

Innovation Times on a Sunday

Perusing the media can be an interesting way to pass the time. On other occasions it can be traumatic and even resemble an obstacle course that a marine never saw, even in a nightmare.



By [Richard Clarke](#) 22 Sep 2002

The Sunday Times yesterday had it all. Dissing and dismissing of certain segments of society, a back pag consisting of fantastic stories of titillation and sport that consists of predominantly rugby, soccer and cricke

But the intrepid reader could have discovered some diamonds amongst the stones.

The main section had a story about women in an impoverished area of Zululand. Brett Horner talks about them "being inundated with orders from overseas countries for their fashionable hats and accessories made from discarded plastic shopping bags". Established by Jenny Kirkland, the So Afr-Eco Community Upliftment project in Obanjeni has also helped to rid the area of litter. Kirkland said she now had a team of housewives collecting discarded packets for her after the bags became scarce in Zululand."

Page 6 includes a story, also by Brett Horner, about the executive director of Durban Metro Water Service Neil Macleod and his achievement in turning around Durban's water woes for which he was praised in the latest edition of National Geographic.

He was also praised for his "ingenuity" in such innovations as recycled waste water for use in industry.

Page 9 has a piece by Rowan Philp that tells the story of a 14 year-old from East London who seized an opportunity to confront Mark Shuttleworth with a promotional opportunity.

Zippy Benn, talking to Shuttleworth, said, "Listen, Mark, there's this little girl (Amoche) at the crèche where help out who was born without a lower jaw and she can't even eat, and all she needs is money for this operation, and I thought if you signed these rockets, I could raffle them for a few thousand and ... "

Zippy had got a local science shop to donate three rockets and had promised them one for a display.

When asked what he would do if the raffle plan failed to raise the required money, Zippy said that he would get Amoche to draw a picture of a rocket and get her to sign it and raffle it back to Mark Shuttleworth.

The Metro section includes a piece by Corina Pretorius that details the exploits of an innovative architecture student at Wits University.

Sifiso Hadebe said that he did not know what an observatory was before his class was told by their Professor David Block to design one earlier this year.

"His design of the Eye-in-the-Sky Observatory and the intricate model he built from cardboard, cellophane and foil blew Block away."

Block said that he wanted, "functionality, originality and something that could actually be built in real life."

The Lifestyle supplement features an article about Jörn Utzon who designed the Sydney Opera House.

Utzon had entered the competition to design the Opera House, in 1955, but was little known outside of Denmark, in fact, according to the writer of this article, William Langley, he was regarded as something of a fantasist.

His design was given the thumbs down by structural engineers and Utzon eventually figured out the spherical geometry necessary by using an orange sliced up into segments.

He has been invited back to fix up the interior which was never made to his original specifications and when asked how he feels about the building he says, "Well, yes, although I have never really been away because my soul is in the building. I think about it all the time. I will haunt it when I go."

Perusing the media can have positive repercussions. The most amazing thing about these articles is that most of the people involved are South Africans. Remember these pieces of work when somebody again accuses South Africans of not being innovative.

ABOUT RICHARD CLARKE

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