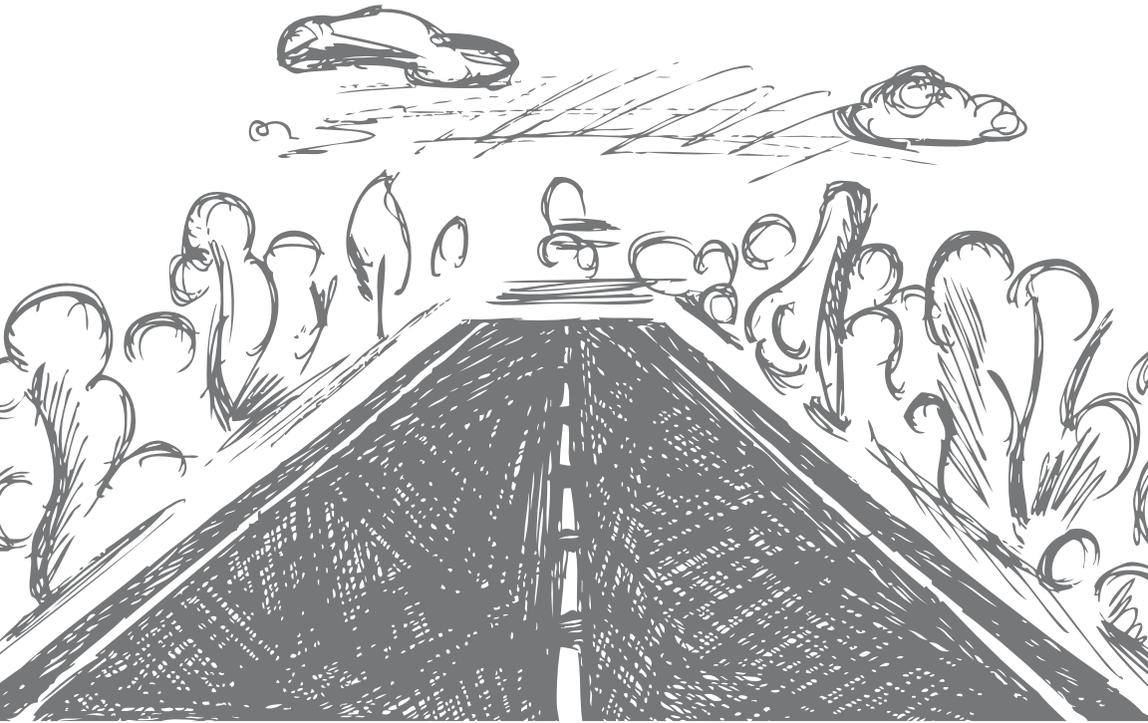


THE ASLA STORY

a journey of
resilience and innovation



ASLA

The ASLA Story: a journey of resilience and innovation © ASLA Operations.

Edition 1 printed October 2018.

Rights

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright holder.

Acknowledgements:

ASLA Operations wishes to thank all companies and individuals who have contributed towards the contents and the imagery used in *The ASLA Story: a journey of resilience and innovation*.

Credits

Written and compiled by Chrissi Maria

Proofread by Joan Hetteema

Professional photography by Dalton Dingelstad

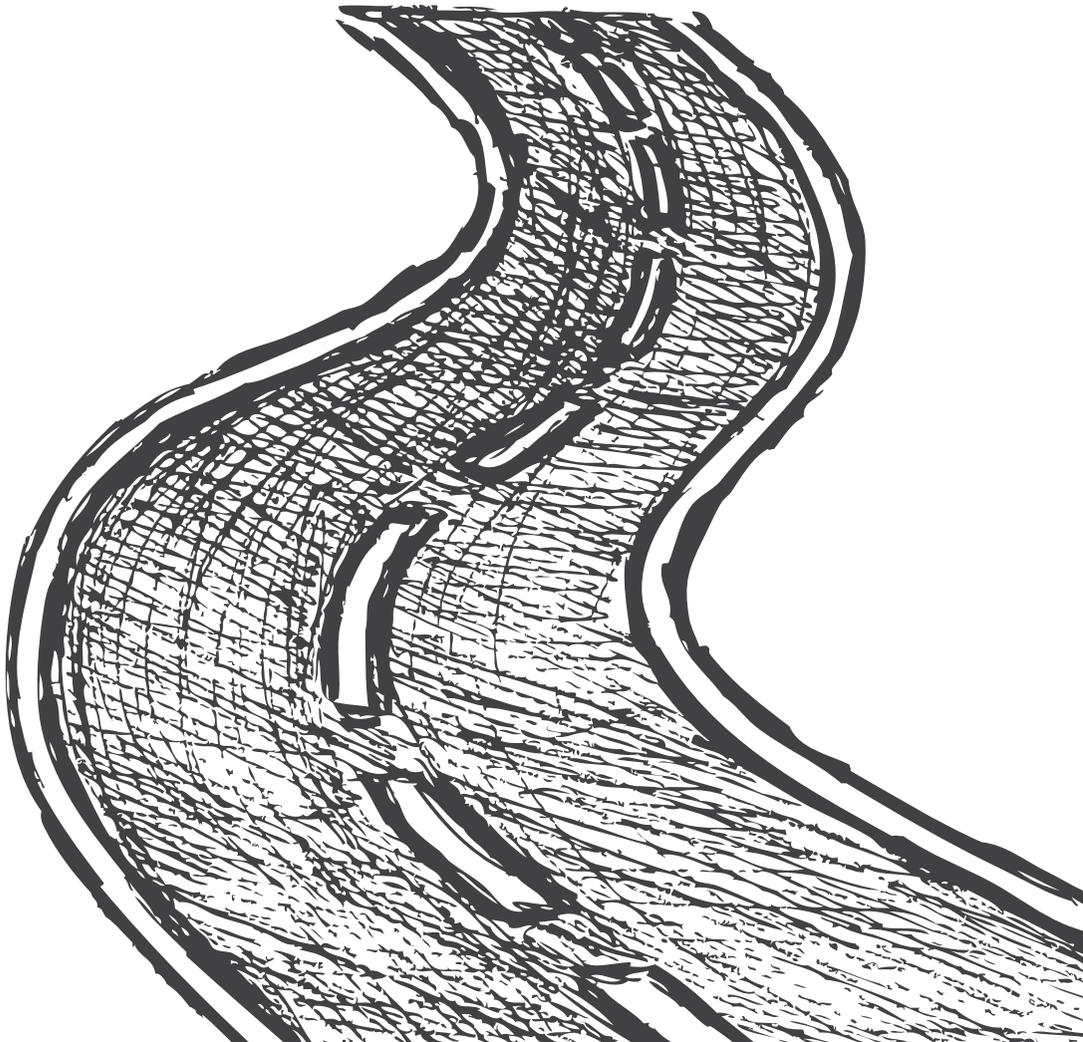
Design and layout by Annarie Paterson



THE ASLA STORY

*a journey of
resilience and innovation*

What's in the way,
is the way.



Contents

PROLOGUE	01
Saturday, 13 October 2018	
CHAPTER ONE	05
The Founders	
CHAPTER TWO	17
The Beginning: 1973 – 1982	
CHAPTER THREE	41
Prosperity and hardship: 1983 – 1992	
CHAPTER FOUR	65
Rising to the challenges: 1993 – 2002	
CHAPTER FIVE	89
An award-winning decade: 2003 – 2012	
CHAPTER SIX	103
No more business as usual: 2013 –	
CHAPTER SEVEN	115
Innovations	
CHAPTER EIGHT	141
Current capabilities	
CHAPTER NINE	151
Saturday, 13 October 2018	
CHAPTER TEN	157
The future	

PROLOGUE

Saturday, 13 October 2018

"Forty-five years! What is it about this unassuming company and its founders that has enabled it to stand the test of time?"



Since its establishment in 1941 the Stellenbosch Town Hall in Plein Street has experienced its fair share of communal events, celebrations, heated town meetings and political rallies. For decades the *stadsaal*¹ has been the venue for incredible performances and plays; it has witnessed special birthdays and couples exchanging their vows and marking anniversaries – and all of these dazzling functions have been attended by a range of citizens, from the most humble, through to the well-heeled and who’s who in society.

On 13 October 2018, another illustrious event is added to the town hall’s calendar as ASLA – a well-known construction company that is also one of the Western Cape’s oldest companies in the sector – marks the achievement of yet another milestone in its history.

ASLA is not a newcomer to the town hall. The company has a long tradition of thanking employees, clients and close associates who have contributed to its success or shown solidarity through trials and tribulations, by inviting them to a celebration every five years. The 2018 event marks the forty-fifth anniversary of this privately-owned contractor.



Caption: An invitation to today's event, and the one twenty years ago, in 1998.

As the guests arrive at the town hall dressed in their finest they come face-to-face with many familiar faces they have seen before, at similar celebratory events or on ASLA business. The low buzz of countless conversations can be heard as guests reflect on the journey of this low-profile construction company, and muse as to what the X-factor is that has contributed to its resounding success. What guided it through the forty-five years that have passed, from humble beginnings to the present day? And what will ensure its future longevity? A future that is all but certain when one reflects on a South Africa that has just entered a technical recession; is struggling to come to grips with its destructive

¹ Town hall

recent political and economic past; and is ready to rebuild itself one brick at a time. This is a South Africa where countless citizens have the desire and need to enjoy the benefits of long-awaited improved infrastructure, to experience the liberation of employment; and where the youth eagerly await opportunities that could change their lives forever.

The portico and eaves of the Stellenbosch *Stadsaal* have seen many of those present before, as they have attended ASLA functions hosted here throughout the past decades. They are no doubt older, greyer and wiser today than at some of the historic events. During times gone by they would have attended wearing smiles on their faces and carrying gratitude in their hearts. At other times they may have worn lines of concern, worry etched into their faces – the burden of uncertainty so intense it could have been another name on the guest list.

This company and its people represent an authentic picture of survival through some of the most challenging and interesting times of South African history. It was conceived as the hippies were packing their bell-bottoms away along with their peace signs and settling down to parenthood; at a time when the horrendous Vietnam war was drawing to a close; launching a manned rocket into space was still a recent achievement; yo-yos and dingbats provided amusement; and families would gather around the radio to listen to their favourite programme. It was also a decade in which the African National Congress (ANC) and South African Communist Party (SACP) stepped up their underground activities, and informed discontent was slowly spreading across the country.

It is a company started by energised and ambitious Afrikaans youngsters from a working class family. They did this during a time when who you knew counted and could give you the inside track, or conversely, block you at every turn. An era during which the Broederbond ruled from the shadows and the Cold War had infiltrated our shores as the *Rooi Gevaar*² and used to drive fear into the faint hearted. This was when patriotism and honour were redefined by the political puppet masters of the National Party and South Africa's population was segregated through the myopic apartheid lens, whilst “normal” people formed relationships and worked together in spite of political ideology.

This is a company that experienced the destruction of political upheaval and protests, felt the cruel hand of poorly conceived policy and witnessed wars at our borders destroy the economy. It knew what the impact of inflation at 16% and interest rates north of 25% felt like. It was around when the oil price went through the roof, fuelling an increase in the cost of gold; and experienced the subsequent infrastructure boom enabled by the increased revenues and tax earned from this improved gold price.

Little is known of the destruction wrought by “*die groot krokodil*”³ on small business owners when he delivered his infamous Rubicon Speech. The Rand tumbled overnight,

² An Afrikaans phrase that translates into “red danger”. This was used in South Africa during the Cold War to refer to the perceived threat of communism to the status quo in the country, in particular posed by the SACP and its sister organisation, the ANC.

³ This translates to “the large crocodile”, a term that was used to refer to South African State President P.W. Botha (1978 to 1989).

sanctions were intensified and South Africa was further isolated. Construction work simply disappeared and businesses failed. Events that uncannily repeated themselves later, during the Zupta⁴ years.

ASLA experienced the unbanning of the ANC and the subsequent political and personal freedom as well as the miracle of the Rainbow Nation under President Mandela. It operated in a South Africa that had regained its dignity and freedom and where everyone could work together for the common good. The improved morale of the construction industry could be felt as it rallied in support of the infrastructure roll-out, and, in the case of this medium-sized company, changed tack to provide housing and the associated infrastructure, to work in communities and create tangible value for its ultimate clients – the beneficiaries of the ASLA home.

The new South Africa also ushered a host of new legislation into her lawbooks and the country's new Constitution became an example of the very best in the world. The construction industry, as a tool by which social and economic change can be achieved, was impacted significantly by much of this new the legislation. Unfortunately the unintended consequences were that this made South Africa a complex environment within which to practice the age-old construction trade.

ASLA demonstrated its faith in South Africa and the country's people through numerous developments undertaken on home soil and its constant investment in the people of the Helderberg, where the business is rooted. Further afield the company has positively contributed to the lives of the communities by supporting school, cultural and sporting activities.

While larger construction companies were building the infrastructure for the 2010 World Cup, ASLA stuck to its knitting and responded to the demand for housing and associated infrastructure – always careful not to over extend and diligently following a conservative strategy, devoid of fame and glory, solidly underpinned by commitment, loyalty, quality and dependability.

What is it about this unassuming company and its founders that has enabled it to stand the test of time? And, what does its future hold?

The answers to some of these thoughts and conversations have, over the decades, been witnessed by the portico and eaves of the Stellenbosch *Stadsaal* as ASLA celebrated various milestones under this very roof. Fortunately, they are not lost to us mere mortals ...

⁴ A recent period of state capture, during Jacob Zuma's presidency, where he aligned himself closely to a powerful family named Gupta.

CHAPTER ONE
The founders

*"Stil broers, hier gaan twee manne verby!"
Mike van Rooyen*

