

Trend Group completes fit-out of first SA WeWork office

For its first foray into Africa, WeWork selected 173 Oxford Road in Rosebank, also known as The Link, developed by Redefine Properties, and designed by Paragon Architects, part of the Paragon Group, occupying six floors of the 15-storey building, taking up almost 10,000m² of space. Design-and-build specialist the Trend Group was awarded the contract to oversee the construction project.



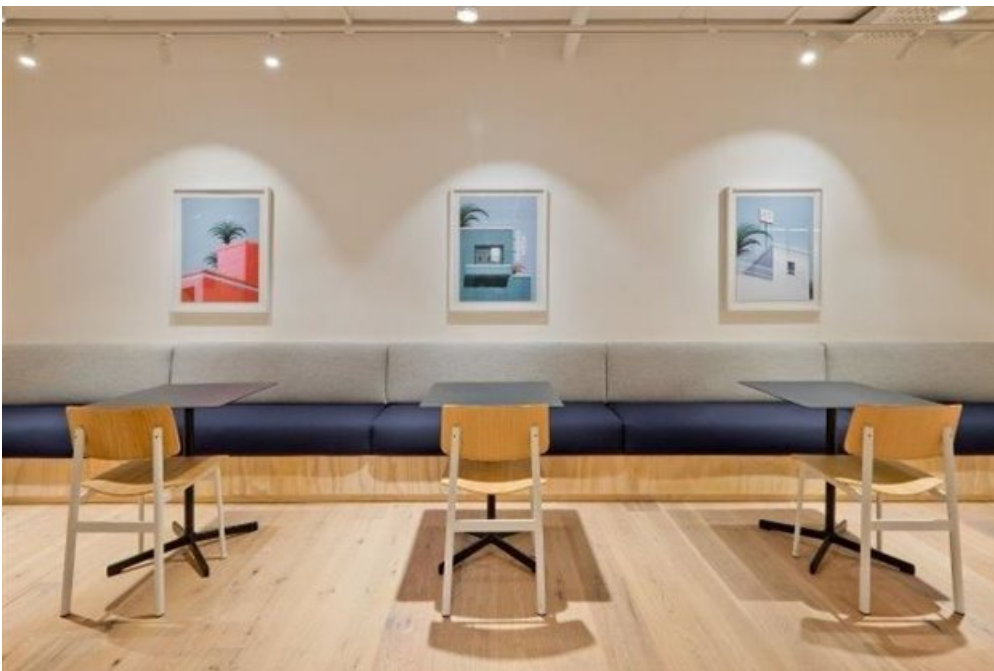
This was a mammoth undertaking “from grey box to completion”, including all of the electromechanical and plumbing, as well as all of the components of the fit-out itself. Trend Group project director Mohamed Okasha reveals that the project had a “near impossible” 14-week timeframe. Handed over officially at the beginning of July, after work began in March, the project completed successfully on schedule.

“We effectively did not stop at all for the entire duration until we finished,” Okasha states. Daily progress reports were submitted to the London-based client, with live cameras installed on-site to track real-time progress. “It was a real achievement to finish in that timeframe, and also to have a happy client at the end. Also being the first WeWork office in South Africa, the approval process was very rigorous and exacting,” he adds.



Fast-tracked project

The tight timeframe was largely due to the fact that WeWork, being an international company, has a specific methodology of tackling its projects, all of which are fast-tracked according to its global rollout strategy. Okasha notes that WeWork's professional team "understands the construction process, which assists us immensely as a contractor. They know exactly what they want, and how to go about achieving that. A lot of clients are not that technical.



"Hence it was both an exciting and informative project for Trend Group, especially to see and learn how an international company like WeWork operates. All construction elements were embarked upon simultaneously, but programmed expertly," Okasha explains. The team included Paragon Interface as the local implementation architect, and Arup as the consulting engineer. While Trend Group produced all of the construction drawings, the actual concept behind the design was produced by WeWork's London team. Paragon Interface specified all of the local materials, and adapted the required details to suit the local construction market.

Okasha stresses that WeWork had a good grasp of the importance of trying to source as much as possible locally, as opposed to importing, so as to support the local design and construction industry. "We collaborated closely with Paragon

Interface on the value engineering required for this project,” Okasha adds.



Trend Group project director Mohamed Okasha, and Paragon Interface director Claire D'Adorante

Collaborative effort

Paragon Interface director Claire D'Adorante explains that “the design was driven from the design team based in London. It was a very collaborative arrangement, whereby they ensured we received a ‘look-and-feel’ design intent for the project, as well as layouts and technical information pertaining to their requirements.” WeWork also has a detailed design guideline, which is adapted per project and per market.

One of the biggest challenges faced by both Trend Group and Paragon Interface was that WeWork has “a certain way of doing things in other markets, which is not necessarily the way we do things here traditionally. So, it was trying to find the right balance as to what they wanted to achieve, and then not only finding similar products that we could source locally, but coming up with more cost-effective solutions that worked in terms of our local market.”



The basic WeWork design specification is a series of shared office spaces, with the design focusing mainly on the communal spaces such as the community bar and multiple pause areas. “These communal spaces are amazingly comfortable and warm, with a lot of soft furnishings to create a ‘home-away-from-home’ environment,” D’Adorante highlights.

She also points out that the interior fit-out complements the aesthetic of The Link perfectly, with internal glass walls creating a transparent space that capitalises on the light and incredible view provided by the modern façade with its articulated strip windows.

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