

Grey Advertising gives its growing JHB HQ a makeover with a contemporary, Afro-modern twist

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Designed to inspire, Grey Advertising Africa's new headquarters is a space to breathe, dream, and invite creativity and collaboration. The agency is based in Bryanston, an area the team felt had the best prospect of developing as a new corporate headquarters hub.



Architectural designer Julian van der Linde and his team were briefed to revamp and re-design a four-storey office building

in Bryanston. The re-imagined building consists of three floors of spacious offices and a mezzanine café with views of the Magaliesburg mountains. It's a space that aligns with the CEO of Grey's vision of building a creative business culture that inspires others to be the best they can be. It's something he describes as their 'open' work culture.

Paul Jackson, CEO of Grey Advertising Africa, said: "At Grey, we foster a culture we call 'open'. It is how today's people-based businesses should work to evolve and thrive. It is a philosophy of collective creativity and responsibility. It encourages increased collaboration between departments, the agency and our clients. 'Open' invites different disciplines and skill sets, from inside and outside, to apply creativity to solve business problems together.

"With this open philosophy in mind," says Jackson, "we wanted to evolve the agency from a collective of old, closeted individual offices into a state-of-the-art, open and collaborative workspace.



"We wanted to bring the beauty of nature inside. And we wanted to reflect our beautiful country's creative energy and spirit and its people." One of the key design features was blurring the boundaries between the building's interior and its surroundings.

The natural light that streams into the double-volume atrium provides dramatic light movement and shadow effect and serves an undeniable energy-saving function.

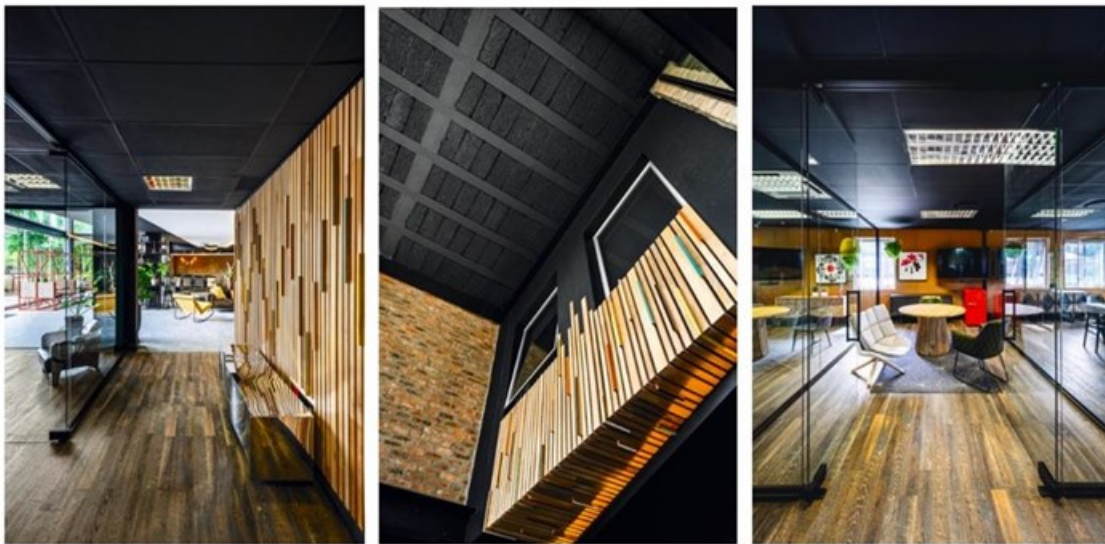


Items such as the reception desk, the red screens, the conversation pods, the custom boardroom tables and the centre column features are all bespoke design elements courtesy of Julian and his team and incorporate the design brief of reflecting the creative energy of Africa and inviting open collaboration. Julian's use of a bright, Afro-modern colour palette throughout the space, combined with the locally designed contemporary furniture, has made for a free-flowing space that oozes positivity and creativity.

One of the construction's most significant challenges was that most of it took place during Covid lockdowns. So, while offices were closed and the staff were working remotely, Julian and his team were working frenetically to re-invent the space. "When the Grey staff returned to the offices post-lockdown, they were delighted with their newly re-energised space, which worked to lift spirits after a challenging period," he says.

Today, when you walk into the Grey Advertising Africa offices, you're greeted by an inviting infusion of modern colour and African style. Refurbished with multifaceted patterns of Afro-modernism, every inch of space is contrasted in untreated tones and bright, vibrant colours. Ranging from boldly patterned floor coverings to stylish hanging light fixtures and plants, which reflect and infuse the creative energy of the agency.

One of Grey's most important values is that we 'honour the work and the people that create it', and we believe the new architecture and décor truly reflect our culture and values.



Research has shown that a warm, positive workspace significantly impacts collaborative work performance. The new office design, conceived with innovative simplicity in mind, perfectly reflects the progressive 'open' culture of Grey Advertising. The agency's new look is bright, with lots of natural light, featuring open, collaborative spaces conducive to interaction between our employees, clients and suppliers. Every meeting area has modern audio-visual equipment making the new virtual-physical blended style meetings feel natural. Writeable glass walls, plug-and-play desk points and cork walls to pin new work facilitate creative brainstorming.

The new Grey workspace had to inspire and stimulate both creativity and productivity. It is achieved with its exposed black ceilings, wood-grained floors, and large collapsible double-pane glass walls that allow abundant natural light to flow into the entire workspace.

Julian's use of an avant-garde colour palette of African colours throughout the work and meeting spaces, coffee shop and staircases has successfully achieved this goal. Combined with the harmonious indigenous furniture, this has contributed to the office's unique ambience, blending home-grown simplicity with functionality that ensures every design element is integrated naturally to create a desirable workspace.



When we decided we needed to refashion the outmoded collection of individual offices, into a contemporary hive of Afro-inspired workspaces, one of the prerequisites was for a co-operative, open-space concept that could provide a large unconstrained area where people could come together. The shared meeting location is a central agency feature, formed by using inter-connected, collapsible glass walls to create a vast open-plan space and an interactive social gathering place when required.

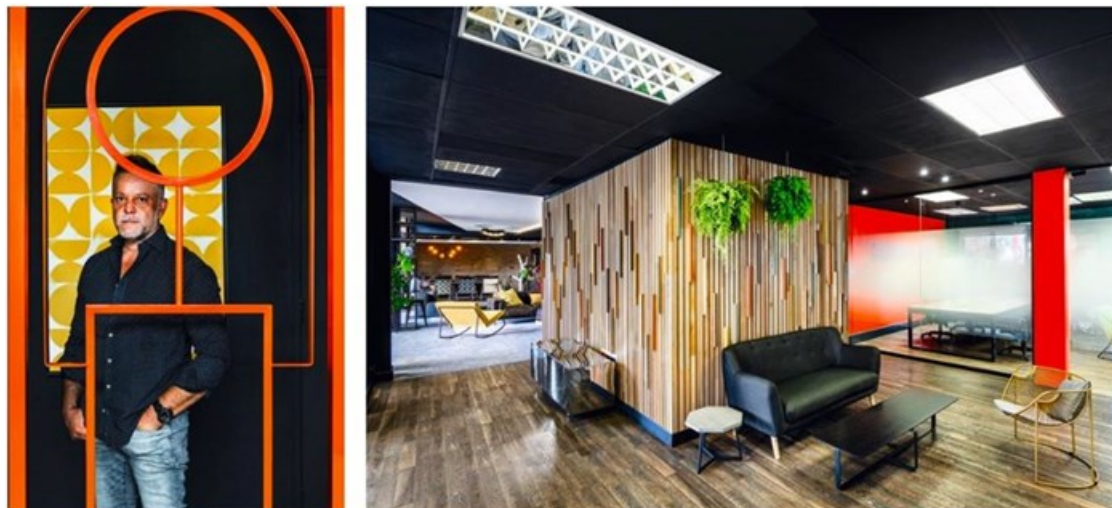
Continuing agency collaboration, where the exchange of innovative ideas and concepts relevant to the South African marketplace is continually evolving, is vital for creativity and encourages cross-departmental and client interaction. This led to the open agency space being reorganised without permanent employee desks. Instead, team members are free to move between the modular workspaces, including meeting booths, solitary spaces and community canteens, a coffee shop, kitchens and outside meeting areas where teams can enjoy the fresh air and nature without losing Wi-Fi connectivity.

The diverse office space isn't just fun to look at – it's also geared to harmonise with a multiplicity of working modes, an essential design requirement from the outset. Staff and clients can work anywhere, using an assortment of specialist work spaces, from boardrooms and meeting rooms to individualised work enclosures inside and outside – on the covered patio decks and adjoining garden meeting stations.



The objective is to enable staff to be much more mobile than before, not be moored to an isolated desk, but to combine with other team members as and when required. Even the open reception area has open grid work pods for single or group work. Customised according to their specific function, the office floors were randomly positioned to break the monotony and encourage spontaneous interaction.

The result is a superb work, meeting and recreational space, with lots of natural light, well-appointed with Afro-inspired furnishings, contemporary colour schemes and paintings, with minimal sideboards, chairs and tables.



Julian van der Linde, architectural designer, said: " What inspires and interests me most is the clients I work with... the people and personalities behind a project. Their interests and aspirations. Who they want to become rather than who or where they are now. It is such a fantastic feeling being part of a journey that allows me to bring to life a vision for where people are going and to help them shape the environment where they can be whoever they want.

"For this project, I wanted to design a happy place. It is filled with bright, joyful colours, forms, and textures representative of our beautiful African continent. A space to breathe, dream and create. A place filled with familiar objects of beauty but renewed with a unique, modern twist.

"Our surroundings affect every aspect of our lives, and it has become important that we work in environments that reflect our aspirations rather than being at work and dreaming all day of going home. Why not create a sanctuary that's an escape from home, something we have yearned for during the past two years? A place that inspires and connects, and invites creativity and collaboration.

"If I have to choose one word that describes the aesthetic of what we've created here, it would be 'optimistic'. Optimistic because the décor and spaces we have created represent a hopeful and confident future, which I experience when interacting with Grey's inspiring creative people."

Photographs courtesy of Paris Brummer and Visi Magazine. These images were first shown in the 2022 Spring Edition of Visi design, décor and architectural magazine.

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