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from the ground up

Described as simple and chic, this modern building is a trailblazing first at this historical Pretoria school

TEXT KATHARINE WILLIAMS-JAFFRA STYLING HEATHER BOTING PHOTOGRAPHS GRAZIE WYLLIE





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Architect Riaan Visser custom designed the concrete seating area, which acts as a waiting zone after school; principal Pierre Edwards says the new space is a huge hit among the boys at Affies; the learning area on the top floor.



A dusty patch of land that was once nothing but an open playground has been transformed into an exciting new cafeteria and learning centre at the Afrikaanse Hoër Seunskool (Affies) in Pretoria. The construction of the contemporary complex sees one of the oldest schools in the country being launched into modern architectural times, following a similarly notable update at sister school, Affies Meisies (see *HL* July 2013).

While the new structure at the boys' school is in obvious contrast to the traditional buildings around it, architect Riaan Visser of +27 Architects/Café says he wanted to maintain elements of the look of the 94-year-old buildings, while at the same time adding a slick, modern twist. He cites the school's history as the main influence for the design. 'I wanted to ensure that it shared in the property's antiquity and that it would blend in with the current landscape,' says Riaan.

The double-storey centre, named 1920 in honour of the year the school was

founded, was created as a multifunctional and practical space for its learners. On the ground floor is the stylish cafeteria, which features polished concrete flooring paired with inlaid strips of parquet, as well as custom-made lights, modified wooden tables and exposed red brick walls lined with original photographs of Affies' first matric class, their first rugby team as well as images of the original building. The cafeteria opens up to the back of the school, facing the evergreen sports grounds, while the other side of the building looks onto the parking area and boasts a comfortable and elegant concrete-frame bench for scholars waiting for their parents.

The upper level is home to a high-tech learning centre, which features bespoke wooden tables and chairs, and currently acts as the reading and study area. It will, over the next few months, be converted into a fully integrated library and computer centre. After hours, the building is used to host internal and external exhibitions, sports events, choir practice and school socials. ▶



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The architect cleverly framed the historic NG Kerk across the road by placing windows strategically around the building; graphic use of typography marks the entrance to the cafeteria; these light fittings were designed by +27 Architects; the cafeteria doubles up as a function spot after hours for choir practice, socials and sports events.



Riaan, who says that his personal style is evident in the simplicity of the building, cleverly framed a number of surrounding elements, including the striking NG Kerk and popular Loftus Versveld Stadium opposite the school, by carefully placing window panes in various areas. These windows allow natural light to wash the interior of 1920, ensuring it is kept bright and airy. 'I also used the windows to connect the space with the sports fields on both levels,' adds Riaan.

Principal Pierre Edwards says it was important that the building didn't stand out from the original structures. 'The architectural team did a great job in blending it in with what already existed. It's completely authentic and looks as if it's been here all along, which is exactly what we wanted.' □

+27 Architects/Café, 072-444-0696