

# The (top secret) story of an African farm

## Former ANC HQ becomes a museum

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About 40 years ago Nelson Mandela worked as a servant at a farm on the outskirts of Johannesburg.

Wearing blue overalls, Mandela played his part convincingly and was often seen working in the garden around the manor.

Mandela was there under the name of "David Motsamai", a "houseboy" who slept in an outside room on the property.

Behind the walls, however, "Motsamai" met up with his "boss" Arthur Goldreich more than was usual for a labourer in the days of apartheid.

His false identity formed part of an elaborate plan at Liliesleaf Farm in Rivonia to evade the apartheid forces.

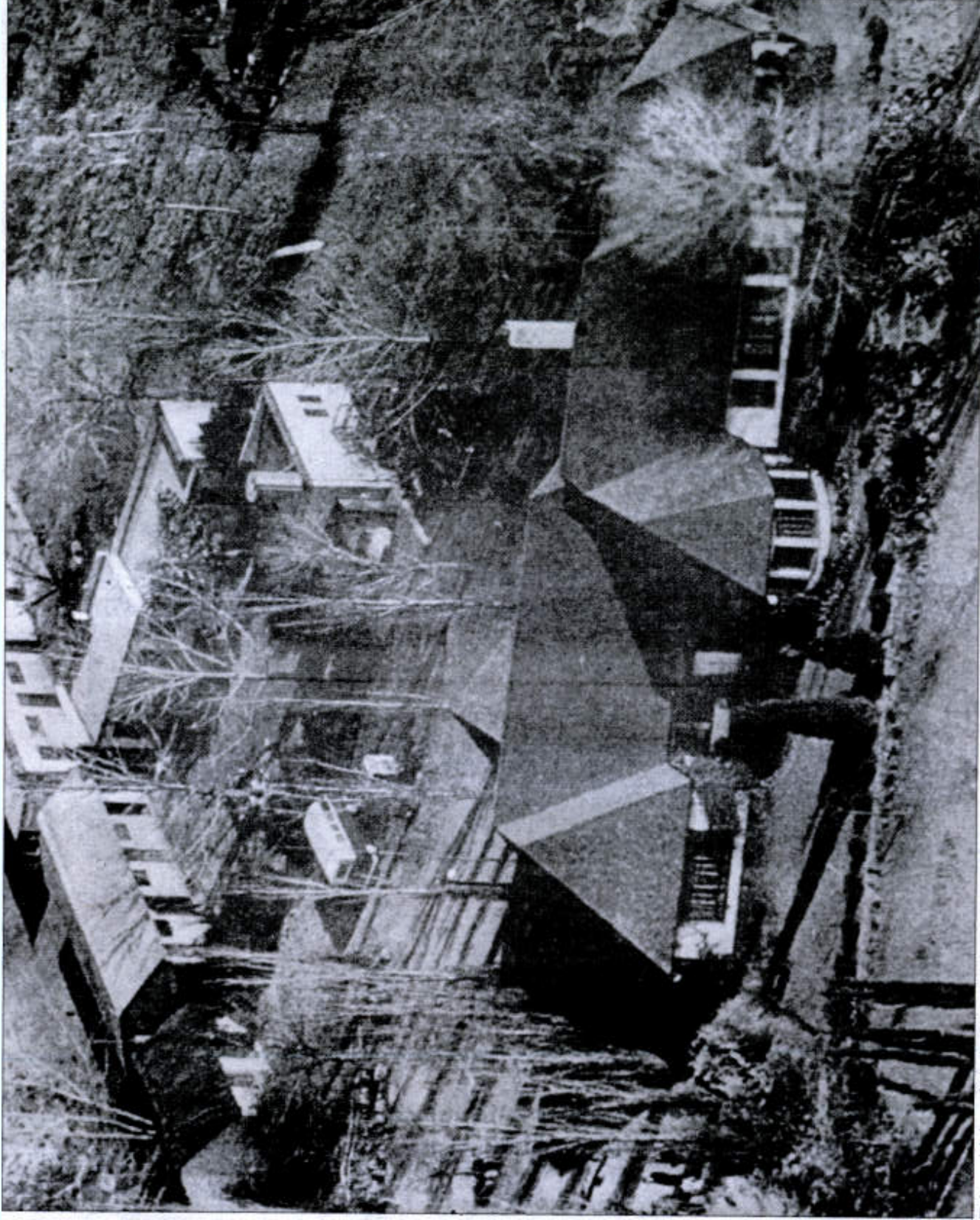
The story of Liliesleaf Farm dates back to when the apartheid government made it illegal for banned political affiliates to meet in public and there was a need for a secluded place.

Code-named "Cetric", the farm became a haven for many senior ANC and SACP leaders and also the liberation movement's secret headquarters.

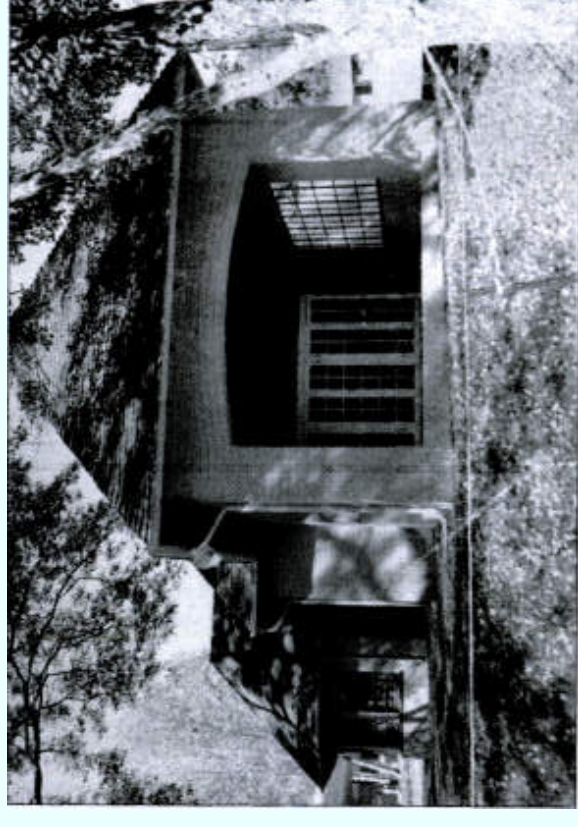
Key political and military strategies and operations were planned at Liliesleaf. It was here, for example, where the idea of forming the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), was first born.

Govan Mbeki, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada, Bram Fischer, Ruth First, Joe Slovo, Harold Wolpe and Raymond Mhlaba, among many others, attended meetings or sought refuge at the farm.

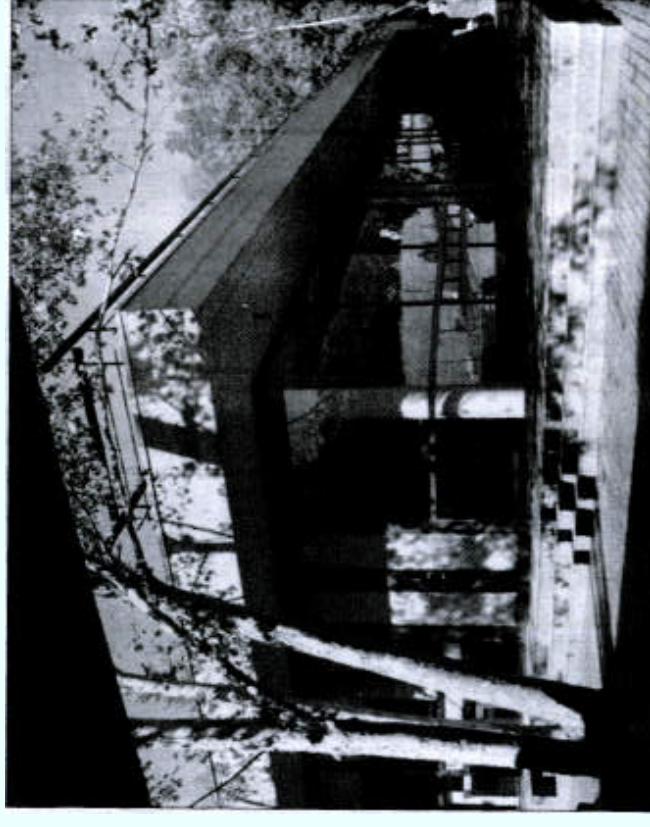
*Operation Mayibuye*, a large-scale guerrilla warfare plan to overthrow the apartheid government, was hatched at this farm.



□ An aerial view of Liliesleaf Farm. It is here Nelson Mandela and other leading figures in the ANC congregated and planned anti-apartheid activities.



□ Liliesleaf Farm will be transformed into a tourist attraction comprising a museum, coffee shop and a hotel. **PICTURE: BOXER NGWENYA**



□ The coffee shop. **PICTURE: BOXER NGWENYA**

Mandela would later write in his book *Long Walk to Freedom*: "Liliesleaf was an old house that needed work and no one lived there. "I moved in under the pretext that I was a houseboy or caretaker that would live there until my master took possession. I had taken the alias David Motsamai, the name of one of my former clients. "At the farm, I wore the simple blue overalls that were the uniform of the black male servant."

Liliesleaf Trust is now turning the farm into a museum for education and tourist purposes. Although the farm is now being engulfed by new, luxurious homes in what is now a fully-fledged suburb north of Johannesburg, it has been undergoing a major revamp into a "learning centre".

Under the theme "celebrating the transformation of a nation", the farm will officially open its doors to the public on June 9 for guided tours.

Two new blocks comprising a library, an archive room and a resource centre have been built on the property. An original receipt shows that R2 600 was paid as a deposit for the 28 acre property priced at R26 000 and purchased by Navian (Pty) Ltd, a front company for the SACP in 1961. An SACP member, Goldreich moved into the farm with his family

and made it look like a typical white-owned farm with black labourers living in the outside quarters. These outside buildings were actually being used for political activities.

Radio Freedom transmission was tested from one of these rooms while printers were hidden in the main house for the production of liberation pamphlets and the like. Liliesleaf later became synonymous with the Rivonia treason trial.

which saw many political leaders – including Mandela – sentenced to life imprisonment on Robben Island. Security police pounced on the farm on July 11, 1963 after a tip-off that the leadership including Walter Sisulu were meeting to discuss *Operation Mayibuye*.

One of those who managed to flee the raid was Wolpe whose son, Nicholas, today heads the project to preserve the farm. "This place will now become alive with interactive exhibits including audio-visual material. Most of the original walls have been left as they were," said Nicholas Wolpe. Entrance to Liliesleaf is situated in George Avenue in Rivonia. "This is a living breathing place, not a museum. If walls could talk you can imagine the stories we'd get from them. However, we have tried to get the stories from the horse's mouth to be seen in our interactive exhibits," Wolpe said.