

New Research Institute at The Mount

Johannesburg, Gauteng

Architects: **Lemon Pebble Design and Greenbrick Architects JV**
 Project Team: **Althea Peacock, Tanzeem Razak, Sandra Felix, Adrian Jackson, Aslam Majam, Rhea Polji, David Couto, Soyiso Sihlali**
 Structural Engineers: **Calibre Engineering**
 Mechanical Engineers: **AOS Consulting**
 Electrical Engineers: **Lebone Engineers**
 Quantity Surveyor: **KDM Quantity Surveyors**
 Project Manager: **Parallel Projects**
 Contractor: **Dryden Projects**
 Photographers: **Althea Peacock, Michael O'Brein**
 Text: **Tanzeem Razak**

26° 10'31.75"S
 28° 02'22.81"E

The intention of the project was to rescript a heritage building to reflect a more inclusive history and realise the client's transformative agenda.

The Mount, as the building was commonly called, was built after 1910 on one of the first sites established in Parktown, Johannesburg. The house and the outbuilding were built on Jubilee Road, named in honour of Queen Victoria's Jubilee celebration.

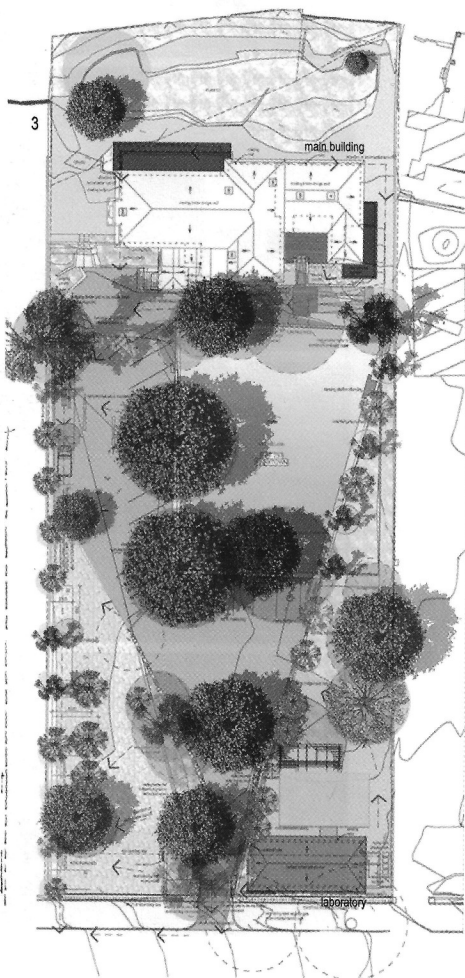
The house, which is set back from the road, was ideally positioned on the Johannesburg ridge with views towards the north of Johannesburg. Over time its south façade with its portico was largely untouched while the northern façade was incrementally added onto. By the time the client, Wits University, acquired the property in the 1970s, it largely remained a freestanding mansion set in a landscaped south-facing garden.

The brief from the client was to refurbish the house to suit the needs of the new tenant – the Sydney Brenner Institute of Molecular Biology. The client's intention was to find a permanent home for its six institutes within an urban development framework. The client wanted the building to reflect its mission to see the institutes as the forefront of

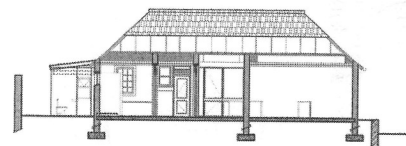
research and development, and encouraged the architects to explore a response beyond merely restoring the form. Local heritage bodies, however, were resistant to any additions that did not restore the building to its original form.

The architects were of the opinion that historically significant buildings in Johannesburg still largely remain limited to restoration to a particular time and fail to meaningfully transform spaces that had a contentious past. There is a reluctance to confront issues of racial and spatial segregation that shaped these buildings. The intention was to rescript the meaning of the interventions from expressing a single narrative to a more inclusive history that might excavate the impact of subverted marks, by exploring ideas around spatial equity through representing historic layers.

The northern façade was excavated to accommodate a glass box that houses the most public entities – the library and the boardroom. The reinstated original columns acknowledges a definitive past, while the new layer of the steel box was shifted deliberately off-axis to recognise the difference between past and present. The original outbuilding was upgraded to the laboratory.



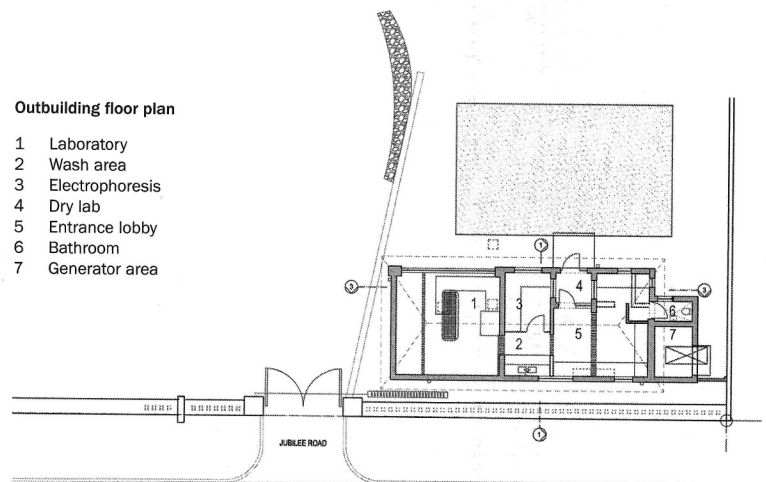
Site plan



Outbuilding section 3

Outbuilding floor plan

- 1 Laboratory
- 2 Wash area
- 3 Electrophoresis
- 4 Dry lab
- 5 Entrance lobby
- 6 Bathroom
- 7 Generator area



Outbuilding floor plan