

SPOTLIGHT

on Gold Fields' new head office

by A.J. ROETS*

Despite its growth over the years, necessitating ever-larger office accommodation, the Gold Fields group changed its head office address in Johannesburg only twice in 94 years. The first move was at the turn of the century, from the then select suburb of Doornfontein to the corner of Fox and Simmonds Streets. The second move was in the thirties, from that address—now the Reserve Bank building—to the well-known address of 75 Fox Street.

With the advent of the first mines of the West Wits Line by the end of the thirties, 75 Fox Street proved too small, and the eastern section of the Commissioner Street side of the present head office was added on. In the fifties, when space once more became a serious problem, the old Exploration building was purchased and demolished, and the present west wing on Commissioner Street was built on the site.

In the early seventies, cramped conditions again made life difficult and, despite a reorganization of the interior layouts, the need for expansion remained critical. Eventually, the adjacent Hollard Place and parking area became available, and plans for an extended new building complex could be considered. The building project was planned in three phases.

Phases One and Two

Phase One involved the erection of the new building at the corner of Fox and Sauer Streets, and excavation started in August 1981. The constricted nature of the site—a situation aggravated by the one-way streets surrounding it—made working conditions extremely difficult. In addition, problems were encountered with the 'concrete slabs' below the basements of the original buildings, which had to be demolished by drilling and blasting, giving rise to rumours that Gold Fields was mining a main reef outcrop in central Johannesburg.

In Phase Two, the adjacent Commissioner Street wing of the original Gold Fields building was refurbished, and the two phases together comprised 19 000 m² of floor space at a final estimated completion cost of 29 million rands. Gold Fields' head office personnel moved into the Phase One building in 1983, and the refurbished wing was fully occupied during the first quarter of 1985.

The New Building

The new head office blends well with its street environment in Johannesburg's financial district. It is faced in imported Italian granite of different finishes, and the whole cladding skin was constructed according to a method never before used in South Africa. The granite is fixed to a metal frame that clips onto the structure, both old and new. At various parts of the building, especially on the corners, this frame 'sails' past the building to create a quality of light and shade, and of

sun and vegetation, that would have been impossible to achieve by traditional methods.

Special consideration was given to the way the building meets the ground so that it would not create a formidable appearance. Portions of the wall of the building bend into the office space in floor-to-ceiling inverted-bay windows, which destroy the monotony of internal space normally created in a rectangular building.

The new building is designed around an atrium, which forms the internal and recreational area of the building. The atrium is roofed with transparent Perspex on the tenth floor, and a special programme of landscaping forms an integral part of the architectural design.

In the design of the building, the architect, Louis Karol, made all efforts, not only to achieve the most effective working relationships combined with facilities for relaxation, but also to promote good human relationships.



Phase Three

Towards the beginning of June 1985, the third and final phase started when Stocks Construction Rand (Pty) Ltd, contractors for the whole project, started with excavations for the new building on the original site at 75 Fox Street. This section will comprise 7600 m² of top-quality office floor space spread over 8 storeys and a basement parking area of 2600 m². The building will be self-contained in that it will have its own entrance (from Fox Street), lift columns, staircase, and basement, but the exterior and interior design is similar to that of the two completed sections. From the outside, the three sections will create the impression of one large building—which, in fact, it is. The final section should be ready for occupation early in 1987, and the escalated completion cost is estimated at 13,4 million rands. Initially, Gold Fields will not occupy the third section, which will be available for letting.

It is interesting to note that, although the third section will have its entrance at approximately the same place as the entrance to 75 Fox Street used to be, the entrance to the Gold Fields office has now moved somewhat 'down the road' towards Sauer Street. However, it will retain its address.

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