

CELEBRATING WOMEN IN ARCHITECTURE

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).

"This is a notable achievement in an industry where women are only recently coming to the fore," highlights 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 inception in 1990."

Nina goes on to say that less than 20% of SAIA members are currently women, however, almost 28% of members have earned the title PR Arch (Professional Architect), the highest level of membership. "We are seeing an encouraging trend emerging with 40% women in the Architect in Training category, she enthuses."

The 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 lead architects were from female practices or from those who have a woman as lead architect.

The four award-winning architects are Anne Graupner, Principal at 26'10 south Architects in Johannesburg; Michele Sandilands, principal of MSa Michelle Sandilands Architects in Cape Town; and Charlotte Chamberlain and Nicola Irving, partners at Charlotte Chamberlain Architects in Cape Town.

A studio home in Brixton, Gauteng, won a Corobrik-SAIA Award of Merit for Anne, who was the lead architect on the project. Anne co-founded 26'10 south Architects with Thorsten Deckler, who was selected as the top emerging practice in the country in 2012.

In addition, Anne co-authored (with T. Deckler and H. Rasmuss) the book, 'Contemporary South African Architecture in a Landscape of Transition.' "Architectural and

urban design projects are highly complex and could be looked at and judged in many ways, however, being recognised for design excellence validates some of our conceptual thinking and values," says Anne. "Designing spaces that creatively encourage the end users to inhabit them would constitute a successful project for me."

Establishing her own practice in 1998, Michele Sandilands Architects, Michele was awarded 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 teaching venues.

"We want to make a positive difference with everything that we design, which is why the design and construction of education facilities fulfils this ideology," she says. "Buildings that have a minimal impact on the carbon footprint and that set sustainable examples are a focus of ours."

Charlotte and Nicola won their Award of Excellence for the new pre-school and art

buildings for Springfield Convent School's campus in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. Both worked together at Louis Karol Architects and spent a lot of time gaining experience in Europe.

Charlotte started a practice of her own, which inevitably saw the two join forces to create Charlotte Chamberlain Nicola Irving Architects. "Acknowledgment from one's peers is a really good indication that what we are doing is geared in the right direction," comments Charlotte. "However, it is important to acknowledge the people who we work with and for. We often ask our clients to extend their briefs and vision for their projects beyond their initial thoughts, and it is a leap of faith to go ahead with what is mostly an unknown to them – until it is built!"

Regarding the role of women in architecture, Nicola says that women truly need representation and diversity in society, and in all aspects and forums to do with the built environment in order to continue evolving and growing in a worthwhile direction.

Nina concludes by emphasising that if someone is a good architect, it doesn't matter whether one is male or female. "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 this must be viewed as a healthy development for the profession," she says. ■

