

Asset

Issue 124 | April 2024



Boogertman + Partners:
architects and urban designers
creating contextual and
synergistic environments

Boogertman + Partners Directors:
Bob van Bebber and Wessel van Dyk

**Boogertman +
Partners:**
architects and
urban designers
creating contextual
and synergistic
environments

Asset

Issue 124 | April 2024



Boogertman + Partners Directors:
Bob van Bebber and Wessel van Dyk

Talking urban design with Boogertman + Partners

Listen 

READ TIME: 10min

Interviewed by Tony Korsten
Written by Ana Lorton

Bob van Bebber, Director at Boogertman + Partners Architects, and Wessel van Dyk, Director and Head of Urban Design, both displayed consummate ease in their discussion on urban design with **Asset**. Their deep knowledge of the collaborative and multi-disciplinary process of place-making served to make this discussion both relevant and contextually easy to appreciate.

Wessel has recently rejoined Boogertman + Partners after a break of eight years and is spearheading the Urban Design department for the Boogertman + Partners group. Since completing his Master's Degree in Urban Design at the University of the Witwatersrand, he has honed his skills in design with a particular focus on urban renewal, placemaking and mixed-use development.

Boogertman + Partners Directors:
Wessel van Dyk and Bob van Bebber

In addition to various projects in South Africa, he has worked in Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Egypt, Mauritius, Kenya and Sudan.

“I’m happy to be back at Boogertman + Partners,” Wessel says, “sharing my urban design experience with the team. My initial intention at Boogertman + Partners was to assist with some urban design work, but it has since evolved into a permanent post, despite being a fairly new profession with a limited number of skilled designers. Urban design has become increasingly relevant in the work of any architectural practice. With so many mixed-use precincts and urban regeneration projects coming to the fore, practices need to be able either to execute them or respond critically to them.”

In addition to various projects in South Africa, he has worked in Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Egypt, Mauritius, Kenya and Sudan.



Renders of La Balise Marina in Mauritius



One simply cannot proceed with a development scheme if there isn't design guidance from an urban designer as part of the professional team.



Pinelands Proposal

A considered urban response

“Architecture often demands a more contextual urban response,” says Bob. “We aren’t constructing buildings on isolated ‘islands’ any longer. Whether the site incorporates boundaries such as fences or not, there is still a need for a considered urban response. Increasingly, architects require an improved awareness of how an individual building responds to the public realm and environment it exists

within. This understanding is crucial as a Built Environment professional,” he adds.

Over and above the design response of individual buildings, a holistic approach is essential when considering a new precinct or regenerating an existing one. This approach takes environmental issues, security concerns, and the demands on pedestrianisation and public transport into account. It enables a far more comprehensive urban point-of-view as well

as an informed urban response to its building type – whether this entails retail, offices, or residential development.

Operating from Stellenbosch in the Western Cape for Boogertman + Partners, and hence working with the local council, Wessel is experiencing a strong appreciation for what urban design means to local authorities and how important it is to ground it with solid foundational frameworks and design guidelines. “One simply cannot proceed with

a development scheme if there isn’t design guidance from an urban designer as part of the professional team. As a developer, you are required to present a professionally prepared urban design approach – with constant design interaction with the council,” he tells Asset.

Frameworks and regulations that have to be adhered to are now par for the course with a new development. Wessel believes the Western Cape is making strides in urban

I'm busy with a range of urban renewal projects in the Western Cape area and the layering means your research will extend across old ideas and concepts.

design thinking and looks forward to seeing it grow over the next few years.

“In the past, it is evident that we took into consideration some form of urban design thinking – by looking at how we contributed to precincts as a whole. The individual buildings we designed were considered in the site and how they would impact the larger precinct. So, our approach is always: ‘This is not about my building, it’s more about how the building

can add to the urban experience and placemaking.”

Exploring the layers in urban renewal projects

“Working within an existing area like Rosebank in Johannesburg or a city centre such as Cape Town immediately means many elements are informing your site because of the ‘layers’ inherent to the site,” Wessel explains. “In some ways, it makes for a richer design experience.



Woodmill mixed-use development



“On a greenfields site, you are building and designing from scratch, but the alternative challenges you to respond to existing patterns. I'm busy with a range of urban renewal projects in the Western Cape area and the layering means your research will extend across old ideas and concepts, almost weaving the old and the new.

“Currently, we are in the design stages of the Woodmill precinct which sits within a spatial development framework in Stellenbosch. Historically it was an old wood and sawmill site with existing industrial buildings in various stages of disrepair – of which we

will repurpose some of these existing structures. The design aims to develop the site into a mixed-use precinct with a focus on pedestrianisation and placemaking.

“In Johannesburg, there has been some remarkable regeneration of areas. Old industrial buildings with a real patina to them now house mixed-use developments. However, some have become islands. As an urban designer, you have no control over what can happen in the surrounding suburbs, and how this can impact the market in a positive way or affect further regeneration.”

Urban design lead at Bankenveld project

A more advanced project is the Bankenveld District City – previously known as Frankenwald – which Wessel and Bob are currently busy with. Located between the Woodmead and Marlboro offramp, this site is in close proximity to Sandton. With the N3 highway exposure, it is Johannesburg North’s most connected precinct. This smart, sustainable, inclusive environment aims to become the model for mixed-used developments in South Africa.

“The aim is to fill a strategic gap in the urban fabric to improve the socio-economic condition of this region. The precinct’s innovative and flexible urban design framework caters for all aspects of multifaceted living, including residential, retail, commercial, logistics, warehousing, and educational development,” says Bob. “It’s not the smallest piece of land! Boogertman + Partners, as the lead urban designer, has already gone through eight years of iterations. There will be approximately 30,000 housing units, with a remaining 650,000m² of non-residential space.”

“We’re currently in the technical co-ordination phase,” Bob adds. “And again, technically, it is an island, but it’s very well connected into the adjacent well-established suburbs like Kelvin and Buccleugh, and of course it needs to respond to the northern end of Alexandra. Across the highway it even has a connection into Linbro Park by road as well as a pedestrian and cycle pathway. We’re improving the quality of how it connects to surrounding streets. It should start going into the ground in the third quarter of this year.”

This smart, sustainable, inclusive environment aims to become the model for mixed-used developments in South Africa.



Bankenveld District City
in Johannesburg



As an architect you're always looking for an urban framework that's robust enough to take things that get thrown at it – economic pressures, urban pressures, other pressures.

Market Square in Reading, United Kingdom

The bigger questions within urban frameworks

An important point around urban design as part of the Boogertman + Partners practice is that while there needs to be a high-level understanding of urban principles, it is also essential to understand how different building typologies work in a particular area. Bob raises the example of how in many Western countries retail is positioned

at ground floor level with coffee shops on every corner. "The economics in SA cannot support a model like this because we don't have the foot traffic to sustain it."

"As an architect you're always looking for an urban framework that's robust enough to take things that get thrown at it – economic pressures, urban pressures, other pressures," Wessel adds. "You can be a good retail

The role of the urban designer is to bring all the elements together in a way that responds harmoniously with the urban environment.

architect answering the retail question. But you have to answer the bigger questions that lie within the urban framework.”

Being at the forefront of urban design on the continent and around the world, Boogertman + Partners are fully aware of the rapid growth in urbanisation globally, the demands this places on housing, and the need for development.

“There’s investment in improving Benin, for example,” Bob comments. “I think it’s being done quite well. There are fantastic sidewalks, beautiful landscaping, people cleaning them and looking after them. It’s only in a small piece of the city, but we hope that it’ll grow and filter through the rest of the city otherwise it would be a failure.”



The Hive in Rosebank, Johannesburg



“Both local and national government seem to be actively driving the process with new ministry buildings that others can respond to, and so improve the whole public realm.”

A rich process

As Wessel digs deeper into Boogertman + Partners’ urban design projects, the richness of the process becomes ever more apparent.

“The role of the urban designer is to bring all the elements together in a way that responds harmoniously with the urban environment. The buildings should be timeless, but how we design the spaces is what it’s all about – whether it’s a greenfield site or a regeneration project. In some ways it’s a mysterious process but a very rich and rewarding one.”