

# Encore for PE Opera House

The PE Opera House has recently undergone intricate renovations and expansions, transforming the building from a heritage site into a first class facility.



As the only surviving example of a Victorian Theatre in Africa, specialists in the construction, renovation and recycling of buildings GVK-Siya Zama were enlisted to ensure that it would be preserved for future generations to enjoy.

When the PE Opera House opened, it was dubbed by press as "the finest theatre in all the world". However over the course of its 124-year history, the building and a number of its unique elements have decayed. GVK-Siya Zama was tasked with preserving its historic architectural features, while at the same time expanding its facilities with modern twists.

## Built for ballet

The building, known as the 'Old Lady', houses two theatres: The Barn, which is a cabaret venue, and the Main Stage, which was built for ballet, opera and musicals. The upgrade called for the addition of a dedicated foyer space and passenger lift in The Barn as well as extensions to the theatre. The Main Stage required renovations to its foyer along with internal and external painting and damp damage repairs. Carpets and wallpapering throughout the building had to be replaced and new air-conditioning, lighting, fire detection and ventilation systems had to be installed to ensure compliance with the latest building and energy regulations. Access for disabled persons also had to be improved. All of this had to be carried out whilst retaining and protecting as much of the fragile original heritage elements – from pressed ceilings and tiles to ornate fretwork – as possible.

Barend Delport, regional MD at GVK-Siya Zama, says that some of the most interesting components of the project were the reconstruction of the original gallery floor to increase seating capacity and the installation of an all-new fire escape route.

Delport believes that the revamped PE Opera House now provides PE and its residents with a first class facility that will attract local and international acts.

Once more funds are secured, the 'Old Lady' will house a rotating restaurant, modern stage, roof garden and opera school.

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