

31 Commerce Crescent

31 COMMERCE CRESCENT
Kramerville, Johannesburg

DEVELOPER & PROJECT MANAGERS
Alchemy

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MAIN CONTRACTOR
Astek Property Group

PHOTOGRAPHY
Franz Rabe

Paragon Architects has established a long-standing relationship with developer Alchemy, which has purchased seven buildings along Commerce Crescent in the Kramerville Design District in Johannesburg since 2015. Following on from its involvement with a successful renovation project at 37 & 35 Commerce Crescent, Paragon Architects has subsequently completed separate projects at 33 & 39, and has recently completed work on 31 Commerce Crescent.

The success of the Commerce Crescent precinct has evolved over a number of years. As a result of the original tenant at 35 Commerce Crescent, luxury Italian design retailer Casaredo, doing excellent trade at this location, it became apparent that Commerce Crescent could be developed into a precinct for high end retailers. As similar buildings on either side of No 35 became available, Alchemy purchased these and refurbished them for other design orientated tenants.

The Kramerville area has been a retail hub with a focus on design related business for a number of years, with many businesses occupying retrofitted offices and old warehouses in the area. Commerce Crescent offered these businesses customised premises better suited to their requirements. As more buildings have been purchased and developed by Alchemy and the Commerce Crescent precinct has grown, the range of clients had broadened from design to other high end businesses that compliment the existing retailers. Although every building is separate, Alchemy sees the development of Commerce Crescent as a single, cohesive retail offering.



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The architecture along Commerce Crescent draws inspiration from the surrounding industrial area. The buildings are designed as showrooms, with each floor being able to be divided into smaller tenancies.

A common pallet of materials has been used, namely black brick, off-shutter concrete and glass. However, each building has its own unique take on how these materials have been incorporated.





Client Brief

The original design of 31 Commerce Crescent was for a multi-tenanted space for furniture showrooms to align with the rest of the Commerce Crescent Precinct. Once the two tenants, a high end car dealership and a supercar customisation workshop, were on board, the design had to be adapted to suit the tenants' needs.

The brief was to create a design that integrates into the new Commerce Crescent Design District while at the same time anchoring the northern corner of the precinct on the corner of South Road and busy Bowling Avenue. The building thus needed its own identity while paying tribute to its predecessors.

Design and Cohesion

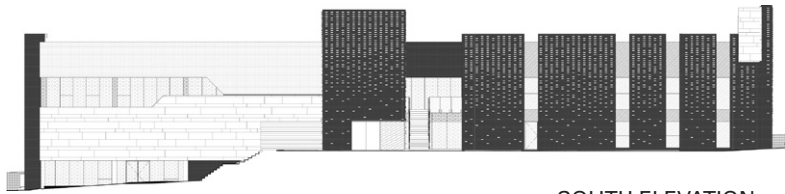
The design of 31 Commerce Crescent is centred around using mass and voids to explore form. Finding a balance between these two elements is also reflected in the contrasting material use - the rough heavy concrete elements versus the more elegant and refined brickwork. Material use is certainly the main element that ties the buildings in Commerce Crescent together.

Mass and scale was also considered carefully, with the site sloping away towards the north and No. 31 sunk away next to No. 33 to the east. To address this the architects added a considerable concrete element to the east façade to ensure balance between the two buildings and not let No. 31 disappear in No. 33's shadow.

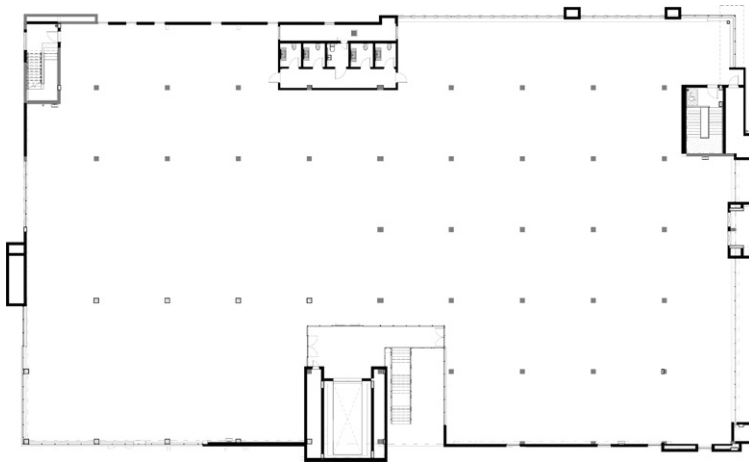
Façade

Performance glazing gives the building a view towards the street and also allows the passer-by to interact visually with the building interior while keeping the internal space comfortable.

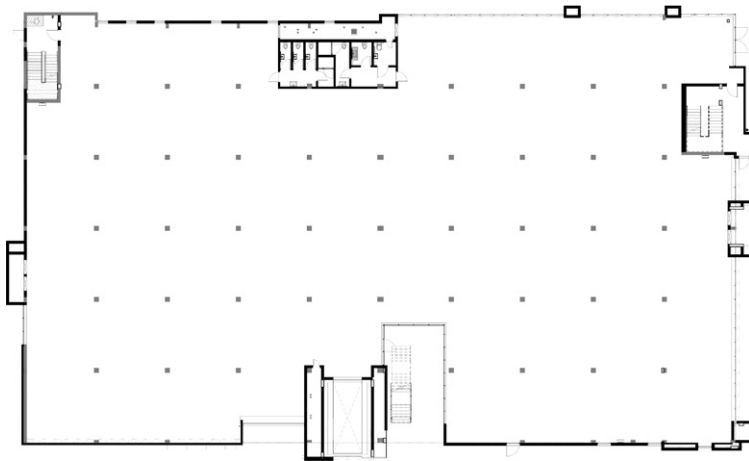




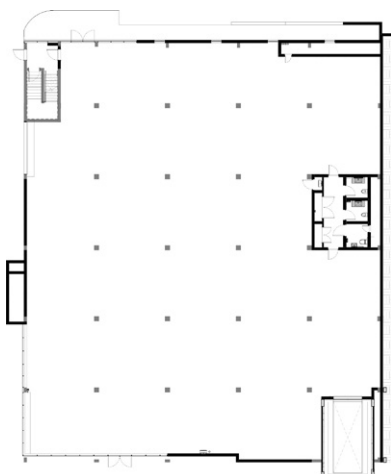
SOUTH ELEVATION



FIRST FLOOR



UPPER GROUND



LOWER GROUND

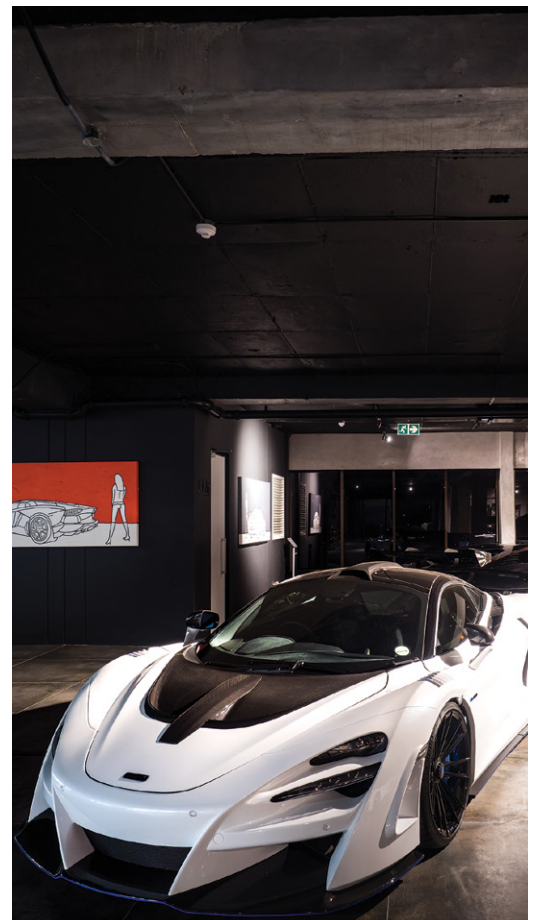
The main elements to the façade are the rough heavy textured concrete elements that stand in stark contrast to the delicate brickwork patterning and the tension created between these elements is what captures the observer's attention. The rest of the design reflects the pure quality of the material use on the outside of the building, with the main entrance staircase done in raw unstained concrete along with the landscape stairs.

It is interesting how the textures and materiality slowly reveal themselves to the visitor. As you approach the building the light concrete and dark brickwork dominates the form. Once close to the building the rich textures of the brickwork and concrete takes focus.

Challenges

31 Commerce Crescent, as with most refurbishments, was challenging in its own right - integrating old and new parts into a coherent whole is always a design challenge. As the building was going to be occupied by a car dealership, another more practical design criteria was creating access to the first floor for vehicles and integrating the car lift and motor room into the design. The most challenging part of the process was the amount of flexibility that needed to be built into the design to ensure its viability into the future.

As 31 Commerce Crescent was refurbished during the challenges of Covid-19 in 2020 - from





building material shortage due to the pandemic and trying to accommodate tenant specific requirements - the design stayed under a continued state of flux till the very end. It became challenging to ensure the design's integrity did not suffer under these conditions. This has very much become the standard for getting a project like this off the ground. Everyone is very cautious with how and where they invest

their resources under the ever more challenging economic environment and clients need to be very accommodating to ensure spaces are favourable to tenants. This in turn creates an interesting design environment.

With the completion of 31 Commerce Crescent, the precinct is now complete and successfully serves its role as a highly visible luxury retail landmark in the area.



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