. The old had to be wrapped by a new façade and I felt that this new 'dreamcoat' had to symbolise the ancient (the classic). The obvious would have been to create another Roman palazzo, with doric columns et al, but I wanted to delve deeper, to look at the forms of even more ancient buildings.

"I chose the wedge shape to form the 'wrap'. It is a prehistoric form and is used here interspersed with practical showroom glazing. The Italian inspiration of the Castelvecchio Museum in Verona – an ancient castle with contemporary minimalist overlay of exhibition methods – confirmed my ideas of the spark created by contrasting old and new. Thus: an ancient wrap with a minimalist 'earthy' interior, forming an ideal contrasting backdrop to the highly refined, hand-made furniture.

"The traffic corner is a magnificent marketing location and I had to use it to the best advantage. I decided to use a tower on this corner. The tower is also a very old form symbolising possession and protection throughout the ages. Here it is used as a marketing trick, always exhibiting a piece of furniture." Bergenthuin says about the tree aloe that its position was taken into account from concept stage and it was the only item that was retained from the original garden. She feels that it blends with the almost prehistoric concept.



Carol Knoff

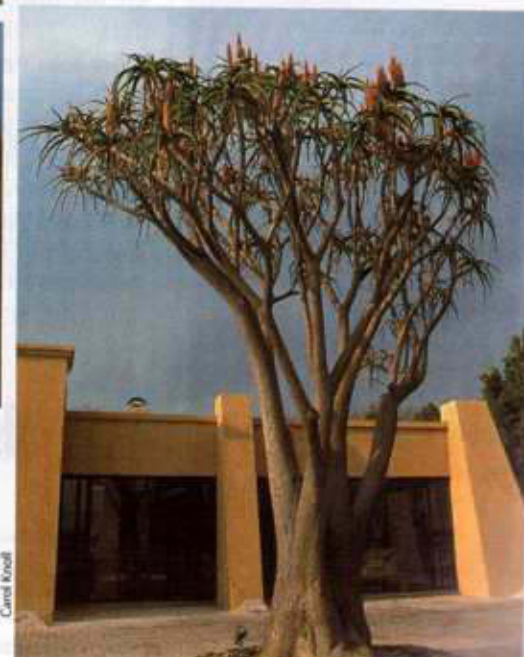


Carol Knoff

Top: The interesting juxtaposition of the *Aloe barberiae* with the wedge shaped 'wrap' given the old house. The architect mentions that both the tree and the house have ancient connotations.

Right: The tree has outstanding sculptural value and gives the development a truly African feel.

Above: The 'marketing tower' on the busy street corner is an unusual feature of the Classic Revivals development.



Carol Knoff

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