

SVA International completes R100m health club in Eastern Cape

Designed by SVA International, the R100m, 3,572m² Virgin Active officially opened its doors on Saturday, 29 July in PE. The firm also led the renovation of the adjoining Greenacres Shopping Centre.



SVA International's Jannie Wagenaar (left) and Greenacres centre manager Brent Starr (right) inspect the new Virgin Active health club that forms the final phase of the two-year shopping centre upgrade.

According to SVA International's Jannie Wagenaar, who worked on the project, the architectural team's brief was to create a contemporary, cube-like fitness space that would become a landmark in its own right, while fitting in with the upgraded shopping centre precinct and activating the centre's underutilised rooftop parking.

The team's solution was to create an eye-catching, two-level building raised on pillars above the existing ground-level centre parking. The building's elevated entryway connects via a bridge to the upper parking decks at the centre's northern retail entrance.

Unique structural challenges

Wagenaar said the elevated nature of the building presented a number of unique structural challenges as well as opportunities to maximise the 360-degree views of the city.

Jaco Howard, also of SVA International, said the team had made the most of the ocean views from the swimming pool, situated on the lower level, by using large windows with high-performance glazing and sun louvres on the north-eastern corner of the building.

On the mezzanine level, full-height glazing on the studio windows, interspersed with off-shutter concrete details, framed the views of the Lady Slipper mountain to the west, he said.

Pop-out elements

“The building is very simple and sleek, so we incorporated pop-out elements such as vertical sheeting, glazing details and red composite aluminium finishes to create points of architectural interest,” he said.

Of the structural challenges, Wagenaar said one of the major engineering feats was effectively suspending the swimming pool above the ground-level parking. “Concrete is not a waterproof substrate, so we undertook a number of intense waterproofing measures to ensure that there are no leaks, including adding additives to the concrete.”

Wagenaar said the 308,000-litre pool was undergirded by a system of large structural beams to support the weight and counter the movement of the water when the pool was in use. He said various sustainable initiatives, such as rainwater harvesting for topping up the pool, and recycling grey water from showers, were being investigated. “The rooftop, which is white, is also designed to be energy efficient and solar-farm ready.”

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