


# JOHANNESBURG

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## HERITAGE FOUNDATION

07 February 2018

### Press Release: The Doll House, Louis Botha Avenue

The Doll House, situated on the one of the roads that predates the founding of Johannesburg, and which connected Pretoria to farms on the Witwatersrand and then beyond to Heidelberg and Potchefstroom, has a rich social history. It was Johannesburg's oldest road house, dating back to 1936, and was founded by American immigrants to South Africa who brought the business model and design from Salt Lake City, Utah. Their timing could not have been more opportune – in the 1930s Johannesburg was infatuated with American popular culture, and potent symbols of American progress and modernity, art deco skyscrapers and cinemas, and traffic lights and neon lights, were making their mark on Joburg's urban landscape.

For eight decades The Doll House provided the set for a changing cast of Joburg's immigrant communities – first Jewish, Italian, Lebanese and Portuguese, and now the African diaspora that has made Louis Botha its home. Generations of Joburgers have fond memories of its milkshakes, slap chips and burgers, and some enjoyed first kisses in the parking lot. For local teenage boys, it was the place to show off new wheels, and where macho pretensions sometimes resulted in ill-considered fights.

But Louis Botha Avenue's change has been hastened by the City's Corridors of Freedom policy, which aims to knit together the City, Alexandra and Sandton with transit-oriented design centred on the Rea Vaya bus network. The Johannesburg Heritage Foundation supports this policy, and believes that densification is necessary to the future success of the City. We are also fiercely protective of our City's heritage. So when we received notification of the proposed demolition of The Doll House, we immediately engaged with the appointed heritage consultants.

We are proud of our City's architectural and social history, and work hard to preserve it. Although the name for The Doll House comes in part from its quaint architecture, many unsympathetic changes have been made to the structure over the last 80 years. It is, thus, very difficult to argue that there is architectural heritage worth preserving. But we believe strongly that the social heritage of The Doll House should be commemorated, and that its replacement should be sympathetic to its context and enrich the neighbourhood.

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INCORPORATING PARKTOWN & WESTCLIFF HERITAGE TRUST

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To this end we have agreed with the developer that the mature jacarandas, the most Joburg of trees, that border the site will be retained. We have also engaged extensively with the architect, heritage consultants, and Lisa Younger, who has been commissioned to design the commemorative elements. We believe that the proposed building will enrich Louis Botha Avenue, and accommodate the changes that are taking place in the area. The public art commemoration will preserve the memory of The Doll House for decades to come and add layers of richness, history and interest to Louis Botha Avenue. We are also supportive of the proposed publication of a commemorative cookbook.

The Johannesburg Heritage Foundation will continue to monitor the execution of the plans to ensure that our engagements have not been in vain.

**Brett McDougall**

Chairman

Johannesburg Heritage Foundation

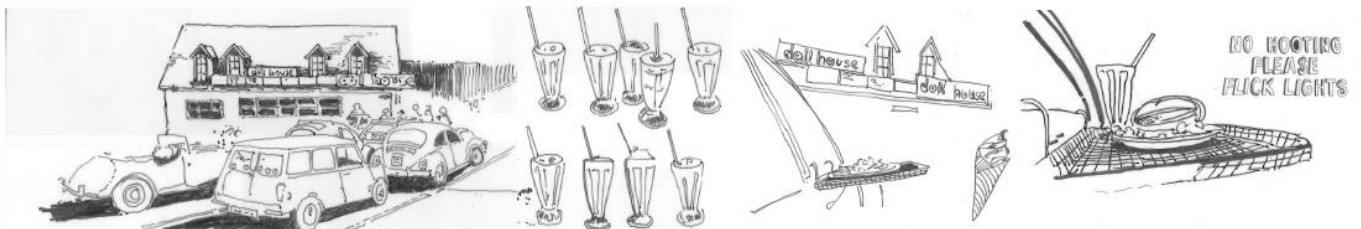
**Dr Alexandra Parker**

Chairperson

Joint Plans Committee East

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**Details on the Commemorative Aspects:**



**Artist:** Lisa Younger

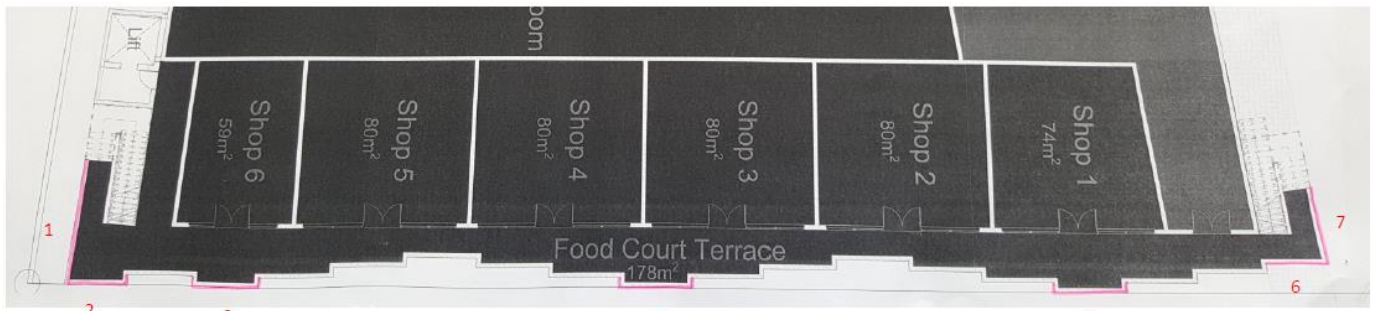
**Concept:**

The Balustrade Mosaic will be interpreted as a historical narrative, realised in a set of hand drawn, full colour scenarios, and applied to sections of the facade of the new building in a mosaic (broken tile) finish.

This narrative will be depict the following subject matter :

- first hand accounts of experiences at The Doll House : stories such as drag racing competitions between the Alfa boys, the Fords, BM's and Mazda Rotary RX's; fist fights and scuffles ('rawls') between rival gangs; kissing your 'cherry' on the back seat of the car; eating ice creams with your folks on the way back from the drive-in etc...

- the story surrounding the origins of the Doll House : 3 American missionary baseball players, who crossed the Atlantic to get to South Africa, armed only with entrepreneurial desire, a handful of famous ice-cream recipes and a small amount of start up capital!
- the growth of the Doll House to include 7 branches across South Africa, including references to historical photographs.
- Roadhouse culture, iconography, and style : icecreams, double thick milkshakes, neon lights, and hamburgers



We propose a narrative element to be installed onto the face of sections of the first floor retail (brick and plaster) balustrade as per numbers 1 to 7 above and indicated in flat red. These sections of narrative mosaic (approximately 30 running meters) will function as an explicit visual element that commemorates the historical and cultural significance of The Doll House.