

Local developers take inspiration from mixed-use precincts abroad

More and more people are buying into the trend of urban living, opting for central living with a range of amenities and minimal travel time. Property companies must now meet the demand with modern spaces that offer a range of benefits, including the ability to 'live, work and play' in a safe and secure precinct.



Darling Harbour in Sydney

Mixed-use developments are thus springing up in major cities worldwide, creating a new way of living and benefiting inner cities in a number of ways.

The core appeal of mixed-use precincts is that they provide a solution for the growing number of people seeking to live and work within close proximity. This is, in part, a growing trend in South Africa in response to rising petrol costs. But the trend has been imminent for some years, further driven by the fact that this immersion in inner-city life reduces hours of sitting in traffic as well as the resulting negative impact on the environment.

Challenges to meeting demand

Nicholas Stopforth, MD of the Amdec Group, explains that there are, of course, challenges to meeting this demand. One thing in short supply in many, if not most, major city centres is space. This means some businesses are moving out of the city and suburban areas are growing into urban nodes around them. But for many people, there is still the desire to be located within the hustle and bustle of city life.

“Another major challenge to developers is to create green urban spaces and less concrete jungle,” Stopforth says.

“With this in mind, local property developers are taking inspiration from best practice globally to ensure South African developments are set in the same league as some of the most iconic mixed-use precincts in the world.”

Globally, developers are finding solutions to all challenges they come across. Mixed-use developments utilise space to its maximum capacity, for example. These precincts are defined by safety and security, design, convenience, connectivity and walkability.



Melrose Arch

Creating green spaces

Secondary to the core function of these developments, but by no means lesser, is the challenge of meeting the demand for green spaces, eco-friendly and sustainable technologies and practices, and providing a range of health benefits. This, after all, is what the modern consumer demands.

“We are constantly striving for unique solutions for green spaces within our developments. We look to trends around urban gardening initiatives and rooftop gardens and we create parks for dog walking and simply enjoying the benefits of being in nature,” says Stopforth.

“There are also many associated health benefits of life in mixed-use developments. The very nature of the lifestyle means you can walk to everything you need – to work, restaurants, and even the gym.”

The Amdec Group, for example, searches for inspiration globally – looking to the likes Hong Kong, Sydney, London, and New York. Its “lifestyle-meets-real estate” projects include Melrose Arch (and the new One on Whiteley within the mixed-use-precinct), and the new Yacht Club and soon-to-be-built Harbour Arch in Cape Town’s foreshore area.



Harbour Arch

Future of development

According to a 2018 report by HM Commercial Group, looking at the Okanagan region in the Canadian province of British Columbia, mixed-use spaces are the future of development and key to breathing new life into communities.

In Cape Town, the foreshore and Roggebaai precinct are seeing big development of mixed-use spaces. The area is more affordable per square metre than the Waterfront, but still on the water's edge and close to the CBD. It enjoys incredible accessibility, with roads, water taxis and pedestrian walkways linking directly with the V&A Waterfront, the Cape Town International Convention Centre, and the CBD. As a result, the area is attracting many blue chip businesses and therefore increasing the demand for mixed-use spaces.

Likewise, Sydney's city centre is seeing huge urban transformation with a number of mixed-use developments and transport infrastructure projects to meet the demand of a further 1 million people expected to call the city home in the next ten years.

In the United States, big development is being seen in the upmarket northern suburbs of Atlanta in Kingsport in Tennessee and in Oceanfront in Sarasota, Florida. And in the United Kingdom, London is seeing urban construction in areas such as Palmer Street and Rochester Row in Westminster.

In the process of creating modern, urban precincts, mixed-use developments are channeling huge investment into city centres. There is significant potential for capital growth for initial investors in off-plan developments, and as such, the Amdec Group predicts that the mixed-use trend is only set to rise in 2019.

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