FORGING A NEW FUTURE

A massive new mixed-use development in the heart of Newtown is connecting Johannesburg’s past, present and future, and reviving the viability of a tired inner city area.

WORDS YOLANDI GREENE/WALD PHOTOGRAPHY WIELAND GIECH
Already the 85 000m² Newtown Junction has shown how rich heritage can be intertwined with the progress needed to drive a modern city. The new development is expected to bring an additional 5000 to 6000 people into the inner city each day.

At a cost of R1.3 billion, Newtown Junction was almost a decade in the making, though the concept only started taking shape six years ago. Construction began in 2012 and finished early this year. It includes a 38 000m² shopping centre, 39 000m² of office space, a gym and basement parking for over 2500 cars. Additional features include a landscaped public piazza, open events space and new pedestrian routes. Construction on another key component of the development – a 148-room City Lodge hotel spanning 8800m² will be complete at the end of 2015.

Situated in the middle of Newtown’s cultural district, it is the biggest mixed-use development built in Johannesburg’s central business district since the Carlton Centre was built in the 1970s. JSE-listed property owner Attacq and Atterbury Property Developments each own half of the development, while some have viewed such a substantial investment in an underperforming area as a brave decision.

The development was financed through Nedbank Property Finance. Charl de Kock, Nedbank’s head of property services, says the bank’s decision to invest in Newtown Junction stems from its firm belief that Johannesburg’s inner city has, and continues to play, a vital role in the greater South African economy.

Marc Wilken, CEO of Attacq, believes Newtown Junction is one of the most exciting developments in the Johannesburg CBD. Part of the attraction in investing in the city centre is also to benefit from the Urban Development Zone (UDZ) tax incentive, which encourages inner city renewal across South Africa.

**NUTSHELL**

Location: Newtown between Museum Africa, Mary Fitzgerald Square and Jeppe Street

- Gross floor area: 85 000m² of which Nedbank occupies 39 000m²
- Number of floors: Two retail levels, three office levels, two basement parking levels, one basement common room, staff dining and a parking facility
- Parking bays: 2546

**GREEN BUILDING PRINCIPLES FIRST**

While embracing heritage, the development also showcases important sustainability features, particularly in the office component. Nedbank, as anchor tenant in the office building and development overall, was the driving force behind Newtown Junction’s green credentials.

The developer knew securing Nedbank, with its 3500 staff, as a tenant would give the project an economic injection. De Kock says one of the conditions of the lease signed with Nedbank was that the office achieve a minimum 4-Star Green Star SA rating.

The Newtown campus is the bank’s fifth green building. The 4-Star Green Star SA Office Design rating has already been achieved and submissions made for the final 5-Star rating.

WSP Green by Design advises on how to achieve an office building committed to sustainability and responsible development. The office space uses 30% less energy than a building built to SANS 204 regulations by using efficient heating and cooling systems. One of the standout green features is...
CITY LIMITS

Because Newtown was declared a heritage district at the turn of the millennium, strict building limits were introduced. It took almost 10 years for the development to take off. It first had to be advertised in a public, open-tender process and proposals had to be weighed up and negotiated while the developers had to sign up tenants successfully.

De Klerk says the development also required extensive enabling works, including excavating and enlarging one of the city’s principle storm water channels. The process required cooperation of various authorities, who all had to buy into the development’s aims first.

The building site was also located above huge quantities of ground water. With excavations that plummet down to 15m below the ground surface, this meant the project team had to remove some 15,000m³ of water per day from the foundation levels.

A portion of the building had to be constructed under the elevated M1 highway. Some of the structure’s roof is only three to four metres below Jon’s famed double-decker highway. Also, the floor of the lower retail level is only three metres below the founding levels of the highway piers and columns.

Meentz says the project team had to isolate construction while building around existing highway piers and columns, and simultaneously ensure the safety of motorists was not jeopardised.

REGENERATION AT THE CORE

Under guidance from DMT, the project team took particular care in creating a structure that connects the past, present and future with vibrant flair, making it an exciting place for people to work, shop and visit.

The project is backed by the Johannesburg Property Company and SARBRA, with a major heritage study undertaken, permits strictly controlled, and work closely conducted with the architects and developers to preserve the unique history of Newtown.

Heritage consultant Herbert Prins says it is especially favourable about Newtown Junction is the benefits it holds for the heritage resources of Newtown.

De Klerk says the architects incorporated existing...
Edwardian, old mining town elements into the design, while retaining and restoring as many of the existing structures as possible.

Many of the old structures originate from the turn of the last century, such as the old Potchefstroom of 1910 – a market with the next to the railway siding of the day, an Edwardian gentlemen's public toilet, and the old stationmaster's house.

Where there have been new interventions to historic portions of the site, they have been kept clearly contemporary, in contrast to the delicate Edwardian steelwork and detailing. The existing pedestrian railway crossing bridge was also reused, while the original railway became an access road.

De Klerk says the natural movement of pedestrians through the site was a key consideration in the design of the building.

Johannesburg's centrality, access to different modes of public transport including the Gautrain and BRT buses, and cheaper rent are all boons to the project. Tenants include Pick n Pay, Ster-Kinekor, Truworths, The Foschini Group, Mr Price, Busboys & Poets, La t'Grande Cafe, Shoppette and Planet Fitness – all valuable amenities to the growing number of inner city residents.

Studies indicate there will be around 4800 people working in the complex, while the growing number of residential developments in the area, including student accommodation at the nearby old grain silo, will contribute to its general sustainability. The developers are enticing shoppers across the bridge in Braamfontein as well.

The test for the development, however, is to convince people to shop there by choice for staple goods and not just see it as a place of work. Ultimately, Newtown Junction has the potential to be an economic injection for an ever-changing and regenerating host.