



Alice Lane: A new breed of health club



Photographs by Natalie Payne.

Virgin Active's 108th South African gym recently opened in Sandton. Paul Pamboukian Lighting was responsible for the lighting design and Anthony Tischhauser explains how they created an ambiance suitable for 'the world's leading health club'.

Alice Lane is the first of a new breed of health club. Gone are the factory aesthetic, pumping music and industrial high bays. Virgin Active claims exercising in the lounge is more fun. That is definitely a shift towards added comfort for the client, who is often someone who is no more than stressed and wanting to work it off. So the Health Club now is your getaway in the heart of the throbbing city where you can relax, tone-up, enjoy

a delicious meal and attend to business from the bar after a work-out, a massage and a manicure. Of course, the gym equipment is state-of-the-art, never seen in South Africa to date, internet enabled for multi-tasking, and the best. That goes without saying. As opposed to a mechanical challenge, it's the mood or, if you like, warm atmosphere that greets you.

The Virgin organisation chose Sandton to realise and test the concept, which is applied as a 'Classic' and exclusive experience in other so called 'world class cities'. As with the usual drive-in structures today, the entrance is from a typical grey and gloomy parking garage – it is not accessible by foot. But then this is no ordinary tune-up centre. Opened by Sir Richard Branson himself, it targets the discerning upper crust. Gone are the downlights too. One is greeted under a soft comfortable blanket of light and indirectly lit arcade walls. Off the modest en-



trance is the reception with custom-made exposed directed black tubular surface mounted fittings. The opposite three-dimensional white feature light-wall relief breaks the stylish warm wooden hews and leads immediately to the fully equipped rentable glass conference room.

The red off-centre stairs detract from the lounge behind, a cosy space set slightly lower than the blue swimming pool with its exquisite view west over trees and hills towards a daily spectacular sunset. The cove-like speckled sitting room offers The Nook and other personal areas to quietly sip a health juice, meet over a cup of coffee or link to the world of internet; sandwich in mouth. In the spacious lounge individual interior luminaires also add definition to the atmosphere. A dedicated work area with a view offers all the necessary connections for networking. Leisure and relaxation are key elements in the new notion of bodywork as one moves from the Kohu Café to the Brew Bar to the Shoeshine Bar.

Much of the lighting is custom, bespoke design, integrated into shopfitting and fixtures. Luminaires are floating disks and panels with differing colour temperatures in different areas, not only to demar-

cate the various activity zones but to complement the various activities in an appropriate ambience. Profile spotlights cast gobo dots onto the off-shuttered ceiling above the pool and red LED in the handrail defines the edge of each step of the glossy Caesar-stone swung stair. Above, seemingly floating but suspended irregular amorphic mirror disks mingle the reflections from below with the reflected light from the different exercise areas - announcing each space on the upper floor. Scattered custom-made circular incandescent coloured discs 650, 900, 1200 or 1500 mm in diameter contrast with the matt black concrete roof structure and service conduits to give mood over the open plan cardio area.

By contrast, the muscle toning area is lit with lines of cold white LED panels. Windowless glazed boxes against the interior walls for body and mind work appear spacious and intimate. The wide bands of LED lighting from floor to floor are graphically decorative and functional, all in one. Fully programmable, RGB colour control allows instructors to set the mood for their specific sessions, be they anti-gravity yoga, trix, power plate or pilates. LID

