

Architects are pulling out all the stops with eco-friendly developments says Peter Feldman

SOUTH African buildings are “going green”, if the winners of the AfriSam-South African Institute of Architects (SAIA) Awards for Sustainable Architecture are anything to go by. At the recent awards ceremony in Joburg, the top honour went to a Sandton building, the Alexander Forbes Headquarters, designed by Paragon Architects and Paragon Interface, in the built work category.

Dr Stephan Olivier, AfriSam’s chief executive said it was hoped that the Alexander Forbes Headquarters would provide a beacon of inspiration, not only as a place to work, but also as a worthwhile contribution to the urban fabric of Johannesburg and human experience in the area.”

The Alexander Forbes Headquarters, which has already been confirmed as a Four-Star Rated Green Building by the Green Building Council of South Africa (GBCSA), employs 2 500 people. It has been occupied for two years and was designed to reduce water and energy use, and waste.

Commendations in this category went to three other Gauteng properties: the Seed Library in Alexandra township, Joburg, designed by Architects of Justice; Monaghan Farm near Lanseria, Gauteng, submitted by Claude Bailey Architecture & Design on behalf of Clewer Development Trust, and House Jones in Hurlingham, Joburg, designed by ERA Architects. Cape Town’s Unisa Phase 2 in Parow, designed by Michele Sandilands Architects, was also commended.

A second award, in the category of works of social importance, including research, went to Vukuzakhe by Koop Design in Durban, which examines urban development in the Municipality of eThekweni, while Collis & Associates received a commendation for research into concrete recycling in Cape Town.

Over the years South Africans have become increasingly conscious of the “going green” philosophy, seeking ways to make their homes and offices more environmentally friendly.

The country seems to have turned the corner when it comes to protecting the environment by creating eco-friendly buildings. It has certainly been doing far better in establishing sustainability than regions such as Europe, the US, Australia, the United Arab Emirates and Brazil.

US-based firm McGraw-Hill Construction undertook a World Green Building Trends survey and concluded that South Africa’s green buildings would increase three-fold from 16 percent in 2012 to 52 percent by 2015. The report also stated that a total of 60 percent of firms in the survey reported future green commercial developments by next year.

Growthpoint is one of the largest property owners in the country. It is acutely aware of its



SHINING LIGHT: House Jones received a commendation in the built work category of the AfriSam-SAIA Awards.

Green BUILDINGS

impact on the environment and continues to expand its environmental commitment.

Dr Werner van Antwerpen, an expert in the field of sustainable development at Growthpoint, explained that “green” building incorporates design, construction and operational practices that significantly reduce or eliminate the negative impact on the environment and people. He says “green buildings” are energy and resource efficient and environmentally responsible.

Van Antwerpen said the company was committed to sustainability and wanted to reduce environmental impact by promoting responsible development. “For that reason all our new and major refurbished buildings are designed to have a Four-Star Green Star rating or higher from the GBCSA.”

In addition to new buildings being developed, Growthpoint is also addressing its existing portfolio

stock, and all new and existing buildings that the company develops and operates, he says, will reap the benefits associated with green principles. “From a business perspective green buildings make good financial sense, as they have lower operating costs that benefit both the tenant and the landlord, while increasing staff productivity in a healthier work environment,” added Van Antwerpen.

Asked whether he felt South Africa was far better off in establishing sustainability compared with other regions in the world, Van Antwerpen said: “The concept of sustainability in the built environment is a much newer one in South Africa compared with other countries like Australia, the UK and the US. Sustainability has only really taken flight in South Africa over the past five years.”

Films on all 15 finalists in the 2014 AfriSam-SAIA awards can be seen at www.4tmrw.co.za



FUNKY: The Seed Library in Alexandra was also commended.

Hands-on activities for pupils

This year, for the first time, the AfriSam-SAIA Awards have mounted an exhibition to showcase both the winning projects and finalists, which includes a curated educational programme.

The exhibition, which runs from October 10 to 30 at the newly renovated Johannesburg City Library, is also free to the public during the library’s normal opening hours.

Sponsored by AfriSam, Grade 6 and 7 pupils from across Joburg have been invited to participate in an interactive session of exploration, designed to highlight the importance of sustainability and how it affects their personal lives. Sessions comprise a hands-on

workshop with interactive activities and take-home crafts and include a walkabout of the exhibition to illustrate the concepts learnt in each workshop.

The exhibition has been designed to take into account its location and to reflect the underlying ethos of the awards and is constructed entirely out of paper and cardboard. Set against the backdrop of the historic library, the design elements become a miniature city-scape within the building, complemented by living green walls and a range of trees laser cut from old books.

For session bookings, on a first-come, first-served basis, please contact batya.bricker@gmail.com

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