

# THE MEETING PLACE

*Alice Lane is an urban development in Sandton, Johannesburg. With landscape phasing spanning over many years, this site was developed for Pivotal Property Investment Fund + Abland, with Abland leading the process of development throughout its various stages. Alice Lane Precinct Phase III & Piazza is the third of the phases Karen Marais has been involved in, initially beginning phase I whilst working for the renowned Insite Landscape Architects, and then tackling phases II and III once she had begun her own firm, The Ochre Office, in 2013. Her and her team have thus had the pleasure of working through the process that has brought this incredible development to life.*

**Size:** 8250 m2  
**Timeline:** 01 Dec 2014 – 28 Feb 2017 (2 years 3 months)  
**Cost:** R10.2 Million  
**Location:** Sandton, Johannesburg



## Project History

The Alice Lane Precinct essentially incorporates 3 individual buildings, connected over one super-basement. The full site extends from the corner of Fredman and 5th up to and southwards along Alice Lane. All three buildings spill out onto the common Piazza Level, designed and landscaped to serve as a seamless integration of the separate phases.

The client and project team saw the potential of creating publicly accessible space in the centre of prime commercial properties. This piazza space not only acts to glue the development as one but opens it out to the street, affording users and tenants the freedom to move easily between offices, shops, services and surrounds.

The site slopes dramatically from Alice Lane down to Fredman Drive, allowing the Piazza to integrate at street level on Alice Lane but affording spectacular views over the North-Western Suburbs on the Fredman boundary.

## The Design

Allowing the precinct to be accessible from all directions and opening it to the street edge was the principal objective of the project. It was paramount to create on the ground level of the three buildings, an active zone that encouraged engagement constantly

throughout the day and night. Accessibility and appeal to the businessmen and woman to utilize the space was at the forefront of the design concept.

## CORE CONCEPTS:

**Open edges:** The development required open edges to the street, allowing free flow of pedestrian movement, pulling visitors inwards. Gateway: The landscape needed to differentiate itself, announcing your arrival into the precinct – “gateway” and “threshold” became important elements;

**Active core:** The three buildings accumulate around a central zone – the heart of the piazza – and working closely with the Architects ensured that the functions that gathered around this core active the space and allow opportunity for gathering and business (cafes and restaurants spill out towards a central space that in turn can be used for functions and exhibitions etc.);

**Fluidity of design:** With the brief encouraging that the piazza space spill between core and edges, the lines on

the ground naturally interpreted paths of movement, bleeding and sweeping below the buildings. Users of the precinct can walk freely between and underneath the building structures and the piazza sweeps through;

## Practicality and Affordability:

The aim was to address user needs and function (rest, business, gathering, security, adaptability of space, maintenance, navigation, etc.) all the while considering structural, drainage, and level implications. The team repeated workshops that built up complex ideas and then stripped them down again to their simplest aspects to ensure they were affordable, buildable and addressed the core intentions of functionality.

**Simplification of Aesthetic:** Common design language, construction-type and materiality were key but each zone of the precinct required various alignments/ combinations of those elements to differentiate the spaces and allow for interest in the design. The team had to harness five years’ worth of ideas, break them down and merge them together into a cohesive whole.



**Sourcing Materials**

Much of the materiality of the design was decided in Phase I – the Marsh/Standard Bank building. Even at this early phase of the design, the team had to develop a palette of textures and forms that they could transfer/ extend out into the Piazza as the development progressed. The materials needed to be sustainable (in budget and supply) and, even at this stage, Karen and her team needed to find a design language that would have longevity and not run the risk of alienating itself from the next two phases (even though they didn't know what the next two buildings would look like at that stage).

The materials that were selected for continuity through the development were the Igneous Concrete seating panels, the Bosun granite paving brick, the Eva-last composite decking and of course general tones of grey, black and white which could easily be supplemented with colour as the project progressed.

There were, like with most projects some obstacles that influenced the process. The unpacking of the slab was a notable aspect: The entire Piazza level is constructed as a suspended / raised Bondek slab over a load-bearing base penetron slab. The base slab was a blanket layer engineered to allow

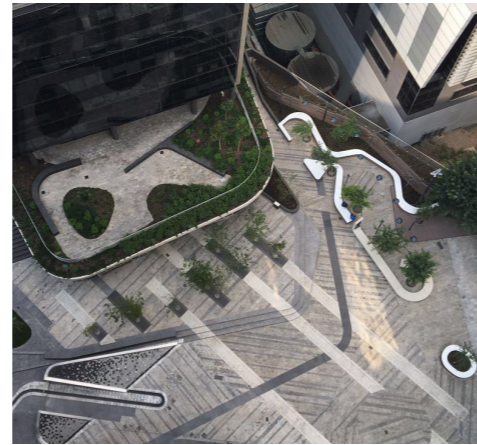
the piazza design the flexibility required to develop and change without requiring redesign of the structure. It acts as a drainage deck, and is tilted to allow for flow of storm water to the various outlet systems.

A Bondek slab is then raised above this (300mm-1m average) above the base slab and would support the paved walkable zone.

The “below board” complications that every team member can attest to are also notable, addressing drainage, support, planter depths and the routing of multiple infrastructure that services the piazza (water, irrigation, lighting, etc.)

The intricate paving design was very tricky to document throughout the process and The Central Water Feature was not without its complications and had to be handled carefully and creatively to create a feature that dealt with the fluid element of water. Levels also played a part in the design implementation. Although all three buildings are set at basement level, their ground floors differ in levelling- implementing paving and flow whilst coordinating levelling was something that had to be taken into account.

Planting selected had to be robust and generally low maintenance to account for the various climate zones amidst the piazza- some shaded areas exposed to the chill and channeling of wind and some



**SUPPLIERS**

**Seating Tops and Pots:**

Igneous Concrete  
Vicky Grigoroglu - 082 443 0084

**Tree Grilles:**

Mojeba Projects  
Morris - 082 449 5038

**Screens, Cladding and Decking:**

Decking4Africa  
Albert Swartz - 083 645 4616

**Paving:**

Bosun and Smartstone  
Anita Zanin 082 907 8201

**Granite Tiles:**

Mazista Melissa Varga 082 334 7910

**Litter Bins:**

Badec Bros  
Edrich Badenhorst - 083 675 3566

**Irrigation:**

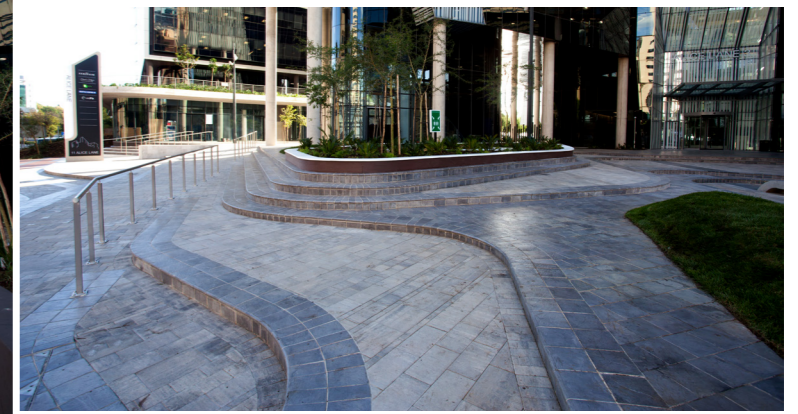
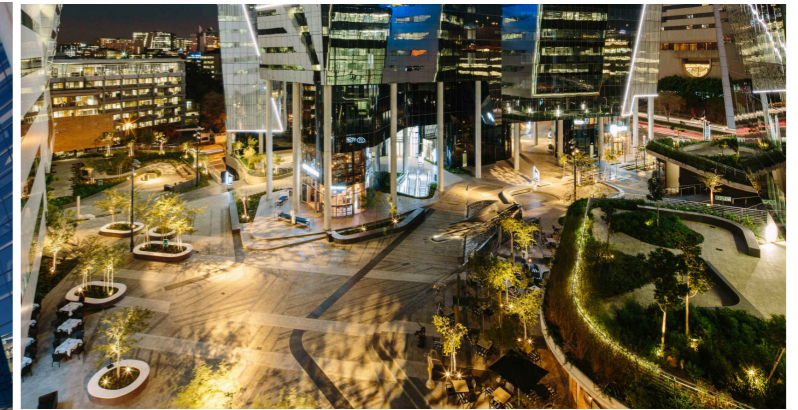
Controlled Irrigation  
Sheldon Hutchinson - 079 050 1856

**Art and Sculpture:**

Art and Sculpture Management:  
Parts&Labour  
Brendan Copesake - 084 455 0255

Sculpture\_Synapse  
Marco Cianfanelli

Tile Artwork\_ Alice Lane Staircase  
Lorenzo Nassimbeni



**MEET THE TEAM**

**The Contracting Team:**

**Main Contractor:** WBHO Construction  
**Landscape Contractor:** Life Landscapes  
**Paving and Tiling:** REE Paving  
**Water Feature:** Water'scapes

**Consultant Team:**

Paragon Architects,  
L&S Consulting Engineers  
Quanticost Quantity Surveyors

**ABOUT THE OCHRE OFFICE (PTY) LTD**



The Ochre Office (Pty) Ltd is a professional design firm specializing in Landscape Architecture. Established in 2013, the company continually strives for excellence in design, planning and contract management, undertaking projects that vary in size and typology be they private, commercial, industrial, or recreational and community sites.

We see our role as Landscape Architects firmly and fundamentally seated in the formulation of connections between people, their built environments and their natural surrounds – understanding the interactions between form, texture, space and function. It is within this notion of connectedness that we seek to design smart, sustainable, environmentally responsive and appropriately integrated landscape solutions.