

arcVision Prize  
Women and Architecture 2015  
Honorable Mention

“ *To create buildings that nurture the human spirit and inspire the imagination.*

*To achieve excellence in architecture in the specific context of Africa.*

*To find an appropriate response to the particularities of each project, in terms of program, site, client/user needs, and specifics of the environment.*

*To design spaces and places that are inclusive.*

*To design places that are economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable.*

*To give people a sense of “ownership” to engender a feeling of pride and relevance in the users of the building.*

*To run my practice as a non-hierarchical organization that encourages teamwork and stimulates team spirit.*

*To promote the empowerment of women in a male-dominated industry. ”*



KATE OTTEN – South Africa

# WOMEN'S JAIL PRECINCT

## PROJECT DATA

### Location

Constitution Hill, Hillbrow, Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa

### Project Type

Restoration of historic building, and insertion of new office building

### Use of the Building

Museum and Offices of the Commission on Gender Equality

### Construction Period

2003 - 2004

As part of Johannesburg's post-apartheid inner-city regeneration initiative, Constitution Hill, a human rights campus, was established. Three former prisons, as well as the new Constitutional Court, are located on the site. One of these prisons is the Women's Jail, notorious for the unjust and brutal imprisonment of many anti-apartheid activists. The Women's Jail project involved the transformation of the Victorian prison buildings to a living museum, a national place of memory, and the insertion of new offices for the Commission for Gender Equality.

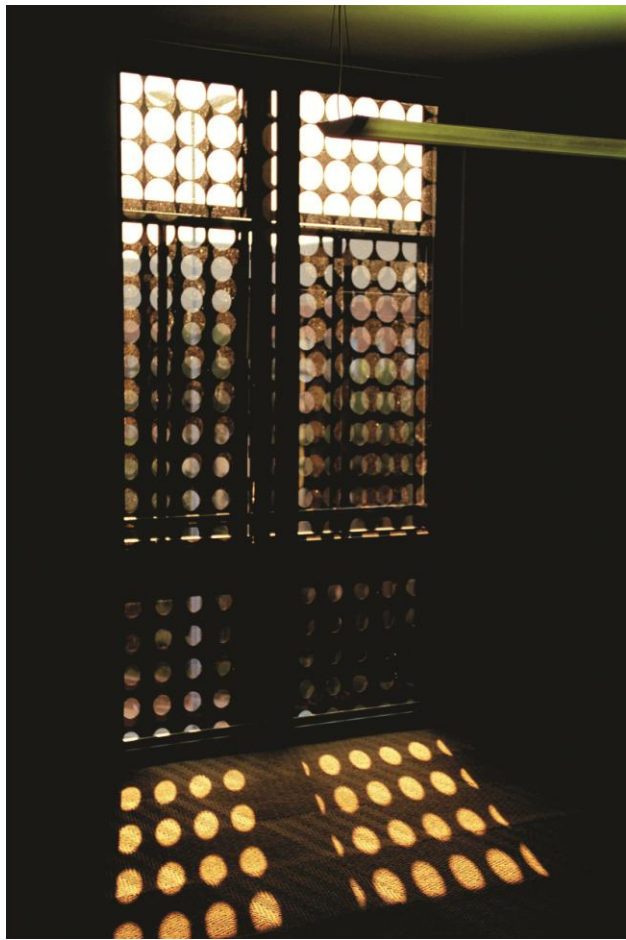
A palimpsest design approach was taken, revealing the layers of meaning and memory. Later additions to the Victorian prison buildings were stripped away, and the history marked on the structure exposed, evoking the brutality of the prison. The two new office wings have become the latest layer, using modern materials but relating in form and scale to the Victorian buildings. The third story physically 'jumps' over the original prison boundary wall, symbolizing the contrast between the original place of confinement and a new expression of freedom.

Workshops were held with ex-prisoners and their experiences were woven into the design. Seemingly a contradiction between materiality and program, the upper floor is wrapped in a sensuous lace-like screen cut out of corten steel patterned from an image of the sky. Ex-prisoners speak emotively about the sky, an element over which prison authorities had no control. Discs cut from the steel are 'stitched' onto the lower levels' sliding screens, symbolic of the tapestries that the women were brought to do to pass the time.

The buildings are recycled in a profound way, transforming a place of oppression and brutality to a symbol of freedom; a place where human dignity is restored. They provide an eloquent platform for the voices of the women who in previous decades were silenced.



KATE OTTEN



KATE OTTEN

# GABRIEL'S GARDEN PAVILION

## PROJECT DATA

### Location

Gabriel's Garden (Protected National Monument), Westcliff Ridge, Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa

### Project Type

Insertion of new office pavilion in garden of restored historic house

### Use of the Building

Studio and Offices

### Construction Period

2007 – 2008

This 1930s house, now a national monument, is located on the Westcliff ridge. With majestic views, the ridge was historically the location of choice for wealthy mining magnates.

The first part of this commission was to restore the house, and thereafter, the terraced garden—a significant part of the historic fabric. This elaborate garden is supported by a complex system of storm water collection and distribution, to mitigate the dry winter climate. Lastly, a new office pavilion was added, the design of which responding directly to the landscape both visually and functionally. Situated on the lowest garden platform of the property, the height and position of the new pavilion were carefully designed to ensure that, even from the lowest terrace, a full view of the historic house and garden terraces was maintained.

The pavilion is composed of two linear boxes offset from the old stone retaining walls that support the ramped driveway leading to the house. The existing garden walls have become the edges of the new building. The space between the boxes and the stone walls are enclosed with a light timber pergola-type structure on the one side, and a narrow sloping glass roof on the other.

The roofs over the boxes are ponds, reservoirs that form part of the functional water system and simultaneously reflect the trees and sky, causing the pavilion to dissolve into the garden when viewed from the upper terraces.

The facades facing the garden are glazed and slide open for ventilation. Deep overhangs prevent summer sun penetration but allow the low-angled winter sun to penetrate the spaces. During the day, the glass façade reflects the garden; at night or when open, it allows a view through the building, revealing the old stone walls beyond. From inside, the glass allows the historic garden to be the boundary of the space.



KATE OTTEN



KATE OTTEN