

HOUSE

AND LEISURE

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build
shaping the future



R130 (incl VAT)

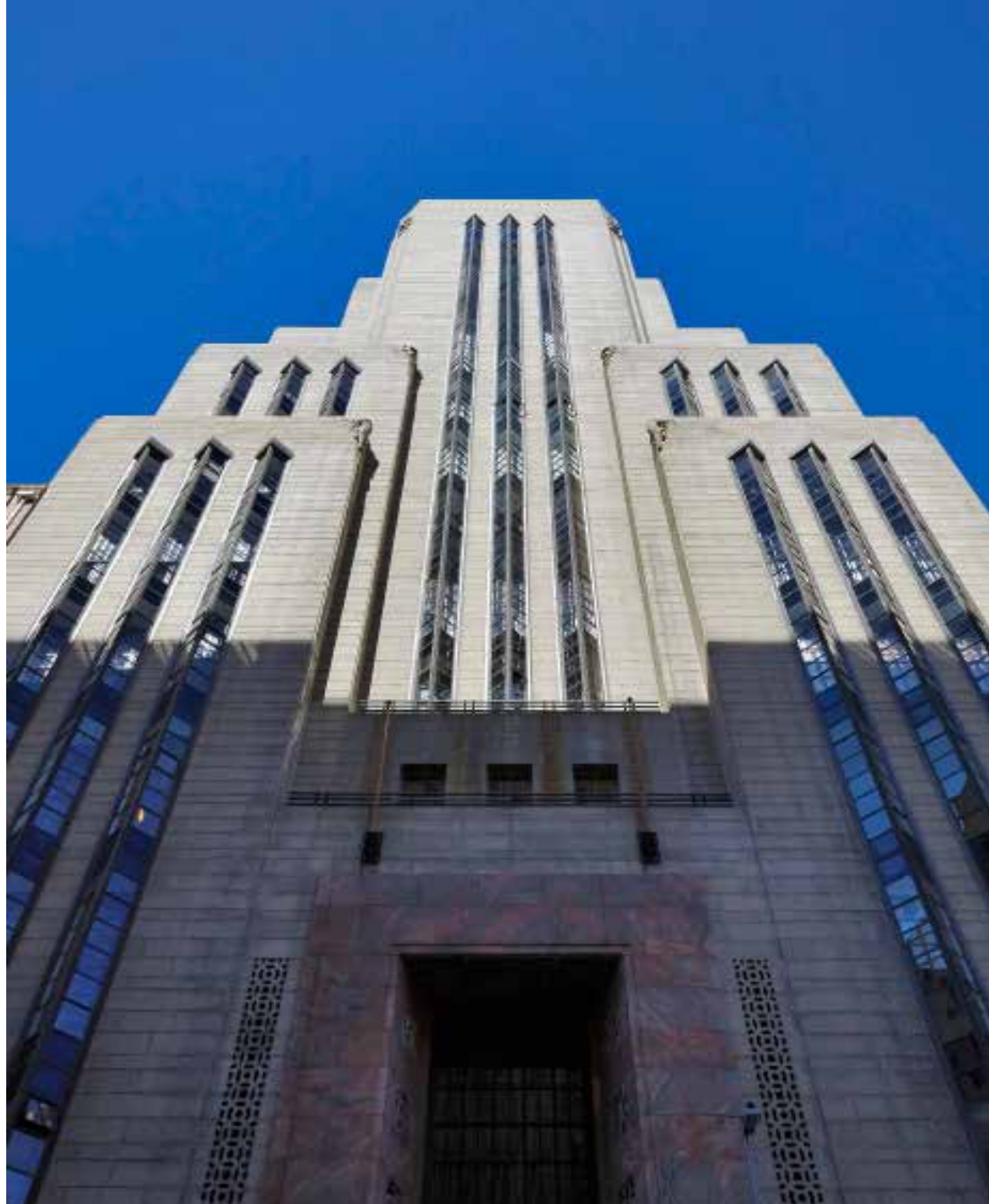


the regal

An expansive section within this iconic building was lovingly and respectfully overhauled to create a space that is grand and sophisticated in equal measure

residence

Words by Lynette Botha Photography by Micky Hoyle Styling & Production by Adri Clery



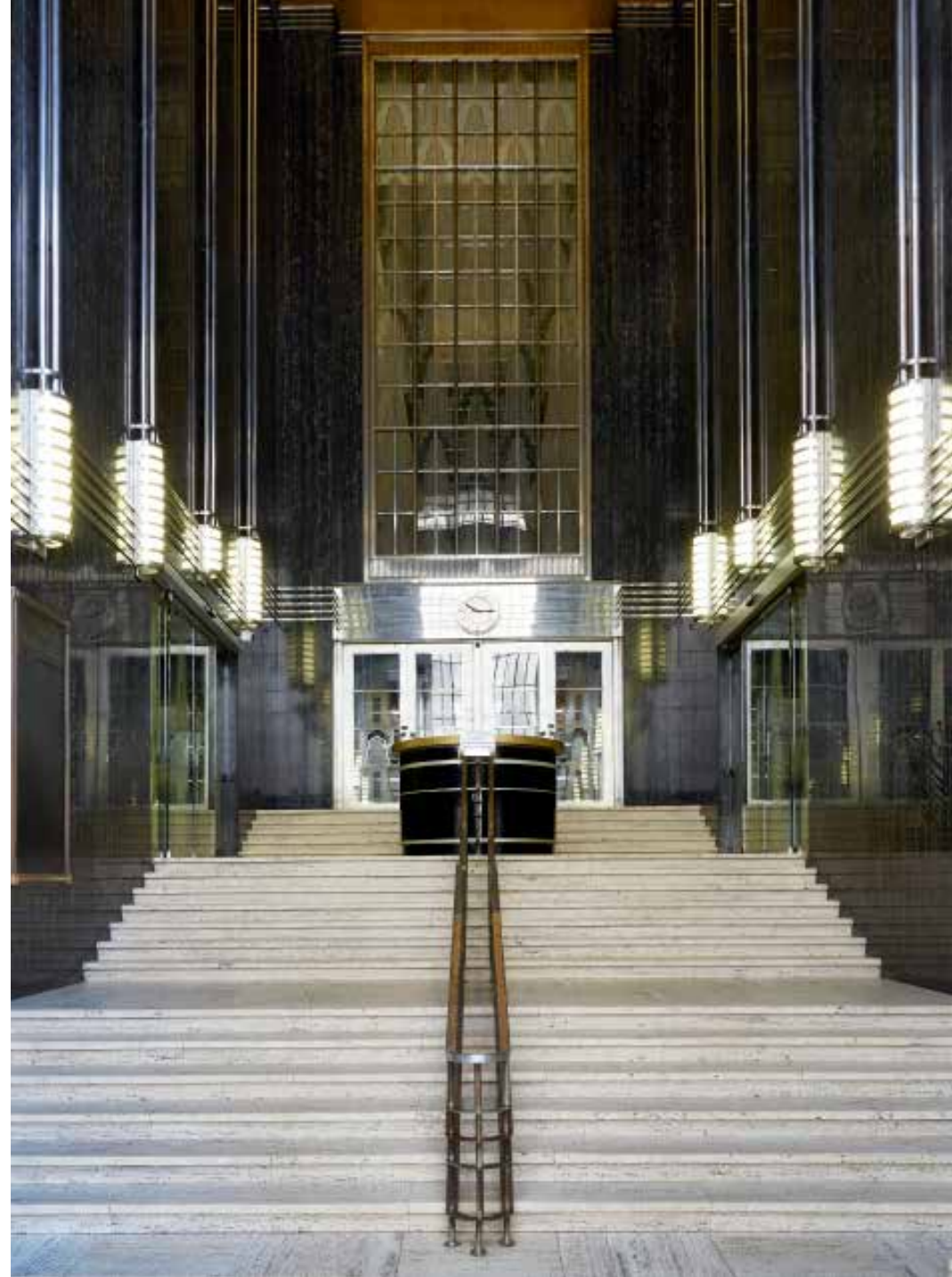
A landmark in Cape Town's CBD, the Mutual Heights building on the corner of Darling and Parliament Street is a classic exemplar of African-inspired art deco architecture.

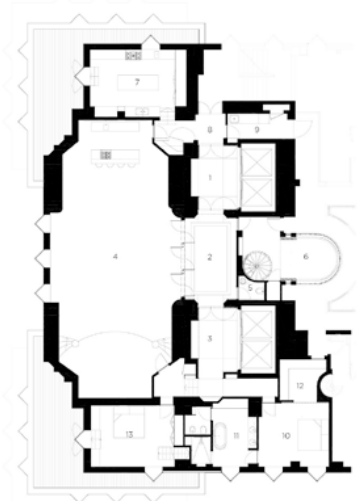
Constructed between 1936 and 1940, the build was a collaboration between Louw & Louw Architects and FM Glennis, and, along with the General Post Office located opposite, it was for many years the tallest building in South Africa.

In 2003 Old Mutual initiated a residential conversion of the building that was the first in a series of projects that helped revitalise the centre of Cape Town. Two years later the remaining heritage sections were sold – including the banking hall, directors' suite and the assembly room.

It's in these historic and iconic premises that two siblings bought an expansive apartment that they could renovate in-line with their unique vision.

Previous spread Off-shutter concrete, bagged brick painted in a not-quite-white (helping to temper the seaside glare), stone, glass, marble, mosaic and Iroko wood make up the material palette of the IGLOO. **Right** Stone excavated from the site was repurposed for retaining walls as well as this distinct entrance hall floor.





A historic masterpiece

A visionary building of its time, it has one of the longest granite friezes in the world that stretches around three sides of its frontage, constructed from a single boulder from the Paarl mountains.

Formerly the headquarters of Old Mutual (previously known as South African Mutual Life Assurance Society), it retains many of its original grand features, even though the business moved premises in the 1960s.

With its structure and design influenced by the Met Life Tower in New York and the Eastern Columbia Building in Los Angeles, the Mutual Building strikes an impressive balance between architecture and design, something that attracted the homeowners – avid art, design and decor aficionados – to this location.

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Inner-city living

Situated in the heart of the historic city centre and old business district of Cape Town, Darling Street runs to the front of the Mutual Heights and Longmarket Street to the back; it is the only street that snakes the full width of the city bowl, from Bo-Kaap to District Six.

'We overlook the Cape Town City Hall, which is next door, with its big turret clock, the Old Post Office is over the road, Table Mountain is behind us, Parliament and the Company Gardens are just a block away and the Grand Parade below us. Another iconic stalwart of the area is Mullers Optometrist, one of my favourite old stores, which is adjacent to the building – it's still family run and has been there for over a century,' one of the siblings explains.

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A reimagined space like no other

For this specific 'revamp', architects Alexander McGee and Reanne Urbain from Urbain McGee, together with Adri and Vincent Clery from Atelier, worked closely with the brother-and-sister duo on their vision, transforming the former Assembly Room – with 9-metre ceilings and a stage – into a home.

'The brief was to successfully combine the heritage-significant Assembly Room with its ancillary spaces and the two adjacent sections purchased by our clients into one inner-city apartment. It was their vision that these separate, smaller sections – juxtaposed alongside the grandiosity of the Assembly Room – could be combined to create a very unique family home,' says Urbain McGee's Alexander McGee.

'The building itself served as an obvious inspiration for us to work within. The international art deco style with a regional localism, in both material selection and decorative motifs, separated it from its overseas counterparts and made it unique in its African context,' he continues.

A heritage practitioner, art historian/restorer, and feng-shui consultant were all appointed on Urbain McGee's recommendation to prepare reports that would help characterise the layers of the space and the original materials.

'We understood the importance of respecting the heritage and frescos and worked with the historian to research and restore every detail but we knew we had to push the boundaries, to challenge the space and look to the future,' says one of the siblings. 'Working with regional materials and local artisans and artists became key to the project. The architectural team are all interesting people, they have a fascination with the world and work in a thoughtful soulful way – we connected deeply during this process.'

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The finishing touches

The austere granite structure helps to keep out the noise and distractions of a bustling and boisterous metropolitan below, and it makes for a brilliant canvas on which to drape art, collectables, antiques and decor. Another unique feature of the space is that The Assembly Room was originally sound-proofed, 'so when we throw a party no one can hear us!'

Adri and Vincent Clery from Atelier loved the scope of this project and its purpose.

'The design intent behind this unique residential renovation was to create a travelled and lived-in aesthetic that was both bold and functional as well as a continuation of the legacy of the space,' says Adri. 'Antiques were incorporated throughout with strong emphasis on unique custom-designed items commissioned by local artists and artisans. Almost every item was privately commissioned.'

Adri continues, 'The striking living spaces have a worldly lived-in feel that is carried throughout the home: from the Italian-inspired modern country kitchen and alfresco back of house, to the greenroom and cabinet of curiosity, the '70s day bed and library, the monolithic bathrooms, the minimalist gallery halls and not least, versatile assembly hall: with kitchen, dining, entertainment and music lounges working in distinct but communal harmony.'

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A place to connect

'We all really enjoy music – so the soundproofing is put to good use. We feel that this space brings us together, in one small lounge up on the stage. It's here where we let our hair down, listen to music and take it all in,' the owner says. The kitchen that leads out onto an outside terrace is a natural gathering space too – 'we love cooking with family and friends!'

'One of my most favourite attributes of our apartment is the geometry of the tall, prism-shaped windows – they are quite something! I love watching as the shadows transform and move across the different spaces as the day progresses.'

The residence may be grandiose with an otherworldly opulence, but for the siblings it's 'just home' – a space to spend time together and connect. ●

@urbainmcgee @atelieradri



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