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WITS JUNCTION – Student Housing and Heritage Adaptation

Hart, Brendan; Munro, Katherine

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want people to know that this project is something different, special, unique and that people who live and work here enjoy their surroundings.’

NAMING WITS JUNCTION – HERITAGE MADE VISIBLE

The naming of the complex as Wits Junction is symbolic of this coming together of a unique mining geology, diverse cultures, Johannesburg history and Parktown traditions. It speaks to the hope that the lives of students will intersect at the centre. New subsidiary lanes in the complex are named for Wits’s proud achievements in palaeontology research – such as Sediba, Africanus, Sibudu and Blombos Lanes, while the theme adopted in the naming of the buildings has been ‘songs of migration’, commemorating the folklore, cultures and vibrancy of the many nationalities and people who made up Johannesburg. The names, such as M’Godini, Uluma, Languta, Sarie Marais, Stimela and Shosholoza, are redolent of memory, physical labour, longing and inclusivity in forging a common history. Meeting rooms have been named for Wits alumni who are Nobel Prize laureates – Nelson Mandela (peace), Aaron Klug (chemistry), Sydney Brenner (medicine) and Nadine Gordimer (literature). A book by Luli Callinicos, *Who Built Jozi? Discovering Memory at Wits*

Junction was commissioned and launched at the opening event in October 2012.

CONCLUSION

The design of Wits Junction strives to set a new standard in student accommodation by creating a diverse range of residential choices in a consciously urban environment, while giving a sense of place and confident purpose. The emphasis is on choice as to the type of accommodation selected by the student based on budgets, maturity and location.

The architectural language of the new buildings has been accused of being bland and flat, possibly due to budget restraints, as well as safety concerns that excluded balconies which would have added a sense of depth to the façades. The quality of internal courtyard spaces is, however, greatly successful, with its closest comparison being Martin Kruger’s Graça Machel Residence at UCT. The architecture created is recessive, which is of enormous value. It allows the restored heritage buildings and gardens to take prominence.

The integration of heritage into the project is probably its greatest success. Adaptation, renovation and a new purpose for the old houses has become a bridge between past and present, contributing to identity and giving a unique sense of place.

- 5 The new student centre creates a social courtyard space behind the historic Mzini Wami House
- 6 Rocky outcrop of the Witwatersrand ridge
- 7 New residences lining Junction Avenue
- 8 The courtyard of block 18, Mohokare
- 9 Restored historic homestead that now functions as the Mzini Wami student centre.

In providing quality residences, the university promotes and ensures academic success for its students. ‘The end product,’ as summed up by Rob Sharman of Wits Office of Residence Life, ‘is a service and not simply a building.’

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REFERENCES

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Report of the Ministerial Committee for the Review of the Provision of Student Housing at South African Universities. www.dhet.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=4VNwYJ%2BE-wvA%3D&tabid=92&mid=495