

# THE CHALLENGES FACING MODERNISM IN SOUTH AFRICA – HOW DO WE PROTECT THE LEGACY?



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This is my city, Cape Town – and if you look closely you will see some of the most unloved modern buildings – our ‘salt and pepper pots’ against the slopes of the mountain



A closer look at our towers!  
Architect: Bergermasco





The Old Mutual Building, central Cape Town. One of our most important Art Deco buildings, and when constructed the tallest building in Africa. Under the threat of demolition public pressure eventually persuaded owners as to its value. It is now an apartment block.

Architects: Lowe & Lowe in association with F M Glennie 1939



Ackermans Building, central Cape Town, then and now. Roberts and Small Architects 1935



The Farber's Building,  
Foreshore Cape Town.  
One of our most important  
modern movement  
buildings. An application  
for demolition was refused  
by the authorities and it  
will now be incorporated  
into a new high rise  
development  
Architects: Roberts and  
Small 1935



The SABC  
building,  
Sea Point,  
Cape Town

Architects:  
Meiring  
Naude  
Papendorf  
and van der  
Merwe



House  
Policansky,  
Bantry Bay,  
Cape Town  
– before  
demolition

1947





And during demolition. A battle that we did not win

The replacement – a block of exclusive apartments set below the road.



# Two cases studies in South Africa Cape Town and Durban....

## The Werdmuller Centre, Claremont Cape Town

Architect: Roelof Uytenbogaardt

1973

(Un)Loved Modern indeed



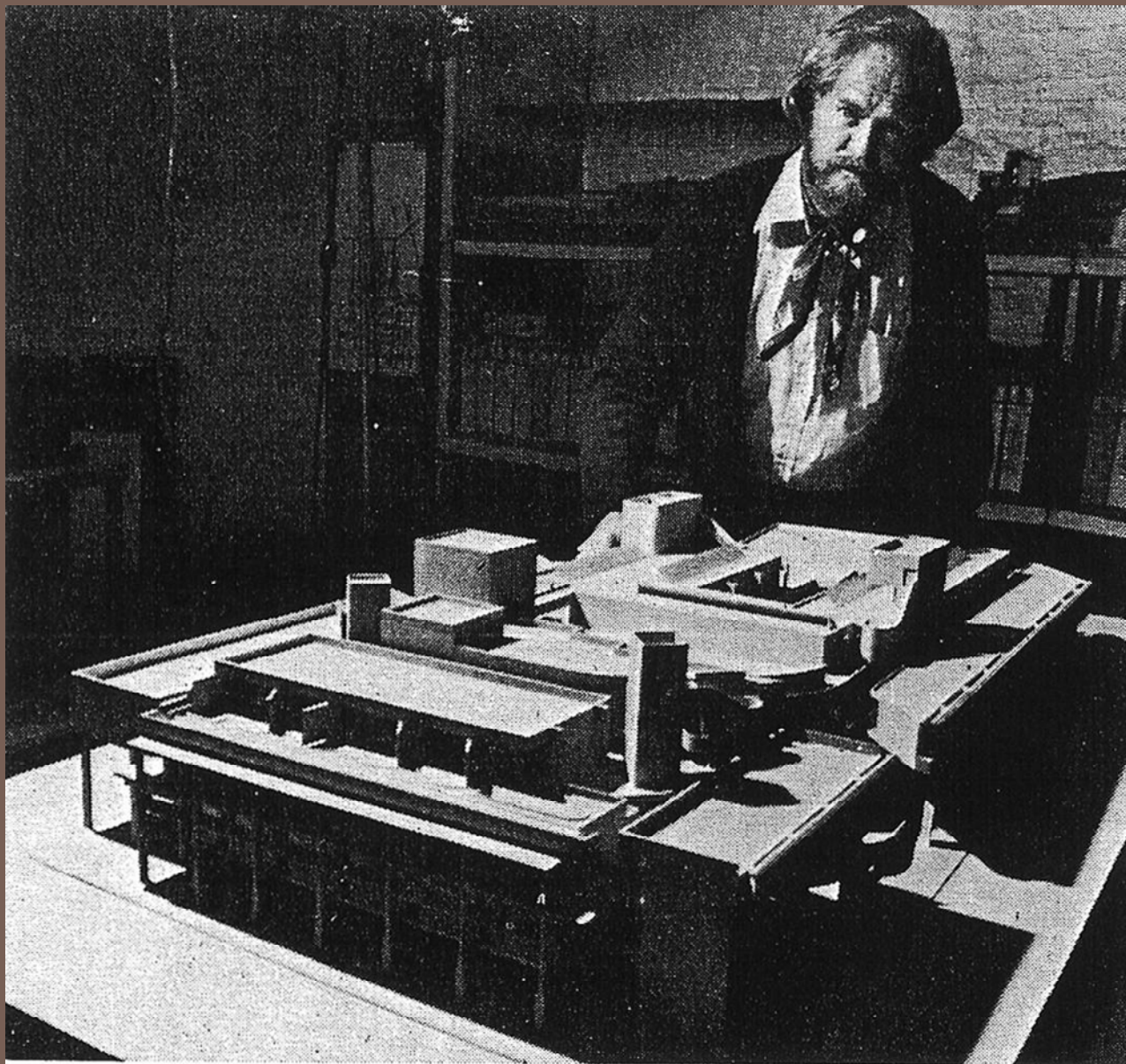
## The Nedbank Building, 303 Anton Lembede Street, Durban

Architect: Norman Eaton

1965

A Case of Architecture Misunderstood?





Cape Times 21 Nov 1975

(Source: UCT Manuscripts and Archives)

Architect Roelof Uitenbogaardt with a model of the Werdmuller Centre.



View towards mountain and main road

View of terrace

(Source: UCT Manuscripts and Archives)



View of ramp and planting box



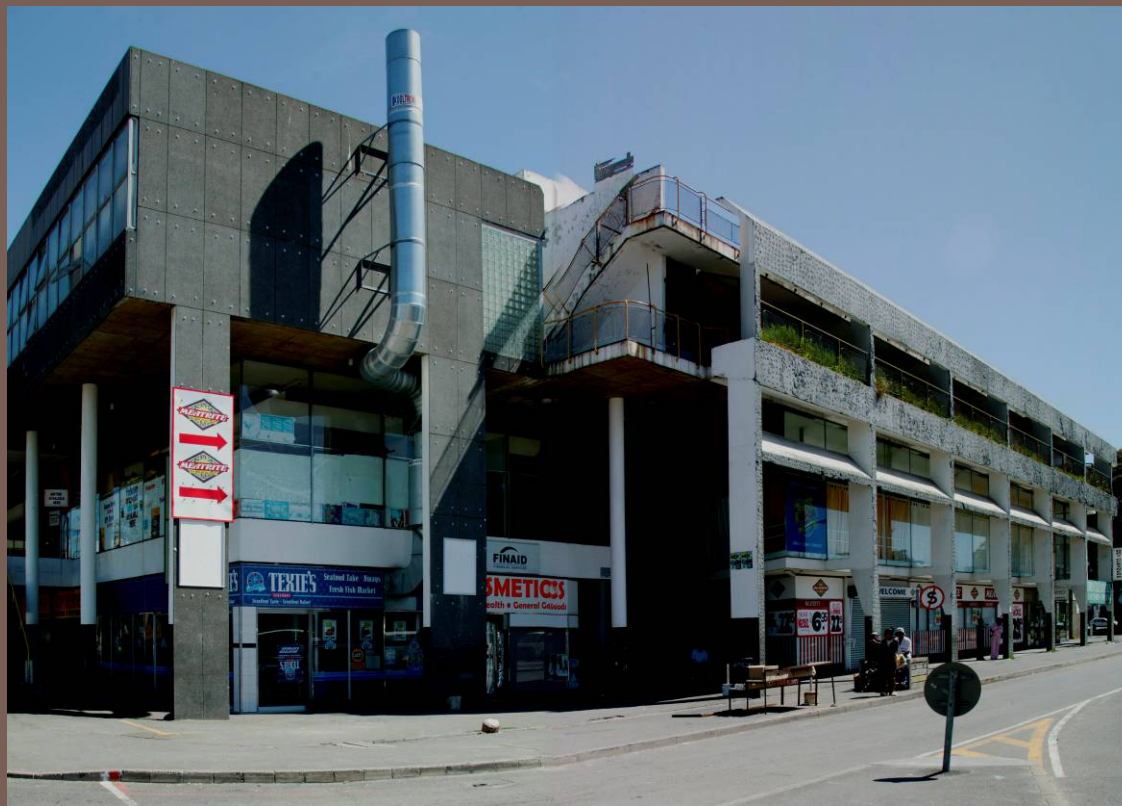
Various views of the Werdmuller Centre  
(Photos by Gealen Pinnock)



**DEMOLISH WERDMÜLLER?**  
**THERE HAS TO BE**  
**ANOTHER WAY**



Werdmuller today, short-term tenants, vacancies and definitely unloved!



(Source: unknown UCT student)



The Nedbank Building.

The new context – surrounded by high-rise buildings in down-town Durban; the *brise-soleil* is hardly required now thanks to the overshadowing of the adjacent buildings

Details of the damage to the screen can be clearly seen....





Architect colleagues in action!!!



“Just look at what he’s done!”

In conclusion, we have the challenges of un-loved, misunderstood modern buildings under threat from a public including developers and authorities that are of the persuasion that they are ugly, impractical and no longer serve the purpose for which they were intended....

If we, as architects and heritage professionals, are serious about keeping these very special buildings we need to lobby government with an articulate and well-reasoned argument as to the value of this heritage. It will not be an easy task..but with the help of our international colleagues and influential organisations such as the UIA, ICOMOS and Docomomo we must be able to make that convincing argument or face losing the battle.

