

Freedom Park – South Africa's flagship heritage precinct

by Hendrik Prinsloo

In 1999, former President Nelson Mandela said, “the day should not be far off, when we shall have a people's shrine, a Freedom Park, where we shall honour with all the dignity they deserve, those who endured pain so we should experience the joy of freedom.”

That day arrived and Freedom Park was born as a national and international icon of humanity and freedom. This memorial site is hailed as the most ambitious heritage project of South Africa's democratic government. It is located on a 52-hectare site on Salvokop in Pretoria, a vantage point that offers visitors a spectacular panorama of the capital city and beyond. The various elements of the park combine to pay tribute to those who have paid the ultimate price for freedom.

The construction process

The site selected for this all-important memorial was a natural hill close to the centre of the capital city. The hill was still in its natural state, which posed major challenges to the design team, who had to put together an urban development framework for the site. Due to the size of the site, it was critical to ensure proper planning from the onset.

The first phase of the project commenced in 2004 to coincide with South Africa's ten-year celebration of democracy. This phase was completed on 8 March 2004 following the appointment of design consultants. In addition to the construction of the infrastructure, the first memorial element, Isivivane, was also completed as part of this phase.

Isivivane is the resting place of the spirits of those who died in the struggle for humanity and freedom. It is situated on the eastern side of the hill. The concept of Isivivane is derived from the word “viva”, which means “to come together in a group”. It can also be interpreted as “commitment to solidarity” and “unity of purpose”. An accumulated heap of stones (beacons), called Isivivane, was believed to bring good fortune to long-distance travellers by paying homage to the landscape and all that it contained.

The idea of an intermediary phase emanated after a visit to Isivivane by former President Thabo Mbeki. He suggested that it was important for the nation to know who the heroes and heroines were who had sacrificed their lives for humanity and freedom. The memorial that commemorates the major conflicts that shaped South Africa's history is known as S'khumbuto and comprises the Wall of Names, the amphitheatre, the sanctuary, the eternal flame and the Gallery of Leaders.

S'khumbuto bears testimony to the various conflicts that have shaped the country and commemorates those who have sacrificed their lives for humanity and freedom. The concept of S'khumbuto is drawn from siSwati nomenclature and signifies a place of remembrance for those who have died and also a place for invoking their assistance in current and future affairs. S'khumbuto is not intended to be a place of grief and mourning, but of celebration. It is a tribute to African and human dignity, and a place for the renewal of the human spirit.

The Wall of Names is an awe-inspiring structure (697 m in length), inscribed with the names of those who died during eight conflicts in South Africa's history: the pre-colonial wars, slavery, genocide, wars of resistance, the South African War, the First World War, the Second World War and the Struggle for Liberation. The physical wall can accommodate 120 000 names. To date, 75 000 names have been verified for inscription. The design allows for future generations to memorialise their heroes and heroines. More names, with additional information, such as biographical data and pictures, will be available on a virtual wall accessible via touch-screen terminals.

The amphitheatre is a terraced space that can seat 2 000 people and serves as a multipurpose venue for



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major events or celebrations. The sanctuary is a serene environment that is conducive to the outpouring of emotion. Visitors are invited to conduct a ceremony or light a candle in remembrance of the victims in the struggle for freedom, or simply to celebrate the life of a loved one. The eternal flame adjacent to the sanctuary calls on visitors to remember the unknown soldiers – those unsung heroes and heroines who lost their lives without their names being recorded in history. The Gallery of Leaders pays tribute to some of the many people whose leadership qualities and achievements have been pivotal in the struggle for humanity and freedom nationally, continentally and internationally. These leaders have been selected because of the way in which they have brought about change and development and influenced the course of history. They are in the

Gallery of Leaders to serve as exemplary role models who are worthy of being emulated. Significant effort went into the design of the intermediary phase during 2005. Designs were based on historical research. Work on the database for the Wall of Names commenced during this phase. Owing to the sheer scale of the intermediary phase, construction was ongoing for the best part of 2006. On the research side, a vast amount of resources were required to collate and verify the approximately 75 000 names to be inscribed on the wall. Construction was completed in time and S'khumbuto, Moshate and the Wall of Names were introduced to the President and the nation on the Day of Reconciliation, 16 December 2007.

An important element of Phase II was //hapo, the interactive exhibition space where the story of southern

Africa will unfold in narrative and visual form. The name //hapo means “dream” and was drawn from a Khoi proverb “//hapo ge //hapo tama /haohasib dis tamas ka i bo”, which translates into “A dream is not a dream until it is shared by the entire community.” As with the other elements in Freedom Park, //hapo was designed to blend in with the landscape, rather than impose on it. Steel structures, overlaid with copper, were used to sculpt the building frames, and so //hapo was shaped to resemble boulders.

The vision for //hapo was to move away from the historic concept of a museum and to provide an interactive exhibition space that would convey the rich history of southern Africa to visitors. Extensive consultation resulted in detailed guidelines for the design team. It is envisaged that the permanent exhibitions will be structured around social spaces



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that allow for live interpretation, performance and storytelling. In future, many of the exhibitions will include a selection of cultural and historical objects that can be handled, discussed or used, transforming the visitor from a spectator to a participant.

The sod-turning ceremony on 23 July 2008 signalled the official launch of Phase IIA. This phase entailed the completion of //hapo, as well as a peaceful garden and walkway that would provide an ideal space for meditation, self-discovery, healing and spiritual contemplation (vhuawelo), additional parking, a restaurant and kiosk, as well as a curio shop.

Phase IIB in the construction process comprises the Pan African Archive, which forms the knowledge base and information storage facility for the park, together with the park's administration building.

The Pan African Archives contain the underlying knowledge base of all the components of Freedom Park. In this space, the park's research data, including printed information and electronic archives of audio, visual and text formats, is stored, conserved and made available to the general public. The archives will

→ *Opposite page: The names of those who died during eight conflicts in South Africa's history are inscribed on the Wall of Names.*

be a respected collector of materials on the themes reflected in //hapo, covering the struggles for freedom and humanity. It is envisaged that the archives will play an instrumental role in the development and delivery of national curriculum elements of history: the struggle period, the coming of democracy, the reconciliation process and South Africa's place in serving a global reconciliation agenda.

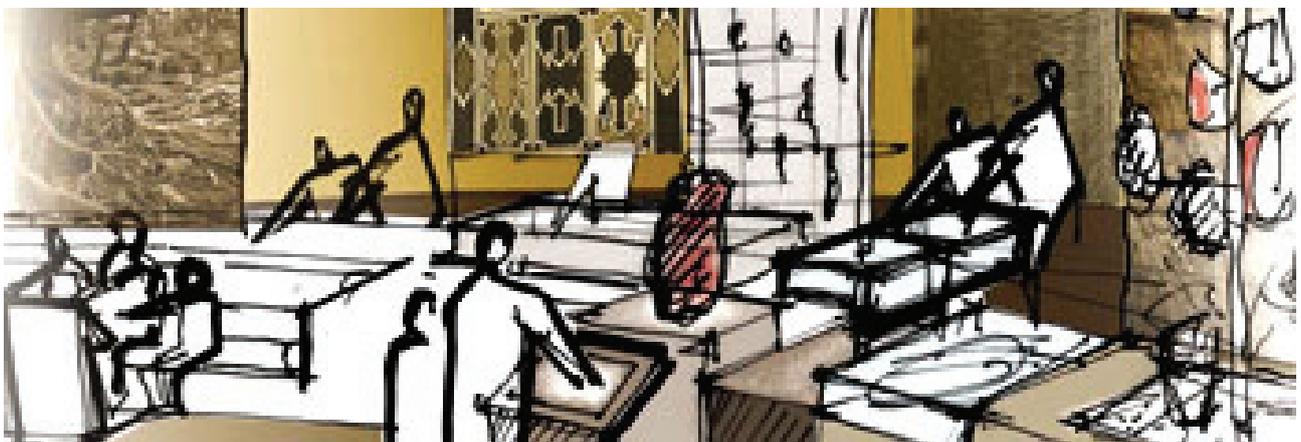
The final phase of construction (Phase IIC) will comprise Tiva and an access road between the Voortrekker Monument and Freedom Park. Tiva is envisaged to be a large body of water, clearly visible on the slope of the hill, symbolising peace, tranquillity and serenity, as water – the essence of life – features prominently in cleansing and healing rituals. Traditionally, a lake is seen as an area of deep mystery that provides for cleansing and healing, as well as communication with the spiritual world. Visitors to Tiva will be able to relax and enjoy the natural environment, and also find a peaceful place for remembering their ancestors.

The result of this construction process is a unique memorial site that will assist all South Africans in the process of reconciliation and nation-building. It tells the story of our country and its people through the lens of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), thus showcasing our distinctive history, heritage, spirituality and culture. •

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Hendrik Prinsloo is a registered professional construction project manager who has extensive experience in the construction industry. As project manager, he has been involved in various major fast-track commercial and government projects, including Freedom Park. He is also a senior lecturer in project management in the Graduate School of Technology Management, as well as in the Department of Construction Economics at the University of Pretoria.



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