

**CIVIL ENGINEERING**

## GASS ARCHITECTURE STUDIOS WINS FOUR AWARDS

*Bespoke architectural design studio GASS Architecture Studios brought home a whopping four awards from the 2021/2022 Corobrik SAIA Awards of Merit and Awards for Excellence, which were held in Johannesburg on Wednesday, 26 April 2023.*



The Corobrik-SAIA Awards of Merit and Awards for Excellence programme is held biennially as part of a two-stage process that alternates between regional and national awards, recognising unique talent and excellence in the field of architecture. According to SAIA, "Stage one sees the regional awards for architecture presented by the nine regional institutes affiliated to SAIA. In Stage two, the national awards, the winning regional projects receive either a Commendation, an Award of Merit and/or an Award for Excellence. This follows a vigorous adjudication and shortlisting process. The national group of adjudicators is independent of the regional awards process and is selected

Jewel City and The Onyx each received an Award for Excellence and an Award of Merit. According to a statement by SAIA, "The Awards for Excellence recognise exceptional achievement in the field of architecture."

Jewel City is an inner-city precinct in Johannesburg's eastern CBD, adjacent to Maboneng, that involved the redevelopment of six city blocks, transforming a pre-existing industrial complex that housed Joburg's precious metals and diamond trade into an open, vibrant mixed-use precinct.

It comprises 1 100 apartments and 20 000 m<sup>2</sup> of commercial space, including retail space, offices, schools and medical facilities, as well as plenty of open public space with lawns and play areas, sports, recreation and public art. While much of GASS Architecture Studios' intervention involved repurposing the existing industrial buildings, The Onyx is a new 13-storey residential building that opens onto a large public square and urban park animated by fountains and public art.

Founder and director of GASS Architecture Studios Georg van Gass said, "We are delighted that this remarkable project, developed by Divercity, has received recognition from our peers at the South African Institute of Architecture. We believe that the architectural profession has an indispensable role to play in the improvement of living conditions and the life of the city in general though thoughtful and ambitious design interventions, and welcome the opportunity to exercise our craft in this area."

SAIA President and Corobrik-SAIA Awards Convenor Amira Osman says, "The SAIA awards are an important event in the South African architectural calendar. They are an opportunity to recognise and celebrate excellence in a profession that has a profound impact in shaping our homes, neighbourhoods and cities, thus adding value to our daily lives and experiences."

by the SAIA President in their capacity as Convenor."

The judicial panel's report remarked that, although Jewel City is a private development, it achieves "meaningful social upliftment" and comments on its "intentions that expand beyond the commercial".

It continues: "The architects and urban design team have made great strides in providing a crucial template. This template can be used as a lens to critique and learn from other city infrastructures that have not managed this level of integration and activity. As urban infrastructure, the project shifts perceptions of how people can be provided for without compromising the fiscal value and benefit for developers. These decisions make for resilient inner-city social and urban spaces."

The panel remarks that the Onyx – with its 348 bachelor, 226 one-bed and 91 two-bed units – "is an ambitious inner-city housing proposition".

"The architects have worked intensively to find creative architectural solutions to consistently transfer the benefits to the user whilst addressing the pressing need for more and accessible affordable gap housing," it continues.

"The building can be read as a manual in design efficiency while still creating quality living and socialising environments. The result is an overall responsible and sustainable housing solution designed and detailed to exact economic standards. Its overall execution is a positive departure and deep critique of similar housing models and projects within the city and elsewhere and is executed superbly."

Last year, the Jewel City Precinct was also awarded top honours in the "Transformation" category and The Onyx was winner of the "Residential Developments" category South African Property Owner Association (SAPOA) Awards. ©