



This is the entrance to the Stellenbosch Village Museum.

The Stellenbosch Village Museum was founded during a time when Afrikaner nationalism was popular, and the museum was interested in becoming a repository for the history and culture of Stellenbosch – which is inextricably connected to this movement and also has deep colonial roots. The museum is comprised of four historic houses that represent four distinct periods during Stellenbosch’s early colonial history. This is achieved through the display of authentic material objects of the periods and information provided by costumed docents. The museum’s entrance building, the Lubbe-Building, holds an exhibition titled “The People of Stellenbosch” that provides information on the pre-colonial and colonial history of Stellenbosch and also contains an interactive timeline of Stellenbosch’s history spanning 1679 to 2000 (Stellenbosch Village Museum, 2017). The museum is comprised of the Schreuderhuis, Blettermanhuis, Grosvenor House, and Berghuis.



The Schreuderhuis (1709) was built by Sebastian Schröder, a German, and is the oldest documented townhouse in South Africa, as it appears on the first known drawing of the town in 1710 (Stellenbosch Village Museum, 2017). Vos and Boshoff (1988:2) compliment the house in their archaeological and archaeotectural investigation as being a valuable material asset of colonial South African history and assert that it is “representative of the early vernacular architectural tradition that has for all practical reasons disappeared from the urban landscape”. The house depicts the period spanning 1690 to 1720 and contains a special exhibition on the fire history of Stellenbosch.



The Blettermanhuis (1798) was built by Hendrik Lodewyk Bletterman, a VOC landdrost (magistrate) of Stellenbosch and depicts Stellenbosch between 1750 and 1780 as experienced by the white upper class of this period. The Stellenbosch Village Museum's brochure describes the Blettermanhuis as "a typical 18th century Cape house with six gables and a H-shaped ground plan" (Stellenbosch Village Museum, 2017:n.p.). This house contains a small special exhibition on the slave history of Stellenbosch.



The Grosvenor House (1803) was built by Christian Ludolph Neething in 1782. The museum's brochure declares that the house is "one of the most outstanding examples of a two-storied, flat-roofed patrician townhouse, of which there must have been a considerable number in Stellenbosch and Cape Town" (Stellenbosch Village Museum, 2017:n.p.). It depicts the period 1800 to 1830 and contains two special exhibitions; one on objects donated to the museum and another on a photographic history of early Stellenbosch.



The Berghuis (1850) was lived in by Olof Marthinus Bergh and his family during the mid-1800s. While it started with an exterior that was similar to Blettermanhuis, during the 19th century it was modified to its current appearance (Stellenbosch Village Museum, 2017:n.p.). It is ornately decorated in the style of the period spanning 1840 to 1870 and does not include a special exhibition.



Signage demarcating the houses involved in the Kayamandi Creative District House Museum project.



The four houses involved in the Kayamandi Creative District House Museum.

The Kayamandi Creative District House Museum is a museum initiative that has been formed by and is run by local community members. It is comprised of a handful of houses in the Kayamandi community that have been transformed into house museum spaces. What is special about this museum is that the houses have not been musealised in the traditional sense but, rather, the houses are still lived in by the homeowners-turned-docents. Visitors are invited inside the homes to glimpse the life of Kayamandi inhabitants through the material museum landscape and also through stories and information provided by the tour guide and homeowner docents. Along with general information on the community, each homeowner docent presents a themed story to the visitor: traditional Xhosa cooking, male initiation, childhood in Kayamandi, and religious life in Kayamandi.



To facilitate the visitor's imaging of each house and period, all of the houses of the Stellenbosch Village Museum are equipped with a docent who is dressed in a period specific costume. The docents all wear bonnets and long dresses – often with aprons covering the front skirts. The ladies of the older houses wear solid coloured shirts and skirts, while the docent in Berghuis wears a checkered shirt; perhaps indicating that, along with the wallpaper on the walls, people in this period were able to access more intricate fabrics.

This is a common practice of many historical house museums, as the addition of an appropriately costumed docent creates a visual reference for visitors to understand the fashions of the day. The docent assumes the role of the homeowner who welcomes visitors into their homes and speaks with authority about the house, its collection, and its inhabitants. This all works together to create the feeling that one is visiting this lady's home, you are being welcomed into her house and given a tour.