

Wellington's 1871 Old Tannery gets 'artisanal' make-over

Dating back to 1871, the landmark 'Old Tannery' in Wellington is undergoing an 'artisanal' make-over that will see it transformed into a mixed-use destination offering office and retail space, restaurants and other leisure as well as a winery and weekend market. Popular as a wedding venue the heritage property will continue to offer that as well, says Phil Craig, a commercial broker with Seeff Wellington.



The Old Tannery is one of the oldest factories in South Africa. The restoration and development project are in keeping with South Africa's heritage regulations so that the unique architecture and character will be restored and preserved for future generations.

Survived the Great Depression

When it was established as the Western Tanning & Boot Company by John Henry Coaton on his farm Olyvenhout, thousands of skins were tanned and about 100,000 pairs of shoes manufactured monthly. Power was delivered by a steam engine and turbine and by 1910 it was well established with several buildings and modern machinery. It survived the Great Depression, but in 1939 the shoe factory was destroyed by fire and never re-opened. The tannery continued to produce leather for shoe uppers among others. The Coaton family sold it in 1940 and it was taken over by SA Mercantile in 1944. By 2000, it produced enough leather to supply half of SA's needs.



When the new owners purchased it in 2017, it was a state of decay and dilapidation. Development started in January 2019 to ensure full compliance with authorities. With the restoration and development well underway, some buildings already house a variety of creative and light industrial businesses while others are being refurbished to provide a space where people can eat, drink, shop and work in safety and comfort, says Craig.

Niche retail, office space

The completed development will include a ground-floor level which will house food and beverage establishments such as a restaurant, coffee shop, selected permanent quality food concessions, general bar and a gin bar as well as an entertainment stage for live music and communal seating. The first floor is allocated to niche retail and office space.



Leading off the central atrium, is outdoor space for seating next to river as well as a wine cellar with a wine shop, wine bar and a tasting room which will also be available for hire. There will also be ground-floor exhibition space for a weekend market and additional undercover seating opening onto the courtyard.

The remainder, spread over the complex, will comprise a brewery, distillery, entertainment space, a cooking school (with a restaurant and shop), more office space and specialised retail targeted at arts and crafts. The complex will offer parking for approximately 750 cars after the next phase of development.

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