

# Boxing Day



Visitors to this year's Design Indaba Expo in Cape Town were given an exciting look at the future of sustainable housing - a container transformed into a home by architect Hayden Ellis.

The four walls of the VISI container enclosed a compact yet chic living space perfectly suited to modern urban living. **PREVIOUS SPREAD LEFT** The container as seen from the foyer in the Cape Town International Convention Centre. **PREVIOUS SPREAD RIGHT** A close-up of the graffiti done by artist Ben Johnston on the exterior wall of the container.



● VISI has earned itself the undisputed reputation of thinking outside the box by constantly pushing the envelope in the field of design implementation. This is why we jumped at the opportunity to be the first to demonstrate the endless possibilities presented by a container home to the rest of South Africa.

Over the past decade, building materials have undergone a process of re-evaluation by engineers, developers, manufacturers and builders – the result of a growing international eco-consciousness in response to the knowledge that we are destroying our planet. In the resulting quest to find alternative building methods and materials, shipping containers have become an obvious choice.

It is estimated that 90 percent of the world's trade today moves in shipping containers, and they have become a permanent fixture in harbours all over the world where they are stacked in ever-growing lego-like structures. It was only when contemplating the amount of useful space that was being wasted by storing these disused containers, along with the realisation that they were a potential source of environmental pollution, that leaders in the building industry were drawn to investigate their potential. It soon became apparent that, while cargo containers have the potential to become a major environmental problem, they have even greater potential to become a part of the solution. They have therefore been identified as one of the key role players in sustainable housing developments the world over.

In recognition of this, VISI published a tabloid-size supplement together with our 33<sup>rd</sup> issue (Summer 2007) that presented ten projects by leading South African architects for transforming containers into living spaces. The results were breathtaking as the architects discovered the infinite possibilities presented by container living and were inspired to implement pioneering design principles.

The response was so overwhelming that we decided to translate the concept from paper into reality by creating a never-before-seen display stand for the 2008 Design Indaba Expo at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC). Using the Expo's slogan 'A better world through creativity' as a point of departure, VISI opted for four walls with a difference: a used shipping container (supplied by Big Box Containers and valued at R22 000) brilliantly transformed into a modern-day urban living space designed by architect Haydn Ellis, who was also responsible for one of the designs in the Summer 2007 container supplement.

The high-gloss floor in the foyer of the CTICC provided the perfect contrast to offset the graffiti-covered 2,45m x 6m container (painted by artist Ben Johnston), and the charcoal and stainless-steel palette on the inside. 'Our goal was to design a container that had an urban edge – hence the graffiti on the walls – so that we could play with the idea of it as a found object,' explains Haydn. 'We wanted the exterior of the container to appear hard and resilient as a foil to the treatment of the interior.'

This goal was certainly achieved. Although the interior was masculine in palette and design, it contained all the luxuries that a city slicker could desire. Only the finest fittings and decor accessories were used, proving that this industrial box could easily be transformed into an über-contemporary urban dwelling, creating an exciting template for the future of container housing.

- Big Box Containers 021 511 3490
- Ellis and Associates 021 422 2824
- Ben Johnston 082 822 8509



Big Box Day



ABOVE, LEFT AND RIGHT The masculine design and palette created the perfect contrast with the graffiti-clad exterior. OPPOSITE LEFT The exterior decking extended the living area. OPPOSITE RIGHT Stainless steel, dark wood and charcoal were the dominant colours and materials.

## Q&A with architect Hayden Ellis



**Q: HAS YOUR FIRM PREVIOUSLY DONE THIS TYPE OF PROJECT, OR WAS THIS A FIRST?**

**A:** We specialise in high-end residential work but have also been involved in corporate interiors and retail design. While the container was unusual in this context, it was quite similar in scale to some of the smaller rooms in houses (such as an en-suite) in which we invest the same degree of design detail.

**Q: WHAT WERE THE GREATEST LIMITATIONS WHEN DESIGNING WITHIN THESE CONSTRAINTS?**

**A:** Size, of course, and thermal properties. Insulation is essential if one plans to inhabit such a structure.

**Q: ELABORATE ON YOUR CHOICE OF FITTINGS INSIDE THE CONTAINER?**

**A:** We wanted to create a snapshot of a lifestyle and not necessarily reflect reality. The art, the books, the clothes, the audiovisual equipment, and the appliances all gave the veneer of urban glamour, with the container styled as a chic 'crash pad'. We used a wine cooler instead of a fridge because milk cartons and microwave food were not in line with our message.

**Q: DID YOU LEARN ANY NEW TIPS ON MAXIMISING THE VIABILITY OF SMALL SPACES DURING THIS PROJECT?**

**A:** The experience reinforced what we have come to know about all – not necessarily only small – spaces: plan them properly. In the case of small spaces in particular, don't clutter and choose one colour and let it dominate. We chose the dark wood because dark colours have the effect of reducing the apparent size of things. Contrast the dominant colour with a safe secondary colour – we worked with a light grey (it is timeless and perfect in the concourse of the CTICC), and then accent with art and *objets d'art*.

**Q: THE WOODEN DECK MAKES THE CONTAINER SEEM LARGER. WAS THIS INTENTIONAL?**

**A:** Yes it was. The decking effectively extended the floor area beyond the walls of the container and pulled the eye through the glazed corner into what would normally be an exterior setting – perhaps landscaped. We have found that dark floor and ceiling planes work in an environment with low ceilings, but this sort of device is dependent on the amount of light that comes in.

**Q: WHAT DID YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT THIS PROJECT?**

**A:** We had 24 hours in which to turn the container from an empty box into a VISI stand – I enjoyed the entire 24 hours!

The

awards

**THANK-YOU TO THE FOLLOWING PROJECT SPONSORS:**

**Lighting:** Spazio Lighting 011 555 5555 **Decking:** Stable Marketing 021 593 5540 **Glass and mirrors:** Cohesion Interiors 021 551 5423 and Peacock Mirrors 021 686 3809 **Electrical fitters:** Schmidhauser Electrical 021 424 4588 **Carpentry and shelving:** Svencraft cc 021 447 0377 **Vinyl lettering:** Creative Brands 021 461 0366 **Audiovisual:** Project 3 021 674 5000 **Metropolis DVD:** DVD Nouveau 021 422 4984 **Aluminium fittings:** DIX Aluminium 021 797 1111 **Sanitaryware:** Ferreira's 021 506 9000 **Bathroom fitters:** Bceen Concepts 021 705 4902 **Kitchen prep bowl:** Franke 031 450 6300 **Miele steamer:** Euro Appliances 021 424 6688 **Samsung Wine Cooler:** A&A Furnishers 021 424 6150 **Espresso cups and maker:** @home 021 408 9000 **Clothing rail:** Häfele 011 796 8100 **Bird Chair:** Knoll 021 424 0101 **Nguni rug:** Prime Leathers 031 767 3932 **Ceramic stool and vases:** The Modern Garden Company 021 434 0611 **Wine glasses, bathroom mat and hand towel:** Woolworths 0860 022 002 **Futon:** Bed King 021 425 8682 **Linen and scatter cushions:** Helon Melon 021 434 4282, 011 440 3870 **Nguni cow paintings by Henk Serfontein:** iArt gallery 021 424 5150 **Clothing:** Paul Smith 021 418 0007 **Shoes:** Slate 021 421 2554 **Books:** Wordsworth Books 021 461 8464 **Brown storage boxes:** Clifton Products 021 447 0440 **Wine:** Spier 021 881 3690