

R5m to repair Rhodes's Cape legacy

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Property Editor

FIVE million rand will be spent on contracts for the repair, restoration and maintenance of Groote Schuur, the Cape mountainside mansion built by Cecil John Rhodes as a legacy for the South African nation, and occupied until 1999 by the country's heads of state.

In 2000 the Department of Public Works appointed Cape Town architect Chris Bam to undertake a preliminary report on the extent of the work required. Based on the report, and subsequent to the approval of a budget increase from R1 million, Bam and his partner Heidi Zollner have produced new and accurate plans of the house and have identified craftsmen and contractors to undertake the work.

There will be no alterations to the existing house and the scope of the work includes the restoration of internal and external woodwork, extensive damp-proofing and the complete overhaul of the historically inadequate rainwater disposal system.

Features of the house, including ceramic and marble flooring obscured over time by insensitive modernisation, will also be exposed.

The contracts are also under the expert eye of Alta Kriel, curator of all the historic furniture collections in the official residences of the Cape, who will oversee the partial removal and preservation of the famed 17th and 19th century Cordova leather frieze on the upper walls of the drawing room. She will direct the removal of inappropriate items of furniture and highlight authentic artefacts and treasures.

Others involved in the year-long

contract are Leon de Bruin, of contractors W Voigt, and Marius Taljaard of the project management department of the Department of Public Works.

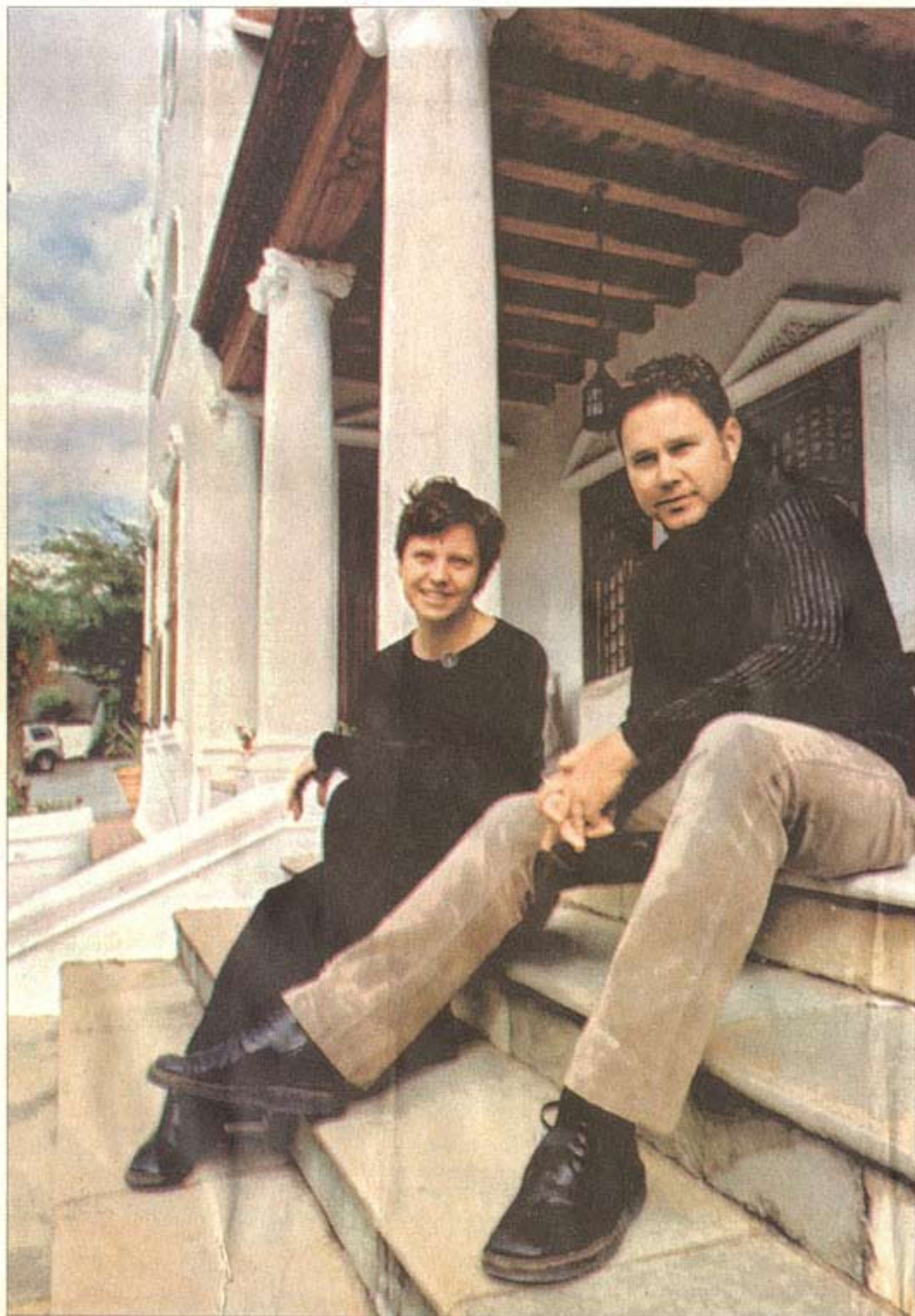
Pivotal to the success of the contract is the proper restoration of the 160 Burmese teak doors and window frames containing 5 350 glass panes, some of which have to be saved from rot that has set in as a result of damp.

This, and the restoration of their intricate ironwork, has been entrusted to one of the Cape's most respected craftsmen, architect Jan Corewyn. He will patch and replace damaged elements of the woodwork with aged Burmese teak.

The house, at the time known as The Grange, was bought by Rhodes in 1893. It stood on the footprint of several previous generations of buildings that started out as the great granary (groote schuur), built by Jan van Riebeeck in 1657 when he expanded his gardens to the more sheltered environment of the southern slopes of Table Mountain.

Rhodes commissioned Herbert Baker to rebuild the house as a grand mansion in what became the Cape Dutch Revival style. When completed, he began to fill it with treasures some believe he intended as his colonial legacy and the core of his dream of a Southern African Federation under British rule. The dream was shattered by the blundering Jameson raid in 1896 which ruined his political career, and later that year by the devastating fire that razed the house.

Baker rebuilt the house in the much grander form that was passed on to the nation as a bequest in Rhodes's will following his death in his simple seaside cottage at Muizenberg.



Renewal: architects Heidi Zollner and Chris Bam, who will be overseeing the restoration of Groote Schuur.