

South African designers Atang Tshikare (left) and Laurie Wiid van Heerden with their Where We Are At graffiti bench

THE CAPE CRUSADERS

As South Africa celebrates 20 years of democracy, Cape Town gets creative as the World's Design Capital 2014, engaging artists, designers and architects in projects for a unified and sustainable future.

WORDS LINDA VERGNANI



The Pot Luck Club

Haldane Martin is relaxing on his giant millipede: a coiling grey, multi-legged creature with about 30 segments, set under a lamp of flouncy black ostrich feathers.

This is the award-winning Cape Town furniture designer's leather Songololo (millipede) sofa. It sits in the window of Martin's studio in Woodstock, a historic inner-city suburb where decaying warehouses have been converted into artists' studios, galleries and cafes.

"The common thread that I explore is very much about forging a new South African identity, post-apartheid," says Martin. "One example of that would be the Zulu Mama chair that I created using indigenous Southern African basket-weaving techniques for the seat, while the frame is made from stainless steel bent on a computer numerical control machine, which is very much our Western heritage and technology."

Like other Cape Town designers, Martin also draws inspiration from nature. The cellular geometric shapes from which he constructed his plastic Polyhedra coffee table are based on electron microscope images of bone

structure. His furniture is made as sustainably as possible and he employs skilled weavers with disabilities.

Set against a backdrop of dense clouds spilling over the cliffs of the 1086m Table Mountain, Cape Town buzzes with design and creativity. Exciting new ventures are springing up alongside established galleries and craft shops in the central business district and surrounding suburbs. It was designated the World Design Capital (WDC) 2014 by the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design, and the city's leading architects, town planners and designers are using design as a tool for social transformation. The theme for the year is "Live Design, Transform Life" and the mission of Cape Town Design, the not-for-profit implementing agency for WDC 2014, goes far beyond craft and art. It aims to focus on "projects that bridge historic divides, reconnect our city in structure and in spirit, rebuild social and economic inclusion, and reposition Cape Town for a sustainable future".

While 2014 is the 20th anniversary of democracy in South Africa, the city still bears the physical and sociological scars of apartheid. Between Woodstock and >

DESIGNERS PHOTOGRAPHY: HENRIQUE WILDING



Clockwise from above left: a life-size bead and wire elephant welcomes visitors to the City Hall in Cape Town; Haldane Martin with his Songololo sofa; Pod hotel; the contemporary art gallery at Ellerman House

Clockwise from above left: woven wire baskets and ceramics, Africa Nova, De Waterkant; cork banquet table, lamp and tableware by Laurie Wiid van Heerden and Community Bench by Aram Lello, Object House, Woodstock; Andile Dyalvane, Imiso Ceramics

the wealthy suburbs higher on the mountain slopes, there are still large tracts of open land left by the apartheid regime's demolition of District Six. The houses and tenement blocks of this once-vibrant, multiracial area were destroyed after it was declared a "white area" in 1966 and more than 60,000 of its residents were forcibly moved to the desolate outlying Cape Flats.

In a bright yellow office, near District Six, Alayne Reesberg, CEO of Cape Town Design, explains that WDC 2014 is not about the pretty things. "It's about the gritty things," she says. "It's about infrastructure, sewerage, rapid urban development and all the problems that come with that, it's about reticulation and recycling of hard waste. It's about the social impact of design, about making the city more liveable."

Reesberg says one of the reasons Cape Town won the WDC bid is that it promised to showcase local ingenuity and often ingenious low-tech, low-carbon solutions to problems. "The way we go about doing things with a bit of duct tape, chewing gum and some *doring-draad* [barbed wire] is more akin to solutions going on in the developing world than those you have in Europe."

She says that it is tough to make these things visible, so her organisation is telling the stories of successful design projects. The 450 projects chosen for WDC 2014 include Dream Mobile, which creates low-cost smart phones for Africa, and iShack, which allows residents

of shanty towns to upgrade to better-designed, solar-powered shacks. Other projects range from the design of new schools, hospitals and clinics to the creation of a Fields of Hope food garden in District Six.

"The indirect goal is to get people to become critical consumers of design, to bring those people who have citizen insights together with the professionals to make the city more liveable," Reesberg says. "We hold the view that you don't have to hold a design degree to know that if you have a gammy knee, steps do not work for you."

A series of events has been planned for visitors throughout the year, including the annual Design Indaba conference and expo (Feb 26-Mar 2), which showcases everything from industrial design to new media, and Mercedes-Benz Cape Town Fashion Week (August).

Last year, Leanie van der Vyver presented her grotesquely high Scary Beautiful shoes at the Design Indaba. She explains that, like a stilt walker, the wearer of her Scary Beautiful shoes inserts her feet backwards into the shoes so her shins are supported by giant heels. They force the wearer to adopt an animal-like gait. A video of the controversial shoes has had more than 4.1 million hits on Vimeo.

"A lot of people were angry that the shoes exist and called me a women-hater," says van der Vyver. "But it was a comment on my anger at the fashion industry for their disregard for women. It's looking at how fashion takes things to the ultimate extreme."

She is sitting at a table at The Pot Luck Club, a trendy, glass-walled

restaurant on top of the silo that towers over the Old Biscuit Mill craft centre in Woodstock. Van der Vyver sees design as a way to communicate: "Design is for everyone and people relate to it."

Currently working in film production, the artist is seeking funding to make a Scary Beautiful machine.

Van der Vyver says South African design is less sophisticated than European, but African inspiration and raw energy make it exciting.

At Imiso Ceramics, one of a series of shops and studios in the converted red brick warehouses of the Old Biscuit Mill, Andile Dyalvane is making a scarified pot. He explains the cuts mimic the body scars that traditional healers inscribe in people's flesh to protect them from illness. "In my clan, we do it mostly for prevention of evil spirits." A few feet away, Zizipho Poswa paints guineafowl-like spots on a hand-pinched bowl, destined for an exhibition in the US.

Another design hot spot is the area around Greenmarket Square, where the recently opened Stable represents the work of almost 60 South African designers, including Laurie Wiid van Heerden, who makes tables, lamps and homewares from thick slabs of cork. His Corkabitation pavilion, a communal meeting space he designed in collaboration with architect Aram Lello, is being built for WDC 2014.

At the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront, visitors can get updates on WDC 2014 events, tour the sea water-cooled No.1 Silo Building – one of the most sustainable buildings in Africa – and view the work of

designers such as Carrol Boyes, known for her playful silverware in the form of naked bodies.

In Gugulethu township, some homes have been turned into galleries, while in the historic fishing village of Kalk Bay, tourists explore exciting craft shops such as Artvark and then cross the road for a feast of yellowtail or mussels at Harbour House.

Mokena Makeka, an influential, charismatic architect who was on the WDC 2014 bid committee, believes good design is a basic human right. Principal of the award-winning architectural practice Makeka Design Lab, his environmentally savvy Water Cathedral, intended as an example of water-wise innovation, was selected to be built as part of WDC 2014, which he sees as a stepping stone for artists, designers and craftspeople.

In Makeka's city office stands his concept model of an angular, spacecraft-like Museum of Design, Innovation, Leadership and Art. He is on a board of trustees that is negotiating for a site where such a museum can be constructed.

"Cape Town is a city that is deserving of an innovative and iconic building in terms of what it would unlock for the people," he says. "I think of all these amazing designers and we have to do something for them. And it's not a festival – it's a living, thinking, working institution that records their work; that archives, that produces, that brings dignity to what designers do." ➤

PHOTOGRAPHY (EXCEPT ELLERMAN HOUSE): LINDA VERGNANI

DESIGN CAPE TOWN

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The minimalist Pod hotel's swimming pool

STAY POD

3 Argyle Road, Camps Bay.
(21) 438 8550. pod.co.za

This minimalist hotel by Greg Wright Architects is a visual delight with its combination of granite and raw scaffolding walls, sculptural modernist furniture, bleached tree-trunk side tables and zany wire art works. The 15 rooms are subtly soothing, especially the suites with suspended, under-lit floors, views of surging surf and the dramatic Twelve Apostles peaks. The hotel serves a good breakfast and

poolside cocktails. For dinner, stroll down the road to one of Camps Bay's buzzy beachfront restaurants. From R1750 (\$189).

FOUR ROSMEAD
4 Rosmead Avenue, Oranjezicht.
(21) 480 3810. fourrosmead.com

This high-ceilinged Victorian boutique guesthouse in sylvan surrounds is an easy stroll from the city. A listed monument, it is decorated in contemporary African style, with bright bead animals and colourful art works by South African artists. Many paintings in this warmly welcoming hotel are available for sale. The hotel – which won a TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice 2013 award as

one of the top 25 small hotels in South Africa – has a relaxed feel, with a wood fireplace in the lounge room and a pool courtyard with views of Lions Head. Breakfast is provided, lunch and dinner on request. From R2253 (\$242).

ELLERMAN HOUSE
180 Kloof Road, Bantry Bay.
(21) 430 3200. ellerman.co.za
It is worth staying at elegant Ellerman House, which resembles a *Great Gatsby* film set, just to marvel at its impressive South African art collection. The wood-panelled corridors and rooms of the main mansion are lined with paintings by famous artists ranging from 19th-century

landscape painter Thomas Bowler to contemporary artists such as William Kentridge. A separate gallery represents established and emerging artists. Built in 1906 and once the home of shipping magnate Sir John Ellerman, the colonnaded mansion with its sea views was turned into a boutique hotel by merchant banker Paul Harris. The hotel boasts there is “no back of house”, so guests can chat with chefs in the kitchen or snack in the butler's pantry. The restaurant serves fine food and the wine gallery has more than 7500 South African wines. Celebrities book the two ultramodern private villas. From R5500 (\$592).