

Esplanade injection

by Jackie Gray

Radon Projects has completed construction of a landmark, R250-million hotel and conference complex in East London. This development is giving the area a much needed shot in the proverbial arm.

“The development is situated on East London’s Orient Beach esplanade, the five star, 261 room, Premier Hotel Cascades and state-of-the-art, 650 seater East London International Convention Centre (ELICC) are doing much to uplift the area both economically and aesthetically,” says Willem Joubert, CEO and founder of Radon Projects.

“Orient Beach was a hub for the tourist trade in the 70s and 80s. Unfortunately it fell out of favour and the surrounding area reflects this. This project is the largest of its kind in East London and is giving Orient Beach a facelift which is attracting investment, business travellers and tourists to the area once more,” he explains.

Radon Projects was awarded the tender for the project in 2007 after performing renovation work on the Premier Hotel in Pretoria. Radon has been responsible for practically all aspects of the projects including the water, electricity and roads. The convention centre is already up and running and roughly half of the Cascades is open to the public. The hotel’s opening is set for August 2010.

Feather in Radon’s cap

Radon Projects has been in business since 1990. Over the years, the company has been contracted by a number of notable clients including BHP Billiton, Eskom, the SABC, the Department of Public Works, the Johannesburg Municipality, Gauteng Province, North West Province, Ingwe Coal Corporation, the Radon Water Board and Virgin Active to name but a few.

Radon works on construction projects across the spectrum but prefers to spe-

cialise in commercial and mining projects. The company boasts an employee contingent of approximately 400.

“The Cascades and ELICC is the first major commercial East London project for Radon” says Joubert. “It is testament to Radon’s ability to produce quality projects across the spectrum. “We definitely consider it a feather in our cap,” he adds.

Radon is currently completing industrial and administration building contracts for BHP Billiton valued at over R200-million. Work on new BHP contracts is expected to commence within the next few months and the company is nearing completion of a new 26 Ml reservoir for the Pretoria Municipality. A new Department of Public Works contract is also in the pipeline.

Radon has stayed under the radar publicity-wise to some extent over the years, preferring to foster relations with clients. Clearly this strategy has worked. Radon has found favour with the mining industry (no mean feat given the stringent protocols of this sector) and recently reached the R200-million annual turnover mark.

Huge facelift

In addition to its many rooms, the Cascades also houses a five star restaurant, a sophisticated bar with comprehensive wine cellar, two fully equipped boardrooms, a gym, VIP lounge, Camelot spa, coffee lounge, reception area and 260 parking bays.

The ELICC is a striking three storey structure consisting of several conference venues of various sizes, three of which can be opened up into a single large conference space capable of accommodating 1 800 delegates. A 650 seat auditorium, 1 600 seat banqueting area, bar/café, 2 500 m² exhibition hall and two kitchens.

The hotel and ELICC were constructed in three separate phases during which a labour force of approximately 450 was employed. Materials used to build the complex weighed in as follows:

- 21 000 m³ concrete
- 64 000 m² formwork
- 1 900 t of reinforcing steel
- 3 200 000 bricks
- 88 000 m² plaster

“The finishes are of the highest standard,” explains Joubert, “and complement the interior design elements at every turn.” For instance, granite and marble bedeck the floors, counters and central hotel staircase and only the best Hans Grohe and Cobra taps and basins have been installed.

Not all smooth sailing

“Radon encountered a number of challenges during construction,” says Joubert. “For instance, lateral support of the earthworks was difficult as the hotel site is situated on an incline which slopes towards the seafront. As such, underground water constantly seeped constantly through the cut embankments into the site.”

Inclement weather, specifically strong winds also affected construction progress at the Cascades given its height and position on East London’s seafront.

Construction of the ELICC presented challenges of its own. The underlying rock at this site is predominantly substrate, which meant that piles had to be inserted in certain places to stabilise the area.

The project also required the in-service training of the local labour force as sufficiently trained personnel was not readily available in the area. This was exacerbated by the fact that the project com-

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menced during a period when demand for construction labour was high.

“Challenges aside, the positive spinoffs stemming from the development are now manifest,” says Joubert. “The local market was ready for a project of this calibre. It has upgraded the area signifi-

cantly and created over 230 permanent jobs. Casual labour figures are estimated at 150 and investors are beginning to make an appearance in the area again. Suffice to say this endeavour has been a success across the spectrum.”

The Cascades’ reception: The 261 roomed hotel also houses a five star restaurant, a sophisticated bar with comprehensive wine cellar, two fully equipped boardrooms, a gym, VIP lounge, spa, coffee lounge, reception area and 260 parking bays.



Client

NV Properties

Structural engineers

May, Houseman and Associates

Principal agent and architect

Design Accro

Quantity surveyors

HRN Quantity Surveyors

Civil and wet services engineers

WSP Group Africa

Mechanical engineers

Carifo Consulting Engineers

Electrical engineers

Ballenden & Robb Consulting Engineers