

Bomax Architects: designing change within architecture

Specialising in bespoke contemporary design solutions for sustainable architecture aimed at minimising environmental impact, a small but well-established Cape Town architecture practice is slowly reforming commercial and residential landscapes across the country

By CDC Business Development Communications Officer



FROM LEFT Dion Max Walters, Joshua Brodie, Robyn Marias, Dane Minords, Armen Abrahams

Bomax Architects, a Cape Town architectural company in practice since 2000, designs and project-manages retail, commercial and residential property using innovative materials that have minimal impact on the environment. Dion Max Walters, sole director of the practice, spoke to us about his company's philosophy and some of its best projects.

"As a practice, we strive for creativity," says Walters. "We design unique buildings that are aware of their environment. The idea behind sustainable architecture is to minimise the negative environmental impact of buildings; we therefore exercise moderation in the type of materials and energy used in the buildings we design, and take into consideration the development space, always being mindful of site context and adding aesthetic value."

Born and schooled in Durban, Walters studied architecture at the University of Port Elizabeth. After graduation, he relocated to Cape Town, where he worked with KCvR Architects on housing projects. Later, through a merger, he spent two years in the commercial space at DHK before he and a fellow graduate joined forces to start Bomax.

"We burnt the midnight oil and in less than four years created a name for ourselves as a passionate design practice that creates unique buildings," he says. "We specialise in creative design and, over the years, we've gained valuable site administration experience. An inability to deliver site administration is a budding practice's weakness. It took time but we got there; now, after 17 years, Bomax Architects specialises as a design practice

that provides a service from design inception through to site completion."

In 2005 Walters became sole director after his partner left following an illness. He and his team of architects and technical specialists expanded out of residential design into commercial and retail work.

"The experience gained from implementing creative details into housing projects and managing consultants prepared us for commercial work," says Walters. "We act as the principal agent on behalf of the client, and coordinate the other consultants and suppliers. We have a short-list of contractors the practice prefers to work with – contractors and suppliers with whom we have built solid relationships and on whom we can rely to deliver consistently good service."

Spotlight on projects

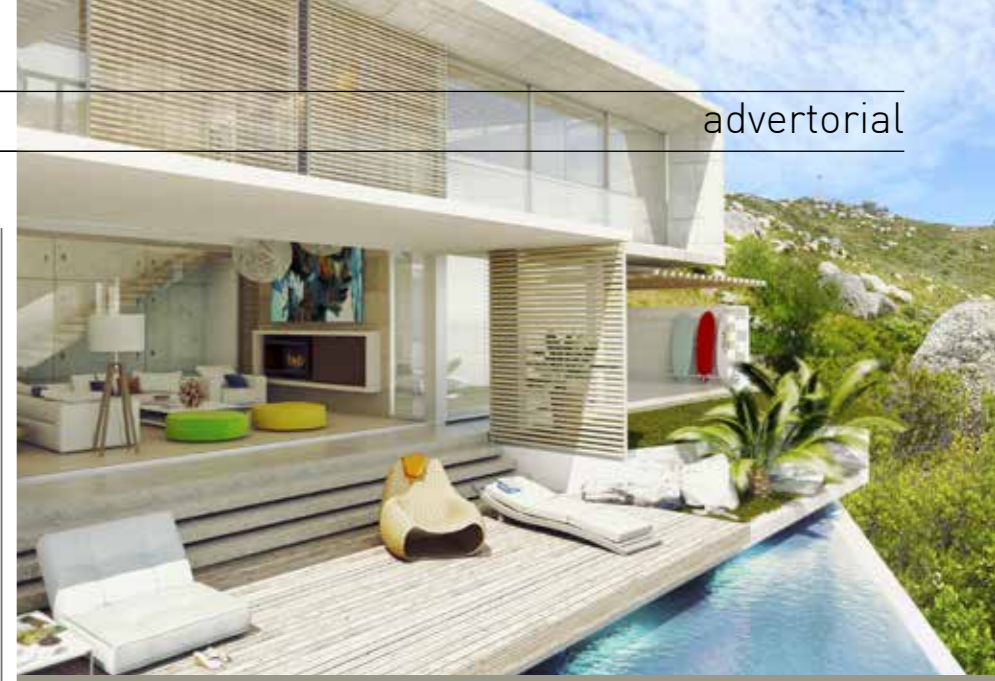
Bomax Architects has created a portfolio of international and national projects, including commercial buildings, up-market residential homes, retail interiors and even a wine farm. These buildings reflect a distinct style of clean lines, balanced forms and ordered planning. They have a relationship with the site they are designed for, often integrating indoor and outdoor spaces seamlessly.

Residential highlights

"We are busy with a project in Fishermen's Bend in Llandudno for a North African client," says Walters. "The property overlooks the sea and offers amazing vistas of Llandudno and the Atlantic Ocean. The design concept brings the beach into the home. Natural materials – all with matte finishes – create a worn, barefoot environment like the beach. The project is an alteration to a badly designed house on a great site – a problem we often have to deal with. There is much energy in an existing dwelling, so we utilise the existing fabric where we can to reduce the costs of energy consumption. We have remodelled this house entirely while retaining the existing concrete frame. A giant granite boulder remains in the house, too difficult and beautiful to move.

"In Thorn Street, Newlands, we designed a home on the fringe of the Newlands forest but it was squashed between two neighbours on a narrow site. We wanted it to feel like a contemporary tree house, relating to the forest behind. The main bedroom is elevated and projects towards the trees. The orientation of the building and the circulation of the planning hides the views of the close urban proximity of neighbours.

"Another house, in Culross Road, Bryanston, designed for a known advertising executive,



Fisherman's Bend, Llandudno



Mixed-use lifestyle precinct for Second Avenue, Bloemfontein

Thorn Street, Newlands



Dedicated and diverse team

Bomax Architects operates from 27 Pepper Street, from a building the firm has recently renovated. The new office interior is an example of the team's design skills and has an industrial, mid-century Modern interior, with bespoke components designed by the team. The centrally situated office is home to Bomax's dedicated creative team whose diverse range of skills and experience enable the firm to provide a full range of architectural services to clients.

The practice is registered with both the Cape Institute of Architects and the South African Institute of Architects, and is a member of the Green Building Council of South Africa.



Culross Road, Bryanston

is currently on hold. It's an awesome project that merges two realms with two distinctive layered forms. On entry you experience a public realm of spaces – lobby, living, family, kitchen and veranda. These are contained in a geometric form surrounding the open-plan spaces. This component is then overlapped by an organic form, which envelopes the private realm where the bedrooms, gym and study are situated. The design is unusual, creative and feminine; it reflects the owner's personality."

Commercial work

Bomax was the designing architect of the recently completed FNB regional headquarters for the Free State in Second Avenue in Bloemfontein. This 10 000m² building was designed to house all the departments of FNB that were previously housed in various buildings around the city.

"It's been a while since the Free State has had a construction crane. We hope this will be a catalyst for further development in the area," says Walters. "The building employs various 'green' features and we have experimented

with new materials. The atrium is designed to maximise natural light with a new acrylic sheeting product instead of glass, achieving both the required heat gain and insulation values. A 100KWp photovoltaic solar system is designed for the rooftop to generate 170MWh of power per annum. This takes advantage of the sunny days in Bloemfontein. The western sun does become extreme, so we designed less glazing on the west façade and more cladding. The cladding is a dark grey, large-format, scratch-resistant ceramic cladding tile from Turkey; it is so hard, we use it on kitchen counters as well. The battleship-grey colour of the cladding gives the building that secure, corporate-banking aesthetic. This cladding is ventilated on a frame away from the building, which prevents heat gain to the interior. The glass used is low emissivity-coated to prevent heat loss in winter, and tinted grey to prevent heat gain in summer.

The building has been designed with two entrances on an east/west atrium axis, which links the pedestrians on Second Avenue in the east to the vehicle parking site in the west.

The pedestrian entrance will be understood later as the precinct develops circulation to the waterfront.

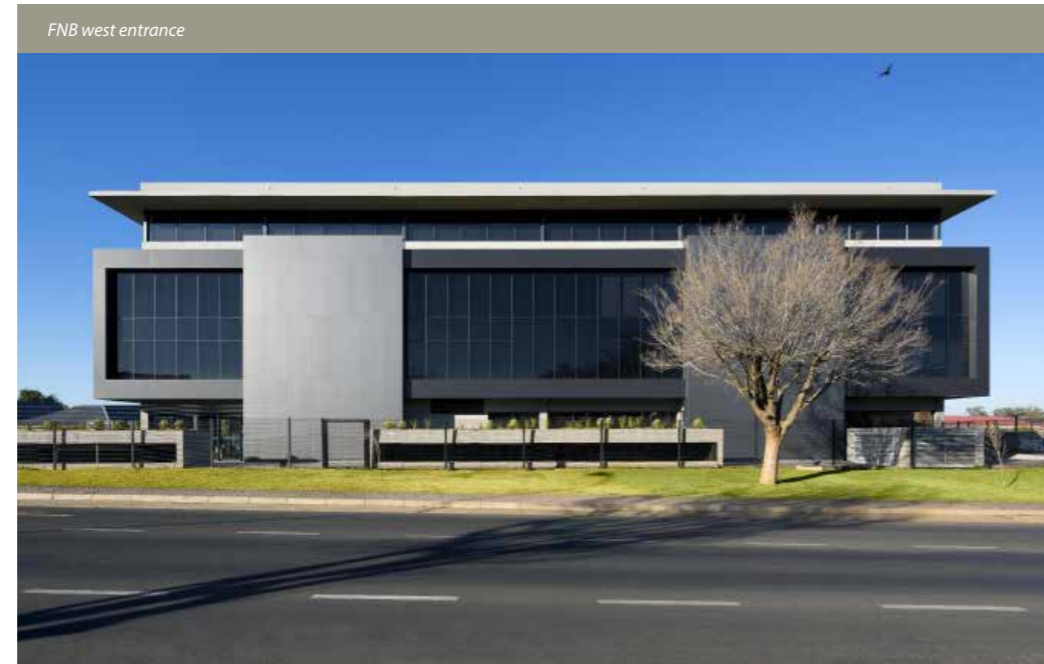
The interior reflects on the regional status of the Free State building and is inspired by the natural materials and palette of the bushveld. Bomax designed the atrium chandelier and had it made in Cape Town. "I love the edgy deconstructed mood the chandelier creates against the ordered interior façades," says Walters. "Like 'shards of glass', the chandelier creates tension in the space. Not foreign to a corporate environment, it is sculptural and designed to fill the volume with feeling."

The building is a catalyst for a new mixed-use lifestyle precinct in Second Avenue, designed by Bomax. It includes a collection of buildings that will enhance the city and create a gateway to the Loch Logan Waterfront.

The practice has also been involved in pro-bono community work. Bomax designed an orphanage in Mozambique called Life Child, for children who have lost their parents to Aids; a project that is funded by the Life Church of Sea Point. With supplied brick machines and



FNB Bloemfontein internal atrium



FNB west entrance

tutoring by the Life Church, the community members are able to progress the development themselves. The project is growing all the time and now includes a clinic and a primary school. This has led to other exciting church projects, which include alterations to the Life Church in Sea Point as well as a new church for Urban Edge in Durbanville.

The new Urban Edge Church accommodates a thousand-seat auditorium with attached public spaces as well as two other halls for use by youth and children. The entire family is considered, with facilities for mothers and infants as well. The building is designed to serve the fast-growing residential community of Durbanville and Pinehurst.

"I am in awe of the dedication and support that the church provides not only to its congregation but the communities within its reach," says Walters. "We want to assist the church with new community projects in Fisantekraal to support its current school and clinic initiatives.

"In Cape Town, we're busy with The Link on the Foreshore. We are converting the old Chevron building to serve as a 'link' between the new Christiaan Barnard Memorial Hospital and Virgin Active. The Link itself will house a Netcare Day Ward Centre, an inner-city urban Woolworths and other corporate tenants on two top floors still to be built.

"We are privileged to be a part of the design future of the inner city of Cape Town. The Link forms part of a new arrangement of buildings that include the CTICC extension, and the Christiaan Barnard Memorial Hospital and Media City that are going to create an urban landscape around Salazar Square. These are exciting times for Cape Town!"

Virgin Active gym visitors can conveniently enter from Salazar Square. "We're cutting a volume out of the existing building's concrete to fit a dynamic 'red ribbon' staircase up to the gym," says Walters. "The staircase has been designed to express movement. In sport, you should feel as though you're wrapped in an Olympic ribbon staircase sculpture while ascending to a victory platform. We opened the façades with glass so it is more visible.

"It's an expensive project. The extensive alterations and additions – particularly the new fire-escape routes – require considerable remodelling of the existing super-structure. We utilise as much of the existing fabric as we can to save energy, and fit the building with effective sustainable materials and systems where possible.

"This is inner-city rejuvenation at its best. It's a collaborative effort by all involved – and ultimately, the city is the client."



Urban Edge Church, Durbanville



Olympic ribbon staircase sculpture, Cape Town