

Top women architects win national awards

FOUR women have been honoured in the 2013/14 Corobrik-SAIA Awards of Excellence presented by Corobrik and the South African Institute for Architects (SAIA) at a gala dinner in Durban on 1 August.

"This is a notable achievement," says Nina Saunders, past vice-president of SAIA. "The Corobrik-SAIA Awards of Excellence recognise exceptional contributions to the field of architecture and have been conferred every two years since their introduction in 1990."

"Less than 20 percent of SAIA members are currently women. However, almost 28 percent of members have earned the title PR Arch (Professional Architect), the highest level of membership and we are seeing an encouraging trend emerging with 40 percent women in the Architect in Training category."

Awards of Excellence – the highest accolade that can be bestowed on a building in South Africa – were presented for eight projects and in three of these projects the architects were from practices headed by women.

Of the 14 awards of merit conferred for a significant architectural achievement, one was for a project designed by a firm with a woman as the lead architect. The four award-winning architects are Charlotte Chamberlain and Nicola Irving, partners at Charlotte Chamberlain & Nicole Irving Architects (CCNA) in Cape Town; Michele Sandilands, principal of Michelle Sandilands Architects in Cape Town; and Anne Graupner, principal at 26'10 south Architects in Johannesburg.

Chamberlain and Irving won their award for the pre-school campus of

Springfield Convent School in the southern suburbs of Cape Town.

Regarding the role of women in architecture, Irving says: "We don't really see that women have a specific role, but we truly do need representation and diversity in our society, and in all aspects and forums to do with our built environment, in order to continue evolving and growing in a worthwhile direction."

Sandilands' entry is for her work on Phase 2 of UNISA on the Cape Flats – creating an inspiring house of learning to accommodate administrative offices, student registration, exam rooms and classrooms.

Anne Graupner of 26'10 south Architects was the lead architect, together with her partner Thorsten Deckler, on the entry for their studio home in Brixton, Gauteng.

This project is close to her heart

because it enables her to be both a mother to her two young children and work as a fulltime professional architect and an urban designer.

Educated in Vienna at the University of Applied Arts, Graupner graduated cum laude in 2001. She worked at the Architecture Centre Vienna before returning to South Africa, her country of birth, in 2002.

Two years later, she co-founded 26'10 south Architects with Thorsten Deckler, which was selected as the top emerging practice in the country as part of a global round-up of young practices in 2012.

On the role of women in architecture, Graupner says that building sites can be tough and women need to earn respect to be seen as equal to their male counterparts.

"Since architecture is still a male dominated profession, it seems that

if women are successful a big deal is made about their gender especially if they have achieved something extraordinary.

But, at 26'10 south Architects, which I run with my partner Thorsten Deckler, we like to work with the best staff we can find – gender plays no role – in the end its about competency, attitude, passion, good client and project management skills and completing our projects successfully as a team."

Saunders believes that, if you are a good architect it doesn't matter whether you are a man or a woman.

"Having said that, it must be acknowledged that a higher percentage of women have been lead architects on the award-winning projects this year and that must be viewed as a healthy development for the profession," says Saunders.



Anne Graupner of 26'10 south Architects