





# LIVE YOUR LIFE





LIVE YOUR LIFE

“In every major city in the world, there is a building where most can only dream to live. These buildings are desirable because they are unique, luxurious, iconic. They require neither introduction nor explanation. The address says it all.”





## LIVE YOUR LIFE

Furniture Packages on Offer. These packages include beds and mattresses, sofas, table and chairs, a stove, fridge, microwave, dishwasher.

FUTURE SLICK: A super slick selection of glass, contemporary and chrome pieces that bring across an uncluttered, modern and minimalist ambience with contrasting colours.

GLOBAL FUSION: An African influenced decor mixed with colourful contemporary pieces.

GLAM ROCK: A sophisticated mix of indulgent velvet and satins mixed with neo classical pieces.

MOROCCAN DELIGHT: A Moroccan influenced decor that is a decadent mix of embroidered fabrics and carved wooden pieces.

OLD MONEY: For the more oldfashioned resident an apartment that exudes elegance and charm and timeless classics.

ZEN LIKE: A cool, serene and organic environment with natural wood pieces and natural colour tones.





Subject: Re: Fwd: Ponte- insurance  
Date: Tue, 13 Mar 2007 14:32:52 +0200

Hi [REDACTED]

20 reasons why we should **NOT** insure Ponte:-

1. Ponte is a legendary drug haven.
2. This is a high-rise residential building perched precariously on the Witwatersrand gold reef seam (subsidence exposure).
3. The building is occupied as “cheap” accommodation.
4. The building is predominately occupied by foreign nationals.
5. The nature of the accommodation lends itself to gross overpopulation of the flats.
6. Malicious damage to fitting, fixtures and machinery is rife.
7. The Fire Dept & Ambulance Dept. will not enter the building without a police escort.
8. The electrical reticulation system has been modified so often by tenants that it can best be described as “unsafe”.
9. The building is in an undesirable area for insurance purposes (Comtech Circular circa 2002).
10. The building has a massive centre core atrium open at the top.
11. The centre core will, in the event of a fire, perfectly facilitate convectional fire spread-the “chimney” effect.
12. In the event of a fire on the lower floors extensive damage is envisaged, hence high EML's are probable.

13. There is a large weighty fluorescent “Vodacom” sign on the roof.
14. In the event of a fire and any structural deterioration the weight of the sign could facilitate structural collapse.
15. We are sure that due to the nature of the occupancy, claims incurred are not reported.
16. The centre core of the building is used as a rubbish disposal system and at times accumulated domestic waste encompasses more than 2 storeys.
17. The centre core of the building is a popular suicide spot.
18. The elevated basement area is used as informal panel beaters and automotive repairers.
19. The wet rising water mains have been removed.
20. Access to the building and egress from the building in the event of a fire is near impossible.

Practically speaking this building is a disaster, from an insurance perspective, in our opinion this building is uninsurable.

In order to insure this type of high-rise there needs to be extensive fire safety and security systems, procedures, controls and plans in place that satisfy all relevant legislation. the likelihood of this being in place is slim and I think we will be wasting our time.

Kind regards.



# RECEPTION







## REDEVELOPMENT 2007/08

*Note by David Selvan*

Ponte shapes the Johannesburg skyline. Its heft and girth perfectly proportioned for its height. A huge tall round building, so much part of the city's look that it feels as if it has been there forever. The neon sign that rings the top of the building, first a Coke advertisement and then Vodacom, seemed to desecrate Ponte's image when it first appeared, before the city allowed such advertising. Now it seems so natural. One audacious building that defines the city.

Ponte once stood for a living standard beyond reach, imagined opulence within its walled embrace. Who knew what went on there?

I bought Ponte in 2007, a bit more than 30 years after it was built. At the time, the building was occupied by ordinary working class South Africans. Foreigners were not permitted. This in Berea adjacent to Hillbrow, once the most cosmopolitan European area in South Africa and now peopled from all over the continent. There were no mythical Nigerian drug-dealers in Ponte. It was a place of anomie now overregulated under the banner of xenophobia.

People reminded me that a previous proposal for the building was to turn it into a prison. I envisaged an integrated village environment for modern middle-class people who love edgy urban living. A place to dream, a base to launch new ideas into the world. Spectrums of colour, light.

We planned to sell off the apartments individually. Give new apartment owners a stake in the building. How to proceed?

The current residents all knew who I was and that the building had been sold. I met them outside the lifts and inside their apartments. Questions were asked and answered. I wanted Wi-Fi for the building when its new residents moved in; electronic notice boards for people to communicate, arrange book clubs, babysitting, dates. The working class residents by word of mouth knew what was going on the day it happened. A magical whoosh of news up and down that internal void.



The residents were at liberty to buy apartments, but this was not a real liberty since no one could afford the prices, which started at around half a million rands for a one-bedroom flat. We offered the residents alternative places to live and gave them time to rearrange their lives. Emptied the bottom half of the building gradually and peacefully. Three months. No forced evictions. No social turmoil. Each family moved with its own private turmoil.

Ponte is a concrete phalanx. Decades of social battering have only wrecked its clothing. The building structure is solid. So solid that when we wanted to alter a small concrete overhang we considered dynamite. I think the builders were concerned about gold mining, a world of interlaced tunnels beneath Egoli now filling with acid water. Whatever that concrete spec is, the structure could withstand a nuclear attack.

Our redesign of the building largely involved furnishings and upgrading the infrastructure – electricity, plumbing, bathrooms and kitchens. Except for the penthouses. There we planned to cut through the slab and create new spaces. From there you look down on helicopters and light planes flying below your line of vision. They are huge double-storey apartments at the top of the world. We priced them starting at R5 million each and had offers to purchase at a very early stage.

It turned out that the penthouses were not the top of the building. There were a further two hidden floors. The lifts did not go to these floors. You have to walk up the stairs. To the ‘servants’ quarters.’ These quarters are at the top of Ponte above the penthouses, with a perimeter wall that prevents anyone looking out, because why would architects want servants to view the world outside? Post Second World War apartment blocks in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg during the apartheid years. Check them out.

One of the first things my financial partner and I did as the new Ponte owners was to hop off the top of the building tied to ropes and harnesses, and we dangled bit by bit all the way down. You cannot abseil off the outside of Ponte because of the windows. Large sliding windows, eyes to the horizon from inside the apartments, a nightmare for parents with young children. Took us 45 insect minutes to climb down. The big step was the first step over the edge, looking down at the ground from way up.

Inside the central core of the building was dark and gloomy. Look up and it was silent. Now and then a bird. To stop residents throwing rubbish into this central space, the circular interior corridor windows were all sealed, creating tubes of stagnant air.

I wondered whether we might have a mighty revolving mirror at the top of Ponte, to follow the sun and reflect light and warmth into the core. My financial partner wondered if we should put a lid over the core. We talked about a giant hanging sculpture, or a hanging garden. We designed light boxes on each of the corridors jutting out into the core so that residents could step into glass look-outs, except these would be look-ins, lit up in different colours so that from the bottom they would resemble multicoloured fireflies.

For the ground floor below the multilevel parking zones we considered a convention centre that could show films to residents and a play area with the country’s highest internal climbing wall, circled on the retail floor by coffee houses and restaurants. We spoke to Virgin Active, Pick n Pay, and Checkers. Nando’s came to have a look. Everyone came to have a look.

The key to modern buildings is steel and lifts. Globally lifts transport more than 7 billion people every few days. So the first problem for a developer is the lifts. Ponte is 54 storeys high: you walk up the stairs only if you are saving heavily on gym membership fees. The lifts are forever breaking down and so the residents wait. These are old lifts. If kids press multiple lift buttons, modern lifts sense when the compartment is empty and do not travel mindlessly to each floor. Ponte lifts stop at each floor regardless. Modern lifts do not send more than one compartment to the same floor when someone presses a button. Ponte lifts do just that. We budgeted millions for modern lifts.

The existing fingerprint access system at Ponte is a nightmare. It is inefficient and cannot handle the rush-hour movements of residents through its single turnstile. It is quite feasible to wait an hour to get to your apartment after work. But these biometric systems give owners control over who comes and goes and we were going to implement them as well. Security is always a key to a residential area in Joburg. We planned for multiple turnstiles and very little waiting.

We redesigned the gardens outside, conceived of a ranging



jogging area. We transformed some of the first residential floors into business floors to give the building a daytime function, business people to gaze over the city.

So there we were. We fully renovated one residential floor half-way up the building as a showcase to start the sale of apartments in the first half of Ponte; in ten days we had offers to buy over 80% of these apartments. Around 50% would just about cover the purchase price for the whole building and much of the next stage of development. Until the financial crash came to the world. Crash.

The banks withdrew. Not only from Ponte. I did not see it coming. Eyes cast inwardly not internationally. Bad mistake. Pam Golding believed we could still pull it off with some bridge financing and six more months, but my financial partner jumped ship and that was the end of that. I set about canvassing the property investment world for a new financier; more than 50 considered my proposition, and some came close, but no one was bold enough to go for it. Back-slappers became back-stabbers and went for everything I owned.

To turn Ponte into a thriving home for bright-minded, middle-class residents living an avant-garde lifestyle was no fairy tale. It was a bold initiative at just the right time and I have no doubt it would have worked. Could still work. Major corporates and government buildings are within five kilometres of Ponte. The airport is less than 20 minutes away. The Johannesburg CBD is turning around. I have seen it happen in Soho, London; in Manhattan; in LA.

Today I only look at Ponte from the corner of my eye. I have been inside. I have looked at the misty horizon. It breaks my heart.





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Right: Found marketing material for New Ponte, 2008  
Back cover: *Mail & Guardian*, 2008





# Ponte project crashes

It doesn't seem that Hillbrow's towering monolith will get the makeover everybody's been talking about, writes **Tanya Pampalone**

**O**nce upon a time on the edge of Hillbrow two men dreamed of transforming Jo'burg's towering, tattered Ponte into a luxury apartment complex.

From 2007 David Selvan and Nour Addine Ayyoub had been telling anyone who would listen — and every reporter from the *International Herald Tribune* to the *Christian Science Monitor* did — that their R200-million project would transform the iconic building into a glamorous and sought-after place to live. First phase occupation date: April 2008.

Today Ponte sits half-empty, a construction zone without construction, mired in would-be lawsuits and promises of what was to be. From unpaid contractors and suppliers to wronged ex-employees and unhappy investors, Ponte is, once again, causing a stir.

Renier de Waal, a contractor hired by Ayyoub's company, Investagain, to make cupboards for the apartments, says he was stiffed for more than R1-million. In his workshop in Kya Sands doors lie in tall stacks and cupboards are wrapped in plastic, unit numbers carefully labelled in black marker, ready for delivery.

Ponte's project manager, Mario Familiar, says the collective total owed to the numerous contractors and suppliers could be as high as R5-million.

This doesn't take into account investors who bought into the dream. One, who asked not to be named, says he'd like his R15 000 deposit back. If he could only figure out who to get it back from. "I don't know who has my money or where it is," he says. "I just want it back."

It's not easy to find out where that money might be. The once-talkative Selvan, an attorney turned film producer, and Ayyoub, a software developer turned property mogul, no longer want to talk. Ayyoub won't take calls and his lawyer declines to comment. Selvan says only that he will say something soon.

It turns out Selvan and Ayyoub never, in fact, purchased the building for the reported R110- to R112-million from the East London-based Kempston Group.

"There was a lot written in the press, a lot was said and done about the deal that wasn't necessarily true," says Jason Kruger, Kempston Group spokesperson. "What I can confirm at this stage is that the deal between Ayyoub and the consortium has been cancelled and we are looking at alternatives."

About the deal, Kruger says only that it was "fairly complex and unique" and allowed the developers to refurbish the building "at their sole risk" before taking ownership.

The strategy for payment appears to be based, at least partially, on investors' deposits and the accompanying bank sureties on pre-sold units, although in interviews with Selvan and Ayyoub last year, the two indicated there was another backer — who they declined to name — that would come up with the bulk of the financing.

Sources say payment on the building was due in June 2008 and that, in the end, Selvan and Ayyoub couldn't shore up the funds.

Ponte speaks for itself. The top half of the building — floors 35 and up — is

partly occupied by long-time residents who continue to take one of the two working elevators up to their homes in the sky. The lower part — floors 11 to 34 — sits empty and half-built; the 1500 people who once lived there were told to pack up a year ago.

The former retail floors below are an empty shell. All that went to make room for New Ponte, the one with a state-of-the-art gym and upmarket grocery store, a climbing wall sprouting up from the centre of the core,

looking up and into the bachelor flats starting at R300 000 and all the way to the top multi-level penthouses going for a dizzying R3,5-million.

Today, in the reception area, Pam Golding signs gather dust and glossy mock-ups of what was to be — sleek elevators, a glowing core lit with neon light boxes — cling to the walls.

The showroom on floor 32 is laid with royal-blue carpet and matching LED lights. Signs on the apartment doors of the fully furnished models

on offer read: Zen-Like, Moroccan Delight and Old Money, and come complete with granite counter tops, 30-inch flat-screen TVs, silver Defy appliances and faux suede sofas.

But in the real Ponte rubble from broken-down walls fills the inner core of the building where the climbing wall was to be, windows on every floor are broken out and the stairwell railings are stripped.

After Ponte's show day in October 2007 the developers claimed they had signed agreements on 80% of the first phase — more than 260 units.

But by April cracks were appearing in the dream's foundation. Suppliers were grumbling about payment and the group's in-house marketing team dissolved.

Pam Golding was brought in. By July Ayyoub was no longer taking calls or returning emails from unpaid contractors or even staff members.

Pam Golding spokesperson Roseanne Marshall says the company received a letter from Kempston in November asking it to discontinue sales while ownership of the building was renegotiated.

De Waal hopes it will be.

"I can't use this for another job," he says, pointing to cabinets designed for Ponte. "I hope whoever buys will say: 'Look, this place is nearly complete,' and will ask us to come in to finish the job."