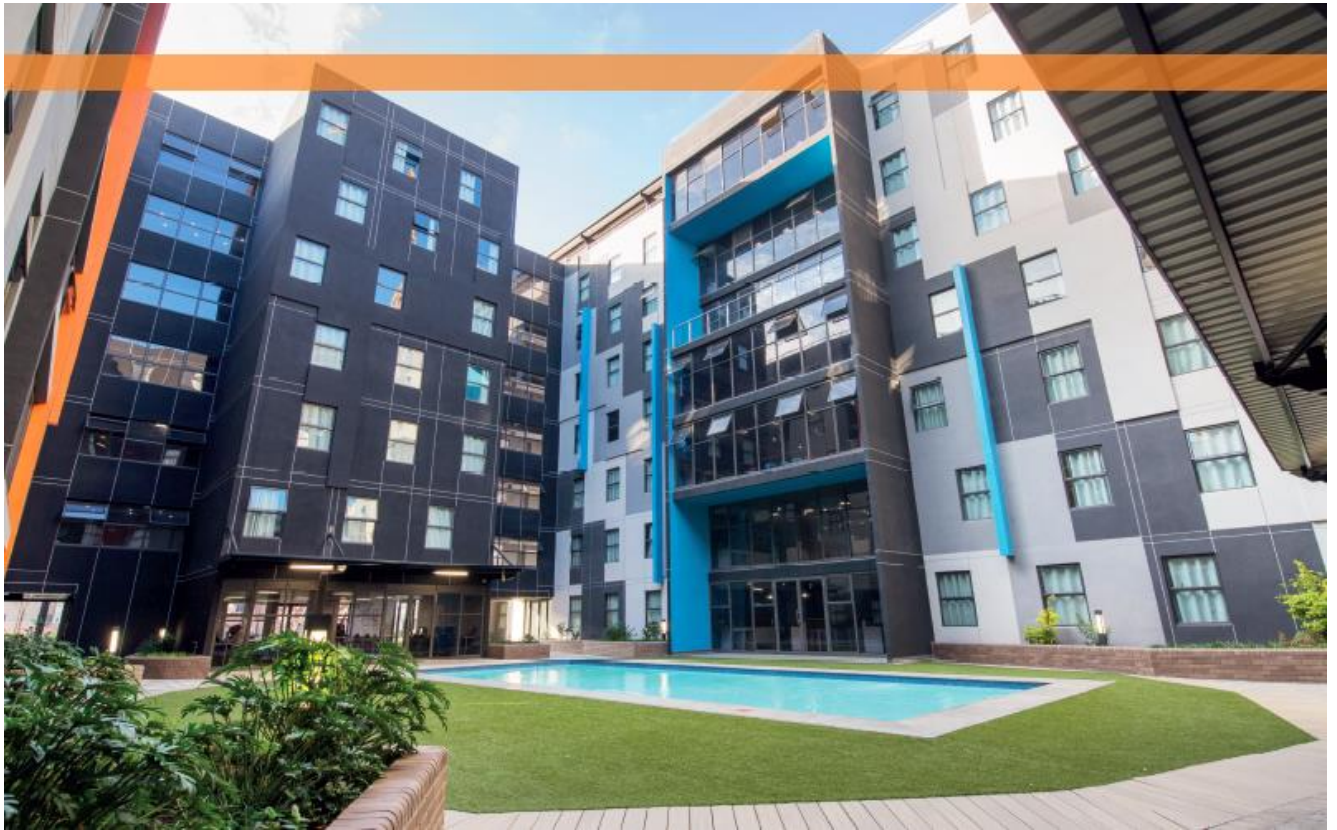


BLOCK PARTY

From LEDs and daylighting design to the rooftop running track and internet-based security, Hatfield Square provides students with a cool, comfortable and user-friendly lifestyle environment



Think back to university life... For most of us, ‘res’ – while a happy home away from home – was not the epitome of comfortable living. Luxury often stopped at regular hot water for the showers, a pool table and a passable beef stew in the dining hall.

Fast-forward to 2018, and a student at Pretoria University could be forgiven for thinking they had landed in Pleasantville, campus-style. Gone is the soulless concrete monolith; in is the light, airy, user-friendly space that oozes cool, urban chic.

There’s a rooftop gym (with a running track) overlooking the retail area, a computer centre, large study areas, recreation rooms, laundry facilities, a swimming pool, slides between floors (surely more Silicon Valley start-up than university), land-scaped gardens, a braai area and unlimited WiFi.

The overall vision? To take the iconic hub of Hatfield Square – long the heart of student life in SA’s capital city – and transform it into a lifestyle village of the future that includes state-of-the-art residences, retail and leisure facilities.

There's no sense of a shoestring budget often associated with student living. In addition to the varied accommodation styles on offer, the village consists of about 85 common areas spread out over four buildings and seven courtyards. Bright colours, modern furniture, laid-back chill spaces and funky finishes complete the clean, modern look and feel. Orange and turquoise pouffes, purple sofas, multicoloured scatter cushions, granite-finished kitchens... The spaces are super-stylish, edgy and contemporary.

Students have easy access to retail outlets in 2 700 m² of purpose-designed space for sit-down and takeaway restaurants, fashion outlets and technology stores. These have been selected to make sure students don't need to travel far to meet their basic needs.

The village seems to pre-empt the users' every need. It is shaped for optimal, sustainable living with careful consideration given to flow of activity and movement. Phase 1 was completed in January 2017, making more than 400 beds available. The second phase pushed the total bed number up to more than 1 000 by January 2018, and the final phase will complete the total of 2 200 beds before the end of the year. The redevelopment of the 11 740 m² site covers more than 90 000 m² of gross building area on completion of Phase 2.

The project, owned by Redefine Properties and Respublica, and managed by Respublica Student Living, has provided a new lease of life to a rather tired Hatfield Square area by incorporating retail space (including a mix of restaurants and shops), and given the surrounding area a reboot.

Respublica founder and CEO Craig McMurray says the group wanted to provide a 'safe, accessible environment where students can live, study and play', adding that the redevelopment of the square is focused on meeting the needs of students, while providing a rejuvenated space for the public. It is within close proximity to the University of Pretoria's main campus, but the development is open to students studying at any tertiary educational institution in the city.

As Respublica puts it, the need for more custom-designed student accommodation is a universal one, and universities in SA are looking for effective alternative additions to their own facilities, with new development limited by on-campus space and demand on financial resources.

In addition to being a home away from home for students, McMurray sees the village working to support them in their academic careers, in what is often 'a first move away from home'. To this end, Respublica's 'committed construction team worked around the clock to ensure that the student residence was ready for occupation... to provide students with the purpose-designed environment that they need', he says.

Respublica believes this development approach has created smaller neighbourhoods within the precinct, with common areas in and around each of the four buildings to encourage interaction and movement of students. Intimate courtyards offer private, smaller spaces while an abundance of breakaway rooms and study areas offer the peace and quiet that is necessary for study times.

The development has been designed specifically to stand out from its surroundings, says Antoinette Kloppers, senior project architectural technologist at Paragon, the architecture firm tasked with bringing this vision to life. ‘The design not only ensures that each unit has maximum access to views and light, but also has the added benefit of promoting individual communities with their own amenities and shared spaces, within the larger scheme,’ she says.

The design also ensures that each unit has maximum access to views and light. ‘Daylighting’ is an important feature, with the architectural design allowing ambient light to pour in.

In addition, the precinct benefits from different scales of public, semi-public and private spaces. Common areas are delineated on the facades, with sculptural forms and colours a reminder that this is essentially a neighbourhood, says Kloppers. An array of window patterns on the facades defines the rooms, reflecting the diversity of accommodation types.

Configurations range from four-sleeper apartments that share a communal kitchen to single studios with an en-suite bathroom and kitchenette, as well as more affordable bedrooms that have modern shared ablutions and kitchens.

‘We believe that this variety of amenities makes it possible for students with diverse resources to have access to the kind of environment they need to excel, as well as enjoy the social benefits of residence life,’ says McMurray.

When it comes to green credentials, the creators of the village can also take a bow. Paragon is recognised in the industry for its sustainable designs and the latest advances in ‘green’ building – and its work at Hatfield Square adheres to some of the best practice in environmental building.

Sun studies were undertaken to optimise building heights, ensuring that all rooms have maximum access to air and light. The result is the precinct of four interlinked buildings, arranged around a series of intimate courtyard spaces, where students can enjoy the smaller neighbourhoods within their blocks. Each building is defined by a ‘theme’ colour, which is carried through to the interiors.

Externally, Respublica was the first to use the Hebel block – autoclaved aerated concrete – manufactured by Everite. It was used as an alternative to conventional brickwork for a number of reasons: it’s lighter (saving in steel reinforcing and concrete slab thickness); and has superior thermal qualities, higher fire ratings, and better acoustic qualities than brickwork.

‘As owners and operators of the purpose-built student accommodation facilities, sustainability is extremely important to us. This is reflected in the design brief to our consultants,’ according to Wynand Fourie, Respublica’s director of property development.

Other green features include natural ventilation, water-storage tanks and heat farms to reduce energy consumption. Energy-efficient heating panels provide heating in all rooms.

In addition, Hatfield Square has installed energy-efficient lighting and control systems fitted with LEDs. All common areas are fitted with occupancy sensors that activate lighting when movement is detected. Installed generators will provide lighting and run all essential systems in the event of a power outage.

Sustainability for Respublica, however, means more than just implementing a few technologies to positively impact operating cost (as important as they are), says Fourie. 'Facilities are consciously designed with the whole being of our tenant – the student – in mind,' he says. 'We believe there's a direct link between constructive social interaction and academic performance.'

The facilities were designed to promote circulation and interaction between students. 'Different design themes for landscaping and other communal spaces encourage students to "move" through the facility, meet new people and develop bigger social and academic-support structures,' says Fourie.