



**AN INTERPRETATION OF THE GOWRIE  
FARM BUILDING CODE:  
HOUSE 246 GOWRIE FARM  
BY ANDREW MAKIN – LEADING ARCHITECT**

The introductory background to the Gowrie Farm Guidelines describes what kind of environment is intended at Gowrie Farm. It primarily involves the relationship of buildings to the natural landscape, climate, available materials, lifestyle, ie regional vernacular. This is a description of the of the Guidelines. The subsequent detail in the Guidelines sets out how the design of individual houses will extend this regional vernacular and intended relationship with the landscape. These are the of the Guidelines against which compliance with the Spirit can be measured.

Focusing on the heritage of old farmhouses of the KZN midlands, the introduction includes reference to the Cape origins of KZN midlands farmhouses and their 'Lettered' plan shapes, which were typically the H, I, L or U shaped; their roof dominated accreted forms; the predominance of the single storey scale in the landscape; response to climate including sun, wind, rain and presumably temperature; and the importance of views as a way of relating to the landscape from within properties, as well as views of properties from the landscape.

The photo of an old 'farmhouse' above is useful, inspirational and beautiful. But it can also have the effect of limiting the perception of the range, variety and diversity of old farmhouses that exist across the Midlands. Also, old farmhouses in the area were conceived of in an entirely different time to the present. This chronological gap must surely have significant impact on the interpretation of 'old farmhouse' just as a change in cost or climate must necessarily have a significant impact on design conception. Perhaps this is why none of the houses built at Gowrie really resemble this idealized image of an old farmhouse.

The design of Lot 246, while largely satisfying the of the Guidelines, attempts to find a way to represent the intended of old Midlands farm houses and the range of outbuildings with which they were almost always associated. But it wishes to do this in the syntax of our own time, rather than as an unsatisfactory imitation or substitute [a simulacrum] of the inherently un-replicable authentic original.

To do so, the accommodation schedule, common to many of the houses on Gowrie, is divided into 2 types. First, is the living space that is treated as one large verandah facing the fantastic southern views, it's range of uses changing along it's length according to lifestyle need and sun position through the day. Prevailing winds, sometimes freezing cold, often come from the south, so this 'verandah' also opens to the sun-warmed northern side. Because the views are so good in all directions, the verandah is double-glazed pretty much all round. This is not a feature of traditional farm houses anywhere, simply because the technology was not available at the time of their construction. But the simple pitched sheeted roof, its long horizontal proportions, the plinth relationship to the ground, and the overhanging verandah roof protecting the [glass] walls from the early summer morning and later afternoon sun, as well as wind driven rain, make direct reference to the midlands farm house.

The second type of accommodation is the private bedrooms. These are treated more like the outbuildings of traditional farmhouses. They are primarily wall rather than roof, and the openings are relatively small. The depth of these windows is exaggerated by the projecting steel surrounds, both to shade the east and west facing glass, and to create very deep shadow reminiscent of the unglazed openings in old farm buildings. The rough brick resembles the orangey-brown clay-like rock found just under the surface of the grassy high-ground. It's broken into smaller units and the joints are deeply raked out to give that rustic, rudimentary, earthy feel, also inspired by old farm outbuildings.

The arrangement of the living space and the 2 bedrooms elements into a Lettered 'U' shape forms a northern courtyard protected from the weather and at a very contrasting scale to the vast landscape all around. Experiential and lifestyle variety is always appreciated in a home. It allows the rich dynamics of family and social life to be accommodated, reflected and expressed.

This house does not attempt to replicate a midlands farm house. That is not possible. But it does attempt to analyze how those lovely old farm houses really work in their contexts and therefore why they feel the way they do in their landscape. And to find ways of learning those lessons,

applying them with respect and acknowledgment of that tradition, while also making inventive use of technologies and materials now available, and that can bring so much pleasure to our contemporary lifestyles. We believe that this is the mandate of architecture; not to replicate the past - that can best be done by measuring up an old farmhouse and simply duplicating it, but rather by respectfully extending the best of custom, tradition and vernacular wisdom into our time, and in so doing, both giving reverence to that tradition as confidently and sensitively creating new tradition.

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