

BOOGERTMAN + PARTNERS – ARCHITECTURAL FIRM OF THE YEAR & BOB VAN BEBBER – SA PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR

By Mzukona Mantshontsho



Boogertman+Partners are proud to have been chosen as the *Firm of the Year – Architecture 2018/2019* in the recent South African Professional Services Awards (SAPSA) 2019 Awards announced at a gala dinner in the Monte Casino Ballroom, Johannesburg.

“This award means a great deal to us” says Richard Wilkins, a company director. “To be recognized by our peers and the industry for the hard work and committed service we put in to our work

makes it easier to excel even further”

Further accolades for leadership skills were handed out to one of the directors of the firm, Bob van Bebber. Celebrating his 21st year at Boogertman+Partners this year, the award for Professional of the Year –Architecture 2018/2019 was topped off with further recognition as the Overall Professional of the Year 2018/2019. A wonderful acknowledgement of his individual dedication to architecture

and contribution to South African business.

“Boogertman+Partners is the largest architectural practice in Africa and ranked 106th in the world by the BD WA Top 100 Survey. With offices in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Durban and Kenya we aim to extend this level of professionalism, with our teams and partners, in all of our future projects and growth territories. Thank you to the whole

Boogertman+Partners team, our clients and the other winners EY/Werksmans for whom we did buildings, and also all the professionals who contributed to our success. These awards send a message to all those in the construction industry to 'stay in the ring' in these turbulent times," said Bob van Bebber.

Prior to the Awards, The South African Professional Services Academy spoke to Senior Director at Boogertman + Partners Bob van Bebber about his personal and professional journey.

What does it mean to you that your colleagues have entrusted you with the position of Senior Partner?

We have a relatively flat structure as an organisation. As much as I might be senior in terms of shareholding, my role is to help everybody in my team put their right foot forward, help the practice to have the right passion for doing the right things, delivering great and quality work consistently, on time and on budget. We have a team of around 250 people, so there is no way that one person can look after every design, my role is to encourage my team to deliver the best, so do the other team leaders.

What would you like to have achieved by the end of your term?

What is important is driving the passion and doing the right thing for the practice, be it for our clients, our peers or the architectural fraternity. Whatever solution we give, it should be because we believe in it, we shouldn't give solutions we don't believe in. We need to be able to sell the product we deliver, if we believe in the product, then we have done great.

How would you describe your management and leadership styles?

I take responsibility for the final product and the service delivered by my team at the end of the day. My leadership style has to be collaborative, have the

hard conversations and weigh up the options, win or lose some of the battles as it a team effort that must be done considering time and affordability. Mine is to get our team members to express themselves as much as they can given what we need to achieve, give our team players space and intervene and direct the conceptual process.

What makes you tick or keeps you awake at night with respect to your position?

The opportunity to make a difference and have a positive impact on the Built Environment. I love the opportunity of changing the experiences of end-users of our projects. Whether it's a big or small project, one is always fascinated by going back to a project you delivered and seeing how people are using it, it is a therapeutic experience in a sense. For instance, when we went back to the Soccer City stadium, it was so rewarding to see how the crowds were enjoying the game in a new stadium with world class facilities which we had made possible.

I am at times concerned about the different levels of passion – we don't judge people by the hours they spend on the job, but by the quality of work delivered, within budget and on time. The shrinking economy is a concern with Statistics South Africa having said we are in a technical recession, work is not always there, at times some of our professionals are reluctant to travel to the various destinations where we find work – particularly in the rest of the African continent, but we need that work to sustain our practice.

How do you take part in mentoring others?

With the industry we are in, we don't have a formalised mentorship programme – our junior professionals learn on the job, from conceptualisation, we give them the questions and they must find the solutions, we will intervene so that our deadlines and quality are always met. This is one way of seeing how great our

candidates are, by giving them practical experience.

If you had to relate a couple of experiences, what would be the highs and what would be the lows of your working career?

My highs would be The Soccer City Stadium, the BMW project, the MTN 14th Avenue head office project, the Discovery Head Office, and The Marc mixed use in Sandton - no one of these projects is more important than the other.

The lows would be the the legal battles we have had to fight in the industry. The other low would be when people's value systems are in conflict with the end goal. With being a successful practice, you also have battles within to find the best solutions, this needs a level of compromise and understanding to go with the winning solution to make everyone look great.

What accolades have you and your organisation received recently?

- Winners of the Architectural Category in the Steel Awards 2018 for the Discovery Head Office.
- We are shortlisted for an award for a school we did in Nairobi Kenya.
- We won an Interior Design Award for the WSP Group Head Office, and
- I have been a judge at the World Architecture Festival. this has been a great space to hone my skills and adjudicate my peers on the World stage.

How has the firm fared in terms of achieving its business growth objectives?

Despite our founding member Henk Boogertman having left the practice eight years ago, we have grown exponentially over the years. Our relationships in the industry have grown, we will hopefully continue to grow our market, and

hopefully we will not be affected by the brain drain from our industry.

Through what means does the organisation ensure that the firm maintains high level of ethics and integrity?

Ethical behaviour and integrity are conveyed to our staff constantly and vigilantly. We have our one-on-one conversations on how we engage with our suppliers, stakeholders, clients and our employees internally.

Is transformation considered a key objective at the firm, and if so, how is it attended to?

Transformation is massively important. We are a BBBEE Level 4 company in terms of our scorecard but we know we have to do better. We hire candidates from designated groups in

a continuous process to try and match the demographics of the country. We have bursaries available to designated groups and when they complete their studies they get to work with us. We also have a Design Scholarship for Africa, where the criteria is design excellence, and there is no obligation to work at our practice. Gender equity in terms of representation within a male dominated industry is improving over time and we have no gender pay gaps.

Kindly highlight some recent contributions by the firm to the community and to the relevant professions your professionals are a part of.

School learners have an opportunity to come and spend time at our practice to job shadow. We also have one of our architects giving a talk to Grade 1 and 2 learners about drawing and art. We

offer a lecture platform together with the Graduate School of Architecture to international and local experts in the industry to share their experiences and the state of architecture in the country and the rest of the world. We are also always busy with some pro bono work to give back to impoverished communities. One of the projects is an early learning centre and clinic near Hartebeespoort Dam which is in the planning stage, and another for a community centre in Devland.

How does the firm ensure that professionalism and good customer service are upheld?

Constant contact is important with our clients and contractors. Maintaining a sense of control is vital and having the right people in the right places on right jobs helps us to ensure we deliver exceptional work all the time. 🍷

