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# AN OASIS IN THE WILDERNESS

The design for the Karoo Wilderness Centre has received a citation at the 58<sup>th</sup> Annual Progressive Architecture Awards presented by ARCHITECT magazine. Of the 300 international entries, the jury selected two awards and gave four citations, which makes this acknowledgement an outstanding achievement.

Architects Stan and Jess Field of US-based Field Architecture described the site as one that “demanded a solution that focused on water... and a form that speaks to it.” The Karoo desert supports the greatest botanical diversity of any arid region and is an area where development needs to be carefully monitored. The design represents a significant shift in perspective and practice, sponsoring and provoking the learning, dialogue, and action necessary to redefine the consequence of human inhabitation on the land, the architects added.

The Centre includes a library, restaurant, conference room, visitors’ centre and researcher accommodation. It generates its own energy, harvests its own water, processes its own waste and uses no municipal water or electricity to provide thermal comfort. The roof is lined with solar electric panels, while waste water is processed and reused onsite. The design shows an understanding of the interdependence of the elements of a healthy eco-system, and essentially re-establishes the connection between the built and natural environment.

The humble *Aloe ferox* plant served as inspiration for the iconic roof. The large rain catchment tank area provides potable water and cools the interior by absorbing latent heat. Hydronic tubes are connected to the water supply and radiate heat through the ceiling when needed.

Juror Dan Rockhill commented: “It’s nice to see a project that is not intimidated by the sustainability question, but that engages it to make something very beautiful.”

Field Architecture is no stranger to working in South Africa, they are responsible for the design of the iconic Ubuntu Centre in Port Elizabeth [www.fieldarchitecture.com](http://www.fieldarchitecture.com)

