



The man at the helm of Bomax Architects is quite clear about what's important in his life: family, architecture and surfing. Dion Max Walters is not giving his order of preference, but from the passionate way he talks about his projects, it's clear that his work consumes a good deal of his time.

With offices in a beautifully restored building in Shortmarket Street, Cape Town, the Bomax success story started 10 years ago. Dion, a protégé of Paul Krynauw (now of dhk Architects), started a practice with partner Frank Böhm. Creatively combining elements of their names, Bomax was born, at a time that Dion believed was opportune to get into the market. He was right – the company quickly got off to an excellent start, with projects in Namibia, London and Cape Town. Unfortunately, three years later Frank contracted leukaemia and had to leave the practice. Dion lost a great partner, but with determination and Frank's blessing, carried on alone. Frank has since made a full recovery and is now specialising in creating contemporary furniture from his own studio.

Today the business is still going strong, having successfully weathered even the storm in the property market of the past few years. 'It's a matter of hanging in there for opportunities to show people what we are capable of,' says Dion.

A Durban boy who earned his architectural degree at the University of Port Elizabeth, Dion likes to describe the firm as 'design specialists'. 'A well-formulated design philosophy is carried out in whatever we do, from residential to commercial and retail design.' A recipe has developed that gives Bomax the tools to approach any design problem in a methodical way. 'It's a process that takes time, devotion and an excellent team if good, practical solutions are to be created. We are fortunate to have developed a great design team; we have taught each other, and

our team is now making great progress with the latest advanced 3D software.'

Although Dion is reluctant to categorise the company's work, and rightly points out that they have conceptualised a number of differing styles over the years, the latest works definitely have a strong 'Bomax' feel. 'First, we consider the site context, the environment and the client's brief; second, we apply our design process and create what we like to call an "international contemporary style". It's clean and minimalistic,' Dion explains. 'Our best solutions are always the simple ones. Well-resolved architecture starts with efficient and simple planning, developed through to the detail.

'One of our biggest influences is the environment. A Cape Town home, for example, will be designed to suit the climate

THIS PAGE Bomax excels in 3D modelling, an integral part of their design process, as demonstrated by these renderings of the exterior and interior of a private residence currently being built in in Berkley Road, Camps Bay. **OPPOSITE** Dion contemplates the surf from the building site on Berkley Road.



Bomax Architect's Dion Max Walters has a contagious enthusiasm for all his projects, whether it's pro-bono work in Mozambique or a multimillion-rand home on the Atlantic Seaboard.

TAKING IT TO THE MAX

Words **Sandy Welch**
Photographs **Nicky Willcock**





under-floor heating. Conventional air conditioning is changing, and where possible we avoid it altogether with calculated sun control, air circulation and insulation. We look at retaining energy, as buildings cool at night, improving performance immensely. We consider heat sink stores of concrete mass where direct north light falls. These stores release energy slowly at night, counteracting cooling. This energy is retained with well-designed insulation, so we use polystyrene boards as thermal transfer barriers at the building envelope, especially where the building contacts the earth. The use of low-emission glass with an insulating laminate layer is used on shaded facades to help retain energy, while glass with UV heat gain prevention on sun-facing facades stops excessive heat penetration, which further helps to alleviate the need for air conditioning.'

Today, staying informed about material advancements is an ongoing part of being in touch with architecture. 'Materials are changing or developing every day,' says Dion. 'Take concrete as an example: we are building concrete roofs that don't require conventional waterproofing at all, thanks to a waterproofing admix formula added to the concrete itself. New methods of polishing concrete are also allowing us to finish a cast slab without any screed or floor finish – and it looks amazing.'

One of the best examples of their design approach is a home they are busy building on Victoria Road on the Camps Bay strip. It's a difficult project. It adjoins an existing home, and Bomax has been tasked with creating something that blends in perfectly with the existing structure, yet has its own personal style. The build will be finished mid next year and is being closely monitored. Dion's justifiably proud of the project. 'It's a high-profile site that deserves an iconic Cape Town building,' he says. Other notable residential projects in which the firm's currently involved include homes in Platteklief and Newlands.

Bomax is not only concerned about the environment, but the community as well, doing pro-bono work for the Ubomi Charitable Trust founded by Life Church Sea Point. The project focuses on providing shelter for mothers and orphaned children affected by HIV/Aids. 'It's great to have the skills to provide a much-needed service to the underprivileged,' says Dion. 'We started out with a concept design for residential units, but this has grown to include a community hall, clinic and school – now an entire village. It's impressive to see what Life Church is achieving – they have had a brick-making machine donated, and volunteers from round the world are on site helping with the construction. It's awesome to see what a collective can do with a little inspiration from above.'

One of the biggest long-term commercial urban design projects that Bomax is involved in is the revitalisation of the Foreshore in the Roggebaai precinct. The company has already completed two buildings in the area, but has a master plan for the whole precinct.

'One of our clients is heavily involved here, and there is much potential for the town planning to be improved. We are focusing on the city's connections to the neglected public open space behind the Civic Centre and the Artscape Theatre. We are looking past the city's zoning scheme that treats individual sites and rather at the bigger picture of the precinct as a whole. We want to be a part of the grand solutions to a better Cape Town, which is going to undergo massive change in the next 20 years.'



Another province where Bomax is making its mark is the Free State, where its has redesigned a new corporate and retail hub for 2nd Avenue – the most active street in Bloemfontein. 'There is such a great student vibe in this growing, central South African city. Huge development opportunities are arising here as the city changes,' says Dion.

When he's not designing or spending time with his wife and their two young daughters, you'll find Dion tracking down the next big swell or working frantically on one of the most complex projects he's yet to encounter – the design of his own home. 'I'm the most difficult client I've ever had to deal with. I have great expectations and a limited budget – the same as all my clients, really. It's just a more emotional challenge this time.'

Other challenges Dion enjoyed were the Cape to Rio yacht race, the Robben Island solo swim and the ongoing challenge of surfing the big swells of the Atlantic.

So what does the future hold for architecture? According to Dion 'we're going to see smaller homes, fewer cars and taller commercial buildings with roof gardens'. 'The extended use of passive sustainable design solutions will become imperative as the world's population grows. We are running out of land – floating cities and reclaimed land will be the result,' he says.

And what about Bomax? 'It's our ten-year anniversary this month, making us a fairly young practice. After everything we have been through, we are now on the edge of something great,' says Dion. 'We are going to make our mark on South African architecture and compete with the best of them.'

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and surrounds. We focus on bringing the outdoors in through the use of overhangs, covered outdoor areas and large glazed sections. The company's choice of materials is essential – glass, steel and concrete feature prominently, as does natural stone. 'We strive to keep our materials honest,' says Dion.

Sustainable passive design has been an important part of the Bomax philosophy for years, and the company was one of the first members of the Green Building Council of South Africa. 'We are committed to keeping up with developing materials and methods that influence a building's passive energy performance. It's our duty to expose clients to the new passive environmental solutions that affect the way their building performs and the mark it leaves on planet Earth,' Dion says.

'Keeping the size and the impact of buildings down and capturing and conserving energy with passive design principles is a responsibility for architects today. We have developed some environmental applications that are practical to implement. These include solar-powered, waterborne heating and cooling systems that avoid the use of gas air conditioning and electrical

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Extract from Roggebaai Precinct masterplan; shading devices counteract harsh light on the west-facing facade of the new Berkley Road; Dion outside a recently completed commercial development, Jan Smuts Avenue, Roggebaai; luxury home, Newlands; Mangfåre restaurant interior, Melorse Arch Phase 2, Johannesburg; corporate and retail concept design for 2nd Avenue, Bloemfontein; Dion surfing the Hoek. THIS PAGE, TOP LEFT TO CENTRE LEFT First phase completion of the Roggebaai urban design masterplan; the recently refurbished building for the Metropolitan Police Headquarters, Hertzog Boulevard. TOP RIGHT A home in Rugby Road, Oranjezicht.