

Introduction

This article discusses results of the architectural documentation project that involved the third-year students in architecture, landscape architecture and interior architecture of the Department of Architecture, University of Pretoria, in 2003. The aim of the project was to document the post-apartheid *genius loci*¹ of selected houses in Salvokop, Pretoria, for the purpose of architectural conservation.² In addition, this article makes recommendations regarding the rehabilitation and participation processes of the township.

The township was established during the early 1890s by the Nederlandse Zuid-Afrikaanse Spoorweg Maatskapy (Netherlands South African Railway Company) (hereafter NZASM) to provide low-rental houses to poor white railway-workers as an inducement to settle in their service (Wasserfall 1989: 224). The NZASM was established in 1887 to build the Pretoria-Delagoa Bay Line (Wasserfall 1989:226). The company was liquidated in later years and since then it has been replaced by numerous administrations, the current one being Transnet. Following the democratisation of South Africa, the township has changed significantly in terms of the socio-



Documenting the post-apartheid *genius loci* of Salvokop:

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The investigation is concerned with the discovery of the *genius loci* of the culturally and historically significant residential sites in Salvokop. It is hoped, as a result, to inform the process of rehabilitation of Salvokop. The students involved conducted the initial survey and documentation after their module in Environmental Studies. The documentation process takes into account particular economic and social issues affecting everyday living in Salvokop. The township of Salvokop, one of the distinct manifestations of the so-called institutions of apartheid, lies in isolation along the north gradient of Salvokop Hill, separated to the north and east by railway lines from the Pretoria Central Business District (CBD), to the west by Potgieter Street (the connection between Pretoria and Johannesburg). It comprises mainly residential land and is therefore useful for the initiation of a conservation strategy that deals specifically with residential properties.

economic and cultural composition of its tenants. Occupation by black tenants (forbidden in the past) of the dilapidated houses abandoned by whites in the early 1990s bears evidence of the need for shelter in close proximity to the workplace and resources around the Pretoria CBD.

With the inception of the nationally significant project, Freedom Park, to be erected to the south towards the top of the hill, Salvokop has become a challenge in terms of urban sustainability, design and conservation. Ongoing discussions about urban revitalisation of the suburb suggest that substantial interventions for upgrading are necessitated by the current state of the suburb, which poses potentially serious threats to the neighbouring Freedom Park Project and wealthier suburbs like Waterkloof. The current architectural manifestation and modifications of selected houses represents a body of knowledge that remains obscure to current residents and intellectuals alike, probably because what



is depicted is an architectural manifestation of a different and diverse socio-cultural and economic nature. The documented sites and buildings are of no particular architectural merit, but are historically complex. They provide an overview of the different lifestyles and systems of racial segregation during pre-democratic South Africa and the subsequent

Figure 1 (left): Houses on 1st Avenue, Salvokop (photo by author)

shift to post-apartheid occupation (mainly by blacks) that is characterised by distinct modifications and living patterns. These artefacts are part of a significant township that belongs to the early housing development initiated by the historic NZASM in South Africa.

The process of documentation hopes to inform the process of rehabilitation³ and eventually increase awareness among residents and learners about issues related to conservation (for example, vulnerability, participation, appraisal and maintenance) and adaptation of old cultural artefacts to accom-

permanent nature that should no longer be viewed as housing in deterioration, but rather as housing in the process of improvement (Hamdi 1991:16). Add-ons depict change in progress and flexibility, and present a type of architecture inundated with deconstructed meaning that many aspire to in architectural design.

Documenting the *genius loci*

The documentation process aims, if at all possible, to capture the *genius loci* of Salvokop that distinguishes this precinct

including those examples of which drawings could not be found.

The project, entitled "Architectural Documentation of Salvokop", required substantial coordination between different groups, who were expected to produce an integrated report complemented by panoramic elevations and plans of the residential blocks. The exercise was aimed at training learners to conduct topographical survey, produce sketches with dimensions and documentation photographs, and ultimately a report on the historical research. Precision in draughts-

A recommendation for the rehabilitation process

Figure 2 (left): Semi-permanent and permanent add-ons to house 154 (photo by author)

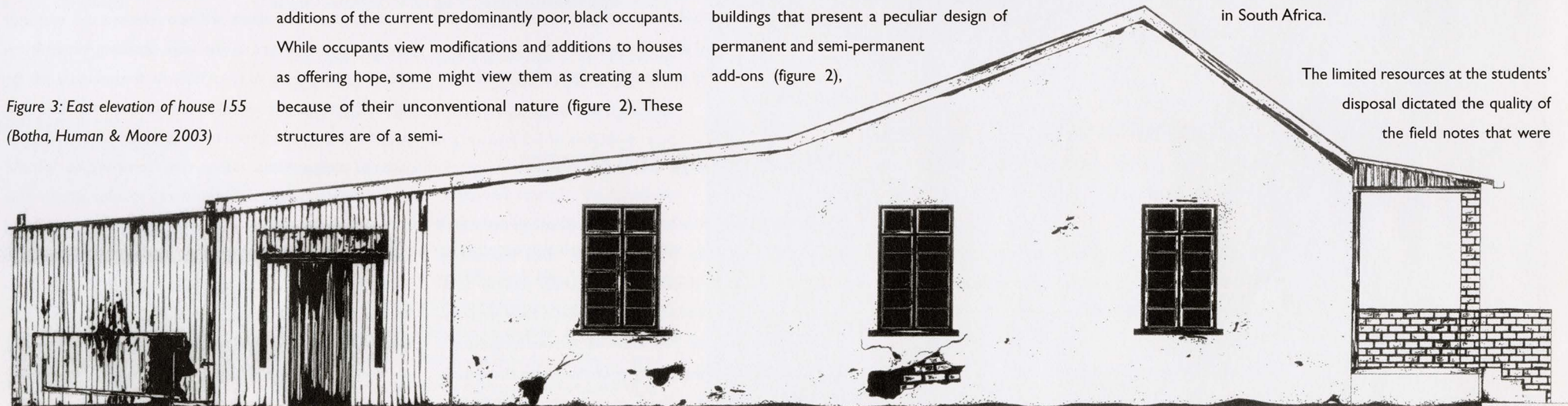
modate current needs. Restoring these culturally significant sites and buildings to their original state might be viewed as glorifying the architecture that was used to promote racial segregation, and consequently undermining the value of the additions of the current predominantly poor, black occupants. While occupants view modifications and additions to houses as offering hope, some might view them as creating a slum because of their unconventional nature (figure 2). These structures are of a semi-

and community from others, thereby adding value to our understanding of these structures and improving the practice of civic design, and thus the quality of the suburb. The process of documentation deals only with selected sites and buildings that present a peculiar design of permanent and semi-permanent add-ons (figure 2),

manship became an undisputable requirement. This exercise was an extension of the attempt to expose students to the topical issues of urban conservation and sustainability with regard to the challenges experienced by many towns in South Africa.

Figure 3: East elevation of house 155 (Botha, Human & Moore 2003)

The limited resources at the students' disposal dictated the quality of the field notes that were



produced. Measurements and scale drawings produced by hand were recommended for this exercise rather than using specialised rectified photography or Computer Aided Drawings. This was meant to promote the interaction between students, occupants and the physical surrounds. This aspect of documentation enables learners to build up comprehensive knowledge of cultural artefacts and particularly the design, construction techniques and materials, ornamentation, planting, fittings, and modifications resulting from different uses

- Materials and identifiable craftsmanship
- Accessibility.

Among other documented artefacts, the so-called 'permanent' buildings were constructed from brick, iron and wood, which provided relatively better comfort (bigger bedrooms, living rooms, patio, fireplaces, bathrooms) than the previous portable timber structures provided by NZASM. Both permanent and temporary add-ons reflect a need for additional space. Permanent add-ons built from durable material were erected in an age during which the historic significance of the site was yet to be fully realised, while most semi-permanent structures built from timber and corrugated iron are recent. Architectural variations of add-ons challenge the static and symbolic values embedded in the old architecture. Roofs of original houses are hipped, discouraging both horizontal and vertical additions or modifications. Such perceptible contradictions show a need for adaptability of architecture to the ever-changing socio-political and economic status of societies, such as the one in Salvokop.

The figures, pages 15-18, depict significant aspects of the documented sites and are representative of the architectural typologies (figures 3-6) and landscapes (figure 7) and add-ons.

Rehabilitation and process

The current state of houses in Salvokop reflects the inflexible architecture of the 1910s and early 1920s adorned by well-contextualised, relevant and culturally diverse additions. Art and design of add-ons becomes a basis for rehabilitating interventions. The nature of deteriorating materials on buildings and the quality of construction determines the nature and extent of the interventions for rehabilitation.

Rehabilitation should acknowledge the current socio-economic and cultural fabric and attempt to give permanent status to architecturally worthy add-ons that offer some insight to the process of social unification (through maintaining the current urban and cosmopolitan patterns), architectural emancipation and re-urbanisation of Salvokop. The process of rehabilitation requires the recognition of social organisations and should focus on participation and facilitating co-operation between the community and other stakeholders. Rehabilitative interventions are usually product-specific but impact on a wider community. It is recommended that rehabilitation in Salvokop be socially driven so that occupants and their initiatives of aided self-help are given prominence. The processes of community involvement within the realm of architectural rehabilitation should be communicated comprehensively to the occupants.

The reading of add-ons reflects daily economic pressures and, at times, natural family growth. Add-ons are usually rented out for additional income (figure 2) and occasionally become slums as a result of the lack of municipal control. Such uncoordinated community self-help solutions unfortunately discourage investment in the area. Straining available resources makes the area susceptible to disease and a hub for criminal activities. In an effort to revitalise the area, it is preferable to support such self-help initiatives and upgrade facilities and services, rather than resorting to forceful removal. Relocation is a discriminatory solution already now being sought and even employed by some. Rehabilitation and consolidation of the current state of the houses may once more bring the suburb into the mainstream of urban productivity and sustainability. Most upgrading programmes involve installation and provision of services such as sanitation, electricity, water and drainage and maintenance of public spaces. Salvokop does not, however, present such complex

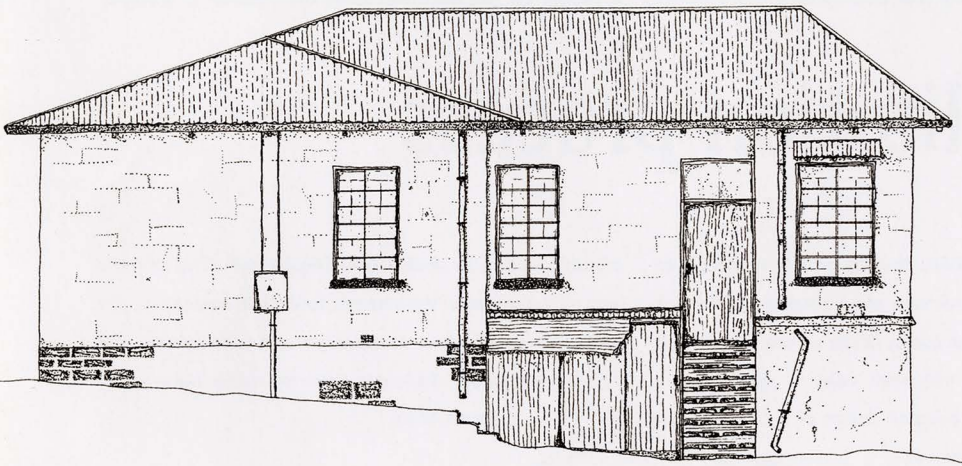


Figure 4: East elevation of house 207 (Brits, Bjornstad, Smit, Terblanch & Te Vaarwerk 2003)

over time (ICOMOS 1990:25). Learners were requested to draw only what they saw and speculations could not be made regarding hidden sections or construction of walls, floors or any other object.

The *genius loci* of Salvokop were illustrated using field notes, text, measured drawings and photographic images. The most important characteristics of investigated sites included:

- Habitability
- Topography, geology, climate and natural resources
- Local vegetation

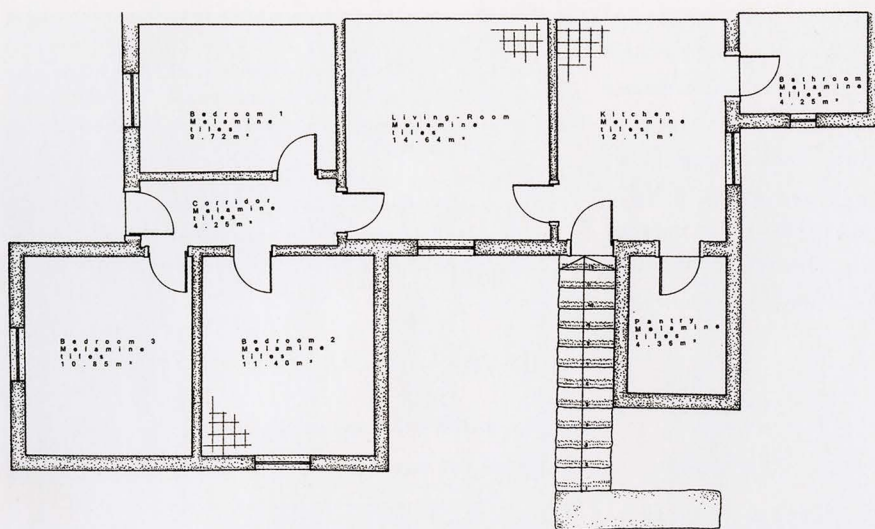


Figure 5: Ground plan of house 207
(Brits et al 2003)

challenges to the local authority, but rather requires the upgrading of services, maintenance of buildings and, possibly, transfer of ownership and in some instances tenure rights to deserving occupants.

Those houses that have been documented are in a physically good condition, although their appearance evidences poor local economy and long-term depression resulting from negligence and lack of maintenance, especially from the property owners, Transnet. The establishment of the Freedom Park Project, if driven in accordance with the needs of local development and sustainability, could stimulate local employment, generating both wealth and confidence that can improve the housing stock, and thus the image of the entire suburb. Housing represents a physical asset that needs to be maintained if the objectives of urban conservation and sustainability are to be achieved in Salvokop. Empowering occupants mainly through job creation may also add to proper maintenance of the houses. Changes leading to urban deterioration could be halted or reduced with appropriate conservation, planning and management. Garnham (1985:9) suggests that the historic continuity and economic development of places

can be maintained based upon the realisation of their unique characters (*genius loci*).

The state of neglect of the physical structure of many houses warrants an investigation to identify causes of decay and establish common rehabilitation strategies for these properties. The assumption is that local authorities, Transnet, Freedom Park Trust and, possibly, private donors will provide funds to upgrade Salvokop. It would thus be appropriate to employ the local unemployed and willing-to-participate rather than opt for big business to rehabilitate and maintain the properties. This should reduce unemployment in the area. A particular participation strategy should be devised to train and employ local people for the maintenance of properties they occupy. The participation strategy should commence with the formation of a management company working together with the community and the broader heritage body to plan and manage the rehabilitation process of these unique artefacts. The composition and responsibilities of the management company should, amongst others, include searching for donors among private and public enterprises, identifying appropriate technologies and possible technology transfer, mobilising an involvement of well-informed members of the community and enforcing accountability amongst participants.

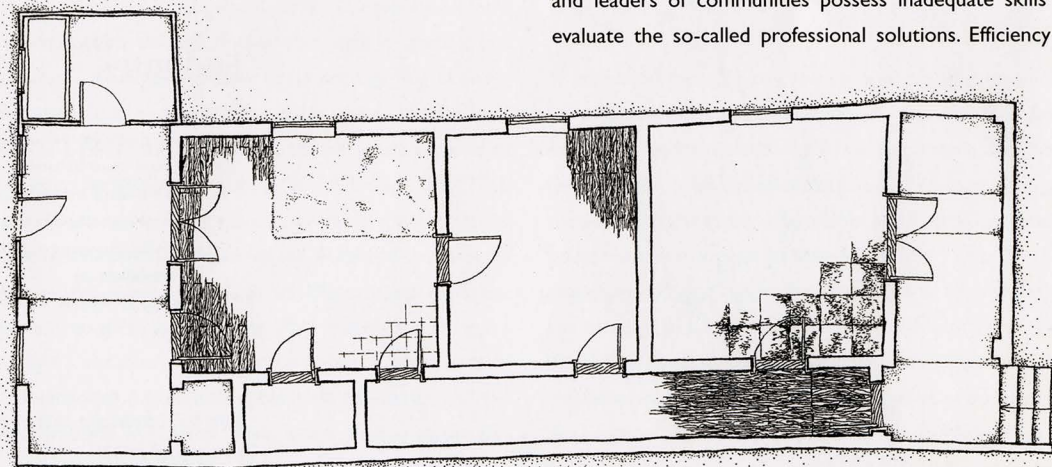
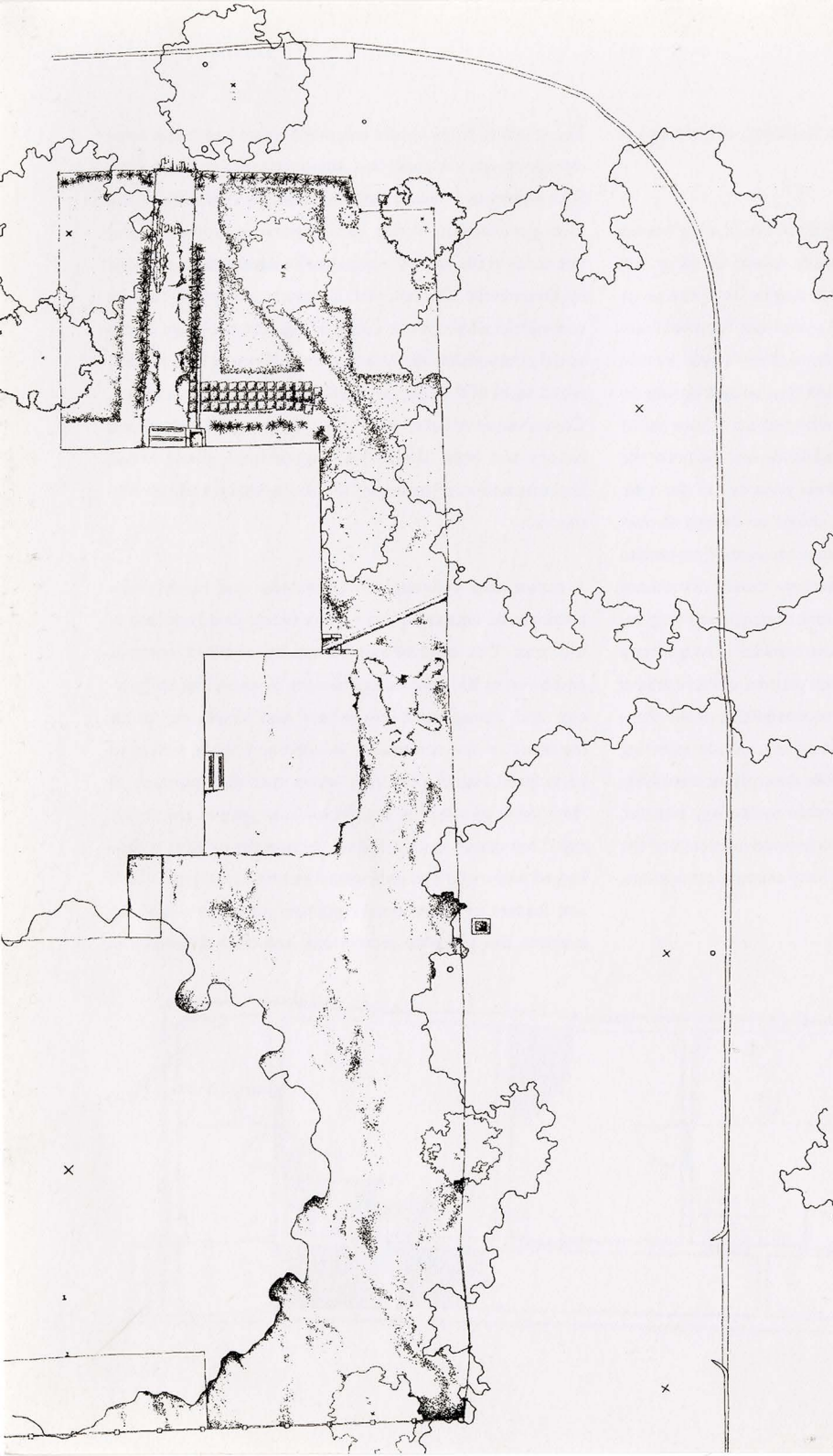


Figure 6 (far right): Ground plan of house 156 (Kim, Huang, Dzirba & Sloane 2003)

The resulting image should enhance tourism and foster commercial investment consistent with conservation in the area. Such investment should help maintain the character of the area (gentrification having local community approval), and not result in the forceful removal of residents to be replaced by commercial development. Unilateral investment such as commercial development usually brings about change in the social composition of income groups through high rentals, which most of the current residents certainly cannot afford. Conservation of Salvokop is about the people, buildings and history and none should be compromised during actual implementation of strategies for conservation and rehabilitation.

A partnership between the community and big business needs to be established to sustain future developments in the area. This establishment must be oriented towards empowering the affected community by providing technology and management know-how and employing those members of the community in need and those willing to participate. Hamdi (1991:25) warns that the approach of "let's do it all with the people, because people are always right" has drawn much criticism because the process is prolonged with regard to anticipated results. Usually members and leaders of communities possess inadequate skills to evaluate the so-called professional solutions. Efficiency in



terms of time and delivery can only be achieved if community participation is coupled with adequate advocacy and pertinent knowledge, while the rest of the stakeholders facilitate the process rather than imposing solutions. Hamdi (1991:36) is puzzled by the fact that the people who the projects and process are meant to serve apparently prefer completed works by providers. The irony is that this preference in developing communities does not promote sustainable development, but instead grows a number of wage earners whose prosperity – disturbingly – depend upon investors from elsewhere.

Conclusion

The character of historic colonial architecture and the deconstructive nature of add-ons are evident throughout the assessment of the documentation process. These depict the needs, affordability and level of comfort desired by occupants. The process of amalgamation between the inherent legacy of political inequality, explicit in the current architecture, and ongoing cosmopolitanism in Salvokop should inform any future intervention or process of conservation, rehabilitation or maintenance. In this way, the *genius loci* of this culturally and historically rich township may be preserved.

Endnotes

- 1 *Genius loci* means the spirit of place (Garnham 1985:7) identifiable through the following three major components of a place:
 - Physical features and appearances dealing with the actual appearance of buildings, landscapes, climate and aesthetic quality.
 - Observable activities and functions dealing with people's interaction with places and subsequent use.
 - Meanings or symbols depicting human reactions to physical and functional aspects.

- 2 Conservation means all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance (Burra Charter 1999). It is a comprehensive process that encompasses different ways and means to preserve, use, protect and consolidate existing buildings, neighbourhoods or ensembles (Sheppard 1980:601). Thus, conservation may involve rehabilitation, reuse, recycling, restoration or reconstruction.
- 3 Rehabilitation means a process of returning a property (new or old) to a state of utility through repair or alteration so as to make it possible for an efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions and features of the site that are significant to its historical, architectural and cultural values (Nelson 1982:7).

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Figure 7: Landscape plan of house 154 (Kerrin, Molobe, Prinsloo & Swanepoel 2003)