

Timeless elegance and long-term relevance are at the top of Greg Wright and Greg Scott's agenda, as is a no-holds-barred determination to break the mould with every project.

Greg Wright and Greg Scott share more than just a first name. They are united in their pursuit of excellence and their determination to never accept mediocrity. These are the founding principles of the Cape Town-based architectural practice they head up – Greg Wright Architects.

Not to be mistaken for spartan doctrine, the lofty standards underscoring Greg Wright Architects' business philosophy stem from a deeper, far richer conviction.

In a statement that grapples with the bigger picture in a way that signifies a mindset of fine intuition, Wright and Scott unanimously claim: 'We truly believe that designers are the key to changing the way we experience and interpret the world we live in.' Therein lies their determination to 'never settle for being average'.

Zambia-born, East London-schooled Greg Wright has always been steadfast in his beliefs. His first 'real job', with a well-established Durban firm that designed large retail, corporate, medical and educational facilities, almost put an end to his career. 'It was soul destroying,' Greg relates, 'and I decided I never want to work unless it's something I believe in, regardless of how much money I get paid!'

The army tracked him down via his first tax submission and thereafter followed a two-year stint in Pretoria, 'an amazing experience in itself, with the AWB at its height and the entire army imploding with the collapse of apartheid'. He subsequently relocated to Cape Town and joined forces with varsity friend Stefan Antoni, whose fledgling practice was growing.

But after four years opinions varied and Greg decided to go solo. Looking back, he says, 'I figured the only way I was going to find out if I was right about certain things important to me was to go and do it on my own.'

And so, in 1995, Greg Wright Architects (GWA) was founded with nothing more than Greg, his Apple Mac and a small bedroom in his Green Point home. Through building on a strong work ethic and being committed to ideals, he has seen the company burgeon into a 25-strong team with a portfolio of over 40 breathtaking buildings.

For his part, Greg Scott graduated from Cape Tech in 1995 and went on to work with Etienne Bruwer at Greenhaus Architects and then with Leon Saven. After returning to studies and graduating from UCT at the end of 1999, he again worked in association with Etienne part-time until he decided to focus more on his career. ('The other time was spent learning to DJ, throwing crazy parties, spending time studying Llandudno and Dangers beaches and those other important things in life!')

In 2001 he joined the team at GWA. 'I was made offers by a few firms, but the opportunities with Greg Wright appealed to me most,' he shares. A year later, Wright offered Scott a partnership in the practice.

'My first few years as partner were spent learning from him,' remembers Scott. 'I have never met anybody so committed and passionate about achieving excellence in all that they do. It was a massive wake-up call. I bought into the mindset personified by Greg and decided to push myself and see where it led.'

True to their word, wherever they go, Wright and Scott have been pushing boundaries. Their work, exemplified by its clean lines and pragmatic response to context, from climate conditions and topography to scenery and lifestyle, has been popping up all over, particularly on the Cape's Atlantic Seaboard, but also further afield on the African continent and even Peru. Some of their favourites include POD in Camps Bay, Spiders Web House in Plettenberg Bay and Ebb Tide apartments in Barley Bay.

But would you recognise a 'GWA' building?

'Our intention is to have people admire our work without being able to place it as an obvious or



Poetry meets PRAGMATISM

Words Sarah Jayne Fell
Photographs Julian Goldswain

ABOVE Greg Wright (left) and Greg Scott discuss a new project.



THIS PAGE, TOP LEFT AND BOTTOM LEFT Camps Bay's POD. CENTRE LEFT Interior and exterior views of Spiders Web House, Plettenberg Bay. CENTRE TOP Penka Michel, Cameroon. CENTRE Greg Scott (left) and Greg Wright engage in some off-the-wall thinking at their Cape Town offices. CENTRE RIGHT Ebb Tide apartments, Barley Bay. BOTTOM RIGHT Artist's impression of a private residence in Hildene Road, Tamboerskloof. OPPOSITE, TOP TO BOTTOM Sunset viewed from an Ebb Tide apartment; Greg Wright Architects renovated this home in Beta Road, Bakoven; exterior and interior views from GWA's competition entry for the design of the World Trade Centre Concourse in New York.

specific style,' they explain. 'If somebody notices a building and appreciates it but has to find out it was us who did it, then we have achieved what we set out to do: progressively well-designed buildings that continue to define architecture going forwards, not mimicking that which has gone before, but definitely always learning from it.

'Our work is underpinned by a process, attitude and mindset more than a "type". We specialise in innovative solutions based on rigorous analysis of the relevant contextual issues at play and then translate these into original design solutions that work on levels that are practical, aesthetic, financial and contextual.

'We do single residences, multiple-unit apartment blocks and commercial and leisure developments. We enter local and international competitions, are working with the Department of Public Works on parliamentary housing upgrading and also have an interior design company, SITE Interior Design, so we can both finish our buildings and deal with standalone interior design/architecture projects. We are currently busy with, and have completed, projects in South Africa, Namibia, Cameroon, Ghana and Peru, and are in talks about others in Angola, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire.'

Speaking of architectural trends, Scott and Wright agree they have bigger ideas when it comes to their designs. 'I don't think

wonder, which make us create ... to give poetic form to pragmatic needs.'

Their new pursuit of poetry amid pragmatism is unmistakable in their attitude: 'We measure ourselves against principles comprising relevance, elegance, innovation, efficiency and effectiveness, amongst others. We are sincere in our attempts to make architecture that contributes to the broader social and built fabric in which it finds itself.'

Realising their work is more than a design discipline, Wright and Scott point to other notable aspects of their profession. 'Rather than conforming to a specific "style" or aesthetic, we prefer our buildings to develop out of a process of engagement informed by the specifics of the brief, the physical context as well as more abstract, principle-based issues, whilst at the same time striving to mould a product that is built around the specifics of our clients, is elegantly packaged and is "easy on the senses"', says one.

Economic factors, such as market forces, also come into play, says the other. 'We always spend time with clients, explaining how a budget must be structured before commencing real design work on any project. Clients need to know that the material sums of money being invested in the development of their properties will yield a return.'

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"trends" are something we spend time engaging with (although they can't be ignored). We focus more on the ongoing search for longer-term relevance within the rapidly changing architectural landscape currently affecting us all.

'There are some major issues that affect all of us, such as dwindling resources, increasing energy demands, as well as changes to the lifestyle people are seeking, and these are what we respond to. We seek to offer meaningful contributions to the built environment that will outlast any shorter-term "trends" and build tailored solutions around our clients.'

Their noble ambitions have chiselled their company's ideology over the years. Once they went with the tagline, 'Driven by the pursuit of excellence'. Today Greg Wright Architects bases its pay-off line on a quote from Argentinean-born architect Emilio Ambasz, famous for his harmonious integration of nature and buildings: 'It's not hunger, but love and fear, and sometimes

Architecture is not evaluated on aesthetics alone, they insist. 'For many people this is secondary, and it is more about the bottom line. This is the bane of architects worldwide: that "value" is measured purely in monetary terms and often the real contribution a building or development could have made to the environment or neighbourhood in which it finds itself never materialises, as the scorecard is too heavily weighted in terms of historic or current market forces and not forward-thinking ideals.'

Their own ideals are what separate Wright and Scott from the rest. With indomitable dedication to long-term success for their company and its creations and a passion for breaking new ground, GWA is putting up far more than buildings. It's building the framework of the future. 'We're in the midst of some interesting steps in the next stage of our evolution, so watch this space.' +27 (0)21 465 9775, gwarchitects.co.za, siteid.co.za

