



OUR VENUE FOR WORLDWIDE 2025

Villa Arcadia

– brief history

Villa Arcadia, beautiful venue for the Worldwide Botanical Art exhibition in 2025, was designed by Herbert Baker and was completely and exquisitely restored by Hollard Insurance after they bought the property in 2003. Lionel Phillips would surely approve of the new developments at his former mansion - a house on property of 16 acres of prime real estate in Parktown.

Herbert Baker was commissioned to design this home for Lionel Phillips and his wife Florence in 1910 – the mansion was believed to be his practice-run for the Union Buildings in Pretoria. Phillips was a wealthy Randlord who was involved in many activities that made wide-ranging contributions to society, amongst which, interestingly for us, was the establishment of Kirstenbosch botanical gardens in Cape Town; as a founder trustee of the Johannesburg Art gallery, contributing seven significant paintings and a Rodin sculpture; and also sponsoring the 30-year research and writing of *The Flora of South Africa* by Rudolf Marloth

In 1922 Phillips sold Villa Arcadia to the South African Jewish Orphanage and for 81 years it remained an orphanage, affectionally called The Arc, which at its height looked after 400 children.

By 2001 the number of children at the home had dwindled to 15, and these children were moved to a new home in Raedene after which they moved into permanent premises in Sandringham. This building was also named Arcadia in commemoration of the mansion that had opened its wings to so many for so long. Some 2 000 children had enjoyed what Arcadia offered: beautiful surroundings and a wonderful home, in addition to caring staff.

Arcadia is a beautiful house, built as a Mediterranean villa, finished with Baker's trademark stone baselines and tall chimneys. It had a number of large reception rooms with beautiful finishes, bedrooms, some en suite, children's rooms and nursery, a library/music room, a delightful courtyard or cloister, a large service wing, a coach house and stables, and quarters for the gardeners.

The house was finished off with a wonderful loggia or long stoep facing the northern suburbs. It boasts fine craftsmanship, like brass work done by George Ness,

and beautifully carved rococo fanlights above each double door by Anton van Wouw.

It has been developed as part of Hollard's office complex with a careful balance between the heritage and modern use. Although the house is not a national monument, it is more than 60 years old, which means that permission had to be obtained for alterations or demolitions of any of the buildings on the site. Hollard was required to submit a Site Development Plan to the Gauteng Heritage Resources Agency (GHRA) and the Parktown Association, for approval. They commissioned a conservation management plan, also submitted to the GHRA and were very sensitive to the fact that the site had several layers of history. "We are trying to build history into the complex while at the same time bringing in new life to the site." said architect Justus van der Hoven at the time. There is no doubt that, on both counts, this has been achieved with the restoration of the Villa, a gift to modern Johannesburg.

We are fortunate indeed to be holding the Worldwide Botanical exhibition at this special venue. 🌸

