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Chatsworth gets a chance

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CHATSWORTH
YOUTH CENTRE



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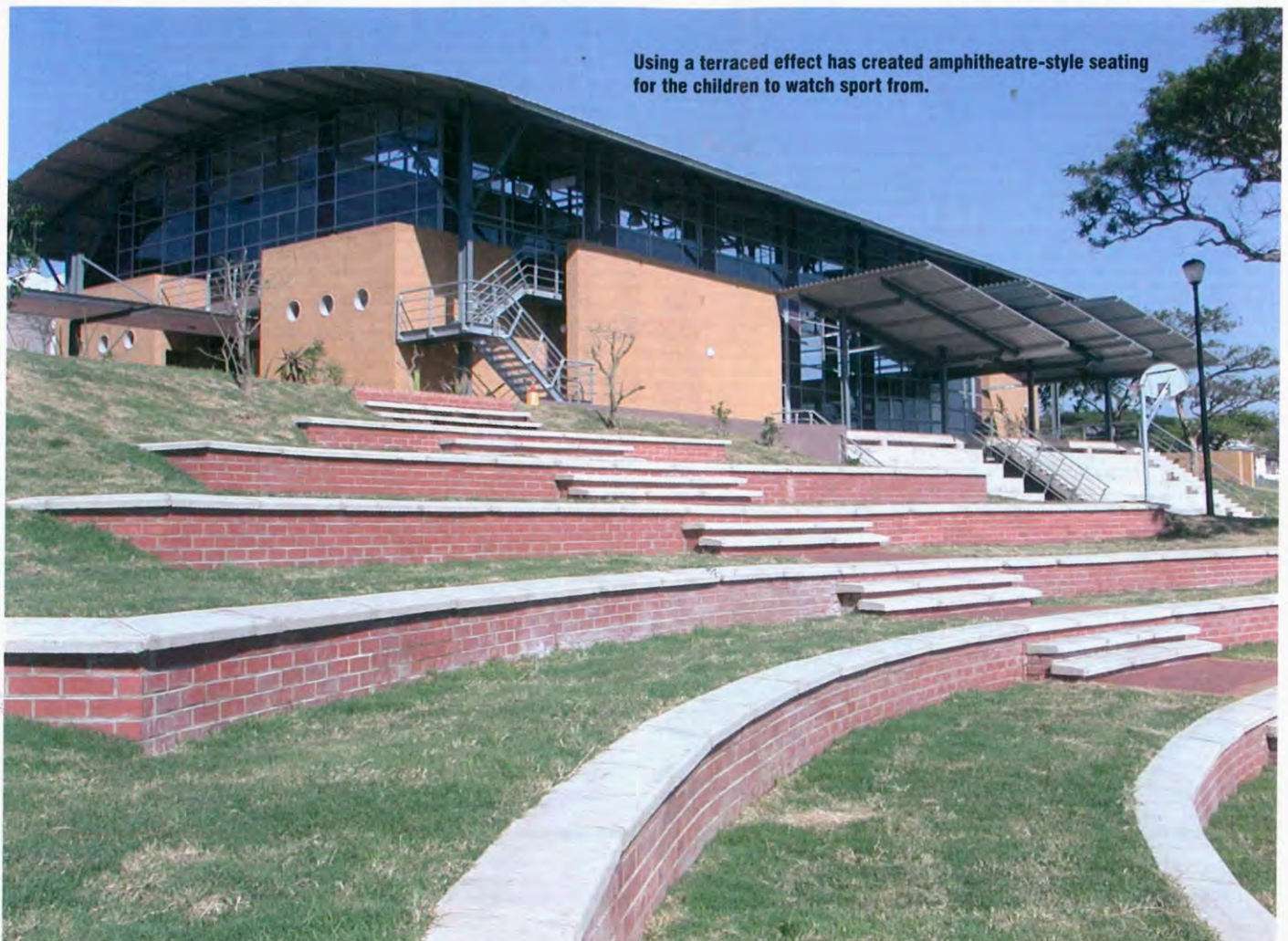
COMMUNITYSPIRIT

The Chatsworth Youth Centre

Ask and thou shalt receive. Or so it seems when Nelson Mandela is involved in social upliftment.



The Chatsworth Youth Centre is nestled on a sloping site, with outstanding views to Amanzimtoti and the sea.



Using a terraced effect has created amphitheatre-style seating for the children to watch sport from.

On 14 October 2003, the Chatsworth Youth Centre was officially opened, and a promise made to former Miss South Africa Kerishnie Naicker fulfilled.

The tragedy of the Throb nightclub incident on 24 March 2000, in which 13 young people died, served as a chilling reminder of the social problems that plague the Chatsworth area.

While sympathy and aid poured into the community, a plan was needed to try and change the vulnerable position of the youth in this sprawling suburb. It was with this in mind that Kerishnie Naicker approached Nelson Mandela to see if he could elicit funds for the financing of a youth centre.

Nando's and Irvin and Johnson Foods were the first to lend their support, and were joined by DaimlerChrysler, and debis Fleet Management. Together, they covered the costs of building the R12 million centre. The land was donated by the Ethekweni Municipality and construction of the Chatsworth Youth Centre began in December 2001.

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEMS

Situated 20km from Durban, Chatsworth came into being in the mid-1960s as a result of the

Group Areas Act. Populated largely by the Indian community, much of the suburb consisted of small, council-built semi-detached homes.

Over the years however, there have been substantial improvements made to many of the houses as well as the roads, transport infrastructure, communication and services. The schools are well-organised and the formal and informal business sectors have thrived, with the Chatsworth Centre being very progressive shopping complex.

Sport is also very popular in the area. There are 53 soccer clubs with a total of 170 teams. Cricket, volleyball and netball are formalised and the Chatsworth Athletics Club is amongst the largest in the country.

With these positive community attributes, one has to ask just where the problems lie?

The economic challenges of the area compel parents to work, breaking down the joint family-centred social structure that is typical of Indian communities.

With few families able to afford domestic help, children are left to entertain themselves and this is where they are vulnerable. They are regularly exposed to shebeens, drug abuse, gambling and prostitution, and rape and domestic violence are being reported with ever-increasing frequency. Sports clubs

have been geared mainly for adults, with no provision for keeping children occupied on club premises.

With the Throb nightclub disaster as a catalyst, and an assessment of the status quo of the area as guiding evidence, the Chatsworth Youth Centre was born.

MAKING IT WORK

As with any development, it was essential to get the experts on board to ascertain what was needed and to determine the manner in which project success would be achieved. The "experts" in this case, were the children.

"It is important to remember that the centre is not a school, so the children do not have to use it. This meant we had to look at what was needed to get them there," says project architect Sue Clarke.

The children wanted pool tables and arcade games, computers and sporting amenities and they wanted the centre to be bright, with lots of light. "While the adults wanted a rather formal emphasis on education, the youth wanted a free-feeling environment and a 'cool' place to 'hang out'. If we created such a space it would hopefully discourage them from frequenting clubs and loitering around shopping centres," said Clarke.



Covered walkways link the various areas of the centre which ensures that all the spaces on the site are used.



A memorial wall is the main feature of the piazza and a giant chess-board keep the children entertained.

The project team was able to choose the site for the centre from a selection of eight available options. They settled on a steep site, with a 25-metre fall across it and a cliff dropping off the lower level. One needed to create an appropriate design, exploiting the outstanding views towards Amanzimtoti and the sea. The site has the advantage of being close to an existing community hall as well

as near the main shopping centre. It is also conspicuously visible from the Chatsworth commercial centre.

"We believe the surrounding amenities help to create a well-balanced use of urban space," says Clarke.

MATERIAL SOLUTION

The centre has been designed for minimal

maintenance. Due to cost constraints, no areas of the centre could be air-conditioned, so the architects opted for a light, open design, with generous ventilation.

"We wanted to have a predominantly lightweight structure, but aluminium was just too expensive, and it would have needed a substructure to support the shopfronts. We thus chose galvanised steel and the Hot Dip



The triple-layered steel roof structure outside the basketball hall seems to float above the ground.

PROFESSIONAL TEAM

Architect and Project Manager

AUB Projects

Team: Sue Clark & Jens Juterbock
- Architects

Meyer Erlank - Project Manager

Structural and Civil Engineer

Ellmer Partnership

Wet Services Engineer

DSB Consulting

Electrical Engineer

Spoormaker & Partners

Fire Engineer

TDW International

Main Contractor

DV Construction (Norvo/DMT joint venture)



The facilities provided have all been included as per the requests of the children who will be using it.

Galvanising Association of South Africa, was quick to provide us with suggestions and advice," said Clarke.

From the base wall up, steel and glass are the dominant materials. Just like a Mechano set, the steel shopfronts bolt to the steel portal frame structure like an elaborate kit of parts. The resulting appearance is one of transparency, openness, and lightness, maximising the views through the glass panels over Chatsworth, to the sea.

The infill panels of the shop fronts vary from fixed glass and opening sections to solid sheet or expanded metal, dependent upon the adjacent space requirements. The sheet and glass panels have been very neatly mounted, using black silicone, instead of conventional putty, eliminating any need to paint.

Galvanised expanded metal mesh ensures the circulation of cool air within the structure at the top of the hall.

Roof overhangs are large, to restrict direct sunlight entering into the buildings.

The brickwork is finished with a tinted cementitious wall coating, which has a textured, slightly irregular finish. Unlike smooth plaster and paint, dust, water-stains and general aging deepen this texture, avoiding the development of a shabby appearance with time.

Students from the Durban Institute of Technology painted murals throughout the Centre as part of their class projects. These murals, added to the brightly painted walls

and doors, fulfilled the requests for colour from the community children.

LOOKING OUT

Visibility is a key feature of the site and the design and structural layout harnesses it.

By following the contours of the site, the structures are layered in a downward progression, creating a natural amphitheatre, which will be used for concerts. Stepped levels and ramps create interesting perspectives, ensuring all levels of the structure are always visible.

The centre's main entrance is located at the top, just off the parking area, with the bottom of the site terminating with a pedestrian entrance. This entrance allows children access from the shopping centre and surrounding amenities below.

The focus of the centre is an open plaza, which acts as a hub, with the centre's facilities radiating from it.

With a commanding 180-degree view of Chatsworth, the main focus of the plaza is the Memorial Wall. A competition was held for the Chatsworth children to provide ideas for this Memorial Wall. Raksha Gorbaden, a young local mosaic artist, executed the final choice; a brightly coloured solar system mosaic mural, with the initials of the 13 deceased children placed in stars within the mosaic.

A giant chess-board has been designed into the plaza floor, with bead-decorated

wire-art chess pieces contributing to a truly local flavour.

All the buildings that lead from the plaza are linked via covered walkways. "It was imperative that the spaces between the buildings be just as comfortable as the buildings themselves. The entire centre had to be a place where the children wanted to be," says Clarke.

BALL SKILLS

The main hall has been used as an indoor basketball and volleyball court, with other sporting facilities leading from it. Due to the steep slope of the site, the centre is unable to accommodate large facilities such as soccer fields, but a netball court, beach volleyball court have been provided for cricket nets, adventure golf and skateboard ramps are being planned.

Between the hall and the exterior basketball court, is a large pavilion. Instead of simply leaving this space open, the architects decided to use it as an area to house the change rooms and topped it with a floating roof structure.

"With the light-weight design of the centre, it was important that the roof gives the appearance of 'hovering' over the pavilion," adds Clarke. A triple-layered steel roof structure was chosen as it adds to the layered effect of the development. The roof was angled to follow the contours of the site.

The light, floating impression is clear, emphasised by the minimal support structures,



Brightly coloured murals painted by the children adorn the walls of the recreation centre.

together with the purlins tied directly to the shop fronts of the hall.

TAKING IT SERIOUSLY

While sport is a major necessity at the centre, it has been important to include an educational element, thus the resource centre.

The ground level accommodates the pool room, the games area, the IT centre and the audio-visual area, while the mezzanine level houses a lounge, which leads to an open balcony. This is perfect for relaxation, and allows the children to look out over Chatsworth. Through the efforts of the project trustees, the Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum was able to facilitate the donation of thirty computers from Microsoft SA.

The computers all have Microsoft software, and are networked for education and training, as well as document scanning and printing

operations. An internal courtyard has been included, with lush planting, which helps to create a cool appearance, giving a 'green' focus. The counselling clinic can offer career guidance and AIDS counselling, as well as counselling for drug, alcohol and other forms of abuse.

The Mandela Garden flows between the structures, and has been planted with a wide variety of indigenous flora. Braai and picnic facilities will be located under the trees around the sports fields.

SAFETY FIRST

Safety and security have been a prime concern. As the Chatsworth Youth Centre follows a simple design, with not too many hidden spaces, the security system that has been proposed will concentrate on the use of CCTV cameras. That the centre is in a conspicuous

location should give the citizens a sense of community responsibility for the well-being of the users as well as the centre.

Gates and burglar-bars have been installed around the resource centre, to protect the valuable contents. A full-time manager will be employed on site to ensure security of the property and the people. The development is very well-lit and visible at night, due to the extensive use of glass.

YOUNG AT HEART

The attractive design and honest and use of space means that the centre is workable that the youth now has an opportunity of reaping the benefits offered to it.

Be it sport, education, dance, music or simple counselling, a facility has been provided for the youth of Chatsworth to direct their boundless energies towards constructive self-improvement. □



A canteen area ensures there are facilities for catering.



The balcony outside the recreation room provides a cool area for relaxation.



The double volume space of the structures has been designed to minimise heat build-up.



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