

Build a real difference

Architects should aim for a lasting ecological effect, not ‘greenwashing’

ARCHITECTS and developers should move beyond “greenwashing” — applying green building principles merely as fashionable gestures — and begin incorporating practical eco-wise solutions that make a lasting ecological difference, industry analysts say.

At a recent meeting of architects at South Africa’s acclaimed energy-plus home, House Rhino at Crossways Farm Village outside Port Elizabeth, South African Institute of Architects Eastern Cape (SAIA EC) president Neill Kievit said it was critically important that the industry began prioritising tangible green building principles.

More than 3 000 architects and engineers have visited the 450 m² off-grid showcase home since construction started in 2012, to learn from the various renewable energy and eco-solutions which enable it to produce more energy than it requires to function, feeding excess power back into the municipal grid. House Rhino was completed in early 2014.

“There is a certain amount of greenwashing in the industry where systems and ideas get applied as gestures,” said Kievit, of MMK Architects.

“We need to be thinking more about materials from cradle to grave, not just the here and now. We need to consider carefully where the materials have come from, how long they will last, and what it will cost to maintain and sustain the new development over the lifetime of the building. Sensible life-cycle costing may require developers to invest upfront for improved performance on many levels.

“Sustainability and greening has become a complex issue,” he said.

Brian van Niekerk, House Rhino developer and managing director of the sustainable solutions company behind



A recent meeting of architects was held at South Africa’s acclaimed energy-plus home, House Rhino at Crossways Farm Village outside Port Elizabeth, where they were urged to begin incorporating practical eco-wise solutions to make a lasting ecological difference.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

the project, Rhino Group, said the aim of the development had always been to showcase what could be done by incor-

porating renewable energy and eco-wise solutions into a building’s design.

“Having professionals such as archi-

ects and engineers out here to learn from the development, to see what is possible with various new materials and

technologies, really validates this project for me,” he said.

— Business Reporter.