Matthew Morris wins PE regional leg of 31st Corobrik Architectural Student of the Year Award

Matthew Morris from the Nelson Mandela University was recently announced the winner at the Port Elizabeth regional awards ceremony for the 31st Corobrik Architectural Student of the Year Award.

Matthew Morris is pictured with Adri Oliphant (left) and Mike Willard (right) of Corobrik. Morris will represent Nelson Mandela University at the 31st Corobrik Architectural Student of the Year Award finals to be held in May 2018.

Speaking at the event, Mike Willard, Corobrik area sales manager Eastern Cape / Southern Cape regions, said that winners such as Morris would shape the future in a world that was already transforming.

“In South Africa, the architects of tomorrow will be tasked with taking an already challenging past into a mind-boggling future that many of us have not yet even begun to understand. They will be the pathfinders who map out a built environment that uses the sophisticated technologies of the future to address the challenges of today that have been compounded by the short comings of the past,” he said.

In the annual competition, the country’s best architectural students from eight major universities are identified based on their final thesis and presented with awards throughout the year. The winners of each of the regional competitions then go on to compete for the national title and a prize of R50,000 at the Corobrik Architectural Student of the Year Awards which will be held in Johannesburg in May 2018.

Balancing the urban, natural environment relationship

Matthew Morris' thesis is entitled "The design of a decentralised sewage treatment facility for a settlement within Bethelsdorp, Port Elizabeth".

The project concerns itself with a heavily polluted river valley system of Swartkops, Port Elizabeth, where the edges are settled by people and lack of adequate service infrastructure has led to high levels of pollution. This unbalanced relationship between the urban and natural environments has resulted in the severe destruction of critical biodiversity zones and endangered keystone species, and is subsequently impacting the quality of life for the residents of the area.

The urban settlements of northern Port Elizabeth lack an inherent identity or sense of community “centeredness” from poor urban structure and settlement making. The absence of formal public buildings and spaces within the community are a result of a structure supporting a minimum standard of living. With this, the potential to address both the ecological problem as well as the making of better living environments was seen through designing infrastructure with an explicit architectural intent.

The design works towards addressing settlement edge and its connection to the natural valley system, whilst building on the under-utilised congregational points within the community. In so doing, providing infrastructure for processing the pollution while concentrating and providing an appropriate place for community activities, making good people places and healthier happier environments. This allows service infrastructure to begin to clearly shape and structure the public infrastructure, promoting a productive category of space, evolving past its utilitarian function.

Matthew Morris received a cheque for R8,500, while Rust van der Merwe, Chelcie Akom and Simone Joubert shared the runner-up places.

Designing additions to culturally significant buildings

A R4,500 prize for the best use of clay masonry was also presented to Ian Woolard. His thesis is entitled "The design of additions to community facilities for the Shri Shiva Subramaniar Aulayam Hindu Temple".

This treatise began as a preoccupation with the Shri Siva Subramaniar Aulayam Temple in Upper Valley Road, South End, Port Elizabeth. It was first opened in 1903 to serve the spiritual needs of Port Elizabeth's Tamil community. In 1950, the temple was disconnected from its community because of the forced removals under the sanctions of the Group Areas Act. Despite this, both the community and the temple have remained intact and the temple complex is still in use today. The aim of this project was to investigate an appropriate way to design additions to a historically and culturally significant building in Port Elizabeth while also ensuring the prolonged functionality of the temple complex for the Hindu community.

Woolard said he included clay brick as it seemed like a natural choice of material, due to the original temple being brick and considering the long tradition of brickwork in Hindu architecture.

Willard stated that fine young minds such as these would not only ride the wave of change but, through their creativity and innovation, enable brands such as Corobrik to continue to contribute towards a sustainable future for South Africans.

"The clay brick has inadvertently helped create both the physical and the architectural maps on which our winners this year will stamp their names. As the designers of tomorrow look more closely at creating a more connected, healthy and sustainable future, we believe that they will continue to embrace key attributes of the clay brick. Now, more than ever, the fact that clay brick is durable, non-toxic, reusable, energy efficient and low maintenance will be key," he said.