



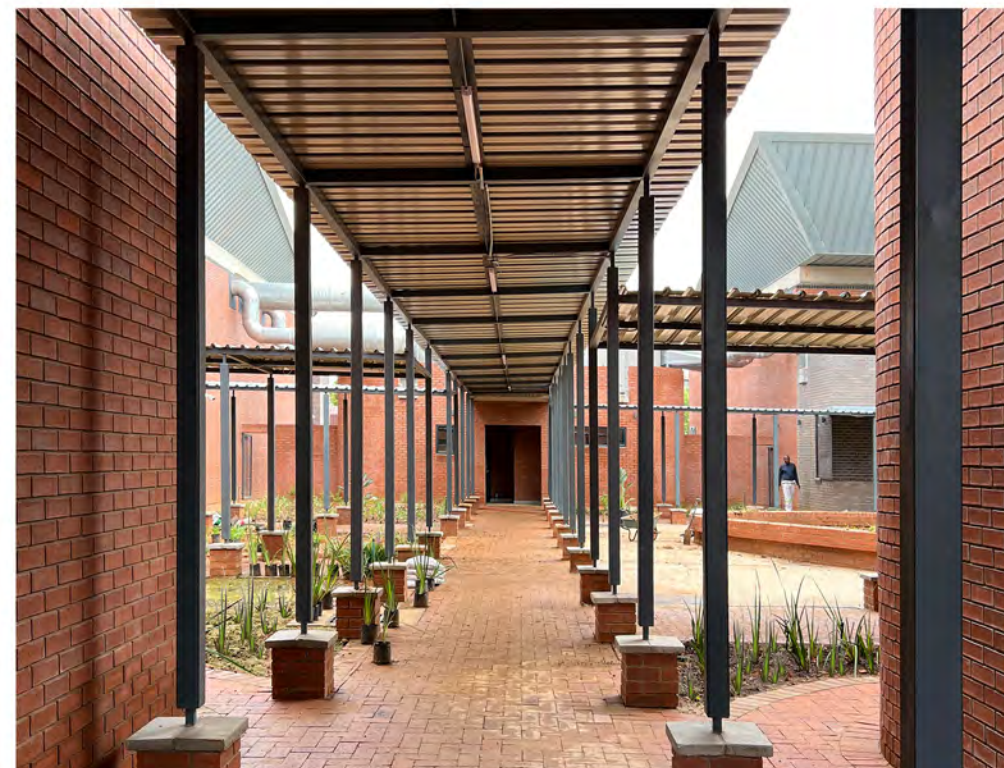
The new Lecture Hall Complex at the heart of the North-West University's Vaal Campus, designed by Mathews and Associates Architects, provides the university with upgraded facilities and contributes to a cohesive campus identity and urban plan.

Photography: Supplied

The new lecture hall complex at the North-West University's Vaal Campus marks the completion of the second phase of a multi-phase development at the campus by Mathews and Associates Architects. The first phase, a new administration building, was featured in the April/May 2022 edition of *Leading Architecture + Design*, and a third building is in progress.

The administration building set in motion a larger endeavour that runs through all phases of the campus development, which involves establishing a cohesive architectural identity for the campus that communicates the university's values and aspirations. Each individual building contributes to an urban design framework for the campus that will improve circulation, tie together various parts of the campus into a more coherent, unified rationale, and engender a palpable 'campus atmosphere' while making provision for future developments.

SIMPLICITY AND COMPLEXITY



The new lecture hall complex is nestled among several existing buildings, with the conscious intention of increasing the density of the campus development, activating its walkways and injecting pedestrian activity and vitality into the urban fabric of the campus.

The complex comprises four lecture halls: three 200-seaters and one 360-seater, plus ablution facilities. Two additional 100-seat lecture halls are planned.

The four buildings are arranged around an open internal courtyard or *lekgotla*, which functions as an outdoor foyer. The lecture halls (with soundproofed doors) open directly onto the courtyard, which becomes a gathering space for students between lectures, providing opportunities for socialising and indoor/outdoor learning.

This outdoor area has been planted with *apiesdoring* (monkey thorn) trees, which will create a shaded canopy. Organically shaped brick planters, column plinths and other elements of the landscaping double as seating, encouraging students to linger and interact. Covered walkways provide shelter and tie the arrangement together, ensuring comfort, safety and ease of access even when it is raining. This and other courtyards, squares and secondary spaces will link and feed into an envisioned central boulevard that will ultimately run through the campus like a 'spine'.

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The lecture halls themselves feature tall mono-pitch roofs, a remarkably simple architectural gesture that serves several functions at once. Their height contains the courtyard space, establishing a relationship between the façade and the courtyard. The high points of the mono-pitch roof act as sculptural landmarks and orientation devices imparting a sense of identity. (They also help channel rainwater away from the courtyard.) Their shape interacts with the landscaping, appearing almost as abstracted trees – this sets off a dialogue between the building and the canopy created by the trees. The covered walkways establish a comfortable human scale once you enter the courtyard space.

The internal volumes of the mono-pitch roof also help to accommodate various services. Externally, the air-conditioning ducts have been consciously expressed on top of the ablution blocks, as have the fire escapes and smaller service elements such as the fire hoses. Their presence is thus integrated into the design from the very beginning, considered from a design perspective.

The materiality of the complex references the red brick that characterises several of the surrounding buildings, maintaining the aesthetic coherence of the campus, while the inclusion of accents of grey and charcoal brick adds a contemporary dimension to the material palette. Combined with off-shutter concrete and grey metal cladding, the lecture hall complex also builds on the material palette of the administration building, creating both variation and continuity.



Red brick is used in all the curvilinear elements such as the corners of the ablution blocks to soften the edges, the lecture hall walls to assist with acoustics and the central planter/seating to define space and emulate movement, acting as subtle guiding and orientation devices.

These curvilinear elements open vistas between the buildings, leading the eye, providing glimpses beyond the complex and creating visual connections between parts of the campus. Rather than merely forming an elevation, the architecture helps curate an experience, considering motion and connections in a dynamic, almost cinematic, rather than static manner.



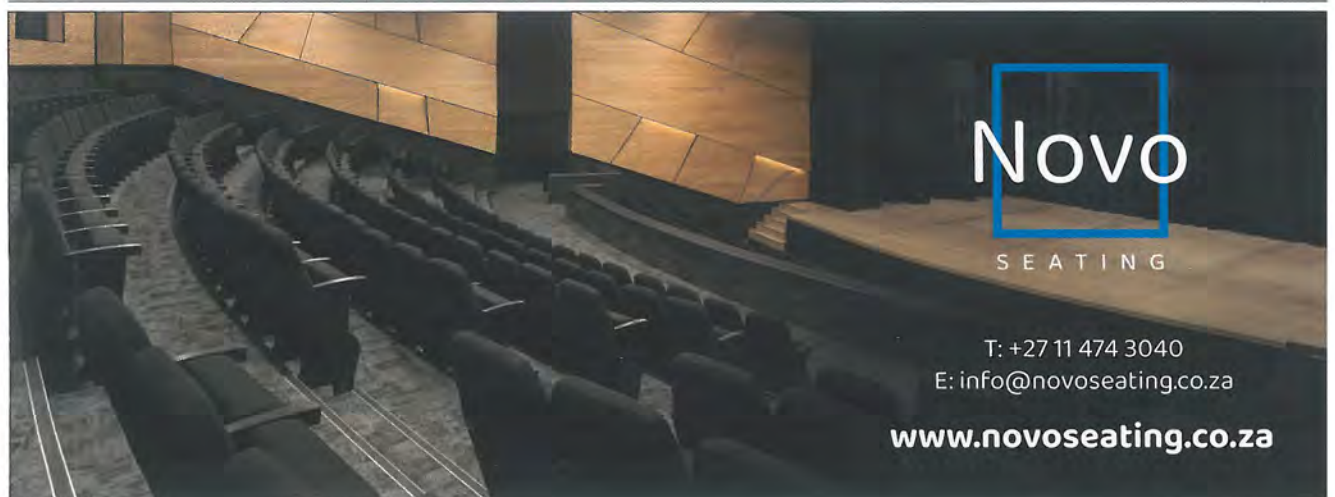
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Professional team

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