



## A first for SA

# Bubble-like showroom for earthmoving equipment

When Barloworld Equipment decided to move their corporate head office in Sandton to their Isando site, the brief was clear: Design an aesthetically-appealing corporate head office and showroom that fit in with the industrial environment of Isando in Johannesburg. The building had to provide enough space to consolidate all corporate staff, while promoting employee well-being.

Paragon Architects South Africa (PASA) was tasked by developer Eris Property Group to get the ball rolling on this project, in order to achieve the client's expectations. Barloworld Equipment is the Southern African dealer for Caterpillar earthmoving equipment for the

construction and mining industries. They currently operate from various sites and offices across sub-Saharan Africa.

#### DESIGN EXPECTATIONS

The building had to facilitate a productive but agile working environment,

considering efficiency regarding water use, energy consumption and waste management.

"Another important criterion was that the look and feel had to reflect Barloworld Equipment's corporate identity and culture," highlights David Cloete, PASA project architectural technologist.

A feature of the project was its prime location adjacent to the busy R24 highway, where it was vital to maximise the available frontage. Apart from housing offices for Cat Rental and Used Equipment, the design had to showcase the brand via internal and external areas.



### BUILDING FEATURES

The state-of-the-art 4.500m<sup>2</sup> head office consists of two elongated, north-facing buildings:

- A two-storey north building.
- A three-storey south building, linked by an enclosed, glazed bridge.

The office structures sit lightly on a landscaped podium, which floats above a semi-basement parking level.

### A DESIGN LIKE NO OTHER

The 3.200m<sup>2</sup> showroom is the first of its kind in South Africa – a bubble-like structure dedicated to large earthmoving equipment. The building is split into two specialty areas, namely equipment defined by a “tyre” or “track” category, and an open and enclosed showroom area.

The space also includes two floors of office space to the rear. PASA came up with the unique bubble-like concept as the main driver of the design. “It was an interesting challenge to visualise and design an architectural space that not only houses people, but which also



caters for earthmoving equipment on a large scale,” Cloete comments.

“Our intention was not only to make the equipment the hero, but to accommodate interaction with the equipment itself, promoting its presence so that users could appreciate the shape of the space. This was achieved by means of subconscious similarities with key elements taken from the form of the equipment itself.”

### UNIQUE APPROACH TO CHALLENGES

Fortunately, the site promotes north-facing buildings, which is important in terms of building orientation. However, the adverse soil conditions in Isando called for some intervention from the surface-bed level in order to accommodate the footprint. In this instance, the footprint was relatively simple, with the head office sitting atop a semi-basement level. Hence the structure above only had to accommodate the kinked footprint design, with the showroom a curved rectangle in plan.

“In terms of space, we had to consider clearance at every single situation – not only to the sides of the equipment, but above especially,” Cloete elaborates. “Structural clearance always calls for an additional structure to accommo-

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date it, and how visually appealing that accommodating structure looks from an architectural perspective.”

### ROOF AND WALLS

Here large spanning trusses that carry a simplified roof were incorporated, sitting on a grid that can accommodate the different sized equipment sizes, with an intermediate steel girder framework allowing for the bubble-like design. This meant that the elongated, curved form of the showroom tied the entire design together.

The head office itself features flush-glazed strip windows, artfully creating a more sophisticated floor-to-ceiling experience. The showroom boasts a highway-facing flush-glazed facade that not only allows visual interaction, but also accommodates the required height and side clearance for the equipment, while conforming with the structural grid itself.

The project broke ground at the end of 2018 and is anticipated to be completed by end 2019.

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