



# MONTEBELLO DESIGN CENTRE

a project supporting local art, craft & design

18 November 2016

Montebello considers the article on the greenhouse at Montebello published in the Sunday Times on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> November to be both misleading and poorly researched. We have asked the Sunday Times to publish our response.

To correct the more flagrant errors in the article :

Montebello Design Centre is NOT demolishing the greenhouse, as alleged in the article. Instead, it will be restored. The entire base structure will remain and the board of Montebello Design Centre is investigating possibilities for the replacement of most of the glass structure with new glass and more durable building materials than the rotten wood that has now become a danger to the public.

The Montebello Design Centre board is NOT planning a conference centre as reported by the Sunday Times. The approximately 50 square metre proposed addition (the approximate size of a double garage) to the original greenhouse structure, plus toilets and kitchenette facilities, is in the initial concept phase of being explored as a possible additional classroom, workshop or very small exhibition space.

A double storey structure as reported by the Sunday Times, is NOT being planned and has NEVER been considered.

The greenhouse is NOT, as claimed by the reporter, “*South Africa’s oldest greenhouse*”. What it is is one of the last remaining of its type; such greenhouses were never designed to be structures that would last a long time, and it is only because of the care and attention that Montebello Design Centre has given it that we have been able to extend its life.

No fee has EVER been paid to the architect, let alone a fee of R135 000. To date, the architect has kindly not even billed Montebello Design Centre. Moreover, Graaff NEVER confirmed to anyone, let alone the reporter, that any fee was paid to any architect.

The Sunday Times article alleges that Mason, the owner of the greenhouse tenant, has been “*paying a maintenance levy to Graaff for almost a decade – amounting to about R135 000*”. Graaff has NEVER received R135 000, or any other amount, from Mason or the tenant. All rent and other payments made by the tenant were made not

to Graaff, but to Montebello Design Centre, the employer of Graaff. To suggest, as your article does, that Graaff personally has been receiving large sums from the tenant, and has not used those sums for their intended purpose, is defamatory.

That maintenance levy of approximately R135 000 was paid by the tenant to Montebello Design Centre in terms of the written lease with the tenant, for the purpose of repairs and maintenance to the greenhouse. The maintenance levy was paid by the tenant to Montebello Design Centre during the period from November 2007 to July 2015; since July 2015 no further levy has been paid by the tenant. Between 2007 and 2016 Montebello Design Centre spent a total of R55 740 out of those levy funds on repairs and maintenance for the greenhouse. The levy funds have at all times been held in a special, interest-bearing account. As at the end of the most recent financial year of Montebello Design Centre (May 2016) the amount held in that special account was R116 470. This amount represents a fraction of what will be required for the restoration of the greenhouse.

The article records, with clearly implied disapproval, that “*the residents association said it had not been approached (by Montebello Design Centre or Graaff) for comment*”. Presumably, the reporter intended to refer to the Rate Payers’ Association.

Because Montebello Design Centre has not yet formulated a substantive proposal concerning the greenhouse, it is inappropriate to consult formally with the Rate Payers’ Association, or any other interested or affected party. Montebello Design Centre has, however, contrary to what your article suggests, already been in informal discussion with the chairperson of the Rate Payers’ Association, to advise the chairperson that the Association will be notified of all meetings between Montebello Design Centre and its architect, and will be welcome to send a representative to those meetings.

It goes without saying that Montebello Design Centre will, in restoring and making possible additions to the greenhouse, consult with and obtain permission from all parties and bodies required by law.

Montebello is working with experienced heritage officials (Dimitri Georgeades, David Hart, Sjanet Martin, Mark Bell and Jacqui Marais) from the City of Cape Town’s Environmental Resource Management Department (Energy, Environment and Spatial Planning Directorate) under the management of Lorraine Gerrans.

In conclusion, we should point out that the article’s second headline, which begins with the phrase “*Battle lines form*” is neatly illustrative of the errors of fact and unwarranted conclusions which characterise the article as a whole. There is no “*battle*”. There is only a tenant who, for whatever reason, does not wish Montebello Design Centre to carry out the necessary repair and restoration work to preserve the greenhouse, render it safe and, in addition, serve the overall interests of the Montebello community and the wishes of the donor.

Yours faithfully  
Philip Todres  
Chairman