



# urban • futures

Designing Tomorrow's Neighbourhoods

Vol. 2 No. 3 Summer 2007

Chris Mulder & Associates. The Boatshed. Thesen Islands.

Knysna, South Africa

## A vision REWARDED

**International Property Awards, in association with CNBC has awarded Thesen Islands the "Best Marina Development, South Africa" and the Dry Mill – Thesen Islands with the "Best Redevelopment (multiple units), South Africa in Europe and Africa.**

It is with these awards that the vision Chris Mulder had almost 14 years ago has finally been recognized as one that has indeed put an end to the criticism he has faced about the development. He says, "We have created a waterfront lifestyle unique in South Africa and the proof of this lies in the fact that what we have created has indeed been more beneficial to the sensitive environment than the state that the island was in previously, allowing regeneration of the surrounding marshland and estuary and an increase in the natural bird population."

From 90 hectares of wasteland, polluted by chemicals from a wood treatment plant, littered with derelict buildings and rusting machinery, Thesen Islands has become a walkable neighbourhood offering the ultimate in lifestyle and security and is now one of Africa's largest and most technically advanced marinas. Far from the sight that met prospective buyers back in 2000, Thesen Islands has been transformed into a marina development paralleled by no other in South Africa. Set within the rich and ecologically important estuarine system of the spectacular Knysna River, Thesen Islands is spread over 90 hectares, with the marina arranged across 19 manmade islands, linked by bridges and 13km of roads including indigenous trees and a multitude of shrubs, hedges and created wetlands.

The Thesen Islands Development Company and Chris Mulder & Associates aimed Thesen Islands at a defined market: nature lovers, boating enthusiasts, the environmentally conscious and those who simply value privacy and security, it has become a more traditional neighbourhood with technically advanced enhancements. The marina consists of over 520 residential houses and apartments, many with private jetties or moorings and some with private beaches. There is also a communal beach, tennis and squash courts and a state-of-the-art clubhouse. Thesen Harbour Town is the commercial hub and includes a range of shops, restaurants and offices plus a hotel and spa. The marina has 13 hectares of parkland with marine and marsh bird reserves and a heron breeding ground.

Perhaps the most impressive piece of redevelopment is the Dry Mill apartments, a short walk from Thesen Harbour Town. Drawing inspiration from the historic structure of the original sawmill, the innovative design incorporates industrial elements creating a chic and modern building with well-balanced proportions and high open spaces. Luxury apartments occupy three storeys and are available with two, three or four bedrooms. Each has a generous open-plan living and entertainment space on the top level, sleeping quarters in the middle, and a double or triple garage and entertainment area leading to a garden with private jetty and optional pool. Decks are a prominent feature, creating a flow between interior and exterior living. Current owners include retired CEOs, successful young business people and professionals from many fields.



# Urban Enhancement

Peter Katz, author of “New Urbanism,” said “Cities have to move to a new system. They should look at the streets they like and the public spaces they like and then write the rules to get more of what they like and less of what they don’t. Conventional zoning doesn’t do that. It just gives a use and a density and then you hope for the best.”

CMAI Architects have won a Municipal bid, which involves the undertaking of an intensive study for the enhancement of lower Knysna’s central business district and industrial centre and the preparation of a document that can be used in conjunction with the existing zoning regulations.

The aim is to transform the area into a mixed-use district with a strong residential component, while promoting appropriate non-residential uses to create a vibrant and safe central town area.

In most cities and towns today, the motor vehicle has become a necessity, increasing pollution and congestion within these areas. CMAI emphasises “liveability” and “walkability” as two of the most important factors to be taken into consideration with modern-day town planning. Dr Chris Mulder, CMAI founder, makes the point that in prime areas of the country the amount of land available for development is dwindling and so the redevelopment of existing

areas is beginning to assume priority. Knysna is perhaps a prime example of a town begging for urban regeneration with the town centre confined to a small area nestled below the suburbs. Traditional zoning regulations limit the use of various erven within the town centre, but looking at transect zones, which are geographical cross sections through a region or an ecology, a set of habitats that vary in their level of intensity, from rural to urban can be identified and upgraded accordingly.

Seven areas have been targeted for enhancement within Lower Central Knysna and these include:

1. Enhanced pedestrian and cycle routes throughout Lower Central.
2. Enhancing the street quality of Gray and Long Streets as important connector routes through to the lagoon, Knysna Quays



- Specialised District** - areas with buildings that can't conform to one of the six Transect Zones.
- T6 Urban Core Zone** - equivalent of downtown. Tall buildings, greatest variety, civil buildings.
- T5.1 Urban Centre Zone 1** - equivalent of a main street. Retail, offices, rowhouses, apartments.
- T5.2 Urban Centre Zone 2** - equivalent of a main street. Retail, offices, rowhouses, apartments.
- T4 General Urban Zone** - primarily residential.
- Green Space**
- Conservation Worthy Buildings** (subject to confirmation)



and Thesen Harbour Town from Main Street, including pedestrian and cyclist movement.

**3. Enhancing the street quality and character of Queen Street** by creating a boulevard to allow easier pedestrian crossing and an open public space adjacent to the Municipality.

**4. Infill projects in Lower East and Lower West** which would allow for urban densification as per the Western Cape Spatial Development Framework and create a vibrant town centre.

**5. East-West traffic should be dispersed through the town** to lighten the load on Main Street and Waterfront Drive.

**6. Ensuring a balance between density and green open space**, with the high school sports ground as the main focus.

**7. The current industrial area on the south eastern side of Lower Central** has a high potential to become a mixed-use, residential and tourism orientated area with public access to the lagoon, parks, restaurants and possibly an extension of the canal system and small harbour.

A transect map was prepared for the whole of lower central and a document was presented to Council in which proposals were made regarding densification, infill, change of use, street frontages and possible interventions in order to improve the town's public domain.

A community participation workshop was held on Thesen Islands on the 29th of March 2007, to allow the people who live, work and play within Knysna Town an opportunity to air their ideas and views. Suggestions in favour of sub-economic housing were raised, as well as requests for specifically mixed-use buildings and streets with businesses at ground level with residential at higher levels rather than shopping malls. All of these suggestions have been included in the project.

## GEORGE REX Coming Soon!

The eco-sensitive mixed-use neighbourhood planned for George Rex Drive is awaiting ROD and has been granted Guide Plan Amendment approval from the Knysna Municipality. **George Rex Place** will be 19.4ha of middle income residential housing, with a commercial component offering residents and people from the area the opportunity to live, work and shop in their immediate neighbourhood. The development will be surrounded by a system of open spaces consisting of 38% wetland, water bodies and landscaped parks. Watch this space for details about acquiring a piece of urban paradise in the near future.







# CMAI continues with **NEW RURALISM**

CMAI is venturing up the West Coast with the rural marina village of Flamink Vlei, opposite Velddrif.



With most urban areas already overflowing with traffic congestion, crime and in desperate need of renewal, it is important to look towards rural areas for further development. The creation of walkable neighbourhoods incorporating living, working and playing is the only way forward and will ensure that these areas do not become rural wastelands, left behind in the urban race.

The Flamink Vlei site overlooks 50ha of existing saltwater holding dams next to the Berg river and these, with a new canal system will be developed into an agri-lifestyle development with a small inland marina and residential stands of varying sizes, a boutique hotel specifically designed for bird watching, which will form part of a planned Flamingo route, and large aquaculture (fish farming) and agricultural components.

True to the rural village character and central to the design approach it includes a broad range of property and dwelling unit sizes and the development aims to cater for a cross-spectrum of society and a wide range of income groups. This multi-use development is based on the concept of New Ruralism which progresses the New Urbanist model of compact, walkable communities to the rural context, as with other CMAI ventures, most important, is the walkable distance from places of work, to shopping and community facilities such as schools, parks and clinics.

The development will blend in with the rural landscape. The majority of the buildings will be single storey, and of the vernacular architecture of the coastal villages of the region such as Paternoster. The development will practice a dark sky policy to protect the rural character of the site. Low water demand indigenous species will dominate the planting of the development.

Strict aesthetic guidelines will be in place and a rural vernacular style will dominate architectural design, calling for rough plastered walls, dark roofs, verandahs, chimneys and gable ended buildings. The proposed development will endeavour to retain the sense of place of the West Coast and create a unique character residents can relate to.

The proposal is based on traditional neighbourhood design – a comprehensive planning system with the neighbourhood as its basic element. The neighbourhood is mixed-use, mixed income and limited in area and not by density. By providing a full range of housing types and work places, age and economic classes are integrated and the bonds of an authentic community are formed. Architectural variety will ensure vitality, and architectural harmony will ensure the beauty of the street scape and the public realm.





# CMAI into the EASTERN CAPE

Another area that CMAI is exploring for the first time is the Eastern Cape, with a new development on the farm Parsons Vlei in Port Elizabeth, called New Horizon Villages.

**A**ffordability is the main focus of this new development in the heart of Port Elizabeth. With 2000 sites marketed specifically at first time home owners.

With all homes centered around large public spaces, the aim of this development is to provide neighbourhood patterns consisting of pockets, each with a park and sharing a central sports field. Once again "walkability" is key, with dedicated pedestrian and cycle routes linking these pockets with various public facilities, all within walking distance.

The architecture reflects a re-interpretation of the South African Cape Vernacular in a contemporary manner. Strong emphasis is placed on street and park contact from within the public frontage, whilst maintaining privacy through shutters, screens and level

changes. Various frontage types will occur and, together with detailed elements will give individual character to each home.

A Code book has been put together, which puts forward aesthetic guidelines for the external appearance and positioning of buildings and structures and is an instrument to maintain the overall design sensitivity, whilst allowing flexibility for individual expression. The guidelines also encompass landscaping regulations for the conservation of the existing and valuable vegetation, which is Rowallan Park Grassy fynbos and rehabilitation will be carried out in areas needing attention.

CMAI received an already approved town planning layout and worked successfully around this to create a liveable, walkable, environment for all. Phase I is already sold out!





# House IN THE HILL

Patience, it is said, is often rewarded. For the owners of Dunvegan, one of the first homes built on the multi-award-winning Pezula Private Estate, it took 18 years for their dream of owning a home in Knysna to come true. But then again, the best things in life are worth waiting for.

From the emerald green hills of Scotland and the Castle Dunvegan, comes Dunvegan at Pezula on a spectacular fynbos-covered plot overlooking the Indian Ocean.

Recognised internationally as one of the world's premier luxury developments, Pezula is being developed with great environmental sensitivity.

The topography of the site presented a number of challenges in trying to maximize views while minimizing the impact of the elements. Architect Steff Mulder of CMAI, who was tasked with designing the house, explains: "Positioning the house on a north/south axis just below the ridge line not only allowed us to reduce its visual impact, it also ensured that it is sheltered from the prevailing strong westerly winds."

For the house to be in harmony with its setting it was decided that Dunvegan would be constructed using steel, glass, stone, wood

and other natural materials.

The brief was both simple and challenging: work around the theme of the predominant elements of sea and earth; ensure that the house blends into the environment so that once completed, it appears that the house simply "grew" out of the hillside; and finally, create seamless, adaptable spaces that meet their lifestyle needs so that the house is as comfortable for a dozen people as it is for two.

The house opens itself to the sea during the day, while at night the focus shifts back towards the earth.

The natural theme carries through to the finishes and décor, in the form of glass tiles, cement floors, natural fabrics, organic colours and artistic lighting. Everything blends visually and aesthetically with the natural theme and at the same time everything has a purpose.







House Tamaris-Levitt - Thesen Islands



**CMAI  
WINS**  
with the  
TFBA



Thesen Islands Sales Centre

## Wetland WONDER

This compact north-facing home on Crabclaw Island, Thesen Islands, has created the perfect space for all seasons...

The brief was simple: utilise as much of the northern light and view as possible. The outcome was perfect - a neat home with the kitchen, lounge and main entertainment area downstairs, overlooking the spectacular natural wetlands of the Knysna estuary, with a large verandah jutting out over the tidal waters.

Clean, simple lines and flowing interiors create a spaciousness on an otherwise small erf. The central courtyard is sheltered from

the wind and creates a haven for relaxing in privacy. The entire house opens up from the front to the back thus creating a constant flow of energy from the cool intertidal salt marshes to the north, to the quiet stillness of the courtyard and flatlet to the south.

The U.K. clients allowed CMAI the freedom to impart their knowledge of the site and the ability to utilise their skills to the fullest, thus ensuring an end product worthy of the spectacular scenery surrounding it.





# Final HANDOVER

With the Thesen Islands Development Company having fulfilled their end of the bargain, the final phases of the development have been handed over to the Homeowners.

This project has spanned a total of fourteen years, 7 in the planning stage and a further 7 of construction and it is CMAI's vision for a community based on lifestyle, walkability and safety that has ensured Thesen Islands has reached its full potential.

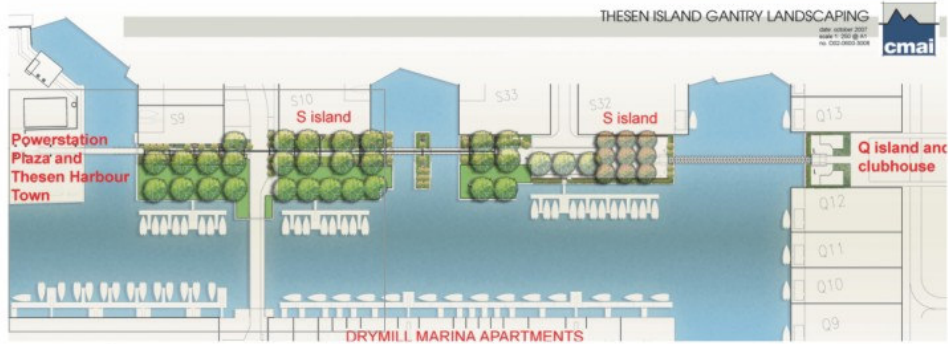
Together with the Thesen Island Development Company, CMAI has turned a veritable wasteland into a flourishing and growing lively community, complete with exquisite homes, a safe neighbourhood for children to play in, shops and offices within walking distance and of course parklands and recreational facilities.

In October 2007, the Parklands and

Orchards were handed over to the Homeowners. These areas have been through an unbelievable transformation and now teem with bird and plant life.

The Monorail Gardens, linking Thesen Harbour Town to the rest of the Islands, will be handed over in December 2007. Access for residents is either by foot or cyclepath. The pedestrian bridges stretch from the plaza outside the biggest retail section, the Sawtooth building, and the Power Station (which will soon be a boutique hotel), to the Club House and Quill Island and is another facet that brings the word "walkability" home.

Why drive when you can experience your neighbourhood safely on foot or by bicycle.



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