

David Smith ~ Johannesburg's Ponte City: 'The Tallest And Grandest Urban Slum In The World' - A History Of Cities In 50 Buildings, Day 33

"On the 13th and 14th floor you could get anything from a blow-job to an acid trip in a few minutes. Essentially, the building was hijacked."

In his penthouse apartment on the 52nd floor, Mike Luptak is talking about the bad old days when Ponte, the tallest residential building in the southern hemisphere, fell into the hands of drug dealers, gangsters, pimps and prostitutes. The inner core of this 173-metre high concrete cylinder became a giant rubbish tip piled up as far as the fifth floor. Among the refuse and junk were, so legend has it, the bodies of residents who took a suicidal leap.

A great deal has changed since then. Featured in newspaper articles, photography exhibitions, documentaries and movies, Ponte has come to symbolise the rise and fall and rise again of South Africa's commercial capital. It is part of an inner-city renaissance in recent years that has seen previous no-go areas turned into gourmet food markets, artists' studios and trendy apartments.

Read more: <http://www.theguardian.com/ponte-city>