

Contemporary functional

The lower ground floor of the three-level building is primarily used for services.



The contemporary new head office for the Majuba FET College in Newcastle.

Newcastle is already well served by a number of education facilities, including five campuses of the Majuba College for Further Education and Training (FET). The purpose of the college is to provide instruction to National Diploma level, preparing learners with transferable life skills that enable them to compete within a multinational workplace. The syllabus aims to teach practical skills, and courses at the college include engineering, agriculture, information and communication technology, civil engineering, electrical infrastructure, construction, computer science, tourism, clothing production, entrepreneurial development, tool making and home décor.

The college found that it was in need of a head office to bring together the different portfolios that channel the flow of information and other resources concerning the five outlying campuses. The architects, Barnard & Burger Associated Architects (BBA Architects and run by Eugene Barnard and Ben Burger), were commissioned to use earthy colours and materials to design a dynamic, functional building in the modern context which embodies technology and design. "The current fragmented functionality of the 'College Administration' had to be remodelled into a more functional and open layout. Very simple material selection and non-standard building methods were employed," explains Burger.

The R23m office complex, covering an area of approximately 2370m², consists of boardrooms, storerooms and staff facilities, as well as a landscaped site with carports for staff and visitors. The complex is located at the corner of Allen and Albert Wessels Streets and was formerly part of the overflow site from a neighbouring school. In fact, one of the sport fields that remained on the sub-division was incorporated into the site. The primary reason for the split-level design of the building is due to the slope of the site. "The sub-division which became Portion 1 is 5,6 hectares. The placement of the building was important in order to accommodate other land uses in the future for Majuba College, the first being the hub – Administration and Student support building," says Burger.

A prominent entrance

The entry statement of the building is a taste of things to come – a contemporary piece of architecture far removed from the majority of the buildings in Newcastle, including the existing Majuba College campuses. Burger explains: "You are welcomed by a very prominent cubist influence that shapes the three individual elements defining the main areas in the building. The most prominent in colour and presence is the north-eastern face, the red Board Room above the main entrance door.

The lower ground, ground and first floors of the building are framed concrete structures. The Space Frame 2000 Building System was used for infill of both interior and exterior walls. A fair amount of off-shutter concrete was used, and because of the high water table on site, the use of an admixture called Penetron for waterproofing was specified. This assisted extensively with the retaining walls on the lower level of the building.

"We attempted to create a vibrant and colourful office environment," explains Barnard. "We wanted to move away from the current mindset of cellular offices. There had to be informal and formal spaces that shared the common entrance and central lobby: for instance, you only experience the formality of the Council Chamber once you enter the space. One becomes aware of the transparency of the interior when inside the double volume atrium which acts as the hub for the vertical circulation." The style of the building could be described as modern contemporary – but primarily functional. "We wanted to have a somewhat industrial appearance to suit the openness and the transparency of the individual departments, each with their own identity," says Barnard.

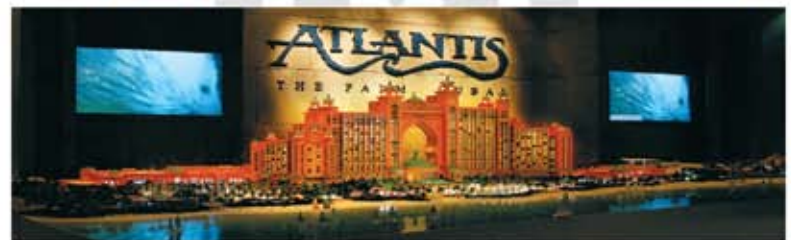
Lustrous screeded concrete floors greet you as you enter into the fresh and open environment. The lighting is both functional and aesthetic and the liberal use of glass means that not only has natural light been introduced, but also great views to the horizon from almost every viewpoint. The interiors are coloured in a natural palette of beiges, browns and greys, with touches of terracotta and red. The simplicity of the suspended timber staircase which forms a focal point of the central interior is juxtaposed with the shimmering stainless steel balustrades



The R23m office complex, covering an area of approximately 2370m², consists of boardrooms, storerooms and staff facilities.



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Informal and formal spaces share the common entrance and central lobby.



One becomes aware of the transparency of the interior when inside the double volume atrium which acts as the hub for the vertical circulation.

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The lighting is both functional and aesthetic.



The naturalness of the suspended wooden staircase, which forms a focal point of the central interior, is juxtaposed with the shimmering stainless steel balustrades.



There is a unique sense of calm in the building.

which are employed throughout the building. There is a unique sense of calm in the building, and the offices are not your standard cubicles – each has its own sense of charm and unusual sense of space.

The environment

The environment and the site had a great effect on the design, with the orientation of the building to the north aspect, the busy main road, and the entrance gate from the north-east dictating much of the design. The concept evolved primarily as a result of the topography, as there

was a substantial slope towards the north and away from the main road to which the architects wanted exposure. The lower ground floor is thus primarily used for services and an archive. "Sun control and getting enough natural light into the building were the major contributors to the layout. Internally, the building is also very transparent – open-plan offices for the most part," explains Barnard.

Sustainable initiatives, such as sun control and insulation to ensure that fluctuations in daily temperature would not affect the climate control,

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Sustainable initiatives, such as sun control and insulation to ensure that fluctuations in temperature would not affect the climate control, were incorporated into the design.



were incorporated into the design. "The design of all the artificial light sources complied with low requirements for energy usage and sensor type switching, yet solar heating and water heating would not have been cost-effective as the volumes would not warrant this. A utility space was provided and can still be implemented in the future to make use of photovoltaic panels for electricity. Low usage of water supply was encouraged by the type of fittings in the bathrooms," says Barnard.

He further explains: "Insofar as green building is concerned, the biggest effort went into reducing water usage – the water supply to the cloak room facilities is electrically operated to prevent unnecessary


operation. The air conditioning system was specified in line with the Montreal protocol, and we made use of certain mechanics such as fans with variable speeds to promote energy efficiency."

"As architects we are satisfied with the outcome and are of the opinion that the client who had the vision and the open mind to take a step outside of the box shares this view," says Barnard, adding, "we proposed the use of many alternative materials and finishes to which the client agreed. This would normally call for various discussions but the client trusted our initiative and approved the proposals. The materials proposed all presented a cost saving as opposed to the standard building materials." 



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