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artist market

JOHANNESBURG
HERITAGE FOUNDATION



TITANIC 114TH
ANNIVERSARY
COMMEMORATION DINNER



NAVIGATION

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JOHANNESBURG

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114TH TITANIC ANNIVERSARY SOUTH AFRICA

Commemoration Dinner at Northwards House



IMAGE: Gino Hart (Titanic Museum Curator) and Michele Vrdoljak (VC Johannesburg Heritage Foundation (JHF) who planned and executed the 114th Commemoration Dinner.

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER IN SOUTH AFRICA

On 17 April 2026, beneath the stately gaze of **Northwards House** in Parkview, a quiet absence in South Africa's historical calendar was finally filled. The **Johannesburg Heritage Foundation**, in partnership with **The New Titanic Museum SA**, hosted the 114th Anniversary Commemoration Dinner of the RMS Titanic, an evening that did more than remember the past. It reclaimed it.

Northwards House, both headquarters and custodian of Johannesburg's layered heritage, proved an inspired setting. Its walls, already steeped in the echoes of another century, seemed to lean in closer as guests arrived, dressed in the unmistakable silhouettes of 1912. Corsets, tails, polished shoes, and whispered anticipation gathered under chandeliers that might well have remembered a similar elegance more than a hundred years before.

The collaboration itself had been charted months earlier. At its helm, Michele Vrdoljak (Vice Chairperson of Johannesburg Heritage Foundation (JHF)) and Titanic Museum curator Gino Hart began laying the keel in

January 2026, envisioning a commemoration that would finally give voice to South Africa's overlooked connections to the tragedy. What began as a modest, almost cautious idea soon found momentum. When Samantha Perry of **SJ Perry PR** (*Fundraising and PR*) joined the effort, the intimate notion of a single table expanded into a fully realised event, polished and precise.

Tickets moved quickly, quietly at first, like signals passed between wireless operators. Twenty-one seats were claimed before the wider public announcement, a promising sign that something long dormant had begun to stir.



IMAGE: Commemorating South African Titanic Connections with the RMS Titanic wreck, surviving pictures enhanced and framed.



IMAGE: Each table at the 114th Titanic Dinner boasted a different Titanic model diorama as centerpiece; this table featured the bow wreckage of the Titanic.



IMAGE: Each table at the 114th Titanic Dinner boasted a different Titanic model diorama as centerpiece; this table featured the Titanic at sea..

By the evening itself, the great dining hall had transformed into a tableau of living history. Each table bore fresh-cut flowers in crystal vases, accompanied by meticulously crafted Titanic dioramas. These were not mere decorations, but narrative sculptures. The ship in her prime, the descent into darkness, even the haunting angle of her final moments, rendered in miniature with delicate LED illumination. Guests leaned closer, drawn into their detail, their conversations circling not just admiration, but awe.

Welcomes were delivered with warmth and purpose. Alexandra Burr Dixon and Michele Vrdoljak (*Vice Chairpersons of (JHF)*) introduced the Foundation, a non-profit volunteer run organisation dedicated to the preservation, protection, and celebration of our city's architectural and cultural legacy. For over forty years, JHF have acted as the stewards of Joburg's history, ensuring that as the city evolves, its unique soul remains intact.

Custodian Neil Viljoen followed, offering a history of Northwards itself. Built in 1904, destroyed by fire in 1911, and resurrected by 1913, its own narrative of loss and renewal echoed uncannily against that of the Titanic. Even in brick and mortar, history seemed determined to rhyme.



IMAGE: Dinner, inspired by that served to First-Class Passengers, unfolded with deliberate elegance. A starter of cream of barley soup, followed by mains that balanced refinement and comfort.



IMAGE: Dinner included a three course meal based off basic meals served on the RMS Titanic in First-Class, and an open cash-bar for those with more modern tastes.

Dinner, inspired by that served to First-Class Passengers, unfolded with deliberate elegance. A cream of barley soup, starter opened proceedings, followed by mains that balanced refinement and comfort. Beneath it all, the air was threaded with music from *The Biju Strings*, a four-piece ensemble whose repertoire drifted effortlessly through the soundscape of 1912. It was less performance than time travel, each note a stepping stone across the years.

When Gino Hart rose to speak, the room shifted. His focus turned firmly toward the South African connections so often relegated to the margins. He spoke of the legacy of the *Titanic Society of South Africa*, of the museum's establishment in Melville, and of the Brown family of Cape Town, second-class passengers whose survival carved a distinctly local thread into the global tragedy. Enlarged photographs, carefully restored, placed faces where once there had only been names.

Then came the curiosities, the quiet numerology of history. The recurring presence of **1**, **4**, and **14** woven through the *Titanic's* story like a hidden code. Coincidence, perhaps. Or something stranger. Either way, the audience listened, caught between fascination and reflection, aware that they themselves now formed part of that unfolding pattern.

Yet the evening held one final reveal. Beside the string quartet, veiled in black, stood an object awaiting its moment. With ceremony and careful timing, the covering was lifted to unveil the 1:37 scale Grand Staircase model by **JOOHOUR**, designed by Hong Kong entrepreneurs Lea and Joye. Illuminated from within, crowned by a miniature dome and chandelier, the structure rose in intricate detail, a luminous echo of the *Titanic's* most iconic interior. It was, in every sense, a premiere. *The New Titanic Museum SA* became the first institution in the world to showcase it.

The response was immediate. Applause filled the room, chairs shifted, guests stood to see more clearly. Cameras flashed in rapid succession, each photograph an attempt to capture something that felt, in that moment, almost unreal.

As the evening drew toward its close, the tone softened. A glass was gently struck. Silence gathered. *The Biju Strings* began to play "Nearer, My God, to Thee," its familiar notes carrying a gravity that needed no explanation. It was followed by "Autumn," widely believed to be among the final pieces heard aboard the *Titanic* as she slipped beneath the Atlantic. Not mournful alone, but resolute. A quiet defiance against oblivion.

- And then, stillness.



IMAGE: The highlight of the evening revealed, the brand-new JOOHOUR 1:37 scale Glory of Titanic Grand Staircase model kit, a first for any Titanic Museum in the world.



IMAGE: The Biju Strings began to play "Nearer, My God, to Thee," its familiar notes carrying a gravity that needed no explanation. It was followed by "Autumn," widely believed to be among the final pieces heard aboard the Titanic as she slipped beneath the Atlantic.

In that silence, remembrance settled fully into the room. Not just for the great names of history, but for those South African connections so often left unspoken. For the fragments of story now, at last, assembled into something whole.

What emerged from that night was not simply success. It was affirmation. That South Africa's place in the *Titanic* narrative is not peripheral, but essential. That remembrance need not be borrowed from distant shores, but can be crafted, with care and conviction, at home.

Because not every enthusiast can stand in Belfast, gazing toward the Harland and Wolff cranes, imagining the ship that once was. But here, in Johannesburg, under chandeliers and within stories reclaimed, they no longer have to. The memory has found a new harbor.

Closer to land, JHF fight to save the city's previous heritage is unrelenting. The stakes are high as anything lost, is lost forever. Join them fight, as they resiliently navigate these stormy seas.

Show your support for the JHF through becoming a member, joining their tours of by donating. Find out more at: <https://joburgheritage.org.za/>



IMAGE: Gino Hart and Michele Vrdoljak, with one of the more decorated guests of the night, a real Royal Navy Reserve Commander.



IMAGE: Titanic Museum Curator Gino Hart, Northwards House Custodian Neil Viljoen and Titanic Collector Valda Wessels pose for an iconic moment.



IMAGE: One of the most talked about Titanic dioramas of the night was an angled and LED lit sinking model, which really thrilled the dinner guests.

