

NOTABLE USERS

Quinton Lawson | Meirelles Lawson Burger Architects CC | Cape Town, South Africa

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Quinton Lawson: Reviving Historical Treasures in South Africa



Quinton Lawson is a partner with Meirelles Lawson Burger Architects CC (MLB Architects CC), based in Cape Town, South Africa. Founded in 1988, the team now numbers more than 25 professionals, and has designed corporate, commercial, and residential spaces throughout South Africa and in Mozambique, Angola, and Zimbabwe.

Xico Meirelles and Quinton Lawson met at University of Natal (now known as University of KwaZulu-Natal) in Durban, South Africa, where both earned their architecture degrees. After graduation, Meirelles and Lawson collaborated on projects for clients throughout the world, gaining valuable hands-on experience. Meirelles joined a Rome-based international firm that handled several monumental projects in North and West Africa, and worked with Portuguese architect Pancho Guedes. Lawson joined the highly regarded Revel Fox and Partners in Cape Town, South Africa. The two schoolmates met up again in 1988, when Lawson joined Meirelles to form Meirelles Lawson Architects; the firm became MLB Architects CC in 1998.

MLB Architects' philosophy is rooted in the Modernist style—a style which emphasizes function and addressing specific needs. Lawson draws inspiration from Alvar Aalto, and the work of Alvaro Siza and the Spanish architects of the Modernist movement. He explains, "We regard our work as the ability to find the most simple, appropriate solutions for any design brief, to create refined and elegant buildings which display a clarity of purpose and timelessness, and create magical spaces for its occupants."

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"We aspire to make a significant contribution to the built environment, in the belief that good architecture results from a healthy balance between creativity, rational design, and economic realism. We have the dynamism, resources, and systems to undertake several large projects simultaneously. Our approach to every aspect of a project, from urban design to detail design—through to construction, is to continually strive to set new standards of excellence."

– Quinton Lawson, Partner, MLB Architects,
Cape Town, South Africa
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RECONSTRUCTING HISTORY WHILE IT'S BEING MADE

While much of the firm's work involves restoring and modernizing older buildings, the team recently tackled a particularly challenging historic refurbishment, as they rebuilt a century-old annex to the central High Court in Cape Town. The Department of Public Works commissioned the project, and received approval for the budget over a three- to four-year period. The construction lasted just over a year. They demolished the structurally unsound fourth floor and replaced it with a lightweight steel-framed structure for four new civil courts, judges' chambers, and other office space. "It was particularly interesting because of the

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Left: Renewed space provides home for The Light from Africa Ceramic Art Studio in Cape Town.



Top Right: 19-story Pepper Club Luxury Hotel and Spa.



Top Left: Prefabricated ceiling beam system of the High Court.

technical problems. That's where CAD helped. We had to deal with highly complex details regarding acoustics, insulation, sound absorption, fire requirements, and others," notes Lawson.

all of these components helped us save time and money. I would hate to have spent the time doing it all by hand the traditional way."

CAD and 3D modeling technology for all of its work. Since the 1990s, MLB Architects has relied primarily on Vectorworks Architect software. The MLB team taps the 3D modeling and rendering capabilities to effectively and beautifully introduce ideas to clients and also uses office-planning features such as linked worksheets and schedules to organize the large number of projects happening simultaneously.

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"Personally, I enjoy the challenge in creating something requiring highly technical skills, attention to detail, yet also the common sense to find the simplest, most elegant, and timeless solutions to the many and varied problems we face as designers of buildings."

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– Quinton Lawson, Partner, MLB Architects, Cape Town, South Africa
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MLB has taken on an increasing larger role in remaking the spaces of South Africa. In fact, the team recently completed the new and very modern 19-story Pepper Club Luxury Hotel and Spa, just off vibrant Long Street in Cape Town. Pepper Club was finished one month prior to the World Cup, just in time to welcome a wide variety of international visitors as well as many locals. With a Modernist approach and a talented team, MLB Architects is bringing important history back to life—and filling old spaces with new life.

MLB Architects CC
Phone: [+27] [21] 462 0170
Fax: [+27] [21] 462 0179

Street Address:
2 Gordon Street
Gardens 8001
Cape Town, South Africa

Mail Address:
PO Box 12145
Mill Street 8010
South Africa

info@mlbarch.co.za

For more information, visit
www.mlbarch.co.za

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"I'm very much a simple designer. I believe in keeping things simple and clarifying things in the planning process. I couldn't reconcile to Post-Modernism because unnecessary elaboration and 'decoration' dictated by this style jars with my desire to simplify and 'minimalize.' I'm very happy to return to Modernism—and its lightness and appropriateness."

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– Quinton Lawson, Partner, MLB Architects, Cape Town, South Africa
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And the biggest challenge of all? The courts remained in session. MLB Architects primarily worked after office hours; however, when they needed to accomplish certain tasks while the judges were working, MLB was careful not to disturb the ongoing legal proceedings.

The team designed a prefabricated ceiling beam system that they could attach to the top of the building, and then attached structural elements to that frame, adhering to high structural and acoustic specifications by employing Vectorworks® Architect software to model the spaces and make adjustments quickly and accurately.

They also updated the building with a number of green elements by incorporating efficient insulation, adhering to glazing requirements, creating effective solar shading, and reducing power requirements. "We are the responsible people who need to be looking at this and ensuring we do it right. We need to take advantage of as many facets of technology as we can," Lawson says. "Using CAD to manage

RELIGHTING AN EXTINGUISHED FLAME

The team is especially proud of the work they did for the modern ceramic art studio, The Kalahari Studios. This famous studio flourished in the 1950s, producing striking Southern Hemisphere artwork that became known around the world—beautiful dark stick figures painted on ceramic. Lawson lived near the renowned building after it fell into disrepair and became a dilapidated site that played host to parties, weddings, and conferences. New owners molded it into a conglomeration of styles. "It was terrible to see it in ruins like this, so when we were approached in the competition to bid for this work, we went for it wholeheartedly," explains Lawson. "It just seemed to me so appropriate that this studio should come back—the vital heart of the art in Cape Town."

MLB Architects won the competition, and rejuvenated the space for the new Light from Africa Ceramic Art Studio, a non-governmental organization that trains and empowers previously disadvantaged individuals in the ceramic arts, as well as supports the fight against HIV and AIDS. Artists now create very expensive pieces that are sold around the world (www.lightfromafrica.org). And they are inspired by their surroundings—the newly restored modern building is nestled above the vineyards of the stunning southern Cape Peninsula. The building has recaptured its former glory, thanks to a willing client and the team at MLB.

Lawson has had a great interest in information technology since the 1980s, and continues to keep the firm on the cutting edge by harnessing the latest