



Name: Yvo Suijs
Age: 26
Working at: Hort Couture
landscape architecture
(2015-2018) and studying at
the University of Cape Town
(2018-2020) in South Africa
Is originally from:
the Netherlands
Has been abroad since:
December 2015

“The picture shows the environment of a new landscape architectural project near Cape Town, that consisted of a wildfire-resilient and nature-inclusive cluster of five eco cabins in the Kogelberg Nature Reserve.”

Have you noticed differences between Netherlands and South Africa in the working culture at universities and/or companies and in the approach to landscape architecture?

The potential for landscape architecture in South African spaces is huge and extremely exciting, since many places have had no previous input from landscape architectural practice. Some pressing issues in which landscape architects in South Africa are involved include affordable and safe housing in the context of rapid urbanisation and informality, the preservation and public interface of important archaeological sites, the commemoration of indigenous knowledge and culture, and tackling the legacies of spatial inequality caused by historical injustice. It is this dynamic and complex environment which makes landscape architecture in this country such a challenge, but also so unique.

What were your expectations of the other country? Much of my time in South Africa I felt like a tourist. Everything was new, exciting and an opportunity to gain experience and understand the country better. It may sound a bit obvious, but what keeps me surprised is the beauty of the landscape. Spectacular scenery combined with intricate detail can be found everywhere, including encounters that appear to have increased color saturation (like Instagram filters!).

What has surprised you the most in the other country? The proximity to relatively intact biodiversity, wildlife and landscape, with, for example, over 8200 (and counting) plant species on Table Mountain alone, is something that few other countries in the world can top. Here, Proteas, Ericas, Daisies and Aloes mark the seasons providing justice to the title of ‘The Floral Kingdom’. Consequently, what’s not surprising at all is the amount of love people have here for their plants. While well-visited events such as plant fairs pop up every month, an annual ‘rare plant sale’ attracts hordes of people looking for the one-and-only. Plants in Cape Town are fashion icons, conversation starters and pet friends.

Has going abroad changed anything about you or your way of thinking?

I have come to realise that the best way to learn and find your place in a foreign country is to let go of your own habits for a while and observe, listen and ask questions. South Africa has many different cultures and beliefs. It is important to take a step back and keep an open mind. There are many different truths and views to life and space in South Africa, many of which I was totally ignorant of when I first arrived. This diversity in philosophical paradigms has begun to reflect in the design of spaces in South Africa, but still has a way to go to reach a sense of inclusivity for all the people that live here.