

New-look Decorex SA announces speakers

Decorex SA has announced a new look to its annual Conversations on Architecture (COA) conference in 2013. A three-city road show featuring some of the world's leading architects will kick off in Durban on 20 March 2013 before moving to Cape Town on 25 March and ending in Joburg on 27 March 2013.



Joburg architect Hugh Fraser, who is hosting in Cape Town, said that Conversations on Architecture is a unique opportunity for like-minded professionals to discuss the built, designed and lived-in environment in a "boundary-less" way. "Architecture is not always as glamorous as it looks; there are a lot of uninspiring times. This conference is an opportunity for South African architects to come and look at clever work, to be inspired and to discuss international trends."

Those attending will be exposed to new thinking and challenging ideas as well as a cross-pollination between various speakers, emerging global trends and the latest developments in design disciplines such as interior design, urban planning and beyond.

Decorex SA's project manager of events and features, Joanne Taylor, said that the new approach to Conversations on Architecture reflects the approach by Decorex SA always to refresh and renew. "We inhabit the world of trends and design and it is, therefore, essential that we constantly bring the very latest in ideas and inspiration."

Caesarstone will also launch and showcase its new additions to the Classico collection at each COA event, with Durban getting the enviable first peek. This new range can be viewed at the Caesarstone stand at each of the Decorex exhibitions in 2013.

The programme of speakers at Conversations on Architecture 2013 include:

Alex de Rijke

Headline speaker and Dean of Architecture and Interiors at the Royal College of Art in London, Alex de Rijke will be showing and discussing his body of work.

The architectural work by De Rijke's firm, dRMM, is characterised by its social relevance, conceptual clarity and inventive use of new materials. Its built projects have been the subject of much critical acclaim and the practice has received many design awards, including the American Institute of Architects' Excellence in Design Award and the Royal Fine Art Commission's Building of the Year Award. De Rijke combines his dRMM leadership with ongoing research into materials, methods of construction and sustainable technologies.

COA delegates can expect De Rijke to touch on his particular fields of interest which include: engineered timber structures, architecture in relation to art, digital and analogue design methods as well as prefabricated and mobile architecture.

Solano Benitez

Award-winning Paraguayan architect Solano Benitez graduated from the School of Architecture of the National University of Asunción (FAUNA) in 1986. In 1987 he founded Gabinete de Arquitectura, the office he currently shares with Alberto Marinoni and Gloria Cabral. It is a professional structure that promotes architecture by applying research in the area of design, construction and education.

Among the prizes and distinctions that Benitez has received are an Outstanding Youth Award from the Junior Chamber of Paraguay for contributions to national culture (1999); the BSI Swiss, an international prize given to architects under 50 for their contribution to contemporary architecture (2008), an Honourable Mention in Paraguay's National Congress for contributions to the country (2011), the Architect of the Bicentenary Award from the Paraguayan Architects Association (2011), and an Honourary Membership in the American Institute of Architects (2012).

Gabinete de Arquitectura has also earned the Work of the Decade Award, for the period 1989 to 1999, from the Paraguayan College of Architects (1999). It was a finalist in the 2nd Mies van der Rohe Award for Latin America (1999), and represented Paraguay in the Venice Biennale, the São Paulo Biennial, and in Lisbon at the Ibero-American Capital of Culture.

Jorg Leeser

Jorg Leeser is of the German architectural practice BeL Associates, which he established in 2000 with Anne-Julchen Bernhardt. He hails from Essen, Germany and attended RWTH Aachen University and Barlett School of Architecture, London. He later became project architect at Leeser Architecture in New York City. Leeser's past positions include that of design director at Intelligent Agent, a magazine for interactive media in New York and Assistant Professor at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) in Troy, New York in 1998.

Leeser collaborated with b+k, Cologne in 1999 to 2000 and he served as Assistant Professor, Constructive Design, at RWTH Aachen University between until 2006. Between 2008 and 2009, he was Professor of Contextual Architecture at Bergische Universität in Wuppertal. Most recently, Leeser is Professor of Urban Context Architecture Studio at Peter Behrens School of Architecture, Dusseldorf.

Durban line-up

Rod Choromanski

Rod Choromanski is a Durban-based architect specialising in small-scale community projects, medium- to large-scale institutional projects, architectural heritage and conservation, architectural competitions, sports facilities, low-income housing, urban design, utility and service structures, as well as residential houses and offices.

Choromanski has served as a juror for the 2012 Afrisam Sustainable Building Awards. He has written for the Wetlands Wire on the Greater St Lucia Heritage Park and has had projects published in local, national and international architectural journals.

Kevin Boyd

Born and bred in Durban, Kevin Boyd moved from architecture to advertising and ended up in interiors and branding. He believes in simple design that is free of clutter, through the considered use of material, finish, texture and proportion. He believes in design that always endeavours to make the biggest impact with the smallest footprint. Boyd's most recent work includes brand creation and design of Stretta Cucina Italian restaurant and Afro's Braai'd Chick'n mobile food trailer.

In his address, Boyd is likely to touch on the challenge of being influenced by trends happening all around us. Ideally he would like to be working in a trend-free vacuum, but, said Boyd: "We're all pirates. We just need to be very selective about what influences us, and rather look at responding to our context and environment."

Jeremy Steere

Jeremy Steere is the principal architect at Jeremy Steere Architect in Mtunzini and Eshowe, in KwaZulu-Natal. Steere will give delegates a unique perspective by introducing them to projects undertaken by his practice in rural South Africa.

Cape Town line-up

Jonathan Green

Eco-architect Jonathan Green is in private practice in Cape Town as well as being financial director of Green Integrated (sustainability consultants to the construction industry, established in 2012). Having returned to Cape Town after obtaining a Master In Science degree from the Welsh School of Architecture at Cardiff University (MSc Theory & Practice of Sustainable Design), he is now also lecturing part time at the UCT School of Architecture in sustainability, and assisting in the third-year studio.

Green has developed a tool to assess architectural products and rate them according to their sustainability footprint. Called SPEARS (Sustainable Product Evaluation and Assessment Rating System), the tool is currently in development phase pending further funding.

Johann Slee

Johann Slee is the principal partner at Slee and Co architects, based in Stellenbosch.

In recent years, Slee has received numerous awards from the South African Institute of Architects, the Gauteng Institute for Architecture, as well as the Cape Institute for Architecture and is widely regarded as one of South Africa's leading "high spec" domestic architects.

Heinrich Wolff

Cape Town architect Heinrich Wolff, of the Noero Wolff Architects practice, studied at the University of Pretoria and the University of Cape Town. In 1998 Wolff formed Noero Wolff Architects, together with Jo Noero and the duo's work has been exhibited at the Venice Biennale twice (2006, 2010), the Sao Paulo Biennale twice (2005, 2007) and at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (2010). Many of Wolff's projects have been awarded local and international honours, the most significant being the Lubetkin Prize from the Royal Institute of British Architects for the best building outside the European Union in 2005/2006. In 2007, Wolff was awarded the DaimlerChrysler Award for South African Architecture.

Wolff has taught at universities in South Africa and the US in the fields of design, theory and technology. He is currently teaching at the University of Cape Town where his research has focused on 20th-century architecture in the Third World, innovation in architecture at times of social change, and housing in South Africa. Heinrich Wolff is an architect who believes that architecture can and should be used as a force for social change, to address issues of inequality.

Joburg line-up

Anton Francois Comrie

Founding member of GREENinc, landscape architect Anton Comrie has been involved in numerous national and international projects. His focus in recent years has been on large-scale projects as well as complex heritage projects. His philosophy revolves around the creation of projects with a sense of integrity and contextual responsibility. He has been a guest lecturer at the University of Pretoria and the University of the Witwatersrand, and has been on the examination panel for Mprof year in Landscape Architecture at UP. Comrie has worked on numerous award-winning projects, such as The Freedom Park in Pretoria, Forum Homini in the Cradle of Mankind and, most recently, the Sharpeville Memorial. He has also participated in winning design competition submissions, including the Anglo American Campus, Premier's Offices in Bisho, the UJ Arts Centre and the PFG Glass centre.

Georg van Gass

Georg van Gass is the founder of GASS Architecture Studios, located in Joburg and Cape Town, as well as co-founder of GOET furniture designers and manufacturers.

Van Gass says that his mission is creative design from inception to completion and realising works that speak to individual needs, crafting sustainability through objects and structures that are environmentally friendly.

In 2012, Van Gass was awarded a commendation in the annual Steel Institute's Awards for the Westcliff Pavilion.

Brian McKechnie

Outspoken Joburg architect Brian McKechnie, of Activate Architects, obtained a Professional Master's degree in Architecture from the University of Pretoria in 2005. He has a keen interest in Joburg and the preservation of the city's heritage as a catalyst for urban regeneration and has been involved in various initiatives to expose the public to Joburg's architectural and social heritage in an effort to preserve it for future generations.

McKechnie is convener of the Gauteng Institute for Architecture Heritage Committee, a director of the Retail Improvement District in the City, and an associate at Activate Architects.

For further information, or if you would like to book your seat at COA 2013, contact Josephine at josephine@tepg.co.za or on +27 (0)11 549 8300.

Important notice to architects: The South African Institute for Architects will be assessing and validating the conference for between 0.5 and 1 Category One CPD credits.

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