

National, global awards for Thesen Island development

■ Landscape architect behind project also honoured as 'icon'

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THESEN Islands, the marina-style property development in the Knysna lagoon that aroused controversy when the concept of a large residential development in a nature conservation area was mooted 10 years ago, has received the Institute for Landscape Architecture in Southern Africa's (Ilsa) President's Award for design excellence.

Dr Chris Mulder, whose firm conceptualised the development, was also honoured as one of three icons of landscape architecture in South Africa, his company said yesterday.

Mulder, who has a doctorate in environmental planning and urban design, was described by Ilsa as "a landscape architect with remarkable vision" and has worked on large-scale property developments in sensitive areas of Africa and China.

Since completing Thesen



WATER WONDERLAND . . . An aerial view of the award-winning Thesen Islands development.

Islands in early 2007, Mulder said he had been working on a number of new residential projects to create rural development nodes that would help slow down the move to urban areas.

With food security and access to clean water a new priority, Mulder said he had developed a concept to combine residential property development with agricultural

endeavours. His company is involved in several such projects near Thornhill in the Eastern Cape, at Kurland outside Plettenberg Bay and at Velddrif on the West Coast.

"These projects, planned to have a high labour content, will not only stimulate job creation but in all instances the land on which the development is undertaken, as well as the farming operations,

will rest in a company of which the farm workers will all own a third.

"In this way we want to promote land ownership among people who for the most part are currently unemployed," Mulder said.

The Ilsa award was not the only one for Thesen Islands. It also received two awards from the International Property Awards, which re-



CHRIS MULDER

cognises the best property developments worldwide.

Mulder's design converted the polluted Thesen Island into 19 small islands to create a waterside lifestyle unique in South Africa without affecting the sensitive inter-tidal salt marshes surrounding it.

Today, teeming marine life populates the broad waterways that meander through the complex and a safe haven has been created for the endangered Knysna Sea Horse.

The development replaced an almost century-old saw-mill and wood-processing plant on the island. It consists of 545 houses, 56 luxury apartments and a commercial centre with shops, offices and restaurants.