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A jewel worthy of the city of gold

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The celebrated Maboneng precinct in the Johannesburg CBD has an entirely new dimension – the major R1.8-b Jewel City redevelopment.

Divercity Urban Property Fund, which is backed by the experience of some of South Africa's leading property investors and developers, including Atterbury, Ithemba, RMH Property and Nedbank Property Partners, has completed the first phase of Jewel City in a two-year development programme.

Divercity's redevelopment has converted six city blocks, which have been closed for decades, into Jewel City on the site that previously housed Joburg's precious metals and diamond trade.

The mixed-use Jewel City includes 2 700 apartments and 20 000m2 of commercial space. Its 7 000 m2 of retail space is already fully occupied.

The fully-let retail space at Jewel City has secured significant brands including Shoprite, Clicks, Pep, Afrodite Beauty Bar, Roots Butchery and Grill, McDonald's, and Chicken Licken as well as a Capitec Bank branch, the primary healthcare of Jewel City Medical Centre and the fun of Five's Futbol five-a-side soccer fields.

Between all this is vibrant public space, creating a world-class 'live, work, play' precinct. Jewel City is also fully pedestrianised with a people-friendly walkway along Fox Street that integrates it fully into the Maboneng precinct. Eight massive murals by local artists adorn the walls of each of the eight buildings that make up Jewel City.

With her eye for beauty, owner of Afrodite Beauty Bar Carmen Kern-McAnda was attracted to the spectacularly gorgeous setting of the new Jewel City extension of Maboneng in the Joburg CBD.

Carmen moved Afrodite Beauty Bar from a few blocks away to Jewel City, lured by the safety and critical mass of retail that the new redevelopment offers.

Based at the entrance to Jewel City's The Diamond residential apartments along the shop-street of Fox Street and on the same block as health and beauty category leaders Clicks, Afrodite Beauty Bar are perfectly positioned for both its established clientele and passing trade.

Carmen, a qualified somatologist who is also a nail technical, chose the name Afrodite to symbolise her Greek and African heritage. Aphrodite, of course, is the Greek goddess of love and beauty, and this name alludes to the kind of experience that Carmen and her team create for their clients – a goddess experience.

Carmen previously owned a franchise and has operated under the Afrodite brand for the past two years. Going out on her own has furthered Carmen's ambition to be a force for change in the beauty industry and make improvements in areas where her experience has revealed gaps.

The new Afrodite in Jewel City aims to delight with a high-end experience where customers can feel good, look good and enjoy value.

The shop is designed with a careful combination of transparency – just enough to give passers-by a dose of pumper-envy, but with the right amount of privacy for clients to feel comfortable. And, as Carmen points out, people shop with their eyes and being able to peek inside also draws people into the doors. The invitingly luxurious pedicure chairs are raised, like thrones on a platform. Afrodite's glazed and white palette is offset by sunny splashes of bright yellow, eye-catching art features and classy yet quirky touches.

"Yellow is my happy colour. I can't help feeling warm and fuzzy, and it always brightens my day. I hope it does the same for our customers," she says. In close synergy, yellow

is also the accent colour decorating the exterior of Jewel City's buildings.

Carmen reports, "The Jewel City team have been incredibly supportive of us through the entire leasing and opening process, and it has been great working with them. This area has so much potential. It just needed the right developers to manage it. Jewel City is so convenient for users and close to everything."

Jewel City isn't only a formidable platform for big brands and small name retailers alike but also embraces the spirit of big city trading. Asked how the precinct plans on dealing with informal traders, Derrick Pautz, who heads Atterbury's Gauteng development, responds warmly that they have an important place in the precinct, as street vendors are part of the city experience. There will, however, be controls around street selling as is the norm for any well-managed neighbourhood.

Divercity doesn't only invest in and develop exceptional precincts; it also manages them – both the buildings and the public spaces between them – to the highest standards.

Jewel City's first phase spans six city blocks and directly extends the energy spine of the immensely popular Maboneng precinct. Five of the blocks held existing buildings, one of which has been reimagined and converted to residential flats, and the other four have been upgraded as commercial buildings.

While packed with an abundance of design and architectural highlights, it is the new residential development, which has been built on the one vacant block in Jewel City that could be accused of stealing the show.

The Onyx is a U-shaped building with 660 studio, one- and two-bedroom units over 11 floors. It also features basement parking and a stylish and welcoming ground-floor lobby with a secure children's play area, as well as incorporating the street-level retail of McDonald's and

Chicken Licken. The building wraps around what is possibly the largest usable public lawn in the city – perfect for a picnic – with an interactive fountain.

Jewel City also includes a Curro school, which enjoys the exclusive use of the rooftop Five's Futbol fields during school times. The five-a-side football facilities are open to the public at all other times.

The safety and security of residents, shoppers, the public and retail and office workers has been paramount for the Jewel City team. The precinct has its own CCTV system, which is monitored both on-site and remotely, and linked to private and public security responders. There is also a reassuring on-the-ground security presence.

Pautz confirms the overwhelmingly positive response to Jewel City, which was already well ahead of leasing projections before COVID-19 emerged in South Africa.

"The quality of the product, retail, residential and offices, is compelling and has been met with strong demand from tenants in all sectors. Much was invested in creating a place for people to enjoy, from transplanting 200 large established trees to providing public seating, an interactive fountain for children, public art and more. Jewel City sets a new benchmark for inner-city living, and we hope that other property investors will join our efforts and embrace this approach," says Pautz.

Jewel City in Maboneng was launched on September 24, Heritage Day, with a safe celebration including everything that makes Maboneng great, and embodying the sights, sounds and soul of this vibrant precinct, with a public programme of pop-up art, music, markets and more.

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