



With the rapid growth of tourism in South Africa and neighbouring countries and the increasing competitiveness between tourist areas and facilities, each individual tourist facility should capitalise on its own unique characteristics and be designed to provide a unique and magic experience. A new name has been coined for this modern type of tourism - experiential tourism - allowing people to experience a specific environment in a participative manner that includes the flora, fauna, culture and history of a region. This kind of tourism often demands an entirely new approach to architecture. Accommodation has to be created that combines the grassroots level approach of the bush and the indigenous population with a modern and even sometimes high-tech approach to satisfy the demands of the discerning tourist and the developer/operator who looks for durable, low maintenance structures. In this article a number of architects specialising in this complex field philosophise on the various aspects of what we will call, for the sake of simplicity, bush architecture and share some of their experiences and challenges that they face.

Architect Johan Jordaan of Quadrisir Architects has some very definite ideas about bush architecture. He appeals to developers and architects of tourism infrastructure to let the specific environment guide the design of bush accommodation, adopting informal, natural styles that do away with preconceived ideas. "What we must keep foremost in our mind when designing this kind of architecture," he stresses, "is that the structures should never become a monument to architecture but should blend in with the environment. We must create spaces that are kind to humankind - not monumental spaces. We tend to be too rigid in our application, applying city rules to build bush architecture. The sophisticated tourist wants to go out and experience a

Bush architecture —



Architectural freedom with a difference

specific environment in its totality. This can be achieved by creating informal structures that add to the ambience of a specific region - not by designing suburban structures that stick to all the bye-laws of a city."

Tzaneen-based architect Henk Schmidt of Arc Africa puts it beautifully. "Designing and building in a highly sensitive environment provides the ultimate challenge for simplified building solutions," he explains. "Whereas in an urban environment you sculpt buildings to create an identity, in the bush you play off the architecture against nature so that it responds in a sensitive manner. In a sensitive environment, the general rule is to be submissive to nature. The buildings must blend in with the existing vegetation and the way the tree canopies above are shaping the landscape."

1,2,3: Warm, exciting colours in a desert environment: The Sossusvlei Lodge in Sesriem in Namibia

4,5,6: Combining traditional natural materials with modern and high-tech materials: Vuyatela Lodge in Sabi-Sabi

Mix and match

Materials and building techniques play an important role. The architect can learn a lot by observing the indigenous architecture of the area, the available local resources and the locally available crafts, styles and techniques. But that's not all. Because the structures have to make economic sense - meaning durability and low maintenance - historic indigenous architecture on its own may have shortcomings, and brave architects have no qualms in combining historically used building components and materials with modern and even high-tech materials. In addition, some architects feel that bush architecture does not have to be restricted to indigenous South African architecture.

Both Johan Jordaan (of Quadrisir Architects) and Niel Crafford (of Crafford & Crafford Architects) are bold in their approach. "The richness of South African architecture is actually very limited. To create richness and diversity, the architect should take cognisance of any indigenous architecture created in tropical and sub-tropical climates, especially in Africa and Asia, and apply suitable elements in a new

unique vernacular," says Jordaan.

At Sossusvlei Lodge in Sesriem - a desert environment - Crafford combined elements of adobe architecture with the tent structures of the Berber and Bedouin tribes to create a unique new architecture that leaves a special and lasting imprint on the tourists that stay there.

At Vuyatela Lodge in Sabi-Sabi Crafford combined Shangaan traditional architecture with contemporary architecture, taking the mud brick walls and woven matting of the Shangaans and complementing it with corrugated iron building elements as well as more high-tech details such as timber decks, stainless steel balustrading, aluminium sliding doors, low voltage lighting suspended from exposed copper wire and lit-up splash pools.

At the Kruger Lodge at the Kruger National Park Crafford responded to the client's wish to move away from traditional thatch buildings in a practical way while still retaining the ambience of a thatched roof. Due to high maintenance costs of traditionally thatched roofs, the high insurance premiums and the unsightly and expensive lightning con-

