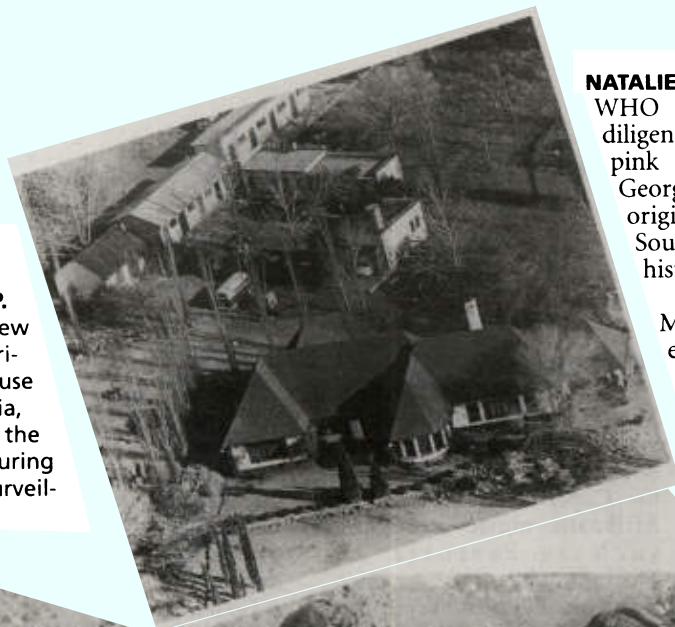


Leafing through history

Liliesleaf farm is a historical site that is constantly evolving

VIEW FROM THE TOP. Aerial view of the original house in Rivonia, taken in the Sixties during police surveillance.



NATALIE BOSMAN

WHO would have thought that diligently chipping away at the pink Spanish villa that lay in George Avenue would unveil original structures from one of South Africa's most significant historical sites?

Certainly not architects Mashabane Rose, and not even Nicholas Wolpe, CEO of the Liliesleaf Trust, who first came up with the idea of preserving a historical site for Liliesleaf farm in 2001.

Liliesleaf was pur-

chased in 1961 by the SA Communist Party and later evolved into the headquarters of Umkhonto-we-Sizwe (the ANC military wing, "The Spear of the Nation").

"I just went into it, without expecting anything. All I knew was that I needed to preserve the site, and strangely enough, whether or not we would find anything didn't preoccupy me," says Wolpe, whose father, Harold Wolpe, was arrested at Liliesleaf but later escaped by bribing a prison guard, fleeing to England with his family.

"I first came up with the idea of Liliesleaf when we had a reunion over six years ago," says Wolpe, "and the project has been growing ever since."

"Liliesleaf has more than three years of research behind it, and the research is still not complete. I feel overawed – I never thought this would be the case," he says.

"It's like entering the twilight zone; you know what you want but you don't know what to expect. It's almost as though it's a story that was meant to be heard."

Although it was designed by the same architects that designed the Apartheid Museum, Wolpe insists that Liliesleaf is nothing like it.

"This is a living, breathing site, with a richness of details that has still to be uncovered. I don't see this as a finished product. It is more an ongoing process that will continue to be built upon, because Liliesleaf is not a static entity."

Thanks to ongoing research uncovering new facts, as well as members of the public joining the dots with their own knowledge and memories, Wolpe says he plans to continuously add and enrich Liliesleaf's exhibits.

"Liliesleaf is about two things: the physical experience of being in such a historical space, and then also the audio tapes and information coming alive and talking to all the senses, which will be added to as we go along," he says.

"So you can come to Liliesleaf now, and then return in a year or two and see something different. We are really trying to create a journey of enlightenment," explains Wolpe, "and to get people to see something different. Whether or not we will ever reach an end to that journey, who knows?"

Liliesleaf will be officially opened to the public on June 9. Visit www.liliesleaftrust.co.za or phone 011-803-7882.

It was at Liliesleaf farm that senior leaders of SA's struggle against apartheid attended meetings and sought shelter. Some of these leaders included Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, Walter Sisulu, Joe Slovo and Bram Fischer, many of whom were arrested in the security police raid on the farm (July 11, 1963) and tried in the subsequent Rivonia Trial.



DOUBLE VISION. This image was one of the original images that was later manipulated by the police for use by the state in the Rivonia Trial.

