

As Cape Town prepares to become World Design Capital in 2014 – the year that also marks the 20th anniversary of democracy in South Africa – the city faces challenges that no past holder of the title has had to tackle.

“In 1994, we inherited a city designed for separation. Since then, we have been designing a city for integration,” reads Cape Town’s winning bid for the biannual award.

The city is vibrant and cosmopolitan. Its Victoria & Alfred Waterfront – South Africa’s biggest tourist attraction – receives 23m visitors per year. But Cape Town’s population remains racially divided after decades of apartheid-era town planning.

The route to a reunified city lies partly in “socially transformative” design, according to Cape Town Design, the non-profit company behind the World Design Capital bid. One big step towards that is bringing back city-centre living.

District Six – once a thriving, largely black inner-city community – has been a ghost town since the 1970s, when 60,000 residents were evicted and their homes bulldozed. But nearby Woodstock is enjoying a regeneration. Its Saturday morning market is a trendy breakfast spot, and the neighbouring Central Business District (CBD) is starting to build a full-time community. Knight Frank is selling a newly-renovated one-bedroom apartment there for R1.15m (£82,225).

Former office buildings have been converted to residential properties and the five-star Taj Cape Town hotel is selling 10 homes priced at R2.99m-R7m (£214,000-£500,500). To encourage investment, the government is offering tax breaks to buyers (see Buying guide).

“These are the only hotel residences in the CBD and buyers get a fully secure property with a parking space [and] use of the hotel’s facilities,” says Peter Weideman, the Taj’s marketing executive.

One area already buzzing with restaurants, markets and tourist attractions is the V&A Waterfront, where there are 515 apartments overlooking quiet canals in a gated



Camps Bay, where prices start at R60,000 per sq metre

The Cape’s crusaders

South Africa property Urban design and residential projects reflect social progress. *By Zoe Dare Hall*



View of the beach from the private decks at the Camps Bay beach development

development with 1,000 CCTV cameras.

“The big draw of the Waterfront is that it’s a very secure environment. It feels like a city within a city,” says chief executive David Green.

For those who want something “grittier”, there is No 2 Silo, part of the R1bn (£71.6m) docks redevelopment. The apartments here cost R3m-R10m (£215,000-£716,000) and have a six-star green rating, with eco features such as seawater cooling and solar-powered heating. Inside, their design is open-plan and airy, and the views stretch as far as Blouberg’s beaches (25km away) and the Stellenbosch wine lands. The apartments also overlook the working harbour, where the vast majority of South Africa’s fish is handled.

“The marina has a definite personality and we don’t shy away from the working aspect. We’re pushing its authenticity and the feeling of being in the middle of the city,” says Green. “This is an exciting, active place where you can engage with the waterfront and walk everywhere.”

Getting people out of their cars is a vital part of making Cape Town function properly. “We have suburban sprawl and a car culture as bad as the US. But Cape Town’s new bus system, inspired by the one that has transformed the Brazilian city of Curitiba, is seeing even the middle classes use public transport now,” says Xico Meirelles of MLB Architects.

Meirelles’ projects range from shopping centres in depressed urban areas such as Wembley Square to beachfront villas in Cape Town’s most desirable coastal area, Camps Bay, where prices average R60,000-R100,000 (£4,300-£7,100) per sq metre. “Mixed-use developments like this bring communities together, so you don’t have dormitory towns where everyone lives and a downtown that’s dead at night,” he says.

His five Camps Bay Beach villas cost between R29.5m and R37m (£2.1m-£2.6m) and have granite walls and floors, and infinity pools on the terraces, where the sound of waves drowns out the roar of Lamborghinis.



Camps Bay wasn’t always this desirable, according to property developer Tony Stern, who first built there 20 years ago when beachfront bungalows sold for R26,000 (£1,860). “Now they cost around R17m (£1.2m) and this Atlantic Seaboard strip is the most expensive 3 miles in Africa,” he says. He rents out his 10 spacious Blue Views apartments and villas for up to R17,000 (£1,215) a night.

Groundbreaking designs and improved trains are also drawing buyers

Buying guide

- Cape Town’s average house price in January 2013 was R894,510 (£64,000), up from R850,589 (£61,000) in January 2012
- Knight Frank forecast a subdued South African property market in 2013, with “modest” price growth in the short to medium term and house prices softening in real terms
- Government incentives mean that, in Urban Development Zones, buyers can apply for a tax depreciation of 20 per cent in the first year of purchase and 5 per cent thereafter for 16 years
- Cape Town’s enlivened downtown has helped to halve crime rates from 2010-2012

What you can buy for...

- **£500,000** A five-bedroom house in Durbanville
- **£1m** A four-bedroom sea view apartment in Camps Bay
- **£5m** A three-bedroom, 833 sq metre penthouse on the V&A Waterfront

to Cape Town’s commuter belt around Stellenbosch, where Nootgedacht Village is a new Mediterranean village-style project set on a 17th-century wine estate. “One senior lawyer has bought here so he can catch the ‘cappuccino train’ into Cape Town for work,” says the project’s developer, Gerhardt Jooste, managing director of Prosperito.

In Stellenbosch, an affluent university town, Nootgedacht’s prices are as novel as the sight of middle-class people on trains. South African and British buyers helped to sell out the first phase. The next tranche of apartments cost from R750,000 (£54,000) and three-bedroom houses from R1,696,000 (£121,300) – made feasible by the wine estate’s owners having paid cash for the land and utilities many years ago.

“This kind of lifestyle estate in a historic vineyard setting is completely new for South Africa,” says Jooste. As World Design Capital nears, this won’t be the end of the innovation.

Zoe Dare Hall was a guest of the Nootgedacht Estate