



“Autodesk Revit has levelled the playing field, helping us to compete with the larger practices. Our competitive edge has been further enhanced by our increased productivity.”

Amândio Castanheira
Architect,
Alchemy Architects
Johannesburg

Levelling the competitive playing field

Using Autodesk Revit, Alchemy Architects has developed brand architecture for several South African projects, including the soon-to-be-launched kopi-k@t outlets, a network of high tech business service centres.

Alchemy Architects is a four person, Johannesburg practice that was established two years ago by Amândio Castanheira, who introduced Autodesk Revit to the firm in 2005, after losing a prestigious project to a much larger practice.

“I discovered that Autodesk Revit gave them the advantage of being able to turn around concepts much faster than we could,” says Amândio. “That was when I started working with the Autodesk reseller, Cadplan, to introduce Autodesk Revit to Alchemy Architects.”

Now, after having used the software for a year, he believes it has gone a long way to levelling the competitive playing field.

“As a small firm, we can produce concepts just as quickly as a practice with 10 staff members, or more. Design ability and skill, rather than financial or human resources, is the differentiator now.”

In addition to contributing to its competitive advantage, the accelerated speed at which the firm now explores and develops concepts has helped to significantly boost productivity. The production of technical documentation from the conceptual model is simplified with elevations, sections and the co-ordination of all floor plans being handled by Autodesk Revit.

“Based on the increased number of proposals we’re generating, without additional staff at the practice, I’d estimate that Autodesk Revit has increased productivity by about 200%.”

Amândio, who has extensive experience developing corporate architecture for leading brands in the motor vehicle sector, says Autodesk Revit has come into its own in his development of brand architecture for diverse projects.



For kopi-k@t, a network of high tech business service centres, Alchemy Architects used the software for the development of the concept and its presentation to the client.

Amândio was briefed to develop interior and exterior corporate architecture that would communicate the brand identity of the outlets. The design had to be adapted to different locations – from stand-alone outlets to application in a shopping centre environment.

“Autodesk Revit enabled us to explore different options, while keeping an eye on the budget.”

The interior was divided into zones for use by staff and customers, and employing the corporate colours of orange and silver, plenty of glass, high gloss finishes and steel, he created a minimalist look that conveyed the efficient delivery of technology-driven services.

The point of departure of the overall design was the functional, easy to manufacture barrel vault roof that ran the length of the building. Amândio used the software to ‘peel back’ the roof over the entrance, creating the negative of the roof shape. The positive and negative were juxtaposed to great effect.

Autodesk Revit enabled him to develop an eye catching exterior architecture with a bold roof that has become the kopi-k@t icon, during the day and at night.

Glassing the entrance all the way to the roof created a defined entrance portal that doubles as the main signage pylon for the facility.

“One week after our initial brief, we made our first conceptual presentation. It was an outstanding success and certainly sold the concept to the client,” says Amândio.

The first outlet opens in Edenvale, east of Johannesburg, in mid 2006.

For the Vodacom Golf Village, a joint project by Vodacom and the Proshop, Amândio developed an identity for a new network of family orientated golf driving ranges.

“We wanted more than a rudimentary, ‘bucket of balls’ type of facility. So, we kept the sporting context, while creating a homely feel for the whole family in a design concept we called ‘residential sport,’” says Amândio.

He came up with a look, which utilised natural materials, such as flush carpeting and wooden panelling, normally found in a residential environment. Scaling down the architecture and interior also helped to create the warm feeling of home.

Amândio also had to adapt the design so that it could be applied to seven branded Vodacom Golf Village facilities around the country, without compromising the overall brand concept. All the sites were architecturally unique and the design had to be adapted to each facility, without changing the structure of the existing buildings.

“This is where Autodesk Revit was so powerful,” says Amândio. “It allowed me to explore and test design options on each facility, before committing to the final design of a palette of elements, including items such as the Vodacom Golf Village reception desk.”

The Vodacom Golf Village at Gilloolys, north east of Johannesburg, is the first venue being developed and is scheduled for completion towards the end of 2006.

