

PROFILE

# PARAGON – COLLABORATIVE DESIGN EFFORT DRIVES INNOVATION

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*In its 21st year, Paragon has grown into a formidable practice offering architecture and interior architecture services.*



**F**ounding directors Henning Rasmuss and Anthony Orelowitz took a decision early on never to turn away a project. “Each project has potential. Sometimes this potential is architectural; sometimes it provides us with learning opportunities; and sometimes it is derived from the people who make up the project,” says Rasmuss.

Today Paragon employs over 100 people across the three companies, of which 90% are architects, interior architects and architectural technologists.

The office is in Illovo, Johannesburg. Rasmuss points out that, although the company does not have any satellite

offices, the mobility of the team to any client location is high. “We undertake projects in over 18 countries in Africa by partnering with local architects where needed. All designs are completed in our Johannesburg offices, and then delivered as needed.”

A number of elements differentiate the company in the industry. Rasmuss says that a driving factor in the company’s success has been the high level of software adoption, firstly with Autodesk and, more recently, a shift towards Building Information Modelling (BIM).

He adds that Paragon believes in hardcore value engineering. “We grew the company on the back of private



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unlisted funds, and we still work for a lot of these developers. This has allowed quick decision making to be the order of the day. We are also very flexible in our approach, facilitated by the development of innovative talent and the application of current technological tools.”

Rasmuss, who speaks five languages, emphasises the importance of balancing the serious and fun elements of Paragon’s design philosophy. This translates not only into exciting and fresh designs, but in a motivated and relaxed workforce. This approach endears the company to its visionary clients, who are themselves innovative and open to trying new things.

Paragon director Thulani Sibande says that the company’s fundamental push and core strength is its ability to value-engineer any kind of building with sustainability, flexibility, functionality, and comfort in mind. “The space planning and interior design element plays a crucial role when we market the business as an integrated service. The seamless collaboration between all the teams ensures the delivery of highly-acclaimed projects.”

Paragon has won many local and international awards over the past 21 years, and is a regular recipient of SAPOA’s Innovative Excellence in Property Development accolade, which measures the commercial



performance of buildings. In addition, it was SAPOA's 2017 Overall Winner and Office Developments (Corporate) Award and Interiors Winner.

As individuals, both Rasmuss and Orelowitz regularly take to the podium in recognition of their professional achievements, with SAPSA wins for Best Professional of the Year and Best Professional Architects of the Year. The partners humbly acknowledge these accolades, but emphasise that their contributions to the architectural community as a whole is the main value point.

The company has built its footprint through its many corporate office designs, but has recently started diversifying into high-density residential buildings and specialised industrial buildings, which are characterised by hi-tech specs such as high- and low-pressure rooms. Student housing is another growth sector, and the team has been involved in a number of projects with developer Southpoint. "We prefer to be known as a generalist, and as such we are now also actively addressing the

healthcare, hospitality, and data-centre sectors," says Sibande.

Orelowitz adds that Paragon has embarked on a concerted strategy "to pursue a broader design campaign to look beyond just architecture." This includes potential collaboration with designers in specialised sectors such as industrial design, in order to increase Paragon's profile in such niche markets. "It will also underscore how we are responding proactively to the latest technologies that are available on the market."

A number of unusual and traditional projects are currently in the pipeline, and the company is currently making inroads into the Middle East. "As we migrate into other regions, we will look at bringing in additional skills and technologies. An area which Anthony is currently researching is 3D printing and JIT manufacture for industrial design, furniture, and components such as door handles. We will also actively pursue shorter duration, smaller projects that run concurrently with our longer-term projects. This keeps our team on their toes and motivated on a daily basis," says Rasmuss. ◀