



PLACE OF RENEWAL
ONE WOMAN'S CHILDHOOD
VISION HAS BEEN REALISED
IN THE MOUNTAINS OF HOUT
BAY, WHERE THE PHAKALANE
CENTRE FOR LIVING RITUAL IS
A SANCTUARY AND PLACE OF
POWER FOR ALL WHO GO
THERE IN SEARCH OF INNER
PEACE AND TRANSFORMATION.



ABOVE Even the guest bathroom at the Phakalane Centre for Living Ritual has a view. The basin was cast by engineer Rod Holmes using sand from the site, while light floods in from glass panels below the cantilevered roof. **ABOVE RIGHT** Walls of glass let the outside in, confirming the close relationship between Phakalane and the surrounding forest. **RIGHT** Phaka the cat, who adopted the centre just after building was completed, suns herself in a therapy room in front of the ever-present heart motif. Glass panels at the tops of all the walls allow sunlight to stream into the rooms, while giving them an extra sense of volume and spaciousness. **OPPOSITE** First impressions: Claudia Rauber does not look like a typical sangoma, but there is nothing typical about her or the remarkable centre she has built. The pot is by Edu Vaughan-Scott. **PREVIOUS SPREAD, LEFT** A wooden deck built by architect Mano Kallos is the essence of tranquility and natural beauty that typifies the centre. The small corrugated translucent roof covers an outside shower. **PREVIOUS SPREAD, RIGHT** Claudia found this heart-shaped rock on a beach after a swim and had it placed in the rock wall at Phakalane's entrance. These muted natural tones permeate the centre. All the rocks were collected from the land during construction.



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BELOW Silke Losch, Phakalane's manager, stands in the kitchen of the impressive dining room, where red accents complement the long tables and benches made by Haldane Martin. Claudia and Mano hand-fitted the OSB ceiling boards themselves, after the carpenter couldn't do it to their exacting specifications. Spectacular views of the Hout Bay mountains can be seen through the glass doors to the right.



OPPOSITE Furniture by Haldane Martin brings the restive lounge area to life. His elegant Fiela Feather Light takes pride of place, as do the comfy leather couches. The striking red walls, also seen in other rooms, lift the space.



At first glance, it seems like an elegantly designed architectural triumph of modernity and traditional South African building techniques – the sheer glass windows, floating roofs, red walls and strikingly Mies van der Rohe-esque straight lines grounded with face-brick and packed stone. It is a beautiful building that exudes charm and draws you in – showing off stunning views of the mountains of Hout Bay when you look back through the walls of glass. But Phakalane is so much more than it seems – not unlike its equally beautiful and larger-than-life owner, Claudia Rauber.

She calls it a “centre for living ritual” – a name that seems vague and esoteric when you first hear it. As she speaks and shows you around, you can understand what Phakalane is and why she built it. “Ritual is a part of our daily life,” she says enigmatically.

She talks somewhat reluctantly about being a sangoma, because of the stigma so often attached to it – despite its deep reverence in African culture.

Claudia, who is revered in Cape Town for the remarkable body work and therapy she has done over the years, is innately humble, a reluctant heroine who has built not only an architectural masterpiece but also a living centre. She is as multidisciplinary in her techniques as she is modern in her methods and the way in which she integrates them into her life and the creation of Phakalane. A former triathlete who runs several kilometres and swims in the ocean on most mornings, she is gracious and statuesque. Her touch can be seen in the centre's fine finishings, including custom-made furniture by Haldane Martin, exquisite attention to every detail, and the combination of practicality and finesse. Yet, while Phakalane was being built, she was on site every day, carrying bags of cement and mucking in with the building, including precisely fitting the OSB-board ceiling in the dining room with the architect.

Phakalane was her idea and her vision, but it wouldn't have happened without her ex-husband and its architect, Mano Kalos, whose eye for detail, straight lines and exacting standards made it possible. Phakalane, as you hear Claudia tell it, seems to have a personality of its own. It is as much a story of this striking building as it is of her remarkable journey to build it.

Claudia bought the land 13 years ago, and always had a vision for doing more with it. But the idea for such a centre took root when she was much younger.

Her own journey has taken her through the deep spirituality of other cultures, she says. Born to a German mother and Swiss father, she spent some time after school working in two health spas in Germany, running the second and helping to set up a third. Trained initially as a beauty therapist, Claudia began wondering how she could work with clients during the week they spent at the spa.

So she trained in body work and massage – although she is skilled in so much more –

and then set off on an 18-month walkabout around the world. She spent time with Native Americans, in Buddhist monasteries and in other cultures watching how people were “living their life in their tradition”.

“I keep coming back to this ‘living’ thing: How do we get to live as human beings with all these other parts of ourselves?” she asks over herbal tea on the wooden deck in front of the dining room.

After falling extremely ill in Vancouver, she relinquished her dream of going to Hawaii and came back to Cape Town, where it was suggested that she undergo sangoma training. Sickness is often how the “calling” manifests itself and sangomas frequently do their training to overcome sometimes life-threatening illnesses. She graduated as the first white woman to become a sangoma in Swaziland.

As triumphant as it is to become a sangoma – which is equivalent in status to graduating as a doctor in western culture – she is remarkably humble about it, clearly cautious of the negative connotations that have been foisted on this traditional African spiritualism. But it has deeply informed her life, and the centre's architecture, which interweaves these complex influences with a purity of intention and design.

Phakalane means “hawk” in Tswana, a name Claudia chose after seeing the birds circling over the property. The hawk is also the symbolic messenger between the spiritual and physical worlds. When viewed from the air, Phakalane looks like a hawk: The central circular chamber, which is built with successive layers of bricks angling in, has two “wings” reaching sideways and a tiny “beak” at the top of tower where the rainwater falls down.

All the rock was quarried on the property, while the red, which is Claudia's favourite colour, depicts “blood, life force and sacredness, as I use a lot of red in my work”.

One “wing” houses two therapy rooms and a larger bedroom, with an en-suite bathroom, that can be both a birthing room (with a bath beneath the large window and majestic views). It also doubles as an exclusive boutique hotel bedroom. A large open-plan kitchen and dining room, with magnificent tables and benches by Haldane Martin, has held many glorious dinner parties and a wedding.

The other wing has a restive lounge with fireplace and 3m-high doors opening onto the terraced fynbos garden behind. Outside are spaces for other ritual work such as sweat lodges and sangoma-derived purification steams, while the entire building is surrounded by fynbos and tall trees.

“I always wanted to feel connected to the outdoors,” says Claudia. “My brief to Mano was that when I am inside, I have to feel as if I'm outside. For me, this symbolises internal work with the external world.”

Phakalane may be a centre for living ritual, but it took a ritual of living to create it.

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THE BUILDING HAS A HEART:
THE ROUND, CONE-LIKE
TOWER THAT HOLDS
EVERYTHING TOGETHER AND
IS A SPIRITUAL SPACE.



ABOVE A custom-made Shongololo Couch by Haldane Martin snakes around the central chamber, while an Nguni-covered lounge is the only furniture in Phakalane's entrance hall. The water feature runs from outside in and back again, symbolising the connection between the inner and outer worlds.

OPPOSITE The central chamber is a masterpiece of construction and forms the "heart" of the centre, says architect Mano Kalos. Painstakingly built using a central pole and adjustable extension arm, each brick is one centimetre in from the bricks below it. The floors are laid with locally acquired wood from sustainable forests, in line with the centre's eco-friendly principles. A floor-to-ceiling window runs along the back wall, while the external views show how the centre stands with the terraced fynbos garden behind it. Claudia and Mano slept in the chamber before coming up with the idea for the roof, which allows light to stream in and has electronic shutters in the centre that can be easily opened or closed.

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BELOW Phakalane is a strikingly modern building, with Mies van der Rohe-esque straight lines, a flat roof and economical use of form. Because of its positioning on the site and the care taken to preserve the existing fynbos garden, it can barely be seen from the road or surrounding properties. **OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Claudia Rauber and Mano Kalos have brought Phakalane to life; The master bedroom has an innovative headboard made from local wood, while the large bath can be used for water births; The en-suite bathroom has a superb shower with a deck that has impressive views; The red walls run across Phakalane’s “wings” like a unifying spine – adding dynamic colour but also symbolising life force in the Arican spiritualism that informs Claudia’s work. Wall-height glass windows flood the corridor with light.



Q&A WITH ARCHITECT MANO KALOS

WHAT WAS CLAUDIA’S BRIEF TO YOU?
To design a clear building integrated in, and incorporating, its landscape – one that could house ritual, ceremony and various healing modalities.

HOW DID YOU INTERPRET “RITUALS” IN YOUR ARCHITECTURE?
Ritual is a lot about symbolism. The building has a heart: the round, cone-like tower that holds everything together and is a spiritual space. Its exact position was determined in consultation with a Chinese Feng Shui master. Its core is aligned along a spine (the red walls) that extend, wing-like, to either side. Hopefully, the volumes and spaces, and their intimate relationship to the valley and surrounding mountains, feed the soul and lead to inner peace. Ritual was an integral part of the building process at various stages.

WHAT PHILOSOPHIES INFORMED THE ARCHITECTURE?
Architecture is about making spaces that feed the soul: sculpting spaces that integrate nature, the manipulation of light, and making use of nature’s palette and texture in the building materials.

HOW DID THE ARCHITECTURE INTERWEAVE WITH THE DESIGN?
Architecture is design. We used an holistic approach throughout: the building and the furniture speak the same language. The strong, clear space is enlivened by minimal touches of candles and flowers, and it comes alive fully by people experiencing it. Apart from nature’s colours, the interior is a mix of sangoma–associated colours: red (the spinal passage wall), white (the ceilings), and black or charcoal (the floors).

HOW DID YOU PRESERVE THE ESSENCE OF THE PROPERTY?
We limited access by fencing off the wild fynbos garden during building, and “inserted” a transparent building that makes use of materials from its surroundings. The only visible elevation is from the gate access.

WHAT ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY TECHNIQUES DID YOU USE?
We made use of rock from the land in the walls and landscaping. The timber doors were sourced from sustainable plantations. Locally grown sugar gum was used for the counter tops and the washbasins were cast using sand from the site. Water is heated by solar power and rainwater is channelled to a dam in the garden.
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