

the new **alte feste**

NEWSLETTER

PROJECT PROGRESS & FUNDING UPDATE

September 2026



Embassy
of the Federal Republic of Germany
Windhoek



RMB



US Ambassadors Fund for
Cultural Preservation



1. A YEAR OF PROGRESS

When we reported on Alte Feste in August 2025, the focus was on saving the building. Phase 1 had addressed the most urgent structural and conservation problems: stabilising the building, restoring the West Wing façade, addressing water ingress and protecting the historic fabric.

The project has since moved into its next important stage - Phase 2 – the internal restoration of the West Wing – commenced in February 2026. The work is now revealing the building in much greater detail, while preparing it for its future role as an exhibition and cultural space.

This next phase has been made possible in significant part through the N\$4.1 million German funding contribution, which was transferred to the project and has enabled the restoration programme to progress. The first German investment therefore did not simply fund individual building works. It helped move Alte Feste from a building requiring urgent conservation towards a building that can begin to serve the public again.

2. WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED - From stabilisation to restoration

The 2025 donor report documented the completion of the first phase of restoration and the successful arrest of significant deterioration. The work included restoration of the stone plinth, structural interventions, roof repairs and historically appropriate lime-based restoration techniques.

The restoration philosophy of *Investigate → understand → conserve → adapt → activate*, is particularly important because Alte Feste is a layered historic building. Later alterations have often obscured earlier building fabric, and intervention can only responsibly take place once these layers are understood. The project team has therefore deliberately avoided treating the building as a conventional renovation project.



View of completed south plinth & balustrade 19/6/25



Close-up view of reinstated spout & balustrade 9/6/25

We gratefully acknowledge the support of our partners whose first contributions have made an important contribution to the restoration journey.

Government of Namibia (Ministry of Education, Innovation, Youth, Sport, Arts & Culture)	5,000,000
German Embassy Cultural Fund	4,100,000
Rand Merchant Bank (First Rand Foundation)	650,000
US Ambassador Fund for Cultural Preservation	984,000
Namibia Craft Centre	266,000
TOTAL	N\$11,000,000

3. PHASE 2: BRINGING THE WEST WING BACK TO LIFE

Phase 2 commenced on **5 February 2026**, with funding received from the German Embassy.

The work has included:

- structural reinforcement;
- new door openings between spaces;
- floor reconstruction;
- electrical infrastructure;
- ceiling interventions;
- window restoration;
- removal of inappropriate later finishes;
- protection and interpretation of historic building fabric; and
- preparation of the exhibition spaces.

The process has also revealed previously hidden conditions: Paint and loose plaster have been carefully removed, exposing original clay and lime plaster, brickwork and evidence of termite activity. Historic floor levels have been investigated and original flagstone floors uncovered and documented.

This investigative work has influenced both the construction programme and design decisions.



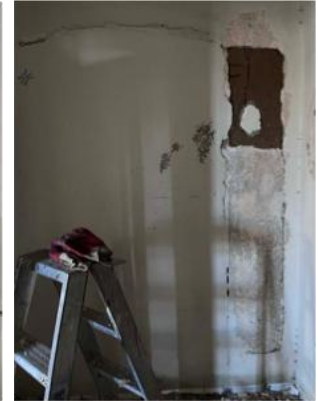
Progress photographs 2.7.2026: Damaged ceilings in the north tower vestibule and old passageway removed. Note the daylight visible at problematic junction of roof with tower wall, and extent of water damage below.



Progress photographs 2.7.2026: Shuttering for floor beams above the old cross-wall foundation walls in the North portion of the West wing is being positioned in preparation for casting.



Progress photographs 2.7.2026: Removal of paint and loose plaster in the southern tower vestibule revealing clay, lime and cement plaster beneath, and electrical reticulation.



Progress photographs 2.7.2026: Removal of plaster and paint in north tower vestibule underway, exposing original clay plaster. Note the extent of termite activity.

The restoration process reveals successive layers of the building's history.



Progress photographs: Views capturing commencement of peeling of paint from the wall surfaces to uncover plaster underneath (25 February 2026).

4. PRESERVING THE BUILDING WHILE MAKING IT FUNCTIONAL

A central challenge has been balancing conservation with the practical requirements of a contemporary public building. For example, the team has had to introduce new electrical infrastructure while retaining historic walls and floors. New openings have required structural reinforcement. Existing windows are being repaired and reused wherever possible.

A new floor system has also been developed following the testing of four different samples using locally sourced aggregate. After technical and cost comparison, the preferred solution uses **Tsumeb aggregate with oxide**. These decisions demonstrate the project's approach to responsible heritage investment: **modern functionality is being introduced without unnecessarily sacrificing historic fabric.**



Four floor samples were tested between Tsumeb and Aris aggregates, before the final finish was selected, balancing heritage sensitivity, technical requirements and cost.

5. THE BUILDING ITSELF IS TELLING ITS STORY

One of the most significant outcomes of the restoration process has been the discovery of historic layers within the West Wing. The removal of later paint and plaster has revealed clay, lime and cement plaster, historic brickwork and evidence of previous alterations. Rather than concealing these changes, the architectural concept proposes that some of the layers remain visible and become part of the visitor experience. The building will therefore not simply house history, but will tell part of the story.



Layers of clay, lime, cement and brickwork reveal the successive chapters of Alte Feste's physical history.

6. THE FLOOR TAKES SHAPE

By August, the restoration reached another important stage as the team prepared the West Wing for its new floor. After months of careful work below and around the historic fabric, the floor area was levelled, prepared and reinforced ready for casting.

The photographs capture that final stretch – from the prepared base and steel reinforcement to the concrete being poured and finished. It is a significant change in the space, bringing the restored rooms one step closer to becoming the exhibition and public spaces envisioned for Alte Feste.





The new floor marks another step towards bringing the West Wing back into use, while the historic walls and windows remain at the heart of the space.

7. INVESTING IN NAMIBIAN SKILLS

The project is also creating skills and employment opportunities within Namibia. Two apprentices from the **Association of Unemployed Artisans in Namibia (AUAN)** were placed with Decora as part of the project's skills-transfer requirement. Both have subsequently been absorbed into Decora's permanent workforce. This is an important but sometimes overlooked aspect of heritage investment.

The knowledge gained through restoring Alte Feste does not remain inside the building. It contributes to Namibia's growing pool of people with experience in heritage conservation, traditional materials, restoration techniques and working within complex historic structures.



Heritage restoration is also an investment in Namibian skills and future employment.

8. REMEMBRANCE, RESEARCH AND DIALOGUE

The most sensitive component of the future Alte Feste is the **Genocide Museum of Remembrance**. The project recognises that this cannot be approached simply as another museum fit-out. The history associated with Alte Feste requires research, consultation and meaningful engagement with relevant stakeholders. The restoration process is therefore progressing alongside work towards understanding how the site's difficult history should ultimately be interpreted. The project documentation records engagement with Traditional Authorities and ongoing work involving the Directorate of Heritage and Culture and the University of Namibia.

The intention is to create a place that allows Namibia to **remember with dignity, learn from the past and contribute to a broader national conversation about memory, identity and reconciliation.**

9. THE FUTURE VISION

The completed Alte Feste is envisaged as a multi-use cultural destination where heritage and remembrance, craft and design, exhibitions and cultural programming, public life and hospitality come together. At its heart will be a future Genocide Museum of Remembrance, developed through research and consultation, alongside a new platform for Namibian craft, design and creative enterprise. Exhibition and event spaces will provide opportunities for learning and cultural activity, while the revitalised courtyard will create a place for people to gather and experience the site. Restaurant, café and visitor facilities will add to the experience and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the precinct.

The architectural vision is to retain the character and evidence of the historic building while introducing contemporary spaces that allow Alte Feste to live, function and welcome people again. The current design brings together restored historic walls, new polished floors, contemporary exhibition systems, salvaged timber and a historic mural discovered in the roof void – allowing the building's past to remain visible as its future takes shape.



Design intent: Wall treatment in exhibition spaces (top); Exhibition space render showing new floor, wall treatment and ceiling (middle); Render of main entrance showing recycled timber-slatted ceiling and incorporation of wall mural discovered in roof void (bottom).

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We also acknowledge our partners, architects, engineers, contractors, heritage specialists, cultural stakeholders and all partners contributing to the future of Alte Feste.

The Team behind the Project:

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Philip Chapman, MD of RMB and the key members of the implementation team



German Ambassador Thorsten Hutter and the Alte Feste Team



US Ambassador Randy Berry and Min Sanet Steenkamp at the handover of the first grant