

Propertuity, LOT-EK collaborate on SA's first large-scale residential container development

By  Sindy Peters

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Property developer [Propertuity](#) - known for taking urban design well beyond the box with its cross-border collaborations - partnered recently with award-winning New York-based architecture firm and upcycling experts [LOT-EK](#) in creating South Africa's first large-scale residential container development, [Drivelines](#).



The project comprises a multi-level structure created using upcycled shipping containers built over what was originally a one-storey car repair shop. A rental-only development, Drivelines is geared towards young people looking for quality spaces, but within an affordable range. The units are compact, but have large windows, each with its own outdoor space.

We interviewed [Giuseppe Lignano](#), co-founder of LOT-EK, to find out more about the inspiration behind the Drivelines concept, the upcycled materials used, and the impact of employing thoughtful design in affordable housing developments.

■ *What inspired the concept behind the Drivelines project?*

There are several inspirations:

The site played a big role:

- The triangular shape of the site was very inspiring for the massing of the building: the idea of creating two blocks that intersect at the eastern corner, which in turn create a triangular courtyard - the core of the "social" life of the building - with walkways and open balconies along its edge at all floors, the stairs and lift in the converging eastern corner and the pool on the open western side.
- The tangential placement of the building along Albertina Sisulu inspired the "billboard-like" concept of the building, with a sheer/flush front facade with its strong graphic presence and the back/yard side very articulated with circulation infrastructure.
- The street view from Albrecht Street where the building becomes a strong graphic backdrop.

We have been working with diagonal patterns for a while now and for this project we were very inspired by geometric African prints. That generated the shape of all the openings in the building: windows, ground floor entrance portico and openings along the courtyard walkways.

The idea of Drivelines being a community of young people desirous to return to downtown Johannesburg not just to attend cultural events, but also to live there. So the idea of inexpensive, open studio apartments, each with its own outdoor space looking onto the walkways and the yard is there to support this community with interactive, communal space. Also, Propertyu's plan to use Drivelines as its first property on its new Flow system added a virtual layer of interaction to the physical one - tying residents and management together in a continuum. The idea of a building that functions as a village within a huge metropolitan area fosters super-local and metropolitan needs and aspirations.

Finally, as per most of our buildings, we were inspired by the structural qualities and the geometry of the shipping container and the mandate from the client to create compact apartments with outdoor space. And like with most of our container buildings, we aimed at countering the limited interiors of the container by maximising space within them for a lofty interior feel with large glass walls opening to the outside.



■ **Was it difficult getting approval for the large-scale residential container development - it being a first in SA?**

Not really. Every building we design and build is a first in its jurisdiction. Over the past 20 years we have developed a true construction technology for the shipping container with our engineers and container experts/manufacturers that includes all relevant technical details. This allows us to provide authorities with a code compliant architectural and engineering design. Because we submitted these detailed construction drawings and specifications, we received very few questions/comments from council. The relationship with council was totally smooth and efficient also thanks to the participation of the local architect of record we worked with, Anita du Plessis, who has a lot of experience with the general approval processes.



■ ***Tell us a bit about some of the upcycled materials used.***

The main object is of course the 'ISO shipping container' which constitutes the structure of the entire building, with the exception of the stairs and lift shaft. The container also generates the outermost envelope of the building and its graphic visual impact on the urban environment. We decided to purchase only green and blue containers to create respectively the southern and the northern blocks of the building. We wanted the structural and visual strength of the containers to play the main role. Made of 100% cor-ten steel – the toughest steel used for construction - the container offers one of the most resistant and durable structures possible. We also wanted to use, rather than hide, the colours, texture, graphics and worn-out patina of the used containers to create a strong addition to the exciting, gritty, contemporary feel of Maboneng.

All the cutouts from the containers (to open up windows etc.) were also reused for various purposes, structural, architectural and even some small details like the door handles. We are also planning on creating some sculptural work with the remaining ones.



■ ***What has the public's reception been like to the development?***

The reception has been amazing. From some locals already calling it the "monument", to our Instagram followers sending feedback, and esteemed colleagues travelling through Joburg and sending us kudos via email. We are so looking forward to being there for the launch to see first hand what people's reaction/reception really is.

▣ ***What does the incorporation of thoughtful design do for an affordable housing development?***

It makes it human. It helps in our collective pursuit of happiness. It is high time that architects had the chance to concentrate again on housing - instead of bringing their valuable contribution only to prestigious cultural institutions or high-end condominiums. We feel that low-income housing, as well as housing for the middle class, is a very neglected sector around the world in terms of design and innovation. It is time to concentrate on that again. Together with food, shelter is our first need as humans and there is an opportunity now for it to be completely renewed.

▣ ***Does Propertuity plan to take the Drivelines concept beyond Joburg?***

This is obviously a question for Jonathan [Jonathan Liebmann, founder and CEO of Propertuity]. We have been talking about Durban... and we have been talking about NYC too!

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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