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# imbued with hotel flair



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# Five Star

## Headquarters

Text by Bronwyn Burns  
Photography by Rebecca Staniforth



The new Headquarters for Tsogo Sun add style to the Tuscan village of Montecasino.

Since its legalisation in 1994, the casino resort industry has mushroomed throughout South Africa promising the 'ultimate' experience in entertainment and leisure. As an exaggerated means of conveying this ideal, it is an industry renowned for elaborately themed architecture and design. Both interiors and exteriors are created to express a sense of luxurious hospitality, comfort and pleasure.

Step through the doors of Montecasino in Gauteng, and voila! Welcome to Italy-in-a-box. The design brings to life in painstaking detail the traditional Tuscan village setting with fountains, piazzas, cobbled streets and, of course, the wash-line of clothes draped across a balcony. Linked to Montecasino via a simple walkway, the InterContinental Palazzo Hotel continues the theme with manicured gardens, a Mediterranean cuisine restaurant and elaborate guest rooms.

Now, aptly situated between the two is the new head office for Tsogo Sun, one of South Africa's largest hotel and casino operators comprising a

joint venture between Southern Sun Hotels and Tsogo Gaming. It does, of course, make practical sense that the design of the new building, although entirely corporate in function, extends the same theme as its Tuscan neighbours.

With a traditional design imbued with hotel flair, the head office has a grandiose feel not often found in corporate buildings. The design was largely dictated by its surroundings and had to convey a sense of unity and flow while maintaining its commercial value. "The original concept behind Tsogo Sun's Head Office was to give it an established civic feel within the





Montecasino context," says architect Brent Buchanan of Nsika Architects, who spent two weeks in Italy examining the civic architecture to add authenticity to the architectural design.

A second spec building, now the head office for Absa Bank, has been constructed on the same site so that two identical 'U' shaped buildings reflect each other across symmetrical courtyards. The placement of the two buildings is the result of conscious design that perfectly frames the Palazzo along a strong central axis. With the stylised landscaping completed, the three will link via symmetrical walkways that run along the typically elongated reflection ponds and focal olive trees common to Tuscan design.

The building steps back with each of the three levels to reduce scale, soften its appearance and draw attention to design. Balconies and profiled eaves add detail while the corporate windows and necessary air conditioning vents are cleverly masked by intricately designed pre-cast concrete surrounds. Sandstone coloured pre-cast mouldings surround light yellow stucco walls, a lighter shade of the Palazzo Hotel, adding warmth to the 4 000m<sup>2</sup> building.

The interiors were designed in a mutual effort between Nsika Architects and the internationally recognised Wilson and Associates firm, combining interior concepts with the architecture. Having worked extensively on Tsogo Sun projects since



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1993, David Adams of Wilson and Associates knew what the client wanted but had the immense challenge of creating a five star environment on a not so five star budget.

The entrance of the building leads into a spacious foyer and reception area accentuated by grand chandeliers and two enormous mirrors. Mirrors are used throughout the public areas to add a sense of spaciousness and the reflection of light lifts the dark mahogany stained wall panelling. The immediately evident hotel ambience makes the reception a space that, despite being so formally designed, is calmly inviting.

Full-height arched windows allow natural light to pour into the double volume foyer, which impressively denotes a sense of arrival. The first floor volume took some convincing on the part of the client because it detracts from the commercial viability of the design, but without it much of the hotel flair would have been lost as the huge open space enhances both the architecture and the interior space.

Scale is balanced by the massive dark mahogany reception desk, which forms a focal point from the

entrance and is placed beneath a wood clad bridge that links the two wings of the building. "It was difficult to make the reception desk non-monolithic and to place it as a feature without it overtaking the space. So we placed it directly under the bridge for horizontal dimension," says David.

A combination of thick, plush Persian rugs for meeting spaces and tiled flooring in heavy traffic areas runs throughout the public spaces. Plain porcelain tiles are enhanced by marble framing tiles that designate meeting spaces and waiting areas in nifty angular designs and earthy colours. The marble inlay continues as a frame around the elevator doors as well as on step edges to emphasise a traditionally opulent ambience.

Leather sofas and wingback chairs in rich browns and blacks, ornate vases and lamps on heavy end tables, over 300 linear meters of damask micro-suede's and satins making up lavish full-length (electrically controlled) curtains and deep mahogany stained veneer wall panels finish the design with elegance. To give texture and lift the walls, wallpaper compliments the veneer panels with a velvety sheen that is irresistibly tactile with



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a subtle square patterning that picks up on the floor tiling. More than eighty framed graphics and paintings cover the walls in the public area with images of abstract art, landscapes and lifestyle depictions.

Unfortunately, the design is poorly overlooked in the office spaces, which lack the atmosphere created by public interiors. The beautiful floors, chandeliers, textured wall panels and intricate detailing are put aside for common blue carpet

tiles, corporate lighting and uncluttered décor that is primarily functional.

The modern trend of pause areas has been diluted a bit so that, while each level is kitted with a kitchen, the central breakaway space is a gorgeous Belgian-style coffee bar that is always filled with the strong smell of freshly brewed cappuccinos. As with the foyer, the pressed ceiling of the bar was raised to give the elongated room a more open feel.

With such stunning architecture and interiors plus the lovely views of Montecasino, the Palazzo Hotel and the Magaliesberg, this Headoffice is sure to be a huge success for Tsogo. That such an elaborate building was constructed in only six months is an achievement worth noting. David Adams adds, "Despite the minimal budget, I think the professional team has done a superb job and has created exactly what Tsogo was looking for."

*Verdict: Five stars!* *ie*

