

# Refreshment, Southern style.

By Lisa Cohn

When it came time to renovate the Four Star hotel at Johannesburg International Airport, Southern Sun turned to Blacksmith, looking for timeless appeal.

The Southern Sun Johannesburg International has been a landmark in the area for close on 20 years and was recently due for refurbishment in line with the new brand strategy of Southern Sun. The refurbishment was to encompass each of the 228 rooms of the hotel, as well as its bar and restaurant.

Given that the hotel was primarily frequented by stop-over and business travelers, the hotel needed primarily to exude an atmosphere of warmth and comfort – a home-away-from-home feeling. Not to be misinterpreted as overstuffed sofa's and twee prints, the Blacksmith team chose to go with a very Euro-chic approach, while picking up African themes in the earthy palette and the tactile aspect of all the different materials used.

The entire refurbishment project had a 1 year roll-out time period, with the rooms being done at a consistent pace. The rooms were done in a monotone palette of neutrals with sharp accents in red. Materials were kept honest and homely, while still being luxurious. The common thread was to achieve something close to the kind of effect you'd like in your own home. Ultimate luxury was highlighted in the en-suite bathrooms, with super-spacious maxi-showers fitted in all bathrooms.

Instead of fitting doors onto the showers, large sheets of glass are used to give a sensuous feel of the play of light and water.

Although the feeling throughout the hotel is somewhat European, African elements do proliferate, but in a quiet, unobtrusive way. For instance, the celebrated South African photographer, Obie Oberholzer was commissioned to do a series of seriously covetable black and white photographs on the themes of flying and skies, which have been placed throughout the bedrooms. This theme has been continued throughout the corridors with images of landscapes and skies. Downstairs corridors are lined with alcoves tastefully mosaiced, filled with unique and very interesting porcelain and ceramic pieces. The whole effect is very far away from the standard hotel fare.



greatest challenge, however, was refurbishing the restaurant and bar area of the hotel. Because the restaurant was still occupied throughout this period, the bar facilities were moved into a banqueting hall during the duration of the refurb, and the team had only a few weeks to complete the whole process. Because of this, time management was vitally important. Detailed schematics had to be drawn up so not a single element would be overlooked in execution. All the manufacturing had to be completed upfront and installed promptly.

Not only was the entire look and feel overhauled, but the practical aspects of the catering had to change. Previously the restaurant had operated the traditional standard buffet, now it was switching to a temporary, trendy environment offering a unique presentation as well as a la carte. Again, the feeling was moving towards a more timeless quality. Warm neutrals were juxtaposed with splashes of colour. The result was given an old school cigar lounge vibe with plush sofas and sueded chairs which were strikingly contrasted



with plexiglass and stainless steel, as well as very clever mood and highlight lighting. Bernoulli's Restaurant and Wine Bar is now on par with any fine, international restaurant.

In order to avoid the feeling of homogeneity, various pieces of furniture were selected for their personal appeal and comfort. Again, the feel of home was a big deciding factor. As such, the bar and restaurant area have become popular with business people in the area for meetings, drinks and meals. It just goes to show, create comfort, and they will come.

**VERDICT:** A simultaneously striking and comfy space that beckons the weary body and refreshes the tired eye. *jc*

Interior Designers: Blacksmith  
Project Managers: Bovel Freeman Holley  
Contractors: Sivukile  
Quantity Surveyors: Quanco