



Historic Newtown buildings to become **cool hangouts**



Trevyn McGowan, left, and Maira Koutsoudakis are behind the Newtown rejuvenation project

CYNICS – and I admit I was one – move aside. The Newtown Junction, itself an impressive leap forward thanks to the biggest Joburg inner city investment since the Carlton Centre in the 1970s, is stepping up a very exciting notch with the launch in November of a groundbreaking retail space, restaurant and cocktail bar, inspired and run by the savviest and most creative minds in the business.

The development was unveiled at a very glamorous launch Newtown Junction recently, and eyeing the guests – the who's who of South Africa's design and architectural world – it's obvious this project will be a clear winner for the Newtown cultural district, and Joburg as a city.

Called “Work Shop New Town”, the retail space is a cavernous 1200sqm within the once derelict Potato Shed (a siding for fresh produce and livestock back in the early 1900s) that will house 45 stalls and store units, offering cutting-edge local fashion, product design and services like a tailor, barbershop and tattoo parlour.

The special design and curating is being done by the highly accomplished design duo, Trevyn and Julian McGowan, of the design company SOURCE.

“We are re-imagining the interior architecture of this 1911 heritage building, the idea being to create a dramatic, eclectic visual language for the varied store options,” said Trevyn McGowan at the launch.

“There will be a lot of industrial age aesthetic, but harking back to the romance of its heritage. Our goal is to create the most concentrated African contemporary fashion destination in the country, while other selected tenants will



The Potato Shed space in Newtown, now and then, is set to become a ‘steampunk’ restaurant and craft brewery. PICTURES: MATHEWS BALOYI AND SUPPLIED

Newtown. Another rejuvenation project. Only this time, it looks like we have lift-off, writes Helen Grange

offer top-end, African-made design and craft, homeware and collectables.”

Adjoining this retail space, also within the old Potato Shed, will be a new “steampunk” restaurant called The Potato Shed, the brainchild of Maira Koutsoudakis, co-founder with her husband John of the LIFE group of companies (owner of the Life Grand Cafes).

Koutsoudakis, an interior designer, has been involved in projects as diverse as a private island resort in the Seychelles and luxury residences in the winelands of Somerset West, to residential projects in Madagascar, Mozambique, Greece, London and penthouse office suites in Joburg.

An indomitable figure in the retail and restaurant world, she is passionate about the future of Newtown Junction, and persisted over weeks to secure the McGowans' collaboration in this project. She believes the Potato Shed development will change the

landscape of the city.

“There is such hip, happening, swaggy energy in Joburg, but it needs to connect,” Koutsoudakis said at the launch. “For me, this project marks a seminal moment in the future of this city.”

Steampunk refers to design inspired by 19th-century industrial machinery, so The Potato Shed will combine the raw and refined – incorporating much of the original structure of the old Potato Shed into a contemporary eatery which will celebrate the icons of Newtown, like Miriam Makeba and Athol Fugard.

“It will embrace indoor and outdoor dining, creating an informal marketplace feel with its open kitchen, craft brewery and interactive, chic dining experiences. We’re talking hearty meals such as lamb spits on the weekends. It’s the kind of place where the humble potato is king, inspiring everything from the drinks and food. Why not? That’s its

heritage,” says Koutsoudakis.

There is more. A walk through the piazza of Newtown Junction and left around the corner near the Market Theatre complex is the charming old Edwardian-era men’s latrine, also built in 1911, which Koutsoudakis says is going to be transformed into the Gentlemen’s Arthouse cocktail bar.

“We’ve searched for the right spot for this project for years, and the Edwardian washrooms is the perfect location for our concept,” she says.

Bent on retaining as much of its heritage as possible, she has decided the cathedral chair-like urinals and the original green tiles will stay, delightfully adding to what will be a unique city cocktail venue, with heavy velvet curtains, cathedral-style windows and heavy wooden bars.

“We want to celebrate the mavericks of our time, with just the right amount of swag and the ladies with enviable class,” Koutsoudakis smiles. “So you’ll see gorgeous Victorian outfits... this is the theatre district after all. And there’ll be a DJ and a trapeze, with ‘Victorian ladies’ in silk costumes descending from the ceiling to perform their acts. Various other performances will take place almost every night of the week.”

At the Gentlemen’s Arthouse will be served artisanal cocktails made by what she describes as “star-tenders”, bartenders with global awards for making unique cocktails. Diners, meanwhile, can expect interesting seasonal menus by some top chefs, featuring

“historic dishes and drinks you’ve never seen before”.

Ambitious as Work Shop New Town, The Potato Shed restaurant and Gentlemen’s Arthouse may sound, it has an excellent chance of becoming a sustainable reality by the scarily imminent November 5 deadline for a soft opening. If all goes according to plan, these three venues will become the new go-to place for edgy urbanites frequenting Newtown and surrounds.

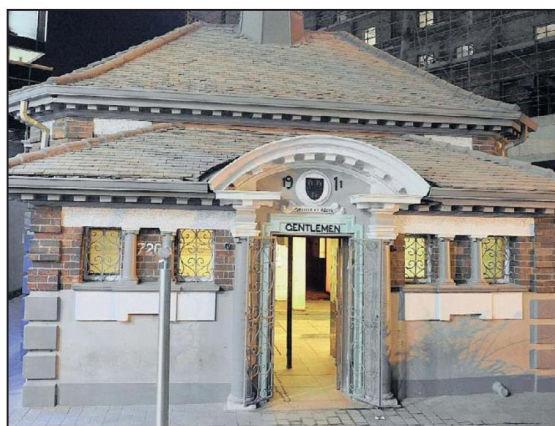
Custom is already on their doorstep, as Newtown Junction, developed by Atterbury Property and Attacq, an investment funder, incorporates more than 70 stores, a food court, gym, a Ster-Kinekor complex, Nedbank’s headquarters and an eight-storey hotel.

A four-storey underground carpark provides easy access to the entirely pedestrianised precinct. It attracts about 500 000 visitors a month. The ongoing development of trendy residential apartments in the area will also feed into profit margins.

In securing SOURCE and LIFE for this project, Atterbury have fulfilled their vision of the iconic Potato Sheds retaining its heritage in the creation of a modern-day market-cum-leisure hangout for people with some disposable income.

For those of us who remember the Market Theatre complex, Kippies jazz bar and the Saturday flea market in the carpark, this real and exciting rejuvenation has been a long time coming.

● The Potato Shed is scheduled to open on November 30. For more information, contact project consultant Alice Cabaret at workshop@source-sa.com



The heritage Edwardian Gentlemen's Washroom, now and then, is to be remade into the boutique cocktail bar, with cathedral-style windows and the original green-tiled urinals.