

Corobrik's face bricks and pavers assimilate Sol Plaatje University with city of Kimberley.

A range of Corobrik's face brick and pavers were selected for the iconic development of the new Sol Plaatje University integrated into the inner-city fabric of Kimberley in the Northern Cape.

Together with the University of Mpumalanga the Sol Plaatje University (SPU) is the first new university to be constructed since 1994. The buildings at SPU had to respond to the historic, cultural and climatic aspects of the region while creating an attractive and suitable study and social environment.

To achieve this level of quality architecture, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) launched the Sol Plaatje University architectural design competition in 2013 with five firms selected from 59 entries. These were Activate Architects, Savage and Dodd Architects, Designworkshop SA, Wilkinson Architects in joint venture with Mashilo Lampbrechts Architects and GXY Architects and URBA Architects and Urban Designers.

"The two-stage architectural competition was a complex and extensive process," explained Ludwig Hansen, Campus Architect and Urban Designer. "Through it, the department was able to extract the best ideas in relation to academic excellence within the 21st century African context which includes environmental sustainability, contextual relevance and best practice in academic buildings."

Sustainable criteria for the construction included effective water management, rainwater harvesting and grey water use; integrated recycling and waste management; capabilities for energy generation and use of renewable energies as well as engaging with the city to maximise opportunities and knowledge for long-term sustainability strategies.

Contracted to Trencon, Qualicon and Murray & Dickson, the first phase of construction, within the university's 'central campus, has been completed. This comprises student residences, retail, facilities' management, retail space, academic offices, an exam hall and canteen.

About 1 million of Corobrik's Bergendal Light face bricks were used for the external construction while 500 000 Flamingo Travertine face bricks were used internally. In addition to this, some 300 000 of Corobrik's Onyx and Nutmeg Piazza pavers were used extensively throughout walkways and courtyards of the development.

"Corobrik's face brick and paving range continues to be selected for construction in government developments because of its sustainability and long-term cost effectiveness," explained Corobrik's commercial director, Musa Shangase. "Institutions such as universities will remain for years, representing elevated principles of academia and humanitarianism that form the foundation of a functioning democratic society. The use of our quality face bricks ensures these structures will remain – without the need for costly future maintenance – while the natural aspects also provide a number of added benefits."

Shangase said that, in the extreme Northern Cape climate, the thermal efficiency of the brick minimises the need for artificial heating and cooling, meeting the criteria of the architectural competition. The inherent noise resistance of the bricks is also hugely beneficial in a busy academic setting.

As the university is completely integrated into the city, the common university spaces are also accessed by the general public. This high level of traffic called for a quality paver where the natural tones integrated well with the surroundings which is why they Onyx and Piazza pavers were chosen.

“The longevity of our pavers makes them a first choice for crucial developments,” explained Shangase. “The non-slip qualities created by the natural substance ensures pedestrian safety, even in wet weather, while the natural colour-fastness means there will be no loss of hue even after years of direct ultra-violet lighting.”

Hansen echoed Shangase’s sentiments, saying that the longevity of Corobrik’s products made them the best choice for the project.

“The university is a long-term investment and face brick was considered the perfect material to ensure buildings that would last centuries,” he said. “The design process was – and still is – a collaborative process which also included the choice of brick and the specific finish of Bergendal. Considerations that went into the selection included the environment, institutional nature of the buildings, availability and subjective preference of the various architects.”

The second phase of construction is currently underway and due for completion in January 2017. This includes a teacher education building and new library while the third stage – set for completion in January 2018 – includes two further academic buildings.