



If Yeoville was a character...

Yeoville stories

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CONTEXT

The “If Yeoville was a character” exercise was part of a series of workshops titled *Yeoville Stories*, part of the Wits School of Architecture and Planning’s Yeoville Studio project. At the workshops, run by Naomi Roux from Wits and Sophie Didier from the French Institute of South Africa, a group of Yeoville residents used various methods, including storytelling, drawing, mapping and photography to share stories and ideas about living in Yeoville and the journeys that have brought residents to the area.

For this exercise, we began with the prompt: “If Johannesburg was a person...” to elicit ideas from participants about the city’s perceived character. In general Johannesburg was seen as: male, young, adventurous, somewhat dangerous. We then narrowed the exercise down to focus on Yeoville as a character: interestingly, in contrast to the city as a whole, Yeoville was often described as female, nurturing, caring, motherly, and older. One participant described Johannesburg as a “grandmother” who took him in and cared for him when he arrived from Zimbabwe: Yeoville, in this description, was the grandmother’s beautiful daughter with whom he fell in love.



An African urban renaissance village

This is where I relax and meditate,
listen to reggae music.

Yeoville is home. I feel safe here.

Yeoville makes me feel hopeful.
It is not a negative place as it is
made out to be.

This is my Yeoville

Here I do what I love: share
my skills with young people.

I wish Yeoville had a theatre
centre, for young people to
develop and expose their talents

I wish that Yeoville would realize what
incredible potential it has as a community



I wish Yeoville did not suffer such a bad reputation, that it was recognized as an interesting place to hang out.

Yeoville makes me feel like it is the only place that embraces the diversity the city offers. It is not at all typical of any other part of Johannesburg.

It's nice to be on the street where people are walking and shopping, chatting, hanging out and being comfortable. It's good to be part of it and feel welcomed.

Yeoville is not Sandton

Yeoville could be a great example to the city of how to live together

If Yeoville was a person, he would be someone who makes other people's dreams become reality.



Johannesburg is cruel, reckless and very clever. She would be a merchant. She would be a woman, because we are the ones who keep the economy moving. She has to be reckless because that is how she has to manoeuvre through the men.

Yeoville would be someone driving reconciliation between people, making the city the kind of place it could be.

Yeoville is a young man, poor but clever. He has some problems, but he takes good care of his family. He looks after those who cannot decide for themselves.

The neighbourhood was filled with Portuguese, Italians, Jews and working class whites. It was a mixed neighbourhood, it was a neighbourhood of immigrants in the same way as today.

Yeoville would be a person with a lot of friends



Yeoville is a big mama with lots of grandchildren of all colours. She cooks for everyone, but sometimes she gets a bit confused and puts too much spice in the food. She speaks a lot of languages.

Johannesburg
is a taxi driver

Yeoville is a woman, welcoming, diligent, everybody is welcome and every individual is respected with their differences.

Johannesburg is young, charming, talkative, a bit dangerous, a gold digger.

If Yeoville was a person, she would train people how to be independent and generate money. She would address people's needs with respect.

I think of Johannesburg as a man. He is a go-getter, sometimes stepping on our toes. I think it is a hard place, where you have to make a go of it.



This lady here looked
after me when I didn't
have a job

I was always hearing about Yeoville.
Then my friend brought me here to
Tandoor's and even now, it's where I
go to relax my mind.

I went dancing here on the night I met my wife

Johannesburg is a grandmother, and
Yeoville is her lovely daughter.
Joburg's sons are Hillbrow and Berea,
but the daughter is Yeoville. When I
crossed the border, Joburg welcomed
me, looked after me, and asked her
daughter Yeoville to stay with me: I
am so much in love with her.

I got stuck here.
My friends found
me in the park.



Yeoville is ordinary

Yeoville can get annoying

A lot of people don't have jobs, but they survive, by saving, by having a small business. People here are very creative.

Nobody can be identified that it's his or her first time to be in Yeoville, whatever language you speak.

Here people just come out and say,
see who I am.

Here you can move at night, you are free to walk in the street

Yeoville is a teacher who knows a little bit about everything

Yeoville has a tender heart



If Johannesburg was a person it would have an A-type personality. Active, punctual, chasing opportunity, always at the right place at the right time. You come with your problem, I come with mine, and everyone makes his or her own way.

Here I see people from everywhere, coming from DRC, coming from Ghana, they can even stay together in the same house. I was surprised.

Yeoville is like an old woman who has given birth to many children, but now she's been left behind, nobody cares. Most people come and stay here but when life improves, they leave Yeoville behind.