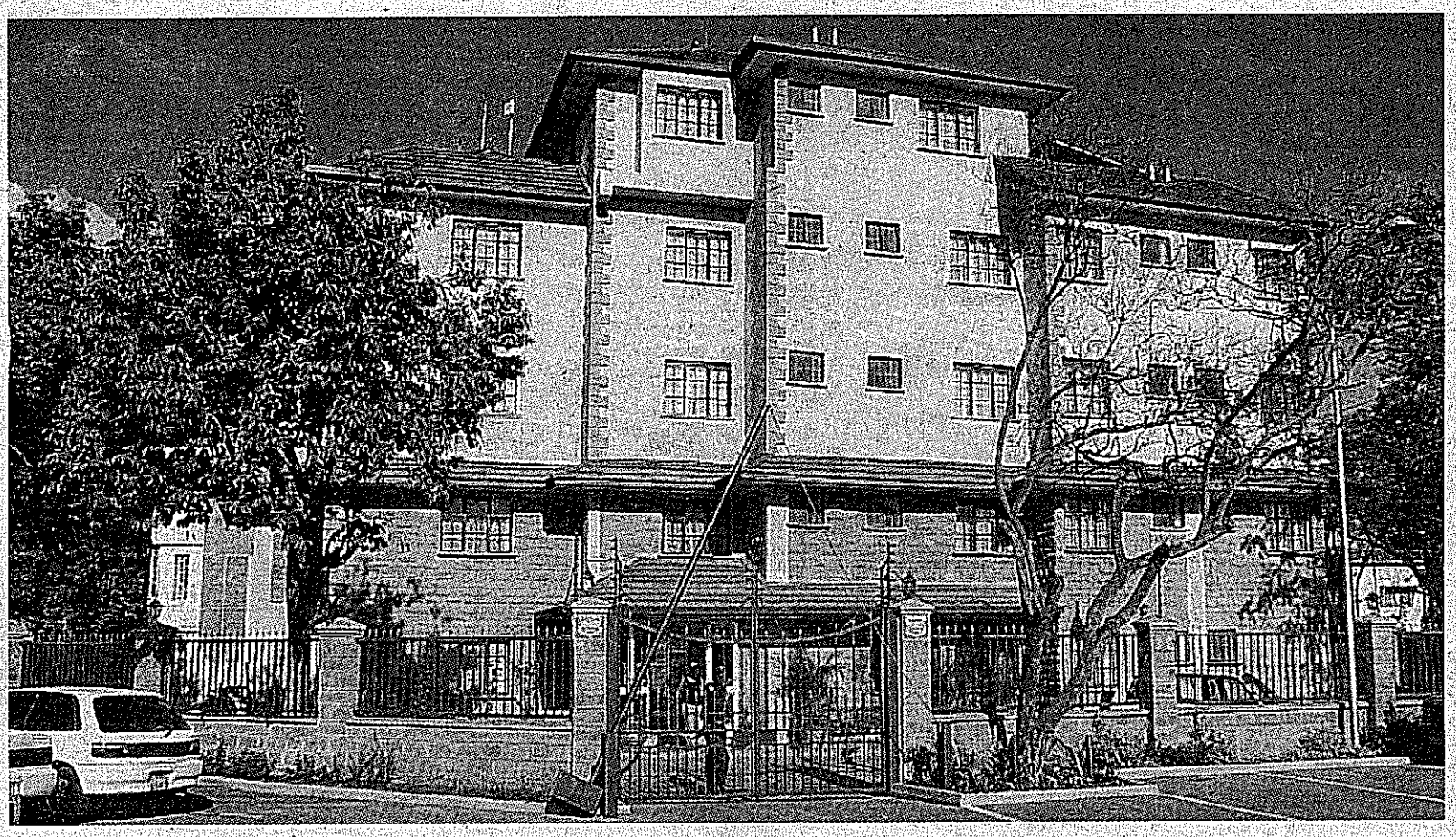
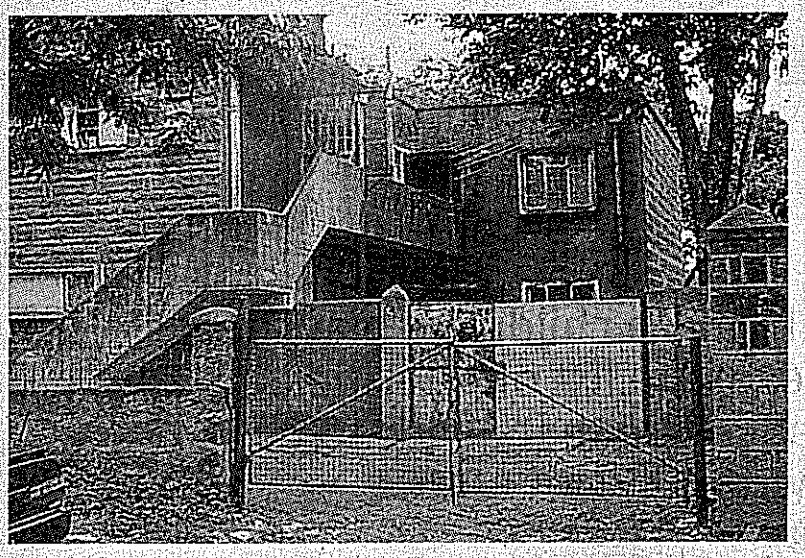
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Giving your house a new lease of life





Mvuli House, before and after renovations. [PHOTOS: WANGECI KANYEKI AND COURTESY/STANDARD]

Renovation, the art of remodeling an existing building to achieve some desired change, will not only enhance its looks, but also increase its value, writes WANGECI KANYEKI

The Mvuli House, previously a two-storey apartment block in Nairobi West was built in the 1970s. The interiors had reached their end of life and had become difficult to let.

The owner decided to upgrade the apartments from rental residential homes to a residential hotel and needed to create 49 rooms each with a bathroom where none existed. The change of use required clever use of space to add public areas such as a dining room, lounge, kitchenette, terraces and a reception as well as to hide the piping works.

Shamla Fernandes of Shamla Fernandes Architects that specialises in hotels and commercial properties says renovations can be harder to design as one is limited and has to work with an existing building.

She has been involved in various renovations including The Mvuli House. "We used the same foundation but needed new columns to support the building due to height restrictions," says Fernandes. Another challenge was creating provision to accommodate plumbing and drainage for wet areas in each room. The work, however, finally yielded phenomenal results.

"The renovations cleaned up and transformed the area, increased the value of the surrounding Nairobi West environment, improved the clientele and increased revenue," she says.

MINOR AND MAJOR RENOVATIONS

There are minor and major renovations. Minor renovations do not affect the structure but include organising space by introducing doors, sub-dividing using demountable partitions with lightweight materials such as timber, glass and block boards. Minor renovations may also combine two rooms to create enlarged space.

On the other hand, major renovations affect structural elements and involves permanent partitions such as stone walls. According to Kamawe Nugi of Associated Architects, when renovating a building, the architect must have the existing plans so as to know where to add support to avoid affecting major service lines such as power and water.

He cautions that renovations should not be carried out carelessly or unprofessionally as they can weaken the structure and cause the building to collapse due to the additional weight of, say, an additional storey or roof. For safety reasons, renovations should be carried out by professionals.

Because of the challenges and risks involved during renovations, professionals involved such as architects and structural engineers usually charge a much higher rate. The structure has to be carefully studied so that knocking down a wall does not cause the building to fall apart.

STICK TO DECISIONS

Renovations can be challenging if the client keeps changing his or her mind. Professionals should have a clear brief of what the renovations entail, including the risks involved, the cost and the duration.

Irrespective of previous approvals by the authorities, renovation plans have to be subjected to new approvals, which may be rejected if the risk is too high, says Nugi.

Before the renovations can commence, the architect will study the existing plans. If there are no existing plans, new measurements need to be taken although it may not be as accurate as the original plan.

A test is carried out using trial pits into the foundation to study the construction works before a structural engineer advises if the structure can carry increased weight of the building.

Nugi gives an example of a church in Waithaka, which needed to be re-roofed. However, when the architects inspected the foundation, they found that it could not support the proposed roof. Eventually, church leaders accepted the advice and instead built a bigger building around the old sanctuary. A more recent renovation saw the ABC building on Waiyaki Way, Nairobi, renovated with a glass finish that has increased the value and aesthetics of the building.

Fernandes recommends that if your building is being renovated, it is better to move out because of the disruption of dust and dirt. This may not always be possible due to budgetary constraints where one would rather use the money on *fundis* to finish off the construction rather than spend it on letting.

You also need to factor in extra time as construction work may take a lot longer than anticipated. Study the space in the drawing and get a professional to explain perceived space well as opposed to real space.

MINIMISE CHANGES

Minimise structural changes once design is costed as, thereafter, it will cost you more every time you want to change the design. Make up your mind and stick to the change. Define the scope of work to be done based on the budget available. Ask a professional for advise on interior finishes, which could save you money in the long-run while giving you a professional revamped look.