

Conference on lifestyle components of shopping centres

Shopping centre developments are reaching a point of refinement where the lifestyle component is becoming paramount in attracting increasingly sophisticated markets. This is one of the themes that will be explored at the 11th African Congress of Shopping Centres to be held at the Sandton Convention Centre, 13 - 15 September 2006.

The design and construction of new shopping centres reflect their increasingly important role not only as retail outlets, but as an extension of the domestic lives of their customers. Retail development and design in South Africa is a discussion that will be conducted at the conference by commercial development designer Lisa Blane, a partner at KMH Architects.

Blane will be using existing projects that illustrate this phenomenon, such as Melrose Arch in Johannesburg and an upcoming fashion and clothing development by RMB Properties.

"While the shopping centres are progressing in the sophistication of their design and purpose, the majority of actual stores still have to take that leap - following the lead of some forward thinkers among the hardware retailers, furniture shops and general stores such as Woolworths flagships," she says.

The congress is entitled "Thinking New" and follows last year's event, "Celebrating Retail", in which the industry's remarkable level of success was examined.

"The response this year has outstripped last year's record, with a total 870 delegates signed up to attend the congress," says Tracey Fowler, GM of the South African Council of Shopping Centres (SACSC). The 15-year-old SACSC represents more than 80% of the shopping centre ownership and management in South Africa and professionals working in associated industries.

Chairman of the confress committee, research expert Dirk Prinsloo says this year's congress will offer much more insight into new developments, worldwide trends, local successes and challenges for the future.

The list of speakers includes four international experts in their disciplines and local speakers on a wide range of highly relevant issues. Delegate participation will play a big part in the conference and the organisers have introduced the Breakfast Club, a new feature in which conference delegates will be offered the opportunity to have breakfast with experts in different retail fields who will spend an hour answering specific questions about their business.

Among other speakers at the congress is 26-year-old UK entrepreneur Guy Levine, who will tell delegates What They Don't Teach You At High School. Levine started his first business at 16, developed his own strategies and applied them with great success both to his own enterprises and to those to whom he consults. He has just been voted Speaker of the Year by the Academy for Chief Executives in the UK.

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