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One of Paragon Group's first projects for an international hotel chain is the Mbabane Hilton Garden Inn in Swaziland, which won at the SAPOA Awards last night for Best International Project. This 124-room, eight-storey development in the heart of the capital has been designed specifically as an iconic building for Hilton's entry into the Swaziland market, according to Project Architect Jarred Pincus.

Situated up against a hill to the south of the city centre, the building and its landscape deck provide unobstructed views across the valley towards the city. This prominent location, combined with the unique design of the building, gives the hotel a presence unique in the urban context of Mbabane.



The project, which was completed in April this year, has been carried out in conjunction with Steve Hall Development Consultants, for the Buna Group on behalf of the Swaziland Public Service Pensions Fund (SPSPF). The main contractor was a joint venture between Aveng Grinaker-LTA with Du-Van Developments and Roots Construction in Joint Venture, known as the ADR JV.

The main spaces of the hotel have been designed to create vertical separation and privacy between public and private or guest amenities. The iconic tower portion of the building, with its swooping and undulating feature façade, is architecturally differentiated from the base of the building, and is solely dedicated to hotel guestrooms and hotel facilities.

Public areas on the ground floor include a reception, restaurant, bar, lounge, and conferencing facilities comprising four meeting rooms of varying sizes, with two of the larger rooms separated by sliding-folding doors with the flexibility to become a single large conference room.

Reception and the main hotel entrance are located adjacent to the on-grade, on-site guest parking, where guests are greeted with a generous porte-cochere entry. The main guest parking is located to the rear of the site, while additional parking is provided in an existing parkade close by.

The entrance to the building is reinforced by a full-height internal atrium that forms the central and primary focus space of the building, overlooked by all the guest-room corridors. The central atrium, which houses the restaurant, bar, lounge, and conference break-out facilities, also features skylights. These spaces also link to the ground-floor landscaping and deck spaces via two large sliding folding doors.

The guestrooms are all accessed via full-height glass scenic lifts leading from the ground-floor lobby. Guest amenities are housed at the first floor, and include a guest laundry and fitness centre that looks out onto the landscaped pool deck, a dedicated guest amenity with a lap pool, low-level children's swim area and garden.

"The client's head office is adjacent, so this was always meant to be an iconic gateway to Mbabane. They wanted something that stood out, and it is definitely one that cannot be missed," Pincus highlights. The hotel is already operational, and successfully hosted visitors to the Bushfire Festival 2019.

The main feature is the performance-rated façade design with undulating and varying sized windows, depending on the orientation. There is also a huge landscaped deck on the ground floor with trees and indigenous planting to cool down the building. "It isn't specifically Green Star rated and designed, but standard best practice has been applied," Pincus adds.

In terms of the challenges associated with the design, Pincus points to the raking columns required due to the large central void. "Getting services to a lot of rooms in very controlled spaces was also interesting from a technical aspect."

Pincus concludes that while this is not Paragon's only project underway in Swaziland at present, it has created awareness of the architecture and interior architecture group's capability to undertake complex cross-border projects from its regional base in Johannesburg. "Our name is definitely out there, and we have proved that we can work effectively outside of South Africa."