

PAVILION PROJECT PREVIEW

At UIA 2014 in Durban in August, Zahira Asmal set the context for the unveiling in November of Johannesburg's Park Station pavilion. Glynis Horning reports

The 'big reveal' of world-renowned Ghanaian architect David Adjaye's design for the hotly anticipated and controversial pavilion project at Johannesburg's Park Station will be made by the man himself in late November. (Adjaye's designs have included the Nobel Peace Centre in Oslo in the shell of a disused railway station, and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington DC.) But Zahira Asmal, founder and MD of Designing_South Africa (D_ZA), gave the context in her keynote address at the International Union of Architects 2014 congress in August.

When D_ZA made its pitch for the pavilion to the city in May 2011, it presented Johannesburg as 'the arrival city,' she said. Fifty three percent of Joburg's population is immigrants, arriving to find their 'gold' - better opportunities and lives. 'They arrive in a great city of opportunity, and we wanted them to sense it.' When apartheid ended and segregation signs came down, 'no signs or structures went up stating people could come together,' and many imagined they were not welcome and that spaces were still not accessible to them.

Park Station is one of Africa's greatest transport nodes, where taxis, buses, trains (including the Gautrain) and pedestrians converge - a million people pass through each weekday and millions of rand change hands. 'It has huge potential,' said Asmal. 'We need to attract visitors to an interesting place. To ensure both visitors and regular commuters are included in its development, D_ZA, in collaboration with the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) and local architectural firm Urban Works, worked with interest groups including Prasa, academic and architectural institutions, the traders and ward counsellors.'

The pavilion (its name, together with the design, will be introduced in November) will be created next to the Blue Room at Park Station, a hall Asmal likened to New York's Central Station. Under apartheid this was reserved for whites as they embarked on the Blue Train: 'It's been inaccessible - we negotiated for it to be opened while the pavilion is there.' The pavilion forms a part of a much larger African Food & Culture Hub, in which Urban Works is the lead designer.



Inspiration for the design included the 'rhythmic arches' and 'architectural grandeur of colonial travel' and it would be 'a multisensory experience,' says Asmal.

D_ZA is a not-for-profit advocacy group 'for the proliferation of design thinking in nation building', and current projects focus on movement: 'Movements are what infuse a city with the energy that gives them their individuality,' Asmal says.

D_ZA has catalogued the movements in South Africa's three major cities. A Durban guide in the form of a poster-zine and map includes the voices of seven residents, from architect Andrew Makin to hip-hop artist Clara-T and filmmaker Shelly Nel, explaining how they move in, and are moved by, the city. It was distributed at UIA2014 and well received by delegates.

Joburg and Cape Town will be explored in books in which prominent writers, academics, designers, artists and photographers view their cities through movement. They can be ordered through designingsouthafrica.com.



TOP Joburg's Park Station, where Ghanaian architect David Adjaye's new pavilion design will be unveiled in late November
ABOVE With a million people passing through each weekday, Park Station is one of the continent's largest transport nodes
BELOW An aerial view of the proposed new African Food & Culture Hub, of which the pavilion is just the start



DAVID ADJAYE



ZAHIRA ASMAL



KEY

- 1. Proposed food hub
- 2. Blue Room (old Johannesburg concourse)