

# Asset

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## **BAM ARCHITECTS** when a plan comes together

Chris Bam,  
managing director,  
Bam Architects

Photo: Riekert Cloete



# **BAM** **ARCHITECTS** when a plan comes together

Written by Neil Hurford

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managing director,  
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**T**wenty-six is a big number in business years, especially for a creative practice led from its inception by one young man. Perhaps it's to do with Chris Bam's unswerving vision to succeed. He has steadily developed his architectural practice from a time when, as he says, "I made the tea and sorted the mail", into a national resource, with a strong team of professionals working from headquarters in its own building in Cape Town.

The Bam Architects building on Esplanade Road in Century City, Cape Town, which was bought new and occupied last year, is one of the milestones in the history of a practice that balances design innovation with the creation of buildings that are entirely appropriate for their use, and which unquestionably enhance their environment.

Bam Architects is where it needs to be right now. And it's not a bad place, servicing a high-profile national client list from headquarters in Cape Town's fastest-developing precinct, where Chris and his team have made a notable contribution.

Nowadays, Bam Architects has a professional complement of 20, and over the course of its quarter century, has been responsible for architectural projects totalling several billion rand. The team has achieved a very creditable number of contracts in an industry where a lot of the work involves pitches and concepts. "Getting the building out of the ground is the big job," says Chris.



169 On Main, Green Point, Cape Town



## Bam Architects

Their diverse skills are applied to a large variety of projects including business parks, healthcare facilities, corporate office buildings, more than 1,300 residential apartments, sports, distribution and retail centres, factories, warehousing and storage facilities as well as corporate headquarters and student accommodation. The firm's client list includes Rabie, Shoprite, Santam, Spear, Nedbank, Virgin Active, Ingenuity and Redefine.

Part of the success that the practice has achieved is as a result of commitment to progressive codes. "We have embraced the principles of sustainable architecture and apply environmentally conscious design techniques in all of our projects. In fact, our positioning statement is 'Future Ready', as we believe that through sustainable architecture, we can ensure that our actions today do not inhibit the opportunities of future generations," says Chris.

"We're proud to have achieved Green Star SA building ratings on several projects, notably The Edge Offices in Tyger Valley, which achieved a 5-Star Design rating; Golf Air Park, near Cape Town International Airport, which achieved a 4-Star Custom Industrial Design rating; and Glacier Place, Tygervally, which received a 4-Star Office As-Built rating," he adds.

Recently Bam Architects, while working on the Golf Air Park project, assisted with the development of the Green Building Council South Africa's (GBCSA's) design tool for industrial buildings – a tool that rates the adherence of a project to the council's requirements.

Over the time that the practice has thrived through good economic phases and bad, Chris has stuck to his insistence on avoiding becoming a 'starchitect' and he dislikes ego-driven attitudes, so the professionals who work with him are primarily team players with very particular skills. It certainly doesn't mean that he's not a fan of strong opinions, and says that he's followed a very sound piece of advice: "Surround yourself with leaders who are the best in their field, and who are better than you at what they do."



The Edge, Tyger Waterfront



Golf Air Park, Boquinar Industrial Area, Cape Town  
Photo: Johann Lourens



## Cover Story

Bam Architects opened its doors in October 1992 and from the outset aimed to achieve a goal of a mid-sized practice with a team of professionals who specialise in different aspects of building design. While Chris is consistently involved in the process, he relies on the specialist skills of each of the members of the team.

Every new building completion is another major step in the development of the practice, and none more so than the innovative luxury apartment block for Abacus Development Company, 169 On Main in Green Point, on which construction is about to begin. The building has been designed to express its own specific identity in an area inhabited by heritage sites, but also responds to the surroundings as a harmonious feature of the existing urban wall on the east side of Main Road Green Point. Its 51 varied apartments, including a penthouse, accommodate a diversity of residential needs.



## Cover Story

Adding to the practice's contribution to the Century City streetscape is a new R80 million retail development by the Rabie Property Group, where trading will begin next year, close to The Terraces apartment development, also designed by Bam Architects for Rabie. The Century Village Shopping Centre will be anchored by a gourmet Spar, with other tenants to include restaurants, coffee shops and other speciality line shops, and a parking provision for 100 cars.

Not only does the Bam team design entirely new buildings, but as in the case of the Santam Head Office in Tygervally, which was first built in the 1980s, an innovative re-design for client Ingenuity has resulted in a spectacular new look that has brought the building seamlessly into the 21st century.

In a project that has helped change the face of the fitness industry in South Africa, Bam Architects has been integral to the roll-out of more than 40 Virgin Active clubs throughout the country, and has also been responsible for the innovative design of the brand's Red iteration.

On the subject of creating and maintaining harmony in a group of highly creative individuals, Chris says it's fortunate that his colleagues take kindly to the collaborative process at play in the practice, and each team member likes to bounce his or her creativity off others to achieve the best outcome. The team has a variety of interactive skills that can be as broad as the creative process, detailing, or managing the contractors on the project.

Bam Architects



The Terraces, Century City  
Photo: Big Ben Construction



Santam Head office, Bellville



Century Village, Century City



Story continues on the next page.



Glacier Place, Cape Town  
Photo: Archigraphy



Bam Architects

Moresport DC, Cape Town



The Quays, Century City  
Photo: G. Duncan-Smith



Panorama Healthcare Centre  
Photo: InfrastructurePhotos



“It’s rare to find an individual architect with the full set of skills needed over the lifecycle of a project,” he says.

Talent acquisition and retention rely on making sure that everyone involved in the firm has stimulating and challenging work, which is often a greater motivation than financial reward.

“Our collaborative style makes us an employer of choice among architectural professionals. As a collective, we present an image that attracts both clients and staff. Forming the team has been a gradual process of building up all the skills required among the various members,” he explains.

“It’s my job to attract the best talent that the industry has to offer and bring those skills to bear on our clients’ projects. Our architects have the space to flourish. To have a successful practice, your resources have to be excellent. We have never chased growth or size but the acquisition of our own building cements the identity of the practice. It’s a reflection of who we are. It’s a bold space, and reflects our character.” The building was developed by Rabie and the interior fit-out was designed by Chris and his team.

About his outlook for the future, Chris says that one has to be a calculated optimist, and he stands by the progressive tenet that he adopted early on for his practice: “Looking forward creates excitement and is what



Virgin Active Century City  
Photo: Archigraphy

makes everyone get out of bed in the morning – it’s about the large-scale creativity of the work that is tangible and durable – and, best of all, it helps people to realise their dreams.”

Bam Architects will undoubtedly progress according to the principles established over the past 26 years, and if there’s an adage that everyone needs to keep top of mind, Chris would have to say it’s “Success results when preparation meets opportunity”. **A+**



The Vineyard, Burgundy Estate, Cape Town