Face brick changes face of university

The new R40-million lecture theatre block at the University of Zululand which students started using in September 2012, provides teaching spaces for 2,160 students. Six lecture theatres, each with 300 seats, provide raked seating for 1,800 students. A further 350 students can be accommodated in flat classrooms - divided by folding acoustic screens so they can be used individually or jointly - and there are 31 work stations in the computer lab.

More than 222,000 Bergendal Satin Blend face bricks from Corobrik's Witbank factory were used to build the new lecture theatre block. This is the first time that this distinctive earth coloured brick with its smooth satin finish has been used at the university as a change from the red face brick and plastered and painted buildings that define much of the aesthetics of the campus.

"The material palette of Bergendal face bricks, off shutter concrete and a steel roof create a warm and earthy feel for the building," said Mohideen Abdool Gafoor who designed the structure. "The design challenge was to link the various buildings at different levels to the central library whilst providing teaching spaces and integrating the development with the surrounding buildings and topography," said Gafoor.

"The design also had to support a sustainable outcome and be energy-efficient. The materials palette had to incorporate sustainable aspects such as recycled content and/or be reusable and products such as brick, steel and metal roof sheeting fulfilled that requirement," Gafoor said. "The brick finishes we chose are durable and relatively maintenance-free. Even the interiors of the lecture theatres are in face brick and the classrooms have face brick dados to window sill height."
Demand is increasing

"There is increasing demand for sustainable building materials in today's environment-conscious world and Corobrik face brick, with its low life cycle carbon footprint, is an important contributor to this," said Dirk Meyer, managing director of Corobrik.

"Face brick's provide a holistic competent solution the numerous sustainability attributes of brick including longevity that provides opportunity to dissipate the materials embodied energy, durability that mitigates future carbon debt associated with maintenance and replacement of less durable materials and thermal efficiency - the inherent thermal mass affording

building envelopes the ability to self-regulate to help keep rooms cool in summer and warm in winter and so save on energy usage and cost."

The university's new lecture block is dominated by the deep roof eaves which shelter not just the building but provide covered link-ways to the various surrounding buildings. A lath screen serves as protection from the wind and rain in the south west. All of the buildings are totally user-friendly for the physically challenged with access ramps, special toilets, seating allocation in lecture theatres and a dedicated lift.