

NMMU student wins place in 26th Corobrik Architectural Student of the Year Awards

"When the Corobrik Architectural Student of the Year Awards were first established in 1986, the key objective was to recognise and reward design excellence amongst talented architectural students. Over the years a new dimension has come to the fore - the capacity of the students to reflect changes in society which, today, demands a thorough appreciation of the need for sustainable development...



... The award winners this year have manifested all the qualities we expect from architects of the future, striking that delicate balance between strong aesthetics and functionality with care for the environment."

These words of praise came from Christie van Niekerk, manager of Corobrik Cape at an award ceremony at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth on 4 December 2012. He was referring to regional winner, Ruan Marsh, along with Jonathan MacLachlan who was placed second and Kevin Coetzee and Dirk Naude, in joint third place.

He said that the winning students revealed a sound grasp of the requirements for architectural sustainability and the need to reduce impacts on the environment in new commercial and residential developments, including complex technological theory relating to the conservation of essential resources such as energy and water.

Ruan Marsh won R7 000 as first prize, whilst Jonathan MacLachlan received R5 000 for second place. Kevin Coetzee and Dirk Naude, in joint third place, each took home R1500. A special prize of R3 000 was awarded to Gareth Porrill for best use of clay masonry.

Prize of R50 000

Thesis students from universities and qualifying universities of technology throughout South Africa were invited to submit entries for one of seven regional competitions. Each institutional winner goes forward to the national finals. At the 26th National Student Architect awards function at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg on 18 April 2013, the national winner will receive a prize of R50 000.

Ruan Marsh's thesis, New School vs Old School is a Community School cluster in New Brighton.

"The South African townships are undergoing a period of rapid transformation. Currently these disconnected dormitory suburbs lack hierarchy and presence as a result of an unclear urban structure. As part of this formalisation, new urban centres are developing," said Marsh.

Situated in New Brighton, the Red Location Cultural Precinct identifies schools as important public buildings that should serve as structuring elements within the townships.

Marsh proposes libraries, halls and workshops that can compensate for the lack of facilities within impoverished communities. "The project challenges the typology of the generic township school model, in location and physical nature. The disconnected and introverted nature of these schools, make sharing of scarce resources and specialised facilities almost impossible."

The Community School Cluster aims to group these specialised facilities around a central public space located along a main public transport route. Resources will be available to the community providing opportunity for interaction between learners and the community. Through responding to the particularities of the context, and using a simple robust architecture, the aim is to produce a place of specific architecture, whilst simultaneously creating an interactive learning environment that is integrated within the community it serves.

In second place, Jonathan MacLachlan proposes an International Airport for Port Elizabeth so that the city can take advantage of globalisation. MacLachlan says, "Port Elizabeth is growing and striving to define its role as a South African city and take its place on the global stage meeting international standards.

The proposition put forward established a space to celebrate the city and the arrival of visitors to an international gateway with local identity.

Joint third place went to Kevin Coetzee and Dirk Naude.

Positive public interface

Kevin Coetzee's proposal entitled 'Bridging the Gap' established a 21st century head office for General Motors, South Africa that will rectify the segregation between public and industry based companies. The new head office building will act as a mediator between the public and General Motors that will produce a positive public interface.

Dirk Naude's thesis entitled 'Living Monument' addresses the struggle in South Africa proposing a monument to Nelson Mandela in Port Elizabeth on a functional, locational and formal level. The construction will offer facilities for research and education of human rights on a historically and naturally significant site in the city.

The special award for the best use of clay was presented to Gareth Porrill for his thesis entitled 'Reviving the Inner City: the design of a Cultural Centre in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal.'

Porrill recommends a centre where the different cultures of KZN are exposed via art programs; exhibitions, conferences, markets and festivals will stimulate the city centre.

The design incorporated Zulu architectural elements including clay, rusted metals and the notions of weaving and beading - expressed through use of different textures, colours, mosaics, artwork and structural elements.

The incorporation of these design elements are carried through into the surrounding urban context by creation of urban artwork and extensive use of indigenous landscaping.

Porrill said, "I chose to incorporate clay brick into my design as Pietermaritzburg architecture is dominated by red-brick

buildings especially in the city centre. The aim was to create a visual link to the historic buildings and respect the existing context by incorporating similar materials into the design and to give the solid elements in the building substance promoting a sense of strength and stability."

The colour palette of rusted oranges and reds, inspired by the KZN landscape, could be expressed by the use of brick (its texture, modularity, colour, and "of-the-earth" material). Various Corobrik products served as inspiration for the project, including Red Leaf Rustic FBS, Kirstenbosch Rustic, Red-Terracotta colour range, as well as the various paver products.

Quality entries

Corobrik MD, Dirk Meyer, noted that the quality of entries this year had made the task of selecting winners a difficult one, which boded well for the future of the profession.

"Of particular note was the way students had dovetailed a sensitivity to South Africa's unique communities with design talent and engineering ability, and the over-riding goal of ensuring the lightest environmental footprint possible," he said.

"This is in line with the developing trend for forward-looking business leaders to commission new corporate headquarters that more than meet current environmental regulations and for home buyers growing preference for green residential estates featuring eco-friendly design with a focus on electrical energy and water conservation."

"Architectural integrity incorporating low lifecycle environmental impacts at lowest life cycle cost is the future challenge and we are pleased that the intrinsic properties of our bricks and their functional qualities in design are well positioned to continue contributing to a more sustainable future," Meyer said.

While the history of brick in architecture makes its own statement as to the comparative value of brick, both international and local research are helping explain the science behind the contribution of thermal mass for achieving optimal energy efficiency in South Africa's unique climates where much of the challenge is to keep the heat out. Clay brick construction is found to do this somewhat more effectively than new lightweight system technologies.

Meyer said that Corobrik was up the learning curve in its pursuit of greener more eco- friendly business practices with products in line with international best practice for the technologies employed. Investment in proven technologies would continue to drive the process as would the progress with our programme to convert more facilities from coal to cleaner burning natural gas as a firing fuel.

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