

Winner of landscape architecture award announced

Amy Thompson of the University of Cape Town has been named winner of this year's Corobrik Most Innovative Final Year Landscape Architecture Project award.



During Thompson's research for a thesis an elder in an informal settlement in Cape Town told her "We are Europe", which led to her giving her thesis the same name.

"My thesis critiques the perception of informality within the city by addressing failings in policy and legislation to allow for better informal settlement upgrade to occur. It is my hope that, by challenging the perception of informality and providing the socio-economic facilities called for within policy, the physical and symbolic boundaries separating the formal and informal parts of the city will be dismantled," she explains.

One of the chief challenges facing local and provincial government, in particular, is urban sprawl which unfortunately tends to reinforce historic spatial, economic and social divides rather than address social and economic needs and cultural development. "You can't address (the issues surrounding informality) through building RDP houses," Thompson believes.

Aim of thesis

"The aim of this thesis is to investigate new ways in which informal settlements within South Africa can be upgraded on an ad hoc, in situ basis and create a land tenure system for the community based on its existing evolved physical and social structure. Keeping everyone within 50m of where they currently live allows for socio-economic facilities and future high density development to occur," she explains.

Corobrik's manager for the Western Cape, Christie van Niekerk, says that this award has demonstrated how young architects are grappling with the idiosyncrasies and diversity of South Africa's unique built environment and using the tools at their disposal to interrogate and transform the world as we know it 20 years after achieving democracy.

He pointed out that Thompson's thesis, which addressed a potentially controversial and more immediate issue contrasted

with that of runner up and fellow UCT student, Wallace Honiball, in his project entitled ERF 217 - The Company's Garden. He worked within a formal and historical setting as he addressed the functional re-organisation and replanting of trees in Erf 217, one of the South Africa's oldest gardens with a 350 year history.

Qualities of shadow

"The Company's Garden was chosen as a case study site to test the notion that space could be shaped architecturally by plants. This idea was explored by making use of the qualities of shadow and the form produced by plants where, like in a building, the architecture and qualities of vegetation is used to make enclosure," Honiball explains.

He says the project's approach to tree replacement and site planning is governed by five habitat areas that function around time based maintenance strategies. Plant selection and maintenance technique are used as the tools or building materials for new proposition on the site based on the aspect of functional re-organisation and the historical replanting of trees that are dying in the garden.

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