

## OBITUARY: FABIO TODESCHINI

Fabio was born on 26th November 1940 in Milano, Italy. His father was involved in the resistance and was forced to flee the Nazis. Fabio had hazy memories of his parents half carrying, half assisting him to walk over the Alps to the safety of Switzerland.

The family came to South Africa when he was four. His father worked as the manager of a small-holding just outside Paarl where they lived.

It must have been a hard time: Fabio could not speak English or Afrikaans. To make matters worse, on his first day at school his mother dressed him in a sailor suit, which went down like a lead balloon in the Afrikaans community of Paarl. Nevertheless, he persevered.

He was introduced to architecture by Pius Pahl, who was a close friend of the family. He enrolled in the Architectural School at UCT and graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture degree, with a first class pass for thesis, in 1965. He worked in a number of practices and travelled widely in Europe and Africa before joining the office of Roelof Uytenbogaart, which was where I first met him.

In the early 1970s he decided to study urban design and he enrolled in the urban design program at the University of Pennsylvania which was Roelof Uytenbogaart's old school. He graduated with a Master's degree in City Planning and a Master's Degree in Architecture (Urban Design) in 1975. He returned to South Africa where he joined the UCT Department of Urban and Regional Planning headed by Roelof, first as a temporary lecturer and then, in 1976, as a Senior Lecturer. He remained at the school until his retirement in 2005. In that time he was promoted *ad hominem* to Associate Professor in 1996 and to full Professor in 2001.

Initially, Fabio's research interests were eclectic but, over time, he became increasingly interested in the field of urban morphology. He developed a very good course called Aspects of City Design which had urban morphology at its core. He taught this to city planning, urban design and architecture students at UCT and, in various forms, he gave courses in India, China, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Namibia. He also did important work with the Japhas and Lucien Le Grange on small towns in the Western Cape, particularly mission settlements.

Over time, his interests flowed naturally into heritage. He believed, correctly, that you cannot consider heritage in isolation from development: that they are two sides of the same coin. He was particularly interested in the interface between the two. It was in this field, I think, that Fabio found his niche. He, together with Liana Jansen, was recently commissioned by Stellenbosch Municipality to undertake a heritage resources inventory for the municipal area and to develop a heritage resources management plan. They and their colleagues have recently completed the inventory phase which contains, I believe, some ground-breaking work. Fabio was excited by the next phase - the management plan. Indeed, the day before he died, he invited me to lunch to discuss what a heritage management plan could look like.

These are the facts. They tell us little about the man.

Fabio was not perfect. He could be curt with people almost to the point of rudeness, and he had a tendency to talk over people in heated debate. This was never deliberate. I think it had much more to do with the passion with which he attacked all dimensions of his life.

There were five dimensions of Fabio which, I believe, were central to his character.

The first is the impossibility of separating the man from his work: indeed, much of his life was his work. Fabio gave an enormous amount of time to the professions of which he was a part. At different times, he has been a member of various committees of the Cape Institute of Architects, UDISA (of which he was a founder member and patron) and Heritage Western Cape. In so doing, he provided considerable intellectual leadership to these disciplines.

The second is that Fabio believed passionately in the custodial and public-good roles of the professions concerned with the built environment. In situations where authorities made decisions which he believed were detrimental to the quality of urban, rural or wilderness environments, he was fearless in speaking truth to power, frequently at considerable expense to himself. The reactions to news of his death in the Bo-Kaap bear testimony to how he was valued in this role.

The third was his seemingly inexhaustible energy. Physically, he was very fit - he walked a great deal, often on the mountain with his son. When he was visiting different places, he had a great cu-

riosity and walked everywhere. He loved to travel and was a good photographer: he was generous in terms of sharing slides he found particularly interesting with his friends on a regular basis.

He also had great mental energy. He did not sleep very much and in every waking minute, he worked on something. It was common to receive emails from him written at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. He once confided that his greatest fear was to have nothing to do. Accordingly, he deliberately gave himself projects: first, the on-going upgrading of his residence in the Bo-Kaap; more recently, the renovation of his recently acquired holiday home in Stanford.

Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, was his love for, and his pride in, his son Mario. Always close as father and son, they successfully made the transition from father and son to close friends. It was a mutually-reinforcing relationship, with each helping the other a great deal. He also took great joy in Mario's happy relationship with his partner, Sophie.

Finally, there was Fabio the social being. Socially, Fabio was a warm and gregarious man with a lively sense of humour. He enjoyed people. He enjoyed music - he seldom missed the Tuesday night concerts at the City Hall. Particularly, he enjoyed talking with friends over good wine and food - and plenty of it.

Fabio had a good and productive life. He also had a good death. He died sitting at his desk, with no pain, working on the project which was currently closest to his heart.

I will miss him.

Dave Dewar

31 May 2018