



“Not everyone wants to risk being the first mover or the guinea pig, and this also holds back the industry.”

WORDS CHRISTY VAN DER MERWE PHOTOGRAPHS CHRISTOPH HOFFMANN

Solid gold

Marloes Reinink never dreamed she would start her own company, but she now runs one of South Africa's most successful consultancies, Solid Green - one that is breathing green life into the built environment.

A well-respected forerunner, Reinink has played a major role in green building since the movement took its first steps in South Africa. She has made a significant impression over the last five years, and was runner up in the Green Building Council of South Africa's (GBCSA) inaugural Green Star Leadership Awards, in the category Recognised Green Star for contributions to the industry in the first five years of the GBCSA's existence.

INDEPENDENT GREEN

In 2011, Reinink took the leap to start her own specialised green building consultancy, Solid Green.

Green building in South Africa is a vibrant new sector within the built environment profession that is not bogged down by preconceptions. Despite her youth, Reinink has managed to establish one of the most successful green building consultancies in the country, boasting a client list including the biggest green precinct in South Africa (Menlyn Maine), top corporates like Exxaro and BMW, and even diverse entities like the National English Literary Museum in Grahamstown.

She notes that being a woman in the largely male-dominated built environment industry has never held her back in any way. "I think more women should be involved in the built environment. It is happening – perhaps more in the green building field, as this requires a more sensitive side."

In operation for two years now, the team has grown, and continues to work on some of the most exciting commercial green building projects in South Africa. With five permanent staff and a number of freelance consultants, Solid Green functions as

an incubator for people wishing to develop their own businesses.

"It is a great, close-knit working group, and we balance out each other's competencies well," says Reinink. She admits that she never expected to start her own business, and is still happily astonished that she has managed to craft a company which exhibits the characteristics of the kind of place where she has always wanted to work – dynamic, flexible, energetic and fresh.

Starting a company meant developing a whole new skills set, which Reinink describes as "quite a scary transition", but one that she made work.

"I learned a lot through the merge of Green by Design into WSP about the kind of company that I wanted to establish," she says, adding that choosing the right kind of dedicated people to work with is key. Trust and flexibility mean that people can come and go as they please, as long as the work gets done.

The next challenge will be to retain staff and grow the company, without becoming too big and rules-based.

"I love everything about the job. I am smiling when I walk in the door, and am still smiling when I leave. Even the meetings that are a big part of the job are enjoyable. I am driven by the good dynamics within our team, and the fact that we have great relationships with our clients," she enthuses.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDUSTRY

Green building in South Africa is experiencing exponential growth. Although there were moves in a greener direction more than five years ago,



ADVICE FOR ASPIRING GREEN BUILDING CONSULTANTS

Nothing is cast in stone. To be active in this industry you have to be interested in working in a field where things change relatively quickly.

Interest and a pro-active approach are key. You don't have to be an architect or mechanical engineer to make a difference in this field. Experience in the construction industry is a benefit, but not necessary.

Be ready to convince. Green building is often seen as more expensive, and in some cases it is: put effort into convincing clients of the benefits of going green, not just in terms of energy and water, but also to create a better and healthier work place.

Keep aware and cautious. Research products before recommending them, and don't get taken in by greenwash.

Interact and keep learning. Make an effort to go to the annual GBCSA convention. They have the best speakers giving great presentations, and an abundance of information is available during that week.

the establishment of the GBCSA has formalised the movement.

It is becoming an easier field to work in, as many precedents have been set, but it still remains an exciting career because there is so much innovation and advancement possible, Reinink says.

Property developers are now much more aware of green building, and realise that lowering environmental impact of a building does not require massive design changes to a project. Initially, many projects that green building consultants were involved with were already designed, leaving little scope for green intervention. However, greening is now an important upfront project consideration.

At first, Green Star SA submissions were viewed as a cumbersome administrative task, but now the processes are fairly standardised, making it easier.

Product suppliers are also rising to meet the demand for greener materials, and are developing better products.

Overall, says Reinink, the demand for green buildings in South Africa has grown dramatically. Developers are convinced that going for a 4-Star Green Star SA rating is viable, and enjoy getting recognition for their efforts.

NEW CHALLENGES

With the growth of the industry come entirely new challenges, while still battling some of the start-up concerns that persist.

The misconception that green building is expensive is still being dealt with. "While there is an additional cost, the benefits far outweigh the cost. Many developers have embraced this and understand the long-term outlook, but there are still many who need to discover this," says Reinink.

A new challenge facing the industry is that of "greenwashing", as unscrupulous people make false claims about products, services, and in some cases whole buildings or estate developments. Materials are a particular challenge for consultants.

CAREER SUMMARY

1997–2004: Attended Eindhoven University in the Netherlands. Came to South Africa as an exchange student. Her thesis was a Sustainable School Design Tool, looking at integration of sustainability into the design process of schools in poverty-stricken areas in South Africa. Master thesis was done in collaboration with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

2005 & 2006: Second Masters at the University of Witwatersrand. Her thesis focused on Effectiveness of Energy Labelling for Commercial Buildings in South Africa: A comparative evaluation of the Green Buildings for Africa in relation to international experience. She also worked as a researcher in sustainable buildings and energy consumption in buildings at the CSIR.

2007–2010: Sustainability consultant at Green by Design Architects. Reviewed the greening of the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup stadia, and supported the sustainability consultant on the new building for Eskom at Megawatt Park. Green by Design was acquired by global consultancy WSP, where Reinink was appointed associate and later principle associate. She guided design teams on improving the environmental performance of buildings and managed Green Star SA accreditations. She managed the Johannesburg office of WSP Green by Design, leading a team of 12 people. **2008:** On the technical working committee of the Green Building Council to develop the Green Star SA Office tool.

2008 – 2011: Worked on the top green building projects in South Africa, including: Nedbank Phase II, Absa Towers West, Standard Bank Rosebank, Villa Mall, 40 on Oak at Melrose Arch, and Menlyn Maine.

2009: Part of the team that delivered Nedbank Phase II, South Africa's first rated Green Star SA – Office v1 building.

2011: Started her own consultancy Solid Green based in Johannesburg, and has a full-time team of five, and five freelancers.

2012: Current projects for Solid Green include Upper Grayston buildings E & F, Exxaro head office refurbishment, Alice Lane phase I & II, the National English Literary Museum, TWP building at Melrose Arch, Menlyn Maine buildings M, O & P & LEED neighbourhood accreditation, Eskom Learning Development Centre and Medupi office, and the BMW head office refurbishment.

“There is a real need for standardisation of claims made, or an independent body to certify claims. The problem is that there is no single testing mechanism or criteria for green, because this can mean different things for different products,” says Reinink, adding that consultants spend a lot of time researching claims and testing products.

Another issue, following from the major growth of the industry, is the shortage of green building consultants. There is space for both smaller specialised consultancies, and bigger firms which offer a spectrum of skills such as mechanical, facade and civil engineering. “Developers have different preferences, and there is enough work for all.”

Reinink encourages anyone interested in green building to join the field. “You should be interested, and willing to learn. Architectural, civil or mechanical engineering backgrounds are welcome. But for the Green Star SA process, just an interest in the industry is required.”

MOVING FORWARD

An important requirement for the industry is brave developers willing to take risks and implement innovative technologies and methods that would take green building to the next level. “Not everyone wants to risk being the first mover or the guinea pig, and this also holds back the industry.”

With constant new avenues of green building to be involved in, Reinink has remained captivated by her work. Two of her latest areas of interest include research and work on refurbishment projects, as well as developing green leases.

Working with developers who keep pushing for improvements also keeps things interesting, and there is a constant drive to get the most out of Green Star SA at the least cost, as well as aiming for higher ratings. She speaks with high regard for inspiring clients like the Brydens Group pushing for a 6-Star rating, and inspirational projects such as the National Literary Museum in the Eastern Cape, which is pushing beyond Green Star SA in sustainable materials sourcing.

Her enthusiasm makes her an inspiration to everyone within the industry. “It is such an exciting industry and time to be working in it. Sometimes I have to pinch myself to remember it's real,” she concludes. ●

Solid Green 011 447 2797 www.solidgreen.co.za