AN IMPORTANT FUNCTION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS (SAIA) IS TO RECOGNISE AND PROMOTE EXCELLENCE IN ARCHITECTURE AND TO CREATE PUBLIC AWARENESS AND DEBATE ON ARCHITECTURAL ISSUES. THIS IS DONE THROUGH VARIOUS INITIATIVES, ONE OF WHICH IS THE PUBLICATION OF MAGAZINES AND BOOKS.

THIS IS THE FIFTH TIME THAT THE BOOK ON THE SAIA AWARDS PROGRAMME HAS BEEN PUBLISHED. IT CONTAINS THE LATEST CYCLE OF THE AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE, MERIT AWARDS, COMMENDATIONS AND REGIONAL AWARDS FOR ARCHITECTURE.

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As with all good and considerate work, it has created a new insight in an authoritative manner. It also reshuffles our accepted understanding of the history and influences underpinning South African architecture and engineering infrastructure. Much of this history predates or just overlaps with the better-known and researched changes brought about by the large-scale discovery of mineral resources in the interior of South Africa. The industrialisation, development and architecture that followed these discoveries was largely driven from an Anglophone perspective—much of our understanding of colonial architecture in the country has also centred largely on early Dutch and English influences. This book fills a gap in this perspective in that, we now know, influences came about from a more industrialised and advanced Holland, as well as other European countries. What is astounding is the evidence of the entire range of international links that were at work in the fragile state of the ZAR in order to establish, at least the start of, a modern infrastructure of institutions and elements such as roads and railways. Much of this contribution still forms the basis of what we now use on a daily basis—albeit being much changed and adapted.

Furthermore, colonialism has in the past and recently been the focus of much negative and destructive commentary and populist electronic hashtag-based movements. We know that the largest part of such popular reactions is based on a superficial interpretation of far...
more fundamental contributions, shifts and interrelationships of high levels of complexity. In this publication, at least, one can find a well-researched and argued base on which to place a position vis-à-vis the architecture representing colonialism.

Often, when the accolade of excellence is made, it needs to be placed in relation to what others produced at the same time or in previous times. When such recent publications – mostly produced outside of South Africa on local architecture or on architecture, urbanism and infrastructure in other African countries – are viewed in unison, they pale in comparison. This is due mostly to the superficiality and lack of academic, historical and professional rigour contained in them. In many ways, this largely homegrown publication sets the standard by which others should be measured.

This publication showcases South Africa’s rich architectural history. But it also reveals how under-researched that history is, and that academics of this stature can make a contribution to society by allowing all of us ‘to know our past’. The book is also written in a manner that makes it accessible to the general population. If we read it with the care and reflection that it deserves, we will all be able to make better informed and considered contributions towards our collective future.

In conclusion, *Eclectic ZA Wilhelmiens: A Shared Dutch Built Heritage in South Africa* forms another chapter in the ongoing search for local excellence, international relevance and contribution that defines the Department of Architecture at the University of Pretoria.