



With their innovative design ethic, Gabs Pather and Khalied Jacobs are revolutionising the SA architectural and design industry

'We've brand spanking new. We'll be five years old next February,' says Gabs Pather proudly.

Gabs met partner Khalied Jacobs while studying architecture at UCT, and after graduating they went their separate ways. Gabs concentrated on designing private buildings, while Khalied was drawn to the public sector. Seven years later, the two formed JAKUPA Architects and Urban Designers.

'We were frustrated with what we'd been doing, so it was a natural progression to join forces,' Khalied explains. The two opened a small practice in Woodstock, Cape Town in 2005. Initially, Khalied was based in Somalia working for the UN, so Gabs ran the show on his own for a year. The partners then worked together for three years, before deciding to open a second practice in Johannesburg in October 2008. 'More and more people had seen our work and were confident in what we were doing, and a number of business opportunities had come up in Johannesburg,' Khalied explains.

Currently, the firm comprises 23 people. 'We've always wanted to stay small. We'd envisaged a company of about 12 to 15 people,

DYNAMITE DESIGN

Words: Julia Malcher
Portrait Photograph: Ruvan Boshoff



but we're not complaining about how we've grown! The team is predominantly involved in public sector work – that's their passion – but they occasionally design private sector buildings, usually housing projects.

JAKUPA holds two portfolios: Gabi runs the architectural side and Khalid handles Urban Design. They have a dual philosophy – research through design practice and innovation as well as creativity in solving everyday African urban problems. Gabi explains: 'Our practice is a little different from most. To us, being socially conscious is just as important as being environmentally aware, and we like to design our buildings accordingly.'

Gabi and Khalid's work focuses on social problems. 'It's the everyday conflicts between various sectors of society and the consequences of these conflicts that we want to address in our designs,' explains Khalid. He describes their style as contemporary and modern.

The JAKUPA team is currently working on provincial government buildings in Johannesburg's CBD. It's part of the provincial government's initiative to regenerate the CBD; they aim to bring all the government buildings together in one location so that they're easily accessible. The government has appointed a number of teams to work on a series of buildings. 'We've managed to secure two buildings, which we're very chuffed about,' Khalid says. Some of their other current projects include the Public Transport Shared Services Centre in Athlone, in association with MDL Architects, the new car rental facility at Cape Town International Airport and the Provincial Tower in Cape Town's Dorp Street.

'Then, in Johannesburg, we're doing something completely different: we're designing a very exciting house in Kyalami for a good friend of ours. We tried to interpret what the elements of a contemporary African urban home could be, and integrated this into the landscape to create a design that responds to its context. It's all about finding what will best suit the site.'

One of the highlights of their careers has been heading up the tender for the 2010 FIFA Green Point Stadium in Cape Town. In 2006, Gabi and Khalid were commissioned by the City of Cape Town to be a part of the team to design the 68 000-seat stadium. 'We were so small, just a year old at the time, and there was some resistance from bigger companies to partner with us. We were part of the winning



TOP LEFT JAKUPA designed the new car rental facility at Cape Town International Airport. ABOVE AND RIGHT Gabi and Khalid are passionate about the Cape Town Society for the Blind project. LEFT The Cape Town Station Revitalisation project

ABOVE The team is currently working on the Transport Shared Service Centre in Athlone, Cape Town RIGHT AND BELOW Being part of the team to design the 68 000-seat Green Point 2010 FIFA World Cup Stadium has been one of Gabi and Khalid's greatest career highlights



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team. We might not have known about stadiums at the time, but we certainly knew Cape Town,' Gabi laughs.

'We formed a company called Point Architects and Urban Designers to work on one third of the project. It comprises four firms: JAKUPA, Conrie Wilkinson, Marnik Visser and Pirog Architects. Being Point's current chairperson has been a significant role for me,' says Gabi. 'We also form part of the Urban Design team whose role is to develop design guidelines for the stadium precinct, the Green Point Common and the Urban Park.'

Gabi and Khalid had a busy year in 2006. They were also fortunate to form part of the Cape Town Station Revitalisation team that will prepare the largest building in Cape Town's

CBD for 2010, the N2 Gateway Housing Project and, for the Cape Town Society for the Blind, the construction of new workshops and manufacturing stalls for artisans who are visually impaired or have other disabilities.

Gabi and Khalid are particularly passionate about the latter. 'We really pushed the boundaries on the Cape Town Society for the Blind project. Dealing with blind people was a challenge but we were happy to take it on. To communicate the design better to them, we built touchy-feely models instead of using PowerPoint presentations. They loved them – they'd never experienced anything like that before,' says Gabi.

It's this kind of innovation and sensitivity that sets Gabi and Khalid apart.

Another project close to their hearts is the Non-Motorised Transport (NMT) development in Cape Town. 'It's very special because it links to our philosophy,' Gabi says. (NMT are bicycle lanes and footpaths located in Lioebock Parkway, Woodstock and Athlone in Cape Town that are used for 'anything without a motor,' Gabi explains.) 'We want to break boundaries – these routes need to be more than just paths, travelling along them needs to be about the experience rather than the speed.'

JAKUPA was also involved in a project to use tourism as a development tool in the small Noodsloek informal settlement, Matieland. 'The tourism opportunity lies in the settlement and its people, so we involve the community in sorting out problems. It's about turning Cape

Town inside out and making it less segregated and more integrated,' Khalid says.

'Some of our designs may not be glossy or sexy, but they mean something to us and to the people we design for. We've been able to make a positive impact on a number of people. We're making a statement. We're breaking down stereotypes. We don't believe that design should just be for the individual – it's for everyone. As far as we're concerned, every building has meaning, whether it's beautiful or not,' Khalid says, smiling. He adds, 'JAKUPA is our baby, but being small doesn't stop you from doing big work.' JAKUPA is proof that dynamite comes in small packages.

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