

Local architects recognised for restoration work in city

NOKUTHULA KHANYILE

FROM intricate Victorian to contemporary designs and brickwork, Pietermaritzburg has much to offer architecturally.

Now city architectural design firm Ica Architects and Urban Designers is set to be awarded the 2019 merit award by the South African Institute of Architects KZN for the restoration and redevelopment of Oliver Tambo House, at the corner of Prince Alfred and Guttridge streets.

Ica Architects and Urban Designers is co-owned by brothers Haroon and Ismail Cassimjee. It was established in their parents' garage in 1984.

The pair are set to receive the prestigious award tomorrow.

The last time a Pietermaritzburg architect's building received this award was 30 years ago.

Speaking to *The Witness* yesterday, Ismail said the project took about three years to complete. "We all look forward to these types of awards. It proves that we can even in the small cities produce buildings that are of a certain standard," he said.

The project will be one of four buildings in the province to receive a merit award from the institute.

"It's nice when this happens. We were of course very honoured to be acknowledged for this as we feel privileged to be a part of the progressive development of the urban renewal of Pietermaritzburg's heritage buildings and special spaces," he said.

Other buildings that the duo have restored include the Upper and Lower Church Street Mosque, the Msunduzi Museum and the old magistrate's court on Pietermaritz Street.

Ismail said in restoring the Oliver Tambo House building, they paid special attention to the history and fabric of the original building, with a priority to restore, preserve while retaining its heritage. "Pietermaritzburg has an array of magnificent buildings and it's something that we need to cherish as residents. There's this underlying order that's built from one generation to next. It's different ideas but they are all held together. It's just amazing."

The restoration of Oliver Tambo House saw the addition of a multi-sto-



Pietermaritzburg architect Ismail Cassimjee, standing in front of Oliver Tambo House at the corner of Prince Alfred and Guttridge streets.

PHOTO: MOEKETSI MAMANE

rey parking garage and an auditorium for the office campus.

The function of the existing squash court complex in the building was repurposed within the existing form to serve a new function as an auditorium with an inner courtyard public space.

This building was given a dramatic face-lift with an external skin of air

bricks, which were manufactured in a salmon colour to blend with the red brick texture of the Victorian buildings of the city. The air bricks, which are framed in steel, serve to reduce the solar hear gain and avoid the need for mechanical ventilation.

At night, movement sensors light up the interior as vehicles travel through

the building, revealing its inner core. The brightly coloured stairwell reveals itself to the street at night. The perforated external skin of the parking garage was repeated to stitch the fragmented set of adjoining existing buildings along Prince Alfred Street to form a continuous cohesive street facade.

• nokuthula.khanyile@media24.com