

# LEADING ARCHITECTURE

AND DESIGN

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## Understated elegance





# A fresh appeal

Photographs by Dallas Dahms

The new R52-million Edgars extension at the busy Lifestyle Centre in Ballito, by Evolution Architects, is a bold and contemporary addition to an already successful shopping destination







The principal of Evolution Architects, Raewyn Gowar, has been the project architect for the Ballito Lifestyle Centre since its origin, so she and her team have in fact been working on this project in phases over the past 10 years. "Each time we have added to the centre, the intention has been to improve and revitalise the centre, keeping the architecture current by creating new and exciting features and keeping the centre ahead of its competitors," explains Gowar. After a major extension in 2006, her design won the South African Council for Shopping Centres 2007 Retail Design and Development award in the "Expansion of a Shopping Centre" category.

The original design brief was to provide an additional 4 000m<sup>2</sup> of retail area to the existing Ballito Lifestyle Centre. This would house the new 2 700m<sup>2</sup> Edgars concept store, as well as eight exclusive line shops. However, during the construction phase, the brief grew to include upgrades and revamps of some of the existing shops, as well as a complete refurbishment of the existing restaurant node. The architectural design concept was essentially to breathe new life into the centre by creating a more contemporary look, feel and freshness to the overall design. "However, it was critical that we retained the original 'high-street' open-air shopping concept," notes Gowar. "This was achieved by implementing contemporary construction materials, finishes and techniques such as spider-glazed facades, off-shutter concrete features and exciting engineering and architectural features." The scale and proportions of the building were critical, and careful attention was given to aspects such as light and shadow, ensuring that there was a balance between the amount of canopy or roof covering (shade) versus sunlight on the walkways. Sandpiper Fabrication fabricated and installed the structural steel shop fronts, stainless steel and architectural steel balustrading, cladding on columns and lift surrounds and stainless steel canopies on the project while GlassInc were responsible for the glass on the canopies and the glass balustrading.

Evolution Architects offers a personalised and dedicated high level of service, with a focus on design and detail. "Our practice has a young and dynamic team with a strong work ethic. Our aim is to provide innovative and original building design solutions which comply with our clients' brief and budget. Our team has been extensively involved in the design, documentation and supervision of several prestigious projects throughout South Africa. Over the years we have gained valuable experience in various fields of architecture, however, our special interests lie in retail architecture and green buildings. We have been awarded first prize by the South African Council of Shopping Centres for retail design development, and our design for an office building in Ridgside, Umhlanga was the first in KwaZulu-Natal and the second building in South Africa to achieve a four star Green Star SA Office v1 Design and As Built rating from the Green Building Council of South Africa," Gowar says. The name of the practice is based on the philosophy that design is an evolutionary process. The dictionary definition for the word 'evolution' is "a gradual process in which







something changes into a different and usually better form; the process of developing". The practice believe that this is exactly what happens during the architectural design process, not only in relation to the building itself, but also for the people involved in the project. "We all grow and develop and our lives are ultimately enriched by our experience," she says.

**Challenges**

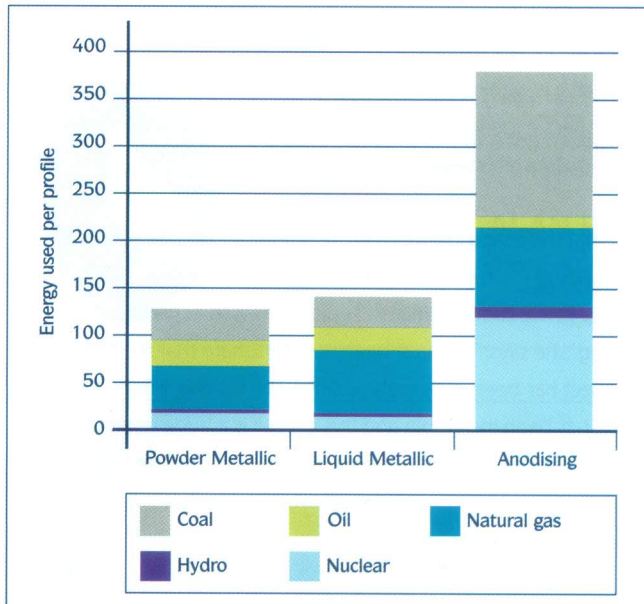
The greatest challenge in the first instance was how to position the new 'box' extension of 4 000m<sup>2</sup> of retail space in an already functioning and successful strip mall/open-air shopping centre. "Our concept was to position the new box as a feature in the existing car park. This was met with some reservation at first and the public generally thought we had lost our minds, but we had a good idea that what we were creating would work and add a huge benefit to the existing centre. We needed to replace the parking that was 'lost' when placing the building in the car park, as well as provide for additional parking. The original parking layout was generous, so this was achieved by rationalising the existing parking space as well as including a designated tenant parking area in the existing lower basement area," says Gowar. In addition to this, a large number of roof-top parking bays were allocated on top of the new building. In order to allow for these parking bays to still be very much part of the centre and to be convenient for shoppers, the architects included three generously proportioned new lifts and two covered staircases connecting the parking level to the ground floor shopping level.

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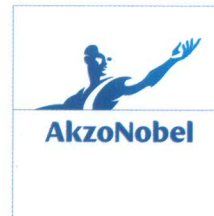
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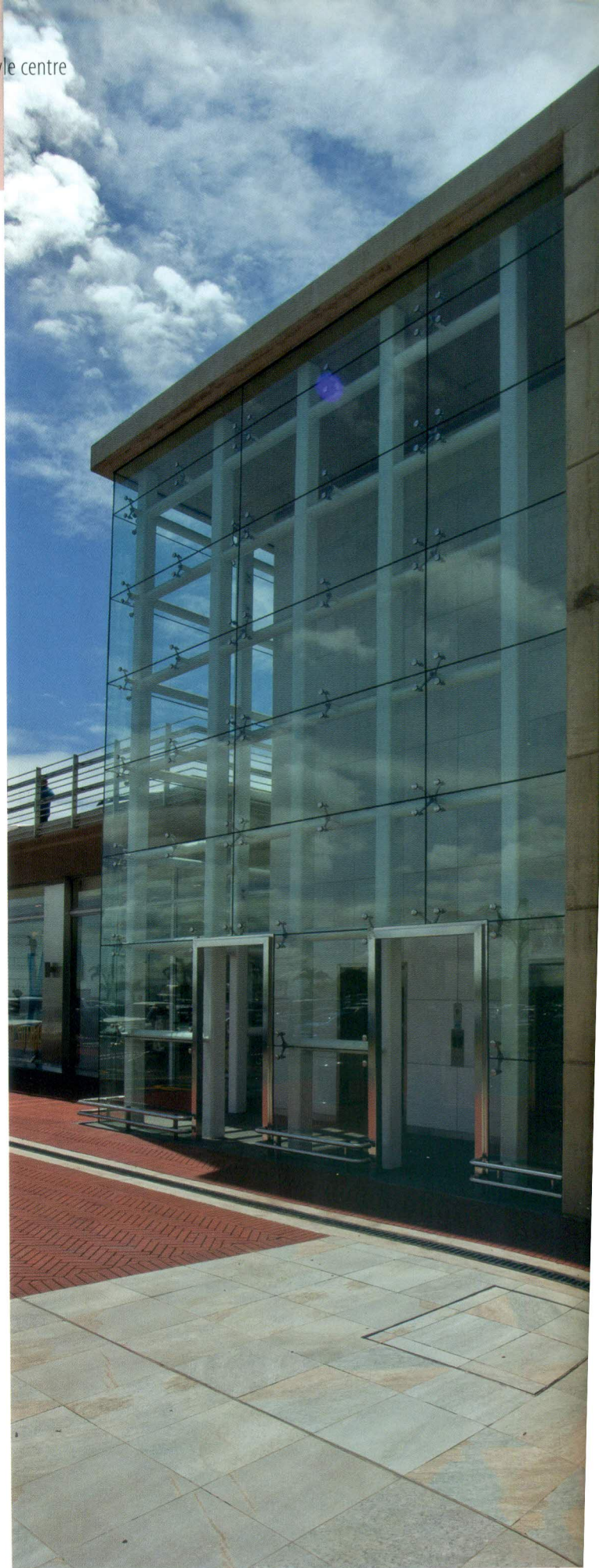
The second challenge was building the extension while the existing centre and tenants were still operating. Careful programming and planning was required so that there was as little disruption for the customers and tenants as possible, as well as ensuring that the building was completed on time. In addition to this, the developers (Bruce and Paul Rencken) ensured that they communicated with their customers clearly as to what was happening within the centre, assuring them that the end result would benefit all. They even went to the extent of having windows put in the hoarding so that curious shoppers could see what was happening on the construction site. "We were fortunate to have a very competent contractor (Construction ID), so everything ran smoothly and according to programme," says Gowar.

### **The box**

As the building is essentially a box, the detailing and feature design elements were critical. Using features such as off-shutter concrete walls, spider glazing, glass-finned canopies and frameless shop fronts, the clean lines of the detailing are simple, elegant, and very contemporary. Each facade of the building has unique features, which work together to form the whole. In addition, the landscaping was seen as an integral part of the architecture, enhancing the spaces between the buildings and creating a relaxed outdoor feel. "We believe that what has been created at Ballito Lifestyle Centre is something completely unique. It gives the impression of high-street shopping in the true sense of the word, yet it is within a safe and secure environment. The quality of the shopper's experience has always been our first and foremost consideration," states Gowar.

"The fact that the Ballito Lifestyle Centre is retail architecture means that the building is intended for public use. Anyone and everyone is able to experience the building and enjoy it, as well as find fault with the building," she says. "We have been very fortunate that the response to this project has been extremely positive. The feedback from the customers has been incredible and this in itself is a huge reward for the design team. Each of the features we have designed for the building have been executed exactly as visualised, which has been very exciting for us. As we've watched the building grow and the finishes and features go up, it has been very rewarding and satisfying to see a vision being realised."


She says that the firm had a lot of fun with the project. "I always feel that we can push the boundaries when working with this client, who is open to new ideas and suggestions. The client was involved in every step of the design process, however, there was a certain design freedom which allowed us to explore new things. The client was also refreshingly open-minded when it came to the budget. If there were design elements which were expensive yet the benefits to the project outweighed the







cost, we went with the option that was appropriate for the project rather than trying to cut corners." She says that they didn't just come up with one idea and stick with it, but looked at various options for design solutions – the good, the bad and then the absolutely perfect option which achieved all that they were trying to create.

The completed project is one which cannot fail to catch the eye, both with its bold contemporary origins and the added value it brings to the centre. "We had an amazingly competent and professional team on this project and we all worked together to create a vision which we are all very proud of. I don't believe that there is any part of this building that I would have done differently, and the outcome has been a great success." 

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