

AWARDS, HONOURS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- South African Planning Institute Lifetime Achievement Award (2010)
- Mayor of Cape Town Medal for Community Service (2010)
- Elected Fellow of the University of Cape Town (UCT) (1996)

DEFINING MOMENT

When he joined a Cape Town architecture firm and met future collaborator Roelof Uytenbogaardt.

WHAT PEOPLE MIGHT NOT KNOW

He enjoys the bush and scuba-diving.

CITIES FOR PEOPLE ON FOOT

Emeritus Professor and senior research scholar, David Dewar's sunny little office in the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of Cape Town (UCT) provides him with a view over a city that he loves yet finds frustrating.

"South Africa does not have cities," states this honorary life member of the Urban Design Institute of South Africa and winner of numerous national and international design and planning awards. "Proper cities are ordered around space and institutions. Those two things go together. Proper cities are not organised around roads and houses, but in South Africa that's all you get."

"Our cities were built on the assumption that everyone would have a motor car, which is just fundamentally wrong," Dewar emphasises. "Most South Africans use non-motorised transport, and that's the way that we have to operate. If you do not have means, it is almost impossible to live in our cities."

Prague, Paris and Istanbul are among his favourite cities for more than just their history and aesthetics. "Those cities work because they were built for people on foot," he explains emphatically. To make his point, he notes that South African cities have been judged to be among the world's most inequitable and most inefficient.

"My passion has always been to get a way of thinking going that results in cities that work for people who do not have great resources, but that are also

spatially very beautiful," explains Dewar, who believes that urban planning should be an interdisciplinary exercise. "Most people do not buy into this way of thinking. Our cities are run by engineers without spatial sense."

FORMATIVE YEARS

Dewar was born on 9 October 1945 in the Zimbabwean city of Bulawayo. At school he played cricket for his country's schools' team. After arriving at UCT in 1963 with a teaching bursary in hand, he played for Western Province's B-team and was 12th man for the South African Universities cricket team.

His interest in cities was sparked during his Bachelor of Arts' years while studying economics and geography. An Honours degree followed in 1966, and in 1969 a Master's in urban and regional planning (with distinction). In 1981, Dewar completed a Doctorate in Philosophy about South Africa's low-income housing policy.

Europe called after Dewar had completed his initial studies, but he was lured back to Cape Town by a telegram: He was offered a job in one of his former teacher's architectural planning and urban design practices. One of the partners was Roelof Uytenbogaardt, who was to play a major role in forming Dewar's line of thinking about urban order and city form. For nearly two decades, the two collaborated on numerous projects until Uytenbogaardt's death in 1998.

In 2018 Dewar and another long-standing collaborator, architect Piet Louw, were invited to deliver the prestigious Roelof Uytenbogaardt Urban Design Memorial Lecture and to exhibit their own work. Uytenbogaardt's appointment as a professor in urban and regional planning had given Dewar a foot in the door as a young academic at UCT. He had helped Uytenbogaardt set up a full-time programme in Urban and Regional Planning during the time of sanctions, when planning was seen as a so-called 'handmaiden' of apartheid.

"Without access to much literature, we had to think out the profession from first principles as we thought it should be. We decided to argue for alternatives," he remembers. "You can only teach what you believe in." Dewar then adds:



“We didn’t pursue politics directly but took on discriminatory policies from a professional or ethical viewpoint.”

LINKS WITH UCT

“My whole life has been around this university,” he reflects on nearly sixty years of memories connected with UCT. He started as a senior lecturer in 1971, became an associate professor in 1978 and Professor of Architecture and Planning in 1986. He rates the period between 1975 and 1991 as among the most interesting of times, when he was a founding member, and after 1980, Director of UCT’s Urban Problems Research Unit. In 1991 Dewar became the first incumbent of the BP Chair of Urban and Regional Planning.

His numerous leadership roles include that of Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Architecture (1993 – 1995) and Deputy Dean and Acting Dean of the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment (2002 – 2006).

A NEW WAY OF THINKING

Dewar has always kept one foot in private practice, either working solo or in partnership with others. This has allowed him to consult on land management issues, draw up plans, do assessments and provide legal evidence on matters. He worked on projects from Pinetown in KwaZulu-Natal to numerous small South African ‘*platteland*’ towns, as well as in Namibia and Mauritius. In Cape Town, he was involved in projects in Khayelitsha, the Milnerton lighthouse site, the Klipfontein Corridor and the high-density, lower-income inner-city housing project, Springfield Terrace, in Woodstock.

His writings and talks on matters such as urban structure and form, self-help housing, the role of spatial design in helping to prevent crime, and integrated housing in a post-apartheid South Africa have been extensive. Also included are thoughts on open space, urban corridors, the planning of university campuses and the impact of climate change on city planning. Dewar’s advice has been sought by many a sub-committee, planning commission and advisory

board. These include the Executive Committee of the South African Council of Town and Regional Planners (1995 – 1998) and the National Development and Planning Commission (1998 – 1999). He also contributed, as an invited lead author in Working Group 3, to the 5th Assessment of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) from 2011 to 2013.

He has thrown his weight behind numerous land-related community initiatives and in the 1980s consulted to many communities resisting Group Areas Act removals. Dewar was a founder board member of the Hostel Dwellers’ Association and of the Hostels to Homes initiative from 1989 to 1998. From 2001 to 2017 he served on the board of the Community Organisation Research Centre, a research arm of the Federation of the Urban Poor.

He believes these activities have allowed him to be a better academic and researcher: “When you teach an applied profession, it is very important to know about doing.”

Two of the nine books he has been lead author of were recently reprinted without the publishers asking for any updates. This says something about the forward thinking of Dewar and his colleagues in matters related to African cities. One book was initially published in 1990 on how urban markets can help develop the informal retail sector and another, in 1986, focused on regional development and settlement policy.

“My whole life has been spent trying to persuade people to see things differently. We have persuaded many. The rhetoric about planning in South Africa has changed, but unfortunately not the practice. This is because most planners have been trained – not educated – to implement an entirely inappropriate model,” he concludes.

Suburbia is to Dewar “a kind of rural mindset applied to cities.” And even though he thinks that local planners often do not have a sense of possibilities, he does not believe all is lost for South African cities.

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