



# Degree of awe for its scale and exuberance

**I**T WAS NEAR Victoria West, I think, that I picked up a guy returning to Upington from his first trip to Port Elizabeth, which he was earnestly certain was the biggest city in the world.

He also called me, five times per sentence, a word that clearly resounded in his culture, but I've never heard again, "Duisman". He's been out of mind for years but he flooded back when, after leaving the Mall of Africa, I googled "World's Biggest Mall" and found that this one didn't make the first hundred.

Which set me on a google trail that enables me to present you a bucket of Mall information that you absolutely never thought you wanted. And still don't.

The eight biggest malls would come up in, uh, Sao Paulo, New York, Shanghai, London, Jakarta and suchlike... right? Nope, Dongguan, Qwezon, Mandalayong, Isfahan, Damansara, Shiraz, Cebu, and yes, one city we all know, Beijing.

Of the top hundred, a third or a quarter would be southern hemisphere, right? Nope. Four percent.

The much-trumpeted big daddy of them all, South China Mall in Dongguan, with 10 hectares or 25 acres more lettable space more than the No 2, is a Ghost Giant, a home for rats and lizards, a million rotting tons of monument to the fallibility of the command economy.

And the biggest Mall in Africa would be? Well, Cairo's entry is called "Mall of Arabia", an interesting comment on loyalties, and claims to be 50 percent bigger than vast dead Dongguan, but the lists spurn it in favour of... Gateway in uMhlanga!

Cheeky Durban KZNers thought they could sneak past us up here in the Real Capital to be Africa's sole representative. Well, here comes Gauteng's Mall of Africa to put them right.

Except that by one measure our mall is twice Gateway's size and by another it may be slightly smaller.

## STOEP TALK



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Corridors shout  
'ambitious' from length to  
breadth

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So here we abandon the silly statistics of size and talk of impact on mind and soul. If I'd been asked a month or a year ago: "What does the Joburg-Pretoria axis really, really, badly, need?" the answer: "Yet another record-breakingly ambitious mall, making last year's record-breakingly ambitious mall look modest," may not have come to mind.

Now that it's here, though, a degree of awe is in order. Sheer scale is part of that, but exuberance is another part and a big one. The architect had a load of fun. Ceilings, for instance, would generally accommodate your average giraffe in comfort, but come to the great sweeping curves of the top floor skylight and that giraffe could have its brother on its back and leave space to spare.

Outside with the vast full view over Joburg and Sandton a grass amphitheatre amplifies ambitiousness. Alongside, PricewaterhouseCoopers are notching up the bar of corporate office ambitiousness. The corridors shout "ambitious"

in everything from length to breadth to window display to names – Pandora, Shesha, kream, The Kooples, Hinterland, Mythos. If you intend a thorough perambulation of the place, consider getting your running shoes resoled before you start.

All this smells of prowess, achievement. We need that stuff. We need people who make things happen (which this time apparently is not an Old Mutual or other colossus in need of receptacles for income overflow, but an up-and-coming developer called Atterbury).

So what irritating woodpecker is rapping on my conscience? The sense that this prowess is great for the 20 percent in the loop but most of the people who statistically benefit from a growing economy have no way of seeing that.

Hooray for the prowess. Let no one think we can do without it.

But will the managers and the engineers get to working on a bit of a wider spread now, please.