

# HISTORICAL STELLENBOSCH

## Design Guidelines

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“No nation, any more than a single individual, has the right to dispose at will of property that may concern men of tomorrow as well as those of today”

*Pictures from a Living Past*

UNESCO, 1978

“Is it not better to add to the sum total of the record of human creativity than to subtract from it?  
Is it not better to allow people to be enriched by the products of all ages rather than just our own”

Randolph Langenbach

*A future for the Past*  
1978

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# INTRODUCTION

The aim of this publication is to provide easily understood general information regarding the care of old buildings, and the design of new ones, in historical Stellenbosch.

Much has been lost of the town's architectural heritage, partly because of disasters and neglect, but also through well-meant attempts at adaptation to new styles and changing tastes and circumstances. Difficult access to relevant information, general ignorance of architectural styles and periods, and limited understanding of suitable building materials and techniques further restrict the quality care which old buildings deserve.

Ill-considered alterations and substitutions can seriously impair, or irreparably damage, the character and authenticity of a building. As a result, we lose not only a bit of history, but also contribute to the dilution of Stellenbosch's uniqueness.

**This publication is not a do-it-yourself manual, but provides background information for appreciating the character, details and characteristics of particular Stellenbosch buildings.** It aims at cultivating an awareness of what conservation entails, and provides owners with practical hints regarding the upkeep of their historical structures. The information has been culled from various sources and represents knowledge gained by numerous experts over many years of study and practical experience.

Places containing historical buildings convey a message from the past and survive as tangible links to early cultures and traditions. They clearly have to be preserved for posterity in their rich totality, and in harmonious surroundings. Every owner of a property in such an environment therefore plays an important part in the conservation process. While historical and aesthetic considerations are paramount, it should be remembered that competent conservation also increases the value of a property. Moreover, it creates attractive surroundings where tourists gather, the retail trade can flourish, and a positive community spirit prevails.

## I. CONSERVATION GUIDE-LINES

The idea of conservation arose because of the inability of architects to create a contemporary building style during the Victorian era. This opinion was expressed in a manifesto by William Morris, famous poet, craftsman and founder of an English conservation society in 1877. Despite a great interest in the subject and the efforts of able conservationists, Morris continues, the previous fifty years had contributed more to the destruction of buildings than all the revolutions, violence and disregard of past centuries. Morris warns that, under the pretext of conservation and with the promise that buildings will be returned to their former glory, architects use their own whims and fancies as guide-lines. That which is destroyed in the process is replaced by what the architect imagines earlier architects would, or could, have built. This dual process of destruction and addition results in a miserable and lifeless fabrication which Morris labels "restoration". Conservation should be emphasized rather than restoration, and deterioration countered by regular maintenance.

Old buildings should be treated as monuments of a bygone art, reflecting the fashions and styles of previous periods. Where decay has set in, this should be skillfully fixed instead of pursuing a feigned ideal. Thus far William Morris.

## (a) WHY CONSERVE?

Despite all the knowledge accumulated so far, misunderstanding still exists regarding conservation. Therefore, it is necessary to start by answering the above question.

Firstly, a building accommodation for humans and is a financial asset. Since it is expensive to replace an old building, conservation makes sound financial sense.

Secondly, conservation preserves the evidence of how earlier generations lived, laboured and even thought. Humans have a need to create an image of themselves. Old buildings are records of history and human aspirations and, therefore, primary sources of information that can be physically experienced. Retaining such tangible signposts promotes the identity of a place, and prevents the estrangement of a community from its surroundings. Careful scientific conservation, carried out with due regard to history, is a source of pride and satisfaction which can serve posterity as a source of study and admiration.

Thirdly, retaining historical complexes are of economic importance to the whole community. The architecture of Stellenbosch and other historic Boland towns hold a strong attraction for visitors because of the pleasing natural surroundings of rugged mountains, undulating hills, cooling streams and lush vegetation. Consequently, the huge tourist market of the Cape Winelands.

Conservation also contributes towards the continuation of traditional methods of construction and decoration. By restoring and preserving buildings, architects and other specialists are stimulated to do research, which increases knowledge and may enrich contemporary design.

Conservation of a building as a tangible historical document requires that preservation and reparations aim at the highest possible degree of authenticity. This implies continual maintenance in order that the structure's cultural significance not be deminished. Besides archaeological remains and architectural design, the context of a building should also be considered, i.e. the site and surrounding structures, as well as the vicinity. Only a few Stellenbosch buildings have intrinsic architectural merit, but collectively the old houses are important because of the historical context within which they are situated.

In order to promote the uniform use of conservation terms, and to prevent embarrassing misinterpretations, the following definitions, approved by the South African Heritage Resources Agency, are given. These concepts represent various degrees of intervention in the fabric of a building.

### **Conservation/Preservation**

Retaining the authentic character of a building while avoiding alteration and deterioration. This implies stabilization where necessary, and maintenance. Such an approach is suitable for aesthetically meritorious buildings or those of cultural-historical value, as well as for those in a reasonable state of repair but lacking sufficient evidence to justify other forms of conservation intervention.

Preservation entails maintenance only and is considered the safest form of conservation since no historical material is removed from the structure.

## **Restoration**

Expertly returning a structure to a former state of appearance. Existing components are repaired and useless later additions removed. This method is based on respect for all physical, documentary and other evidence, and avoids conjectural re-creations. This approach should only be followed where sufficient information is available concerning an earlier appearance of the structure, and only when the return to that condition reinstates its former cultural significance.

The most serious restoration mistake involves returning a building to a former stage which is of no relevance to its particular history. The preferred stage need not necessarily be the earliest, especially not if this means that evidence of its evolution, or culturally important later additions, have to be demolished.

## **Reconstruction**

The erection of a faithful copy of a building. This is appropriate where a gap in a historical streetscape needs to be filled - preferably exactly where the original stood - or where a museum attempts to recreate a particular historical period. Hypothetical reconstructions, i.e. based on supposition, should be strongly discouraged.

## **Renovation**

The superficial repair of a building to a good condition while retaining its existing character. This is appropriate where a structure has little intrinsic merit, yet forms part of a harmonious streetscape.

## **Rehabilitation**

The reparation and alteration of a building for a particular use, while retaining significant architectural and cultural-historical features. It is important that such alterations only be allowed where the future use of the structure does not differ drastically from the original function: rehabilitation should respect the former cultural importance of the building by keeping internal alterations and external additions to the minimum.

## **(b) THE CONSERVATION APPROACH**

All buildings are affected by wear and changing needs. Changes can, however, be reasonably unobtrusive if sensitively managed through good conservation practices.

A number of interrelated factors determine the particular conservation route to be followed. These include the cultural-historical importance of the building; present physical condition; intended use; and available funds. Moreover, it must be remembered that the building, and not its present owner, is the most important party (the latter being only a temporary custodian). Further, what is advocated is not conservation for conservation's sake, but an innovative, original approach which will ensure the continued utilization of the building.

The following principles can serve as a basis for good conservation:

- \* Thoroughly research and document the building and its history before starting conservation. Unsubstantiated interpretations based on suppositions and personal taste cannot be justified in the case of a historical property;
- \* Repair rather than replace. Retain as much of the original fabric as possible;
- \* Where repair is impossible, the replacements should be based on actual examples and not on supposition or romantic notions. Pay particular attention to style, colour, texture, arrangement and traditional materials. Document all substitutions;
- \* Carefully measure and record the inside and outside of the building, as well as the layout of the garden, garden walls/fences and adjacent buildings;
- \* Do not blindly restore a building back to its earliest form. Stoeps, verandahs, cast-iron fixtures as well as fret and turned woodwork of the Victorian and Edwardian periods have also become part of Stellenbosch streetscapes;
- \* Do not create a building that never existed. It is tempting to want to improve the appearance of a simple structure by adding elements foreign to its character. Conservation should not be fashionable but rather stylistically bound to the period from which the building dates. Honesty and integrity above all!
- \* Beware of gilding the lily! Do not falsify and confuse by intensifying the stylistic features of a house e.g. by heavier mouldings or over-elaborate doors, gates and fences;
- \* Because conservation requires considerable expertise, rather employ professionals. Should you attempt the project yourself, do consult the experts when the slightest doubt exists;
- \* Do not make unreasonable demands on the building. Rather find a compatible use which requires minimum intervention in its structure or historical character. Be prepared to compromise. Ideally, an old building should continue serving its original purpose;
- \* Honour the character, details and congenial atmosphere of an old building. Do not restore to such an extent that everything is renovated!
- \* If at all possible, new additions should be invisible from the street;
- \* Retain the original configuration of the building. This is important, since the proportions of rooms and passages and their interconnections all contribute to the basic character of the interior. Removal of internal walls and drastic modernisation of the inside should be avoided.

### **(c) HOW TO IMPLEMENT CONSERVATION PRINCIPLES**

#### **A complete survey**

It is important to begin a conservation project by thoroughly investigating every element of the structure. This is the field of professionals such as the archaeologist, historian and architect. Therefore, they should be called in to produce reports for the owner, as well as the required Heritage Impact Assessment for the South African Heritage Resources Agency. These investigations comprise the following aspects:

- \* The physical condition of the structure;
- \* The various phases of construction (old building plans are often very helpful);
- \* The age and stylistic period(s) of the components;
- \* Location and preservation of all archaeological artifacts;
- \* Finding and studying all available deeds, plans, sketches, photographs and early descriptions;
- \* Gathering eye-witness accounts from previous owners and inhabitants (such socio-economic information elucidates the structure's function in the local community);
- \* Full documentation of the fabric before any changes are made i.e. measuring, sketching and photographing the building and its components.

### **Methodology**

After all possible information regarding the site and building(s) has been gathered, it must be processed. The result will indicate accurately what particular policy should be followed regarding conservation.

Whatever that policy, the site and its structures should be seen as the products of a particular period in time, and must be treated as such. Alterations not based on history must be avoided. Conservation aims at honesty and should neither falsify nor deceive.

The methods and materials used during the process, as well as the discoveries made, should also be documented. Deviations from initial plans for conservation often occur because of such discoveries, which shed light on the property's past. Every deviation and adjustment, including its motivation, should be recorded. All this information is invaluable for further research and maintenance, as well as for future owners. In the course of years these documents serve as the only indication of what material is original and what was replaced.

### **Legal Aspects of Conservation**

When alterations or additions to a building are contemplated, it must first be established whether it is older than 60 years, in which case all new work will have to be approved and monitored by the South African Heritage Resources Agency. Moreover, should the site or building fall within a special historical zone or conservation area, further limitations might apply.

Due to the historical character of Stellenbosch, certain areas have been identified where, notwithstanding a particular zoning according to the zoning scheme, special control is exercised over a plot, groups of plots, or a neighbourhood. Here the following special regulations, requirements and conditions apply:

- \* *Facade facing the street*: No structural work is allowed unless the design and style, finish, colour scheme and general appearance is expressly approved by Council;

- \* Maintenance of buildings: If a building is deemed worthy of preservation by the Council because of its historical or architectural value, the Council will not permit alteration or demolition;
  - Signage on buildings and bill-boards, and the erection of the latter, is strictly controlled in the expanded historical zone (see map). This also applies to plots bordering on the following feeder routes to Stellenbosch:
 

Bird St/Koelenhof Rd (R304); Strand Rd/Adam Tas Rd/Klapmuts Rd (R44); New Helshoogte Rd (R310); Adam Tas Rd towards Kuils River (R306); Molteno Rd/Jan Celliers St/Hammandshand Rd. More information regarding signage is available from the Municipality, including a document entitled *Guide-lines for the design and control of Signs*;
- \* The provision of parking on the premises is governed by regulations prescribed by the Municipality;
- \* The height of a building is usually limited to 10 metres, measured from average ground level to the wall-plate;
- \* Historic building-lines are usually observed, but the Council may prescribe others in order to protect trees within the boundary of the street;
- \* Any other aspect related to a building which the Council may deem important in a particular case.

These regulations apply to the erection of new buildings and to additions, renovations and alterations of existing buildings. The Municipal Aesthetics Committee advises the Council and makes recommendations concerning architectural and historical aspects of all structures and components (existing or proposed) within and around Stellenbosch. Therefore, applications are judged according to the nature, scope, appearance and context of the structure in question. Advice is also given regarding bill-boards and advertisements.

Approval has to be obtained from the Municipality for the demolition or erection of any structure, for any alteration to the outside of a building, and for the painting or otherwise attachment of names and signs to the exterior of buildings.

### **Documentation**

It is of the utmost importance that all original plans, and also those concerned with alterations, be preserved. Photographs taken before, during and after conservation activities provide a clear impression of how the building developed. Even detailed information concerning replacements, e.g. gutters or cast iron work, should be retained for reference purposes during future conservation activities. All information should be gathered in one volume and be available to subsequent owners of the property. Ideally, a data bank should be created for the entire Stellenbosch encompassing all historical buildings.

### **Able Supervision**

Because the conservation of a building requires specialized knowledge, the assistance of experts should be called in where needed.

## **Context**

A historic site consists of more than just buildings. Conservation demands the maintenance and consolidation of such places in wider context. Any new construction, demolition or intrusion in the vicinity which can have a potentially negative impact on experiencing and appreciating the historic site, must be avoided. Vistas and period gardens provide meaningful surroundings for historical buildings. All evidence of former garden walls, paths and plants should be investigated, and these elements then recreated to provide a comprehensive and authentic picture.

The relationship between historical and adjacent structures can be strengthened by the re-introduction of connecting elements such as walls, fences and hedges.

## **Interiors**

The inside of a historical building forms an integral part of its cultural significance. Divesting it of its original ceilings, banisters or wall decorations is like removing the engine from a vintage automobile. Notwithstanding the demands of modern living, authentic interior details and – if at all possible – the original floor plan should be retained.

## **Minimum Intervention**

Conservation is based on respect for the existing fabric and should, therefore, involve minimum intervention. Evidence contained in the fabric of a building should not be tampered with, or destroyed. Alterations effected over time should be respected since they serve as evidence of the past, as well as the evolution, of the structure. Where possible, alterations should be made in such a way that, were they to be undone at a future date, the original fabric will again be visible.

Contemporary design is acceptable provided that it harmonizes with the existing historical character and scale, and does not overwhelm it. New designs should be compatible with regard to the size, material, texture, colour and character of the historical building and its surroundings.

## **Repair rather than replace**

Worn or weathered architectural features and fittings should be retained or repaired, rather than replaced. Here follow some golden rules:

Use the gentlest method. Do not employ harsh chemicals, mechanical sanders, and other machines that can damage or destroy original surfaces. If it is necessary to replace, great care should be taken that the substitute matches the design, colour, texture and other visual qualities of the original as far as possible. Use traditional techniques if at all feasible. On closer inspection new work should, nevertheless, be distinguishable so that the historical authenticity of the structure is not impaired. Hence the importance of documentation. Where architectural details have been lost, reconstructions are only justified if based on history i.e. on imprints, early depictions, or archival records.

## **A Sympathetic New Use**

If a building is no longer used for its original purpose, an agreeable alternative use should be found which, in order to retain the structure's integrity, will require the least possible

alteration. This makes financial sense, and also prevents damage to the character of the building, site or surroundings.

### **Continuous Maintenance**

“Prevention is better than cure” is the appropriate parole as regards the upkeep of an old structure. Frequent inspection and continuous maintenance ensure the preservation of historic features of a building, and obviate future expensive repairs.

The following general hints may be useful:

- \* When structural problems such as cracks crop up, determine the cause and take immediate action to fix it. By far the most common problems are those caused by the weather. Note in particular the following:
- \* Prevent water running down walls from leaking gutters. Water must be diverted from walls and foundations;
- \* Do not replace wooden floors with concrete floors, since this encourages rising damp in walls;
- \* Do not brick up ventilators below wooden floors. Proper circulation of air is required to prevent floor boards from rotting;
- \* Repair leaking roofs immediately. Make certain that water running off the roof is properly diverted from the building. Water should not be allowed to seep away near the foundations of a building. Take care that all exposed woodwork is regularly painted or varnished (woodwork originally painted should again be painted);
- \* Rust should be removed immediately and treated with an anti-rust agent before painting;
- \* Repair damaged plaster and mouldings using a mixture with a high line content. A ‘strong’ mixture of Portland cement causes the plaster to crack and peel because of the softness of the old brickwork behind.

## **2. CARE, MAINTENANCE AND RESTORATION**

### **Thatched buildings (18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries)**

- \* A formerly thatched building should preferably be rethatched in order to regain its visual beauty and insulation advantage. If this is impossible due to financial limitations, the original appearance should at least be respected by restoring the plasterwork and roof timber (to the correct pitch), and using finely corrugated metal sheets of a dark brown or charcoal colour - corrugated sheets were already used in the 1840s!
- \* Roof trusses were always imbedded in the outer walls and therefore invisible from outside. Only the thatch of about 125 mm (5 inches) thick projects beyond the wall, and then never more than about 150 mm (6 inches). The eaves line often extends visually across the central gable by means of a ‘string course’ plaster moulding.

- \* The roof ridge remains the same height throughout the building if the room depth remains constant. Where wings are narrower, the roof pitch is adjusted slightly in order to maintain a uniform roof height. Roof pitch varies from a minimum of about 45 degrees (to ensure that the thatch remains waterproof) to a maximum of about 50 degrees (above which dry thatch has a tendency to creep).
- \* The correct way of finishing a thatched roof ridge is by the application of a lime plaster mix which is afterwards whitewashed (A sheet metal ridge is historically incorrect, even when painted white.);
- \* While gutters and down pipes characterize flat roof buildings of all periods, they are not original to thatched buildings and impair their beauty;
- \* The top rail of windows and, in the case of Cape Dutch sliding sashes, also the transom, usually line up with those of the central door. Should this be a top-and-bottom ('stable') door, its division is in line with the window sills in the most pleasing examples.
- \* Eighteenth century front doors are sometimes framed by a tripartite architrave. In the most harmonious examples the division of the architrave coincide with those of the door, as well as the transom and sills of the flanking windows. Such surrounds were initially of imported teak which was marbled or painted olive green. However, after the demise of the Dutch East India Company in 1795, they were moulded in plaster and again painted!

### **Flat roof buildings**

With the exception of Grosvenor House, such buildings in Stellenbosch date from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and are now covered with corrugated iron. Leakages occur mainly where the roof joins the parapet, and this can be fixed with modern waterproofing materials. It is, therefore, not necessary to tile the parapet, or demolish it in order to extend the roof so that its projects across the outside walls!

### **Cape Victorian buildings (middle to late 19<sup>th</sup> century)**

Make certain that the roof construction is sturdy by inspecting the trusses for noticeable distortion or rot. The latter frequently occurs on top of walls, along valley gutters, and beneath parapets. The purlins which stabilize the trusses should also be firm, since any outward tilting of the latter causes distortion, and possible collapse, of the upper part of the wall.

Ascertain whether the outer walls are waterproof. The longevity of a building is closely linked to a solidly constructed and waterproof roof. Since the fabric is a major cause of damage and decay, this should be regularly inspected for water penetration. Parapets in particular should be thoroughly waterproofed at the roof joint, and rain water rapidly diverted towards waterproof gutters and down pipes, and then away from foundations.

Remember that one should rather repair than replace: Where repair is impossible, exact replicas should be made so that no architectural detail is lost. The charm of Victorian architecture depends greatly on roof decorations: chimneys, fascia boards, barge-boards, finials and cast iron ridge ornaments. The main roof should have its own set of gutters, and not extend across stoeps to drain directly into the rainwater troughs of verandahs. This ensures that the latter retain their stuck-on character.

Roof tiles of Welsh slate were in vogue for a short period during the mid - 19<sup>th</sup> century, e.g. Devonshire House and Leipoldthuis Annexe. The common roofing material, however, was corrugated iron and the original sheets should be retained where possible. If not, the same profile must be used, but not be left unpainted. Maintenance-free epoxy coated sheets of the correct colour are also acceptable. Traditionally, the colour was either red oxide, black, or various shades of grey. Verandah sheets were painted in alternative colours, either red and white or green and white.

The finish of a Victorian house is also important: Do not change the pitch of the roof, or install roof windows in the side facing the street. Retain historical elements such as cast iron work, chimneys and chimney pots (which provide vertical emphasis).

Water is a major cause of damage in buildings, and the maintenance of gutters and down pipes is therefore very important. Retain cast iron originals as far as possible, or substitute with second-hand pieces obtained from buildings with fixtures having identical or similar profiles. Traditional galvanized half-round or s-shaped ('ogee') gutters with matching down pipes are also acceptable.

Even PVC or aluminium fixtures may be used provided they have the original profile, but asbestos and box gutters are undesirable.

## **General building information**

### **(a) WALLS**

The survival of old walls is sufficient proof of their durability. Since materials used at the time are not generally available today, successful maintenance requires a knowledge of substances and techniques of former years. If the characteristics of an old wall are understood and the wall consequently treated correctly, few problems should be encountered.

Existing foundations must not be disturbed by new excavations, because this will impair the stability of the structure. This can also happen if interior walls are demolished. Such alterations should therefore be confined to the minimum. Retain the foundations of demolished walls, since they provide evidence of the building's history.

Surface damage such as cracking must be investigated immediately. Most 19<sup>th</sup> century walls rest on narrow foundations which may cause uneven subsidence. Modern techniques enable foundations to be strengthened or widened. As soon as the cause of cracking is established, the cracks should be properly filled in to prevent water penetration.

Structural problems are caused by overloading, leaking drainage systems near foundations, saturation of the soil because of water leakage, roots and branches of trees too close to the walls, and expansion and contraction of the soil.

Water penetration of walls can also be the result of imperfect joining and painting of brickwork, and must be repaired with suitable mortar. A 'strong' mortar mix, poor pointing and normal weathering all contribute to the decay of joints which, in turn, causes bricks to loosen, moisture to penetrate, and roots to enter the wall. Even surface cracks allow an amazingly high penetration of moisture, which is often increased by the action of plant roots in

the case of soft bricks and mud plaster. The planting of creepers such as ivy against walls should be discouraged.

### **(b) COMBATING DAMP**

Before damp-roofing can commence, the source of damp must be determined. Check the following:

- \* Gutters and down pipes: Any leakage, blockage or flooding? Is water sufficient deflected away from the building?
- \* Sewerage system: Any leaks or spills? Does it drain properly and is it situated far enough away from the building?
- \* Ground level: Is this sufficiently lower than damp course and floor levels? Does it slope away enough from the outside walls to prevent flood water from flowing towards the building?
- \* Doors and windows: Do thresholds and sills slope sufficiently outwards? Are exposed surfaces properly protected by paint/varnish, or do they show cracks, flaking, and spots of rust?
- \* Flashing: Has this been applied correctly, or does it leak?
- \* Roofs: Is the surface in good repair, or does it leak? Any signs of mildew on the trusses?
- \* Rising damp in walls: Traditionally, this was checked by using stone for the lower courses. Today silicone can be injected into walls, or a damp-proof course inserted after cutting away the base of the wall, one section at a time to maintain overall stability. As regards painting, it is essential to allow moisture in a wall to escape outwards by applying limewash or permeable paint such as Glutone to the exterior, and never to coat the outside with suffocating PVA, enamel or sprayed paint.

Rising damp in walls is made worse by the substitution of wooden floors with compacted fill and cement surfaces. Old timber, if still sound, should be retained together with its underfloor ventilators. Where a stoep is added, this should be at least 5 cm lower than the inside floor level, and contain horizontal shafts connecting the ventilators to the outside.

### **(c) LIME PLASTER**

Old walls must be covered with lime plaster which, like masonry mortar, should have a low Portland cement content so as not to exceed the strength of the brickwork. Such walls usually consist of stone, mud, sun-dried bricks and (later) baked bricks. It is essential to use the correct mix to prevent cracks and adhesion problems. Where plaster starts to peel, it has to be fixed to prevent water penetration. Stripping must be done carefully to prevent damage to the brickwork which, where exposed, has a powdery surface. This requires the application of bonding liquid for proper adhesion of the new plaster.

Lime plaster consists of a mixture of Portland cement, hydrated SABS approved building lime (not agricultural lime or slaked lime) and river sand. When old walls are replastered, more lime should be used than in the usual cement mix. Lime has strong binding power, is easily

applied and adds greater flexibility to mortar which prevents cracks from developing. The following is a reliable old recipe approved by SAHRA:

5 parts clean river sand  
1 part quick lime (i.e. unslaked lime)  
Water as needed

Mix the ingredients, cover to reduce evaporation, and leave for 24 hours to become suitably elastic ('tempered'). Apply with a wooden trowel in layers not more than 1 - 1½ cm thick to prevent sagging, allowing time for the previous coat to dry.

Plaster surfaces should not be absolutely flat or straight. Judge the smoothness with your eye using a relatively short wooden straight-edge. Do not imitate the old appearance which developed over time and with many coats of whitewash, since the result is usually unnatural and too uneven.

Furthermore, it should be noted that, although walls sometimes remained unplastered in dry or poor areas, the use of modern face brick is completely unacceptable.

Where old rooms need to be subdivided today, it is advisable to use lightweight dry walls, consisting of a frame covered with wooden panels or compressed fibre. Such a structure can easily be removed later should the need arise.

Stucco decorations, plaster mouldings and masonry rustication should be carefully restored to their original profiles, preferably by an expert if the work is at all complicated.

#### **(d) THE PAINTING AND DECORATION OF WALLS**

By carefully cleaning or sandpapering small areas of wall surfaces, it is possible to establish how many layers of paint were applied over the years, what colour schemes were used, and whether any form of artistic design exists. Such findings can be used as a guide in conservation.

As a rule, the original finish should be restored. The most common, economical and effective finish was lime-wash, particularly on the outside of buildings. Repeated applications created an attractive patina, characteristic of Cape vernacular architecture. Sometimes the lime was tinted with locally available red or yellow ochre, which resulted in a more subdued appearance.

The traditional way of preparing lime-wash is as follows: mix 13 kg unslaked lime with 1,5 kg coarse salt and 10 liters of water. When the temperature begins to rise, add a kilogram of soft fat (or 1 cm cubes of candle wax). Allow the mixture to cool, then strain. Dilute with water if necessary. Wet the surface before whitewashing since this improves adhesion. An approved modern alternative to this mixture is Glutone, made by MMC Chemicals.

Wall paintings, whether simple geometric dadoes or elaborate naturalistic designs, were usually done in oils on very smooth surfaces. They are found in both 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century houses, reflect the prevalent tastes in fashion, and should only be touched by an expert who can either restore them properly, or seal them if a full restoration is found to be too costly. In the latter case the painting should be carefully documented (by means of a ground plan,

elevation drawing and photographs) in order to facilitate a possible future restoration, and as insurance against unintentional damage to the art work.

The above remarks are equally appropriate in regard to wallpaper, particularly common during the Victorian period when theatrical colours and designs were in vogue. Where financial considerations preclude restoration, samples of each pattern should at least be photographed and retained for later reference.

Finally, it must be emphasized that the paints used in old buildings should allow the walls, especially the outer walls, to 'breathe' i.e. expel moisture. To spray paint or apply PVA to the outside of an old building, permits trapped moisture to begin turning bricks and mortar into dust.

### **(e) CARPENTRY AND JOINERY**

#### **Doors, windows and shutters**

The details of these elements determine to a large extent the authenticity of an old building. All original doors, thresholds, windows, sills, sashes, fanlights, window panes, shutters, iron mongery and built-in cupboards should therefore be retained – and in their original positions! In this regard the rule 'repair rather than replace' certainly prevails. Thus, even if a sash is beyond repair, it does not automatically follow that its fixed case also has to go.

The greatest mistake that can be made during conservation is to disregard the original proportions and dimensions of doors and windows, since such errors disturb the visual harmony of the façade.

Conspicuous blunders include slender, insubstantial doors and shutters (usually off-the-shelf), too even and thick window panes (usually of the wrong size and proportions), and poorly designed and produced metal fittings.

Another common error is to position frames of the Cape Dutch style too deeply into a wall, leaving little room for the typical splayed reveals on the inside, and too much space for the shutters to swing out properly.

In the event that a piece of woodwork has to be replaced, use an exact replica. If this is too expensive, try to obtain an original of the same age and dimensions from elsewhere, keeping in mind that the front façade at least should be as authentic as possible. Mass-produced 'heritage pattern' doors and windows are simply not accurate enough to warrant installation in a historic building!

#### **Floors and Ceilings**

Whereas yellowwood floors and ceilings are characteristic of many 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century Cape houses, Victorian buildings usually contain imported deal, i.e. Baltic or Oregon pine, of slimmer dimensions.

Such woodwork has to be restored very carefully, since the attractive patina acquired over many decades can quickly disappear in the cleaning process. Unpainted surfaces may become coated with grime, which can be safely removed with spirits and 0001 or 0002 steel wool. Woodwork which was later painted requires a solvent which will not damage the wood. After

neutralizing the solvent and sealing the wood, floors can be polished with Cobra Liquid White and beams given two coats of aloe juice.

Fireproof ceilings (*brandsolders*) present a dilemma to the conservator: on the one hand such mud, clay or brick layers in the loft should be preserved for functional and historical reasons. On the other hand, they produce dust which sifts down between ceiling boards, reeds (*spaansriet*) or saplings (*sparretjies*). Usually, *brandsolders* are replaced by reinforced concrete poured over isolating plastic sheets, which protect the ceiling below. The latter can then be cleaned and varnished with aloe juice, or whitewashed.

Traditionally, the problem was solved from below by tacking a dust-proof ceiling against the existing ceiling. In Victorian times such ceilings were quite decorative, and therefore deserve to be preserved, especially if the rest of the room was also Victorianized with picture rails, chair rails and skirting boards. A particularly attractive feature of Victorian and Edwardian houses is the pressed ceiling, composed of steel or gypsum centre-pieces, panels and cornices. Today these patterns are carefully reproduced so that only damaged sections need to be replaced.

### **Screens and Wall-cupboards**

Decorative examples of this type of built-in furniture are to be found in many late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century Cape houses. As rooms became smaller and passages were introduced during the English period, wall-cupboards disappeared and screens were reduced to little more than paneled and painted double doors. Such built-in furniture only belongs in houses where evidence of their former presence has been found.

### **Types of Wood**

Besides indigenous yellowwood and stinkwood, oriental teak and deal from North America and the Baltic were used onwards from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Soon locally grown pine, and later camphorwood as well, became available as did small quantities of fruitwood and indigenous species such as cedarwood.

Today suitable wood for restoration purposes is very expensive, while available types such as meranti and Philippine mahogany should be avoided as far as possible because of their inferior quality. Steel and aluminium profiles are on the whole unsuitable.

### **Wood finishes**

Outside woodwork, as documentary evidence and sometimes close inspection of old woodwork make indisputably clear, was always painted. The actual colours depended on tradition, purpose, availability and fashion, but dark green/olive was predominant during the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and brown in the late 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Traces of pigments in cracks and mouldings of outside woodwork are reliable indicators of what colour was used originally. Sashes and their glazing bars were usually painted white on the outside in the Dutch period, and brown later on.

Under the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement, exposed exterior woodwork became fashionable in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This led to the rapid deterioration of numerous doors and windows because of the Cape weather, and the sacrifice of much visual appeal in many fine

facades. Consequently, the rule should be: if the woodwork was originally painted, paint it again!

Painted woodwork must be inspected regularly for air bubbles, peeling or cracks, and repainted at least every five years. Surfaces require an extra layer of paint. Stripping of paint is only necessary if overpainting becomes impossible, or where so many layers have been applied that details of the mouldings become blurred. After applying the undercoat, an oil-based paint should preferably be put on – never polyurethane finish which can trap destructive moisture and cause flaking.

Where teak was used in Victorian buildings, it is sufficient to varnish the outside. However, where deal was used, it has to be painted – whether exposed or not. Deal was never considered to be something special, and so was either painted white, or grained (*faux bois*) to resemble a more valuable wood – a popular technique since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **(f) METAL FITTINGS**

As the literature on the subject shows, a great variety of hinges, locks, bolts, holdbacks, handles and escutcheon plates were used over the centuries. Careful examination of woodwork often reveals the imprint, or other traces, of fittings that were later removed. By comparing such templates with actual examples, or illustrations in books, it is often possible to make fairly accurate reproductions. Moreover, fittings sometimes survive in odd corners of buildings where they escaped over-use. Such examples can then serve as models to be copied, while keeping in mind that old fittings are on the whole more delicate and refined than modern examples. Naturally, original fittings should be retained, and if possible repaired for re-use.

In conclusion, it should be noted that chromium-plated fittings and purely ornamental strap hinges do not belong in an authentic Cape setting.

#### **(g) STOEPS AND VERANDAHS**

The uncovered stoep at an early date became an integral part of the Cape house, and must be retained where it still exists – whether of clay, cobbles or tiles. Tiles manufactured in the Bottelary hills are common in the Stellenbosch area, but have not weathered well over the years. They should nevertheless be preserved if possible since they lend character to a building. Where an old stoep now has a modern finish, this should be replaced by a historically correct surface. In removing the later overlay, imprints or remnants of the earliest surface may be revealed, which can then be used as a guide in restoration.

Verandahs date from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and are stoeps protected by corrugated iron roofs of various shapes (catenary, ogee, bull-nosed, or straight). They rest on cast iron pillars embellished with open-work brackets of the same material, or on wooden posts of individualistic design decorated with trellising. The surface of such shady terraces were either smoothly plastered and then polished with red or green wax, or covered with multi-coloured encaustic tiles.

Modern walls and windows which turn verandahs into stoep rooms should preferably be removed, since they destroy the pleasant transitional space between the interior and the garden i.e. between the private and the public domains. Other extraneous elements which should be avoided, or done away with, because they impair the beauty of a house, are stoep

pergolas (particularly those made of tarred poles!) and face-brick walls (which should at least be plastered and whitewashed).

Restoring the outward appearance of a Victorian or Edwardian dwelling is today facilitated by firms such as Cottage Castings in Paardeneiland which can make exact reproductions of old metalwork in cast iron, aluminium or synthetic materials. Even corrugated iron sheets can now be cut and shaped as required.

#### **(h) WALLS, GATES AND RAILINGS**

These elements define semi-private spaces around the house and link them to public thoroughfares. In so doing they convey the architecture of the dwelling to the street, and thus contribute to a harmonious 'streetscape'.

Traffic and concomitant noise in old residential areas has unfortunately increased substantially, resulting in less privacy and security for inhabitants. The resultant higher safety walls create sterile streetscapes contrary to original intentions. If such walls are inevitable, they should at least be rhythmically perforated to allow glimpses of the enclosed domestic space, and thus alleviate the stark appearance.

An acceptable alternative to high walls around Victorian and Edwardian buildings are well-designed metal fences, anchored at regular intervals to whitewashed columns. Such a scheme allows visual interaction between street and dwelling, balances the old and the new, and enables neighbours and passers-by to monitor what happens inside the enclosure, thus increasing security. Furthermore, traffic noise can be reduced by the judicious planting of shrubs and trees, which also create a softer visual impression, and counteract social isolation.

Higher walls between properties do not necessarily have a negative effect on the surroundings, but if a lack of privacy is really a problem, such constructions should rather be confined to back yards, and the materials and techniques employed be limited to those available at the time when the house was built. Face brick and precast concrete walls are so alien in character to Edwardian and earlier building styles that they are unacceptable. Obviously, privacy is enhanced by trees and hedges that have acquired substantial height, girth and density over the years, and these should be retained as far as possible.

#### **MODERN ADDITIONS**

Through sensitive design and correct positioning, modern conveniences can be accommodated successfully in old buildings. As a rule, cutting and chopping of floors and walls should be limited to the absolute minimum, even if this involves roundabout routes for wiring and plumbing. Fittings should be positioned as unobtrusively as possible by using, for example, ceiling switches and portable heaters. For total peace of mind, services should be thoroughly checked every 20 to 30 years, and a diagram kept of the exact route of all conduits, underground as well as in lofts and walls.

Garages should be invisible from the street if possible, or at least have the approximate dimensions and proportions of old buildings with similar functions. (Hence double garages should have two single doors).

Garden plants and their arrangement should reflect the period from which the dwelling dates. This information can be obtained from early illustrations and descriptions, specialized

publications and talking to experts, but also from studying the evidence still present above and below ground in the garden, and elsewhere in town, e.g. the Museum.

In selecting light standards, street numbers and post boxes, the temptation presented by the great variety of modern fittings should be resisted in favour of those which in shape, colour and material bear the closest resemblance to the stylistic period of the house. Here again early photographs, specialized publications and a close inspection of intact houses of the same period will be of assistance. Otherwise, it is best to settle for unostentatious, modern, design.

Burglar-proofing presents a particular challenge, because it should be unobtrusive yet allow ventilation if possible. In the case of Cape Dutch windows with their small panes, steel rods painted white can be fixed to the frame to coincide exactly with the glazing bars. More recent double-sliding windows with their larger panes may require each sash to be protected by a single sheet of reinforced plate glass.

Security gates are inherently obtrusive and their design should therefore be as simple as possible, with no attempt to rival those of the Sun King at Versailles!

Technical equipment must never disfigure a historical façade. Air-conditioners and meter boxes should be fixed to the sides or, better still, the back of a building, and solar panels preferably attached to an outbuilding if they have to face the street at all. Modern awnings are equally unsuitable for such houses. In general, municipal regulations should be complied with in a way that causes minimum visual impact on the appearance of an old building.

### 3. TOWN PLANNING MEASURES

Initially, conservation focused mainly on individual structures with little regard to context i.e. neighbouring buildings and elements of the street.

Gradually it was realized that historical streetscapes were fast disappearing and that attention should also be given to the conservation of groups of buildings, as well as to their immediate surroundings. Thus the character of areas as a whole came under scrutiny.

This does not imply that all development in historical environments should be prohibited, but it does mean that new constructions should take into account existing landmarks and familiar points of reference. Such 'islands of stability' represent a psychological part of people's identity, and are recalled before the mind's eye by the mentioning of the name of a particular place, e.g. the Braak, as a tree lined square surrounded by whitewashed buildings, and blue mountains beyond. The conservation of these areas are therefore not simply a romantic pastime, but a deliberate effort to find new uses for old buildings, in order to maintain a balance between the past and the present.

When discussing the conservation of streetscapes it is important to consider not only historical buildings, but also new constructions and related elements such as parking, signage, illumination, seating and vegetation.

#### **New Buildings within Historical Streetscapes**

Harmonising the new with the old poses one of the most difficult challenges for an architect. A successful contemporary design treats scale, volume, shape, texture and colour in a sensitive and innovative way, without blindly copying historical buildings. There should be no

gratuitous parody, or imitation which confuses. Neither should the newcomer be taller or more massive, nor garish or more raking. Rather than introducing contrasting novelty, the architect should by distillation strive to interpret existing patterns and proportions, colours and textures in a contemporary way which blends unobtrusively with existing buildings. This type of 'infill architecture' in historical surroundings is generally a less controversial approach, and can be considered to be an important aspect of conservation.

### **Walls**

Historical Stellenbosch architecture consists predominantly of wall surfaces regularly perforated by doors and windows, or strengthened at intervals with engaged columns. Large, uninterrupted expanses of new walls or windows must be avoided. Moreover, the finish of projecting walls and parapets with caps, ridges and mouldings require sensitive detailing.

### **Vegetation**

The character of a street is determined not only by its buildings, but also by its trees and shrubs: their shape, size and spacing, and whether they are evergreen or deciduous. Thus, seasonal changes in foliage of Stellenbosch avenues reflect botanical influences introduced from colder climates, as much as the buildings reflect stylistic influences from overseas.

The overpowering African setting has been modified further by plants introduced from other regions in the course of history: fig trees from Bengal, jambos (rose apple) from Malaya, camphor trees from Japan, eucalyptus from Australia, Norfolk pines from The Pacific, and jacarandas from Brazil. While palms, umbrella pines and fruit trees from the Mediterranean grace our parks and gardens, human intervention now enable indigenous yellowwood and wild olives to slowly regain their former pre-eminence on the banks of the Eerste River.