

# International design award for Google SA HQ

By [Nicci Botha](#)

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When you're the world leader in your field, it's not surprising that your offices would reflect your company's philosophy of innovation, sustainability and creativity. And it was interpreting these values that scooped a prestigious international award for Boogertman + Partners Interiors for their work on Google South Africa's head office.



Gogo's Kitchen. Image by Graeme Wyllie.

The annual International Green Interior Award, established by Australian Living – a platform that promotes sustainable building - acknowledges industry professionals, and the design of the Google HQ in Joburg walked away with top honours.

## Design brief

“Google’s culture is manifested in the design of its offices worldwide. Each office takes inspiration from its location’s cultural history and visual flavour, becoming corporate spaces which express local personality. No two Google offices out of the 70 world-wide are the same.

“So, we needed to create an office space that speaks the language of South Africa, a country renowned for its diversity. The design was inspired by the cultural and urban fabrics of Jozi. And so it developed into a visual language where all spaces showcase the local personality and unique flavour of the city,” says Elene Olwagen, interior designer at Boogertman + Partners.

## Green elements

The office features a number of unique recycling ideas, such as the local Googlers donating their old jeans, which are repurposed into fabric for upholstery. Other innovations include:

- Chairs made from old wheelbarrows.
- 7500 magazines were collected for wall cladding in the waiting nook.
- 3.1km of reconstituted timber were used for the construction of the Nest, a chill-out space.
- General recycling of paper, plastic, glass and metals has been implemented to meet the local green requirements.

In addition, all the lighting in the building is LED and there are 55 separate lighting zones controlled with dimmer switches or sensors including motion and daylight monitoring in the open-plan work space. All the AC units are also connected to occupancy sensors.

## Working in comfort



Google HQ reception area. Image by Graeme Wyllie.

“Different areas are designed around the characteristics typical of Jozi, an international city buzzing with activity,” says Olwagen.

An example is the design of “Gogo’s Kitchen”, which relates to the township shebeen culture in South Africa.

Other areas include the beaded reception with its big “Howzit”, designed to break the ice. The contrast in finishes represents the juxtaposition between the business hubs of Jozi, namely Sandton and Fourways, and how they rub shoulders with townships such as Alex.

The various break-out zones are developed around the diversity seen throughout the city. The “Book Nook” is designed as a creative escape and boasts seating inspired by a set of punctuation marks (brackets). The ‘Egoli’ area represents Jozi’s industrial

and financial diversity, while the “Nest” is inspired by a weaver’s nest and revolves around creating a space where Googlers can relax or catch some shuteye.

## Ergonomics

Height adjustable desks give employees the choice of sitting or standing while they work, while the Freedom Task chairs from Human Scale ensure that each employee has full control over the height, and flexibility of their seat.

Water and fruit stations are placed within visual line and walking distance of each department to encourage healthy and more frequent break-time intervals.

“It is our hope to be respected as leaders in innovative, conceptually strong, human-centred design solutions that arise from a deep appreciation and consideration of space and its function. We are fortunate to be given opportunities by our clients to work on world-class projects both locally and internationally, and are truly humbled by receiving such a prestigious award,” concludes Carin Dreyer, marketing and communications manager for Boogertman + Partners Architects.

## ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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