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| ARCHITECT AND BUILDER | | |
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JEWEL CITY

JEWEL CITY
Johannesburg

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Ithemba

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GASS Architecture Studios

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FIRE ENGINEER
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HEALTH & SAFETY CONSULTANT
Cairnmead Industrial Consultants

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
Daniel Rebel Landscape Architects

MAIN CONTRACTOR
Motheo Construction Group and
WBHO Construction JV (Blocks 2, 4, 5 & 6)
Nomad Construction (Block 1)
Pentacon Civils (Fox Street)

PHOTOGRAPHY
Louis van Zyl
Monograph

Diversity and GASS Architecture Studios has re-envisioned this all-but-defunct industrial complex into a series of thoughtful interventions that breathe new life into Johannesburg's CBD

This massive urban redevelopment project on the outskirts of the Maboneng Precinct in Johannesburg's eastern CBD breathes new life into the previously walled-off former centre of the diamond and precious metals trade industry. The complex consists of six city blocks of industrial buildings, some dating back to the 1930s. The entire area was closed off to the public in the mid 1990's and has remained an isolated and forgotten node for decades.

Jewel City includes the reinvention of this pre-existing industrial complex as an open, vibrant mixed-use precinct that introduces a more sustainable dimension (socially and economically) and new diversity to early inner-city rejuvenation projects such as the Maboneng Precinct.

Undoing Spacial Divides

Diversity, the developer, sees Jewel City as a catalytic project that will enhance the eastern CBD's urban potential, introducing crucial facilities that include new, affordable residential space, a school, healthcare and retail facilities such as a pharmacy and a supermarket and other recreational facilities that help to sustain an inclusive, prosperous and wholesome social, economic and cultural life in the inner city. Jewel City has been envisioned as an opportunity to undo apartheid-era spatial divides and transform the inner city in a way that also addresses much needed access to resources and economic opportunities in the face of a dire need for housing.





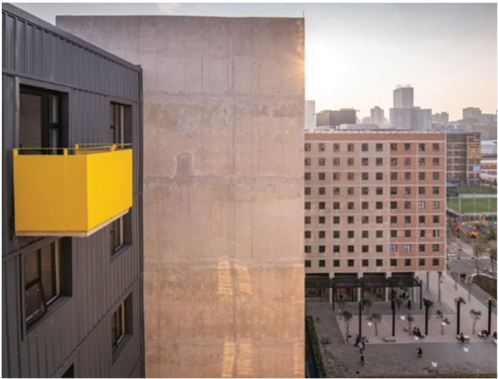


The Precinct

The architectural brief involved repurposing the existing industrial buildings, which includes the conversion of Block 1, The Diamond, into apartments, Block 2, The Ruby, into a commercial building and Block 4, The Amber, has been converted into a retail block. Block 5, The Sapphire, has been upgraded and remains the main commercial building in the precinct. Block 3, a commercial building, received minor refurbishments and will form part of a second

phase along with the redevelopment of The Amber. Block 6, The Onyx, previously an empty city block used as a parking lot, now houses a 13-storey residential building that stands as the flagship building of the Jewel City precinct.

The existing buildings were not substantially altered externally, although their façades were refurbished and adorned with local artwork. Particularly in the residential conversion (The Diamond), the central shafts have been enlarged through punching additional openings into the





existing central cores to improve the quality of light and ventilation. The new residential units include a wide range of apartment types, from micro-studios to family-size two-bedroom flats, encouraging not just economic diversity, but also social diversity.

The new residential building also adopts a similar approach in its unit mix over 11 storeys overlooking the Johannesburg skyline. Jewel City comprises of apartments, commercial spaces, various retail spaces, offices, a school, a medical facility and a 5-a-side soccer club.

Industrial Heritage

The industrial heritage of the buildings are honoured not just through the lightness of the architectural interventions to the façades by exposing the expressive minimalism of their industrial materiality – off-shutter concrete, brickwork and steel – but also through the naming of each building, which includes reference to their former incarnations as a centre of the diamond and gold trade, but reframed as more inclusive and representative of South Africa’s broader history.





The Public Realm

The Jewel City complex has been reintegrated with the existing urban fabric, mainly orientated inwards to create and sustain a new pedestrianised section of Fox Street as its central axis (further enhancing the link between Maboneng and the Iconic ABSA Precinct). This urban intervention will help to support a safe, friendly and open pedestrian-focused public environment and urban infrastructure characterised by shared public space. All the buildings along the central axis on either side of Fox Street includes retail pockets to encourage activity along the spine from east to west.

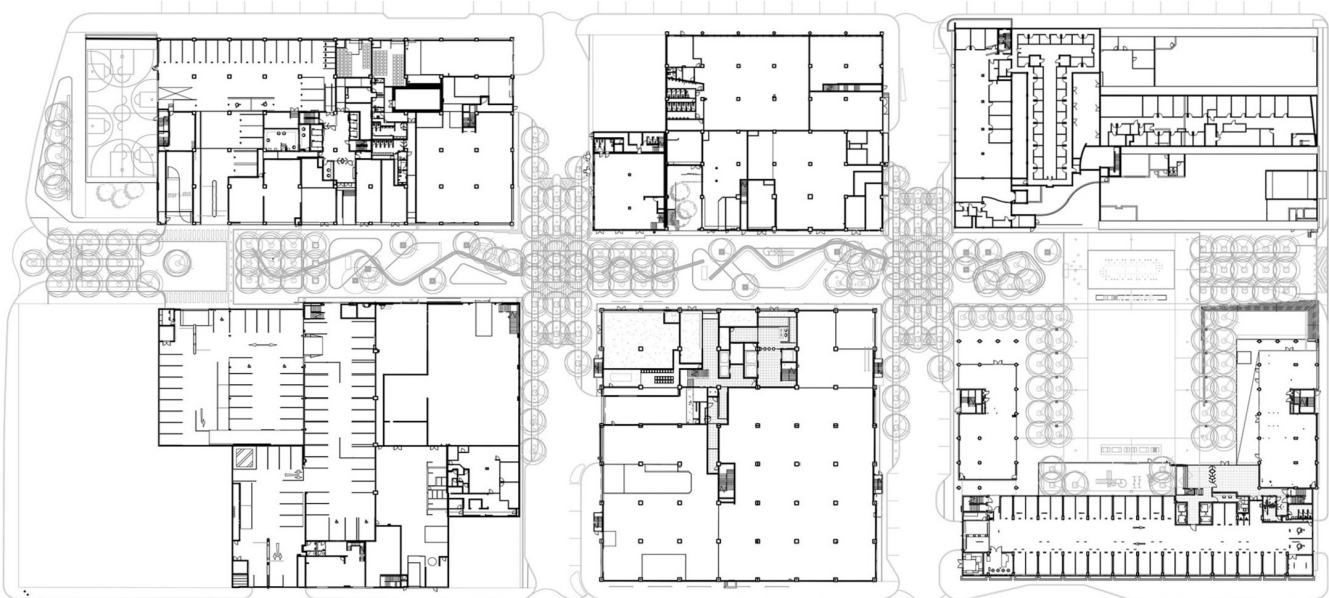
Other interventions are woven into the architectural fabric, which introduces a layer of heritage through artworks, signage, and interpretive panels. The involvement of local artists and artisans has been a priority, symbolically introducing the idea of the city's new era of prosperity being anchored in its people rather than reliance on mineral wealth, while substantiating that theory with an economic injection into the local art economy.

Architects, GASS Architecture Studios, have placed major emphasis on the precinct's public realm. While they have made pragmatic provision for vehicle access at key points around the peripheries of the precinct, where there's safe parking and drop-off areas for deliveries and services off the busy main arteries, the precinct is largely pedestrianised along its central axis.

The landscape can be accessed from six points of entry leading up to the central spine which is Fox Street. Bespoke concrete ribbon seating elements lead the visitor from one end to the other like a golden thread linking the different spaces. All the furniture and public amenities are custom designed and very robust – from bins, bollards, benches, to tree grids. Large amounts of granite cobbles were re-used from the roadway upgrade adjoining the ABSA Tower.

Asphalt is used as the main walking surface almost creating a seamless transition between the roads that cross Fox Street. Areas are demarcated with permeable gravel areas where visitors can sit and socialise. The multi-storey buildings surrounding the landscape give the opportunity

**BELOW:
PRESENTATION PLAN**





for people to look down onto the landscape design from a unique perspective and to experience the different patterns, textures and colours.

A fully indigenous plant palette has been chosen to soften the edges of the building and small urban forests are created by clumping together trees where people can pause and enjoy the dapple shade of the overhead leafy canopy. A large lawn area was proposed at the residential building where tenants and visitors alike can use the space whether it is for relaxing or appreciating a show.

The Onyx, the second of the residential buildings, features a large public square and urban park, flanked with trees and retail space as well as a safe children’s play area that spills out on to the square, animated by fountains and public art. The zero-level fountain will be easy to deactivate so that this central piazza can be used for events, including concerts, conferences, exhibitions and markets.

A Catalyst for Further Development

The quality of the public space and the broader architectural character of the precinct is

designed not only to catalyse and support a greater diversity of people within the precinct, but also to invite and encourage further investment into the CBD. The peripheral areas and sidewalks along the busy Commissioner and Main Streets have been repaired and upgraded, and additional lighting has been introduced to create a cleaner, safer space around the precinct. More broadly, the development opens up the potential for other key nodes of urban development such as Maboneng, the planned Absa Precinct and further developments along Fox Street to merge and form an integrated walkable city.

Conclusion

Sustained by a belief in the transformative potential of urban design and architecture to catalyse economic and social energy, dignity and prosperity, Divercity and GASS Architecture Studios has re-envisioned this all-but-defunct industrial complex into a series of thoughtful interventions that breathe new life into Johannesburg’s CBD, while remaining respectful of its heritage.





*Italtile Commercial
adds signature sparkle
to Maboneng's*

Jewel City

Against the backdrop of much economic uncertainty in the wake of COVID19, along with the gradual disintegration of inner city spaces, it is extremely heartening to note the number of regeneration projects in full swing around the country.

The Jewel City Precinct is one such rebuild, envisioned as a link between Maboneng and the Absa campus. The precinct has been closed to the public for several years; the vision is to pedestrianise Fox Street, to create a safe, green and energetic place for people from all walks of life to come together and enjoy the inner city.

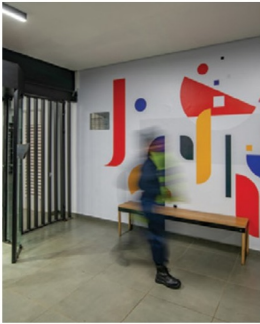
Although building is still underway, the sense of renewed energy is already evident, as the envisioned "Live, Work, Play" ethos takes root. Manhattan-style apartment living, ultra-mod offices, shops, learning centres,

coffee hubs and eateries are rising, and residents and shopkeepers are moving in. The transformation began in 2018, with project partners DiverCity, Atterbury and Ithemba Property, along with Green Building Council-registered GASS Architects, working together to develop the dream. In 2019, GASS architects approached Marius Maree of Italtile Commercial to collaborate on interior finishes.

Marius proposed porcelain tiles from local manufacturer Gryphon for durability, elegance and sustainability, complemented

with sanware from sister company Betta (with similarly stringent sustainability protocols) and water-wise Tivoli taps with low-flow features.

Italtile is proud to contribute to the regeneration of Johannesburg's inner city, and it is a privilege to provide our product knowledge, experience and Italtile mindfulness to help nourish the powerful new circular economy, as the country reimagines itself.



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