

David Adjaye reveals design plans for Thabo Mbeki Presidential Library

Adjaye Associates recently revealed the design plans for the Thabo Mbeki Presidential Library in Johannesburg which will comprise eight cylindrical volumes referencing the structures of granaries in Africa's vernacular architecture. The firm will use locally sourced compressed mud to form a rammed earth facade for these cylindrical volumes.



All images and video courtesy of Adjaye Associates

The building, covering a total 5,400m² area, will include museum, temporary exhibition space, research centre and special collections, auditorium, women's empowerment centre, reading room, shop, cafeteria, digital experience, seminar rooms, office space, archive centre, and service spaces.

"The Thabo Mbeki Centre presents an opportunity to realise the ambition of the dreams of President Thabo Mbeki to advance and empower an African renaissance," said David Adjaye, founder and principal of Adjaye Associates.

"The architecture of the library taps into the collective memory of the continent through the establishment of a new historical centre for African consciousness in which knowledge, education and sustenance are nurtured in the representation and intelligence of the continent."

The archive centre will act as a repository for the papers, artifacts and key documents of President Mbeki and other significant African historical figures.

"Providing infrastructure for the preservation and distribution of African history and knowledge, the library will become a new anchorpoint and campus for local and international scholars," said Adjaye Associates.

The studio said that "conceptually, the new building makes visible the invisible knowledge of ancient and contemporary African history through both form and program".

"Sited in Riviera, Johannesburg, the library will harbour the knowledge of the land whilst acting as a space for connection in which the advancement of an African renaissance becomes the premise of the structure."

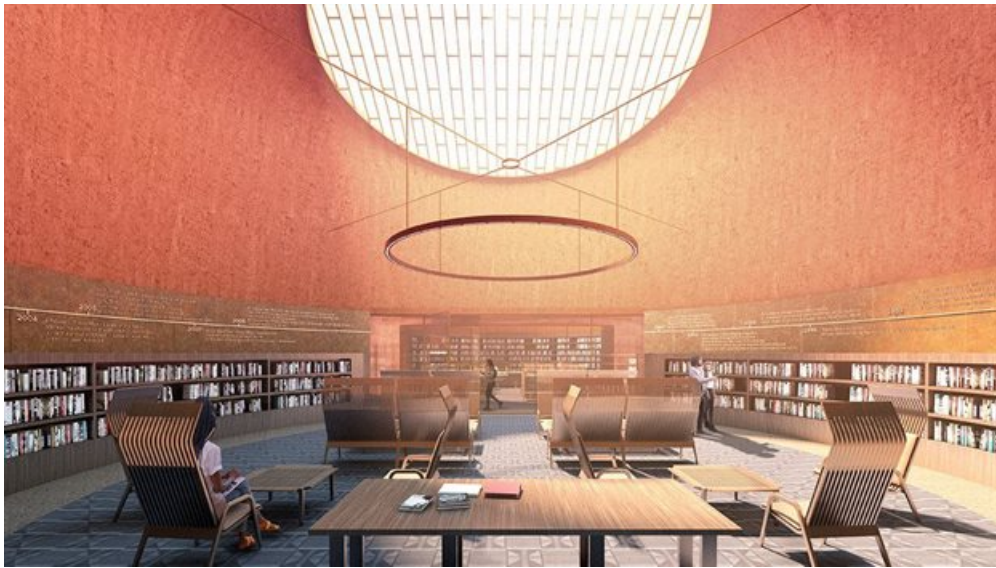


Intersection between North and Main Avenue. All images and video courtesy of Adjaye Associates

Represented in design as a metaphor for knowledge-based nourishment, the new building references the structures of granaries — which allow for the extension of grain production and the systematisation of cycles of feeding, planting and harvesting.

The eight cylindrical granary-styled forms are made contemporary through the topping of domes with apertures that take into consideration the solar orientation of light within the site to create a distinct atmosphere for each of the programs within.

The internal infrastructure of these chambers see to it that the building accommodates a multiplicity of programmatic functions. They are connected through an 'indoor den' — a horizontal interstitial space that extends the length of the entire building to provide a new public space in service to the community.



Reading Room. All images and video courtesy of Adjaye Associates

In the interiors, the studio will use terrazzo flooring made from local stone, and timber cladding from local wood species collectively reduce the overall carbon footprint of the structure.

"Through a site-specific understanding of the subtropical highland climate of Johannesburg, solar harvesting is utilised through state-of-the-art photovoltaic solar panels located on the rooftop absorbing sunlight and generating electricity," added the studio.

Geothermal heating and thickened walls harness the Earth's energy by storing heat during the day and releasing it later at night to warm the building when temperatures drop.

The architecture of the Thabo Mbeki Presidential Library brings together continental African thought and form as a powerful means of tapping into collective memory.

This memory, embedded within the intelligence of the African consciousness, now sees a typology of learning and a typology of sustenance materialise into form.



Ground Floor Level. All images and video courtesy of Adjaye Associates

"My vision for the new presidential library aims to encompass both an African past and an African future. It will be a place where Africans uncover their own history and identity. A place where we are empowered to script a brighter and more prosperous future," said President Thabo Mbeki.

"Through this wonderful collaboration with Sir David Adjaye and his team, I believe this building will become the epicentre for an African renaissance — a place of pride, celebration and future-forward thinking in which a strong sense of the African identity is empowered for further leadership in service to humanity."

Adjaye Associates will work with local architecture firm MMA Design Studio on this project.

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