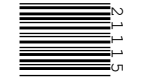
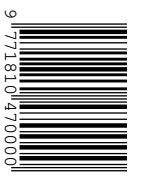


VISI

SKYLAR, HOTEL ROBOT AT CAPE TOWN'S HOTEL SKY



SA R95
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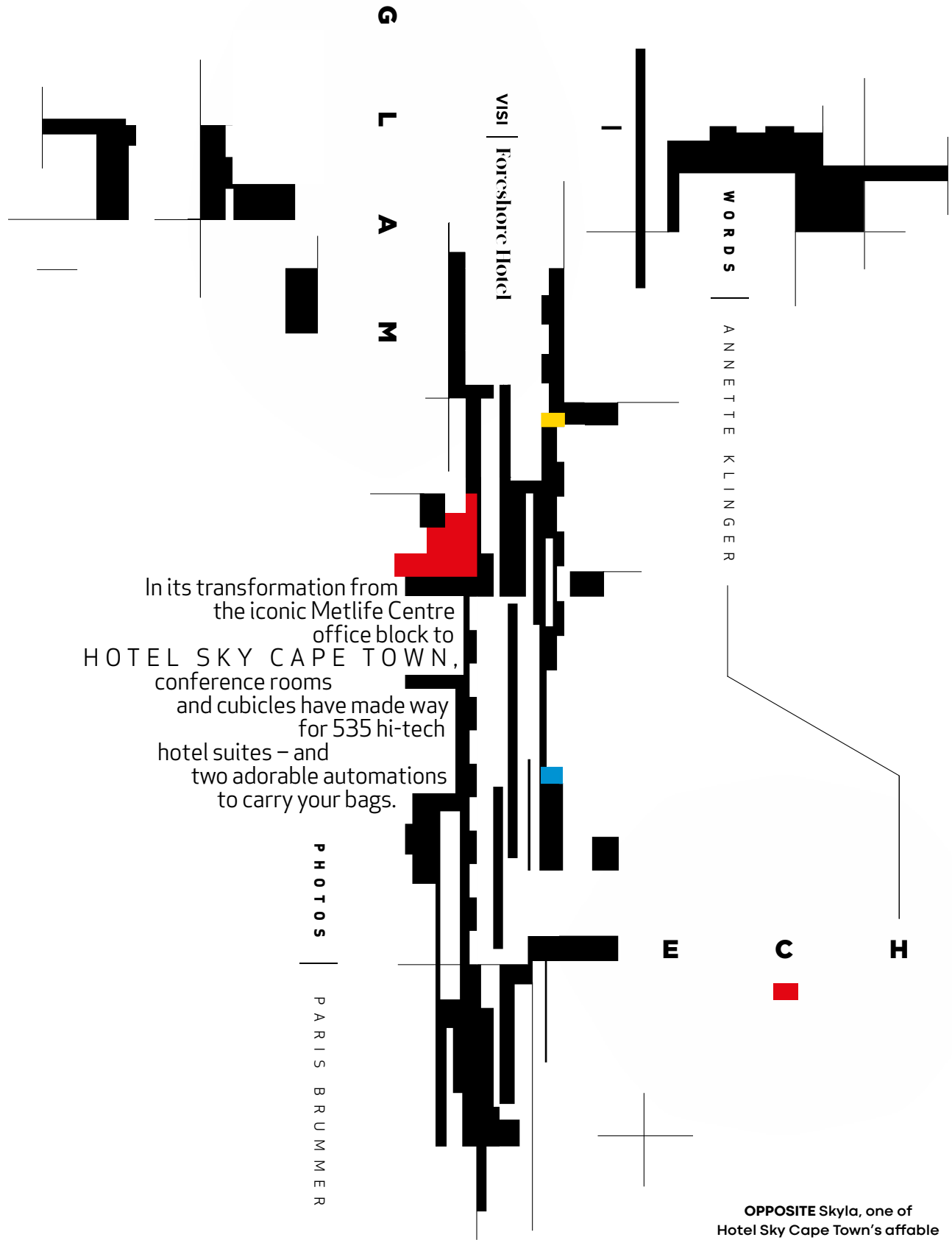
DECOR • DESIGN • ARCHITECTURE AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2021

FUTURE FORWARD

BOLD NEW FRONTIERS IN ARCHITECTURE INTERIORS DESIGN AND ART

TRAILBLAZING HOTELS STRIKING FURNITURE ECOFRIENDLY FASHION

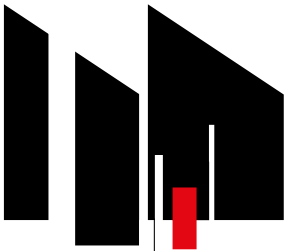




In its transformation from the iconic Metlife Centre office block to HOTEL SKY CAPE TOWN, conference rooms and cubicles have made way for 535 hi-tech hotel suites – and two adorable automations to carry your bags.

OPPOSITE Skylia, one of Hotel Sky Cape Town's affable robotic concierges, ready to direct guests to their rooms.





Hello, welcome to Hotel Sky. I am Ariel. How can I assist you?” Delivered in a soothing, measured tone, the welcoming refrain sounds every few minutes – whenever a guest enters the lobby of the newly minted Hotel Sky in Cape Town’s Foreshore. The voice emanates not from one of the friendly receptionists, but from a robot with expressive LCD eyes that has been programmed to answer more than 2 000 questions. And bring you room service.

Joined by her equally helpful colleague Skyla, the idiosyncratic AI assistant guides guests into a brave new world of automatic check-ins and app-enabled key cards on their phone – the future of hospitality, according to Hotel Sky managing director Paul Kelley.

Hi-tech machinations aren’t all that’s been grabbing Capetonians’ attention. Hotel Sky is situated in the former Metlife Centre, diagonally opposite the Cape Town International Convention Centre. Known for its striking stepped profile and the curved, floor-to-ceiling bay window on the facade, the 27-storey Modernist building was designed by the late architect Doug Roberts and used to hold the title of the city’s tallest skyscraper. Constructed from precast concrete panels, it still exudes the stately, austere beauty of its office-block days. Until you step inside.

With leopard print, palm trees, gold mosaic, gleaming marble, crystal chandeliers, velvet ropes and vertical gardens, it’s a little bit Las Vegas – and a *lot* of everything else. Conceptualised by Paul and his business partner Johan Franck, the irrepressibly OTT interior is designed to evoke a uniquely South African experience among its guests. “Often, when you walk into the foyer of a hotel in South Africa, you might as well be in Europe or America,” says Johan. “We live in a country known for its gold and diamonds, wildlife, colourful birds and flowers. This hotel is a celebration of all these elements.”

By keeping the footprint of the rooms small and transforming communal areas into experiential destinations, Paul and Johan are able to offer guests an upmarket hotel experience with conspicuously low room rates. Hotel Sky Cape Town has 535 rooms with an average floor space of 20 square metres – but it also has a swanky cocktail bar, a restaurant, a breakfast room, two sprawling pool decks, a gym, a shop, and a rooftop tower ride that takes you 30 metres into the air to appreciate a bird’s-eye view of the city, only to plummet you back down at what feels like supersonic speed.

The Metlife building is not the first office space that Paul and Johan have transformed into a hotel. In Cape Town alone, they converted a century-old warehouse at the V&A Waterfront and an old public-works building off Heerenracht in Pier Place into two Signature Lux Hotels. In all three instances, Jo Noero was brought on board as design architect to reconfigure the structures’ inner workings into liveable hospitality spaces.

“One of the nice things about working on a project like Hotel Sky is that the original building was designed by a good architect who knew his craft,” says Jo, who first saw the Metlife building during an architectural tour of the city he did as a student in the 1980s. “I’ve always argued that the way to make a building sustainable is to design it well, so that someone else can take it over in 50 years’ time and convert it to a completely new use.”

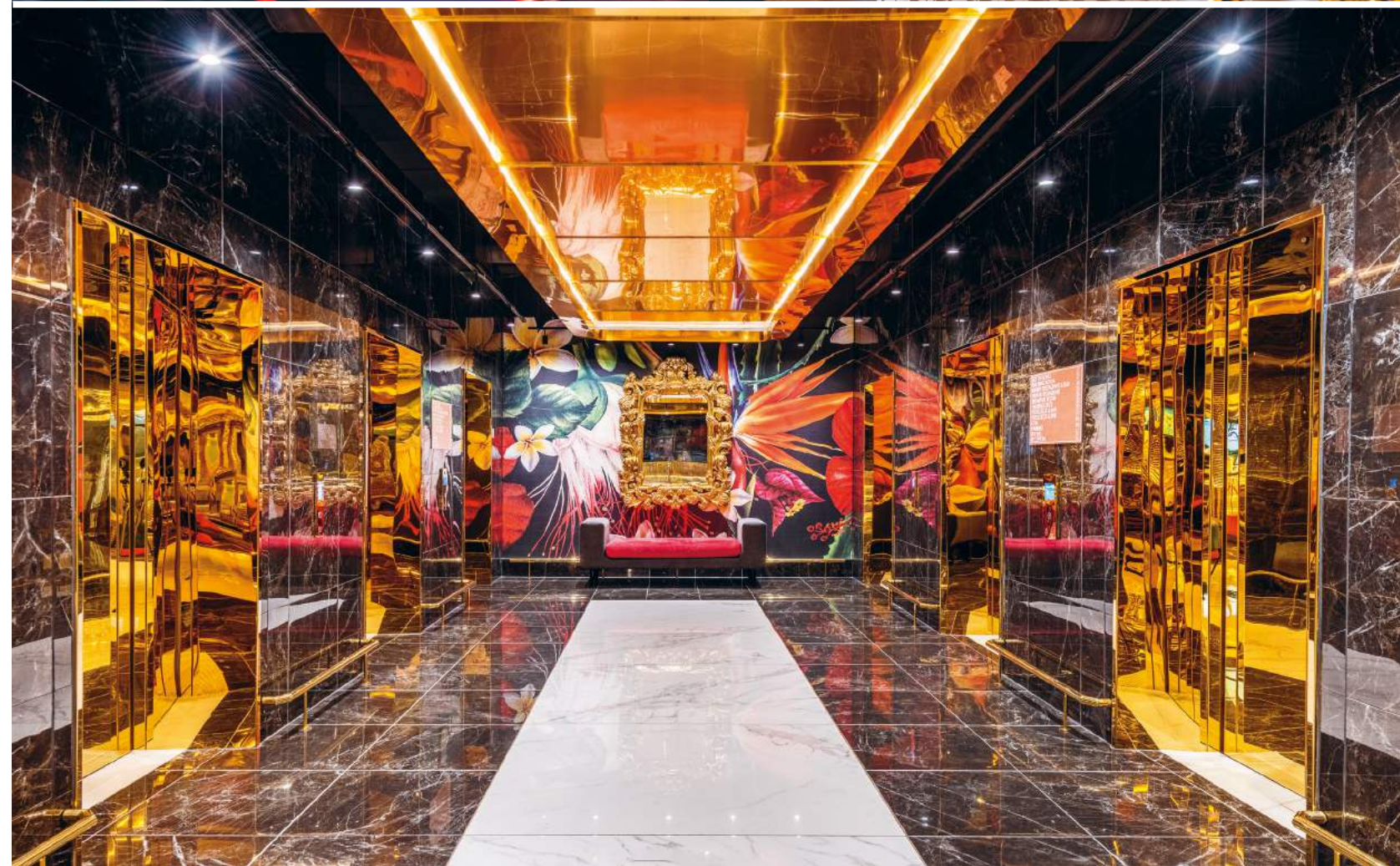
As for fitting in the rooms, Jo worked according to a structural grid based on a parking grid for three cars. “To make it work, we essentially had to get three bedrooms into three parking bays,” says Jo. To maximise every square centimetre, Jo worked with the narrow, rectangular configurations rather than against them. Standard-room guests, for example, enter their room via the bathroom, with a double vanity on the left and a shower and loo in separate compartments on the right, and then step through a lounge onto an elevated platform that houses the bed. “What’s nice about the rooms is that we have vast volume, because we stripped out all the existing ceilings and services to raise the height.”

While you could comfortably Netflix and chill for the duration of your stay, the appeal of the hotel is that there’s so much to explore within the confines of its walls. “It’s like a mini-city that you don’t have to leave,” says Jo. He’s right. Just ask Skyla and Ariel...

hotelsky.co.za | noeroarchitects.com

CONSTRUCTED FROM PRECAST CONCRETE PANELS, IT STILL EXUDES THE STATELY, AUSTERE BEAUTY OF ITS OFFICE-BLOCK DAYS. UNTIL YOU STEP INSIDE.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The exterior of the former Metlife Centre lights up a vivid red when the sun goes down; eight crystal chandeliers by LDC Décor sparkle in the reception area; the elevator lobby, with wallpaper by Sasi, marble by Italtile and a custom light fixture by Noero Architects.





THIS PAGE The self-check-in area by Bright Horse goes for gold with a custom LED light fitting by Noero Architects, mosaic tiles by Limegreen and waiting rope stands by The Silver Flair. **OPPOSITE** The waiting area is a mashup of pattern, texture and colour.

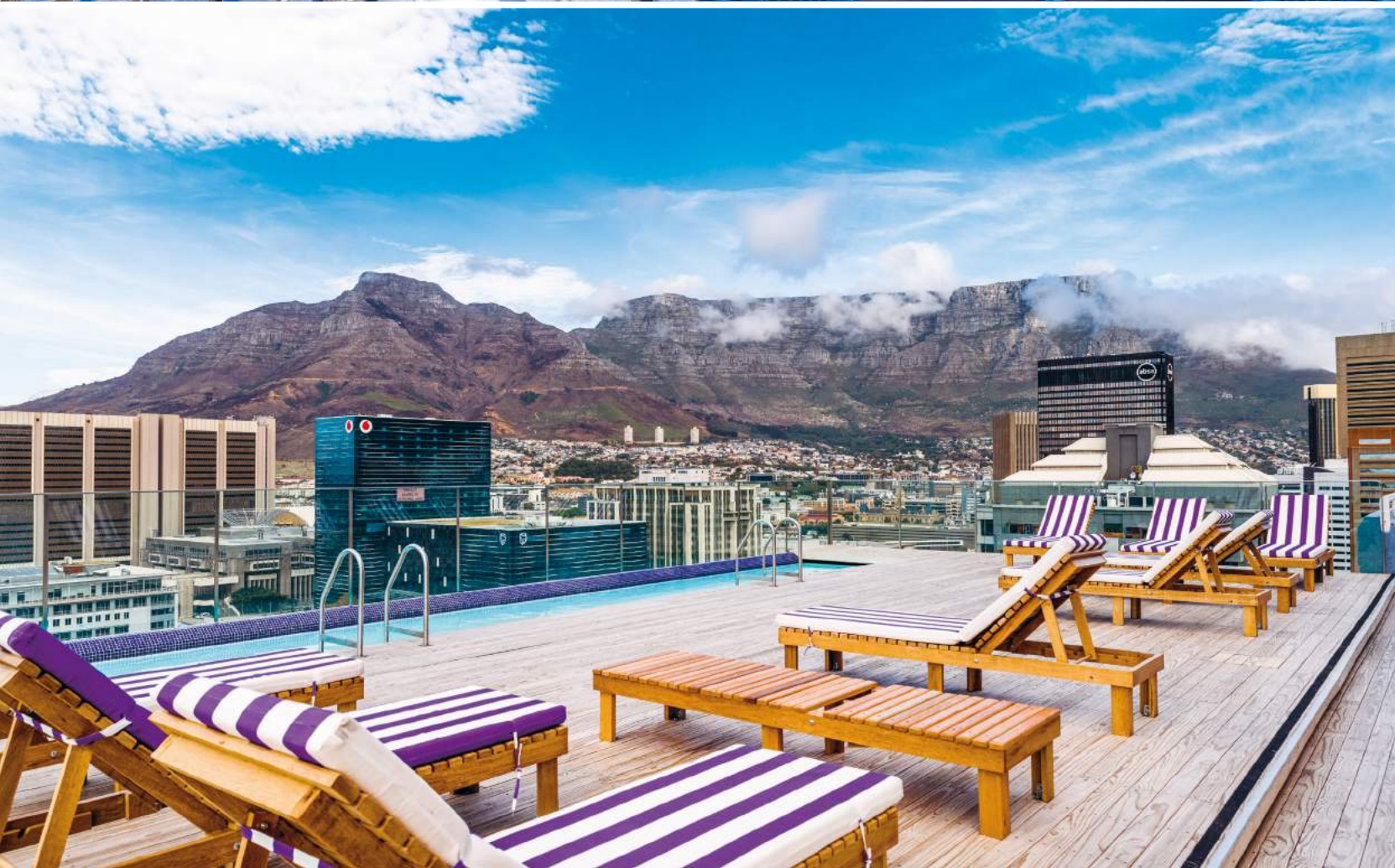


In sharp relief to the lobby's ornate decor, the exposed services in its ceiling were transformed into an industrial-chic showpiece with clever red-and-black colour blocking.





THIS PAGE Standard rooms are entered via galley bathrooms. The sleeping/lounge area is decorated with Sasi wallpaper, quirky lights by Eagle Lighting, a Hertex-upholstered headboard designed by Noero Architects, and a sleeper couch by PH Design. **OPPOSITE** With multi-functional joinery designed by Noero Architects and built by Ram Shopfitting and Libra Joiners & Interiors, the roomier suites offer sweeping views of the city.



THIS PAGE The building's iconic "steps", with two cantilevered pool decks - one off the 17th storey, the other off the 20th. **OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** 27 on Long - Hotel Sky's bar on the 27th floor - is illuminated by pendants from The Lighting Warehouse; the Sky-Hi Ride, a 30-metre thrill ride on the roof, is the first of its kind in Africa; one of the two pool areas - with a pool by Pool Designs, decking by Decks4Life and loungers by Metriplex Retail - that cantilever off the back "steps" of the building to offer unobstructed city views.

F O R E V E R
F O R N O W

Agora, a new development by architects ANDRÉ KRIGE
and THEO KRUGER of

TWOFIVEFIVE ARCHITECTS,

is built to blend in with its surroundings
- but this striking building is by no means a wallflower.

WORDS
CELESTE JACOBS

Okay
Bye.

PHOTOS
PARIS BRUMMER

PRODUCTION | ANNEMARIE MEINTJES

visi | Observatory Apartments

THIS PAGE Agora stands six storeys above street level in its Observatory neighbourhood. "We had to be sensitive to the scale of the other buildings in the area, which are mainly brightly coloured single-storey row houses," says architect André Krige. OPPOSITE Agora is full of personal touches - these include custom door handles with messages ranging from motivational to tongue-in-cheek.



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for over half a decade. "I designed this building in 2015 – it went through some changes, but the concept remained the same," says André Krige of TwoFiveFive Architects. "The primary intention was to create something better than what was the norm for the area, but to keep to a feasible project budget."

Initially, one might think "Agora" is derived from the Greek word for public spaces, but the appellation actually originates from the Portuguese word for "now". This idea is something that André and his team believe the building embodies. It's created to live in concurrent harmony with its occupants – a physical reminder of living in the present – and to architecturally transport people between yesterday and tomorrow, while always bringing them back to today.

The building's roots are firmly planted in its neighbourhood, honouring the colours and plastering techniques used in the surrounding dwellings that make up the lively and architecturally colourful suburb of Observatory. This thoughtfulness

and consideration have had a profound impact on Agora's design, and make it stand out from the crowd.

"In terms of colour, we flew a drone over the site and captured photographs towards the mountain and back to the harbour side," explains André. "We then pixellated those images – and from there we drew a base colour scheme." The concept serves as a form of architectural camouflage, since depending on how you look at Agora, the colours match the direction you're facing.

André and his team didn't stop there. "We couldn't make Agora smaller [than its current six storeys]," he says, "so instead we kept asking how we could make it identify with its surroundings." This is why the project team also came up with the idea of embodying the surroundings with more than just colour. As André explains, "When you look around Observatory, you see single-storey row houses with a stoep in front... and almost every house has a different plaster technique

– everything from banana plaster to scallops and more. We worked within a kilometre radius of Agora, and each plaster technique we found in that area was incorporated into the building."

Agora's interior is versatile, and was designed with the intention of creating spaces to truly come home to. "The building caters for a wide variety of age groups and people at different stages of their life, but it is mainly occupied by young professionals and postgraduate students," says project architect Joné Krös.

The interiors also embrace local design. "We specified locally produced terracotta for the floors; Joe Paine designed a light for the apartments; terrazzo tops by Notation were introduced; and we included custom-made kitchens, and lighting by Kink," says André. More unique touches abound, including custom door handles that feature motivational messages such as "Go Get Them!" and "Hello, Good Looking".

At first glance, Agora rises boldly upwards from the pavement, standing before you with the proud stature of a mini-mountain. Yet, as you start to get to know it better, there's a sort of tenderness in the building's design that begins to make itself evident. It's got the roar of a lion, and the playful familiarity of a beloved house cat – and this dichotomy is what makes it so endearing. twofivefive.co.za

OPPOSITE In line with the idea of blending in while standing out, the brand identity for Agora was designed by Carina Comrie of Büro Comrie. André explains that this was carried through to all the way-finding and signage elements of the building.

“WE KEPT ASKING HOW WE COULD MAKE AGORA IDENTIFY WITH ITS SURROUNDINGS.”
– ARCHITECT ANDRÉ KRIGE



THIS PAGE A considered use of space offers a versatile living area that doubles as a place of work. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Agora's dynamic interiors were designed to create spaces to truly come home to; the built-in light fixtures play into the apartments' unique personality; well-lit spaces keep the inside in tune with the outside world, consolidating the sense of harmony in the building; a vertical rectangular window frames the suburban view.



"The fitout of the show unit was quite interesting," says project architect Joné Krös.
"This is not your typical apartment building, and the look and feel of the interiors plays on that."



THIS PAGE While the flooring throughout each unit is terracotta with grey grout, the bathrooms feature grey wall tiles and terracotta grout. **OPPOSITE** The ideal of creating a balanced space that is both connected to its environment and able to functionally stand on its own is brought to life.

