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WISE CHOICES

The design of Sage's new HQ is agile and dynamic, in keeping with its global ethos and the evolving needs of its employees

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Last year, when Sage – a market leader in cloud-based business-management solutions – relocated its African head office from Woodmead, the choice of new home was obvious.

Waterfall, midway between the metropolises of Johannesburg and Pretoria, is the latest growth node in Gauteng. Its CBD, Waterfall City, is a signature mixed-use precinct created by developer Attacq for, as its website puts it, ‘people and their work/life requirements today and well into the future’.

Waterfall City’s dramatic Gateway West building stands right at the exit to Allandale Road, beside the Mall of Africa, the biggest single-phase mall on the continent (location, location, location). And it’s an eye-catcher with a green heart.

Its distinctive concave facade of glass and aluminium, which resembles an owl’s face, was dictated as much by sustainability (function) as aesthetics (form), reducing conductive heat and

AREA CODE
The open-plan layout has been designed to encourage interaction between employees

allowing the building’s radiant temperature to stay low all year round.

Along with more conventional green features – energy-efficient HVAC systems and controls, lighting with occupancy sensors, economical hot-water systems and water fittings – the building has been awarded a Gold LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating.

This was a significant attraction for Sage, when it moved its operation and workforce to the top three floors of Gateway West, which boast a commanding view of Midrand. The company



‘Each meeting room is customised with its own unique feature walls, colour combinations and acoustic secrets’



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ALL ROUNDER

Sustainability and aesthetics merge
effortlessly to stunning effect



HVAC system and controls
are **energy-efficient**



Use of **natural light**
has been **maximised**



The **lighting features**
occupancy **sensors**



A **low-energy hot-water**
system has been **installed**



Plumbing **fittings**
encourage **water saving**



Running lanes and a nearby
park promote **healthy living**



Low-VOC paints,
coatings, adhesives,
sealants, carpets
and composite **wood**
are used **throughout**



Bicycle and shower
facilities are available
and there is **easy**
access to the M4
Gautrain **bus route**

engaged Paragon Interface to design and fit out its aerie in a style befitting this setting – and its global ethos.

‘We conceptualised our designs based on how we understood Sage as a global client,’ says Jessica Self, Paragon’s project interior designer. ‘But the brief was also to develop a uniquely South African flavour for this organisation. From both a finish and a functionality point of view, South Africa is behind on trends. We designed the space towards

the global trend and best practice – however, we also ensured that the employees in South Africa could adopt these principles while still feeling at home within the spaces. We also ensured that the functionality could adapt as mindsets shift and trends evolve.’

One of the main challenges for Paragon was the timeline – concept development to final completion took just a year (from the end of 2017 to the end of 2018). The size of the fit-out was a daunting 5 500 m² over three floors, and it needed design and layout approval for each step from the Sage Global Real Estate team based in France, before the Sage South Africa team stepped in.

‘The workplace design strategy was geared towards open plan, with a lot of agile spaces, which support the functionality of open plan and allow for an increased amount of interaction and collaboration,’ says Self. ‘Differentiating all the meeting rooms in feel, finish and size, from small private “phone booths” to formal meeting rooms, enables employees to work according to their needs and encourages them to move through the three floors and floorplates, increasing employee engagement.

‘Each meeting room is customised with its own unique feature walls, colour combinations and acoustic secrets.’

This builds on the experience of employees and visitors from the moment they enter the building. ‘A defining feature is its multi-volume internal atrium ensuring ample natural light and an impressive sense of space,’ notes Attacq. ‘The urban environment is showcased in a central piazza, created as a corporate square and green open space, ideal for informal discussions or lunch breaks.’ But Sage employees may very well opt for their own inviting interior open spaces, enhanced by ‘maximising external views and natural daylight – principles that aid a healthier and more productive work environment’, says Self.

The spaces start with an airy reception area featuring a distinctive long reception ‘table’ in a new Caesarstone finish, ‘rugged concrete’, rather than a conventional counter (which can cut people off), then moves through the work, meeting and chill spots, including coffee-pause areas, a canteen and a data centre.

Colour and texture are key, and different hues have been used on each of the three floors in carpeting and hexagonal ceiling boards, to help with wayfinding and design differentiation. Textures range from natural wood used in tables, wall



‘It’s a constantly changing and thus “agile workplace” that we need to design’

panels and ceiling rafts, to glossy, pale floor tiles, and Caesarstone cladding on certain walls, offset by striking ‘green’ features incorporating cleverly fashioned silk foliage used to lush, tropical Africa effect. Bold custom-designed signage was created especially for Sage by Made By Lemon, suggesting certain functions for certain workspaces.

‘Because Sage has global space-planning guidelines for all its projects, the planning process was very streamlined,’ says Paragon Interface director Claire D’Adorante. ‘The Sage French team worked with the local Sage team to assist in making the plans come to life.’

The fit-out accommodated 550 desks in all, based on the desk-sharing principle in an open-plan setting. As part of Sage’s global standard, the bulk furniture supplier was Steelcase, a US-based company that has invested extensively in new

UP THE WALL
A wide variety of textures and materials was used, from Caesarstone cladding to lush silk foliage

ways of working. ‘They refer to it as “new work, new rules”,’ says David Fish, director of Inspiration Office, the SA agent for Steelcase. ‘As they put it, “hyper-collaboration is redefining teamwork and me work”.

‘Due to the incredible speed that companies need to deliver products and services today that are more innovative than their competitors, they need to allow for teams that work together, as well as individuals working alone. It’s a constantly changing and thus “agile workplace” that we need to design. Steelcase specialises in developing products for



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teams, to create spaces that “feel right”, reflecting and encouraging the practices and working ways of a team, helping them with “building trust together”, creating a sense of identity, and all while encouraging important “playfulness”.

The Sage fit-out had a number of challenges, ‘but as Steelcase SA, we’re fortunate to have experience in dealing with large installations of global customers like Sage’, says Fish.

‘The installation required 22 40-foot shipping containers, the biggest available, so as you can imagine, that’s a significant volume of furniture. The secret to a smooth installation is of course planning, and our team invested meaningful time in logistics planning. This begins as soon as our orders are loaded for shipping – tracking the shipments, ensuring swift delivery to site, off-loading, and installation with our experienced team of installers. Behind the scenes there’s constant communication and updating of our client Sage, as well as the design team at Paragon Interface.’

Fish’s favourite feature of the development? ‘Our beautiful Steelcase QVi chairs in all the meeting rooms, with a pivoting back and gliding seat – one of a kind.’

Everyone has a different favourite. ‘The entire project has been one of my favourites, but I especially enjoy the use of colour and many custom-designed features,’ says Self. ‘I’m personally proud of our design of the interactive power panels that reticulate power to the workstations. The custom-designed signage also adds flavour.’

Gordon Cook, associate director for Turner & Townsend, the project manager says: ‘My best is the interior design of the meeting rooms and canteen space, and the front reception table.’

For Beverley Ogden, design consultant for Execuflo, the planting supplier, the most innovative aspect was ‘drilling holes into Caesarstone and inserting various silk plants to create an innovative and exquisite feature. We used all artificial plants and were given a specific brief from Paragon. We love the Caesarstone wall and all the artificial green walls that were custom-designed to fit around windows. The wire frame stretching to the ceiling that was draped in creeping plants is magnificent’.

As Pieter Bensch, Sage’s executive vice-president (Africa & Middle East), puts it: ‘We believe in creating a conducive environment for our colleagues to collaborate, interact and do their best work and, in turn, help customers and communities succeed. Our offices are a great place for our colleagues to work.’