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VIS

TOYNHUIS
CAPE TOWN

**PINK, PIZZAS,
GREEN FINGERS
& PRIMARY
COLOURS**

**APARTMENTS,
PODS &
BUNGALOWS**

**LAGOS
BIENNIAL,
DESIGN MIAMI
& DUTCH
DESIGN**

DECO MINI

Situated on the 8th floor of Cape Town's iconic Holyrood building, this ultra-compact apartment combines the best of Art Deco with one of the city's most enviable locations.

WORDS ROBYN ALEXANDER

PHOTOS PARIS BRUMMER



PRODUCTION ANNEMARIE MEINTJES

THIS PAGE From just inside the front door, the living-sleeping area is to your left and the bathroom and kitchen on the right.
OPPOSITE Holyrood's distinctive pink exterior paint and curvaceous Art Deco facade make the building instantly recognisable.

visi | Cape Town Icon

here simply isn't a better view in Cape Town than the outlook from a Holyrood apartment on a summer evening. Sorry, denizens of the Atlantic Seaboard and devotees of Boyes Drive. Apologies, everyone in Bloubergstrand and Bishopscourt. But if you one day stand on a curvy, postage-stamp-sized balcony at this, one of the Mother City's best-known buildings, you'll understand. Set out directly below you is the Company's Gardens, green and verdant, with its blend of landscaped formality and whimsically wandering humans. Beyond that to the left is downtown Cape Town and its various unfortunate high rises – and then to the right, the dramatic sweep of the City Bowl and the face of Table Mountain.

But the view is just one of the many reasons why you might want to live in Holyrood. As one of the few Cape Town buildings that can properly be called "iconic", this narrow Art Deco apartment block is instantly recognisable and very beautiful. Plus, it's also always attracted what one of its best-known current residents, architect Robert Silke, broadly describes as "outcasts and eccentrics", among whom this maverick designer would undoubtedly include himself.

The building was designed by an architect named Cedric Melbourne Sherlock and constructed in the very late 1930s, on a site where two old Georgian townhouses had previously stood on Queen Victoria Street. Sherlock was also the developer and owner of the building, and designed Holyrood as holiday accommodation for working-class families visiting Cape Town, speculating that this was the best and quickest way to make the most money from them.

Unfortunately for Mr Sherlock in this case, the start of the Second World War in 1939 prevented almost everyone from taking a holiday for quite some time, and when the war ended six years later, as Robert says, "the architectural style of the building had fallen completely out of fashion". And so, the tiny apartments – the original layout fits four small flats into each of Holyrood's ten floors – quite quickly fell into disrepair and were almost entirely neglected for the rest of the 20th century.

In 2000, Robert was a recent architecture graduate and already an admirer of Holyrood due to his training, design proclivities and the fact that he'd walked past the building for years because his father, an advocate, had chambers close by in Keerom Street. He'd also visited New York and London where, as he says, "any apartment situated alongside a park is automatically some of the city's most expensive real estate". Not in the Mother City at that time, though: when he told an estate agent that he longed to live in the building "one day", the agent laughed. He told Robert that he could buy a flat in it immediately for a pittance – in spite of the fact that, at the time, Cape Town was experiencing the first of several huge recent increases in property prices.

Robert now owns several apartments in Holyrood, as well as living here himself. "I'll never leave," he says. Among them is this jewel of a property on the 9th floor, which he has meticulously restored to something very closely resembling the original. That was a process that involved a great deal of effort and time, including "spending every weekend at Milnerton Market", he says.

It was worth it. The details of the interior design – think oak parquet floors, restored monochrome tilework on sensuously curved walls and divinely Deco pieces that include classic light fittings, a wall-mounted heater and built-in porcelain soap dishes – are utterly lovely. And they make this very compact space, which is just 35m² in size, immensely appealing.

The apartment is divided into three rooms: a minuscule kitchen, a beautifully planned small bathroom, and a living-sleeping area that still includes the bunk beds originally built in at one end. These were, of course, intended for the two children of the four-person family that was once expected to be holidaying here. And on the far side of this charming and beautifully organised space is the balcony – and that view. robertsilke.com

THINK
**OAK PARQUET FLOORS,
RESTORED
MONOCHROME
TILEWORK ON
SENSUOUSLY
CURVED WALLS
AND DIVINELY DECO
PIECES.**

In keeping with the fact that it was designed to be used as holiday accommodation, the apartment's main room is intended for both living and sleeping, studio-style. The built-in bookshelf and mantelpiece around the heater, and the hanging light fitting, are both original fixtures of the apartment. The Art Deco armchairs were found on Gumtree and upholstered in a flamingo print fabric from Hertex (hertex.co.za).



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A view from the minuscule "hallway" into the bathroom and kitchen; the electrical box is one of the original elements brought back into the kitchen when Robert restored the apartment; all the bathroom fixtures and fittings are originals too, including the mirrored cabinet set into the wall. **OPPOSITE** The linoleum used on the kitchen and bathroom floors is "the real thing" from KBAC (kbacflooring.co.za), made from linseed and cork dust, says Robert.



THERE'S
A MINUSCULE KITCHEN,
A BEAUTIFULLY
PLANNED
SMALL BATHROOM
AND A LIVING-
SLEEPING AREA.





THIS PAGE Looking back towards the front door, the original built-in bunk beds peek out from behind the curtain that closes them off to the rest of the space. The electrical heater is an original feature, and the flamingos are from Propeller Props (propellerprops.co.za).
OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Robert found the ornate original Art Deco sideboard and dining suite at Cash Crusaders in Sea Point (cashcrusaders.co.za); the Voortrekker Monument could well be South Africa's best-known piece of Art Deco architecture: the artwork on the left is a commemorative palm wood carving from The Vintage Lamp Shop (Facebook/TheVintageLampShop), and the painting on the right is a commemorative vintage oleograph.



PRODUCTION ANNEMARIE MEINTJES

I N T O
T H E
L I G H T

AN IMPOSING **CIRCULAR SILO**

WORDS BIDDI RORKE

IN THE HEART OF THE WINELANDS

IS A PLACE OF WORSHIP

- AND AN ARCHITECTURAL MASTERPIECE.

PHOTOS PARIS BRUMMER



W

WHEN AN EXISTING CHURCH IN THE WINELANDS OF SOMERSET WEST

became too small for its growing congregation, architect Jo Noero created an extraordinary new space. “As the new church needed to expand and contract easily to accommodate 450 to 900 people depending on the occasion, we converted the original church into a hall and performance space and built a new one approximately 25 metres away,” Jo says. A grassed courtyard links the two buildings – now converted into a hall and performance space – while the covered colonnade provides access to all spaces from the entrance gate.

Working closely with the minister, Gavin Millard, who trained as an architect before entering the ministry, Jo conceptualised a circular inner “drum”, large enough to accommodate 450 people. To incorporate the additional Christ Church congregation, a roofed square space fans out from the main circle, like a generous skirt. The dramatic vertical dimension of this circular space means the minister is never more than 15 metres from anyone in the audience.

Inside, natural light streams into this circular volume and a dramatic cross is formed by the play of the solid and void elements of the roof light. Fittings and finishes are pared down to the bare essentials: ash wood and white steel-framed chairs; a polished concrete floor; a white steel spiral staircase that leads to the sound control desk at the back of the church.

Multifaceted brick interior walls constructed breeze-block style further enclose the upper reaches of the main floor, creating an effective acoustic shell. “Circular forms are notoriously difficult acoustically and the brick wall was designed to mitigate this problem,” Jo explains. The result is such superb sound quality that the wider community is now using the space for concerts and other events.

Outside, additional breeze-block walls in concrete make for a friendly boundary between public and private, providing security while allowing cross-ventilation plus light and sun control. Rendered brickwork, galvanised steel and white painted concrete (rather than pricier off-shutter concrete) were the materials of choice throughout. “The palette was selected to reflect and highlight the difference between luxury and necessity,” says Jo. “I have always loved the unabashed utilitarian nature of the buildings in the surrounding wine estates and Christ Church reflects some of the forms and materials found on these estates. I wanted to create a space in which everything was elevated from the necessary to the beautiful. Too much architecture nowadays is impoverished by the exaggeration of luxury and expensive materials.”

noeroarchitects.com

Rendered brickwork, galvanised steel and white painted concrete were the materials of choice throughout.

visi | Somerset West Church



EVERYTHING IN THE SPACE HAS BEEN **ELEVATED** FROM THE **NECESSARY** TO THE **BEAUTIFUL.**





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT Wood and white steel-framed chairs and a polished concrete floor reflect the pared-down ethos of the building; a white steel spiral staircase leads to the sound control desk; brick interior walls create magnificent acoustics in the circular structure. The circular hanging light fitting was custom-made for the building. **OPPOSITE** The dramatic vertical dimensions of the space allow the orator to be no more than 15 metres away from the audience.



INSIDE, **NATURAL LIGHT**
STREAMS INTO THIS
CIRCULAR VOLUME
AND A
DRAMATIC CROSS
IS FORMED BY THE PLAY OF THE
SOLID AND VOID ELEMENTS
OF THE ROOF LIGHT.

Architect Jo Noero conceptualised a circular inner "drum" large enough to accommodate 450 people. To incorporate additional congregation members for special events, a roofed square space fans out from the main circle.

A grassed courtyard links the old church building - now converted into a hall and performance space - and the new one, built around 25 metres away.

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