

# BACK TO THE Source

The concept of using water and natural spaces to regenerate urban environments is becoming an increasingly important point of consideration for major cities wanting to redefine or reposition themselves globally. In this regard Cape Town's Reclaim Camissa project is right on target.

**L**ocated at the confluence of the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, the southwestern tip of Africa has historically held a strategic position as an important port on one of the world's busiest trade routes. Table Bay remains a leading international port and with its backdrop of the majestic Table Mountain, it is undoubtedly one

of the most picturesque harbours in the world. However, Cape Town is much more than a principal port city – it is also a hotbed for innovation in urban design, especially in light of the city's status as World Design Capital 2014.

Cape Town is steeped in the history of the Southern African region. From the 1650s when

Dutch settlers laid out the Company's Garden at the foot of Table Mountain, when the city was established as a replenishment station for ships rounding the Cape, an abundant flow of water from Table Mountain was the enabling factor for the fruit and vegetable gardens and therefore the primary reason for the early settlement at the Cape. Yet in 1994, as a result of sewage seepage from urban development above the springs, this important source of water was scrapped from the asset resource register.

In a progressive move to reclaim the central city's connection to Table Mountain's natural water, a public benefit organisation (non-profit trust) was founded in March 2010 and took its name from the ancient Khoi name for Cape Town - Camissa, which means "the place of sweet waters".

The Reclaim Camissa project is committed to securing the waters of the Table Valley Catchment for deployment in an integrated, multi-dimensional infrastructure embedded within the urban fabric, becoming in essence, "an interconnected series of places where water is reinstated and functions within the public realm". Caron von Zeil, founder of Reclaim Camissa explains that "as an inclusive project that would engage all the citizens of Cape Town, Reclaim Camissa has the potential for great public good".

In a water-scarce country like South Africa, water is a critical issue within the urban environment, especially with climate change increasingly likely to cause water shortages and higher temperatures. It is therefore imperative that water resources, wherever they are found, should be secured and protected from wastage and pollution.

The project aims to celebrate the rich cultural and historic strata of the city, reflecting the public past and embracing new civic infrastructure, while acknowledging the very waters that defined Cape Town's location as well as recognising and respecting the water's social, cultural and ecological significance.

### SPATIAL FRAMEWORK

The 6.7 km long spatial framework for the city lies between Table Mountain and Duncan Dock. It would function as a catalyst for urban renewal, economic generation and community development through creative urban planning interventions that incorporate parks, pedestrian walkways and urban public places. "Reclaim Camissa would 'day light' water that is now underground, providing 'greeninfrastructure' and paying homage to nature as master," according to Von Zeil.

Numerous gravity-fed water systems would be introduced into an innovative network of linked



public spaces or precincts in the City Bowl: a web of seven precincts incorporating a Dockside, a New Water's Edge, the Old City Waterways, the Cultural Heart, a Water Sustainability Park, Civic-Hydrology Precincts and a Gateway to the Mountain. "These precincts," says von Zeil, "would unite building typologies that are currently separated by severing mechanisms such as major roads."

The proposed framework would provide multi-layered experiences as well as public environmental education opportunities through demonstration models relating to water renewal and power generation.

Through a systemic approach and cooperative collaboration, the many integrated projects that constitute Reclaim Camissa would essentially restructure the urban fabric of Cape Town's city centre according to environmental principles, while securing water from Table Mountain for use by present and future generations.

Most significant, however, would be the

reinstatement of an important source of potable water to the city, while grey water would be made available to water urban landscaping and sufficient water flow for small-scale hydropower generation to provide lighting for the centre of the city.

Portions of subterranean rivers and other water utility infrastructure would be exposed, introducing an imaginative new dimension to the city, creating adventure-tourism opportunities such as a subterranean *gracht* adventure trail through an historic tunnel.

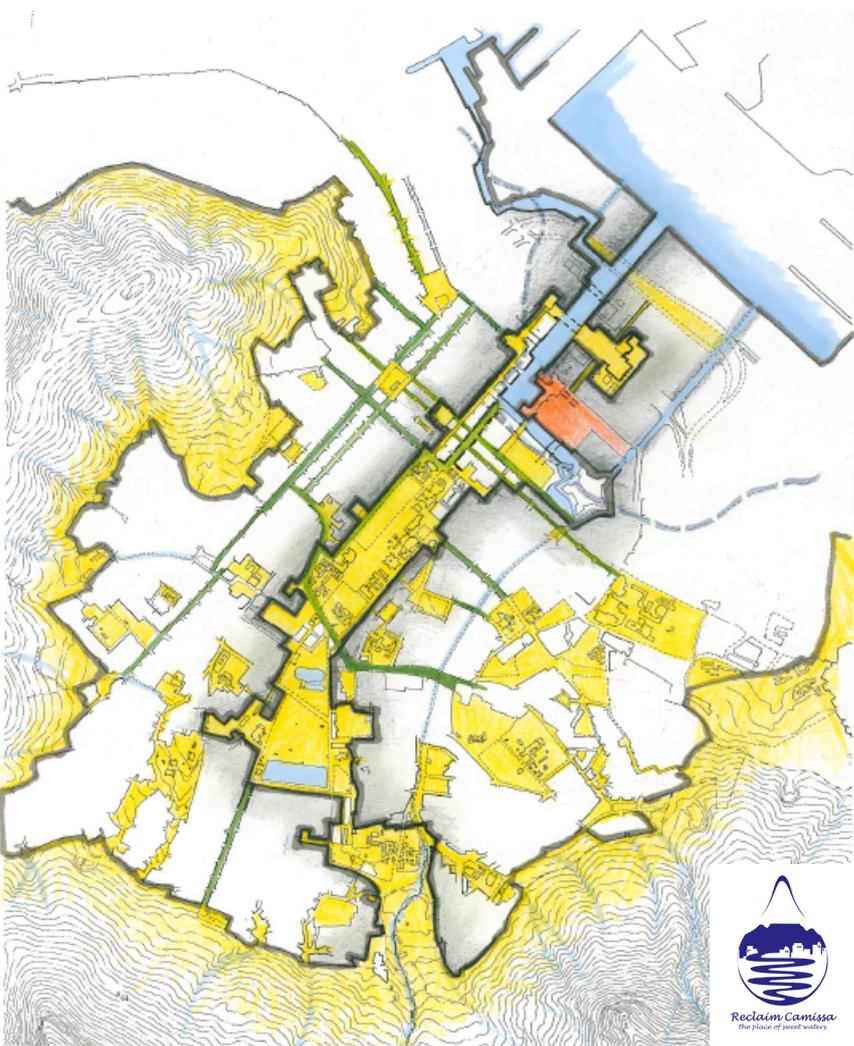
The valuing of Cape Town's natural water resource for its social, cultural, historic and ecological importance is at the heart of Reclaim Camissa. This precept is being addressed through civic hydrology that not only reinstates infrastructure of the past, but creates new civic infrastructure for the present and future, and that optimises the area's natural dual water system (spring water and mountain run-off) by providing ecological links, creating educational opportunities and providing opportunities for the storage and collection of the water for use in different applications.

The task at hand may seem almost impossible, but there are real examples of this type of regeneration.

#### A REAL LIFE EXAMPLE: SEOUL

The city of Seoul, South Korea, was considered "hopeless" after the devastating Korean War (1950-1953). Today, it is a miracle of modernisation, economic development and technological achievement. In less than two generations the city has transformed itself from an economic wasteland with war-damaged infrastructure into a leading global city with one of the most technologically-advanced infrastructures in the world.

South Korea's highly accelerated economic growth has been referred to as the "Miracle on the Han River" and today its capital and largest metropolis, Seoul, is ranked fifth in the Global Financial Centres Index. Seoul, however, is not a city to rest on its laurels and it has embarked on a transformation drive to reintroduce nature into the city and to





promote more eco-friendly urban design.

Seoul's paradigm shift from rapid industrialisation at any cost to development that values the quality of life of its people and the importance of functioning ecosystems is reflected in the restoration of the Cheonggyecheon Stream, an ambitious urban renewal project that has introduced clean water, green spaces, an historical context and cultural amenities into the city centre.

In response to South Korea's intense post-war industrialisation programme and its policy of auto-centric urban development, in 1968 the old streambed of the Cheonggyecheon Stream was paved with cement and covered with an elevated freeway. Over two decades the area became the noisy, congested commercial centre of Seoul.

However, when repairs were needed to secure the safety of the ageing infrastructure, a decision was made instead to demolish it in order to uncover a section of the historic Cheonggyecheon Stream, thereby introducing a continuous art and nature walkway through the heart of the city.

The 8.4 km long Cheonggyecheon Restoration Project, which was opened to the public in

September 2005, is a continuous east-west green corridor with a park that runs on both sides of the stream, spanned by 22 overhead bridges. Design elements include small waterfalls, stepping stones and art installations, while willow swamps, shallows and marshes in 29 locations along the stream provide habitats for fish, amphibians, insects and birds and thus increase biodiversity in the area.

The Cheonggyecheon Stream is visited by 64 000 visitors daily. In addition to the recreational and ecological opportunities it has created, the project has cooled temperatures in nearby areas by 3.6°C on average, improved air quality and reduced traffic congestion in the area. It has also been a catalyst for the revitalisation of downtown Seoul, providing significant economic benefits such as an increase in the number of businesses to the area, increased property values and growing earnings from foreign tourists. 🌱

[www.lafoundation.org/research/landscape-performance-series/case-studies/case-study/382/](http://www.lafoundation.org/research/landscape-performance-series/case-studies/case-study/382/)

<http://discoveringkorea.com/081209/seouls-cheonggyecheon-stream/>

The Cheonggyecheon Restoration Project.