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Cover illustration

Composite graphic by Rennie Scurr Adendorff Architects, 2011.

Centre image: Cape Town City Hall tower finial. Details clockwise from top left: Ruth Prowse School of Art balcony; Oude Schuur, Nuy front door; Cape Town City Hall parapet; 109 Harrington Street (Granite Lodge) window and shutter.

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For John Rennie

past Chairman of the Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa

on the occasion of his 70th birthday (11 September 2011)

with thanks for many years of support, guidance and sharing valuable knowledge

and very best wishes from his fellow Vernacs
John Rennie: aspects of practice

Compiled by Mike Scurr

Introduction

John Rennie’s 70th birthday is a timeous occasion to reflect on the achievements of one of Cape Town’s most dedicated and renowned conservation architects. While for many this milestone may signal either retirement or a slowing of pace, John remains engaged and energetic, enjoying nothing better than clambering over roofs inspecting out-of-reach corners of buildings or solving complex detail issues.

This article provides a brief overview of some of the highlights and key aspects of John’s career to date. Many of the drawings here are from John’s own hand and illustrate more clearly than any text can, the respect for and detailed engagement with the fabric of the buildings he has worked on.

![Figure 1. John Rennie, 2005 (photograph A. Malan).](image)

Practice overview

John Rennie’s early career is marked by his time spent in the offices of two leading figures in architecture and conservation in South Africa, namely Gawie Fagan and Revel Fox. Though the grounding and experience gained in these two practices cannot be understated, it was perhaps inevitable that John would forge his own career with specific focus on conservation issues.

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1 Mike Scurr is a UCT Architecture / M Phil Conservation graduate and has worked with John since 1989 (1996 onwards as a partner).
On graduating in 1966 John began a four year stint in the office of Gabriel Fagan Architects. While John also worked on projects such as House Raynham in Fernwood, Newlands, it is the restoration of Tuynhuys that influenced John’s subsequent career the most. The careful fabric analysis, site investigation, historical research and the production of copious amounts of detail drawings – if not necessarily the same conservation philosophy – remain a hallmark of John’s working method today.

On leaving Gawie Fagan’s office, John worked for Revel Fox & Partners until 1982 (and was a partner in that firm 1981/2). For a period of nearly two years during the early 1970s, John was resident site architect for Fox’s landmark BP Centre on Cape Town’s foreshore. A multi-storey tower block may seem at odds with many of the projects John worked on before and since, yet the complexity of the project and the integration of services and co-ordination of multi-disciplinary teams has enabled John to co-ordinate complex conservation projects such as Cape Town’s Central Library in the Drill Hall as well as ongoing involvement with simpler vernacular structures.

John’s time in Revel Fox’s office was interrupted in 1973/4 when he, Tamara and their young family uprooted and moved to York where John attended full-time post-graduate courses, becoming the first South African to gain the University of York Conservation Studies Diploma.

Returning to Cape Town in 1974, John rejoined Revel Fox & Partners. Key projects from his time in this office include work on vernacular farmsteads such as Stettyn in Worcester and Kanetvlei in Paarl. However, John’s chief accomplishment during this period was his secondment as compiler of the 1978 Cape Institute of Architects’ Buildings of Central Cape Town survey volumes.

John left Revel’s practice in 1982 and founded his own firm, John Rennie Architect, working from a studio in his house in Gardens. John’s portfolio from this period includes mainly simple rural buildings such as Oude Schuur in Nuy and Rondeberg, West Coast. John was also a senior lecturer at UCT’s School of Architecture during this period until the early 1990s when the demands of the practice took over.
Increasing workload led to John forming a partnership with Pat Riley in 1985, operating under the title of John Rennie and Pat Riley Architects and moving later to its own studio in Gardens. During this time, John completed restoration work to the landmark Gilbert Scott Cathedral of St Michael and St George in John’s birthplace, Grahamstown. Other notable projects from this period include the Old Wynberg Village Catalogue of Buildings and the significant conservation report for the Cape Town City Hall.

Architect Gregg Goddard joined the firm in 1990 – the practice then becoming known as Rennie Riley and Goddard for a year before restyling itself once again as Rennie & Goddard Architects. Gregg left to form his own practice in 1996, with Mike Scurr becoming a partner in Rennie & Scurr Architects. The growing workload and shift to technology led to Shaun Adendorff becoming a partner in December 2002 in Rennie Scurr Adendorff Architects.

Today, Rennie Scurr Adendorff Architects continues the ethos established by John Rennie, specialising in the field of conservation of historic buildings and precincts, research and report writing as well as pursuing a broad-based involvement in educational, religious and commercial work along-side contemporary domestic work. Each partner is equally responsible for running his own projects which reflect personal skills and interests, but the close-knit operation means there is much sharing of ideas and utilisation of core skills as far as possible. This in turn means that rather than there being a top-down structure, a project-specific approach is adopted. The practice has been awarded nine Institute of Architects Awards and various projects have been published in architectural journals and magazines.

Work methodology

Research and building analysis
Research is a key component of the methodology of the practice. Early conservation projects, such as John’s work at Stettyn for Revel Fox & Partners or his own work at Rondeberg, provide firm evidence of his commitment to thorough assessment of the fabric of a building. At Rondeberg, for example, during the rebuilding of the burnt-out shell of the house, components of the original front windows were found built into a nearby shed building, the find thereby avoiding the need for assumed details or design by analogy.

Despite John’s years at UCT and extensive survey work of Cape Town buildings, he has written relatively little and therefore the built projects must provide the main clue to his work. Nonetheless, an early published text of a lecture series from 1978 provides some insights from his post-York training and which remains pertinent today. Regarding over-zealous restoration work, John’s comments reflect progressive thinking:

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2 All projects are credited to the practice as a whole, but those referred to in this article are ones driven by John Rennie and with particular input from him.
3 In ‘design by analogy’, details assumed to be typical of the period are utilised, or details are borrowed from other similar building types.
4 Covered in the accompanying piece by Melanie Attwell.
It follows … that the richest stylistic record of a building's history and development is very often the fabric of the building itself. It is shown, too, how easily concern for preservation and an enthusiasm for re-creating a building’s imagined past form can precipitate naive and often most destructive “restorations”, resulting in an end product of debatable merit (Rennie 1978:57).

**Measured drawings and field notes**
For John, the starting point on any project is to become fully acquainted with the existing form and fabric of the building. Detailed measured field notes are compiled using a well-honed technique: preferably three pairs of hands (and eyes), running dimensions, reading clockwise around a room and diagonal measurements to ascertain alignment of walls, are chief among these.

![Field notes: Vergenoegd cottage 2001.](image1)

**Figure 2. Field notes: Vergenoegd cottage 2001.**

![Training and mentorship: John and staff around a camphor tree, Vergelegen, 1990.](image2)

**Figure 3. Training and mentorship: John and staff around a camphor tree, Vergelegen, 1990.**
The field notes, and the measured survey plans derived from these, in themselves become a valuable document of a building’s history, and the denseness of information contained in them a clue to the detailed issues confronted early on in the process.

**Drawings and detailing**
A key practice belief is that the quality of the building fabric needs to be reflected in the documentation. Since the shift to computer-aided design after 2001, project drawings are mostly no longer produced by John himself. A process of refinement of technique has however allowed the same standard of documentation to be achieved, with the added benefit of speed and flexibility made possible with CAD. Nonetheless, the once-off details still produced by John reflect his highly detailed, three dimensional understanding of the components of a building.

![Figure 4. Door and archway architrave details, Leinster Hall, 2001 by John Rennie.](image)

**Modes of conservation intervention**

The Burra Charter\(^5\) recognises that a work of conservation can include a variety of strategies including maintenance, preservation, restoration, reconstruction, adaptation and interpretation.

John’s approach is to answer the brief within the shell of the existing structure wherever possible. Internal adaptations and planning reorganisation, utilisation of roof space and basement areas are hallmarks of John’s work.\(^6\)

Aspects of key projects undertaken by the practice / John Rennie can be illustrated according to the conservation ethos or strategy employed:

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\(^5\) Article 14. Conservation processes. Conservation may, according to circumstance, include the processes of: retention or reintroduction of a use; retention of associations and meanings; maintenance, preservation, restoration, reconstruction, adaptation and interpretation; and will commonly include a combination of more than one of these.

\(^6\) New build or additions are undertaken by other partners in the practice.
• Material conservation – fabric maintenance and/or repair
• Respect for the layers of history
• Adaptation and recycling for new or modified use
• Reconstruction of elements/restoration to earlier state
• New interventions in sensitive contexts

Material conservation / fabric maintenance and repair

These projects have conservation of the extant physical fabric as the key component. Sometimes, where decay has set in too severely or where modern “repair” has caused more damage, a more radical approach involving replacement in new stone, plaster or precast material has been necessary. But overall, the surviving fabric is retained and conserved wherever possible. As Ferro (1985:24) comments: “the great cathedrals of Europe survive through the constant replacement of stone blocks ... If we replace, we lose historic fabric, but if we do not, we lose the true spirit and appearance of what was, in favour of the romantic notion of age and patina”.

At the Centre for the Book in Cape Town (conservation work completed in 1996), the programme called for a dual approach of extensive external fabric repair and internal upgrading of services and renovating of rooms for usage as an extension to the National Library further down Queen Victoria Street. The initial work involved extensive repair work and replacement of the copper dome, green-glazed ‘fish-scale’ tiled roofs and ornate pavilions as well as stone repair to upper areas. The main component of the conservation work that followed was the repair and replacement of external stonework. Much original sandstone was decayed and disfigured from ill-considered modern repair. Location at eye level mitigated against further extensive ‘plastic’ (plaster) repair on the facades. Matching original stone, Flatpan Free State sandstone, was no longer available as mining activities and slime dams had obliterated the quarries.

Figure 5. Copper clad finial, Centre for the Book.

A radical decision was therefore taken early after extensive research, to replace the most severely scarred courses up to the piano nobile level with available and durable Cape granite, as an extension of the existing granite plinth. This was achieved with block-by-

7 The work undertaken at The Centre for the Book was published in an article by the author in Planning, no. 144, March 1996.
block detailed drawings which accurately recorded the original configuration so as not to lose authenticity of form.

Aside from the granite insertion, sound portions of the removed original Flatpan sandstone were utilised for the replacement of smaller sandstone elements such as balustrades and dentils. Plaster repair of less visible higher up sandstone was pursued with due reference to masonry layout and appearance. The procedure involved careful cutting back of decayed areas and reinforced bonding with suitably placed copper wires. Repetitive elements, including balusters and copings, were precast while selected sheltered smaller mouldings were reinstated in blended sands and resin. General areas of the sandstone were cleaned by bristle brush scrubbing and the most severely stained, slurry-coated or chemically discoloured areas were manually scraped before extensive lime mortar re-pointing.

The interior was extensively renovated and restored including the main central hall which was stripped of all added partitioning and shelving and redecorated to highlight the architectural plasterwork. The ornate centre cupola lantern was restored to send shafts of light down into the main hall.

Cape Town’s **City Hall** (conservation work completed in 1997) had similar concerns. The architect’s report notes the condition at thre outset of the work in 1992:

“Unsatisfactorily patched, ochre-daubed, stained and failing Bath limestone (especially on the weather-battered skyline), spalled, missing or precarious urns and similar features, various settlement and movement cracks, dilapidated and leaking replacement roofs, much altered roof and opening trimming collectively and drastically spoiling external appearance”.

Figure 6. Side elevation Centre for the Book showing new granite plinth and repaired sandstone.  
Figure 7. Portion of detail drawing for facade repair.
The solution here was complete re-roofing in fibre-cement slates to resemble the 1905 Welsh slates, with copper box gutters and flashings and lead cladding to ledges and exposed chimney tops and the reinstatement of vents and ridge trim crucial to the original appearance. With regard to the stone, decayed soft limestone was removed along with unsatisfactory previous repair and replaced in matching precast or special copper wire-anchored plaster. Restoration and repair work was also carried out extensively to doors and windows to undo years of ad-hoc change and mutilation. Drainage and storm water were rationalised and a host of actions aimed at facilitating the usage and maintenance of the grand building were put in place.\(^8\)

The conservation work to the **Cathedral of St. Michael & St. George**, Grahamstown (1985), for which John Rennie was awarded the Eastern Province Herald Architectural Heritage Award in 1986, can best be described as “invisible mending” (Rennie 1988: 32).

The usual range of issues required attention, including leaks, peeling paintwork, damaged leaded lights, powdering soft limestone, loose copper roof sheeting and decayed downpipes. Coupled with these were requests for improved vestry and ancillary spaces and a string of desired improvements. The work was carried out with John’s characteristic diligence and attention to detail\(^9\) but in rather more difficult conditions given that the spire top stands 55 metres high above the street.

\(^8\) The two external phases of work to the City Hall have been extensively documented in *Planning*, no. 138 (March 1995) and in *Architect & Builder* (October 1988).

\(^9\) The project is described by John Rennie in *Architecture SA* September/October 1988: 30-33.
Another project equally close to John’s heart has been the ongoing renovation work to his and Tamara’s house, St Moritz, in Gardens. For seven years the practice was also located here, prior to moving to its own building downtown. The key feature of the house is the Australian Federation style period detailing and generous two-storey timber fretted verandah front and period stained-glass. The balcony has received particular attention via careful propping, rescuing of timbers and insertion of new painted Oregon pine moulded posts, and redecoration in traditional two-toned colours to retain as much of the original fabric as possible and the integrity of the original design.

Figure 11. Gable detail of c1900 house by William Black.

Respect for the layers of history

In 1988 the Architects were appointed to advise on the redevelopment and restoration of Vergelegen in Somerset West, in particular the core historic area and major buildings.

Figure 12. Vergelegen measured plans and cadastral survey.
Systematic measuring up of all the fabric was undertaken immediately and dovetailed with a full cadastral survey. Extensive research and planning followed and restoration and adaptation occurred during 1991 and 1992.

The substantial and historically remarkable 1920s Arts and Crafts remodelling by architect Percy Walgate for Sir Lionel and Lady Phillips had survived relatively unscathed over the intervening seventy years of wear and tear and changing ownership. This layer was deemed significant for architectural conservation.

The setting was enhanced by the removal on the west side of a vast modern concrete walled enclosure which competed with the Octagon Garden. Several elderly lengths of the latter were notched and jacked upright before replastering. The Octagon also received a decorative wrought iron pergola and various railings and entry doors or gates.

Overall, much of the conservation work done remains camouflaged beneath the surface, being judiciously introduced to conform and rejuvenate.
The award-winning\textsuperscript{10} \textbf{Ruth Prowse Art School}, Woodstock, Cape Town (conservation work completed in 2006) provides a clear reference point to John’s philosophy and recent work. A c1915 concrete vaulted balcony structure (possibly by Salt River Cement Works) replaced an earlier version from the mid 19\textsuperscript{th} century which had been captured by Arthur Elliot c1910. Previous heritage opinion had been to remove the decaying concrete structure and to “restore” the original form based on the photographic evidence.\textsuperscript{11}

In John’s words (Rennie Scurr Adendorff project document dated 2007), “sacrificing the lively and generous near century-old work, now so much a part of the whole seemed to be far too Philistine! Extensive chiseling away of old repairs and bursting rib spalls confirmed the intriguing ingenuity and informed the remedial route.”

\textsuperscript{10} Cape Institute for Architecture Award of Merit, 2007.

\textsuperscript{11} This project was previously published in \textit{Digest of South African Architecture}, 2007: 080-081.
The resultant conservation work has brought renewed life into the building while at the same time preserving valuable fabric from various ages.

**Adaptation / recycling for new or modified use**

**Drill Hall, Cape Town Central Library** (2008)

The focus of this project was on the interior space and its reconfiguration to house the relocated Central Library, which in turn freed up the adjacent City Hall for more appropriate cultural use. Rennie Scurr Adendorff’s design concept saw the insertion of a contemporary steel mezzanine structure to house the requisite amount of reading areas and shelving space. The mezzanines pay homage to the lofty riveted lattice steel arches of the old hall, only touching the original structure at doorways and bridges.\(^\text{12}\)

\[\text{Figure 17. Drill Hall: cross section.}\]

In addition to the inserted “building within a building” steel structure, a full size piled basement was created to provide the additional space required and facilitate the insertion services, including air-conditioning. Ad hoc intrusive stairs were removed and doors and windows were renovated to enhance the original form of the exterior.

\[\text{Figure 18. Interior view on completion.}\]

\(^{12}\text{This project was previously published in Digest of South African Architecture, 2008: 032-033.}\)
**St. Mark’s Church** in District Six, Cape Town (alterations 2007) is another example of the dictum of conversion within the envelope. This project was referred to the practice once design work by others had already advanced; that proposal included a large new gothic arched stone extension to the north side. John managed to convince the client to significantly alter course.

John’s design fully utilises the excavated undercroft space for the required meeting room accommodation. The modest new structure on the exterior is a hybrid design; traditionally proportioned and detailed but with a contemporary openness and transparency. This design met the stated needs of both the church and Heritage Western Cape that it be fairly traditional.

The intervention at the same time enabled the repair of the badly cracked stonework on the north gable façade to be attended to.

![Image of St. Mark’s Church in District Six](image)

*Figure 19. St. Marks Church, District Six.*

**Reconstruction of elements / restoration to earlier state**

As the preceding examples show, reconstruction or returning to earlier form is not a core belief of the practice, or of John Rennie. Yet, there are clear cases where this method has been undertaken for specific portions of a building.

The Burra Charter only permits restoration if sufficient evidence exists. ‘Restoration’ is defined as “returning the existing fabric to a known earlier state by removing accretions, or by reassembling existing components without the introduction of new material”.13

‘Reconstruction’, which is defined as “returning a place to a known earlier state and is distinguished from restoration by the introduction of new material into the fabric”, is similarly permitted, again only when there is evidence of the earlier state and when ‘the place’ is incomplete due to damage or subsequent alterations.14

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13 Burra Charter. Article 19. Restoration is appropriate only if there is sufficient evidence of an earlier state of the fabric.

14 Burra Charter. Article 20.1. Reconstruction is appropriate only where a place is incomplete through damage or alteration, and only where there is sufficient evidence to reproduce an earlier state of the fabric. Article 20.2. Reconstruction should be identifiable on close inspection or through additional interpretation.
The reconstructed balcony and internal joinery at Granite Lodge (109 Harrington Street, part of SAHRA’s 111 Harrington Street offices) from 1993 is one example where this method is employed.

The project embodies conservation philosophy and strategy ranging from specific reconstruction (in the cl834 “Granite Lodge”), to selective recycling and rehabilitation (the adjoining 1917 building by Parker and Forsyth), to the insertion and integration of new fabric (the new entrance, ‘spine’ circulation system, council chamber and ancillary spaces plus the complete new library and archive building behind). The maxim that built fabric can be adapted and successfully gain a new, useful and architecturally delightful lease of life is firmly upheld.15

John’s chief contribution on this project was the authentic detailing of Granite Lodge. A major design feature is the delicate cantilevered cast iron balcony which had been lost to decay over time. This was stylistically reconstructed based on found evidence, archival photographs and by tracing extant pattern samples of the cast iron railing to London and Sydney. The final product can be said to be an authentic reconstruction and is not conjectural. Hidden steel beams strengthen the timber (to prevent failure again) and should leave no doubt as to the age or status of this element on close inspection.

15 The project was more fully described in articles in Architect & Builder, October 1993: 2-7 and Architecture SA, January & February 1996: 15.
The proposed reconstruction of the Battlements at the Drill Hall provides another example.\textsuperscript{16}

![Figure 22. Drill Hall: Parade Street elevation showing reinstated battlements at parapet level.](image1)

The battlements were removed c1950 amidst disenchantment with Victorian romantic detail. Though non-functional, their reinstatement is argued for by John, on the basis of sound evidence and on the incompleteness of the building facades without them.

**New interventions in sensitive contexts**

**Alterations to semi-detached house, Tamboerskloof** (2004). A single storey semi-detached c1900 Victorian terrace house was given new life with an internal part open-plan and mezzanine insertion with new dormers bringing in much needed natural light. The garage was rebuilt lower to allow a new en-suite for the main bedroom above. A new service cellar space was provided in the stone-walled foundation space under a portion of the old house. A new internal timber stair and library shelving enhanced the ascent to the mezzanine over the new generous open kitchen capturing views to Table Mountain and Lion’s Head.

![Figure 23. Tamboerskloof house, street view: added dormer to the new mezzanine seen to the right.](image2)

\textsuperscript{16}These were not crucial to the operating of the library and therefore not implemented as part of the building work, though it is hoped that they will be done at some future date.
The alterations to the interior layout are clearly contemporary in nature and suited to the needs of a young family, but the exterior intervention sits beside the original structure, taking cues from the original gable proportion and detail so as to be understated and complementary.

**Two cottages at Stofbergsfontein, Churchhaven** (2005-2007). Two recent projects set in the idyllic lagoon and strandveld landscape of the West Coast National Park are tailored to meet the stringent style, material and services guidelines and restrictive envelope codes of the Stofbergsfontein Homeowner’s Association. These cottages have been tailored to cope with weather extremes and have a generous vermiculite/cement roof insulation layer. Doors and windows all have customised stocky vernacular detailing with window shutters added for climatic and aesthetic reasons.

![Figure 24. Section and elevation of new house, Stofbergsfontein.](image)

The new cottage has a spacious double volume core under pitched reed ceilings. Two of the three bedrooms are accessed externally off the sheltered stoep to allow for a traditional plan form without passages. The site fall allowed a generous cellar space to be provided to house a water storage tank and space for sporting equipment.

![Figure 25. Front view.](image)
In contrast, the second cottage has a bedroom wing extension linked via a covered verandah to the very modest single roomed renovated dwelling to the front of the site.

Together, these two projects allowed John to demonstrate his skill in the proportioning and detailing of traditional doors and windows and simple vernacular planning.

Figure 26. Elevation: renovated portion (left) and linked and extended portion (mid and right).

Figure 27. Elevation of renovated portion of cottage.

End notes

In addition to continually building up a body of solid work, a large part of John Rennie’s legacy is achieved through the transfer of knowledge via the many young practitioners who have passed though the practice, as well as those who have stayed in the practice.

The projects that John has been involved in do not have ‘quick profit’ as a chief aim, and his architecture seeks to achieve a timeless quality that is not overly concerned with the latest trends, though John is quick to acknowledge the power of changing perceptions and fashions on our work as architects.
John’s architecture follows its own instinctive path with each project guided by its inner logic, fabric, details and history, and most importantly, being informed by the needs of the client’s brief. While the methods employed do not slavishly follow conservation charters, the approach employed generally does accord with the Burra Charter or the earlier Venice Charter.

John’s approach can be said to be based on respect for the fabric and the history of each building rather than dramatic gestures and ostentation.

![Figure 28. John Rennie, December 2003.](image)

References


Other sources of information:

Unpublished project documentation held by Rennie Scurr Adendorff Architects.

All drawings and images are by Rennie Scurr Adendorff.
Architectural surveys in Cape Town: the contribution of John Rennie

Melanie Attwell

John Rennie once remarked: “The richest stylistic record of a building’s history and development is very often the fabric of the building itself” (Rennie 1978). This ability and curiosity to look into and beyond a building, and to delve into its history and understand its construction has characterised much of his work and enriched the archival record and heritage environment of Cape Town.

Rennie’s approach informed The Buildings of Central Cape Town (Cape Provincial Institute of Architects (CPIA) 1978a and 1978b), the influential work with which he is most closely associated. This short paper focuses on that seminal catalogue, and outlines some of the other survey work that John Rennie conducted in the Metropolitan area of Cape Town as part of his own practice.

The Buildings of Central Cape Town

Rennie, then working for Revel Fox and Partners, undertook analysis, research, fieldwork and description for the catalogue of Cape Town buildings on behalf of the CPIA (now the Cape Institute of Architects), the National Monuments Council (now SAHRA) and the City of Cape Town during 1977 and 1978. The publication, originally of two volumes and later extended to a third volume (CPIA 1983), remains to this day a key reference work for students, planners, developers, architects and conservationists, or anyone who wishes to understand the growth and development of Cape Town and comprehend the building stock in this historic city. It is known colloquially in the heritage profession as the “Rennie Catalogue”. While by no means minimising the contribution of many organisations and individuals involved in its production, the catalogue is an ongoing tribute to John Rennie.

The catalogue’s impact and continued use as reference material for a dynamic and growing city, is no less astonishing bearing in mind that it was published more than 30 years ago and the descriptions are now somewhat out of date. For instance, it is considerably more than just a list of buildings in Cape Town at a certain time. By inspecting, understanding and describing the buildings that constituted the City with reference to a myriad of urban changes – some dramatic and some incremental – Rennie was able to trace the City’s growth and development. It is also influential in the way it recorded buildings by combining keen observation and fabric and construction analysis with archival records. The catalogue contained no conjecture and was based on carefully documented historical information only. The system of mapping and review through fieldwork according to a normative set of criteria was the first of its sort in the country.

A critical influence on more recent survey methodologies has been the use of GIS technologies, enabling the development and integration of complex databases of information. It is difficult to conceive now that such an influential work as The
Buildings of Central Cape Town was undertaken without access to GIS, Google Earth, digital maps and aerial photographic overlays, or any of the digital assistance we now take for granted. It was instead done with lists of buildings, recording forms and photographs, and in-depth investigations of maps and historic panoramas which were analysed building-by-building.

The Buildings of Central Cape Town was a collaborative project initiated as early as 1975 as a direct result of the growing awareness by professionals and the public alike of the significance of the City’s historic building stock and the threats to its historic character by an uneven process of modernisation. The project was also related to growing concern for the protection of the historic fabric in European and some colonial cities after 1975, the European Architectural Heritage Year. Such awareness of the significance of buildings and the need for their conservation found its full expression in the Venice Charter of 1964. Rennie was profoundly influenced by the debates around architectural heritage in the late 1970s, and he was the first South African to attend the programme in architectural conservation at the University of York’s Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies.

In late 1975 a Committee was set up by the CPIA for the preparation of a catalogue of buildings that built on the precedents set by other countries who had undertaken similar projects. Revel Fox wrote as chairman: “Catalogues of this kind have cultural and historical significance, but they have also proved to be essential information for anyone concerned with planning and development or for students of any aspect of the built environment” (CPIA 1978a).

Fox’s introduction outlined the basic intentions of the catalogue. He explained that it was to be a carefully prepared list of buildings, which were then categorised and plotted on a series of maps. A composite map would enable the researcher to better understand the buildings and ensembles. The publication also contained useful empirical information for reference purposes. The emphasis at this time was on the architecture itself rather than on the site and surroundings. The system of classification was intended as a tool for understanding a building’s significance but did not articulate the notion of significance any further.17

The Buildings of Central Cape Town was published in 1978 after two years of fieldwork and research on the part of John Rennie. The study area covered the core of the historic City from Buitengracht to Canterbury Street, and from Riebeeck and Strand streets to Buitesingel and Roeland Street. It included fieldwork in some 37 blocks and involved over 900 buildings. Following its success, a further volume was published in 1983, based on the fieldwork and research of Theresa Louw, Greg Goddard and John Rennie and following the same methodology and categorisations. This volume, entitled The Buildings of Central Cape Town, Volume Three, was initiated by John Rennie in 1981;

17 The emphasis on the articulation of cultural significance was introduced through the Australian Burra Charter of 1979 (revised 1981 and 1988). It was extremely influential and the term “cultural significance” and related definitions found their way into South African heritage legislation (National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999 (NHRA)).
and continued by Theresa Louw in 1982, who was guided by a Committee led by architect Gabriel Fagan.

The second phase catalogued three important historical areas on the periphery of the historic core. These were the original Table Bay harbour, the Bo-Kaap and the site bounded by the Foreshore development to the east. This project area was extensive, involving some 80 blocks, 1588 buildings and an additional 111 other items. The authors followed the same format as before, including a unique number based on the block number, an erf number, property reference number, a street address, a brief description and a chronological listing of reference material. In the case of Volume Three, use was also made of the building plans and plan registers from 1889 onwards.\(^\text{18}\)

*The Buildings of Central Cape Town* predates the current heritage legislation, as do all heritage studies and surveys prior to 1999. Many surveys\(^\text{19}\) currently underway, or recently completed, are intended to meet certain requirements of the National Heritage Resources Act.\(^\text{20}\) Surveys today are accepted to be partly a list of heritage resources (including buildings), partly an assessment of context and character, and partly an assessment of their value and proposed management action in relationship to specific legislative heritage requirements. All this information, together with relevant grading dating and contextual analysis, are included in a database. What makes today's surveys different is the extension of the notion of “heritage as buildings” to a broader definition of heritage to include sites and contexts and landscapes of cultural value. Surveys range from locales of known character to increasingly larger areas such as whole towns and municipal areas.

Despite such fundamental changes in the way heritage environments are surveyed, *The Buildings of Central Cape Town* remains the basis of methodology used today. This includes a building-by-building inspection\(^\text{21}\), the use of erf numbers and street addresses as a basis for location, the provision of a unique number, and the division of the catalogued area into blocks for ease of reference. Descriptions were a combination of on-site assessments and the inclusion of spatial-historical data, based on a review of historical maps and panoramas. For example, in the case of Central Cape Town, the careful use of the Millard Panorama of 1860 and the Snow Survey of 1862 enabled

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\(^\text{18}\) Original plans have subsequently been removed from the City archives and placed in the Provincial Archives in Roeland Street.

\(^\text{19}\) A distinction might be made for the purposes of clarity between a “catalogue” and a “survey”. A catalogue identifies, analyses, describes and assesses buildings in terms of empirical criteria but makes no judgments about value and conservation-worthiness. It also does not factor in context other than in the identification of groups of buildings. A survey, on the other hand, provides an assessment of conservation-worthiness in terms of a prescribed set of criteria.

\(^\text{20}\) Such requirements may include Section 34 or the “60 year clause” which includes the identification, mapping and assessment of buildings older than 60 years for appropriate management action; Section 30, which requires responsible planning authorities to compile inventories of heritage resources; and Section 27, the listing of existing formally protected Provincial Heritage Sites for appropriate management action by the provincial heritage authorities.

\(^\text{21}\) Descriptions have dated, and without constant upgrading the catalogue becomes a historical document in its own right, a snapshot of Cape Town in 1978. The failure to update the catalogue is a major shortcoming on the part of the parties concerned.
Rennie to date buildings, building footprints and remnants with an astonishing degree of accuracy to the mid nineteenth century. The third volume of the catalogue made use of the Pryce-Lewis List of building plans\textsuperscript{22} linked to attached building plan numbers. This provided an invaluable archive relating buildings to architects.

The value of this historical information to heritage consultants, architectural researchers and the general public cannot be underestimated. Its importance as a reliable base-line resource remains one of the most powerful legacies of the catalogue. Subsequent researchers have built on this information on a project-by-project basis, and the knowledge base of the spatial development of Cape Town has grown as a result, but attempts to upgrade the catalogue itself have unfortunately come to nothing.

Volume One of \textit{The Buildings of Central Cape Town} contains a series of composite maps showing the distribution of classified sites accordingly to the eight categories agreed by the Catalogue Committee. While it is true that such categorisations have been superseded\textsuperscript{23}, and do not remain fully relevant for current conservation theory and legislation, some of the categories - in particular categories six, seven and eight - are dependent on the spatial, historical research undertaken by Rennie. Therefore the catalogue could be added to as further information became available, thus enriching the archive of the spatial/historical morphology of Cape Town. In addition, categories three, four and five allowed for the identification of landmark groups and those groups of buildings defining characterful settings and spaces. Such an approach was a forerunner to the broader concepts of townscape and streetscape evaluation, which was to characterise later heritage surveys. Further refinements and methods of analysis have been built on this foundation.

The spatial historical analysis of Cape Town contained in Volume One remains to this day the only general architectural, spatial, material, and developmental history for Cape Town. In it, Rennie links historical events, vernacular imperatives and constraints, construction methods and technology to the stylistic and cultural influences that shaped the City. This account is one of the most lasting legacies of the catalogue project.

Those involved in the development of \textit{The Buildings of Central Cape Town} were pioneers in the evolution of a cataloguing system for buildings. The methodology has since been built on and refined in subsequent area surveys, aided by digital technology and greater use of landscape context as an analytical tool. The classification of buildings according to a defined set of criteria was a great step forward in the development of a consistent and predictive set of judgments about the City’s architectural and historical fabric. Ultimately, the legacy of \textit{The Buildings of Central Cape Town} is the fact that it established a professional, consistent and articulated methodology for the first time,

\textsuperscript{22} Professor Pryce-Lewis catalogued plans approved by the City of Cape Town and other local Peninsula Municipalities up to 1913.

\textsuperscript{23} The criteria have with hindsight received a mixed reception. Townsend (2003: 134) describes them as a “mixed bag” and “not particularly well defined”. However, there is no mistaking their significance as a pioneering set of classification criteria which reflected the pre-occupations in architectural heritage at the time.
very different from the *ad hoc* lists and small histories which up until then had informed architectural conservation management and decisions.

The influence of John Rennie in this endeavor was substantial, not only because it was the first consistent and coordinated attempt to identify heritage resources in the City, but also because of the combination of scholarship and observation used in the methodology and the application of historical/spatial analysis. Rennie’s contribution was unique and was suited to his abilities and his skills. These included an unmatched knowledge of the history and development of the City, its buildings and the materials of which it was constructed, an eye for detail, and a patience and exactitude to examine the smallest of clues and details.

**Surveys and studies of Cape Town and surrounding areas**

Rennie and his partners undertook other surveys and studies which have left their mark on the history of heritage surveys in Cape Town and surroundings areas. These include a survey of Upper Table Valley undertaken between 1985 and 1986 by Rennie and Pat Riley (Rennie & Riley 1986). This formed part of the group of surveys commissioned by the City Planners Department between 1986 and 1988 (see Japha 1986, Meek & Attwell 1987, Todeschini & Japha 1986, 1989, 1990). At this time the undertaking of conservation studies was becoming increasingly systematic and more evaluative in approach. Nevertheless, the basis for assessing historic architecture remained a combination of the review of historic maps and aerial photographs with an on site building-by-building and street-by-street evaluation in terms of age, rarity, relationship to the street, detail and intactness.

The Upper Table Valley study and the Gardens study were later extended into a full heritage survey by the Urban Conservation Unit, based on the model of *The Buildings of Central Cape Town*. In the heritage survey, structures were graded for the first time according to the system of consolidated gradings developed by the Urban Conservation Unit. It also contained a link to the City’s list of approved architectural plans. This survey was intended for publication but because of costs this was never undertaken, although the information is available to researchers at the City of Cape Town Heritage Resources Section.

In 1987 Rennie and Riley produced *Old Wynberg Village: Catalogue of Buildings*. This catalogue followed on the first conservation project for Wynberg Village, which had developed a set of guidelines for conservation and development in Wynberg in 1981.24 The *Guidelines* contained practical advice for those intending to alter their homes in the historic core of old Wynberg, and was based on a historical/spatial analysis of the development of the village and knowledge of the vernacular architecture of the area.

The *Guidelines* of 1981 combined the development of typical architectural styles, conservation issues and technical advice regarding affected properties in a defined area.

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24 It was unusual for a set of guidelines to be developed prior to a catalogue, but, as Rennie notes in his introduction to the catalogue, the guidelines gave rise to a need to understand the composition of Wynberg village and a catalogue was a pre-requisite for that.
The development of the building typology was based on historical research and observation, by now a standard Rennie and Riley approach. The resulting periodisation and typology was converted into architectural and restoration advice. It addressed practical issues such as roof construction, roof finishes, windows, materials to be used, and treatment of “later” Victorian additions. Advice was accompanied by a series of helpful sketches showing appropriate and inappropriate interventions, as well as indications as to which elements were important to retain and conserve.

The Catalogue, which followed in 1987, used documentary sources to establish age and historic presence. These included sketches and photographs as well as the hugely useful 1888 Municipal Map of Wynberg. The format followed that of the Cape Town catalogue: a list of structures with a unique identifying number, an erf number, an architectural description and any known historical data.

Rennie and Mike Scurr, with the assistance of Kathy Dumbrell, undertook a survey of the Blaauwberg municipal area in 2000 (Rennie & Scurr 2001). This encompassed an area extending from the “Salt River mouth roughly northwards, flanked by the sea to the west and the N7 to the east. Contrasting terrain from established industrial and urban areas to windblown coastal sand-strewn strandveld with virtually no development and sparse plant and animal life are present in close proximity”.

The extent and scope of the survey was broad, and was intended to meet legislative requirements to inform planning and conservation, as many other surveys were beginning to do at the time. The task was to identify, date and classify “man-made structures and conservation-worthy features” in the area. The study used the 1938 and 1945 aerial photographs in order to eliminate the need to inspect those parts not yet developed 60 years ago. It was informed by historical research, literature searches and archaeological reports.

The area was divided into urban and rural environments. The urban environments were subject to a street-by-street survey to assess pre 1938 and pre 1945 building fabric and contexts. The rural environments were subject to an in-depth study involving individual site visits and fabric and building analysis, which was undertaken by Rennie.

The result is a significant series of analyses of some 30 to 40 rural farmsteads in the Blaauwberg area, some of which were previously unknown to have cultural significance (Fig. 1). In all, some 600 sites in both the rural and urban environments were recorded and have been included in a digital database by the City of Cape Town. The study conforms to local government requirements and is an addition to the corpus of broad area studies. As a result, the region has been assigned some 10 areas of significance (using the existing Cape Town consolidated grading system), which have the potential to become urban conservation or heritage areas, or special areas.

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25 Rennie Scurr Adendorff was also involved in a study of the Tygerberg area, undertaken for them by Peter Buttgens.

26 Section 34 NHRA. K Dumbrell, pers.com. 29 July 2011.
Figure 1. This is a summary of the findings at Blaauwberg Farm after a site visit by Rennie and based on research undertaken by Dumbrell. It is a well maintained and much modernised farm werf with outstanding views of Table Mountain. Rennie suggests the original configuration of the homestead was U- or H-shaped and predates 1820. The voorhuis is divided from the achterhuis by a tall teak and yellowwood six-panel screen, partly modernised (opaque-glazing). There is a long barn in line with the homestead, with corrugated iron, solid south end stair and gable attic door, and north end buttressed. The report notes internal heavy old beams (possibly ship) and stone cobble floor (Rennie & Scurr 2001).

The Grand Parade Revitalization Study is partially a survey, partially a research document and partially a summary of the knowledge and insights developed by Rennie in his understanding of a key area of Cape Town. It was undertaken for the City of Cape Town’s Heritage Resources Section in 2003. The report comprises a comprehensive timeline for the spatial/historical development of the Grand Parade as the heart of historical Cape Town. There is an extensive photographic and map record of the development morphology of the Grand Parade and urban environment. Archaeological excavations off Darling Street by the Archaeological Contracts Office of UCT revealed the presence of extensive deep stone canals (grachten) which defined the southern and eastern borders of the Parade (Fig. 2).

27 These arose out of recommendations attached to a Heritage Impact Assessment (Attwell 2005) for the Grand Parade Revitalization Project.
The report concludes with a concise series of recommendations for regeneration. The recommendations were based on observation and in-depth knowledge of the growth and development of the City, and point out the (mostly negative) impacts of development and encroachment on the Grand Parade.

The report was also permeated by a powerful mission statement. Rennie stated, *inter alia*, that it was important “to return the Grand Parade to its rightful role and former significance as the major and most historic open civic space in central Cape Town and to avoid perpetuating the numerous present ills and missed opportunities besetting the space”. In order to do this, Rennie recommended that the City undertake a bold series of interventions, ameliorative actions and planning initiatives to reduce negative impacts and introduce a process of revitalisation. These include:

- Creating enough space to serve as a multi-function civic place;
- Maximising opportunities for historic re-interpretation;
- Ameliorating the negative impact of transport planning (the bus terminus and Golden Acre parking);
- Re-establishing the maximum extent of the Parade by removing encroachments and kerbs;
- Defining space with tree planting;
- Revitalising the area by upgrading facilities for pedestrians and “rejuvenating” peripheral buildings.\(^{28}\)

Despite the repaving and re-landscaping of part of the Grand Parade for the 2010 Fifa World Cup, many of these insights and recommendations unfortunately remain unexplored by the City of Cape Town.

One of the great riches of the report is the collections of photographs, maps, observations and insights affecting the Parade and the Central City. In addition to perceptive observations on the broader context, John Rennie has an eye for detail, and such details are well represented in the report, from photographs of ship’s timber lintels found during the demolition of the Old Custom House on the Parade, to unique photographs of the excavations preceding the building of the Strand / Adderley Street Concourse (Fig. 3). Such images represent his unique view of Cape Town, the result of a long career of observation and investigation. The heritage community is richer for it.

\(^{28}\) For a full list of the recommendations see Rennie Scurr Adendorff (2003).
Figure 2. Image from Rennie Scurr Adendorff (2003) showing the grachten and turnstile off Darling Street. The presence of the grachten has been verified through archaeological excavation.

Figure 3. The Strand / Adderley Street Concourse excavation showing the remnant storm water drains which extended to the shoreline near the central wharf. Rennie identifies them as potentially mid-nineteenth century. The bluestone walls and rectangular wall (upper left) may be considerably older and may be part of the historic system of grachten (photograph by J. Rennie, from Rennie Scurr Adendorff 2003).
References


Rennie & Riley. 1986. Upper Table Valley Study. Report to Cape Town City Council, Urban Conservation Unit.


John Rennie

Gawie Fagan

John Rennie worked for me during the latter part of the 1960s, and from the day he arrived in the office, which at the time was at 66 Loop Street, we recognised in him those special qualities which makes of him an asset to the profession. He was hard working, passionate about his work and meticulously concerned that detailing should be accurate. But above all he was a wonderful mimic and had a subtle sense of humour so that tea intervals with him and Alex Brugger often lasted for an hour or so!

Figure 1. John Rennie, far left, stands innocently by as Alex Brugger whips out “The Boss” and Paul Rhigini attempts to look serious.

I have always believed that an architect should be able to use his hands, and what better example than the young Rennie assembling a kit ukelele, or more recently making a miniature cedar casket to house a sailing ship in a torch bulb. John married Tamara and we often visited their home where we met Tamara’s parents – both excellent musicians. One evening John turned up at our small flat in Camps Bay to inform us that his daughter Bridget had just been born and to this day I remember the broad smile on his face. During this time we were restoring Tuynhuys, and together John and I crawled around the roof and parapets, diligently noting swags and unexpected detail not visible from the ground.

Everyone had thought that the little French palace depicted by Josephus Jones was a fiction of his imagination and Professor Barry Biermann had even called it “Disney Cape Dutch”. The veranda, which had been erected by Lord Charles Somerset in the
early 19th century, enclosed a ceiling space which we opened and crawled into. There, to our surprise, we discovered the complete balustrade so carefully drawn by Jones. Only the figurines holding the two ends of a central drape were missing. We took many photos, pasted them together and folded them to post to Barry Biermann. It was then decided that the veranda should be removed and the 18th century façade reinstated. John was deeply involved in the necessary drawings and Sydney Hunter was at the time the gifted sculptor appointed to remodel the putti, representing Mercury and Neptune. And what a wonderful job he made of it! Models of the babes were produced, approved and the erection of the sculptures so keenly anticipated by John and myself could proceed.

Figure 2. Gawie and John on Tuynhuys roof.

Figure 3. Sydney Hunter with putti.
It was when they were hoisted in place that John showed signs of extreme unhappiness. Surely they were too large! I thought they were acceptable but John doubted my architectural judgement and courage to have them remade. In his disappointment he burst into tears and resigned that same afternoon.

But I have a great admiration for John and the more so for his strict sense of responsibility and his striving for perfection, and feel a certain pride that the young architect who worked for me so long ago, today runs one of Cape Town’s leading practices.

David van den Heever and Gawie Fagan on the steps of The Granary, Cape Town (photograph A. Malan 2007).
A tribute to John Rennie

David van den Heever

John introduced me to the Vernacs in 1980. I had been at that time a keen member of the Simon van der Stel Foundation but found the Vernacs more attractive, combining serious heritage issues with a good deal of fun and friendship. James Walton was still alive at the time, and he actively encouraged all the activities of the society and inspired us all.

I was elected to the Vernac Committee at my first meeting as an ordinary member and I found the whole prospect rather daunting. John assured me, however, that all would be well, and so it was.

John and I had worked together in the office of Revel Fox and I was fully aware of his capabilities especially in the field of architectural restoration and conservation. At the time, for example, John and Gawie had discovered and subsequently restored the magnificent Tuynhuys facade. This event had the whole conservation fraternity agog for months in anticipation of the final result. John had been at the centre of the project and thereby had the opportunity to successfully extend the limits of his craft.

The other work in progress at that time was the cataloguing of the buildings of central Cape Town. John played the main part in the study and his meticulous and learned approach to this publication ensured an excellent result, which is still in use today.

As Chairman of the Vernacs, John shared his knowledge and experience with all the members unstintingly and this was done in a relaxed yet informative manner. For instance, we learned about vernacular detailing including the use of weird things like sneeze wood, gordings and leg-of-mutton gables – certainly strange words and terms for the uninitiated!

To illustrate John’s meticulous attention to detail, he once built a model sailing ship inside a very small bottle. It was received by disbelief by all who saw it! John has also an uncanny talent as a mimic, not only of voices but things like telephone rings, bird calls, etc. There were many times, for instance, when the Vernac members on an outing were summoned by the shrill ringing of a Protea phone and not knowing its source.

The “Tribute to John Rennie” title of this piece sounds a bit too much like a farewell. Rather, we should pay tribute to John as an ongoing and dedicated architect, who we know will contribute to the study of vernacular architecture for a long time to come.
The British period: 19th century influences on vernacular architecture in the Eastern and Western Cape

John Rennie

Context

Contrast the Dutch Occupation (from 1652 to approximately 1800), covering about 150 years of settlement but not really wanting to colonise, and the British Occupation (from about 1800 to 1900), with much British (and other) immigration, and direct and extensive influence and administration as the colony developed and expanded into the hinterland.

Think of the 19th century educational establishments (essentially the Scottish university degree system), general services, for example the postal system with “post-office-red” cast-iron “pillar”-boxes, the expansion of roads, passes, bridges and transport, and then at a vernacular level a great deal of new building styles and materials, and traditions such as egg and bacon (and wors) for breakfast, Guy Fawkes, and much else.

Look at the late-19th century spires added by Charles Freeman to the older churches at Malmesbury, Wellington and Worcester (at much the same period as his Greenmarket Square Metropolitan Methodist Church), transforming the style and architectural accent of these local, crucial “nagmaal saamtrek”, so that, with some sleight of hand, essentially vernacular hallowed spaces became outwardly much more significantly British in style than they ever were before.

Left: Grahamstown: the early settler St. George’s Church (photo c1870).
Right: Grahamstown: The Cathedral of St. Michael and St. George: modification and replacement begun with Sir George Gilbert Scott’s spire under construction.

29 Brief notes and selected slides from a VASSA Talk by John Rennie, 19 April 2011.
Much of my background stems from Grahamstown and through my parents an appreciation of the whole district and beyond. Even though my father was Cape Town-born (Rondebosch Boys High for part of his schooling), and then a contemporary of Oscar Wolheim, he was equally descended from Cape “Dutch” colonists (the de Smidt family for one branch) together with his Eastern Cape links. In his last years my father was immersed in a fascination for the background and doings of the tiny Scottish Settler party of 1820 under the leadership of the intellectual poet Thomas Pringle, and a party member, one widow Rennie, along with her four sons thrust into the initial harsh realities of the Baviaans River allocation high in the hills above Bedford and very close to border hostilities.

Think of the (more British) Eastern Cape farming stock carrying on from trekboer example, and still today talking about herding “the beasts into the crawl”, or “man the roygrass is looking dry”, or “the sproot came down yesterday after the storm”.

Gawie Fagan (who guided my first years as a greenhorn architect) might be right in imagining that I come from a more British-influenced line than his own antecedents, though in truth our families stem from very similar collations and even boast a direct overlap with at least one prominent Cape Town freed slave matriarch!

Australian-born Dr Ronald Lewcock, architect and academic, is the main catalyst for my humble observations. Ron’s landmark publication is still unchallenged today after almost 50 years: *Early Nineteenth Century Architecture in South Africa: A study of the interaction of two cultures 1795-1837* (Cape Town: A.A. Balkema, 1963).

Ron’s doctoral study period was 1795 to 1837 (i.e. from the start of the First British Occupation of 1795 to just before Queen Victoria’s lengthy reign). This University of Cape Town (UCT) School of Architecture thesis (housed in the African Studies Library) formed the basis of the subsequent publication. Ron carried out the work in the main during the 1950s while already a member of the architectural school in Durban, returning to Grahamstown at intervals to make finishing touches and to visit outlying farms or hamlets. I believe he had much support and influence from his energetic mother to collate photographs and the like. The thesis was completed more or less at the time I began my architectural studies at UCT.
Lewcock’s study reaches exhaustively into all aspects of early 19th Cape building, both stylistically and relative to the existing earlier developments, with observations on the social situation, the churches, official buildings and the gradual advance in the building professions.

Left: St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Somerset Road, 1827: architect designed fashionable Greek Revival.

Right: Bishop’s Court: front openings influenced by earlier Cape Dutch façade configuration.

Stylistic differences

My brief overview can only simply draw attention to a relatively few architectural differences, some obvious and some not so obvious.

I begin with doors and windows, which I regard as rather like the differing cut of pockets on jackets of similar or different cloth and style.

Lewcock sets out in some detail various post-fire of London (1666) building restrictions and regulations stipulating, for example, first floor balconies to large urban houses (to catch embers), fire walls, front masonry parapets instead of (timber) eaves, and in effect the regular setting-in of windows (and doorways) behind protecting masonry edges. These deliberate attempts to expose a minimum of flammable timber on the outside of buildings, including details such as slender glazing bars and almost concealed sliding sash frames, all originate from the attempts to minimize the spread of fire. In contrast, within the buildings woodwork burgeons into generous timber-clad, splayed reveals, panelling, internal folding shutters, and the like.

Coupled with the windows is the fashion for geometrically divided fanlights, with putty applied on the inside (to read crisply from outside), some still square or rectangular (with past local influence), others semicircular and segmental. And the fanlights become set over vertically divided double doors, as opposed to the earlier “bo-en-onder” stable doors.
Valkenburg c1800: transitional façade restored.

Left: Nova Constantia c1800: transitional configuration and door and window detailing.  
Right: Worcester c1830: transitional square radial geometric fanlight.

**Materials**

The use of materials overlaps the Dutch and British periods. Vernacular thick walls, soft dagha and rubble or sun-dried bricks persist, but into this amalgam comes the influence of military works beyond Cape Town and spread over the Eastern Cape. With the Royal Engineers and an abundance of stone came a strong and more deliberate favouring of stonework, whether crafted in county vernacular style and method or more vigorously cut and dressed. The skills for building the Grahamstown Drostdy, Kingwilliamstown and the border forts and barracks of the Fish River and Amatola mountain reaches were naturally extended and applied to the fortified farmsteads, churches, schools and the like, to some extent preceding the growth of the brick and tile industries.

Bear in mind also that the less well-known German Settler influence (British German Foreign Legion, 1857) in the Eastern Cape (East London, Berlin, Stutterheim, etc.) brought some stylistic influence into what was essentially part of the British military administration. (My second initial is for Linsingen, as my mother was the last of the Von Linsingen line from this settler background).
Left: Lombard's Post near Port Alfred: buildings grouped for defence.
Right: Trompetter’s Drift, Fish River: military outpost, to the left with square tower.

Left: Vredenburgh, Rosebank: traditional steep “duigen” (stave) truss.
Right: Outbuilding, Kentucky near Fort Brown: vernacular English “king-post” truss.

Having seen the still very much extant and nearly indestructible Albany sneezewood fenceposts in my youth, I came to recognize the same source of many sills and frames. For example, in the Salem church (1822) and my Grahamstown childhood home (1860s) the window sills and more visible front door sill hardly show any wear. Sneezewood is not known, or not evident, nearer the Western Cape. Yellowwood floors abound in the Eastern as much as the Western Cape. I hope the old public library in Hill Street, Grahamstown, still has the hefty (around 450 x 300 cm) first level yellowwood beams of its former warehouse existence.

One should expect (as in the pre-British times) to also identify teak, stinkwood, local vernacular poplar (dare I say, ‘exotic’ timber?), and indigenous white pear, rooiels and so on. I understand that some Cape furniture thought to be stinkwood may well be the very similar imported “Brazilian stinkwood” (our later Imbuia), according to Cape auction records of the 1840s! (see G.E. Pearce, Eighteenth Century Furniture in South Africa. Cape Town: A.A. Balkema, 1957). Life is full of surprises.

Ceilings

During the 19th century, Cape Town and all the settlements continued or grew to welcome development from single-storey prototypical Cape-style to double-storey or more. British developments in constructing row houses and building methods were introduced, such as the fashion for closing off under-first-floor-sawn timbers as a more efficient building approach and for crucially improved sound-proofing from floor to
floor, also better light quality within the main spaces with flat reflective ceilings as opposed to more sombre dark-stained moulded beams and boards.

Before the advent of extensive machine-cut tongue-and-groove boarding (used extensively from say 1870s onwards), 6 x ½-inch “matchboard”, plaster and lath ceilings were widely introduced. A popular range of precast gypsum ornament became available, like the window and door details to many buildings large and small. Sometimes it was used in totally new buildings, such as the dressed granite-fronted 109 Harrington Street, or sometimes to clad and conceal older vernacular Dutch-period single-storey beams and boards, for example at Ruth Prowse School of Art (formerly the early homestead Roodebloem, Woodstock).

One can only really dissect examples of the plaster and lath work during regrettable demolition or replacement. Some of my collected relics originate from a large double-storey house, 12 Kloof Street, that I sadly saw bite the dust. The plaster was suspended under older once-exposed beamed and yellowwood-boarded first floor construction. Also from observation of the demolition of an early 19th century house on Sir Lowry Road (opposite the Good Hope Centre), from which I salvaged a set of decorative timber beads and cover moulds.

I also have a slate or two, as a reminder of the prolific quantity of imported Welsh slates which covered so many buildings here in the Cape as well as many Eastern Cape settler buildings, often replacing earlier reed or thatch, and long before the advent of corrugated iron (1860s) and even persisting in preference to iron into the 20th century.