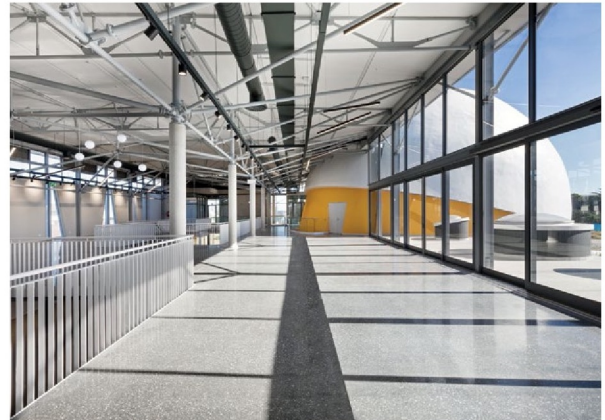
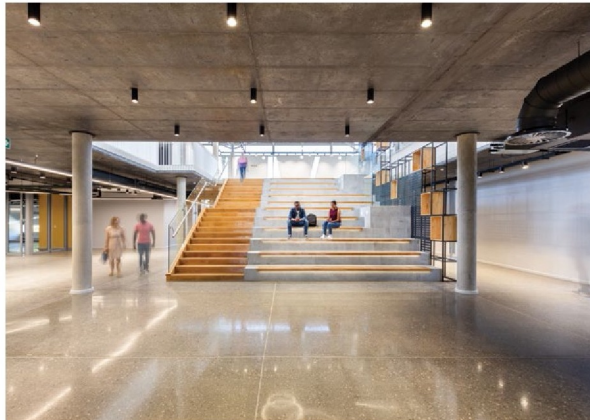




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Nelson Mandela University Science Centre
OVERALL WINNER | OTHER DEVELOPMENT AWARD



The Nelson Mandela University (NMU) Science Centre was established as an expression of the University's commitment to being an engaged institution, dedicated to using its resources, students and staff in pursuit of building a social justice-oriented learning society. It is a dynamic hub designed to cater to learners, students, academics and the wider public. Funded by the Department of Higher Education and Training's Infrastructure Efficiency Grant, the building aims to democratise the public's access to science. Scientists will share complex concepts with the public and engage in discussions with them, while the exhibitions will be interactive.

The brief to architects SVA International called for the design of a new Science Centre which would also accommodate a new state-of-the-art 150-seater digital planetarium installation.

From the onset the decision was taken to set the building back from the main arterial movement route on the eastern edge, thereby creating a public plaza and gathering space. Situated in a very visible position as one enters the Nelson Mandela University Campus, the building's eastern edge along this plaza is then further extended as landscape onto the public realm, thus creating a 'living edge', allowing visitors to circulate both vertically and horizontally within a multi-levelled terrace.

The building is conceptualised as a multi-layered pavilion allowing for maximum spatial flexibility while capturing the notion of science in academia. The main spatial components include the planetarium Dome which creates the main focal and formal element within the composition. This is placed off-axis on plan as a datum within the double-volume foyer, in turn inviting visitors on a journey prior to entering the Dome and further allowing them to experience the building in a 3-dimensional manner. The dome structure itself is a composite layer of steel and concrete with a specialised digital installation within.

Visitors approach the main entrance to the building up a series of planted stepped terraces, which serve as both the access point as well as an interactive space that facilitates social gathering and interactivity with the building. The entrance also becomes part of the public space of the campus, inviting passing students to gather. Before entering the building, a series of raised, interactive skylights built at differing heights and angles offer the visitor diverse views inside the building. As the building will often be used at night, careful consideration was given to how the building was lit.

Choice of materiality was dictated by both a contemporary aesthetic in line with client requirements as well as consideration for maintenance due to proximity to the ocean. Off-shutter concrete, expansive floor to ceiling glazing as well as cladding are used to differentiate the various design components of the building.





The main foyer space is a large open area designed for exhibitions and functions and finishes had to take into account high traffic as well as strong, durable surfaces that can support the requirements of exhibition materials. The polished concrete floor is finished with a darker but still neutral pigment to provide a stronger contrast between the space and exhibition components. The steel roof structure is left exposed, allowing for maximum height as well as providing easily accessible support beams from which to hang heavy materials. The harder elements are softened through the use of timber as well as a more organically shaped feature staircase that

forms a focal point in the foyer and provides access to a meeting space above.

The Science Centre showcases the university's approach to innovation and cutting edge design, both for the benefit of the students as well as the community of Gqeberha.

Architect: SVA International

Quantity Surveyor: BTKM Quantity Surveyors

Civil, Structural, Mechanical & Electrical Engineers: Bosch Projects

Main Contractor: WBHO Construction

