

# WESTOWN SQUARE, KZN

Westown Square is a mixed-use property and lifestyle development situated between Durban and Pietermaritzburg, with a number of interconnected precincts and spaces forming its urban core. The area has a rich equestrian and agricultural history.

## Project Team

Developer: Fundamentum Property Group

Project Management:

Orion Project Management

Main Contractor: Steffanuti Stocks Coastal

Urban Design/ Town Planning: Urban Praxis

Architects: MDS, Boogertman & Partners

Landscape Architects:

Uys & White Landscape Architects

Landscape Contractors: FSG Landscaping



The amphitheatre and tower lights. Screens were botanically inspired, with Jasmin flower cut-outs in the stainless steel sheets.

Surrounding sugar cane fields have been rehabilitated into an active green belt and The Barn, a signature feature of Westown Square, serves as a hub of artisanal activity. Overlooking the landscaped gardens, children's play area and open-air amphitheatre, the development is a reflection of its community and the broader Westown vision.

## Brief and landscape design concept

The equestrian and agricultural history, as well as the client's love of equestrian sport, formed the basis for a shopping experience in a village/country garden setting, as opposed to a shopping mall. The client says: "If people refer to the shopping or the shops as references for Westown Square,

we have lost the plot! They should refer to the project as the gardens at Westown Square."

Landscape architects Ignes de Beer and Lucas Uys state that the design concept was predominantly an agricultural theme, leading to the introduction of vineyards in all the parking areas. Every entrance is considered as a feature and a botanical theme was therefore created for each one, for example avenues of Flamboyant trees and Laurels; a rose arbor, bridge arbor and concrete 'smarties' cut into the contemporary brick road are other features at entrances. To represent the agriculture, wooden crates on wheels and wine barrels cut in half were used as planters - they contain lemon trees to

introduce the idea of orchards into the public spaces.

## Soft and hard landscaping

De Beer explains that due to Shongweni's rich heritage and exotic plants, they specified both indigenous and exotic plant material for the project. "We could reminisce and relate back to the 'old Durban', using flower colour, seasonal colour and year-round colour in our selection of trees, shrubs and groundcovers". More than 550 000 plants have been planted at Westown.

Currently, Uys has a large tree Bonsai exhibition to reflect community interests, and one *Portulacaria afra* is the oldest Spekboom bonsai in the world. This tree species holds significant local, cultural beliefs.



A play horse sculpture of stainless steel and timber connects with the equestrian history of the area, as well as the client's love of equestrian sport.



A tree Bonsai exhibition reflects community interests. *Portulacaria afra* has significant local cultural beliefs.

Hard landscaping such as paving could also be expressed in an individual way, depending on the area. Most paving is a cement G-block, specially made without chamfered edges, and intercepted with concrete and clay brick bands at the level 2 drop-off area. Bevelled concrete patterns at the level 3 entrance and a large concrete strip and clay brick block area on level 4 demarcate a marquee/outdoor events area. Town Square on level 3 is a combination of concrete and clay brick that represents a historic add-on rather than a newly designed square. Uys says that one of the biggest contributions they made to the paving throughout the project was to have less kerbs and only use straight-edged pavers

to allow a smooth transition for trolleys and prams.

An open-air amphitheatre was designed by Uys & White and built by the main contractor. It was designed to specifically make up the large level difference in the landscape between the level 3 parking and level 4. De beer says the space allowed Uys & White to design a perfectly curved structure with 'an almost Hollywood bowl-type stage' at its centre. The amphitheatre has six terraces and can seat approximately 400 people.

Screens for the outdoor lighting around the amphitheatre are botanically inspired, with Jasmin flower cut-outs in the stainless steel sheets.

The client is community-driven and

planned for various art and future sculptures to form part of the village.

### Streetscapes

The largest arrival icon for the village is a nine metre tall 'rainbow' arbor representing the Westtown logo and symbolising the 1000 hills of KZN. Various creepers have been planted to achieve quick coverage and long-term succession on the arbor.

The streetscape forms boulevards lined with trees and contains evergreen *Trachelospermum jasminoides* as a groundcover.

Trees such as *Platanus sp.*, recommended by Urban Praxis, were used for their high carbon exchange capacity. Indigenous trees planted include *Acacia cyclops*, *Celtis*



The toddler play area is a rubberised play pen enclosed by a polished concrete seat



The Barn and overview of the play area. The Barn is a signature feature of Westtown Square



Climbing nets and monkey bars in the play area



Listening flutes

*africana* and *Erythrina* species. Spekboom tree hedges were also introduced and sidewalks feature a mix of indigenous plants designed to develop into a permanent, sustainable flowering meadow.

A landscaped stairway connects the paddock area crossing Saddle Road to link with the village.

**Landscape installation and irrigation**

The client’s passion for the landscape led to the establishment of an onsite nursery two years in advance of project commencement. This was undertaken by FSG Landscaping in order to grow the six metre high trees in large bags, as well as all the groundcovers. Careful co-ordination was required right at the outset so that construction could continue without damaging the trees.

A project of this scale requires close

coordination between the main contractor, architects, landscape architects, landscape contractor and all other contractors involved. Effective collaboration amongst all these parties was essential to the project’s success.

Drainage was another challenge in that half the site was in cut (the natural topography was cut down to create a platform) almost onto bedrock, and the other half was filled in with a suitable construction sub-base material, but not necessarily good horticultural material. For this, the main contractor had to install multiple agri-drains in most of the planting areas in order to direct excess storm water away towards the storm water system.

The irrigation system, mainly drip irrigation in the village, operates and is supplied by four x 20 000 litre water tanks that harvest rain water from paved and

hard surface areas at level 4 (this does not include parking bays and driveways). A second borehole is being drilled to top up these tanks.

**Noteworthy points**

- Level 4, located on the northwest side, is considered the garden area. It features four 8x8x8 m bridge arbors spanning the driveways and marking the main entrances to the marquee area. Over the next two years, these arbors will be covered with colourful and trailing greenery;
- Also on level 4, there is a 6x6x8 m rose arbor, serving as a romantic reference. It is planted up with Peggy Martin trailing and standard roses;
- The parking area is edged with 8m wide pergolas, with grapevines and creepers;
- Scattered play spaces have been introduced in different areas and at



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Due to Shongweni's rich plant heritage, both indigenous and exotic plants were specified for the project. Flower colour and seasonal colour has been introduced throughout



Skywalk tree sculptures

different levels. A sculptured horse by Johan Nortje is a 3.5 m tall play structure of stainless steel and timber, standing next to a skywalk sculpture on trowel rubber floor matting. The toddler's play area is a 300m<sup>2</sup> rubberised play pen enclosed by a polished concrete seat;

- Herb and vegetable planter boxes, along with a vineyard, are part of the garden experience.

### New economic hub

The Westtown urban core forms part of the 2000 ha Shongweni urban development. Going forward, it will create a new economic hub and bring socio-economic benefits to Ethekwini's outer west region.

Information and photos supplied by Lucas Uys and Iqes de Beer of Uys & White Landscape Architects.

## WESTOWN SQUARE AT PLAY

Microzone Trading 980 CC specialises in custom-designed, creative steel art and play pieces for children of all ages. At Westtown Square, their scope of work was a turnkey solution for the various play elements. They undertook design, manufacture and installation of the following items:

- sculpt and play tree structures on a skywalk – a challenging installation due to the size and design of the trees which were pre-manufactured off-site, painted, transported by crane trucks to Shongweni and re-assembled on site;
- a toddler play area with mounds and undulations, compising spatial nets, slides, tunnels and climbing grips;

- listening flutes;
- a cube play system with climbing nets and monkey bars, manufactured from wood and cargo netting;
- horse sculpture made of stainless steel and timber, and serving as a striking visual landmark;
- cube play with slide made of steel and fibreglass; and
- safety matting in all areas.

The play area is an example of how public spaces can be transformed into imaginative worlds that inspire wonder and joy for children.

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