



LEKGOTLA The inner chamber of the Johannesburg City Council Chambers



PHOTOS: SUPPLIED



TOWER OF LIGHT The building has been awarded a five-star Green Star rating for its use of sustainable technologies



INTEGRATION The use of public space was an important element of StudioMAS' design

JOBURG'S *golden chamber*

The Johannesburg City Council Chambers are officially open. **Garreth van Niekerk** takes a look inside

The dust has settled and there are leaves once again on the ground surrounding the brand-new **Johannesburg City Council Chambers** - an elegant rotunda of curved glass, gold steel "fins" and clean architectural lines. It's another feather in the cap of Pierre Swanepoel of StudioMAS Architecture & Urban Design, one of the country's most high-profile urban designers, who also created the similarly iconic Circa on Jellicoe gallery on Jan Smuts Avenue.

Located just across the road from the Joburg Theatre, and hidden in the shadows of the extreme brutalist council buildings behind it, the form spirals around itself in an organic shape. It's a stark contrast to the

linearity of the modernist city around it, but one desperately needed between the concrete towers.

Within, a towering chamber is the perfect space for debate, allowing occupants to meet in the lekgotla style - one of Swanepoel's design inspirations. The building, which was awarded a five-star rating on the Green Star SA rating system, also uses the latest ecotechnologies to ensure it's optimally cooled in summer, heated in winter and uses minimal energy to power itself.

At a price tag of R280 million, it's a major investment in South African architecture,

and one that has drawn significant attention worldwide. But at its core the building is not a loud, Gehryesque statement of pomp and ceremony, but a celebration of a new era in the inner city, one where the public and private merge into an architecture that is more friendly, and approachable.

One of the most poetic parts of the building is the public park built around it. It circles a reflection pool built at the base of the building where visitors are able to take a moment and enjoy the space while discussions and debates take place inside this bold new architectural beacon.

It's one of the nominees for this year's Africa Architecture Awards.

The full list can be viewed online at africanarchitectureawards.com.

