

INTERNATIONAL





# Feasting on art

Adorning the walls of its UK restaurants, Nando's contemporary South African art collection entrances patrons while empowering emerging artists

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IT MAY COME AS A SURPRISE, BUT IF YOU WANT to see some of the best that contemporary South African art has to offer, you might as well pack your bags and head north. Chicken chain Nando's didn't merely bring peri peri to the Poms: in almost a decade, its UK operation has amassed a collection of over 3 000 pieces of South African art, many of which are showcased in each of its 243 restaurants in the UK.

"Great art has always been in the DNA of the Nando's brand," says Nando's CEO Robbie Brozin. The restaurants are "all about atmosphere", he says, and so showcasing good contemporary South African artwork helps to provide an authentic experience. One of Nando's most ambitious art projects to date has been the massive mosaic unveiled at its King's Cross restaurant in June. Designed by Joburg-based artist Clive van den Berg, *Coming to the City* riotously captures the bustle of modern life. Vibrant colours echo its African origins, and yet the work remains firmly rooted in its proximity to one of London's largest railway stations.

*Wanted* paid a visit to Union House, a former factory in Cape Town's inner city where the mosaic was painstakingly

produced by students of the Spier Arts Academy. Founded in 2008, the school offers a three-year apprenticeship in which students are taught drawing, ceramics and mosaic — the latter by mosaicist Irene Rizzin, who obtained her master's degree in mosaic at the Scuola Mosaicisti del Friuli in Spilimbergo, Italy. The course also teaches art history and business skills, empowering the students to be able to develop their own careers as creative entrepreneurs.

The academy forms part of Spier Architectural Arts, an initiative of the Spier Arts Trust which oversees the creation and development of large site-specific art installations using mosaic and other mediums. One of the largest commissions to date is Marlise Keith's *The Rat Race*, a maritime-infused meditation on movement, which was installed at insurance group Hollard's Parktown head office last year. The 16m long mosaic has been nominated for BASA's Single Strategic Project Award.

This year, the five members of the Art Academy's inaugural graduate class will be forming a collective, Sisonke, that will also be based in Union House and operate as a

satellite mosaic manufacturer, receiving commissions from Spier and elsewhere, as well as conducting mosaic workshops.

The academy is run by Jeanetta Blignaut Art Consultancy. Blignaut works closely with Spier to serve as the fulcrum between emerging artists and big business, sourcing art for Nando's and Hollard. "What they are enjoying is to get involved with the lives of the artists and to see the difference that their investments make in the artists' lives," she says, adding that the power of art is that you are gaining on "your investment but you can also see what difference that investment is making in an individual's life".

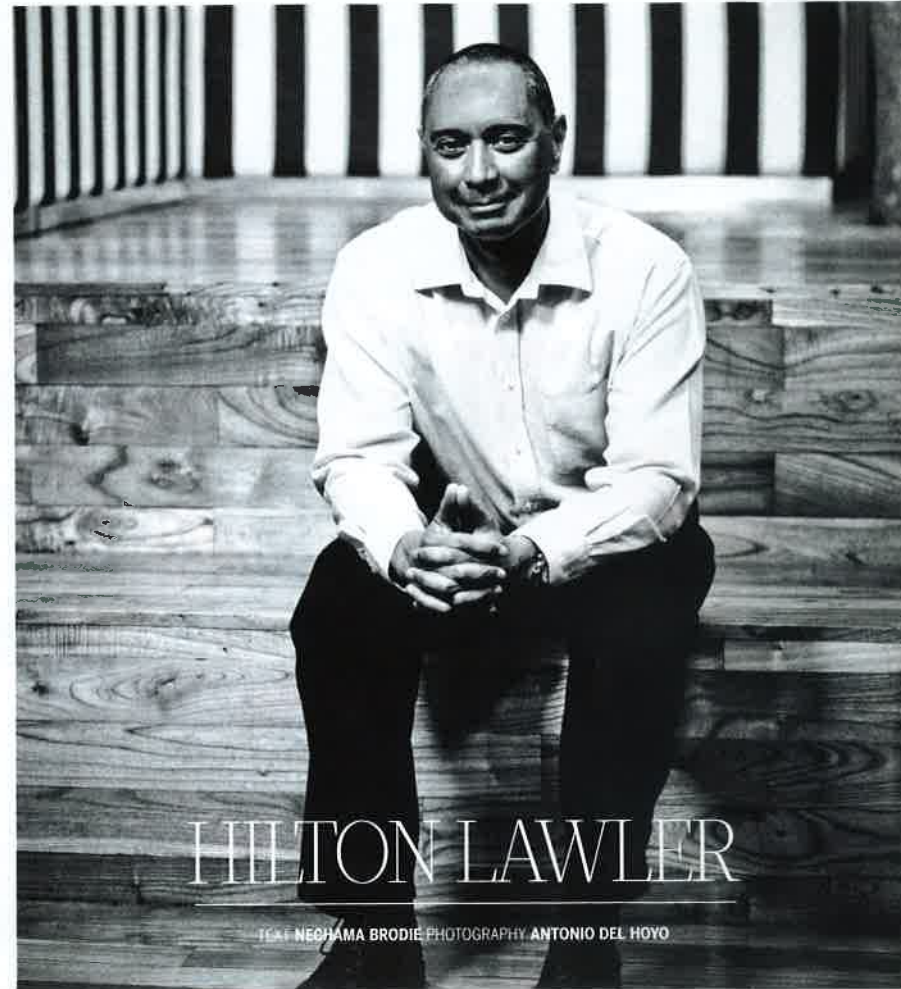
As an investor in both Nando's and Hollard, and with his family owning the Spier estate, art patron Dick Enthoven has been a driving force behind the academy's development. "Dick is very involved on a day-to-day basis, conceptualising new things," says Blignaut. She describes the family as being "equally enthusiastic and supportive".

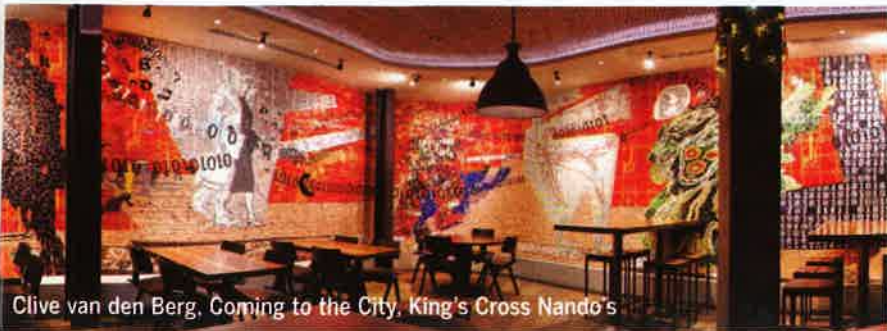
Blignaut's team manages the Nando's Artists' Society which provides six mid-career artists, each with a proven track record, with a regular source of income: they get paid within a

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15 MINUTES





Clive van den Berg, *Coming to the City*, King's Cross Nando's

week of submitting their art. At the same time their work helps to meet the huge demand for original artwork from Nando's restaurants in both the UK and SA.

"We are looking at how we can start leveraging the art in the restaurants, and start exposing customers more to the artists," says Brozin.

A closer relationship between Nando's patrons and the artists whose work adorns the walls is underway. "Now with technology it's much easier to bring those stories into the restaurant," says Blignaut. "We've done a number of events this year where the artists were flown over (to London) — like for the launch of *Coming to the City*."

One initiative, ArtServe, will bring five emerging artists who have consistently produced good work to London. Afterwards, they will produce artworks based on

their experience at printmaking studio Warren Editions and these images will then be used on Nando's UK menus.

Blignaut describes Union House as "an ideas factory". The basement is being renovated to provide a new computer lab, ceramic studio and additional classrooms. There are also plans for an additional floor to be built where a creative residency can provide accommodation for visiting artists.

The vast ground floor, home to a stainless steel bar imported from Paris and several antique dining tables, serves as a meeting area. Nicknamed the KitKatClub after the Berlin hotspot of the same name, it is hoped that the space will come to serve as a cultural hub.

*Spier Arts Academy,*  
[www.spierartsacademy.co.za](http://www.spierartsacademy.co.za)



When the Nelson Mandela Museum in Umtata opened its doors 11 years ago it was intended as much more than just a static tribute to Mandela the man or to other struggle heroes. The museum was positioned as a living monument to the values and vision of freedom fighters and as a catalyst for development; a place where heritage and resources could be shared.

Local artists, crafters and budding cultural entrepreneurs would often come to the museum seeking advice and support. In response to this, the museum launched an Arts Incubator Programme last year under the guidance of artist, curator and activist Churchill Madikida. The programme was designed to develop professional skills and help implement long-term survival strategies for local artists and crafters. During the pilot phase, Madikida was able to call in veteran brand marketing and strategy consultant Hilton Lawler to work with some of the artists at the Qunu Youth Centre in Umtata.

"My role is to give people direction in terms of what they need to do with their business," Lawler says. "How to plan it, how to scope it out, how to resource it. I make people think about where they would like to be, why they are in business, what they want to achieve. Coming up with a vision for your business might only take up six lines in your strategy, but it can take you two days to articulate, to work out what your mission and goals are. And if you're not comfortable with that, everything else will be a struggle."

Lawler says that, working with artists, a lot of them "knew their trade very well, but lacked the business skills. They didn't know what opportunities were out there, how to market themselves. So we ran workshops where we could give them the tools they needed, taught them how to apply the tools. Of course I could do the work for them, but what happens next year when a strategy consultant like me isn't around? It's all about imparting skills, about sharing and interrogation."

Lawler, who has previously worked as a BASA mentor with the Origins Centre at the University of the Witwatersrand and with the colourful Shwe Shwe Poppis initiative, says the "biggest stumbling block" most people (and artists, NGOs and art programmes) have is "understanding who and what they are. When I worked with Origins, they initially only saw themselves as a museum. I said it was much broader than that — it was about entertainment. Origins engages the senses, allows visitors to touch, hear, see palaeo sciences and archaeology. Once you change the way you think, everything changes. The feedback I got from the artists at the Nelson Mandela Museum was that they were overwhelmed with the information they'd received. I'd opened new doors for them. That was the biggest take-out: 'I thought I could only go so far. You mean I can do this?'"

*Nelson Mandela Museum, [www.nelsonmandelamuseum.org.za](http://www.nelsonmandelamuseum.org.za)*