Sketch: Vision of the east west bridge connector
The easiest way to challenge these existing hierarchies without ‘reinventing the wheel’ is to drop a level of raked seating to the level of the member seating and make this the strongest and most dominant element in the chamber thus reshaping the existing hierarchies. This would favor the inclusive ideals of the PAP. These seats should be used for active participating members of the public, n.g.o and civic groups and members of the media. The norm of a gallery is retained to a lesser degree fitting each one of the seats with microphones and retractable writing tables allowing the less active members of the public and the occasional visitor and opportunity to voice their concerns.

The chamber can take additional advantage of the busy periphery zones on the civic square above pulling through a public walkway over the chamber for passers by, tourist and visiting school groups to walk through unhindered and view in over the activities of the parliament. This walkway is sealed off with bullet proof glass panes and accessed off the two southern corners of the glass box element on the civic square above.
The materials used in the parliamentary chamber are not intended to be plush, or be chosen on the basis of being romanticized representations of African cultures or landscapes. Instead these are chosen on the basis of reminding members of the PAP and visiting dignitaries and members of the public about the dire condition of the continent. An example of this is the central ‘court’ of the parliament which is packed with rough sandstone boulders representing a dry river bank. A stainless steel map of Africa floats above this representing the last remaining puddle of water.

The dark timber wall cladding adds to the darkness of the space with natural light from the glass box and light wells above reminding the parliamentarians that the strength of the continent is in the hands of ordinary people and not the leaders who gather below. Such symbolism refers to the real conditions of the continent and resonates with the establishment of the AU and PAP, namely for Africans to come together to solve the continents problems.
Privacy gradients

The classical hierarchy of political architecture has been subverted in this design as the spaces become more private as one descends further down into the ‘building’. The most public floor is the ground floor in this case given back to the city and its pedestrians. The floor immediately below it is allocated for the more public of the spaces: multifunctional halls, exhibition space, rentable conferencing and meeting facilities and the canteen / restaurant. The floor beneath that is semi private housing the visitor’s accreditation center, visitor’s lounge, art gallery, functions hall and the public galleries that overlook the main parliamentary chamber. The seating for the n.g.o, civic groups and active public members extends from this level to the level below.

The member’s ceremonial stairway also links to the level below and the visiting public can view the procession of PAP members and dignitaries as they descend down to the third and most private level. This level houses smaller council and workshop rooms to be used by the bureaus and subcommittees of the PAP. The member seating of the main parliamentary seating also occurs on this level.

The structural system

The structural system is an extension of the adjacent superbasement structural grid of 8.5 meters. This grid reduces to 4.25 m at the retaining basement walls. These deep retaining walls also have a vertical beam grid of 3m to form a rigid grid.

The reinforced concrete columns are 500 x 100mm in size and they support 425mm hick two way spanning coffer slabs used for their strength and structural efficiency. The grid adjusts were major voids occur. The main parliamentary chamber has a span of 42.5 meters requiring a reinforced concrete beam 1.65 meters in depth to span that distance. This beam rests on a ‘compound column’. This is essentially two 500 x 1000mm columns with a circulatory space in-between joined at every level by intersecting beams. This means that structurally these two columns function as one large column.

Right: photo of structural model
Photo of the structural design model
The design detail

The chosen design detail is of the entrance doors to the ‘glass box’ element at the level of the civic square since it reflects the inclusively of the PAP. These are large top hung glass doors that when open allow for uninterrupted flow of the public to and through the public walkway that overlooks the parliamentary chamber. When closed the glass box becomes a closed object with no discernable openings, however still allowing views into the parliament through its glass walls.

Sketch: The intended design detail elevation

Sketch: The ‘glass box’ showing the corner doors
Plan of South Western Corner of 'Glass Box'

Southern Elevation of 'Glass Box' showing timber sliding doors in closed position

A. 254 x 254 ms h-section column structurally bolted to RC beam toeng detail painted 'matte black' as per paint spec.
B. 30 x 150 x 440 mm ms tubing continuously welded to 254 x 254 h-section column painted 'matte black' as per paint spec.
C. 3600 x 15 x 10 mm ms laser cut plate continuously welded to 50 x 100 x 440 mm ms tube 'arms'. Plate painted 'matte black' as per paint spec to receive structurally siliconed toughened glass panels.
D. 2400 x 900 x 15 mm toughened clear glass panes structurally siliconed to ms laser cut plate receiver.
E. Two 'true extension arms' fabricated from 200 x 75 ms channels, painted 'matte black' as per paint spec structurally bolted through 254 x 254 ms h-section column. True extension arms to receive box gutters and 5mm ms laser cut plate from sister element. Refer to detail.
F. 200 x 200 ms t-beam painted 'matte black' as per paint spec. (laser cut from 254 x 254 ms h-section) continuously structurally welded to 254 x 254 h-section ms column.
G. 50 x 644 mm deep box gutter on treated S.A Pine spacers.
Box gutter drains to 200 x 205 x 1955 mm epoxy coated ms channel spouts 2244 centers. Refer to detail.
H. Toughened glass roof structurally siliconed to 50 x 50 mm rebar elements 600 mm centers. Glass to comply to S.A.S. 5 applicable codes.
Sloped Glass roof drains to 200 x 75 ms epoxy coated ms channel gutters 1500 centers. Refer to detail.
I. 5mm thick ms laser cut plate fixed to 50 x 50 ms tubing substructure with 10mm black machine screws 300mm centers. Plate painted 'matte black' as per paint spec forming ms plate fascia edging. Refer to detail.
J. Solid timber top hung sliding door to schedule. Door fixed to sliding track with 1x10mm aluminium. Sliding pivot pin below. Refer to detail.
K. timber motorised sliding pivot constructed from ms tubing clad in ms laser cut plate to detail. Pivot rests on two 900 mm X rubberised wheels.
L. Electric gate motor to later spec.
M. Pvc water channel to spec.
N. Ms webbed truss fabricated from 200 x 75 ms channels. Refer to eng detail.
O. Exited Aluminium finition with brush seed to seal against timber door refer to glazing details.
The resolved design is shown on the following pages
Basement 1 Plan