

LOOK: 3 local designers have reimaged Constitution Hill's Old Fort

Constitution Hill has gone through numerous iterations since being commissioned in the 19th century. Now, thanks to an initiative led by Clout/SA and supported by Nando's, three rising local designers have creatively reimaged the Old Fort Meeting Rooms and Coffee Shop at the historic landmark in Braamfontein, Johannesburg.



Source: Supplied



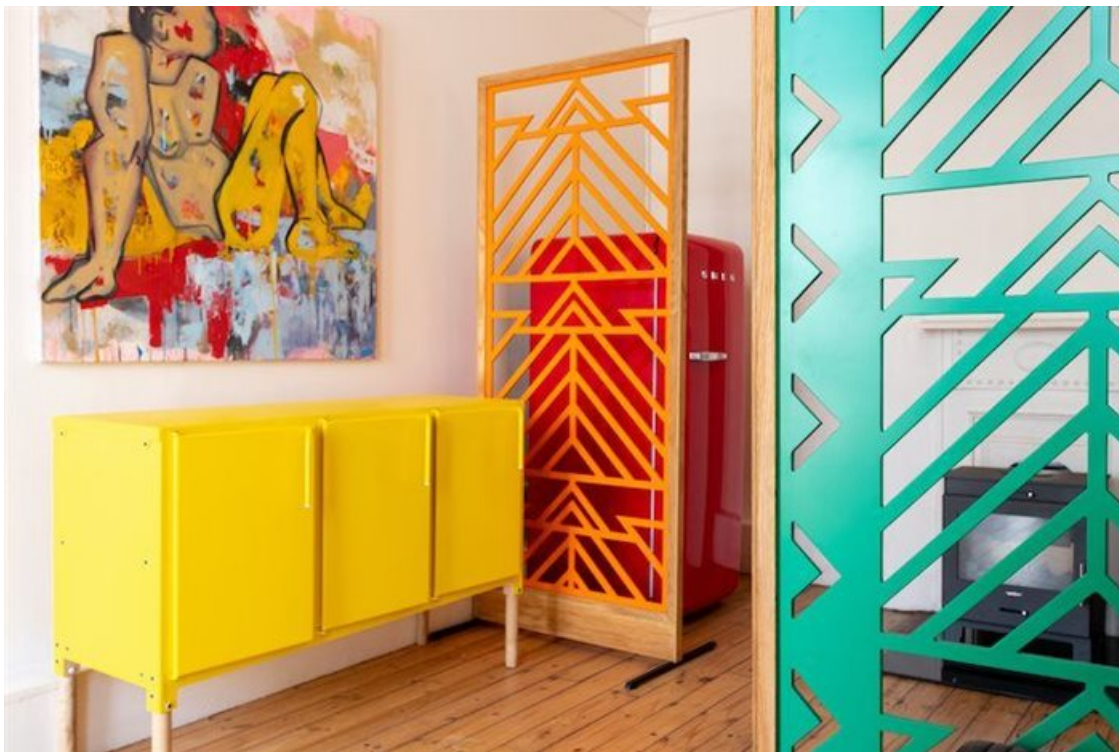
Source: Supplied

During the struggle, many anti-Apartheid stalwarts served time here, as did tens of thousands of ordinary South Africans. Today, the former prison and military fort serves as a living museum and a venue for exhibitions and other events, as well as being the home of the country's Constitutional Court.

With the redesign of the Old Fort Meeting Rooms and Coffee Shop - which are now filled with furniture and lighting from some of the most innovative young South African designers - it has also become a window into the present as well as the future of local design.



Source: Supplied



Source: Supplied

Developing and growing emerging interior designers

"The Meeting Rooms present an opportunity to incorporate the particular aesthetic of South African design, artistic culture

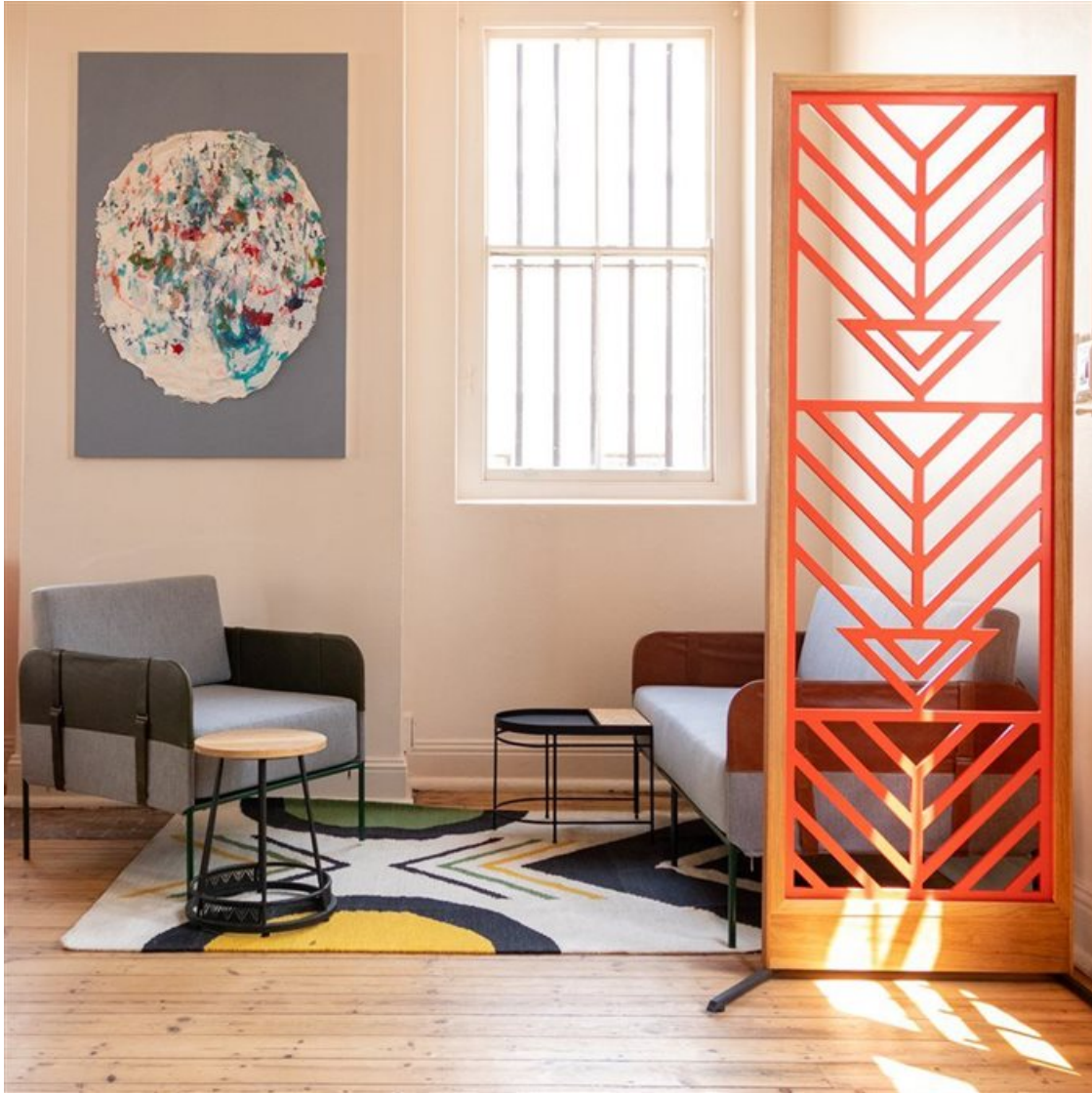
A modern interior space with a large window on the left. A wall of horizontal wooden slats separates the window from the rest of the room. In the foreground, a curved leather armchair with a black frame sits on a green rug. To its right is a small black metal table. Further back, another curved leather armchair is visible, and a green patterned screen stands near a doorway. The floor is made of light-colored wood.

A vibrant green modular cabinet with yellow geometric patterns and a yellow metal base, topped with four framed illustrations of a person in a yellow suit in various urban settings.

Source: Supplied

With the support of Nando's, which funded the initiative as a gift to Constitutional Hill, Lynch nominated three interior designers to pitch proposals for the redesign. Afri Modern founder Sifiso Shange, Pinda Furniture and Interior Design founder Siyanda Mbele, and Renaissance Design founder Glorinah Khutso Mabaso (who invited Omni Design's Nelson Kubheka to collaborate with her on the pitch) were all asked to put forward their concepts for consideration.

"These selected designers speak a language of rebirth and transformation. They have found new ways of expressing our South African heritage, of making creative connections and building community. Storytelling, art and design are their chosen tools," Lynch explains.



Source: Supplied



Source: Supplied

Journey of learning

Beyond being an interior design project, the challenge turned into a journey of learning for the designers, each of whom had to take a deep dive into the history of Constitution Hill, and therefore, the history of South Africa.

“It wasn’t just about designing and putting mood boards together. It was about how to create a conversation and tell a South African story,” Mbele states. “When I started on the research with my team, we were talking about how little we knew about our history until we visited the site... and every time, with each bit of research, we stumbled on something new.”

For Mabaso, the process took on personal significance: “My dad was actually an activist. He was the first vice-president of

COSAS... I grew up hearing these stories from him; and it's the first time now that I've interacted with a space that speaks the same language. It became very real."



Source: Supplied

'Centrality and Diversity'

After the pitch process was concluded, Shange's design, dubbed 'Centrality and Diversity', was chosen as the winner. However, all three designers then collaborated to bring 'Centrality and Diversity' to life in the space.

"The project itself allowed me to realise so much about the history of our country and where we are today... and the centre of everything was the people themselves," says Shange.

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