

Hilton Windhoek Hotel



Private equity firm United Africa Group has built the first international five star hotel in Namibia, the Hilton (Eliakim Namundjebo Plaza) Windhoek Hotel. Martha Namundjebo-Tilahun, daughter of liberator Eliakim Namundjebo, headed the development, which marks the first phase in the Freedom Plaza project, a mixed-use precinct with a central tree-lined pedestrian spine, hotel, and retail, luxury residential and office buildings. Situated in the centre of Windhoek, it is bordered by Rev Michael Scott Street to the east, Sam Nujoma Avenue on the south and Independence Avenue to the west. Pamboukian lightdesign was commissioned to design the lighting scheme for the hotel and Anthony Tischhauser explains how this was achieved.

A 40m high glass entrance cylinder – topped with a double volume executive lounge, pool, terraces and bar – on Rev Michael Scott Street is off-set from the main rectangular building. The hotel is constructed around a full-height day-lit atrium, which acquires a warm and richer glow as darkness approaches. It is designed around the conceptual idea of boxes placed within a legible building structure. The ‘illuminated box’ is applied throughout as a design theme – and especially to visually important elements such as the retail shops, offices, bars, reception desk, and selected service components – with varying degrees of transparency that reflect the required levels of privacy.

Local firm, Wasserfall Munting Architects in association with Martin Kruger Architects of Cape Town conceptualised and designed the building as an ‘element on the urban stage’ with an understated contemporary but international feel. As night falls it changes character, coming alive through the effect of its internal lighting scenarios. The transient character of theatre is expressed through the use of LED lighting; changing the ambiance and appearance of interior spaces and external facades.

Water, a cherished resource in Namibia, was themed by the architects. The Californian interior designers – SFA Design from Santa Barbara; brought in by Namundjebo-Tilahun – introduced a similar theme of ‘urban oasis versus safari reserve’.



They created a chandelier mimicking rain; an “impression of water raining down on arid land...”, in the form of glass pendants in the double volume hotel concierge opposite the entrance doors. In the lobby lounge, reference is made to the mineral wealth of Namibia by the suspension of over 1000 different shaped diamond-like glass crystals.

The operator came on board rather late in the building process which meant the building was subject to major changes. This had consequences for the lighting budget which was cut four times and, in this particular case, led to four different lighting scenarios and schemes.

In the final design, Pamboukian lightdesign illuminated the glass water-like drops with blue and white LEDs to create a flowing liquid effect. Similarly, in the lobby lounge the different sized crystals are lit by recessed RGB LED downlights programmed to project warm amber colours as the sun sets and which fade as the evening progresses, through greens and blues to a deep saturated midnight blue. The gentle, natural movement of the crystals adds to the reflected charm of the lighting. The face of the main walnut stair is centrally lit by a subtle LED wash to create a soft carpet of warm light. This runner of light is achieved by placing LED strips in a specifically designed groove – to avoid glare – in the underside of each tread that washes the up-stand of each corresponding stair.

The hotel foyer is randomly flooded with red light that appears and disappears with the movement of either lift. Defining the threshold between concierge and hotel public areas, the two lifts read as glowing boxes that penetrate a space unannounced; filling it with a red glow before disappearing again. The similarly illuminated outer side of each lift adds a dynamic and novel element to the urban landscape. The exposed sides of the panoramic lifts are illuminated with a saturated red LED wash.

A soft strip wash, from a narrow band of LEDs built into the balustrades, lights the walkway carpets to the rooms. By contrast, rooms are entered through a wall of warm light: the solid full height doors are placed between full length light boxes either side, lit with T5 fluorescents. The box-like headboards are also light boxes lit by low bright LEDs that fade towards the floor adding to a comfortable atmosphere that complements the ‘feel’ of the guest rooms. Room lighting has become the basis of all hotel lighting with an emphasis on personal mood, comfort, adaptability, easy operation and efficiency. ■

