

The extra mile

Twenty-one years is a milestone associated with achieving a measure of maturity, when independent decisions are made and life is viewed through adult eyes

For Chris Bam, the establishment of his practice 21 years ago already marked a level of independence rare for such a young architect. He says the years of consolidation on his home turf in the Cape and building a high-end client list have prepared him to expand the frontiers of Bam Architects to the north. The practice now also has a solid footprint in Johannesburg of more than 10 projects in progress. These range from commercial/industrial buildings to new premises for the Virgin Active health clubs.

Bam Architects' upfront exploratory work and development of concepts for the new range of smaller Virgin Active Red clubs, aimed at a different demographic from the traditional ones, has meant that the practice has become the sole design resource for this fast-growing sector of Virgin's business.

"We have walked the walk during two years of cooperation and commitment – common qualities we apply to all our projects – to achieve the right solution and bring the Red clubs to the market," says Bam, adding that several of the new clubs will be rolled out this year, along with larger ones for which Bam Architects shares the design load with another practice. Sites of the first new Red clubs are Brackenfell in the Cape and Boksburg in Gauteng. They will open at the end of June.

Bam Architects has also gained a reputation for landmark corporate head offices through its many significant projects completed or under way in the Cape. "It's on this reputation that we will build our expansion to the north," says Bam.

Impetus weathers the storm

Looking back on the recessionary drift over the past six years, Bam believes that the firm's weathering of the lean times is probably the result of its ability to maintain

impetus and resist negative trends. "It's also very much to do with having the right clients with whom you can grow, and who have confidence in your ability to deliver," he says. "Aligning our values with those of our clients and delivering a product whose function reflects exactly their market aspirations to achieve a competitive position are among our primary goals. For us, innovative and pristine design goes hand in hand with commercial viability."

The ability of the practice to survive and thrive is evidenced by the current staff complement of 17. "We have grown in line with the increasing projects, and the growth has also had the effect of attracting more work through the collective effort of a talented team. More appointments are on the cards – expansion to Johannesburg will result in a higher resource requirement."

A demonstration of Bam's long-haul capability is the practice's association with the Rabie Property Group. A development collectively called The Quays at Century City has just been completed, and comprises three separate buildings surrounding a small lake, which is connected to Century City's hallmark chain of waterways.

The residential component, consisting of Quayside and the Quay North building, provides sectional title apartments; the third phase, The Quays, houses sectional title office suites. The innovative, colourful collection of buildings creates a self-contained environment with a village atmosphere around a piazza with a restaurant. Occupants have the further benefit of having the Bam Architects-designed Virgin Active health club a short distance away.

Rabie Property Group's long-term commitment to Century City, which will last into the foreseeable future, is, according to Bam, typical of the group's commitment



MAIN PICTURE *The Edge, Tygervalley Waterfront*
INSET *Glacier Place, Tygervalley*

to its projects. "The group also encourages its professional associates to turn out the most innovative and attractive work possible, which is both a challenge and an inspiration for us at Bam Architects. There is a dedication to a wide diversity of aspects that includes landscaping and even the tenant mix."

Rabie Property Group's resident property brokers Property World have also taken offices at The Quays.

Green priorities

Further north, Bam Architects is busy with another major green corporate headquarters building, which is also aimed at a five-star green compliance rating. It is The Edge, at the Tygervalley Waterfront, providing 10 000m² of AAA-grade office space, developed by Omnicron for Integri-t Property Fund.

The building will be registered with the Green Building Council of South Africa with the objective of achieving the top green rating, in line with the groundbreaking sustainability measures employed in its construction. The entire building is double-glazed, and water from the quarry on the edge of which it is built will be used in the air-conditioning system, where it will also be treated to improve its purity before being returned to the quarry.

"This purpose-designed system will have a substantial positive effect on the power-usage saving, which will be passed on as a benefit to the tenants," says Bam.

Sustainable materials will be used extensively throughout the building, and include a composite product for decking and façade screens to replace timber.



The material is made from 60% recycled wood fibre and 40% high-density polyethylene. Only reclaimed waste wood is used to make the material, substantially lowering the life-cycle cost.

The development also incorporates spectacular landscaping, using indigenous drought-resistant plants, rainwater harvesting for irrigation, shade structures and walkways. It will be completed and occupied in October this year. Occupants will be the developer, Omnicron, as well as WorleyParsons, a firm of multidisciplinary engineering consultants.

Already completed at the Tygervalley Waterfront is the landmark Bam-designed 12 000m² Glacier Group headquarters, Glacier Place, developed by Ingenuity Property Investments. It is already fully let, with Glacier as anchor tenant. Pioneer Foods' head office and Santam are also accommodated in the remaining space.

Broad competencies

Bam Architects incorporates a broad range of competencies, including insight and skill in the various applications for industrial architecture. The practice is well known for its many successful innovative industrial buildings that are both highly functional and attractive, avoiding any stereotypes.

An industrial building designed by Bam Architects for use as a distribution centre for Moresport, the brand-holders of Sportsmans Warehouse and Outdoor Warehouse, is nearing completion. In partnership with Redefine, the nationwide redistribution facility is another individual creative design project by the practice. "Our versatility across many architectural functions is the result of a conscious decision to be ready for any major brief," says Bam. "By being prepared, trained and backed by exhaustive research, we avoid being limited to work that might not always be available."

Bam Architects is headquartered at The Palms in Woodstock, a major industrial makeover of the old Baumann's biscuit factory, undertaken by the practice for Wetherlys 14 years ago. The atmospheric, sensitive development – a mix of retail and office space – stands as one of the most innovative recycling projects in Cape Town.

This earlier work represents Chris Bam's determination that the buildings the practice creates should be sustainable on all levels. He was fully committed to green building principles well before the introduction of the official guidelines. He considers sustainability to be one of the cornerstones of good building design, and his projects embrace the use of recycled materials, innovative temperature control measures and the use of existing and easily available resources.

Bam's commitment to his practice, his colleagues and the clients they serve is backed by an abiding principle that progress through one's working life should follow an upward curve that goes with greater experience and personal maturity. "There should never be any room for compromised or poor quality," he says.

Because he believes in enhancing the lives of his buildings' occupants, those buildings provide pleasure on both a visual and a practical level. Though each of the projects is different, they all carry a stamp that distinguishes them as unmistakable products of Bam Architects' design studio.



Chris Bam



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP Soho on Strand, Cape Town; Moresport National Distribution Centre, Philippi OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Virgin Active Century City; Sheffield Business Park; Quayside, Century City; The Quays, Century City (including the new Tribakery premises); Virgin Active Tygervalley

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