



Retail therapy

With relative political stability and massive economic potential, design and construction opportunities across Africa are huge, say retail experts Bentel Architects.

With its rich history of retail design, Bentel Architects has been a natural choice for many shopping centres and mixed use developments north of our borders.

Locally, Canal Walk, Cradlestone Mall, Waterfall Corner, Greenstone Shopping Centre, Maponya Mall, Montecasino and Nelson Mandela Square are just some of the retail and mixed use centres Bentel has designed.

And while one of their recent projects, Manda Hill in Lusaka, Zambia, might be small by South African standards - it is 43 000m² - in African terms it is one of the bigger shopping centres on the continent, says Bentel Business Development Director, Tim Harlech-Jones.

Harlech-Jones says designing and building in Africa calls for a different way of working. "Budgets are usually tight so you design

outdoor malls with a lot of open air spaces. That brings building costs down because there's no air conditioning and less bricks and mortar. This works well in Zambia because they do not have a harsh climate."

Another project, Levy Junction, is also in Lusaka, Zambia and is 30 000m² in size. "This is on the upper end of the sweet spot in Africa, when it comes to size," says Harlech-Jones.

Levy Junction has an industrial feel and the design made use of face brick, concrete, glass and plaster. "Lots of raw materials - it kept the building deliberately low maintenance which means it still looks great, three years after we completed it."

To keep costs down, the design of Levy Junction includes no ceilings, exposed trusses, some dropped ceilings and lightweight steel features.

Harlech-Jones adds that an essential part of property development in Africa, is to bear in mind the potential second and third phases, when you start with the first phase.

Levy Junction, for example, started with a double storey atrium, then came single storey retail on either side of that and finally came two anchor tenants on either end of the development.

"A lot of development has the ability to expand and we always have to factor that in."

Harlech-Jones says one of the biggest challenges when it comes to building in Africa is that of having to install certain services beforehand. "Sewerage, water treatment, electricity - sometimes these services have to be installed as part of the development - and they have to come out of the budget!"

He added that South African design and construction teams were often the preferred choice for new retail developments in Africa because of their depth of knowledge plus the fact that 'we are globally linked and on top of international trends'.

Harlech-Jones said now that most African countries were relatively politically stable and with a rising middle class across the continent, there was huge opportunity for property development.

"There are a lot of projects just sitting and waiting for the resources markets to recover before we see the next African property bubble." 

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