

HOMEFRONT

GREENOVATION

Urban refurbbs

The global approach today is to repurpose and reuse. By refurbishing urban buildings, these developers in SA are transforming spaces creatively and sustainably

WORDS: KIM MAXWELL :: PHOTOS: SUPPLIED



Black Brick in Sandton was redeveloped by HB Realty and Capstone

Adaptive reuse – a process of retrofitting old buildings for new purposes – allows structures to retain their historic integrity while meeting the needs of new occupants.

Construction and design are constantly being updated to meet modern technology and lifestyle demands. When older buildings are abandoned to make way for new ones, adaptive reuse has become a popular urban alternative around the world. This way, these structures keep their character and historic integrity while serving different purposes.

As modern communities pursue more sustainable development and try to curb costs, there is much to gain from adapting and reusing urban buildings. Bypassing demolition waste also has environmental benefits.

INNER CITIES
 Property economist and UCT associate professor Francois Viruly has studied

many inner cities. He believes smaller living spaces help draw in more residents and stimulate local economies from the ground up. He cites Amsterdam as a great example of a thriving inner city that revived its night-time economy to create business and employment opportunities.

Many local commercial property owners see the value in refurbishing to high green building standards to attract and retain tenants requesting these types of spaces. “Reduced operating costs, improved indoor environmental quality and investment and compliance criteria are some of the drivers,” says Green Building Council SA (GBCSA) managing executive of market engagement Grahame Cruickshanks.

Take GBCSA’s Cape Town office, located in the Old Warehouse Building in Observatory. Certified to a Green Star Existing Building Performance standard, its solar energy and water efficiency initiatives have created better-quality assets

for the building owner, Redefine Properties.

FACELIFT
 More and more local property owners are refurbishing existing assets to attract new investment and to counter the drop in tenants in a tight property market. “A good facelift can do wonders,” says Keron Muller, senior architectural technologist for Paragon Group. “Owners are focusing on maintenance as much as possible. Refurbishment at present is mostly market- or tenant-driven, or a combination of the two.”

Formerly occupied by Discovery, 155 West Street in Sandton is a recent refurbishment project undertaken by Paragon Group. The brief was to upgrade the façade of the 25-year-old building and add a three-storey atrium with a roof terrace and a skylight. The plans also included changes to the ground floor to incorporate meeting rooms and a coffee shop, and a proposed upgrade to the P1 parking level to

accommodate changerooms, showers and parking facilities for cyclists.

Modern materials, including a new composite aluminium cladding, were explored. The new entrance and atrium is a steel structure with a polycarbonate and glass façade. “It’s the first time this polycarbonate material was used on such a scale in SA, which by itself posed a challenge,” Muller says.

No rezoning was needed, but a new site development plan was submitted after the entrance was adjusted. The multitenanted office upgrade was completed in December at a cost of about R100m.

RESIDENTIAL CONVERSIONS
 HB Realty in Johannesburg partners with various shareholders and development companies. Its website lists several



Black Brick before the refurb

“Reduced operating costs, improved indoor environmental quality and investment and compliance criteria are some of the drivers”

Grahame Cruickshanks, managing executive of market engagement, Green Building Council SA

HOMEFRONT



The Bolton in Rosebank, another HB Realty project



Paragon Group redeveloped 155 West Street in Sandton

successful renovations in its Rezi Refurb section: the majority are old office blocks converted into residential apartments. The company offers a full turnkey approach to its developments, usually undertaking joint ventures (JVs) in the process.

"The services we offer in our JV developments include concept design, feasibility studies, market research, both rental and to sell, full costing of the development, town planning, project management, and development management," says HB Realty partner and cofounder Anton Hartmann.

HB Realty and JV partner Capstone's 114 Dennis Road in Atholl is a good

example of taking an old B- or C-grade building and converting it into a residential space. The former office building previously occupied by Nampak had been vacant for a number of years. Recently started, the upmarket conversion involves creating bachelor, one-bedroom and two-bedroom apartments as well as plenty of common areas, a co-working space, a boardroom and a gym for residents.

"Most refurbis are undertaken in built-up areas close to places of employment. So these developments will be close to peoples' workplaces and have loads of features

to save valuable time and money," says Hartmann.

The Bolton in Rosebank is another refurbishment of a B-grade building owned by Emira and formerly occupied by Sasol. When Sasol moved into its new A-grade Sandton office, HB Realty undertook a residential development to give the building a new lease of life as The Bolton. It comprises 264 apartments.

HB Realty and JV partner Setso are converting Black Brick, a Sandton building previously owned by SAB and AB Inbev, into apartments with interiors and furniture designed by Weylands. They are 95% sold out. A hotel will occupy the first two floors.

The Randburg area used to be an industry node before many businesses relocated to Sandton. Now it has established itself as a growing residential node. HB Realty's Surrey Place in Ferndale, a seven-storey development with 331 apartments planned, is a case in point.

THRIVING

In inner-city Cape Town, what used to be a gritty industrial-commercial zone has become the thriving East City Precinct, where bars and restaurants coexist with residential accommodation. Located between the CBD and Zonnebloem (the former District Six), this area has

undergone a gradual revival. Among the recent projects is The Harri, a refurbished mixed-use development at 75 Harrington Street that is scheduled for completion in October. It combines residential living and co-working office space under one roof.

When The Harri is complete, developers Jeff Kleu and Steven Lampert of Sepia and Silk will offer 32 studios and seven two-storey penthouse units. The apartments will be on one side of each floor, with co-working and co-living spaces on the opposite side.

Lounges with fireplaces, rooms with smart TVs, open-plan dining areas and rooftop terraces with

gas braais and minibars are some of the planned features. The development will also offer a concierge, a housekeeping service, innovative storage units and parking bays for vehicles as well as bicycles.

CHEAPER?

Is refurbishing more cost-effective than building new? For Paragon Group, it can often be tricky to merge new with old as it requires more additional unplanned remedial work than new builds, owing to limiting factors such as existing site restrictions or land and usage rights.

"Challenges in the refurb business include finding the right building at the right price and that is suited to a refurb," Hartmann says. "The shape and structure of the building play an important role."

"Sometimes costs can be higher because of the quantity of remedial work that is needed, often usually only identified during the actual construction phase," Muller agrees. "Generally speaking, refurbishing an asset is a great way to facelift and maintain it if it is done correctly."

These future urban spaces are getting smaller yet more functional. They include multipurpose furniture that converts living rooms into bedrooms with the click of a button.

"The global trend I'm seeing is that compact is becoming the new norm, with new shared or co-living developments as small as 14m² being rented for more than £1,000 a month," says Hartmann, "but these buildings do come packed with many appealing co-living features."



The Harri is at the heart of Cape Town's bustling East City Precinct