

STEELING LIGHT

EXTENSIONS TO DAIMLERCHRYSLER, SWARTKOP

Any extension to an existing building, especially where different architects are involved, requires careful planning. Not only do the changing needs and infrastructural development of the organisation need to be taken into account, but the integration of the different structural components needs to be as effective

The Café Ratazzo, creates a warm spot in an environment dominated by the cold materials of steel and glass.

Professional Team

Client

DaimlerChrysler

Architect

AUB Projects (Sue Clark and Jens Jüterbock)

Project Manager

AUB Projects (Meyer Erlank)

Structural Engineer

Dynacon

Electrical and Mechanical Engineer

Spoomaker and Partners

Wet Services Engineer

DSB Consulting

Contractor

Interkor



The structure of the new extension is designed in block form, the double volume atriums creating a feeling of open communication and interaction.

Text and Photographs by Cara Pauling

The extensions to DaimlerChrysler's corporate headquarters in Swartkops manage to seamlessly integrate a 6 000m² building into an already established environment, yet still allows it to stand out as an individually creative entity.

TYING IN

With DaimlerChrysler being the company it is, the architect felt that a clean, no-frills design was the best option to go for. By using raw materials and design elements such as strong lines, the building conveys a no-fuss feel, efficiency and open communication being the order of business.

CLEAN LINES

The structure itself is very simple, configured around two 12m double volume blocks, with a staggered front entrance. The new section is linked to the other buildings via walkways, one completely enclosed and the other open, leading to a secure internal courtyard, which effectively turns the building in on itself. Harnessing the importance of these gardens, the glass-clad meeting rooms either open out onto, or overlook the courtyard.

Internally, the distinction between the two blocks is made by large glass security doors. As the structure has no solid ceiling, the tops of the doors have

nothing to connect to and they seem to "float", accentuating the transparent feel of the development.

The first block serves as a public space, housing the reception area and meeting rooms as well as providing access, via the walkways, into the other buildings. From here, one moves past the security doors into the office area, where the office floor-space encircles the double volume atrium. This multi-functional atrium acts as a display area for new DaimlerChrysler products and the exhibition of artworks and also contains a Café Rattazo. With its warm light and wood finishes, this pause area acts as a hot spot in the building, drawing people to it



Through the design, a multi-functional dimension is introduced, and the internal atrium also acts as a display area for DaimlerChrysler's new vehicles.



to socialise as well as conduct informal meetings.

The floor plan is open, with staff interacting freely with each other. Screens are in place between the desks and while they provide privacy for individuals, their red and blue finishes also serve to bring colour into the building.

RAW MATERIALS

The dominant material, used both internally and externally, is steel, the ways in which it has been applied a clear indication of its diversity.

Externally, large steel I-beams, coated in grey, have been exposed at different levels. On the external walls, these horizontally-placed beams form the support for a canopy over the main entrance, which in turn, has thinner aluminium slats, creating louvres across its width.

The same beams have been used both vertically and horizontally, to form the support for the corrugated covering over the porte cochère leading to reception.

The window and door frames complement the use of steel, with their glass and aluminium components setting the tone for the design of the interior. Steel fire escapes and balconies as well as sheet metal components on the side of the building enhance the various shades of grey used on the external walls.

INNER SANCTUM

The internal spaces maximise natural light through the design of the roof, as well as the uncluttered pattern of the office floors. The atrium is flooded with south light, coming in from the pitched angles of the skylight. This zig-zag pattern of light means that very little extra lighting is needed, but also ensures there is no direct sunlight shining into the double volume atrium. Channel sections, 400mm deep, cross the south lights of the roof, from which the walkway hangs. This open walkway links the two sides of the offices on the first floor and is suspended from these channels by steel cables. This walkway represents the importance of the free-flow of information and people in the organisation and linking to a large steel staircase, which juts out over the atrium, means the movement of people is constant. The lift stands as a dominant feature of the internal structure, its glass and steel components anchoring to the central roof beam and forming the vertical backbone of the structure. As well as its superb outer casing, the lift

The corridor leading to the older building follows the trend of the new extensions, yet fits seamlessly into the original look.



From the front of the building, the use of steel and glass is immediately visible, with the colours of the lighting complimenting the mix of materials.



Again, yet this time via the open walkway, the design relationship between the buildings is consistent.

mechanism itself works on a spiral screw, the lift pulled up and down on a single cord and is the first application of its size in the country. This design meant the outer casing was not too large and allowed for it to be openly displayed in the building.

LINEAR RULES

The use of steel and its by-products dominate the internal design with the tiling and glass components, accentuating the hi-tech nature of the development. The staircase has brushed aluminium handrails, with steel tread plates on the steps, while horizontally placed cable trays have been used to form the ceiling elements underneath the suspended walkway and above that, under the roof sections. These areas have been up-lit creating interesting pockets of light as one looks down the length of the building.

The tiling is a combination of dark slate and quartzite, with white and grey granite and marble inlays creating elegant detailing.

COLOURFUL TALENT

Despite the very clean, crisp look of the development, colour was an important element to introduce into the building and this was achieved through the use of artwork.

DaimlerChrysler is very active in promoting up and coming South African talent and every year, it supports a different form of art, by running a competition. So far, it has highlighted the

talent of artists, sculptures and jazz musicians. From this pool of talent, the company then commissions the artists to create something for the company, which then goes on display in all DaimlerChrysler's buildings.

In their new building, there are various paintings on the walls, as well as a large gum boot dancer, made of colourful wire and designed by artist Moses Seleko, taking centre stage in the reception area.

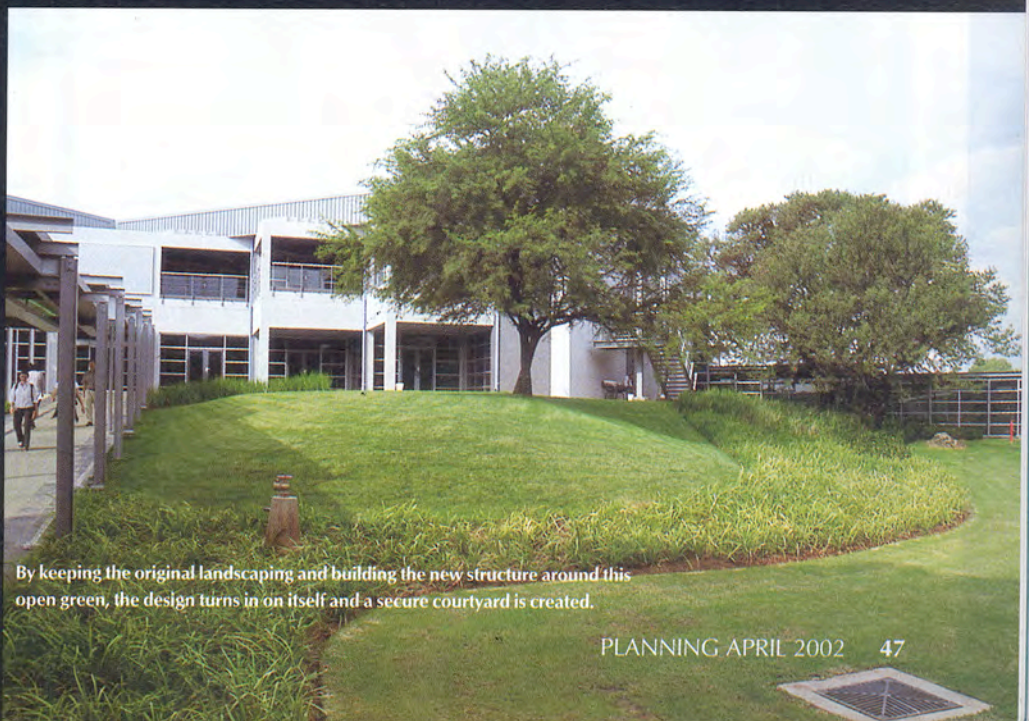
SOFTER SURROUNDS

In terms of landscaping and the inclusion of greenery, the development's setting means that the view is east to the

surrounding Swartkops hills. Closer to the building, most of the original trees have been retained, while other indigenous plants such as thorn trees have been added, to maximise the garden feel of the inner courtyard and soften the steel elements.

COMPANY IDEALS

With a building's structure being a reflection of the organisation occupying it, the extensions to DaimlerChrysler's office park harness the company's identity and the building further communicates the sheer efficiency and elegance of the corporation. □



By keeping the original landscaping and building the new structure around this open green, the design turns in on itself and a secure courtyard is created.