Prominent Buildings in Durban's South Beach Area

- Information and Analysis

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Building Name:

South Beach Lifesavers Building (South Beach Facility)

Architects:
Restored by Ivor Daniel and Peter Butler

Architects' Other Designs:
Not specified in the provided text.

Year Built:

- Original building: **1935**
- Restoration and adaptive reuse: **1985** (as part of the 1984 Durban Beachfront Redevelopment Scheme)

Architectural Style:
Art Deco / Coastal Public Architecture with Adaptive Reuse. The original 1935 structure features classic Art Deco coastal public architecture, while the 1985 addition introduced a contemporary low-slung semi-circular pavilion that complements and preserves the historic fabric.

Owners:
eThekwini Municipality (Durban Municipality), operated as a public beachfront facility for municipal lifeguard, parks, and beach management services.



Building Name:

Dayton Building (originally **Hillestar**, now known as **10 South**)

Architects:
Leslie Neville Lester (Architect)
Louis van Loon (Consulting Civil and Structural Engineer)

Architects' Other Designs:

- **Leslie Neville Lester:** Not specified in the provided text.
- **Louis van Loon:** Co-founder of the Buddhist Retreat Centre in Ixopo and consulting engineer on several Durban projects.

Year Built:
c. **1966**

Architectural Style:
Mid-Century Modernism / International Modernism. The building pioneered mixed-use high-rise development in Durban, incorporating residential apartments, retail, a service station, and a circular parking garage. Its design responded to Durban's subtropical climate through deep balconies, concrete sun-shades, and modern structural engineering solutions.

Owners:
Originally developed as **Hillestar**. The current ownership is not specified in the provided text. The building is now known as **10 South**, located at **10 Gillespie Street, Durban**.



Building Name:

Grandborough Court

Architects:
A.G. Frolich (Obel & Obel Architects)

Architects' Other Designs:

- Astor Mansions, Johannesburg
- The Barbican Building (1931), Johannesburg
- Belvista Flats, Johannesburg
- Beacon Royale Flats (1934), Johannesburg
- Astra Court (1937), Durban (with Roger Cooke)

Year Built:
1935

Architectural Style:
Art Deco / Streamline Moderne (Ocean Liner Style). Grandborough Court is one of Durban's finest examples of beachfront Art Deco architecture. Inspired by the form of ocean liners, it

features continuous wrap-around balconies, a strong vertical central façade, stepped roofline, symmetrical composition, steel-framed windows, and smooth plastered surfaces. The design combines luxury apartment living with climate-responsive features such as deep balconies and natural ventilation, making it an outstanding example of Durban's tropical interpretation of Art Deco.

Owners:
Privately owned residential apartments under sectional title ownership.

History:
Completed in **1935**, Grandborough Court was one of the first luxury apartment buildings developed along Durban's Marine Parade (now OR Tambo Parade). Designed by **A.G. Frolich** of **Obel & Obel**, it became a landmark of Durban's expanding beachfront and a symbol of the city's Art Deco boom during the 1930s. Often referred to as the "Grand Old Lady of South Beach," the building has undergone careful restoration to preserve its original Art Deco character and remains one of Durban's most significant architectural heritage buildings.



Building Name:

SS Van Der Stel (formerly **Van Der Stel Hotel**, briefly known as **Natalia**)

Architects:
Unknown

Architects' Other Designs:
Not documented.

Year Built:
c. 1950s–1960s (exact date unknown)

Architectural Style:
Mid-Century Modernism / Functional Modernist Architecture. The building reflects the practical, high-density apartment developments common along Durban's beachfront during the mid-twentieth century. Its design is characterized by a strong rectilinear form, a heavy concrete base, repetitive balconies, and a functional façade with minimal ornamentation. The solid lower level, originally designed to accommodate parking and commercial uses, gives the building a fortified appearance reminiscent of post-war civic and institutional buildings such as banks, emphasizing permanence, strength, and durability.

Owners:
Privately owned sectional title residential apartments.

History:
Originally operating as the **Van Der Stel Hotel**, and later briefly as the **Natalia Hotel**, the building was part of Durban's popular beachfront hotel district during the 1960s and 1970s, providing affordable accommodation for holidaymakers. As tourism patterns changed, the building was converted into sectional title apartments, becoming a permanent residential development. Today, it remains a prominent landmark at the corner of Gillespie and Rochester Streets, recognized for its distinctive blue façade and its evolution from a seaside hotel into high-density coastal housing.



Building Name:

Seapark

Architects:
Obel & Frolich (Louis Obel and A.G. Frolich)

Architects' Other Designs:

- Grandborough Court, Durban (1935)
- The Edward Hotel, Durban (1937)
- 225 Anton Lembede Street (formerly Smith Street), Durban (1938)
- Anthea Court, Durban

Year Built:
1939

Architectural Style:
Streamline Moderne (Late Art Deco). Seapark is an excellent example of Durban's Streamline Moderne architecture, a simplified evolution of Art Deco inspired by the aerodynamic forms of ocean liners, trains, and aircraft. The building is distinguished by its curved corners, continuous horizontal bands, smooth plastered façades, and long steel-framed windows that create the appearance of a luxury passenger ship. Its clean lines, minimal ornamentation, and emphasis on horizontal movement reflect the influence of American modernism while responding to Durban's subtropical coastal environment.

Owners:
Privately owned residential apartments under sectional title ownership.

History:
Completed in **1939**, Seapark was designed by **Obel & Frolich** during Durban's rapid beachfront expansion in the late 1930s. The building reflects the city's transition from traditional colonial architecture to the modern, American-inspired Streamline Moderne style that came to define much of Durban's Golden Mile. Today, Seapark remains one of Durban's best-preserved Art Deco residential buildings and is recognised as an important contributor to the city's internationally significant architectural heritage.



Building Name:

Oxford House

Architects:
Stanley Nelson Sercombe

Architects' Other Designs:

- Ambassador House, Durban (1930)
- Althea Court, Snell Parade (c. 1933)
- Burlington Court, Marine Parade (1930)
- Alton Flats, Mahatma Gandhi Road (1932)
- Victoria Mansions, Margaret Mncadi Avenue (1933)
- Delrenee Mansions, Albert Park (1934)

Year Built:
1935 (plans approved in 1933)

Architectural Style:
Classical Revival with Art Deco influences. Oxford House is a distinctive hybrid building that combines the formal symmetry and proportions of Classical Revival architecture with the emerging Art Deco style of the 1930s. Classical elements include structured cornices, traditional façades, and formal entrances, while Art Deco features are expressed through stepped vertical panels, geometric plaster detailing, and simplified decorative motifs. The building reflects the architectural transition occurring in Durban as designers moved from traditional colonial architecture towards the modern aesthetic of the beachfront.

Owners:
Privately owned residential apartments under sectional title ownership.

History:
Completed in **1935**, Oxford House was designed by Scottish-born architect **Stanley Nelson Sercombe**, whose plans were approved in **1933**. Located in Durban's South Beach precinct, the building was constructed during the city's rapid beachfront development and represents the transition between traditional British-inspired architecture and the modern Art Deco movement. Today, Oxford House remains an important part of Durban's architectural heritage, illustrating Sercombe's ability to blend classical design principles with the emerging modernist influences of the early twentieth century.



Building Name:

Four Seasons Hotel

Architects:
Unknown

Architects' Other Designs:
Not documented.

Year Built:
1965

Architectural Style:
Mid-Century Modernism (International Style). The Four Seasons Hotel exemplifies the shift from Durban's decorative 1930s Art Deco architecture to the clean, functional Modernist architecture of the 1960s. The 16-storey tower features a simple rectilinear form, repetitive grid façades, exposed concrete structural elements, large rectangular windows, and minimal ornamentation. Designed to maximize accommodation and efficiency, the building reflects the International Style's emphasis on function, modern construction techniques, and high-density urban development.

Owners:
Originally privately owned and operated as the Four Seasons Hotel. Current ownership is not publicly documented.

History:
Completed in **1965**, the Four Seasons Hotel became one of Durban's landmark beachfront hotels during the city's tourism boom of the 1960s and 1970s. Popular with domestic holidaymakers, it was renowned for its vibrant nightlife, hosting live music, ballroom dancing, and the famous Persian Room lounge. The hotel also housed the popular Pink Panther Steakhouse, making it a significant social and entertainment destination. The building remains an important example of Durban's transition from Art Deco to Modernist architecture during the post-war era.



Building Name:

Buckingham Court

Architects:
Cowin, Powers & Ellis (N.T. Cowin, E.M. Powers, and T.G. Ellis)

Architects' Other Designs:

- Transvaal Memorial Hospital for Children, Johannesburg (1923)
- Metro Theatre, Johannesburg
- Synodical Hall, Cape Town
- Drama Building (Old CBC Dormitory), University of Pretoria (1928)
- Chemistry and Physics Building, University of the Witwatersrand

- Majestic Mansions, Johannesburg
- Darragh House, Johannesburg

Year Built:
1935

Architectural Style:
Art Deco with Functional Modernist influences. Buckingham Court is a distinctive example of Durban's urban Art Deco architecture, characterized by a bold, minimalist composition rather than the decorative style typical of many beachfront buildings. Key features include a prominent rounded corner tower, continuous horizontal black window sills that emphasize the building's length, asymmetrical massing, and clean geometric forms with limited ornamentation. The design prioritizes functionality, natural ventilation, and high-density residential living while expressing the streamlined aesthetic of the Art Deco movement.

Architectural Style (Expanded):
Buckingham Court is a distinctive example of Durban's **Industrial Art Deco**, characterized by its bold geometric forms and minimalist design. Unlike the decorative beachfront apartments of the period, the seven-storey building emphasizes functionality through a prominent rounded corner tower, continuous horizontal window sills that accentuate the building's length, and an asymmetrical composition of curved and box-like forms. Designed for high-density urban living, the building incorporates compact apartment layouts and natural ventilation strategies, reflecting the practical and modernist approach to Art Deco architecture during Durban's 1930s urban expansion.

Owners:
Originally developed as a private residential apartment building. It was later owned and managed by **TAFTA (The Association for the Aged)** as retirement accommodation. The building is currently under private ownership.

History:
Completed in **1935**, Buckingham Court was designed by **Cowin, Powers & Ellis** during Durban's rapid urban expansion. Initially developed as housing for city and harbour workers, the building later became well known as a TAFTA-managed retirement residence, providing secure accommodation for elderly Durban residents. Today, Buckingham Court remains an important example of Durban's Art Deco heritage, reflecting the city's shift toward high-density urban residential development during the 1930s.



Building Name:

Halrozby Court

Architects:
Unknown

Architects' Other Designs:
Not documented.

Year Built:
c. 1930s–1950s (exact date unknown)

Architectural Style:
Functional Modernism / Art Deco-influenced Residential Architecture. Halrozby Court reflects the practical high-density apartment developments that shaped Durban's Point and South Beach precincts during the mid-twentieth century. The building featured a simple multi-storey form with deep window recesses, compact apartment layouts, and perimeter planning to maximize natural light, cross-ventilation, and thermal comfort in Durban's subtropical climate. Its restrained design prioritized functionality over ornamentation while incorporating characteristics associated with late Art Deco residential architecture.

Owners:
Originally developed as a private residential apartment building. Current ownership is not documented.

History:
Located at the intersection of **Smith Street (now Anton Lembede Street)** and **Point Road (now Mahatma Gandhi Road)**, Halrozby Court was a prominent residential apartment block serving Durban's inner-city community. During the mid-to-late twentieth century, it accommodated harbour workers, professionals, and young families, while its proximity to popular entertainment venues made it a well-known landmark within Durban's vibrant nightlife district. The building formed part of the broader residential expansion that transformed the Point and South Beach precinct into a dense urban neighbourhood.



Building Name:

560 Point Road (Nedbank Circle Building)

Architects:
Unknown

Architects' Other Designs:
Not documented.

Year Built:
Mid-20th century (exact date unknown)

Architectural Style:
Functional Modernism / Commercial Architecture. The building was designed as a practical, high-density commercial development serving Durban's busy harbour precinct. Its architecture emphasizes functionality through a simple, utilitarian form with minimal ornamentation, reflecting the commercial priorities of the post-war period rather than the decorative Art Deco style of earlier Point Road buildings.

Owners:
Originally privately owned commercial property. Later occupied by various commercial tenants, including **Tong Lok Chinese Restaurant**. Current ownership is not publicly documented.

History:
Constructed as the **Nedbank Circle Building** at **560 Point Road**, the building served the growing commercial activity of Durban's harbour district. One of its most prominent tenants was the **Tong Lok Chinese Restaurant**, a well-known local establishment that occupied the premises for many years. As Point Road experienced urban decline during the late 1980s and 1990s, commercial activity diminished, the restaurant closed, and the building fell into disrepair, eventually becoming an illegally occupied ("hijacked") building during one of the area's most challenging periods of urban decay.

Originally known as the **Tong Lok Chinese Restaurant**, Rockworld later fell into severe disrepair after being abandoned and became an informal shelter for Durban's socially marginalized communities. By around **2005**, the building housed homeless individuals, unemployed residents, sex workers, and people struggling with substance abuse, all living without basic services such as water or electricity. A feature by *MetroBeat* magazine documented the harsh living conditions while highlighting the broader social challenges of inner-city poverty and urban decline. More than a derelict building, Rockworld became a symbol of Durban's social inequalities, reminding observers of the human stories behind urban decay. The rooftop message, **"When Days are Dark, Friends are Few,"** came to encapsulate the hardship experienced by many of its occupants.



Building Name:

Lucien Hotel

550 Mahatna Gandhi Road “Waterfront” student residence – previously the “Lucien Hotel”.

Architects:

W.B. Barboure 1938 (Also Willern Court , Devonshire Court)

550 Mahatma Gandhi Road was originally “Lucien Court”.



Building Name:

Pioneer Lodge (49 Tyzack Street)

Architects:
Unknown (likely designed by a commercial architectural practice or developer's in-house architects). The original Edwardian houses on the site were designed by **W.C.E. Robarts**.

Architects' Other Designs:
W.C.E. Robarts:

- Residential properties for the J.G. Tyzack family (1908)
- Greenacres Store, West Street (designed by his father, W.E. Robarts)
- Numerous residential and commercial buildings throughout Durban during the early 1900s

Year Built:
c. 1950s–1970s (Pioneer Lodge)
Original Tyzack family residences: **1908**

Architectural Style:
Mid-Century Functionalism with Coastal Brutalist influences. Pioneer Lodge reflects the post-war transformation of Durban's South Beach into a high-density residential district. The building emphasizes functionality through its simple geometric form, repetitive balconies,

exposed concrete elements, and durable materials suited to the coastal environment. The design prioritizes efficient apartment layouts, structural practicality, and resistance to the harsh marine climate rather than decorative architectural expression.

Owners:
Privately owned residential apartments.

History:
Pioneer Lodge occupies land originally associated with the **Tyzack family**, after whom Tyzack Street was named. Early Edwardian residences designed by **W.C.E. Robarts** in **1908** were later demolished as Durban's beachfront intensified into a high-density residential area. Pioneer Lodge was subsequently developed during the post-war apartment boom of the **1950s to 1970s**, reflecting the city's growing demand for coastal housing and marking the transition from suburban villas to modern apartment living along the Golden Mile.



Building Name:

Sandringham Court

Architects:
Unknown (designed by a commercial architectural practice or developer's drafting office)

Architects' Other Designs:
Not documented. The building was later home to **Reginald Victor Sullivan**, former President of the Natal Institute of Architects, although he was not the building's architect.

Year Built:
c. 1950s

Architectural Style:
Late Streamline Moderne / Transitional Mid-Century Modernism. Sandringham Court represents the transition from Durban's decorative Art Deco architecture to the simpler forms of post-war Modernism. The building features strong horizontal bands, a symmetrical façade, stepped parapets, vertical plaster detailing, and an L-shaped plan. Its restrained ornamentation and climate-responsive design reflect the demand for practical, high-density coastal housing during Durban's post-war expansion.

Owners:
Privately owned residential apartments.

History:
Constructed during Durban's beachfront development boom of the **1950s**, Sandringham Court was built to provide high-density residential accommodation along the South Beach precinct. Designed as an economical apartment block, it reflects the city's post-war shift towards functional coastal housing. Although its original architect remains unknown, the building has historical significance as the later residence of renowned South African architect **Reginald Victor Sullivan (1887–1964)**, a former President of the Natal Institute of Architects.



Building Name:

Ottawa Court

Architects:
Unknown

Architects' Other Designs:
Not documented.

Year Built:
c. 1960s

Architectural Style:
International Style (Mid-Century Modernism). Ottawa Court is a notable example of Durban's International Style architecture, characterized by its clean geometric form, deeply articulated façade, corner windows, and minimal ornamentation. The 13-storey building emphasizes functionality, structural expression, and natural light, while its corner glazing maximizes panoramic views of the Indian Ocean. The design reflects the modernist principles that shaped Durban's coastal skyline during the 1960s.

Owners:
Privately owned residential apartments.

History:
Built during Durban's coastal high-rise development boom of the **1960s**, Ottawa Court formed part of the city's transition from Art Deco apartment blocks to Modernist residential towers. Located at the corner of Gillespie Street and Dr Pixley KaSeme Street, it originally incorporated an active ground-floor commercial arcade, including the well-known **Ottawa Café** and several retail shops serving residents and beachfront visitors. Today, it remains a prominent landmark within Durban's South Beach precinct and an important example of the city's post-war architectural development.



Building Name:

Olympic Court

Architects:
Langton & Barboure (G. Langton and William B. Barboure)

Architects' Other Designs:

- Surrey Mansions, Durban
- Berea Court, Durban

Year Built:
1936

Architectural Style:
Art Deco. Olympic Court is one of Durban's finest examples of classic Art Deco architecture, distinguished by its symmetrical composition, strong vertical pilasters, stepped roofline, and bold geometric detailing. The building incorporates climate-responsive features such as projecting bay windows and plaster sun-shading elements that maximize natural ventilation while reducing coastal glare. The interior retains significant original Art Deco craftsmanship,

including a stepped Aztec-inspired entrance arch, a decorative springbok fountain niche, original timber lift doors, retro lift indicators, and built-in foyer seating.

Owners:
Privately owned residential apartments under share-block ownership.

History:
Completed in **1936**, Olympic Court was designed by the renowned architectural partnership **Langton & Barboure** during the height of Durban's Art Deco building boom. Constructed as a prestigious beachfront apartment building, it reflected the city's growing popularity as a coastal holiday destination. Today, Olympic Court remains one of Durban's best-preserved Art Deco landmarks, retaining much of its original architectural character and interior detailing, making it an important contributor to the city's architectural heritage.



Building Name:

Wyham Mansions (Lonsdale Residence)

Architects:
Kallenbach & Kennedy (Hermann Kallenbach and Kennedy)
Associate Architect: Edward Stewart Cornelius

Architects' Other Designs:

- Hermann Kallenbach is internationally recognised for his architectural work across South Africa and for his close association with Mahatma Gandhi.
- Edward Stewart Cornelius completed numerous residential and commercial projects in Durban.

Year Built:
1927

Architectural Style:

Early Modernism / Classical Modernism (Pre-Art Deco). Wyham Mansions represents the transition from traditional early twentieth-century architecture to the emerging modernist movement that later evolved into Durban's Art Deco style. The building is characterized by strong vertical window groupings, solid masonry construction, deep recessed balconies for climate control, and a restrained, symmetrical façade with minimal ornamentation. Designed as a mixed-use development, it incorporates a street-level retail podium that reinforces its urban presence and pedestrian activity.

Owners:

Privately owned residential apartments with ground-floor commercial premises.

History:

Completed in **1927**, Wyham Mansions is one of Durban's earliest high-density residential apartment buildings and played an important role in the development of South Beach as a modern urban precinct. Designed by the renowned firm **Kallenbach & Kennedy**, with **Edward Stewart Cornelius** overseeing its execution, the building predates Durban's Art Deco boom and illustrates the architectural transition toward modern apartment living. Its mixed-use design, combining residential accommodation with street-level commercial spaces, continues to contribute to the character of Durban's beachfront district.