

dhk completes sculpted monolithic apartment block in Century City

dhk Architects has completed an apartment block in Century City, Cape Town, conceived as a monolith with indentations and cut-outs. The building features 85 luxury residential apartments and penthouses supplemented with small-scale commercial and retail space at ground level.



The compact form of the building wraps around itself and gradually rises, orientating most of the apartments towards views of the city. Its doughnut-shaped form is adorned with visual gashes that allow the sheltered walkway spaces to catch glimpses of the city around it, connecting the inside circulation to the outside world. The rising form cuts away, creating dynamic terraces and activity at differing heights, culminating in the penthouse units. A large panoramic lift runs the full height of the building and is positioned at the pinnacle of its mass. The exterior of the lift is completely clad in red aluminium and sits within a glass shaft facing Table Mountain.

dhk utilised 2500mm x 1250mm sheets of satin off-white aluminium composite panels (ACP) to wrap the facade. This approach was to clearly define the monolithic appearance with the natural play of sunlight and deep shadows creating the articulation. The panels were bent and pressed to form 20mm cassettes used to create the profile of a large format tiled finish. The cladded panels have been staggered, within 1200mm grid centres, while the building fenestration is equally staggered but on a wholly separate 1800mm grid, creating the complex randomised fenestration appearance.



Alternate world inside the building

At the heart of the building is a deep fissure, as a result of the negative space created by the building form wrapping on itself. This deep 30m x 13m space acts as a light chasm that catches the north light and delivers it down to the lowest floors. At the base is a courtyard made up of a white-painted face brick fenestration that creates an alternate world inside the building. The rustic textured nature of this area was intentionally designed to complement the smooth, sleek external cladding. A series of transparent glazed commercial and public spaces surround the courtyard which spill out onto landscaped gardens – offering 360-degree views, connecting the internal areas to the outside environment. Inside the courtyard, a highly reflective aluminium material wraps the bottom escape staircase – emulating a mirror and encouraging residents to look up.

The building, named Axis, complements the suburb's greater urban strategy by creating a series of public, semi-public and private spaces and urban courts - challenging ideas associated with apartment living. A public urban plaza has been introduced as a forecourt and arrival space that is fed by routes along the precinct's pedestrian network and leads into the building's courtyard, forming a chasm of sorts.



Henry Abosi, associate director at dhk and lead architect says, "Elements of Axis are embedded in abstract narratives paying homage to classic literature; from the crown-shaped crescendo to the 'three urban courts', while conversely responding to contentious aspects of the realities of apartment living. For example, the large gestural cuts and gashes in the building offer views of Robben Island, Intaka Island and Tygerberg Hills; allowing for stunning outward views even from the innermost crevices of the building".

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