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## Architectural practice homes in on urban renewable prospects

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Architectural firm dhk Architects, a subsidiary of the dhk group, has set its sights on becoming more involved in South African urban renewal projects, particularly in Johannesburg.

The dhk group is a design-based, inter-disciplinary group of companies, comprising architecture, urban design and interior design.

"We have done a lot of urban renewal work and I think that the city of Johannesburg has a large stock of old buildings that can be converted into residential opportunities," executive chairperson **Derick Henstra** says.

He cites the City of Cape Town as a successful example of urban renewal, where his company was involved in the upliftment and renewal and hopes to use some of that expertise in Johannesburg. He adds that Durban can also benefit from an urban renewal initiative.

The company is also looking for opportunities in neighbouring countries and further into Africa. "We have been appointed to design a mixed-use waterfront development in Maputo, Mozambique, as well as in Accra, Ghana," says Henstra.

He points out that the dynamics in the architectural industry are changing rapidly and the challenge is finding good resources. In a recession, people disappear into the woodwork, he says.

"Our target is to convert most of the projects in the pipeline. "We have done an incredible amount of work in what I call 'investment time work' for future projects, which will hopefully soon come to fruition."

Over 12 major projects in the country have been completed in the past two years by dhk Architects. "We were the architects for the new Melrose Arch expansion. We have also been appointed to redesign the Village Walk, in Sandton, and are preparing the design for a shopping centre behind Mary Fitzgerald Square, in Newtown," explains Henstra.

The company is also involved in the design of five high-rise projects in Cape Town and Johannesburg, as well as in Italy.

"As urban areas are becoming more and more built up, high-rise is a viable option to consider. "High rise structures can be an alternative, especially since green high-rise buildings are the future." He notes that there is enough technical expertise in the country for the construction of high-rise buildings.

"I don't believe that there will necessarily be an 'African Aesthetic' to our high-rise buildings - they should perform according to their natural environment."

The company is currently involved in the construction of the Ridgeside office development for Zenprop, in Umhlanga, in KwaZulu-Natal. The first building of this group of office buildings will be occupied by Nedbank's regional head office and was the second building in South Africa to be awarded a four-star green design rating by the Green Building Council of South Africa.

"The aim was not just to create an environment or a structure that is eco-friendly but to use the natural elements, such as light and elevations, to establish a working space that lives and breathes with its natural surroundings. "I think we have been able to achieve this," says Henstra.

He adds that innovative design, coupled with the latest in environment-friendly building technologies and materials, means that the entire 31 500-m<sup>2</sup> complex is energy efficient, cost effective and [engineeringnews.co.za/.../high-rise-b...](http://engineeringnews.co.za/.../high-rise-b...)

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sustainable, and has a vastly reduced carbon footprint when compared with similar developments.

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