

Historical Het Gesticht museum restored

Het Gesticht, an old slave church in Paarl in the Boland, today is a museum that serves as a symbol of reconciliation between the communities that were driven apart by the draconian laws of the past. Two centuries on since its construction, the building has recently undergone external redecoration and repairs.



Jason Krause, MD, Gordon Verhoef & Krause Painting and Restoration

Specialist contractors, Gordon Verhoef and Krause (GVK), carried out the work. Built in 1813 by missionaries to serve as a space where slaves and non-white people could receive religious instruction, the building became an integral part of the Paarl community. During the 20th century, the building fell into disuse and in 2000, it was purchased by the South African Gesticht Museum Trust, which restored and converted it into a museum to honour the memory of the Paarl community.

Specialist job

"We are known as specialists in the field of restoration of heritage buildings and have worked with the heritage architect Hanns Blumer on previous projects. Due to the specialist and delicate nature of the job, he negotiated with us to carry out the works," Gordon Verhoef & Krause Painting and Restoration managing director, Jason Krause says.

Work entailed washing the building down, repairing the plaster with specialist mortar mixes to suit the existing plaster used 200 years ago and filling small and large cracks with specialised fillers. The crew also removed the incorrect paint applications that had been used over the decades and applied a lime wash coating to match that originally used when the building was constructed. In addition, the roof was prepared and recoated to match the original colour. Minor carpentry works, such as replacing rotten timber doors, were executed - all of which had to be made to the exact spec of the existing items.

Heritage elements preserved

The windows also had to be replaced which necessitated specialist glass being sourced so that it would match the surviving pieces as closely as possible. The team delicately polished the bell, which was donated to the church in 1854 and recreated some of the mouldings that adorned the building. Great care had to be taken to ensure that the heritage elements were preserved. "The existing plaster on the walls is very old and brittle so we had to be careful not to cause more damage" Krause says. "To clean the walls, high volume, low pressure hydro washing was used instead of high pressure washing as this would have caused too much harm.

"When we were preparing the walls for the lime wash coating system, the plaster mixes used to patch the surface also had to be of a lime-rich nature, as modern cement types will eventually cause further damage to the structure. Furthermore, as access to the façades was gained with scaffolding, caution had to be taken not to damage the structure."

The two-month long project was subject to several rain delays due the Western Cape winter. An additional challenge was that the church/museum is still operational and is used three days a week with the occasional wedding on weekends.

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