



The conventional industrial facades were transformed by sloping off-shutter concrete and black brick facades cantilevered off the existing structure to form the futuristic exterior. The facade forms are punctuated with reflective glass panels. Internally, a new atrium was created to bring light into the centre of the deep floor plate, in addition to future-proofing the building.

# Pushing architectural boundaries at Commerce Crescent

Alchemy Properties' purchase of seven buildings along Commerce Crescent in the Kramerville Design District has resulted in several successful renovation projects by its longstanding partners, Paragon Architects.

The most recent completion has been Paragon's new build of 33 Commerce Crescent and the renovation of 39 Commerce Crescent, which allowed the team to push some architectural boundaries in form, shape and materiality.

As the architecture along Commerce Crescent draws inspiration from the surrounding industrial area, with several buildings designed as showrooms, a common pallet of materials has been used, namely black brick, off-shutter concrete and glass. However, each building has its own unique take on how these materials have been incorporated.

## **BRAILLE-LIKE BRICK FACADE**

"The development in 33 Commerce Crescent incorporates the same language as its surrounding architecture, but creates its own uniqueness with a braille-like pattern of black brick facade," explains the project architect, Kirsty Fick.

The design shows a cantilevering brick box protruding onto Commerce Crescent, consisting of a double-volume space overlooking Sandton, with a strong contrast between the off-shutter concrete, black patterned brickwork and reflective glass bands. The black-brick facade has protruding bricks to create texture, while the strong vertical forms of glass reflect its surroundings.

"We wanted to create high visibility for both Commerce Crescent and Bowling Avenue. It was important for the client that each floor plate could be subdivided into multiple tenancies. This was the driver behind the form, resulting in three levels with different entrances," notes Fick.

As a new-build project, Paragon Architects was able to control and design for any structural challenges at 33 Commerce Crescent.







### CANTILEVER CONCRETE

"Meanwhile, 39 Commerce Crescent also had to tie in with all the other buildings along the street," highlights the senior project architect, Kim Newell. While using the same pallet of materials, its form breaks away from the rectilinear lines of its neighbours. The facade is made up of angled forms that cantilever 1,2m off the existing structure, separated from each other by reflective glass bands.

Traditionally, brick facades are rectilinear. However, at 39 Commerce Crescent the bricks were set out at 70° angles to create the sloping forms that wrap around the building.

Detailed drawings of the brick facades were created to determine what would happen to the pattern when it

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**The internal atrium allows all floors to be accessed from a central common area, allowing the building to be let to multiple tenants. A central staircase was installed in the atrium void to connect the four levels. The installation of a skylight above the new floor level allows light into the centre of the floor plate.**

needed to change direction around a 90° corner. Cut bricks were inserted into the pattern to ensure that it could be continued around corners, without interrupting the visual impact of the staggered pattern. The rough off-shutter concrete facades mimic the slope of the angled brickwork. Reflective glass punctuated the junctions between these two materials.

This project involved converting an existing three-storey commercial building into a four-storey showroom. The existing structure was retained and strengthened where required. To add an additional floor, the foundations had to be stiffened and the size increased to accommodate the additional loads.

The sculptural stair was designed in Rhino, with the 3D form flattened to form panels that were subsequently laser-cut to create the formwork cast in place for the stair. "This allowed us to create a complex form that would not have been possible with conventional formwork," adds Newell.

The building is let to a single tenant that wanted to maximise the usable area. Early in the project, they decided to convert the roof space into an open-air showroom, which enjoys a panoramic view towards Sandton.

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