

# PRESS RELEASE

## Young architects breathe fire at Paragon Group

**15 August 2019:** Architects not only have to be able to design, but must also have project management and client liaison skills. It is for this reason that Paragon has adopted a pod structure to ensure that its younger architects not only receive practical on-the-job experience, but become involved in all major processes and procedures at the architecture and interior architecture group.

The pods are essentially a new internal structure to maximise employees' exposure to as many different aspects of design and project management as possible. "The pod structure is not only an amazing mentorship experience, but has advanced the way that both the group and its pod-team members focus their energy on projects and each other. The overview of integration, learning, and all-round training is key," Paragon Group Human Resources and Operations Director **Cindy Faux** comments.

An excellent example of the all-round training is Senior Architectural Technologist **Anthony Karam**, who joined the group in 2012 while still studying. Anthony is a member of the Imagine Dragons pod. Early exposure to Paragon Interface, the interior architecture arm, resulted in his decision to specialise in this area.

"At university we were taught that buildings are for people, and I realised that interior design has an innate ability to create such spaces. Paragon Interface focuses on the user experience of a building, rather than what a building looks like per se," Anthony comments. In addition, the fact that the group's major client base is corporate clients means that interior design can be leveraged to articulate specific brand experiences.

"Our initial articulation of a project begins with an interrogation of how a brand is experienced, and how that brand experience can then be translated into the built form itself. The traditional approach is to assume that a building that looks good is a pleasant space to occupy. However, does it actually showcase a company's core business?" Anthony queries.

Spatial innovation has been a key feature of two of Paragon Group's most acclaimed projects to date. These are the GE Africa Innovation Centre (GEAIC), which clinched the 2017 SAPOA Award for Innovative Development, and Discovery Place, the Office Design Winner at the prestigious 2018 SBID International Design Awards in London.

The award for the GEAIC was won in competition against prestigious consulting engineering firms, among others. "What was so interesting here was that Paragon Group's spatial innovation was recognised. It is not that often that architecture is placed under the same spotlight as technological innovation," Anthony elaborates.

Gone are the days of assigning work packages to individuals, which in the past saw them performing rote tasks for extended periods. For example, a complex project like Discovery Place took five years from initial concept to end product.

Now employees with all levels of experience, from those fresh out of university to the experienced associates at Paragon Group, are included at all stages of the process. "This results in stronger designers and architects at the end of the day," Anthony stresses.

Imagine Dragons is one of the 'youngest' pods at Paragon Group, including students just out of university, or employees from related built-environment professions. The aim is to nurture young professionals by knowledge transfer and mentoring. "In this way, you create a really strong team from the ground up," Anthony points out.

Instilling critical thinking allows these young professionals to be accountable decision-makers who are both effective and innovative. Such tenacity and perseverance is reflected in the informal pod name of 'Imagine Dragons'. "A fellow pod member likes the band. At the same time, we are driven by imagination and breathe creativity as if it were fire, so the name was a natural fit," Anthony enthuses.

The pods are anticipated to evolve naturally, and ultimately integrate into a unified structure within Paragon Group. "That diversity might produce something really new and exciting that might not necessarily have come to fruition under a larger hierarchical structure. In this way, the knowledge and experience of the pods is shared with everybody, which will strengthen the entire business," Anthony highlights.

Clients also stand to gain major benefit from the new structure, which assigns skills according to specific project requirements, as opposed to the traditional team allocation. "If we develop better employees, then our designs for our clients will improve commensurately as well," Anthony argues.

In terms of translating its designs into live construction projects, the structure also allows individual pods to develop new methodologies to stay ahead of the curve, and thereby drive excellence throughout the Paragon Group.

### ***Ends***

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### **Notes to the Editor**

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### **About Paragon**

Paragon, established in October 1997, is an internationally-active design business, based in Johannesburg. We deliver commercial architecture, masterplanning, interior design, and space planning to visionary clients in all property sectors, from retail to residential and education. We are committed to global urban development. We are able and agile. Paragon is flexible and diverse in its approach to design. Each project is unique and not driven by style, but by lifestyle and a response to user needs. Elegant and efficient planning form the core of our designs. We understand the needs of our clients, and know how to generate ever new architectural forms in a competitive property market.

We are known for hands-on engagement with all opportunities present in the modern global building industry. The true measure of our skill is our ability to engage at all levels and with all players that make up the colourful world of construction and property development. Our buildings look forward. We embrace the future, because we will be a part of it – part of its problems and responsibilities, and part of its great freedoms and achievements.

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