



Images courtesy of Paragon Architects

Dancing in the lane

Celebrating the new year, Karen Eicker writes about the new interplay of innovative design and technology.

Designed primarily as an iconic building, Alice Lane Towers is demanding the ultimate in commitment and cooperation from all parties involved.

"We wanted to develop a unique building; something different from the other Sandton buildings," says Stuart Gibbs of Zenprop.

Anthony Orelowitz of Paragon Architects notes: "The success of the building lies in the intention to create a piece of sculpture rather than a traditional building. As we have done that, the form has become quite powerful. We have tried to create the impression of two stand-alone buildings with the taller, more dominant building on the south. This gives a greater sense of height – if the building had been a single mass, it would have seemed quite squat. By having two towers, one taller than other, a sense of verticality has been achieved, as well as dynamism between the buildings".

The two most apparent architectural devices that have been used

to make a statement are the curved forms of the towers, and the visually- and structurally-innovative glazing system. "We spent a lot of time resolving how the building would terminate at the edges because the glass extends about 3 m past the edge of the structure on the sides, and 5 m above the structure on the top of the building," says Orelowitz. "On the north and south elevations, the façade is essentially a curtain wall applied to the office structure and, where the glass extends beyond the edges, it will be expressed as such. At these points, we have taken the backing material off the glass so you will be able to see where the structure of the building starts and stops behind the glass. From a construction point of view, it has been very difficult to find people to do the glazing and cleaning systems for this design. The systems don't exist so we have had to design them for the first time. We are custom-making various systems and components of the build-

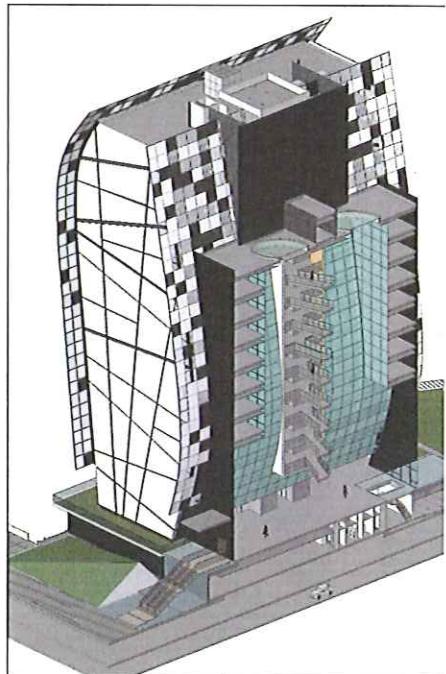


ing to achieve the desired outcome." Trevor Dillon, contracts manager for Tiber Bonvec Construction, says the glazed façades are made up of a unitised aluminium and glass system with components that slot into one another, and eliminate the need for excessive scaffolding.

According to Orelowitz, because of the building's complex form and the limited availability of local skills, constructing the design has been challenging and everybody on the project has been stretched. "The

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only way to make these architectural forms work cost-effectively was to use angled columns to transfer the loads. This gave a lot of freedom in expressing the edges of the building by extending the slabs out and pulling them back. Initially the shape of the buildings was quite symmetrical but, as we became more confident with the structure, we could start to create different kinds of energy. This sets up an interesting movement between the buildings and they almost look like they're dancing." ■