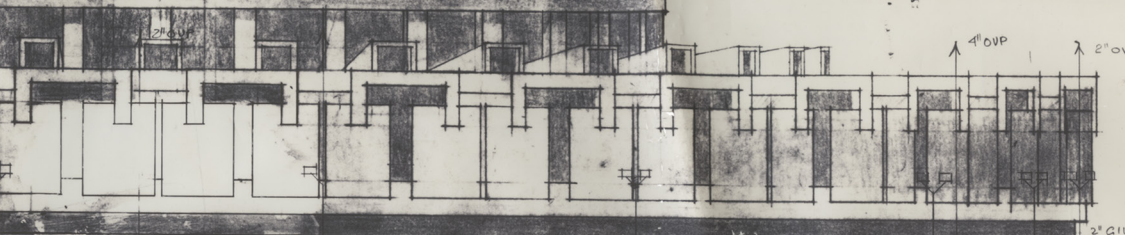




FLUTED OFF SHUTTER CONC.



Handwritten signature or initials in blue ink.



LAR buildings are  
g headway in the  
uction scene in Jo-  
burg where three  
of flats are being  
n Braamfontein and  
rea

19 AUG 1972

have one thing in  
, the location and the  
site which make it  
to gain the best  
ge of sun and view.  
ocks of flats are built  
possible with a north-  
aspect so that tenants  
oy morning and after-  
n.

se of the design, the  
buildings allow for  
that are not restricted to

flats  
east  
are  
vista.

Th  
that  
diam  
walls  
the c  
look  
will  
rather  
ciner  
front

It  
meas  
will  
neigh  
below  
be g  
tiona

NEWSREEL

STEIDL

THE WALTHER COLLECTION



# ROUND BLOCKS MAKE MOST OF SUN

## Property Reporter

CIRCULAR buildings are making headway in the construction scene in Johannesburg where three blocks of flats are being built in Braamfontein and the Berea.

All have one thing in common, the location and the type of site which make it possible to gain the best advantage of sun and view. Most blocks of flats are built where possible with a north-facing aspect so that tenants can enjoy morning and afternoon sun.

Because of the design, the circular buildings allow for views that are not restricted to

any one direction. South-facing flats will get the sun both from east and west as the windows are wider and have a greater vista.

This applies to the rooms that face on to the outer diameter of the building where walls fan outwards. Instead of the occupier only being able to look straight out in front he will be able to see both sides rather similar to the modern cinema screen which curves in front of the audience.

### PRIVACY

It will also give an extra measure of privacy as tenants will not be able to see into neighbouring flats or those below although their view will be greater than in the conventional block.

Developers of these circular buildings say that planning and efficiency will be increased because of the more compact circulation area. Long exposed corridors will be done away with and walking will be considerably reduced.

Radiating from the inner core, the flats will be positioned in the circular corridors more strategically to lifts which can be reached from two directions, so that a tenant does not have to walk a full 360deg if his flat is farthest away.

The 22-storey block in Braamfontein with 220 flats, will be completed by October. An observation lounge round the top of the building will be open to residents who can view Johannesburg from any direction they wish.

Built on a system of

columns, the lowest flats are about 3m above garden level. Started two years ago the structure has its foundations on a rocky outcrop which prevented straightforward excavations into the ground. The perimeter has been faced to allow extra penetration of sun from varying angles.

### PARKING

The tallest will be the circular tower bordered by Hatfield Road, Saratoga Avenue and Harrow Road which will be completed in 1975. Rising to a height of 50 storeys it will have seven levels of parking for 540 cars with the eighth storey for shops.

Because of the slope of the ground where the garages were specially built to fit in with the contours, one side of the

shopping level will actually be on the ground floor although from the other it will be eight storeys above ground. A link road from Lily Avenue will give easy access to this section.

Five duplex penthouses will take up the two top floors and the four floors below them will be used for ordinary penthouses. The rest of the building will contain the balance of the 50 flats and will be served by 10 lifts.

The structure has reached the shopping level area and although work has been going on for the last two years it will now start to go up more rapidly.

On Louis Botha Avenue with part of the north-facing section overlooking The Wilds is the 14-storey circular block which will have 145 units, a mixture of bachelor to two bedrooms. It will have two penthouses at the top and will be completed by next January.



**PONTE-NUCLEUS IS ...**

# THE TALLEST BUILDING IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

**PONTE-NUCLEUS** is the tallest residential cum retail complex in the Southern Hemisphere. This incredible construction acts as a "gateway to Johannesburg" and will stand 162 metres high.

This 54 storey building will house 1 500 people in 464 flats. The 54 storeys comprise 42 floors of apartments, 4 floors for service, servant quarters and storage, seven floors of parking and one floor being the shopping centre, Nucleus.

The apartments vary from bachelor flats to luxury three-bedroom flats. The

majority of the flats are leased furnished and all have a panoramic view. To date, 200 flats have already been let and the demand for the remainder, as they are completed, has been great.

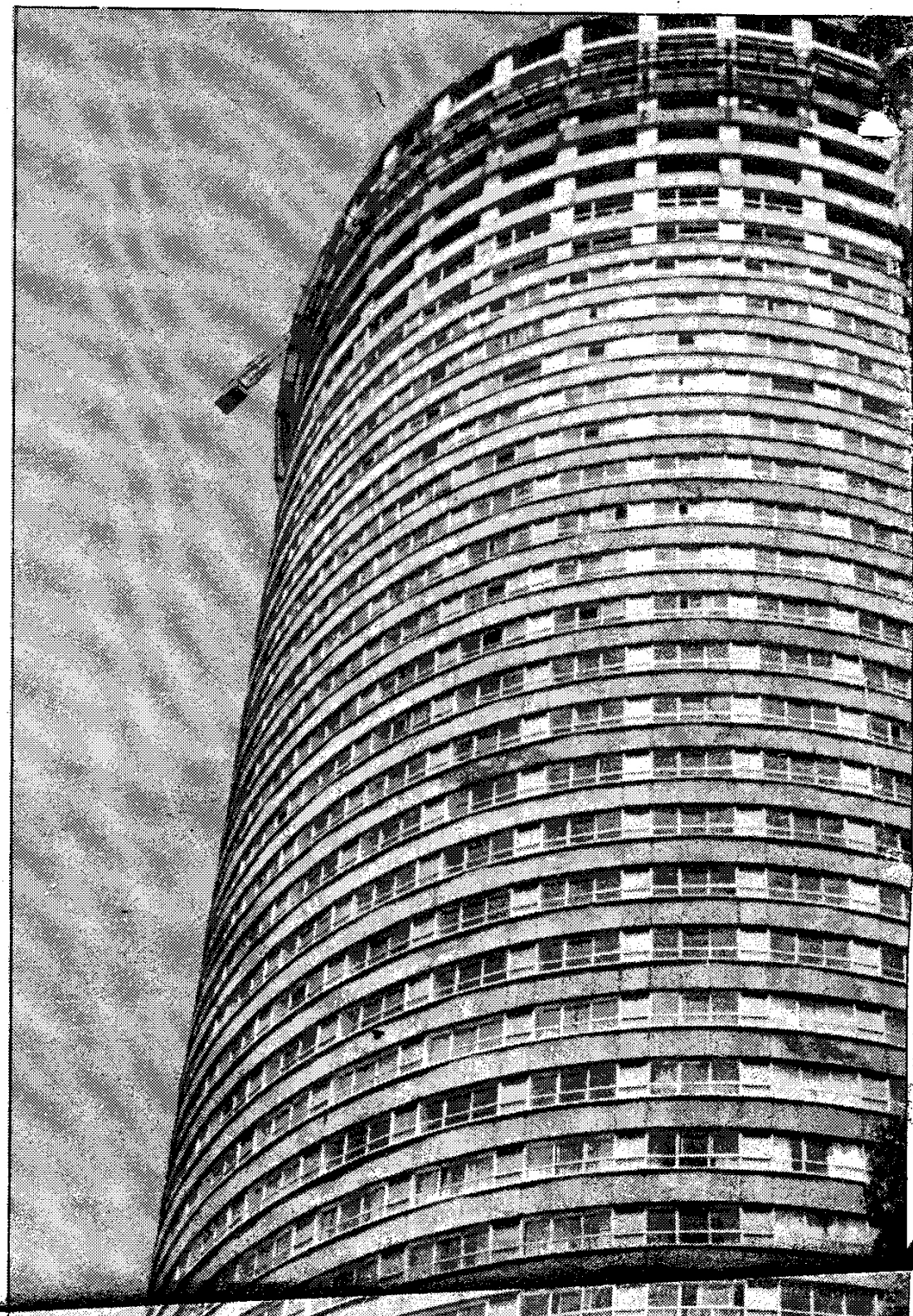
The circular building has been divided into seven segments. Six of these are occupied by flats and the seventh segment which faces west and the inconvenience of the afternoon sun and view of high-rise buildings, consists of eight lifts and two stairways. An additional staircase on the opposite side of the open well acts as a further fire-escape.

There are seven floors of

parking, allowing space for 550 cars. Access is from Lily Avenue in the north and via a spiral ramp in the south from Hadfield Road.

Nucleus the shopping area, is totally covered and will be a unique and innovative shopping centre. Forty shops and kiosks will provide every need for the Ponte and surrounding populations, plus, be a centre where there will be entertainment for all people at all times.

Ponte is scheduled to be totally completed by the end of 1975 and will be South Africa's Premier Apartment complex.





# Ponte not for wealthy only

*Salmonville Flats*

PONTE, South Africa's largest apartment block, has a reputation for highpriced luxury. After all, its fully furnished penthouses on three levels are as much as R1 050 a month, probably the most expensive rental on the African continent.

But it is an unfair reputation, says general manager of this 450-flat complex, Kassie Kasselmann.

"You can live in Ponte and have all its breathtaking

*Will be 26.8.76*  
mid-September which will form a central point for a wide range of entertaining activities. A second TV channel is being installed for live broadcasts, the first of its kind in the country, and this will include children's programme's as well as record special events arranged for the tenants.

"People in Hillbrow still want to make friends," says Mr Kasselmann, "And we intend creating an environment in which a mother



# Terror trial lawyer

From Page 1

after being unable to determine who had instructed Mr Chetty to appear for the accused in the case. Norman Velapi Ngwenya, 24, who was charged with terrorism, sabotage, attempted murder and the possession of explosives and undesirable weapons.

Mr Chetty qualified as an attorney in Durban in 1971 and carved out a name for himself as the instructing attorney in the Saso trial in Pretoria in the mid-seventies.

Two of Mr Chetty's former employees, Mr Chris Mokeditoa and Mr Kenneth Matima, were detained under the security laws.

Others who have worked for him include Mrs Ilona Kleinschmidt, separated wife of Mr Horst Kleinschmidt, a key figure in the banned Christian Institute, Mr Glenn Moss and Mr

Karel Tip, prominent student leaders.

In 1976 Mr Chetty's passport was withdrawn.

Legal associates last night expressed concern about the future of trials in which Mr Chetty was involved.

He was the instructing attorney for a major African National Congress treason trial due to begin in Maritzburg next month.

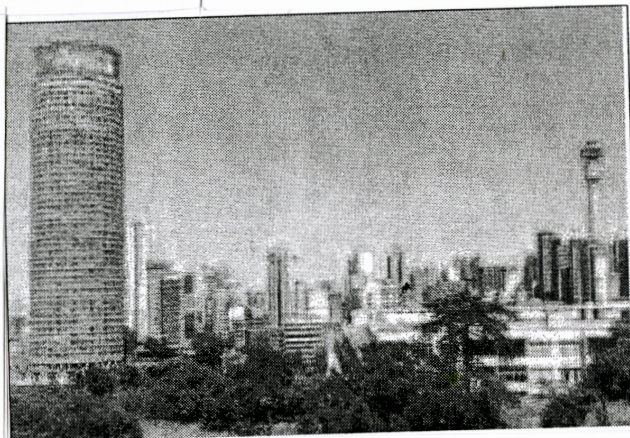
Mr Chetty covertly lived in the all-white luxury Ponte flat building before he fled South Africa this week.

He had hired flat number 4505 through an intermediary on March 7 without signing a lease.

Mr Chetty paid R360 a month for the luxury, one-bedroomed flat on the 45th floor of Ponte where the Sunday Times was told he enlisted the help of a switchboard operator to design cards for an ivory import-export business.

One employee said: "The police came here wanting to see his flat. They also asked questions about the kind of business he was running."

Employees told the Sunday Times that it was not the policy of Ponte to allow Indians and Coloured people to occupy flats in the building and when they searched for his application form it was missing.





# Ponte penthouses posh pads — at R<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-m each

SUNDAY EXPRESS

## 461 OTHER FLATS ARE ALSO FOR SALE

By TERRY MEYER  
Property Editor

SOUTH AFRICA'S most glamorous penthouses, atop the world's tallest circular residential building — Ponte — go on sale this weekend at a cool quarter million rand each.

In what must be the biggest sale of apartments in any one single building, agents Curries-LK Jacobs is launching a massive campaign this weekend to sell these six "super-penthouses" along with no less than 461 other units in this massive 54-storey block.

The undertaking is being handled by Curries-LK Jacobs' Dave Edge and his team.

While the penthouses may well be snapped up by companies wanting the best pad in Johannesburg, the real campaign will be to sell the other apartments.

The campaign will obviously be aimed at the well-heeled — judging by the prices being asked.

Three-bedroomed apartments are to be marketed at prices from R98 000 to R99 000, for example.

These are to be found from floor 47 upwards and the price varies depending on floor and position.

Two-bedroomed apartments are being marketed between R68 000 and R79 000 — again depending on situation.

The cheapest flats are the bachelor apartments, which start at R25 000 and go up to R55 000 for the luxury models. There are only fifteen of these.

Completed in 1975, Ponte, in Berea, currently houses 2 000 people.

All the apartments are fully furnished and have under-floor heating from the 34th floor upwards.

From the 41st floor the units are termed "luxury" as they have a better finish and facilities and also superior quality furniture.

The six triplex penthouse suites have a living-room, dining room, conversation area, bar, study, ultra-modern kitchen, four bedrooms, three bathrooms, and a sauna and braai-patio area.

The complex is almost self-sufficient in that it has its own floodlit tennis courts, a ten-pin bowling alley, swimming pool, second channel TV, a laundry, a supermarket, two restaurants, shops, conference facilities and its own 24-hour telephone exchange.

There are eight levels of parking and as many elevators. Ponte has its own generator, which switches on automatically in the event of a municipal power failure.



# R250 000 vir só 'n ,nessie'!

DIE VADERLAND

Flats

17 JUL 1981

Nic Oosthuizen

BENONI. — Mevrouw, u kan nou 'n pragtige woonstel in Johannesburg koop. Net R250 000! U bly dan in die Pontegebou, die grootste enkele woonstelblok buite Amerika. Met sy 53 verdiepings troon hy op 'n randjie aan die bo-punt van Doornfontein en Johannesburg.

Die 467 woonstelle het nie balkonne nie. Volgens mnr. David Edge van L. K. Jacobs het die argitekte vooraf besluit dat 'n stormwind die balkonne van so 'n wolkekrabber sal afruk.

Die huidige vervangingswaarde van die Ponte is R25 miljoen, sê mnr. Edge. Bouwerk het

sowat vier jaar geneem en die gebou is agt jaar gelede voltooi.

Marca Bank aan wie L. K. Jacobs ook behoort, is die eienaars van die Ponte. Hulle was 'n paar jaar gelede baie in die nuus toe 'n skatryk dobbelbaas daar doodgeskiet is.

Net die woonstelle word nou verkoop. Na verwagting sal hierdie reuse-verkoopstransaksie teen die einde van 1982 afgehandel wees en sal dit altesame sowat R20 miljoen oplewer. Die eienaars behou dan nog die Ponte se supermark, twee restaurants, 'n wassery, 'n droogskoonmakery, al die sakekantore, 'n dameshaarsalon, 'n konsertsaal, ens.

Die Ponte is diep in 'n massiewe, soliede rotskop ingeplant en staan in werklikheid in drie woongebiede — Berea, Doornfontein en die oorspronklike plaas Doornfontein.

Van die dak van die ses luukse dakwoning is Pretoria op 'n helder dag maklik sigbaar. So 'n dakwoning van R250 000 het vier slaapkamers, drie badkamers, 'n eetkamer, sitkamer, geselskamer, studeerkamer, kroeg, winkelder, saunabad, patio, braailokaal, sondak... en 'n tennisbaan.

Mnr. Edge sê daar word nou onder meer onder-

handel met groot korporasies. Een van dié organisasies bring byvoorbeeld 60 tot 70 gesinne uit die buiteland om vir hulle te werk.

Só buitengewoon is die Ponte dat daar selfs al by die Witwatersrandse Universiteit 'n lesing oor die gebou gelewer was.

Die eenkamerwoonstelle kos van R55 000 tot R60 000.

Die woonstelle is ook ideaal vir groot maatskappy wat 'n luukse plek wil hê waar hulle sakekennisse kan onthaal of besoekers uit die buiteland kan laat woon.

Tot nou toe is die woonstelle verhuur — 'n luukse dakwoonstel teen R1 250 per maand.

As 'n belangstellende koper so 'n deposito van R25 000 betaal, gaan sy maandelikse paalement nog R2 500 wees en met 'n deposito van R100 000 is die maandelikse paalement net 'n gerieflike R1 600!



Ponte... in die mark.



# Checking in to Heartbreak Hotel

## Hundreds evicted as big firms buy flats

For a young Witwatersrand couple Christmas is becoming a time of sadness.

Last Christmas they were told to leave their flat in Boksburg because the block was being taken over by a big business firm to provide accommodation for miners.

This Christmas the couple and their baby are facing eviction from their flat at Kempton Park because the block is being taken over by a big business firm to provide accommodation for Modderfontein dynamite factory workers.

"It's the same as last year, except worse," said the young mother, who does not want to be identified.

"During Christmas we will be worrying about where we can move to."

"But this time we have the baby to think about, and accommodation is even harder to get than last year."

Last year the couple were among hundreds evicted when the giant ERPM mining company took over seven blocks of flats in Boksburg.

Now the couple are being "chased out" of their Kempton Park flat because of an AECI deal to take over three blocks.

AECI says that residents of Aronia Court, Blue Marlin and Aston Place in Long Street will "gradually be given notice in such a way as to ensure the company's total occupation of the premises by April 30, 1982."

Some residents have already been given a month's notice to leave by November 30.

Others say they could

**The critical shortage of accommodation is forcing many big firms to buy up blocks of flats to house their workers. But what of the evicted old tenants.**  
**ANDREW WALKER reports.**

get notice any time — and with the serious housing shortage in Kempton Park it could mean that they will have to move to another area.

Residents interviewed by The Star expressed "disgust" that big corporations could take over scarce accommodation and evict the occupants.

"It is criminal that this sort of thing is allowed to go on," said Mrs Maria Cristina of Aston Place.

"I have been looking for a house or a flat since I got my eviction notice, but it is impossible. I am prepared to pay up to R400 a month, but so far have not been able to find a place."

Present rental for the 90 two-bedroomed flats at Aston Place is R250 a month.

Asked to comment, AECI said in a statement that the evictions would take place over six months "to ensure a minimum of disruption or hardship to existing tenants."

"Further, it is specifically provided for in the lease that in the event of suitable alternative accommodation not being found for any elderly tenants, that their premises are ex-

cluded from the provision of the lease until alternative accommodation is found.

"AECI is a key industry producing strategic materials.

"With current competition in the labour market, it is necessary for the company to do all in its power to assist employees to find suitable accommodation if it is to maintain the full complement of the factory's 8 000 workers.

"Despite the fact that the company operates a home ownership scheme, it has been unable to meet the demand for houses. It appears that the basic problems are a shortage of mortgage bond finance and a general shortage of houses and other living units.

"The company is therefore forced to lease accommodation for its employees — some of whom are living in caravans.

"To alleviate the position at Modderfontein, the company has built 23 houses, and a further 30 are under construction, while six have recently been leased. This is in addition to the 106 single quarter units and 510 houses on Modderfontein property."

Mr Basil Elk, president of the Institute of Estate Agents, said people would find it increasingly difficult to get accommodation because the shortage of rental units was critical.

"The Government should be doing something to encourage the building of flats. They will not be able to do that unless they abolish rent control," he said.



## Rent control explains why the flat-hunters have nowhere to go

If rent control is not to be abolished the system must be drastically revised, says a Randburg property developer.

Mr Robert Massey explained how rent control stopped him building flats (he used to build 50 a year) and why "only a fool" would build flats while the Rent Control Act was still on the statute book.

"In the early '50s the Rent Act allowed developers a maximum return on their investment that was sufficient to pay off the mortgage bond interest, cover maintenance expenses and make enough profit to pay off the capital.

"Yet today, when mortgage rates are as high as 14 percent, all the Rent Control Act allows developers is a maximum 8.5 percent return on invested capital.

"This means that an investor who borrows from the building societies could lose up to 5.5 percent — or R55 on every R1 000 invested — if his flats are subject to rent control. This is a quick way to bankruptcy," said Mr Massey.

He said that if rent control was to work in modern times the return on investment allowed in terms of the law would have to be raised from the existing 8.5 percent to about five percentage points above the going mortgage rate. At the moment this would mean a total of about 19 percent.

**A Randburg developer explained to DAVID BRAUN how rent control put an end to his building flats and why the Rent Control Act should be urgently revised.**

Mr Massey gave as an example the flat unit he built in 1954 for R6 000. The interest on the mortgage bond then was R330 a year.

"The Rent Control Board then allowed eight percent return on the cost of the building plus an extra 25 percent of that amount for expenses. This meant a total income of R600 a year and a total expense of R450, leaving a reasonable amount to pay off capital.

"The same flat in 1981 would cost R30 000 and the interest on the bond would be R4 050 a year (at 13.5 percent).

"At 8.5 percent return, the maximum allowed by the Rent Control Act, plus 25 percent of that amount for expenses, the total maximum income you could legally enjoy would be about R4 000. After paying interest on the bond (R4 050) and expenses you would be out of pocket by R1 500 a year.

"That is why so many flat developers have gone insolvent and why only a fool would build while there was still a threat of being subjected to rent control," said Mr Massey.

He said building societies would not grant mortgage bonds knowing that developers could not possibly pay even the interest on the bond.

Developers had been so

Rent control was a good thing because it protected tenants from exploitation but "because the maximum return investment has not been raised from 8.5 percent, so many years, landlords have had to subsidise people's accommodation."

"That is the Government's responsibility. It should buy up old blocks and let them to tenants subsidised rents based on what people can afford."

"Property developers cannot be expected to carry the can and go into bankruptcy because the Government will not shoulder its social responsibilities. Housing of the poor must be provided by the State."

Mr Jack Esakowitz, director of a large property administration company in southern Johannesburg, agrees that the Rent Control Act must be changed urgently.

"The method of determining the value of property for rental purposes must be jacked up considerably."

"The Rent Board has the power to make an arbitrary decision on the value of your property — in spite of evidence from quantity surveyors and accountants to the contrary."

"The board may even determine a value below the municipal value which itself is almost invariably much lower than the true market value."

"You can well imagine how unattractive an investment becomes when you are allowed a rate of return of 8.5 percent on what the Rent Board says the value of your property is," he said.

He said that was why he had millions to invest in the best places he could find but his money would be in a block of flats.



# Not less than R22-m

## for Ponte

By CAS St LEGER

PONTE, the giant, circular apartment block in Johannesburg, is not for sale — at least, not in the immediate future, said Dr Charles Ferreira, managing-director of the owners, Mercabank.

If somebody comes up out of thin air with an offer, I will accept it," said Mr Ferreira. But the 53-storey building, completed in 1975 for R10-million would not be changing hands soon.

Reacting to a Sunday newspaper report that Ponte was on the

market for R22-million Mr Ferreira retorted: "I only said that we would not accept less than R22-million for Ponte."

He said that if he were Mercabank's sole decision-maker, Ponte would never be sold. However, he was only one man on the board, and he promised "better and more interest-

ing news," within the next two or three months.

He declined to be drawn on whether the "news" implied that the flats would be changing hands. "Nobody makes an investment of that magnitude overnight."

Last year plans to sell the largest circular apartment block in

the southern hemisphere under block shares were aborted. Prices ranged from R28 500 for a bachelor apartment right up to R250 000 for the pent-houses. There was no lack of takers — 72, in fact — but Mercabank, reluctant to be "tied into financing for perpetuity," according to Dr Ferreira, withdrew the scheme.

Now Ponte, with its 464 units, is "more than fully let" at rentals from R15 000 down to a modest R180 a month. Mercabank receives a 10 percent return — less return than offered by a conventional banking investment.

"It is not enough," said Dr Ferreira.

It was suggested to Dr Ferreira that at the bottom end of the scale the rentals at Ponte were probably less than those pertaining in Berea today.



# Luxury penthouses 'the tops'

15 OCT 1983

RAND DAILY MAIL

## Mail Reporter

**LUXURIOUS** Johannesburg flats are being rented and sold at staggering prices — rentals vary from R1 000 to R1 500 and prices from R200 000 to a whopping R300 000, according to estate agents.

"It is sometimes very difficult to rent or sell them," one agent said, referring to an unfurnished Rosebank flat with three bedrooms en suite, patio — and a rental of R1 500 a month.

Penthouses, it seems, are

no problem. Some estate agents indicated that they had not had penthouses on their books for months and Mr M. J. van Wyk, general manager of Ponty City which has six penthouses, confirmed that people clung to them.

Ponte City's fully furnished penthouses — which may be up for sale soon — each has a guests' toilet, a study and wine cellar with a lounge-dining room and ultra-modern kitchen.

On the second floor there is a sauna, two main bedrooms,

en suite with dressing rooms, and two more bedrooms with separate bathrooms and showers.

The roof deck has two or three maids' rooms with a bathroom, a roof garden and a little nook for a gas braai.

And then there is a sun deck too — of course completely secluded.

According to Mr Van Wyk only two of the penthouses are rented by companies.

Most of the luxurious flats have attractive extras like a second channel TV and sporting facilities in the complex.



# A shining beacon in the darkness

By CHARMAIN NAIDOO

**IT TOOK** Ethiopian Samuel K 69 gruelling days to steal across hostile African terrain to reach Johannesburg.

When the 28-year-old soldier learnt of the slaughter of his family by the rival Oromo tribe in his home town of Tigray, he fled south along the east African coastline, walking when he couldn't cadge a ride on trans-Africa transport trucks.

He carried nothing, not even a change of clothing. His only thought was to reach South Africa and safety.

Sammy is one of hundreds of thousands of "illegals" in South Africa. Here to escape political persecution in his own country, he chose Johannesburg because "people in my country call it a shining beacon in the darkness".

"You may not be able to work because you don't have a work permit, but you won't starve. It is the land of hope," he said.

Hundreds of professio-

## Funding

Last year alone, 61 200 M were deported for being in illegally.

Mr Baskin believes that illegals should not be deprived of informal sector funding.

"They should be able to remain work at legalising themselves."

The extent of the influx from nowhere more evident than at a 54-storey circular block of fringe of central Johannesburg.

In addition to English and signs, notices and warnings in ing are in French and Portuguese.

Ponte has become known Zaire, and 70 percent of the occupied by Zaireans seeking in South Africa.

of clothing. His only thought was to reach South Africa and safety.

Sammy is one of hundreds of thousands of "illegals" in South Africa. Here to escape political persecution in his own country, he chose Johannesburg because "people in my country call it a shining beacon in the darkness".

"You may not be able to work because you don't have a work permit, but you won't starve. It is the land of hope," he said.

Hundreds of professionals are legally seeking permission to enter South Africa. Home Affairs regional director George Orr told a migration seminar in Johannesburg recently.

Thousands more people, with few or no skills to offer, cross the borders each month, hidden in trucks or entering on tourist visas, and staying.

Jose, 34, is an Angolan surgeon who fled Luanda with his paediatrician wife Aurora and their three small children when government troops burnt down their home in November.

Though he worked in a military hospital, Jose's anti-MPLA sentiments were well known, and as members of the despised

Umbundu and Kikongo tribes, he and his wife were persecuted.

They escaped with the help of the Catholic Church, flew to Windhoek and caught a bus to Johannesburg.

Jose is ashamed of being an "illegal". He wants to work, and is prepared to do anything. He and Aurora and their children share a one-bedroomed flat in central Johannesburg with seven other people.

Daily, the number of Angolans and Mozambicans in South Africa swells.

In the course of his work at informal settlements and hostels in the PWV area — at least 20 percent of them are inhabited by Portuguese-speaking Mozambicans — Julian Baskin, a community planner at

nowhere more evident than at a 54-storey circular block of fringe of central Johannesburg.

In addition to English and signs, notices and warnings in ing are in French and Portuguese.

Ponte has become known Zaire, and 70 percent of the occupied by Zaireans seeking in South Africa.

In one of the biggest apartment blocks in Johannesburg, notices in English and Afrikaans have taken second place to signs in French and Portuguese as thousands of new immigrants from Africa pour into the city they call ...

The Mozambicans and Angolans only Portuguese, and the Zaireans French and a central African called Lingala.

Like the early American immigrants who arrived in their new home with possessions and bad memories of their homeland they'd left, these new immigrants are preparing their children for life in South Africa.

In one flat, young voices can be heard practising their vowels. Master

English language is the key to getting into mainstream schools.

In a residential hotel in Johannesburg, men in exotic

In one of the biggest



# M-Net shock for

**BELEAGUERED** tenants of Ponte City — one of South Africa's largest block of flats recently hit by eviction orders — are reeling under another body blow.

This week, residents of the 50-storey high-rise landmark were informed that their M-Net service would be cancelled.

No reasons were initially given by management in a letter to tenants.

However, management said later that it was considering extending the independent second channel video service until September.

Tenants claim the M-Net service was offered as an "incentive" to encourage people to move

## Loss of free TV perk follows Group Areas Act eviction notices to 50 black tenants

into the block.

"After offering us this perk as a carrot to take up occupancy, they now want to take it away because it suits them," said one outraged tenant.

"After all, how much can it cost them, considering all the money they take in rents?"

Another bitterly disappointed resident said: "At least M-Net has something decent to offer in the way of movies and sports coverage, and people who might not necessarily have taken up occupation in Ponte did so because of the free M-Net service."

Said another angry tenant who refused to be named for fear of victimisation:

"This is the last straw. I expect there will be a flood of people handing in their notice."

### Notice

Last week 50 black tenants in the building some of whom have lived there for three years — were given eviction notices in terms of the Group Areas Act.

A notice to tenants said there would be no exceptions and quoted part of the Act. It added that premises would not be leased to any person, corporate body, company, agent, firm or anyone in contravention of the Group Areas Act.

Ponte tenants include professional people, deejays, magazine executives and socialites.

Some tenants served with eviction notices claim they have been physically intimi-

and whites who are married to blacks.

"Although management claims only 50 flats are involved, there must be at least 150 families and mixed couples living in the building," said a concerned resident.

The manager of the letting agency, Vincemus Investments, Mr SJ Steenkamp, said notice to evict tenants was taken to avoid possible prosecution after a visit by the police.

But a spokesman for the holding company, Bankorp Property Services, said the decision was taken before the police intervened. Black tenants, he said, were living there "illegally".

A spokesman for Actstop said the tenants were "prepared to fight their evictions in court if all other means were exhausted."

And earlier this week police visited the building in an apparent attempt to prevent the distribution of a pamphlet calling for a residents' protest meeting.

Uniformed police arrived while pamphlets drawn up

by the Ponte Residents for Justice Committee were being distributed.

Besides the threatened eviction of black tenants and the cancellation of the M-Net service, disenchanted residents had other grievances.

### Gunshots

Although most tenants were "respectable", they claimed there was a "bad element" which caused trouble.

"People throw their rubbish out of windows and loud music is played at all hours of the day and night," said one tenant.

"It's not unusual to hear the sound of gunshots going off, people screaming and drunks making an unholy racket."

And, although pets are not allowed, residents were disturbed by barking dogs and miaowing cats.

Although a security system had recently been introduced and guards posted at the entrance, "unruly elements" continued to infil-

trate the building.

"Visitors are required to sign in. But more often than not outsiders simply follow tenants into the building when the residents let themselves in," explained a tenant.

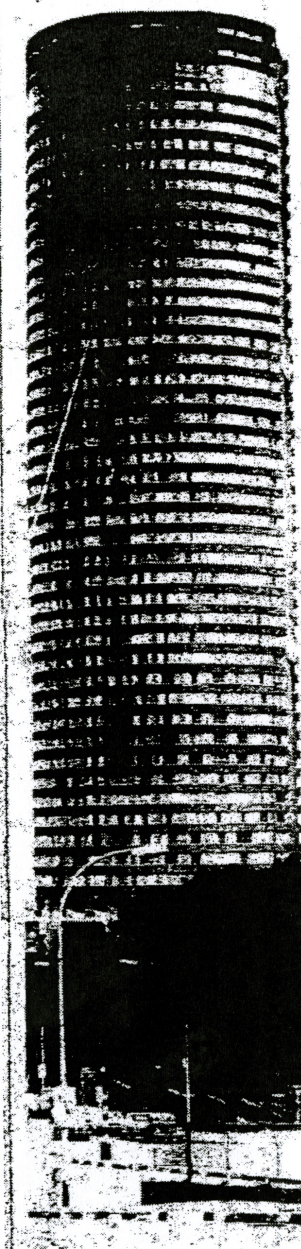
Replying to the allegations concerning the discontinuation of the M-Net service, Mr Donald Botha, general manager for Bankorp Property Services, said the decision to terminate the M-Net service was taken to defray costs; otherwise the rentals would have to be increased.

### Service

Although the letter to residents had stated that the service would be discontinued at the end of March, management was now considering extending the service to September, he said.

Steps would also be taken to prevent bad behaviour and rowdiness.

"With about 2 000 residents in a building the size of Ponte you will always find some bad elements. If we discover who the troublemakers are, we will take steps to remove them," added Mr Botha.



By IVOR CREWS

**DEFIANT** tenants of Ponte City in Johannesburg — one of South Africa's largest flat blocks — are heading for a showdown with big business.

Outraged residents of the spiralling 50-storey landmark in Berea have banded together to oppose eviction notices issued to "illegal" flat-dwellers last month.

## RESIDENT BODY VOWS TO TAKE ISSUE TO COURT

Now a Residents for Justice Committee will take up the cudgels on behalf of the black, coloured and Indian residents told to vacate flats they have lived in for up to three years.

At a meeting attended by

Mr Clifford Garrun, DP councillor for Pullingerkop, and Mr Lester Fuchs, DP councillor for Berea, the tenants resolved to:

- Seek legal opinion regarding the increased harassment, intimidation, assaults and wanton damage to some residents' property by "racist vandals";

- Request a meeting with the management of Bankorp Property Services to resolve

"That is an insult to our dignity. We are not prepared to be shown the door on the basis of colour," insisted Mr Moss Leoka, a committee member.

"The vast majority of the tenants are professional people who have been loyal and responsible tenants for a number of years."

The owners, he said, had known all along that they had black tenants.

"Most of us pay our rental by cheque, and it's between R300 and R1 000 a month. Now, because the owners are scared of being prosecuted, we have suddenly become illegal tenants," Mr Leoka pointed out.

### Loyal

White residents have come out in support of their black neighbours, with hundreds signing petitions against the evictions.

Until now, Bankorp Property Services have not responded to a request for a meeting.

Said DP councillor, Mr Garrun: "It is difficult to understand their motives in view of the fact that Berea could become a Free Settlement Area."

"The decision to evict blacks is an exercise in self-destruction. If they leave, half the building will stand empty, and the State would have to find alternative



# Ponte of no return

**WITHIN** hours of the Free Settlement Areas Act coming into effect this week, about 50 black families in a suburb adjacent to "grey" Hillbrow were served with notices of eviction from homes they have occupied for up to three years.

And, not far away, families living in squalid conditions in stables have also been given their marching orders.

The plight of the "illegals" has again highlighted the harshness of the residential segregation laws.

The families under threat in Berea, adjacent to Hillbrow, live in Ponte City, a high-rise building and familiar landmark in Johannesburg. They fear a crackdown under the Group Areas Act which will put hundreds of black people on the streets.

The Ponte families have been given until the end of the month to vacate the towering block.

While the agents, Vincemus Investments, say that fewer than 50 flats are involved, tenants claim that more than 100 families, including mixed couples, are affected.

Most of those facing eviction are upper-income professionals. They include a partner in a city consultancy, an engineer

living in a flat leased to the Swazi Trade Mission, a pharmacist, a Malawian who represents his national airline and other foreign nationals.

## Final

Vincemus Investments manager Mr S J Steenkamp says the action was taken to avoid possible prosecution after a visit to their head office by the SAP's group areas squad.

"There will be no exception to this decision," he said in notices given to tenants this week.

However, Mr Donald Botha, general manager of Bankorp Property Services, the holding company, said the decision to evict blacks

He said the company anticipated trouble with the police because of the growing number of black tenants who were moving into the building behind white fronts.

"We have nothing against these tenants. Their money is as good as ours and we would love to have them, but we have to respect the laws of the country. These people are in the building illegally," said Mr Botha.

But the residents have dug their heels in and are bracing for a fight to the end. Actstop, which monitors harassment

of black tenants in white areas, has been roped in.

Mr Moses Leoka of Dempers, Leoka & Kevany Consultants is one of the tenants who are being evicted.

He said he was astounded by the move taken by the owners of the 50-storey block at a time when laws like the Free Settlement Act showed that the Government acknowledged the permanence of blacks in the cities.

"The action is made even more ridiculous by the fact that we are literally across the street from Hillbrow which is a de facto open area and Berea looks like it will eventually go the same way."

Mr Leoka said that in his professional duties he met on a daily basis with senior executives from the holding company and some were his clients.

## Hazard

"We are certainly going to take this up with the owners at the highest level," he said.

And several kilometres from Ponte, in the suburb of Kenilworth, more than 100 people who have been paying a total of R3 000 a month for the right to live in disused stables have also been told they have three months to get out.

Although the tenants agree the amount they were paying

## Despite 'grey' areas law, black families get eviction orders at landmark tower

was taken before the police visit.



**THE** Ponte City tower in Jo'burg's Berea — the blacks who live there are in the main professionals, including an engineer and a pharmacist

**NO ROOM . . .** Nomsa Mabize and her sister outside the stable they call home **Picture: JOE SEFALE**



# Ponte eviction

## High-rise black tenants get an eviction reprieve

BLACK residents of one of South Africa's biggest blocks of flats have been given until the end of December to get official permission to live in the "whites only" area.

They were served with eviction notices earlier this year.

But the company which runs Ponte City, the 50-storey building near Hillbrow, said this week that evictions had been postponed to allow black tenants to apply for permits.

"Most of them have now done so," said Mr Donald Botha, general manager of Bankorp Property Services.

When asked whether the tenants — thought to number about 150 families — would be evicted if they did not obtain permits by the December deadline, Mr Botha said: "We will cross that bridge when we come to

**Sunday Times Reporter**

it. We do not want to cause trouble or evict them but we have to abide by the laws of the land," he said.

A spokesman for the

### Dignity

"However, if management evicts those without permits after December we will resist the evictions, in court if necessary. We will not see people thrown into the street on the basis of colour," he said.

The building's owners, Vincemus Investments, said they had given their tenants eviction notices earlier this year to avoid prosecution after police carried out an inspection of the building under the Group Areas Act.

Ponte's black tenants and mixed couples have in the past refused to apply for permits to live in a white group area, saying it was "an affront to their dignity".

"The suggestion is an insult to us as South African citizens," said one tenant who did not wish to be named for fear of victimisation.

A spokesman for the civil rights organisation Actstop said tenants were prepared to fight their evictions in court "if all other means were exhausted".

Residents said they had not been told by Vincemus Investments why the service was to be terminated.

Tenants now claim the M-Net service was offered as a one-off "incentive" to encourage people to move into the block.

"After offering us this perk as a carrot to take up occupancy, they now want to take it away when it suits them," said one irate tenant.

Tenants' other complaints include:

- "Bad elements" who loiter in the building and cause trouble;

- The "shocking" state of the lifts, with buttons ripped out of their panels;

- A breakdown in the cable TV network which took a week to repair;

- The loss of hot water for three days;

- Loud music played at all hours.

### Increase

Mr Botha of Bankorp said his company had decided to discontinue the M-Net service because of its



# Towering inferno

## High-rise residents fuming after blaze

**ENRAGED** residents voiced their grievances this week after fire ravaged an apartment in Berea's 52-storey high-rise Ponte City, causing mass panic.

When firemen reached the blazing apartment on the 41st floor they were forced to use the portable fire extin-

By FELICITY LEVINE

and their five-year-old son. The damage is estimated at R80 000.

Neighbour Mrs Emma Wilson, who smelt smoke and rescued the little boy from the blazing flat, is demanding that Ponte City administrators Bankorp Property Services "thrash things out" with tenants in order to make the building a safe place to live in.

Tenants are also incensed over the lack of security in the building, which, they claim, anyone can enter without so much as a backward glance from the security guards.

They also resent what they call a "lack of criteria and selectivity in letting

### Wilful

"We are busy investigating the causes of both the fire and the water supply failure but, in terms of the 1971 fire protection requirements, Ponte City is adequately equipped," he said.

Fire prevention legislation does not require buildings to upgrade fire fighting facilities even if rules change.

No one was injured in the Ponte blaze, but irate residents are complaining that the 52-storey building which hundreds of people has no central fire alarm system, no smoke detectors and no emergency plan.

This is Ponte City's second fire in six months. Its reception hall caught alight

### Air attack

ISRAELI fighter jets attacked an militia base in southern Lebanon yesterday, killing three and wounding eight.

### Ponte fire

A FIRE was put out in a top floor flat in Johannesburg's towering circular Ponte City building last night.



# Egoli's Ponte a place of dreams

17 JUL 1993 STAR

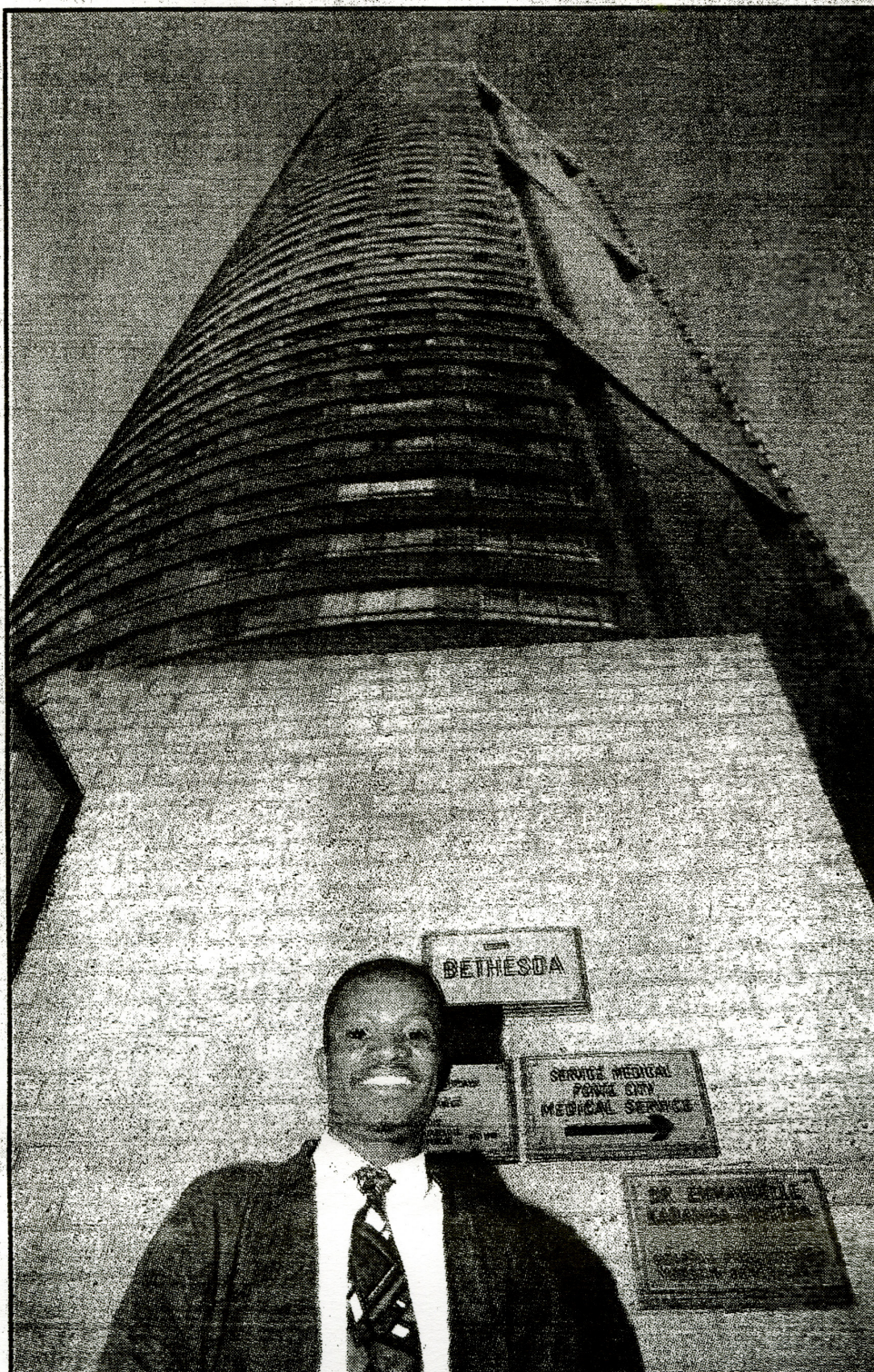
**FORTUNE CALLS:**  
Africans from north of the Limpopo are heading south. Many stay in Ponte in Berea, where the lingua franca is French. **JOE LOUW** reports.

IN Africa north of the Limpopo the call is out: Go South, young man! There is a fortune to be made!

South Africa has become the new frontier, a magnet for thousands of emigrants from Africa. And much of this human flood is heading straight for Johannesburg. And once they reach the legendary City of Gold, hundreds of the new emigrés head straight to Ponte City in Berea, one of the tallest residential buildings in Johannesburg.

Ponte, as it is simply known to its habitués, with its 54 floors, 650 flats and unique circular design, is a reminder of a happier time when the urban spirit soared.

Today it is the home from home, ironically, for people who, barely a few years ago, may not even have been allowed into its fover.





City Press 20/3/94

By LEN KALANE

# WE LOVE PONTE!



Angelinah Ramaila

THERE'S no city quite like it. Present population: 1 000.

It has the trappings of the new SA: a non-racial society, democratic representation, a joint governing council and hey presto, its own constitution!

The city's "fathers" recently had their own *bosberaad* in Maritane near Rustenburg which gave birth to the joint governing council and the subsequent constitution.

Isn't this the way of doing things SA style?

The city's population consists, regrettably, of only about 20 white families (two percent) as against 98 percent black families.

That calls for concern, especially during these days when talk is about reconciliation and having more whites and blacks mixing together.

This city also has a Public

Relations Officer, Angie Ramaila, who moans: "We would like to have more whites living here. As things are in SA, whites tend to move out everytime there is a large number of blacks moving in. I hope this trend comes to a stop. We should all behave like South Africans - black and white living together."

Ramaila said the city still had room to accommodate a further 500 people and she hoped this would create the opportunity for whites to come in large numbers, depending much on the political situation after April.

This city? Is it the *Bophuthavolkstad*, a city still to be created somewhere

in the Free State as the new capital of the new, free SA? No, this is a city that already exists in our midst.

It is PONTE CITY!

Ponte City - the city within the city of Jo'burg - is the "five-star" block of apartments in Berea, near Hillbrow.

Residents of this "city" have their own bakery, supermarket, disco-pub, laundrette, dry-cleaner, church, hair salon, floodlit tennis courts, a filling station, swimming pool, creche, night chicken grill, administrative offices, tenants' offices, Acstop office, security offices and wow, 467 family apartments in a 51-storey building.

This is Jo'burg's towering pride, built some 30 years ago.

The circular building towers awesomely above the rest, and according to the building's general manager, Jack Sher, Ponte has never

descended to the level of other flats. Throughout the years, Sher stresses, Ponte was known as an upmarket residential building. Even today the building is still known as the "five star" apartment block.

But then why is Ponte in the news again?

Sher argues, in a prepared document, that while Ponte City had always been different from the other run-of-the-mill apartment blocks, in 1993 it took a giant leap away from the rest.

This was the year that the building's management decided to embark on a transformation (*Viva, new SA!*).

The process involved empowering the tenants to participate in all major decisions affecting the building and thus jointly sharing the management (*Viva, power-sharing, viva!*).

To facilitate this process, management enlisted the services of an outside black

consultancy firm led by Moss Leoka as well as Acstop.

Sher says most of the Jo'burg flatland was decaying and Ponte City had since embarked on a programme to help uplift the standards in residential buildings. He said he hoped others would follow suit - to keep the flatlands clean and attractive.

In his document he goes on to explain the aim behind the democratisation process, saying this was two-fold:

- To strengthen Ponte City's position as an up-market residential block without peer in the inner city.

- The involvement of ten-

ants in the running of the building would ensure that Ponte City would remain peaceful and free from strife and stormy landlord-tenant relations so common in flatland.

Ponte City Tenants' Council chairman Hope Papo agreed that all 1 000 of them at Ponte City were a big, happy family.

He said: "After our *bosberaad*, we developed a joint governing structure and a joint management document wherein procedures were laid down on resolving disputes."

Some of these agreements are very interesting. For example: Tenants are required to provide serial numbers

and descriptions of all additional furniture, appliances and any other apparatus brought into the building.

Management, at its discretion, is entitled to check the serial numbers of equipment being brought into the building or being removed from it.

The parties have also agreed that a strict occupancy number in flats will be adhered to:

Bachelor flats - two adults and a child; studio flats - two adults and two kids; one bedroom flats - two adults and three kids; two bedroom flats - four adults and four kids; three bedroom flats - six adults and four kids; and so on.

Any tenant caught exceeding the number will be charged fifty percent of the monthly rental for each additional person living in the flat.

Manager Sher went on: "Buildings such as Ponte City need to be supported for the good that they do, so that they can be seen as role models for the rest of 'flatland' to follow."

"We feel that the democratisation process at Ponte City has reduced the risk to any future mortgage lender. The efficient manner in which the building is now run, especially the structures now in place, should make it much more attractive and easier for financial institutions to invest in."

Sher said further proof that Ponte City was leading the way was the fact that Acstop had already started taking the "Ponte Model" and using it in other buildings in the inner city.



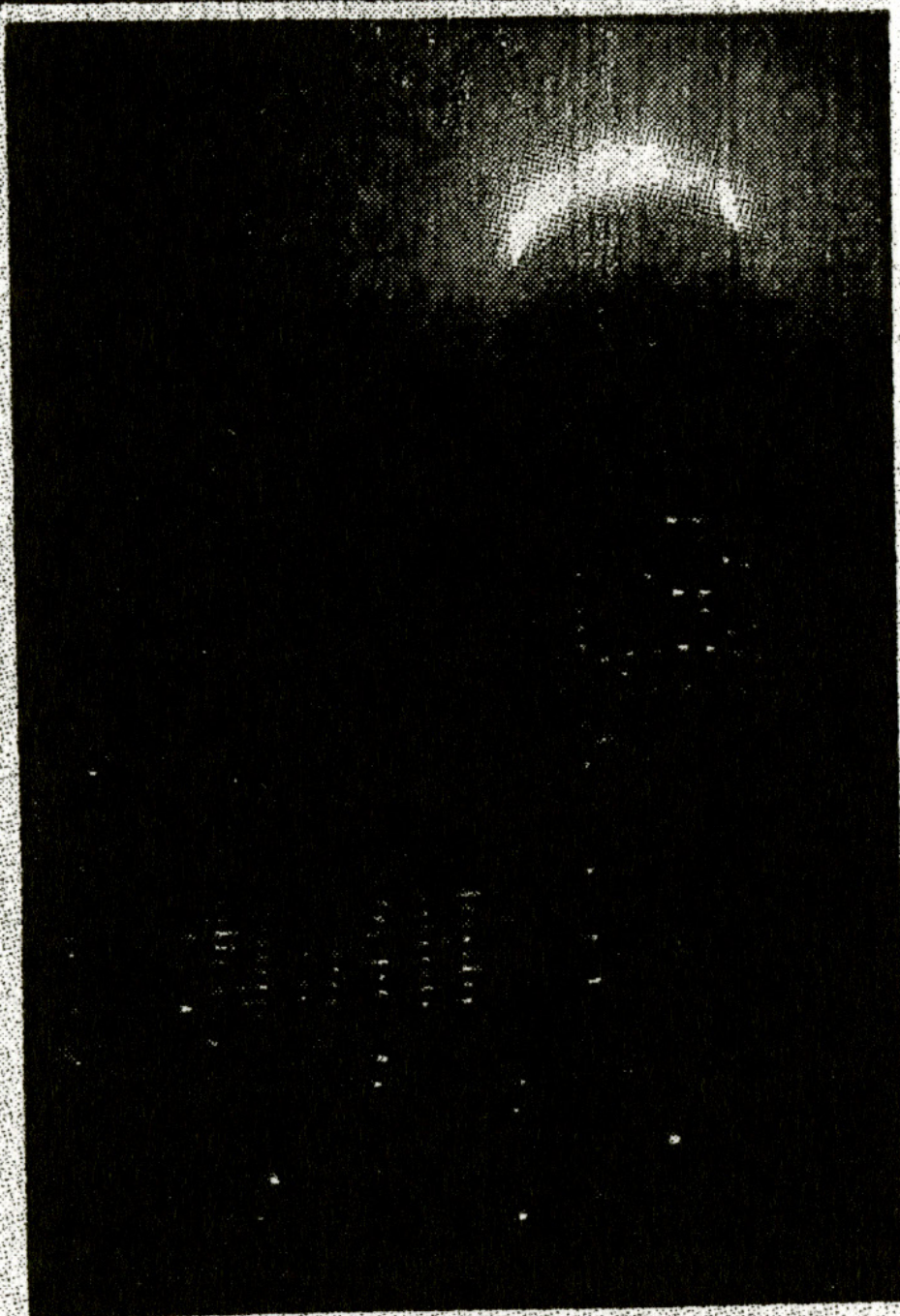
# Coke city — down the tubes

By ANDILE NOGANTA

EVERY NIGHT a glowing Coca Cola sign flaunts its international image atop an apartment building, complementing the cultural diversity of the neighbouring Berea flatland of Johannesburg.

The building is Ponte City, Johannesburg's towering 54-floor pride, which was built some 32 years ago.

Alongside the Carlton Centre, Ponte must rank as one of the city's more famous landmarks,



**BEACON . . . The famous —  
or infamous — Ponte City.**

■ Pic:  
**THULANI SITHOLE**



# Hillbrow's high-rise human hive buzzes with life

STAR 20-4-96

Surrounded by controversy from its earliest days, Ponte is still the subject of argument. **KURT SWART** toured the huge block of flats to get the lowdown on the highrise monolith

Thrusting aggressively into the Johannesburg sky is one of its best-known landmarks – Ponte City, a concrete monolith housing a population larger than many a platteland town.

The building, with 467 flat units, was built in 1976, in the days of white domination of the inner city, but has since changed its population profile – and its media image. The large soft-drink advertising sign at the very top has resulted in Ponte being dubbed “Coke City”.

This, says Jack Sher, building manager of the owning group, Vincemus Investments, has been universally negative.

Tales abound of the building being a haven for illegal immigrants from African states, and for drug dealers allegedly plying the cocaine trade. The reputation is undeserved, says Sher.

## Suicides

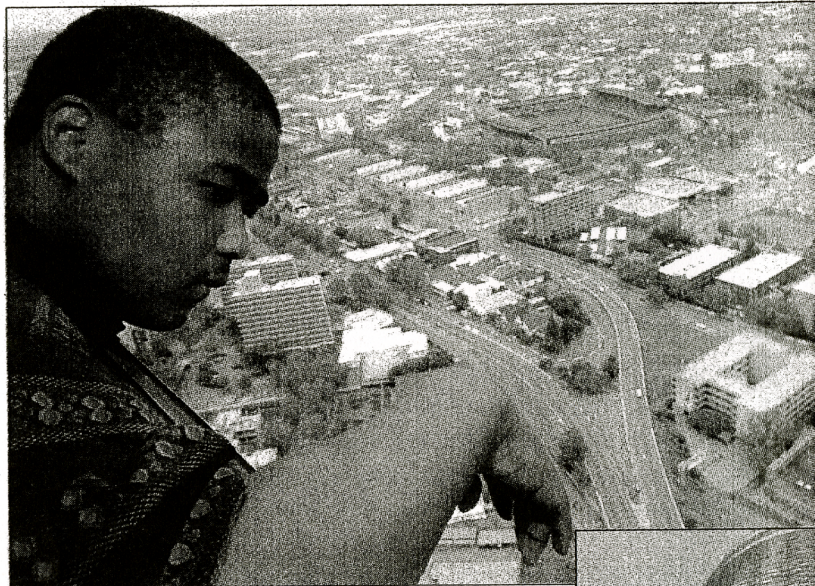
“Most of the residents are students, and mostly South Africans. Less than 10% (42 flats) are let to Zaireans. But the perception is that the building’s lingua franca is French.”

Another perception of Ponte is that it is the favoured venue of many Johannesburg suicide victims, whose method is to leap into space more than 50 floors above ground level.

“I have been running this building for six years and in my term there have been three suicides. If I wanted to do that, I would probably pick Ponte because then I would be reasonably sure of my success,” says Sher.

He says police have been affected by the perception of Ponte as a drug den. Raids have been conducted, and drugs were found in nearby streets. “Nothing was found in Ponte itself, yet that is what the press reported.”

Ponte’s silhouette has been used as a backdrop to television programmes on drugs. “We had John Bishop standing on the Harrow Road bridge talking about the drug problem in Hill-



**PENTHOUSE WITH A VIEW:** Student Boitumelo Mokgatle looks out across Johannesburg from his luxury home in the sky

brow. And behind him is Ponte. That gives a false impression that everything that happens in Hillbrow happens in Ponte.”

Sher is proud of what he terms the democratic relationship between tenants and management at Ponte.

“We were the first rental building in the flat belt to move into the new South Africa. There was a change in population profile in Hillbrow and Berea, and Ponte followed suit.

*Building manager Jack Sher is proud of what he terms the democratic relationship between tenants and the residents at Ponte*

“I established a tenants’ committee where each floor elects a representative. The committee meets management once a month at meetings of the joint governing council.

“Our problems get thrashed out at this level. We have never had rental boycotts or demonstrations in the building. While we don’t always see eye to eye,

our democratic system is alive and well. We have nearly 2 000 people living here harmoniously. “We are a city within a city.

We have all the basic facilities: a laundrette, supermarket, phone shop, a hair salon and a church.”

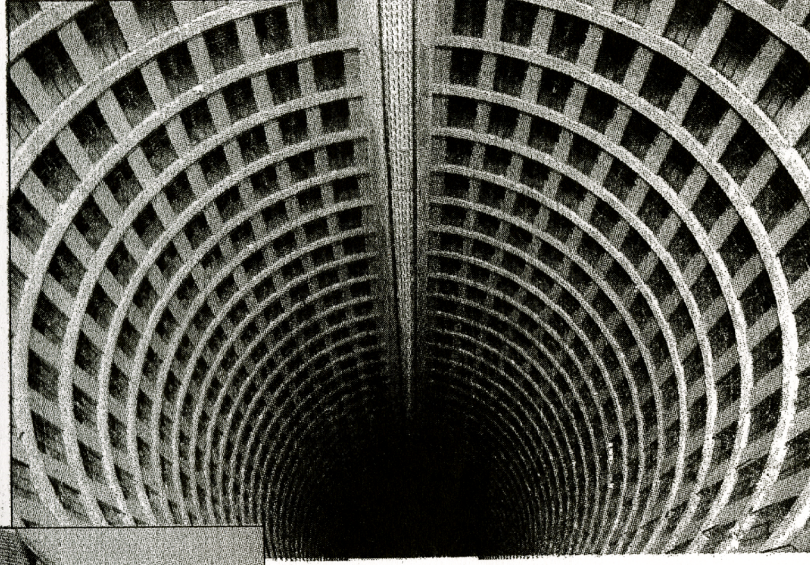
When Ponte raised its monstrous head 20 years ago, Hillbrow was spoken of as having a “Continental flavour”, and berths in Ponte were much sought after by white residents.

“The continent they were referring to was Europe. It is still ‘continental’, but the continent now is Africa.”

Sher says Ponte has some inherent problems related to the sheer size of the building. “Careless people cause danger and damage by chucking litter from their windows. About two years ago a security guard was fatally injured by a Coke bottle thrown from an upper storey.”

The litter problem adds to the scruffy appearance of broken windows, and doors sagging on their hinges, but this is part of the problem of the size of the building, he says.

“A block with 30 units will have a broken window to mend once a month. We have a broken



**THE PIT:** The inner core of Ponte is a rubble and refuse trap – some careless tenants cause danger and damage

window once a day. We have a full in-house maintenance team which refurbishes and maintains the building constantly.”

Ponte is a huge funnel, hollow on the inside. The first seven floors are taken up by parking facilities. Reception is on the eighth floor. Then follows a “triple volume void” of three floors, before the flats begin on the 11th floor and stretch upwards to the 50th. On the 51st floor are luxurious three-storey penthouse triplexes, each with two staircases.

“They are 300 square metres in area – as large as most northern suburbs houses, but with an unparalleled view,” says Sher.

Tenants’ liaison officer Angela Ramaila agrees: “It has the greatest view. At night it’s positively breathtaking.”

Part of Ramaila’s job is to screen prospective tenants, many of whom may be illegal immigrants. Prospective tenants must produce valid identification documents.

Before meeting management and being conducted on a guided tour, a *Saturday Star* news team undertook an unofficial

adventure in Ponte, interviewing tenants and workers. Their perceptions differed from the official picture, but not markedly.

Sher describes Ponte as the fourth highest structure in the city. “But because it is built on a hill, it reaches higher into the sky than all but the communications towers. It is the tallest residential building in the southern hemisphere.”

Toddlers, despite the security

*The litter adds to the scruffy appearance of broken windows and doors sagging on their hinges, but this is part of the problem of the building’s size*

gates, wander on the fire escape platform above the inner core. This platform, less than a metre wide and with a railing less than a metre high, produces an uncomfortable feeling of vertigo.

Above is a circle of sky, while the base of the funnel is a mess of rock, gravel, broken glass, litter and building materials.

In the domestics’ quarters on the 54th floor, Mbali Sithole sips

tea and speaks about her desire to live on the ground in a “nice suburban area”.

“It’s not nice living at the top of the world like this. It is also very dangerous for small children. It is overcrowded and the place is getting dirty.”

Boitumelo Mokgatle (20), a first-year mechanical engineering student at Wits, lives in one of the beautifully appointed penthouses.

Originally from North West Province, Mokgatle moved into Ponte in March last year. “I used to live on the 14th floor, but I’ve moved up since,” he says. He shares the flat with four other students, reducing the rent of R1 585 a month to about R380 a person.

Mokgatle’s penthouse has four bedrooms, a bar, an open-plan lounge and dining room, a sauna and, up the second staircase, an open-air sundeck and braai area.

He is happy with his surroundings – luxury for a first-year student. He has a problem with the lifts, however: “They are bad. Sometimes they do not work and people have been trapped in them.”

## Litter

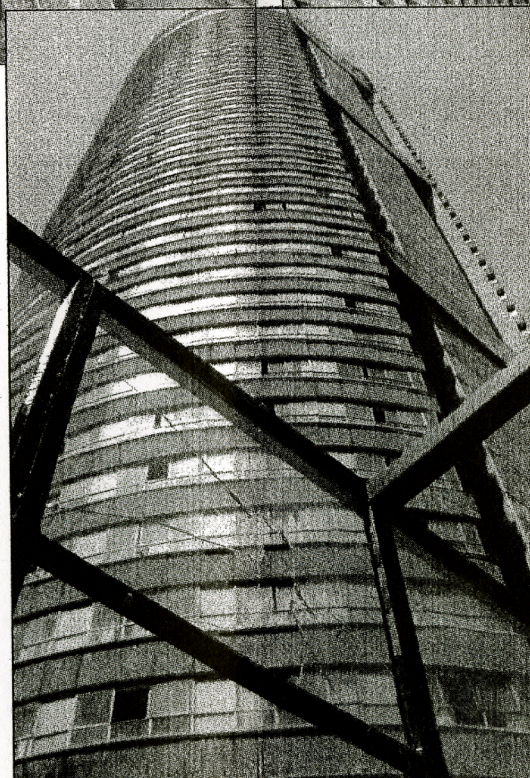
Liaison officer Ramaila speaks of the battle to make tenants less inclined to litter.

“In other places I lived in, I had to paint my own flat. It was often in disgusting condition and I had to fumigate it. Here at Ponte we provide people with fully furnished flats in spick-and-span condition and we expect them to keep it that way. I’m sure they would look after it better if it were their own property.”

Her sentiments are echoed by Sher. “We have had thoughts of selling flats as sectional title. But we are waiting for the times to change, for financial institutions to be more amenable to lending in

the area. We would like to turn tenants into owners.” He maintains that Ponte, despite problems with the lifts and litter, is “no worse off than 10 years ago”.

Says a black taxi-driver, with just a hint of sarcasm: “Ponte is the symbol of our city. The sign on top is from our rich American friends. Ponte takes in anyone, regardless of race and background. I like the place.”



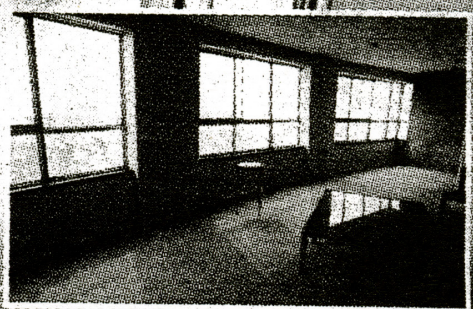
**TOWERING GIANT:** Ponte, with the population of a small town, thrusts up into the sky

PHOTOGRAPHS: ANTON HAMMERL





Sunday Times: 2004-1-18



# ROOM WITH A VIEW

CLIMB-HIGH: The six newly revamped penthouses in Ponte City afford a fantastic view over Joburg

Pictures: SYDNEY SESHIBED

ISRAEL MLAMBO

**W**ANT the best view in Joburg? Try a penthouse suite at Hillbrow's famous Ponte City — for only R3 695 a month.

Six deluxe penthouses stretch from the 51st storey to the 53rd of one of the tallest residential buildings in Joburg, complete with saunas and rooftop braai areas.

From wall-to-wall lounge windows one can see the whole of the city centre and across mine dumps to Soweto.

"The fantastic view is the best-kept secret in Joburg," said Andre Celliers, sales and letting manager in the city for Trafalgar Properties and Financial Services.

Sitting at a long breakfast counter in one of the spacious kitchens, high above the bustle of Hillbrow and the inner city, it is easy to forget that you are in

**Exclusive**

what was known as one of the most notorious buildings in the city.

will not be turfed  
ets.  
real vision for the  
and we have  
l that the people  
ted properly to  
ss as smooth as  
ys.

had short leases,  
the developers  
leases to expire.  
s, there is three

l decorators are  
novating 300 flats  
to 34. Each is  
e of six different  
g Moroccan and  
atter described as  
mix of indulgent  
mixed with neo-

of the first set of  
ll be ready for  
he end of April,  
p within two days

from R400 000  
rtment to nearly  
three-bedroom  
sonable price by  
standards.

ted, the complex  
secure parking,  
upmarket shop-  
nasium and even  
ing wall.

y man! My dream  
e Ponte at night  
k trail, or to climb  
s I am an indoor  
ayyoub, who has  
nat to do with six  
the top three

ic restaurant? A  
s-men?"



# 'Yes' and 'no' to Ponte as a prison

Those in favour point to successful US examples, those against say it would be irresponsible

**MATTHEW BURBIDGE**

Ponte looms overhead like a curved wall. A lift takes visitors from the deserted parking lot into the depths of the building.

Groups of young men lean against the walls of a courtyard with its decaying canopies and a long-defunct disco.

The security guards won't let journalists into the building proper, claiming it may cause trouble for the tenants.

Three tenants say they are definitely moving out, and another says he's only been there a month and is already thinking about leaving.

Vincemus Investments Ltd, the owners, say Ponte City, in lower Berea, has failed as an apartment building and, now in its 28th year, it is showing signs of urban decay.

They want to turn the building into a correctional services facility,

including six courts, a police station and a public clinic.

Lone Paulsen, a lecturer at the Wits University architecture faculty said the inner city is desperately short of housing and it would be irresponsible of the owners to turn it into a high-rise prison.

Paulsen acknowledged that it would be a difficult and complex task for management to revitalise the building, but the fact that people are prepared to live in it – despite its problems – showed it was too valuable to turn into a jail, however unusual.

"The owners should provide more amenities in the building, so a community can be created – which is especially important for people living in a high density area."

Another option, besides demolition, would be for the tenants to

manage the building themselves.

Prisons, like Pollsmoor in Cape Town, are usually built in secluded areas, away from the hustle and bustle of society, so the jailers, in a perfect world, have a chance to "correct" the criminals' behaviour.

Turning one of Johannesburg's most visible landmarks into a jail might turn the thoughts of its citizen's toward crime and punishment – and serve as a symbol of the law in what seems to be a lawless society.

Negative perceptions like these, and the eviction of tenants, urgently needed to be addressed, says Don Stuart, spokesman for the owners.

Stuart mentioned Atlanta, Cincinnati and San Diego as some of the modern cities that had "downtown facilities," which had re-

talised the surrounding areas.

"In fact the value of property would go up in the area and security and quality of life around the area would improve – it's very safe to live next to a prison."

Stuart outlined the vision for the new building, which involves improved ventilation and air circulation, lighting, convenient access and of course, security.

A landscaped piazza and a copper domed rotunda are also planned as well as the substantial upgrading of the adjoining park.

"We have tried for several months, and the previous owners tried for several years, to make the building work – we were both unsuccessful," said Stuart.

"The face of Johannesburg is changing and we think the building will add value to the city. It will create 500 jobs and accelerate the economic cycle of the area – the benefits outweigh the disadvantages."

**'Provide amenities, create a community'**





Change on the horizon ... the Coca-Cola advertisement, which has become a Johannesburg landmark since it was erected on the roof of Ponte City in 1995, is to be replaced by an even bigger Vodacom billboard.

# Vodacom taking over Coca-Cola's towering Joburg perch

STAR 11-4-2006

BY MATTHEW BURBIDGE

That famous Johannesburg icon, the giant Coca-Cola sign perched on the roof of Ponte City, will soon make way for a new billboard advertising cell-phone group Vodacom.

Work has already begun on dismantling the massive metal-and-neon sign, after the soft drink manufacturer decided not to renew its contract.

The eye-catching sign, believed to be the biggest in the country, was first switched on on the evening of February 9 1995, and was switched off last week.

Vukani Magubane, corporate and media relations manager for Coca-Cola, said the decision to remove the sign was part of the company's "evolving marketing activity", and it now planned to focus on "community-based marketing".

Comparing the sign to the Empire State Building and the Eiffel Tower, Magubane said: "We feel privileged to have played a role in landmarking South Africa."

Coca-Cola would expand its community-based marketing, which would be more "interactive", and "bring back the magic" and "re-ignite" the

brand, Magubane added.

When people in Johannesburg were told that the sign would be taken down, many expressed sadness: "It was the only way I could get back into town," said one person.

"I'm going to miss it. I just used aim for that red sign - you could see it from Midrand," said another.

Piet Muller, media director at Saatchi & Saatchi, said Coca-Cola probably decided to remove the sign because the company would be able to buy more exposure on the ground.

"It won't be as big or impactful, but now they will be

able to afford more exposure, and over a larger area."

"The sign was much talked about when it went up, but it probably won't be missed. It became a bit like wallpaper over time, and it obviously wasn't working hard enough for Coke," he said.

Coca-Cola would probably now focus on face-to-face marketing at a grassroots level, which would involve bringing consumers into direct contact with the famous fizzy drink, Muller added.

While the gap left by the sign may raise eyebrows at first, the Vodacom advertise-

ment should start taking shape from the end of the week. It is expected to be operational at the end of April.

Joan Joffe, Vodacom's group executive for corporate affairs, said their advertisement would be "like the Coke sign, but bigger".

The sign will feature the group's name, in blue and green, and will feature the green Vodacom globe.

Neither Joffe nor Magubane would disclose how much their signs had cost to build or maintain. However, an insider said the rental had cost Coca-Cola R12 000 a month.



# Feldman stamp on Ponte City

RESPECTED modern architect Mannie Feldman (78) of Riviera is the architect responsible for designing the landmark Ponte City building in Berea.

Feldman was a partner of Manfred Hermer (incorrectly credited with designing the building in last week's issue of CityBeat) in the firm Manfred Hermer Grosskopf which won the contract. While Hermer was certainly involved with the project from a business point of view, it was Feldman who undertook most of the design work.

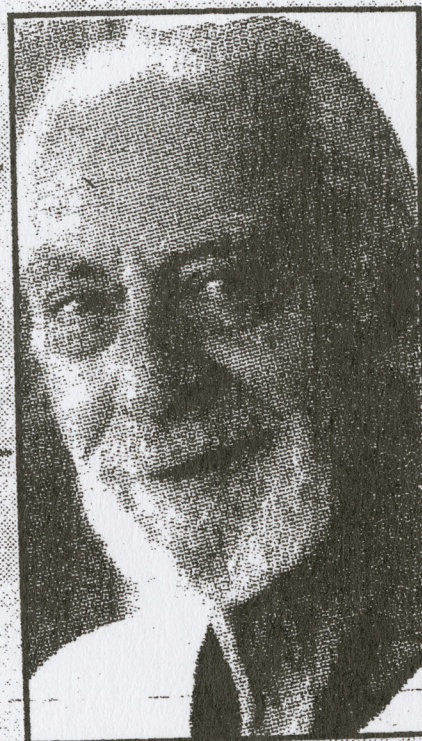
"The brief was to create a landmark building which would serve to visually bring one into the city from Harrow Road," explained Feldman. Less than 4 000 metres square, the

site was small and located on a steep slope. Everything - wind, stability, sunlight, the shadow line and the cityscape - pointed to a circular building.

The foundations for the building began to go in 1971 and it took six years to complete at a cost of R11-m. It was a "tremendous effort".

Defined by Feldman's distinctive sense of drama, geometry and monumental scale, Ponte City has dominated Joburg's cityscape ever since.

Feldman's acclaimed works include House Feldman in Parktown North, the Parkhurst house he designed for his late son, award-winning commercials producer David Feldman, the Yiddish Folk School in Sydenham, and the Metal Box building in Milpark.



**Architect Mannie Feldman's sense of drama, geometry and monumental scale defines the landmark building.**

17.01.2003

17.1.2003

Roseland & Killarney

✱



## PROPERTY

# Turning point for Ponte?

**Ponte City, Jo'burg's biggest** block of flats, has been bought by IT businessman Nour Ayyoub and a partner, for an undisclosed amount. They plan to sell the units individually.

Ayyoub says he can't reveal details yet because his marketing plan isn't com-

plete. But the *FM* understands that he will divide the larger of the 470 flats in the circular block to increase the total to more than 600 units.

The big question is: how will the owners ensure that Ponte will become a successful, multi-owner building? It doesn't have a good history.

The 52-floor skyline landmark, located on the edge of the Johannesburg central business district, is a classic example of development disaster and urban decay.

The builder went bust after finishing it in 1977 and things went downhill from there. In the early 1990s, Ponte earned a reputation as a no-go area occupied by crime syndicates. Ten years ago, then correctional services minister Sipho Mzimela proposed making it a prison.

It has never been fully occupied, though current national manager Trafalgar reduced vacancies to their lowest level ever. Management, upgrading and redesign will be the key to the building's success; and related costs are likely to be high. In 2000, the Cotterell family — which sold the building to Ayyoub — had a quote of R12m to modernise the lifts.

Ian Fife



# Living the high life at Ponte

**The once rundown building gets R100m facelift, writes ZANELE MAZIBUKO**

**T**HOSE who have previously sworn not to set foot in Hillbrow could soon be in for a pleasant surprise.

A recent visit the newly refurbished Ponte City suggests that many people could be returning there soon.

Ponte is currently undergoing a R100 million revamp after which it will have cafés, bars and clubs, among other amenities.

Ponte has become an icon on Joburg's skyline and it is the tallest residential building in the southern

Nour Addine Ayyoub and David Selvan, the men behind Ponte's revival, say they bought Ponte because of its potential.

Selvan says they have already sold 264 flats in a week.

Setshwano Rametse, the director of Space Marketing and Investments, the company marketing the sale of the flats, says the flats are fully furnished when they are sold. This includes a fridge, stove, washing machine and dishwasher.

Prices range from R440 000 for a bachelor flat, R550 000 for single-bedroom flat, R750 000 for a two-bedroom flat and R938 000 for a three-bedroom flat.

Six different furnishing styles and themes are on offer – glam rock, future slick, Moroccan delight, global fusion, Zen-like and old money and antique style.



Ponte poised to reclaim its

# GLORY

Inner-city icon on the way up, writes Fiona Forde

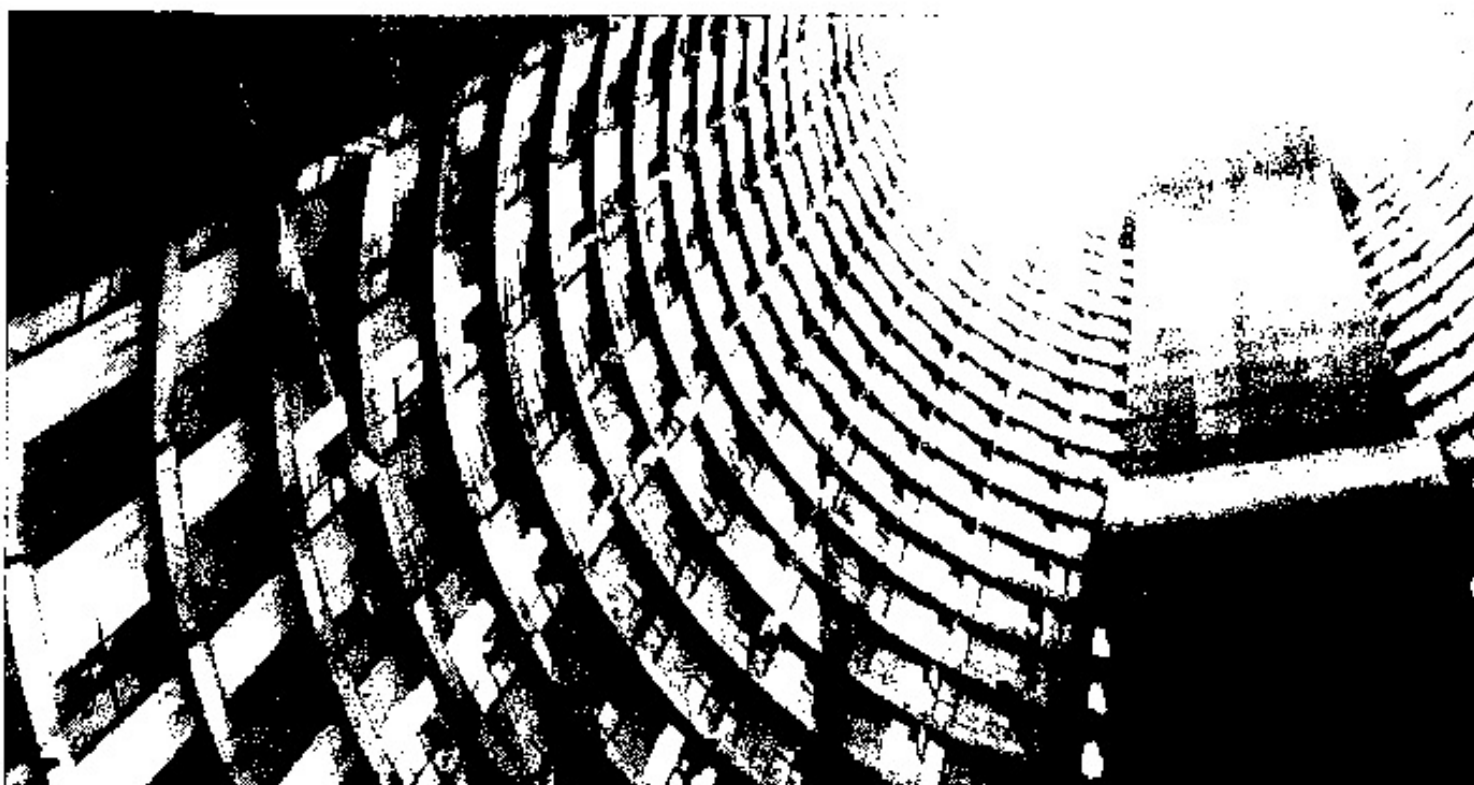
**T**o most South Africans, the winter of 1976 conjures up images of Soweto's students rising up in protest and sparking the uprising that spell the beginning of the end for apartheid. But for architect Rod Grosskopff it marks the unveiling of Ponte City to the world, his 54-storey residential creation that rose 173 metres above Berea, on the fringe of Hillbrow.

Almost overnight, Ponte, built at a cost of R11-million, became an icon on Joburg's skyline, the tallest residential building in the southern hemisphere.

It also became a magnet for middle-class metro types and a playground for Joburg's yuppies, allured by the hedonism of Hillbrow.

But during the three decades that have passed, Grosskopff has watched the glimmering architectural showpiece fade into disrepute as whites moved out to suburbia and illegal migrants from all over the continent moved in.

By the time freedom dawned in 1994, Ponte had well and truly become a den of inequity of world repute, where prostitutes were doing a roaring trade and where some residents involved themselves in all sorts of questionable - and often illegal - activities.





# The full Ponte

**Luxury apartments in the roughest neighbourhood in town?  
One small development group with big plans thinks it's an easy  
sell. All you have to do is believe. Make yourself some coffee, put  
your feet up, take the tour and see if you do. BY TANYA PAMPALONE**





# ON TOP OF THE WORLD



Nour Addine Ayyoub abseils down the side of Ponte, the tallest residential building in the southern hemisphere. At 173m high, the landmark of the skyline is at a height that few people would attempt to abseil down. Ayyoub is one of the property developers who are hoping to turn around the fortunes of the inner city by upgrading the building's apartments.

See Car





Were  
springing  
up all over  
Hillbrow'

RENAISSANCE MAN:  
Rodney Grosskopff, the  
architect of the Ponte,  
Johannesburg's 'palazzo  
in paradise'

Picture: THYS DULLAART

# Ponte-ficating on a classic

The architectural oddity is about to mutate into an elitist apartment block, writes **Aspasia Karras**

**R**ODNEY Grosskopff has always been a little disappointed that Ponte was not voted the ugliest building in Johannesburg.

Those honours went to the Johannesburg General Hospital in all its apartheid immutability on the Parktown Ridge.

The architect who designed the round, defining feature of the Johannesburg skyline in 1976 is telling me this with a twinkle in his eye on the roof of the Troyeville hotel, where we have a perfect view of Ponte's thrusting presence and the gradual brightening of the day.

urbane apartment block with pre-fitted 70s shag-rug styling and apartheid blinkers, then as the leering black hole of the inner city as it transformed overnight to accommodate the flood of post-apartheid immigrants.

It is about to undergo a third transformation as its new owner, Investagain, waves its wand and turns the disco Cinderella into a sexy, inner-city apartment block for the burgeoning middle classes.

Rodney and I contemplate breakfasting downstairs in the Troyeville hotel but the classic residential hotel has not risen from its slum-

with architectural arcana about Ponte. "It was meant to be a Utopia; it was a period when highrises were springing up all over Hillbrow — Nasbou, the property developers, wanted to create a Manhattan."

The name was chosen after seeing it day in, day out on all the plans — the ground was owned by an Italian called Ponte.

"Then they created the marketing and said it was a bridge between heaven and earth — a palazzo in paradise."

Rodney's effect on Johannesburg's architectural legacy is marked. He tells amusing stories

a swamp. A highly flammable fertiliser factory was separated from the building site by a tin wall and a 24-hour guard was hired for sudden conflagrations.

His firm, with his Belgian partner Pierre Lombart, has built some of the most high-profile buildings in the country. He says he is semi-retired now. His daughter followed him into the firm, and they roll him out for his grey hair and gravitas.

I am not fooled for a minute — about the retirement, that is. After breakfast we return to his house, where his garage is full of a series of large-scale sculptures he is

says his inspiration as an architect and in life came after he failed his first year and lost his bursary to a more deserving student.

"Julian Beinart arrived at Wits from MIT and started asking us to do things like supporting a brick with drinking straws."

An older colleague, Alexander Munro Hodge, mentored him in a Renaissance-man approach to life. "I suppose most of life is luck and grabbing the luck and running with it," he says.



# Ponte's tall story

The skyscraper's reinvention holds the key to its neighbourhood's rejuvenation, writes **KWANELE SOSIBO**



# Ponte gets a total makeover

From den of iniquity to high style

ISAAC MAHLANGU

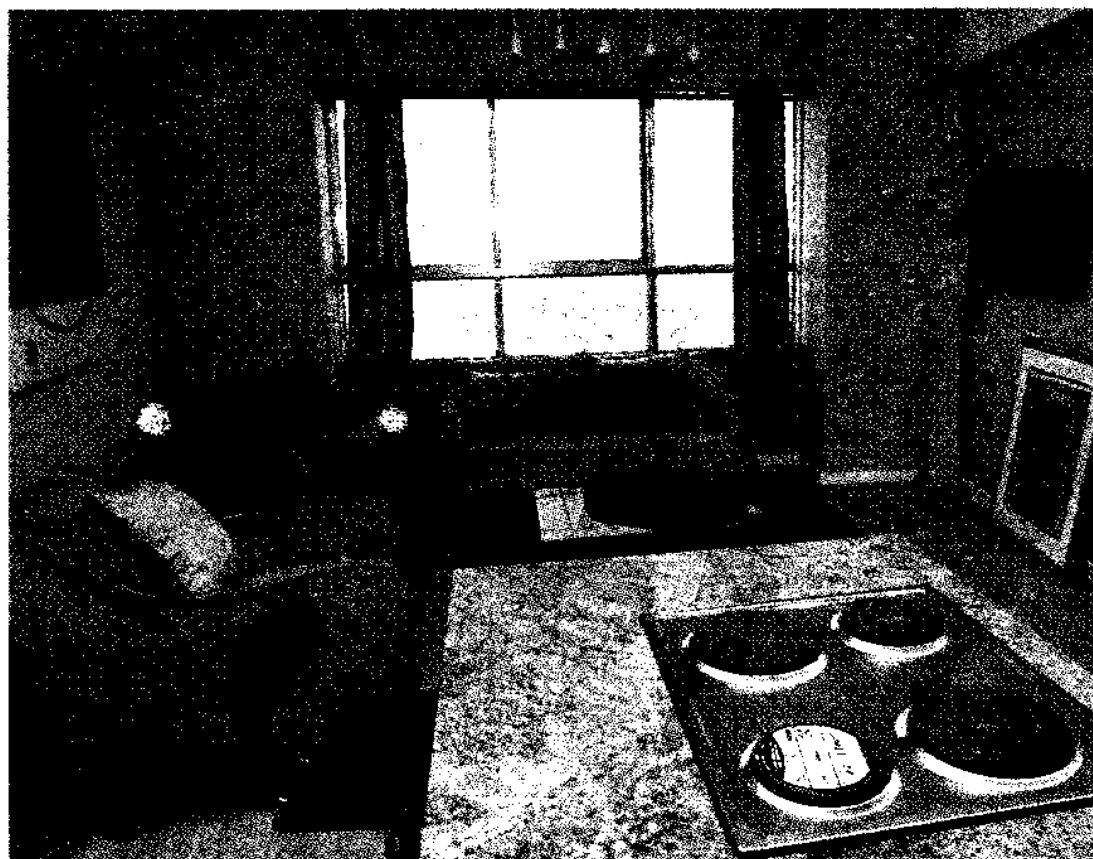
THE 173m-high cylindrical apartment block, Ponte City, situated at 1 Lily Road Hillbrow, is a Joburg icon.

It has been a landmark on the skyline since it was built in 1976. However, in recent years it has become a symbol of something else — the city's urban decay.

But nowadays people are clamouring to live in it, as the 54-floor block is being revamped at a cost of R100-million. Its furnished apartments, with their spectacular views, are being snapped up at a cost of between R410 000 for a 29m<sup>2</sup> studio and R940 000 for a 67m<sup>2</sup> three-bedroom flat.

Eighty percent of the newly renovated flats have already been sold.

Ngaire Blankenberg, director of Space Marketing and Investments, which is selling the flats, said: "We are absolutely thrilled. The numbers just confirmed what we've been saying all



SMALL BUT STYLISH: Ponte apartments are selling fast

Picture: KEVIN SUTHERLAND

along — people have a huge amount of faith in the renewal of Joburg, and can't wait to invest in a spectacular building like Ponte City."

Said by its developers to be the tallest residential

building in the Southern Hemisphere, and within walking distance of Ellis Park Stadium, Ponte is appealing to property speculators ahead of the 2010 Soccer World Cup.

**Buyers can choose décor styles such as 'Glam Rock', 'Moroccan Delight' and 'Old Money'**

for middle and upper-middle class tenants.

She said most buyers were singles and those who already owned property and were buying in Ponte as an investment.

Drew Lindsay, owner of Spaza Art Gallery in Troyeville, was among the 300 people who attended the show day on October 28. He said the excitement was "like being at a bargain basement sale with red stickers [showing sold units] everywhere. There were lots of buppies, yuppies and BEEs."

Architect Clive Chipkin, author of the definitive *Johannesburg Style: Architecture and Society, 1880s-1960s*, said that Ponte "went into a crisis, it became a little Kinshasa and then a little Addis Ababa".

But security is high on the developer's agenda. "Once phase one is complete, there would be a 24-hour security system that will ensure access is strictly controlled,"

said Rametse.

She said the fully renovated building would consist of 467 flats and a floor of shops, with a restaurant, supermarket, gym, cafés, a large childrer's play area, a climbing wall and parking.

Property valuations expert Graham Ewing said he was not surprised that so many of the flats had already been sold.

Ewing said that Ponte prices would rise even higher than they are now.

"There is not likely to be another Ponte," he said.

The apartments are all fully furnished and buyers can choose décor styles, including "Glam Rock", which Rametse described as "velvets and satins mixed with neo-classical pieces".

Other styles on offer include "Moroccan Delight" and the more traditional "Old Money".

Chipkin said he called Ponte Joburg's St Paul's. "When I used to draw pictures of London, there's always the big St Paul's Cathedral and smaller churches around it.

"Ponte is visible from everywhere, from half way to Pretoria and Krugersdorp. It's also visible from Heidelberg road from the east."



# Makeover for notorious Ponte

*The plan to turn the iconic high-rise block into an upmarket mixed-use development seems farfetched – but reinvention is Joburg's trademark*

**P**ONTE Towers is hardly the stuff of dreams. Yet, Joburg's ugliest building has inspired one-time Hollywood producer and South African-born David Selvan to invest R260m in the high-rise block. He plans to turn Ponte into funky, upmarket apartments – where we might all want to live.

Or would we? At the launch this week – the place was still a building site – the building looked like a ghastly communist housing project, sinister, haunted by a torrid past. Wasn't this the home of the city's drug lords?

There was talk at one time of turning the place into a prison, and the joke went that you just needed to lock the door.

There was also talk that the inner section of the strange, cylindrical building had three storeys of rubbish in it. Residents tossed the contents of their bins out the window.



But property developers and Hollywood producers have a lot in common: the ability to turn dreams into reality – at some expense, of course. Hopefully, Ponte Towers will turn into a multimillion-rand blockbuster.

Selvan is convincing. After his speech at the launch I felt a whole lot better about the place, I liked the idea of a lobby pianist and coffee on the piazza. I wasn't sure about the neighbourhood. Sometimes you can fix it, often not.

Imagine, said Selvan, you live on the 32nd floor of Ponte. You awake at 5.30 and look out at the view, the finest in the city.

You go for a run around the track circling the complex, or to the Ponte gym. You meet your partner for coffee on the piazza. Later, you drive the kids to school to nearby St John's, King Edward VII or Roedeane, and then you connect with the rapid bus system and shoot off to work.

This is a picture of an upper middle-class life, although I don't think Ponte, new or old, is the likely home of a St John's or Roedeane family.

We were invited on a tour of one floor of show apartments – taking the wobbly lifts, which spooked the journalists. Only a few were brave enough to travel up to the 50th floor to see the view from the penthouses.

The apartments are okay, but hardly upmarket.

The furniture – the apartments come decorated – is gorgeous. But the rooms are tiny and the kitchens are badly designed.

They've left the original windows – and they shouldn't have.

The circular shape is jarring. Does it make you feel suicidal? After a while, would you just want to give up and leap out of the bedroom window?

Certainly the view from the passages into the inner cylindrical core is pretty grim. The developers are putting glass viewing boxes there, and only they know why. Who wants to look at floor upon floor of flats?

However, this is really a move by the establishment into previously uncharted waters, and it

Pam Golding Properties' Andre Dippenaar sees it in the same mould as other once-controversial, and now hugely successful, projects such as Pecanwood and Melrose Arch.

And in a city that has reinvented itself many times – from tented city to Edwardian buildings to skyscrapers – who are we to argue?



## PROPERTY

# Ponte dream crumbles

Has the R400m dream by two developers to turn Ponte into an iconic apartment block collapsed? Less than a week after Pam Golding Properties launched it, the seller, Tony Cotterell, has put Nour Ayoub and David Selvan to terms because they haven't paid for the property.

Ayoub (with 80%) and Selvan (20%) bought Ponte last year for R110m with the sectional title register already open and spent about R30m on initial refurbishment and show flats. They launched the 54-floor property for sale late last year and apparently sold over 100 of the 470 flats for about R80m. But the *FM* understands that only about half of these were granted bonds and are ready for transfer. This was not enough to raise finance to pay for the building. The *FM* understands Selvan approached a number of property investors to inject capital in return for a 30% stake, saying his partner had not produced his share of the capital needed. They soon started contacting

Cotterell directly.

"I believe Ayoub and Selvan's vision is a sound one, with many millions of rand in potential profit. A developer with sufficient capital could make it happen," says Cotterell. "We're in the process of cancelling and I shall start talking to a number of developers who've approached me." Cotterell bought Ponte 15 years ago from Cape developers Ian Hirschon and Steve Phelps for R17m and spent R30m on it.

He's about the only investor who has made money out of Ponte in its 30-year history. "It's been very profitable," he says. "Together with the rent from the Vodacom sign on the roof, net income is about R10m/year." Golding's Andre Dippenaar is confident Ponte remains hot property despite the current market slump. Fully furnished flats are priced at R420 000 for a 30 m<sup>2</sup> bachelor unit. A 67 m<sup>2</sup> three-bedroom unit is going for R960 000.

Dippenaar intends targeting owners and occupiers who work for major companies and institutions nearby and investors who will rent to employees who can't afford to buy. He expects rents to start at R3 500 for a bachelor unit to R6 500 for a three-bed unit. A rental of "between 0,7% and 0,8% is attractive these days to investors", he says.

Ian Fife



# Ponte is proof a revamp can work

**BARRY BATEMAN**

PROPER credit control, secure access and buy-in from residents are just three of the ingredients in the recipe for a successful, healthy building. If it worked for the notorious Ponte tower in Joburg, it can work for the Kruger Park and Schubart Park buildings in Pretoria.

But how do you transform a dilapidated, overcrowded, illegally occupied building in the city centre

security was brought in and services to the building were put in place. In other words, the building worked."

Schaefer said it required significant investment to clean up the backlog, but doing so showed a commitment to the tenants that something was being done.

"It creates buy-in to the process."

He said rent collection had to be enforced, which proved to be one of the biggest challenges because it meant some people would be evict-



# Ponte gepoets

## Ikoniese baken van Goudstad kry nuwe lewe

Ügen Vos

**D**ie Ponte-toringgebou in Hillbrow skud jare se stof en afskeep af en lok dank-sy 'n onlangse hernuwingsprojek en skouspelagtige uitsig op die Johannesburgse middestad al hoe meer inwoners.

Die kleurmake maak hulle

nou aanduidings dat die ikoniese gebou sy ou glorie dae sal herleef.

Ponte spog deesdae met opgeknapte woonstelle en 'n groot aantal begeesterde nuwe intrek-

kers. Daar's groot planne om binnekort verskeie nuwe winkels op die perseel en

### Herrys ná verval

Die situasie in die Ponte-toringgebou het vroeër dermate agteruitgegaan dat daar in 1998 selfs voorgestel is dat die gebou met sy twee 173 m-skagte in 'n tronc omskep word.

Dié skagte was teen daardie tyd heeltemal vervul met rommel wat inwoners wat nie die moeite wou doen om hul vullis te verwyder nie daar afgegooi het.

Volgens [joburgcentral.co.za](http://joburgcentral.co.za) is 'n groot-skaalse skoonmaakprojek in 2001 begin en 'n verbeterde veiligheidstelsel in gebruik geneem.

Ponte het kort daarna die aandag van die ontwikkelaars Nour Ayyoub en David Selvan getrek.

Die gebou se potensiaal het hulle so begeester dat hulle R100 miljoen opsy gesit het vir 'n hernuwingsprojek.

Die droom is egter in 2008 daarmee heen toe dit aan die lig gekom het dat Ayyoub en



# Ponte's fourth coming: An urban icon reborn

Johannesburg's most infamous building has gone through glory days and gory days. And now, in its latest incarnation, it just may have found its mojo

Nickolaus Bauer

**T**he thought of venturing into Ponte Towers remains cringe-worthy to many South Africans. They continue to see it as a den of iniquity run by drug dealers and thugs. Likely, the most people will be able to tell you about the current state of the building is the change in colour of the Vodacom sign that adorns its crest.

But apart from the branding that dominates Johannesburg's skyline going from blue to red, Ponte has undergone another metamorphosis of sorts. By all accounts, the grizzled concrete cylinder is slowly turning into a haven for the middle class in the city centre.

The rattle of cement mixers and jackhammers is resounding once again and the once-forgotten flats are filling up with residents less interested in Ponte's shady history and more concerned with its future.

"Historically, Ponte Towers was the place to be," says Jayson Kruger, spokesperson for the East London-based Kempston Group, which owns the building. "We realise it will never

return to its former glory, but our goal is to restore dignity to Ponte and create a safe and inviting environment for people to live in."

When it opened its doors in 1975, Ponte Towers was the *crème de la crème* of city living. But by the mid-1980s, Hillbrow's melting pot of cultures became a lair for the nefarious activities of the Johannesburg underworld and Ponte's glory days ended almost as quickly as they came. In the 1990s, it got even worse: the decade is punctuated with tales of drug dealers, prostitutes and criminals running free within its walls.

Residents of that era claim the 11th and 12th floors were completely stripped bare and, along with the downstairs parking lot, were nothing more than spots to score. Both were informal brothels, used as a thoroughfare for those in search of anything ranging from an acid trip to a blow job.

Resident security guard Philemon Thwala, who moved into the building in the late 1990s, witnessed Ponte's multiple realities. "Ponte was not in a good space when I first moved in. There was a lot going on: crime, people misbehaving, drugs and prostitution. It was hectic. I knew nothing about these things but learnt quickly how bad they can make your life."

But in 2001 Kempston managed to drag the building back from oblivion. Employing the services of Elma and Danie Celliers, a husband-and-wife management team, Ponte was given new hope.

By the time they arrived, the building was easily one of the most dangerous places to live in South Africa. But Danie, a former cop, was not fazed as he set about cleaning out the rot that gave rise to Ponte's tarnished image.

"Jeez, it was bad," he told *Maverick* magazine in September 2007.

"Nothing was working. In one flat I found a tomato plant growing out of the sink. It filled up the whole kitchen. It was a tree, that thing. Big tomatoes on it, too."

Although it was nothing like the glory days, the cleanup led by the Celliers paid off: it was a safe, low-cost living space boasting a 97% occupancy. Then in 2007, at the height of the property boom, developers David Selvan and Noor Addine Ayyoub arrived on the scene.

They had bigger plans. They told any media outlet that would listen that they intended to pour R200-million into Ponte, with the hopes of flogging luxury sectional-title apartments ranging from R340 000 to R3.5-million. They knocked out and stripped floors 11 to 34, moved 1 500 residents out and were ready to completely renovate the building.

They equipped a handful of apartments with luxury finishes, such as granite tops in the kitchens and designer wardrobes in the bedrooms, to act as showrooms, and gave them names like "Zen-Like", "Moroccan Delight" and "Old Money".

But the pair's lofty ambitions came crashing down in little more than a year and several contractors, as well as a handful of would-be residents or investors who had bought into the

venture ahead of the planned first-phase occupancy in 2008, were all left out of pocket.

The *Mail & Guardian* revealed in 2009 that claims that Ayyoub and Selvan had bought the building from Kempston for a reported R110-million to R112-million were untrue. In fact, Kempston had always owned the building and Selvan and Ayyoub had started construction before they had the money to complete the sale.

So the opulent transformation was left unfinished, Ponte was left in tatters, the tallest residential building in the southern hemisphere was stripped from head to toe and its infamous core filled up to the fifth floor with building rubble and general refuse.

Of the 467 flats in the building, just more than 40 were occupied when reconstruction finally ceased. Kempston took back the building in 2009, beginning its own refurbishment in the Selvan and Ayyoub aftermath, a process which lasted a little more than two years.

"It was difficult to attract residents back. We had to reconstruct everything, from the infrastructure inside right up to the perception people had outside," Kruger says.

By late 2011, almost all 54 floors had been redone, many from scratch, with approximately 2km of electrical wiring and sanitary piping used on each floor. Possibly the toughest task fell to Quinton Oosthuizen, construction and maintenance manager for Ponte, as he led the team clearing out the notorious core.

"It was nasty; we pulled out some very funny things. Anything from mattresses, rubble, loose steel, kitchen and bathroom fittings — even dead stray cats," Oosthuizen says.

The biggest financial burden during refurbishment was the installation of eight new elevators to replace the decades-old deathtraps that stalked up and down the building. Strict security was implemented, such as around-the-clock guarding and biometric fingerprint access at all entry points to the building. The ground floor, with its 2 000m<sup>2</sup> of commercial space, has its internet café back and, according to Kruger, fast-food operator Bimbo's is due to open later this year. But the crowning jewel will be the 54th-floor walkway that, when finally completed, will allow people to walk around the exterior of Ponte on reinforced glass panelling, kitted out in a harness attached to a railing around the building.

Whereas property companies operating in Hillbrow and nearby Berea offer valuations of the entire building that vary from R50-million to R200-million, Kruger says his latest valuation of the property puts it at R500-million. Still, he maintains there are no plans to sell Ponte at this stage, even in the sectional title model that was touted in 2007.

"Our group doesn't believe in being in partnership anymore. You could recoup an initial investment, but you lose control in the long run. We'd only sell it as a whole — if ever," Kruger says.

Now at 75% occupancy, Ponte's remaining accommodation is in demand. Maki Tsekefetsa, Ponte receptionist and resident, says she deals with up to 10 applications a day.

"We have a good mix of people here. South Africans, people from the Congo, Zambians, Zimbabweans — we all live here together," Tsekefetsa says.

There is a mix of families and single professionals ranging from waiters to administrators. Rentals vary from R2 000 for a pad on the 11th floor to R3 200 for a three-bedroom on the 34th floor and R4 500 for a two-bedroom penthouse on the 51st floor, complete with marble tiles and modern kitchen with granite countertops.

Tsekefetsa says there are occasional problems with the non-payment of rent, but for the most part residents seem happy to pay for a building they think is safe, clean and affordable. Children play in the corridors and spend sunny days next to the swimming pool. A weekly newsletter is circulated to all residents informing them of the latest developments in the building as well as suggestions on how to keep things tidy. A recent newsletter pointed out the major

problem these days: the unwillingness of some residents to place their garbage inside the dustbins, leaving trash adjacent to or on top of bins.

It is all a far cry from the problems Ponte experienced in the past, but remnants of yesteryear still linger.

The core may have been cleared out but residents — as they had in the past — continue to use it as an informal garbage heap, where you will find used condoms, empty KFC buckets, tatty weaves, stale pap and razor blades.

Nonetheless, Gugu Ndlovu, a resident of Ponte since 2008, says any perception of Ponte as a place of ill repute is outdated. "What's a home without rules? This is a great place to live and it's getting better. Things change and times change — just come and see," Ndlovu says.

It is aeons away from the aura Ponte enjoyed in the late 1970s and 1980s, far from the drug and prostitution haven of the 1990s and nowhere near Ayyoub and Selvan's vision of luxury city living, but it is workable. Ponte's latest evolution has given it a new lease on life. It seems the idea of middle-class suburbia locked into a concrete tube in the middle of the city might have finally found its groove.

**Ponte Towers: It's not what you would expect. Watch the video at [mg.co.za/pontevideo](http://mg.co.za/pontevideo)**

## Tower trivia

- At 173m high, Ponte is said to be the tallest residential building in the southern hemisphere.
- The Vodacom sign, which contains 11km of neon tubing, will dominate the skyline until 2015. The contract reportedly brings in R500 000 a month.
- Ponte opened its doors in 1975 at a cost of R11-million. It was voted the second-ugliest building in the country by *Fair Lady* magazine a few years later; first prize went to Johannesburg General Hospital.

- In 1998 there was a plan to turn Ponte into a prison. It never got further than talk.
- Architect Rodney Grosskopff was 29 when he designed Ponte. Since then, he has done the Johannesburg Civic Theatre, the Randburg Waterfront and Sandton's Emperor Apartments.
- Released in 1998, the movie *Dangerous Ground*, with Ice Cube and Fitzpatrick Hurler, was partially filmed in Ponte. — Source: *Maverick*, September 2007



First edition published in 2014

© 2014 Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse for images

© 2014 individual authors for texts

© 2014 original copyright holders for archival material

© 2014 Steidl Publishers for this edition

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any other storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

ISBN 978-3-86930-750-3

Printed in Germany by Steidl

buckets, tatty weaves, stale pap and  
razor blades?

Nonetheless, Gugu Ndlovu, a resi-  
dent of Ponte since 2008, says any  
perception of Ponte as a place of ill  
repute is outdated. "What's a home  
without rules? This is a great place  
to live and it's getting better. Things  
change and times change — just  
come and see," Ndlovu says.

It is aeons away from the aura  
Ponte enjoyed in the late 1970s and  
1980s, far from the drug and pros-  
titution haven of the 1990s and  
nowhere near Ayyoub and Selvan's  
vision of luxury city living, but it is  
workable. Ponte's latest evolution  
has given it a new lease on life. It  
seems the idea of middle-class subur-  
bia locked into a concrete tube in the  
middle of the city might have finally  
found its groove



2101 — 2113

2001 — 2013

1901 — 1913

1801 — 1813

1701 — 1713

1601 — 1613

