



CHAIRMANS REPORT
AGM 2019

COMPLIANCE

SAHRA – South African Heritage Resource Agency

After a couple of years of delay, on the 19th June 2019, the Owl House Foundation, SAHRA and the Dr. Beyers Naude Municipality jointly signed the Heritage Agreement which agreement now formally governs the tripartite relationship between the important stakeholders who are tasked with conserving and preserving the Owl House for future generations.

This agreement is a corner stone of the foundational agreements that our board was mandated to finalise and it is a massive step in the right direction to ensure that the Owl House receives the correct and relative expert attention regarding its conservation and preservation.



19 June 2019 – Signing the Heritage Agreement

Mr. Ben Mwasinga from SAHRA, Mr. Fulvio De Stefanis from OHF and Municipal Manager Dr. Eddie Rankwana from BNLM.

MOI – MEMORADUM OF INCORPORATION

The Board of Directors finalized and approved the new draft MOI and I thank everyone involved in the many hours of consultation to develop a good document that will be considered and voted on in November by our members. In particular, I would like to thank Derek Light,

Leonie Fouche and all the Board members who applied their skill and expertise to finalise the draft document.

At a Special Meeting held earlier today on Monday 25th November 2019, the members of the OHF voted to adopt a new MOI.

The adoption of this new MOI makes the Owl House Foundation compliant with the Companies Act of 2008 and with such compliance, many new opportunities will be available to us as a Foundation such as the Application to SARS for Section 18A Certification as well as Lotto Funding.

The Foundation is now in a much stronger position to engage with donors and sponsors and we look forward to these opportunities.

In conclusion of this section, I am happy to report that the Board has finalized 2 of the 3 cornerstone documents that was on our list to finalise. The last important document is the Lease Agreement with the BNLM which Leonie Fouchie will report back on after the Chairman's report as this involves the many long and arduous processes within the municipality.

INTERGRATED CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

A fundamental and crucial document required by SAHRA which once approved by SAHRA will constitute the Blue Print on how we as a Foundation conserve, preserve and maintain the Owl House and Camel Yard, is the Integrated Conservation Management Plan or CMP abbreviated.

In order to ensure that we have the right team of experts compiling this CMP, the Board approached Professor Roger Fisher to head the development of the CMP.

We are honoured that Professor Fisher not only agreed to compile the CMP for the Owl House and Camel Yard for submission to SAHRA but Professor Fisher has agreed to this essential project on a Pro-Bono Basis.



This is a huge benefit to the Foundation and I would like to introduce Professor Fisher to our members by reading out an excerpt of his biography in order for our members to understand the significance of having such a prestigious expert compiling our CMP.

Roger FISHER is Professor Emeritus at the University of Pretoria.

In 2010 he was the recipient of the Writers and Critics Award from the [South African Institute of Architects](#), "The Writers and Critics Award is presented to Roger Charles Fisher in recognition of his deep knowledge of South African architecture and its links with international and local contexts, his astute powers of architectural evaluation and criticism, his ground-breaking implementation of innovative training programmes and broadening of the scope of training for the architectural profession, his prolific writings on South African heritage, his contributions to practical conservation by means of incisive technical

reports and seminal conclusions, all of which has established him as one of the great figures of architectural writing, criticism, research and education in the country."

The [Heritage South Africa](#) Gold Medal, the most prestigious award recognising achievement on a national level, was bestowed on Dr Roger Fisher. We quote from the citation that accompanied the Medal:

"Roger Charles Fisher was born in Rondebosch in the Cape Province where he commenced his education. He moved with his family to Pretoria in 1964 where he completed his schooling. After a varied early career he registered at the Department of Architecture where in 1982 he obtained his degree of Bachelor of Architecture. After a brief spell in private practice, he joined the academic staff at the University of Pretoria in 1986. There he read for his doctorate. On his retirement he was made an Emeritus Professor.

In 1997-1998 Dr Fisher was tasked with the major challenge of developing an integrated curriculum for the Professional Courses in Architectural Design and the Departments of Landscape and of Interior Design. This had to be aligned with the requirements and validation of National and International Bodies.

In his curriculum development at the University, Dr Fisher included the ecology of the past and the present built environment as an important component. This has inculcated an insight into and appreciation of heritage in several generations of students, extended through his personally conducted annual student history and design tours covering heritage in all provinces.

He has acted as Pro Bono advisor to the Northern Gauteng Region of the National Monuments Council and currently serves as a Councilor to the Mpumalanga province Heritage Council. He has participated in the Potential Atlas project (ENPAT) done for the DEAT in providing information at national scale relating to architectural cultural landscapes.

At a ceremony held at the [Voortrekker Monument](#) on 7 November 2011 he received a [PIA](#) award for the book *Eclectic ZA Wilhelmiens : A shared Dutch built heritage in South Africa*.

Again, the Fondation is honoured to have Professor Fisher undertake the important task of compiling our CMP.

Professor Fisher has indicated that the 1st draft of the CMP will be completed in the 1st quarter of 2020 and he will be liaising with SAHRA to finalise.

REPAIRS AND RESTORATION WORKS



With the signing of the Heritage Agreement with SAHRA, we were granted, in the agreement, permission to commence with urgent and critical repairs.

As such, we mandated our experts to commence especially on the Glass and Concrete.

CONCRETE

I would like to thank Daniel Van Der Merwe for facilitating Chryso SA and their Technical Team for attending to the Technical analysis of the current situation of the cement structures in the Owl House.

I am happy to report that Chryso SA sponsored the Technical training of our staff as well as sponsored the initial batch of material for the repairs and restoration of the structures.

We are grateful for Chryso SA's method and technical statement that is being incorporated into our Conservation Management Plan.

We look forward to a fruitful partnership with ABE and Chryso SA.

GLASS

We have appointed Amanda Snyman from the Nelson Mandela Bay University with expertise in glass restoration as our expert to attend to the various reports for the CMP as well as to attend to critical and urgent repairs to glass related matters in the Camel Yard and Owl House.

These critical repairs, in compliance by our Heritage Agreement and approved by SAHRA, has now commenced and I am happy to report that we have had great success in stabilizing and strengthening previously precarious structures.

We are grateful to Ms Snyman for her attention, work and training in this field.



VISITOR EXPERIENCE

A constant critique from visitors to the Owl House is that the experience is overwhelming and without guidance, very confusing.

Most people have heard about the Owl House but have never researched or read up on Helen Martins, her wonderful creation and/or Outsider Art.

Upon arrival to visit, without guidance or easily accessible information, many find the experience overwhelming.

We embarked on various exercises to improve our Visitor's experience.

We invited Eugene Hon from the University of Johannesburg to assist with some of these exercises.

A brief introduction to Mr Hon :



Mr Hon was the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture (or FADA) at the University of Johannesburg between 2001 – 2006

Mr Hon remains a Senior lecturer in Design at the University and is also the Director of the FADA Gallery.

Mr Hon has also been on numerous Committees, Societies and Professional Bodies – to name a few:

Committees, Societies and Professional Bodies

- Co-Founder of the Craft Council of South African (CCSA)
- Founder member of the Institute of Contemporary Art
- Chairman, South African Ceramic Society Council
- DTI's Small Producers Export Council; including the Education and Training Sub-Committee
- Chair of TWR Art Advisory Committee
- UJ Space Planning Committee
- UJ Strategic Task Team
- UJ Disability Committee
- UJ Executive Committee for Quality Assurance

As if these credentials aren't impressive enough, Mr Hon is a celebrated ceramist who has won numerous awards, has been exhibited internationally and has been extensively published.

We invited Mr Hon to the Owl House to assist with improving the Visitor Experience.

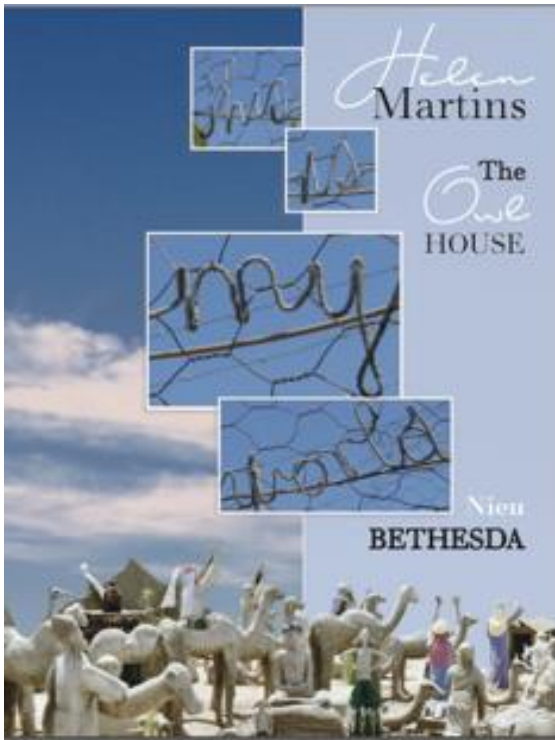
In line with international trends, and agreed to by SAHRA, a "Walk Through" with various significant points was established.

In order to better facilitate the Walk Through, Visitors are now brought into the Owl House via a gate from the Foundation's property.

They are then directed around the Camel Yard and Owl House following 35 points of interest.

These points of interest are sign posted by pedestaled numbers placed at the various points.





A full colour booklet titled “This is my World” was produced with a map of the Owl House complex illustrating the 35 points with a short paragraph describing to our Visitors what these points of interest are and their significance.

This booklet forms the basis for us to be able to expand in to Audio guides in line with most international museums.

Lastly, our Visitors are meant to exit the Camel Yard through “Helen’s Exit” at the front of Owl House, exiting onto New Road, requiring our Visitors to pass by the Crafters Market, and loop back to the Visitor Centre.

In our booklet we state, and I quote:

“Helen’s Exit :

In her last will Helen wrote the following:

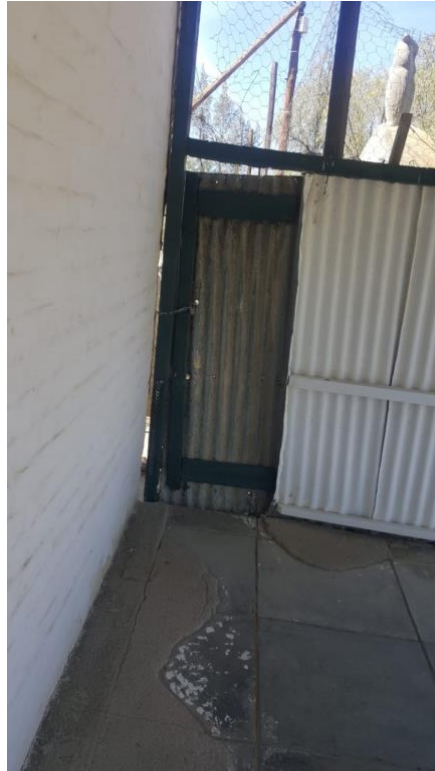
“My body is to be removed through the red door in the long bedroom and out through the zinc gate in the yard, not through the front door. I have my reasons.”

It seems that Helen believed she would pass away in the long bedroom. But Helen was instead found in the kitchen after drinking caustic soda, still alive. Rushing her to the Hospital in Graaff-Reinet, Helen was taken out the front door. She died three days later after being admitted to hospital.

Helen never got her final wishes but you, our gentle Visitor, are now completing her journey by leaving the house through Helen’s gate. “

Although we have opened the entrance and it is working very successfully, we experienced difficulties with Helen’s Exit as it is not in an acceptable condition to let people exit especially the elderly.

We are currently working on designs to install a non-intrusive, non-permanent structure with a ramp and rails to install over the obstacles at Helen’s Exit in order to finalise the Walk Through.



In the interim, we have temporarily opened the front door as an Exit onto New Road in order for our Visitors to still loop around to our Visitor Centre by walking past the Crafters Market.

Through Mr Hon, the University of Johannesburg sponsored the design and photography of our new information booklet as well as the direction and guidance of the Walk Through and we would like to extend our sincere thanks to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture, Mr Hon and the designers for their contribution to these exercises.

NEW SIGNAGE

Another area identified for upgrade and improvement was the old signage in and around the Precinct.

I am happy to report that modern, new and well sized signage has been installed around the Precinct giving directional information to our visitors.





VISITOR CENTRE & NEW SHOP



Our Visitor Centre and Shop were our most ambitious exercise in elevating our Visitor Experience and we embarked on the upgrades during August and September of this year.



The improvements have been positively received from virtually everyone who have visited.

We are very extremely grateful to our members, Albert Van Schalkwyk and Charmaine Haines who, at no cost to the Foundation, with their relevant expertise, designed the aesthetics and oversaw and implemented the upgrades.



The new shop has also reignited interest and excitement from the Artists who live in our village and we are proud to announce that most Artists from Nieu Bethesda are now represented in the Owl House's shop – these include Gregg Price, Martin and Charmaine Haines, Frans Boekkooi, Daleen Kruger, Annette van der Hulst.

We have taken the direction of undertaking that all content of the shop will be locally sourced within the borders of South Africa.

We are depleting our current stock and will only be replacing new products with Proudly South African content.

A positive sign of things to come is reflected in the September sales in the New Shop. Having opened it's doors on the 14 September 2019 – there were only 16 trading days in September. In these 16 days, the sale revenue exceeded the sale revenue of the entire September 2018 period of the previous year; proof of the positive impact of the upgrades.

In fact since the opening of the new Visitor Centre, our sales figures are impressive:

September 2018	Total Sales	R12'915-00
September 2019 only 16 days from 14th	Total Sales	R24'240-00
Increase 88%		
October 2018	Total Sales	R20'500-00
October 2019	Total Sales	R33'305-00
Increase 62%		
November 2018	Total Sales	R21 905-00
November 2019 up to 20 November	Total Sales	R47'050-00
Increase 115%		

This is a crucial component of the Foundations revenue stream and although we have seen a decrease in the number of visitors during 2019 due to the South African economy, we have been able to counteract and compensate the decrease revenue from ticket sales with improved sales in our shop.

It must be noted that our profit margin on the art pieces, which assist in elevating the sales, is not as significant as the smaller items but on the other hand, we have no capital outlay on these

items as they are all consigned into the shop and we earn a 25% commission on any and all sales.

NEW PRODUCTS

As part of the further development of income streams for the OHF, and in line with the new ethos of the shop, we engaged with Simon Ford, the Cape Town artist who in 1990 created a



wonderful series of artworks that hung at various places in the Visitor Centre.

In collaboration with Simon, the A1 art prints were resized to produce a range of Postcards and Birthday Calendars specifically for sale in our shop to raise funds for the OHF.

These new products have been well received in our new shop and have proven to be very popular souvenir purchases by our visitors.

NEW WEBSITE



I am happy to report that O'BD Design has sponsored the design and implementation of the OHF's new website in line with the design parameters of the produced Brochure by FADA.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mike O'Brien for O'BD's generous sponsorship to the Owl House Foundation.



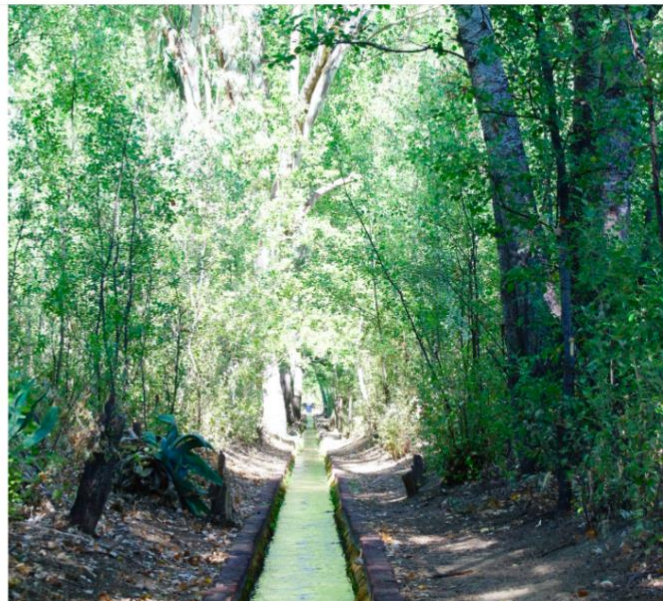
Contact

Get in contact with the Owl House during office hours.

The Owl House's operating hours are 09h00 to 16h45, Monday to Sunday; December school holidays, 08h00 to 17h45; and closed on December 25.

Tickets may be purchased at the visitors' centre entrance in Martin Street, and cost R60 for the Owl House only, and R90 for a combined ticket to both the Owl House and Kitching Fossil Centre. Special tariffs are available for groups.

Contact the Owl House via telephone at 049 841 1733 or [email](#) us at admin@theowlhouse.co.za for further information.



The Camel Yard

A procession of camels and wise men are making their way "east". The caravan is in fact traveling north to south and not true east. Helen has written the words "East/Oos" on the boundary fence, creating a place where the sun and moon rise and the direction in which men turn to in prayer. The whole of the Owl House and Camel Yard is filled with many stories and themes, inspired by books and images. Welcome to Helen's Mecca.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF DONORS AND SPONSORS

The Foundation will be erecting a Plaque in our Visitor Centre onto which all our Sponsors and Donors will be acknowledged.

CANCELLATION OF MEMBERSHIPS

The Board took the drastic step of canceling one members membership to the Foundation due to the various serious nature of offence this particular member committed.

It was not a decision taken lightly and it was taken only after sanctioning the member, giving them an opportunity to redress the situation and after they failed to take any remedial action.

It is important to understand that although membership into the Foundation is not limited, once a person has chosen to be a member they have elected to comply with the rules and regulations of the Foundation and certain conduct and behavior cannot and will not be tolerated by the Foundation.

CRAFTERS

Possibly the most important work that we, as a Board, has conducted this year is the work on behalf of the Crafters.

The Board took a decision that we must prioritize the work and effort to uplift and improve the situation of the Crafters.

And to this effect we have taken major strides this year in our efforts to improve and uplift the Crafters.

MOI

In our newly adopted MOI, we have agreed and adopted that our Secondary Objective of the Foundation is to, and I quote from the MOI “

The Secondary Object

The Company hereby recognizes its social responsibility towards the community of Nieu-Bethesda and undertakes to support the community and in particular also the crafters and informal traders in promoting “the Owl House” as a tourist attraction, as it endeavors to fulfill its primary objective.

For the first time, the Foundation has formally recognized the legacy of the Crafters as integral to the future work of the Foundation. This objective mandates the Foundation to work to support the Crafters.

As Chairman of the Foundation, I am particularly proud that the Board and the Foundation has taken this significant step.

CREDIT CARD FACILITIES

A common known fact and a problem the Crafters faced for years was the fact that Tourists could only buy their crafts with cash – if they had cash. This often led to tourists wanting to buy but could not as they did not bring enough cash and there is no atm to draw.

At the beginning of the year, we implemented a system whereby we offered the Crafters the facility to use the Credit Card facilities of the OHF's shop to sell their crafts to tourists who do not carry cash but would like to purchase their crafts.

Since the implementation of the system on the 23 January 2019 until 20 November 2019, the total sales of Crafters transaction through the OHF's shop was R58 350-00.

This has been a remarkable assistance to the Crafters.

REGISTRATION AS A CO-OP

After many years and many failed attempts by the Beyers Naude Local Municipality, we facilitated the formalization and registration of the Crafters into a Formal Co-Op with the municipality. Through this process of consultation and discussion with the Crafters, we were also able to formalize with the Crafters who they believed were the historical and legitimate “owners” of a stall space in the Crafters Precinct.

Our concerns were aligned with the Crafters, that as our efforts of upliftment and assistance began to bear fruit, it would attract new people to the Precinct to sell their goods. The Crafters were adamant that they did not want this to happen as they felt that they were the ones that have spent the years in discomfort outside the Owl House.

The Crafters agreed that they would police the situation themselves and they elected 15 people to form the Co-Op and those 15 people would be the 15 stalls in the Precinct.

HARDWARE SUPPLIES



Through our on-going discussions with the Crafters, they let us know that their material supplier in Nieu Bethesda closed down and that they were finding it extremely difficult and expensive to now buy and import material from Graaff Reinet.

To further assist the Crafters, and in line with our new MOI, we allocated one of the store rooms

on our property to keep cement and wire. Now twice a week, the Crafters can come and purchase their cement and wire from the storeroom.

This is a further service that we have implemented to assist the crafters. No mark-up is made on the supplies and this is purely to assist the crafters and save them the exorbitant costs and effort related to getting the supplies from Graaff Reinet.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF CRAFTERS AS PART OF HELEN MARTINS' LEGACY



To further cement the relationship between the Crafters, the Foundation and the Owl House itself, when the numbered pedestals were designed for the Walk Through, we invited the Crafters to create cement and glass bases for the numbered pedestals.

Each Crafter is acknowledged with a tag in their particular base that they created.

For the first time, Helen's legacy with the Crafters is now represented within her own creation of the Camel Yard.

CRAFTERS MARKET PRECINCT



In terms of the formalization of the Crafter's Market Area, we appointed Town Planners Urban Dynamics to submitted the rezoning application to the BNLM.

The application has been advertised and will now go to tribunal to assess the various objections received to the application.

The tribunal is a critical part of the process as any and all objections will be assessed by professionals, such as Town Planners, Engineers, Social Responsibility Managers, Integrated Development Planning Managers etc, in the correct forum.

We are aware of some objections that have been received but are confident that they will be addressed in a professional and constructive manner. However, objections for the sake of objections will find little support.

It must be understood that:

NO CHANGE = NO UPLIFTMENT

And we can ALL agree that for far too long, the Crafters have been existing in horrendous conditions that is unbecoming of their humanity and fundamental human rights.

This application has the support of the Municipality, the Mayor, SAHRA and the Foundation and we are all working to ensure that we improve the standing of the Crafters.

Ultimately, for those who are concerned of this process, must understand that by elevating the standing of the Crafters and creating a formal precinct, the entire area will benefit.

During the consultations with the Crafters, we also established their requirements for the fundamentals design of their stalls.

The critical points were 3x3m spaces for each Crafter, cement floors, shelves, windows, weather proof and lockable.

From a design brief perspective, we will be cognizant of the materials to be used, in line with the Owl House, the environment and the Karoo setting.

We will be embarking on the design phase of the Crafter's Precinct and will continue through this process of consulting with the Crafters.

Once we have a design - we will be presenting this for Public Participation.

All the regulatory bodies will be involved in the process and by the time the design has been finalized, we are confident that we will have garnered the support of the majority of stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

In Conclusion, 2019 has been an extremely busy year and I would like to thank my Board of Directors for their time, effort and constructive impact that they have had on the management of the Owl House Foundation and creating fantastic forward momentum.

Thank you

FULVIO DE STEFANIS
Chairman
25 November 2019

