

# Design is the difference between a street and great street

By [Terry Levin](#), issued by [Off the Shelf marketing](#)

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This article appeared in the Cape Times letters page in response to Rory William's Man About Town column entitled "Can we make Adderley Street into an attraction itself?" which ended with a plea for "new ways of thinking which could be applied across Cape Town".

Following a recent trip to New York it occurred to me that the only difference between a street and great street is the opportunities for engagement and enjoyment it provides along its way.

New York's streets act as a showcase for the arts, the beauty of which is that it is neither abstract nor esoteric, but integral to its context, most often simply reflecting people back at themselves - depicting workers, commuters, shoppers, flower sellers, entertainers, business people, theatre goers and kids equally as its themes. In this way the art is relevant to all, representative, inclusive, meaningful, heartwarming.

New York is also zealous in its mixed-use environments - commercial, retail, utility, residential, leisure, entertainment, green, art and tourism spaces live cheek-by-jowl - so there is always more than one reason to visit a destination or more importantly a destination that can offer something for everybody at any given time. While this is a bit more difficult to achieve, Adderley Street still offers the potential to do this, because it has always been the main conduit for processing people in the city and is still a bustling thoroughfare in daily use.



The City Hall, by Terry Levin



Public art at the Cape Town Civic Centre, by Terry Levin



Adderley Street flower sellers, by Terry Levin

Some ideas one could moot in order to elevate Adderley Street to new glories could be:

- Lure some of the funky boutiques, galleries and lifestyle shops dotted around Cape Town into the empty, under-utilised and dead retail spaces by offering attractive rentals, so that the Adderley Street shop fronts become the showcase from which the creativity and style of the whole city could radiate, creating as much of a tourist destination for itself as the V&A Waterfront or Long Street, improving the experience of the existing commuter and attracting a more regular and broader demographic to the area.
- Design a better system for the street traders to free up space on the narrow pavements and give priority to world class retail display
- Commission our best local artists and designers to transform pavements and other surface with integral themes - the flower market, the fountain, the transport hub, the Slave Lodge, the Company Gardens, the Groote Kerk, Xmas lights - are the many themes that allow the street to promote its assets and deliver on its promise as a worthwhile destination
- As you will see in other great cities, create merchandise such as postcards, t-shirts and street art, that ensure the above assets become saleable
- Create a Chinatown quarter in Cape Town to get cheap, gaudy imports and signage out of our historic thoroughfares
- Reverse the previous cycle lane experiment into some much need parking to stimulate flower seller bulk trade
- Close the street to traffic one Saturday a month in favour of art and farmers' markets



Public art at the Cape Town Civic Centre, by Terry Levin

As we can deduce from other great cities, turning ordinary streets into great destinations



The iconic Adderley Street Fountain, by  
Terry Levin

does not happen by accident, but by intention. Cape Town is in the enviable position to be able to be known, not only as one of the world's most naturally beautiful cities, but also one that means business in capitalising on its diversity of talent. It is to the detriment of all if we continue to ignore the opportunities presented by Adderley Street as a great destination.

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