



A NEW CHAPTER FOR OLD HIGH STREET, HERMANUS

The recent completion of the High Street upgrade means a new chapter and a new life for one of the oldest streets in Hermanus. Created in 1874, 20 years after Hermanuspietersfontein was established, the street developed a mostly residential character with typical fisherman's cottages lining both edges. Many of these cottages still exist in current time but around the 1960's disruption in the form of the Group Areas Act meant that a number of coloured families lost their homes and the predominant residential character of the street vanished. This made way for an increased commercial function that came with growing vehicular traffic and parking which overwhelmed the space to the detriment of the pedestrians who were relegated to two narrow sidewalks.

The first 'seed' towards the change and a renewed pedestrian-friendly focus with the application of a 'shared street concept' in Hermanus was identified in the CBD Regeneration Framework completed by GAPP Architects and Urban Designers, in 2016. The plan envisaged the Hermanus CBD as a vibrant, safe and attractive public place for locals and visitors to spend time, a CBD that builds on the existing character of Hermanus. It also identified several high impact projects that could contribute to this vision and High Street was highlighted as one of these catalytic projects.

The opportunity to implement the plans for High Street was seized by the Overstrand Municipality when appointing Element Consulting Engineers to carry out urgent stormwater upgrades to solve regular flooding in High and Main Street. For this purpose most of High Street had to be broken up and this meant that GAPP Architects and Urban Designers could implement the vision set out in the Regeneration Framework. Together with local government, residents, business fraternity and organisations like the Hermanus History Society, the plans were further developed. In this process, the Covid pandemic delayed the implementation but in return improved the conditions due to a changed outlook on the role and function of public space in society. It created a much broader support for quality pedestrian public space and reduction of vehicular dominance in the street.

The upgrade of the High Street, completed in 2021, has created a streetscape with a single paved surface that connects building edge to building edge and an improved public realm, with new street lighting, seating, signage and tree planting. The whole street has become pedestrian domain, with the area earmarked for vehicular guests defined by a subtle change in paving textures and patters, through the use of SUDS, planters and bollards. This creates a shared street environment that allows for self-regulation of traffic, where vehicles do not dominate and people and cyclists take preference.

As a pedestrian user of the street, there is a real sense of comfort which is achieved through minimising the width of the roadway and removing most of the on-street parking to maximise space that can be used to gather. The space gained by eliminating parking means that the many historic buildings have become visible and 'connected' to the street again, as well as making space for 'street living.'

The street which was once a transition space, somewhere to park on the way to the beachfront, has now become a destination in of itself. It is lined with galleries, café's and restaurants that spill out generously into the shared space and take advantage of the prime position beneath the new street trees. A new pergola, centrally located in the street, creates a focal point which spatially creates a new façade to separate the street from a parking lot and functionally has become a nice place to sit down and have a chat or be the centre piece for a market, outdoor concert, etc.

The reimagined street creates a slowed down atmosphere that is brought alive by the local residents and businesses who have taken ownership of the space and made the street their own.



SUPPLIERS

- Lighting**
BEKA Schröder - 021 510 8900
- Paving**
C.E.L Paving Products - 021 905 5998
- Bollards**
Streetscape - 021 703 9000
- Mature Trees**
Just Trees - 021 871 1595
- Bins**
Igneous Concrete - 082 443 0084



MEET THE TEAM

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Element Consulting Engineers: Uli du Toit, Tertius Retief, Trevino Julius



Since the completion of the project there have been further community led initiatives to close High Street to vehicular-through traffic on particular weekends to allow for street markets and festivals and the street has hosted art and antique fairs as well as a jazz festival and a particularly lively, Bastille Day. Of particular note is a place called Black Medicine, where Amelia serves the best coffee and croissants in the Cape. She, as a renowned food entrepreneur, has been one of the champions of adopting a new pedestrian street and utilising it to the fullest.

The Hermanus CBD is a town with very few street trees, probably due to a number of reasons including the fact that the coastal, windy and rocky environment is not kind to trees, being an important one. The design for High Street has seen the inclusion of 32 new *Syzygium guineense* (Waterpear) trees, that line the street edge and contribute to the quality of the public realm, making this the most tree lined street in the town. The final choice of trees came after a lengthy process in which a variety of other indigenous trees were considered but rejected. An innovative addition of Sustainable Urban Drainage areas with planting has been introduced along the kerb line of the street. Besides adding green and a change of texture, these SUDS are designed to support the primary storm water upgrades by absorbing the first portion of stormwater from the paved channel along the street besides providing much needed greening and spaces to sit.

The High Street upgrade was commissioned in conjunction with the Hermanus Public Space Manual, a guide for future public space development within the Hermanus CBD. The Hermanus CBD manual defines key public spaces and outlines principles to create better public places for locals and tourists to spend time. This manual outlines a material look and feel for the CBD and capitalises on successful upgrades undertaken at Market Square and Gearing's Point. There has been an effort to enhance the character of the CBD through the use of locally sourced materials with low stone walls introduced at key points along the street. The use of concrete grey pavers in High Street ties the public spaces in the CBD together as does a similar use of signage, and street furniture.

The historical narratives and stories of the street, collected and written up by the Hermanus History Society have also been included in the street upgrade and are highlighted through the use of laser cut corten steel inlays in the street indicating the names of families and businesses that once occupied the street, as well as an installation under the pergola at the centre of the street space explaining the different eras High Street has seen. This old and new chapter of High Street is best enjoyed as a leisurely stroll in the street along the shops, art galleries and restaurants while reading the narrative in the pavement and ending with coffee and croissants on one of the street corners.

