A MILESTONE IN CONSIDERED DESIGN SOLUTIONS

30

YEARS OF **GAPP ARCHITECTS**
& URBAN DESIGNERS

Singita Kwitonda Lodge
Photographs courtesy of GAPP Architects & Urban Designers'

GAPP Architects & Urban Designers have a portfolio of projects that propels them to the forefront of the local industry. Guided by the ethos of collaboration, innovation, and creation, the firm is dedicated to crafting solutions to obstacles in our ever-changing world. From urban design and architecture to spatial planning, their legacy is a collection of some of the country's best builds. To honour their 30th anniversary this year, we spoke to the GAPP Team about their achievements, goals, and role in making a difference.

With such a highly esteemed stature in the industry, let's go back to where it all started. How did GAPP begin?

In 1979, two Johannesburg-based architects, the Schlapobersky Partnership and Glen Gallagher, merged to form the Gallagher Schlapobersky Collaborative. Four years later, the company changed its name to Gallagher, Aspoas, Poplak, Senior (which would become known as GAPS). GAPS went on to win the Newtown Cultural Precinct competition in 1987, leading to a working relationship with David Jack, an adjudicator on the competition panel, who later became Managing Director of the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront Company. It was David Jack who introduced GAPS to Prinsloo, Parker, Flint, Elliott, and Van den Heever, and who connected them to the initial urban design of the V&A Waterfront project and the architectural design of selected buildings. This collaboration resulted in the successful joint venture company Gallagher Prinsloo Associates (GPA), established in 1993. Shortly thereafter, the two practices formally merged to become the firm we know today – GAPP Architects and Urban Designers.

After three decades of producing projects, which ones really helped put the firm on the map?

The V&A Waterfront certainly stands out. GAPP successfully transformed a working harbour into a thriving tourism hub while preserving the original harbour's activities, such as fishing and port operations. The Waterfront project now welcomes over 24 million annual visitors, solidifying its status as a prominent South African tourist destination. Our mission was to seamlessly balance the commercial and tourism aspects of the project, which was achieved through an integrated urban design and architectural approach, effectively meeting the diverse needs of all sectors. Our portfolio spans cultural, commercial, mixed-use, educational, development frameworks, and infrastructure projects, and considered design, responsive architecture, and resilient urban design have solidified our position as one of the continent's premier architectural and urban design practices.



Tswalu Loapi



Faru Faru Lodge

Apartheid Museum

Rob Meek, Andrew Flint, Ivor Prinsloo, Dennis Elliot



With your projects reaching into a variety of sectors, such as architecture, urban design, and spatial planning, how do you ensure you incorporate your company's ethos into each area of work?

We employ an 'urban' approach to architecture. The alignment between our Johannesburg and Cape Town studios is strongly evident, particularly in the collaborative approach for the greater good of a project and the shared mindset of integrating architecture with urban design. A differentiator in the GAPP approach is the distinct, principle-driven skillset of urban design, offering an expert perspective on urban coordination. We are enthusiastic about collaborating with other design professionals to enhance our final product through our shared approach; It strengthens the practice of adopting an urban attitude towards architecture.

How has the South African environment, such as culture, heritage, and social climate, influenced your approach to projects?

Adaptive reuse of old buildings is a significant focus for us, combining heritage and sustainability without sensationalism. Our approach prioritises retaining a building's historical, architectural, and cultural value through careful and sensitive restoration which respects the past while serving the present, combining preservation, compatibility, adaptability, and expertise. Our aim is to create accessible, functional, and culturally rich spaces that enhance public engagement.

Most of your projects have been in South Africa, but which other countries have you designed for over these 30 years?

Beyond our projects in South Africa, we have also designed the Faru Faru Lodge, nestled in Singita's private reserve in northern Tanzania, and the Singita Kwitonda Lodge and Kataza House in Rwanda, located on the edge of Volcanoes National Park. Britam Tower, a 30-story, 30 000 m² multi-tenanted office development for British American Investments, in Nairobi's upscale Upper Hill area, is another of our projects abroad.

What type of client proposals excite and inspire the team the most?
GAPP is committed to pushing boundaries in thinking, design, and service, and projects are selected where our involvement can truly make a significant difference. We are inspired most when embracing challenging projects because of the gratification of creating a positive impact. Sally Tsiliyiannis, one of our GAPP Directors, attributes the three decades of success to the capacity to excel in diverse projects and an unwavering dedication to delivering optimal results.

To what would you attribute the team's 30 years of accomplishments and successes?
GAPP cultivates a culture of mentorship and skills development, empowering young architects to handle complex projects and diverse challenges, and nurturing talent with abundant experience and growth prospects. Staff longevity at GAPP is sustained by its management teams, diverse projects, and innovative approach, and we value diversity and the ability to provide distinctive client solutions. Our three-decade legacy forms the bedrock for our future explorations and innovations in the decades of success we see lying ahead.

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