

Asset

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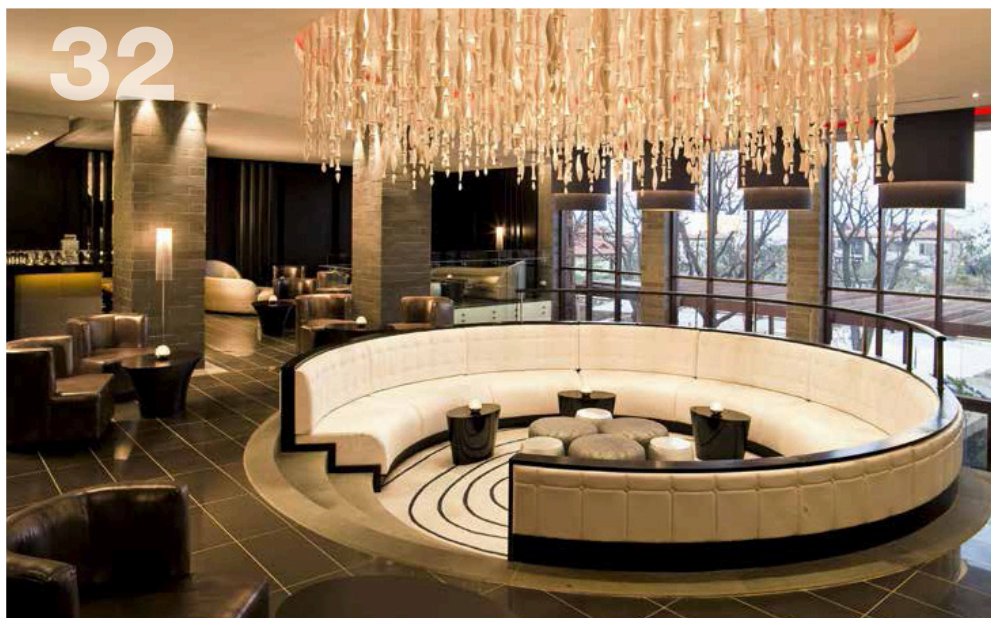
**Betts
Townsend**
celebrates a coming
of age after 21 years



Howard Betts

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Betts Townsend celebrates a coming of age with its 21st birthday

Much has changed for businesses operating in South Africa in the past 21 years, and Betts Townsend is no exception. What started as a small, two-person operation in 1995 has now grown into a company with a staff complement of over 60, with offices in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, as well as offshore in Mauritius and Kenya. In that time, the company has seen boom times and recession times, political shifts and changes in the professional and built environment landscapes. Now, 21 years after founding, Betts Townsend is a thriving construction project management consultancy with a vision for the future and the combined energy and enthusiasm of its people to take it there.



Betts Townsend has a solid client base and a strong track record in the South African industry, having worked on many high profile projects for blue chip companies throughout the country. Founder and MD, **Howard Betts**, notes that it was important to establish a good reputation as reliable professionals within the South African market, particularly given the degree of responsibility which project managers have in a process which involves working with large client investments.

Having laid those foundations, it has made sense to start exploring opportunities that the rest of the African continent offers, as ultimately South Africa forms part of that greater whole. Betts Townsend's entry into the Kenyan market has been an important move in this respect, and the company has approached it very differently from the way many others do. Mike Taylor, MD of Betts Townsend Africa, ran the Betts Townsend Cape Town office for many years before relocating his family to Nairobi to open the Kenyan office. This move was driven less by a pipeline of work at the time but more by a belief that if one is going to play in a market, one needs to show full commitment to it and embrace it wholeheartedly.

Interviewed and written by Claire Cole
Howard photographed by Grant Difford



Cover Story – Betts Townsend

“It’s all very well to fly in and out of cities for meetings every few weeks and go back to the comfortable situation that you know, but the only way to really get to know a market intimately is to immerse yourself in it 100% - including the less comfortable side of living or working in a challenging environment,” comments Mike. He and Howard agree that in many other parts of Africa, South Africans are not well received because they are seen to be arrogant, don’t show a tolerance for other ways of working, and are also often seen to be out to make quick money rather than being truly interested or invested in a different country.

These and other learnings over the years have both informed and guided Betts Townsend’s core values today, namely accountability, people and leadership.

Hyde Park Southern Sun Hotel



Oprah Winfrey School



90 Grayston, Sandton

Story continues on the next page.



Of the three, accountability is a theme which comes through strongly in Betts Townsend. Mike comments that during his time in Kenya, he has been pleasantly surprised to encounter professionals who are far more prepared to be held accountable for their work (for example, in relation to engineering or architectural detailing) than their South African counterparts. Howard comments that historically, there seems to be a great deal of reluctance to commit to certain things and accordingly, to be held accountable. He notes that this permeates throughout the various professions, and even some clients are not exempt. This differs strongly from Betts Townsend's values.

People are the second important cornerstone of Betts Townsend's values, and to prove it, the company established a black staff trust several years ago. The staff trust, in which all black South African members of staff hold shares, owns 51% of Betts Townsend (Pty) Ltd and shareholders have seen regular dividend payouts. The company's books are open to any staff member or client who wishes to view them. It is worth noting that 40% of the shareholders in the staff trust are black women. In addition to this, Betts Townsend has generally been a firm which experiences a low staff turnover, with many people having received long service awards for their loyalty. This can only be attributed to the emphasis which Howard and his team place on making people feel valued and involved in the business.

Leadership is the third of the company's core values, and although it is an easy topic to speak volumes about, it is not always an easy thing to demonstrate. In this case, it not only relates to the way in which the directors and senior management run the various offices, but to the way in which the company's people uphold its values in the course of business. If a company says its people are important, it must demonstrate that. If accountability is a value that is expected from others, it is also a value that must be proven by everyone in the organisation. Leadership is perhaps the most difficult of Betts Townsend's three values to live up to, but each staff member is encouraged and expected to take the initiative, be resourceful, support and mentor others, and through their contributions, to create a leading organisation in the industry.





Baywest Mall



Pick n Pay revamps nationwide




Hemingways Mall



Ottery Pick n Pay distribution centre

Story continues on the next page.



Howard's plan for Betts Townsend is not to let it fade into obscurity once the likes of himself, John Townsend and other senior directors decide to retire one day. The company is clear about its succession plans and in both the South African and Kenyan operations, young project managers who have proven themselves are given the opportunity to rise through the ranks. He reports that what is even more encouraging in the South African situation in many instances, is that there are deserving black senior managers and directors in place. Howard believes that there will likely be a black managing director in place in the South African business in the next five years, and says that such candidates will contribute to taking a diverse and balanced organisation forward. A+

Peter Mokaba Stadium JV