



Retail reimaged at Westtown Square

Westtown Square, a new retail lifestyle destination that opened in March 2025, is the first phase of the Westtown Precinct.

The 100-hectare mixed-use development in Shongweni, is located between Durban and Pietermaritzburg on the N3 highway near Hillcrest. Anchored by Westtown Square, the rest of the precinct will be developed in phases over the next ten to fifteen years, with a significant residential component set to begin soon.

The design of Westtown Square was delivered through a joint venture between Boogertman + Partners and MDS Architecture.

Speaking at the recent Media in Africa DAS event in Durban, Geoffrey Richards, associate at Boogertman + Partners Durban, elaborated on the architects' design approach.

Getting started

Westtown was developed by Fundamentum Property Group. The project began in 2016 with the purchase of land from Tongaat Hulett – a site comparable in size to the Umhlanga Ridge new town centre on the North Coast.

At the outset, the site lacked all infrastructure and formal access. Now, with over R1 billion invested in roads and infrastructure currently under construction by the eThekweni Municipality in partnership with Fundamentum, the project represents one of the largest infrastructure investments made by the eThekweni Municipality since the 2010 FIFA World Cup.



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on the central square to create a vibrant gathering space. "This is not a mall, and there are no mall walkways," said Richards.

The retail core is defined by densely planted walkways, pergola-covered seating areas and a deliberate celebration of the surrounding Shongweni green belt.

Although Westtown Square is officially categorised as a shopping centre, with a carefully considered tenant mix, it has been purposefully designed to offer far more than retail and dining. It is a vibrant, people-focused destination.

Connection to the surrounding residential development was part of the design, allowing for unhindered movement through the space. Image courtesy of MDS Architecture



The architecture and landscaping draw inspiration from the rural landscape. Image courtesy of MDS Architecture

A changing retail landscape

Westtown Square marks a departure from the conventional enclosed, multi-tiered mall model. Richards explained that the retail landscape shifted significantly after the Covid-19 pandemic.

In response, the original concept, an 80 000m² enclosed mall, was reimagined as an open, permeable and accessible environment that encourages connection and interaction.

The 48 500m² programme embraces a 'high street' interface, with side streets and lanes converging

Community-driven design

At the heart of Westtown Square is The Barn. An architecturally striking destination within a destination that redefines the traditional "food court" concept.

This iconic structure serves as the spatial centrepiece and cultural anchor of the development. Shaped like a traditional barn but realised with modern architectural precision, the space provides a permanent home for local traders and embodies the development's commitment to community and local economic empowerment.



Building a town

The architecture and landscaping draw inspiration from the rural landscape and traditional town layouts, interpreted in a contemporary manner using modern materials.

References include the rolling hills, sugar cane fields and traditional farmstead buildings arranged around a courtyard. Elements such as timber fencing, steel portal frames and the contours of the surrounding hills inform the façades and roofing.

"We wanted that old-school feel," explained Richards, "not perfect and smooth."

He noted that forming close working relationships with builders and contractors on site was fundamental to bringing the vision for Westtown to life. "Those are the heroes of our industry," Richards said. "The people on site."

Beyond the spreadsheet

A key priority for the architectural team was to create a space that supports movement, social interaction and lifestyle integration. Westtown is designed to be open and accessible, maintaining connections in all directions.

Post-Covid, Westtown Square was reimagined as an open-air high-street concept, centred around a town square. Image courtesy of MDS Architecture

"We wanted people to be able to walk through from one side to the other, linking with the future residents, welcoming them with their dogs and bikes, as part of the community," said Richards.

Walkways are intentionally wide, seating areas are carefully positioned, and the overall development feels more like a curated urban landscape than a traditional retail centre.

"The interplay between the town square, village green and children's play areas encourages pedestrian movement, activates the 'village' and its streets. It creates a dynamic environment where visitors can connect with each other and with the spaces around them," said Richards.

Full acknowledgement and thanks go to [Boogertman and Partners](#) and [MDS Architecture](#) for the information in this article.