

Playing in the light on the piazza

Photographs by João Viegas (JV) and Natalie Payne (NP).

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The Central Square development in the heart of Menlyn Maine, Pretoria, is a 'New Urban' city precinct, or multi-use development, comprising shopping centre, office space, hotel and health club, all brought together by a central open air triangular piazza, which is bordered by restaurants, coffee shops and pubs, and further enhanced by trees, water features and public artworks. A park runs through the entire city precinct and alongside Central Square offering a space for people to relax and refresh. Pamboukian Lightdesign (PlD) was invited to design the lighting plan for Central Square and the piazza.

The shopping centre was designed as an internal 'high street'. It is tiled in granite, with wood and stucco plastered bulkheads. Every shop has a front of steel, aluminium and wood, all in shades of charcoal. A glass roof with intermediate ceiling panels ensures there is an abundance of natural light.

"During day light hours," says João Viegas of PlD, "natural light from the roof along with the sliding doors of the two internal courtyards make you feel as though you are outside. To ensure there is also sufficient light at night, we uplit the ceiling between the skylights to break the contrast from daylight. This we did using 14.4 W linear batons which become an architectural feature at night when they complete the visual threshold once you can no longer see through the glass roof. We also created an articulated feature along the fascia with scallops of light, and glass lanterns hanging from the ceiling add a festive element"

The outside façade is uplit and the wall behind the glass façade backlit so the façade punches through. On the northern and western sides up/down lights emphasise the rhythm of the architecture by illuminating the vertical supports. Strip lighting divides the square from the walkway. PlD also designed the pathway lighting and the streetlights, the latter with special bases able to withstand un-

successful parking attempts by visiting customers.

Central Square, however, is about the piazza and here the atmospheric lighting by PlD was conceived as the basis to all activity from blue hour into the night. The most striking features are the surfaces of glass panel light boxes that by day light the ramp of the parking level below, one of three. Originally thought of as translucent glass, the lighting designers suggested a frosted glass, which would hide the fittings – situated over a metre under the ground and in effect lighting an entire well – emanating a hue of colour from below as part of the piazza surface. The LED colour changes from a whitish blue through shades of blue light on a slow program.

"This utilitarian idea," says Anthony Tischhauser of PlD, "turned into something very beautiful. People mill around and the blue light shines up their legs ... they love it." Viegas agrees wholeheartedly adding that children particularly illustrate an honest appreciation of the design. "They delight in the light on the square, running around and jumping on it, just as they would in water."

An exhibition of 31 sculptures by Anton Smit aims to make art part of people's daily experience. Interaction is encouraged and there are QR codes alongside the sculptures which visitors can scan if they would like to read about or buy them. The sculptures lift the space and the awareness of art. Again, there is movement here as children run up to them and, in the case of the central piece, play on the mound upon which it is mounted.

In-ground fittings light the trees and the sculptures from below. As opposed to flood lighting the square, or introducing street lighting, projected gobo mood lighting – directed from two 9 m high masts – adds interest to the surface texture. Light and shadow fill the space as the masts emit soft light through the trees and onto the square, and brush the top of the sculpture to lift out its features.

Viegas and Tischhauser believe that the gobos



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Menlyn Maine is South Africa's first green, mixed-use city precinct. As a partner of the Clinton Climate Initiative, it is one of 16 green 'cities' being built in various countries, and the only one in Africa. In line with Menlyn Maine's exceptional sustainability benchmarks, all buildings in the precinct are set to be rated 4 Green Star SA or higher by the Green Building Council of South Africa. It is also targeting a LEED ND certification for the precinct.

have worked well, they light different patterns on different things. The ground, in essence, is floodlit, but without the glare. People walk through brush strokes of light and where it comes through a tree it mimics what it would be like to walk through a forest or green space. "It is the subtleties," says Tischhauser, "that make the lighting special."

On the north side of the square, a change in material indicates that a granite wall has become

a timber bench, which draws a line between public and semi-private space and creates pockets of space within the square. Viegas explains that people use these benches to enjoy a cigarette, wait for someone or have a private conversation. "A strip of warm white LED lighting gives people privacy but they are not entirely in the dark. It is very important to have human-centric light that is warm and soft," he says.

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Another long bench emphasises a pedestrian route that passes in front of the hotel to a node on the internal streets. The strip lighting is just above the paving, defining direction.

On the southern side a huge steel tree by Marcel Gunther stands high. First designed for Christmas festivities it now is tuned for individual celebrations. The lighting is adapted on each occasion. Between events the lighting runs through a series

of sequences during an evening adding an engaging element to the square.

Central Square has become a popular venue and gets very busy at night. More and more it will become the central urban element in the greater Menlyn development as the casino comes into operation and the planned hospital opens. The lighting in the square has played no small role in its success. LID