

Carvings on Anglo American's offices renovated

When the mining company Anglo American established its offices in Johannesburg in the late 1930's, it decorated the building with sandstone panels featuring detailed carvings of plants and animals.



Over the past eight decades these have been damaged, due both to environmental degradation and vandalism.

Specialists in the construction, renovation and recycling of buildings, Gordon Verhoef & Krause, have spent the last few months repairing and recreating the panels in order to preserve this architectural heritage and restore it to its original beauty.

"Our mandate was to remove large, carved sandstone blocks from the sides of the main external staircase which leads to the building's entrance and replace them with new blocks with matching sculptural carvings," according to John Croad, director of Gordon Verhoef & Krause in Gauteng. "As parts of the original sculptural detail had deteriorated and begun to delaminate over time, new blocks were cut to size from quarry sandstone and hand-carved to match the existing details. This process was a long and slow one with meticulous care taken to replicate the exact original design."

Several challenges

The team encountered several challenges whilst carrying out the work. Among them was accessing the panels due to their enormous weight. Croad explains that scaffolding had to be erected on both sides of the staircase wall to create a platform from which to work. Large pulleys or hoists were also attached to assist in the removal and replacement process.

This process was fraught with health and safety risks due to the sheer size and weight of the engraved blocks and thus safety precautions and careful management was key to preventing injury to the workers on site.

Another difficulty faced was that the stone had deteriorated too extensively for the stone masons to use a mould and cast process to replicate the sculptures as was originally planned. The new stone blocks therefore had to be hand carved by eye.

"The work has been completed beyond our expectations. We specifically selected Gordon Verhoef & Krause for this project due to our long-standing relationship with them as well as their reputation and expertise with this type of work," says Ritesh Ramtahal, Accommodation Manager at Anglo American.

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