PROJECT FEATURE

PRAN BOULEVARD

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Umhlanga

CLIENT
Shree Property Holdings

PROJECT MANAGERS
Orion Project Managers

ARCHITECTS
Paragon Architects

LOCAL ARCHITECT
Zadar Studios

QUANTITY SURVEYORS
Brian Heineberg & Associates

STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS
L & S Consulting

MECHANICAL CONSULTANTS
Mahesh Khoosal & Associates

ELECTRICAL CONSULTANTS
Tesla Consulting Engineers

WET SERVICES CONSULTANTS
Redline Consulting

FIRE CONSULTANTS
Umlilo Fire Consultants

GREEN BUILDING CONSULTANTS
AECOM

LANDSCAPING
The Ochre Office

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANTS
Triplo4 Sustainable Solutions

MAIN CONTRACTOR
Trencon Construction

PHOTOGRAPHY
InfrastructurePhotos
Alexis Diack
Karl Beath

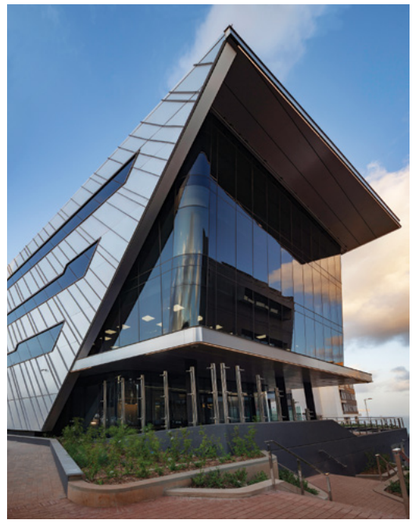
Pran Boulevard is a Premium Grade office development that has been developed at the Ridgeside Precinct in Umhlanga as the head office of Shree Property Holdings (Shreeprop), as well as KPMG and an additional two tenants.

Paragon Project Architect Jurie Geldenhuys comments: "Shreeprop contacted us to bring our distinctive vision to bear on its KwaZulu-Natal head-office project after being duly impressed by our work on iconic projects in Johannesburg such as the Norton Rose Fulbright Towers at 15 Alice Lane." Well known for its work on numerous distinctive projects in Sandton, Paragon saw the Pran Boulevard project as an opportunity to make its presence known outside of Gauteng.

Site

A major challenge was posed by the steep site itself, which slopes from Umhlanga Rocks Drive down to Nokwe Avenue. This means that the building is approached on two different levels, from both the northern and southern sides. The site, situated on the corner of Umhlanga Rocks Drive and Ntusi Road, slopes away steeply from Umhlanga Rocks Drive towards the east, down Ntusi Road. The steep slope, combined with a maximum building-height restriction on the site, posed a major challenge in terms of maximising the building height/office area, while also finding a median level to maximise pedestrian accessibility from the Umhlanga Rocks drive side, and vehicle access from Nokwe Avenue on the opposite side of the site.

The project comprises construction of two separate office buildings of three levels each above ground floor, linked together on each level by bridges



There is a level difference of more than 1m between Umhlanga Rocks Drive (the western side) down to the ground-floor podium level, while down Ntusi Road (the northern side), most of the first-level basement would have been exposed was it not for the cascading planters next to the stairs, which provide access from more than 1.5m below the podium level. Therefore the landscaping is technically on street level. The steepness of the site does guarantee panoramic views, even down to the sea itself.

Design

The project comprises construction of two separate office buildings of three levels each above ground floor, linked together on each level by bridges. There are three basement parking levels providing about 250 parking bays, as well as a ground-floor podium level with walkways, landscaping, and water features. The total building area, including basement parking, is approximately 18,600m^2.

Paragon was the lead architect on the R140 million project, with Zadar Studios assisting with local requirements in terms of planning submissions and building requirements for the eThekwini Municipality.

An interesting aspect of this project was that, because it consists of two interlinked buildings, it can either be multi-tenanted or occupied by a single main tenant, which maximises the lettable area of the floorplates.

Some of the main architectural features of the project are the cantilevered corners, the fantastic panoramic view, the landscaped area with water features, an interactive floor area between the two buildings and expansive timber decks under three of the cantilevered areas. The project aimed for a 4-Star Green Star Office Design v1.1 certification from the Green Building Council of South Africa, which it received in May 2018.

Façade

The building itself has slabs or overhangs that cantilever more than 3.5m in some cases. In most instances, the high-performance glazed façade angles upwards, with curved glazing on the corners - a particular challenge in terms of detailing. Kevin McPherson of Orion Project Managers agrees: "The façade was a challenge, nothing was straight or square. Every single section of double glazing was a special size. In some cases the double glazing was curved and sloped in 2 directions. The façade cladding was also a challenge as every panel was different shape, size and dimension and each and every panel on the building was made to fit a specific position."

Paragon's total solutions approach was showcased by the fact that it provided an interior design service for three floors of Building 2, namely the Shreeprop Head Office and the Thusa Head Office. The ground floor includes a meeting suite and restaurant, while the third floor boasts an executive suite and open-plan office area. The brief was for an elegant, contemporary office space speaking to the Shreeprop brand, which is corporate, but with an edge.

Paragon made extensive use of Revit Architecture's parametric modelling software to optimise the design and minimise any snagging. The generation of a fully-rendered three-dimensional model allows the entire professional team to make informed decisions prior to construction commencing, while also allowing for value engineering to optimise cost-savings.

Landscape Architecture

Paragon was also commissioned to design the landscaping as part of the holistic design of the project. This meant using the building's design language throughout the landscaping. "The client gave us the design freedom to sculpt the landscaping to complement the building's angular and distinctive design," said Project Architect Jurie Geldenhuys.

Six basic elements or materials had to be included throughout the design, namely fire, earth, water, metal, wood, and stone. Three separate external timber deck seating areas had to be provided in terms of the program: two areas for the two buildings, and one area for the public coffee shop at the pedestrian entrance to the buildings.

Paragon also had to adhere to the very specific requirements of the Ridgeside Management Association (RMA) concerning the treatment of corner sites in the precinct, as set out in the RMA Design Guidelines Volume 0 & 1.

These guidelines relate to planting types, which had to be presented to and approved by the RMA Design Review Committee. The guidelines also include: planting recommended for use on specific streets; 90% of all planting is to be indigenous,

and the landscaping plans are to list and motivate plant types to be used for approval.

A minimum of 20% of each site area is to be landscaped (the 20% is to be regarded as hard and soft landscaping areas); landscape designs are to take into account safety, surveillance, and defensibility of the public environment; in addition, corner sites have very specific requirements in terms of planting height and species, so as not to obscure or obstruct views.

Another focus of the guidelines is the external horizontal surface treatment throughout the Ridgeside precinct and the interface of the public surfaces with the surfaces used in the various properties. In this regard, landscaping design firm Ochre Office of Johannesburg assisted Paragon in selecting and specifying plant types that would meet the requirements of both the RMA and Green Star throughout the design. Ochre Office also assisted in terms of the documentation of the paving layouts, timber decks, timber seating, and the water features.

The edge conditions of the landscaping on the site boundaries were designed to, where possible, join seamlessly with the adjacent RMA landscaping levels to soften the transition, to keep the natural slope, and not to impose the new landscaping on the area with hard edges. The RMA landscaping will, in future, tie into the project's landscaping as a natural extension of the design.

Pedestrian access to the site was designed with the pedestrian movement through the precinct in mind. From Umhlanga Rocks Drive, pedestrian access was introduced to the podium level through an accessible ramp and a stair down. From Ntusi Road, access is provided through a stair to the podium level, while on the corner, on-grade access was provided that could also be used for deliveries to the coffee shop. The positions and angles of the various access routes were influenced by the buildings' shape, its axes created, and the relationship/position of the pedestrian routes around the site.

Another important element of the client brief was to keep the area between the two buildings as flexible as possible for future functions, and as a spill-out area for both buildings. To that end, a row of trees was designed on the axis between the buildings, in combination with built-in and movable planters to create the necessary flexibility.

Pran Boulevard marks an exciting addition to the Ridgeside skyline with its complex glass façade and bold design.

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