

No. 33

Walter Sisulu University - Lifespan Architectural Beams

East London, South Africa, 2025



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PROJECT DETAILS

Project Name

Walter Sisulu University

Project Type

Institutional

Description

Exterior

Date of Installation

February/March, 2025

Main Contractor

Roddy Anderson, Glass Co

Architect

Anita Cartwright – MDS Architecture

Size

850 units used (cut to different lengths)

Project Location

East London, South Africa

Product Used

Lifespan beams 100 x 30mm in Savanna

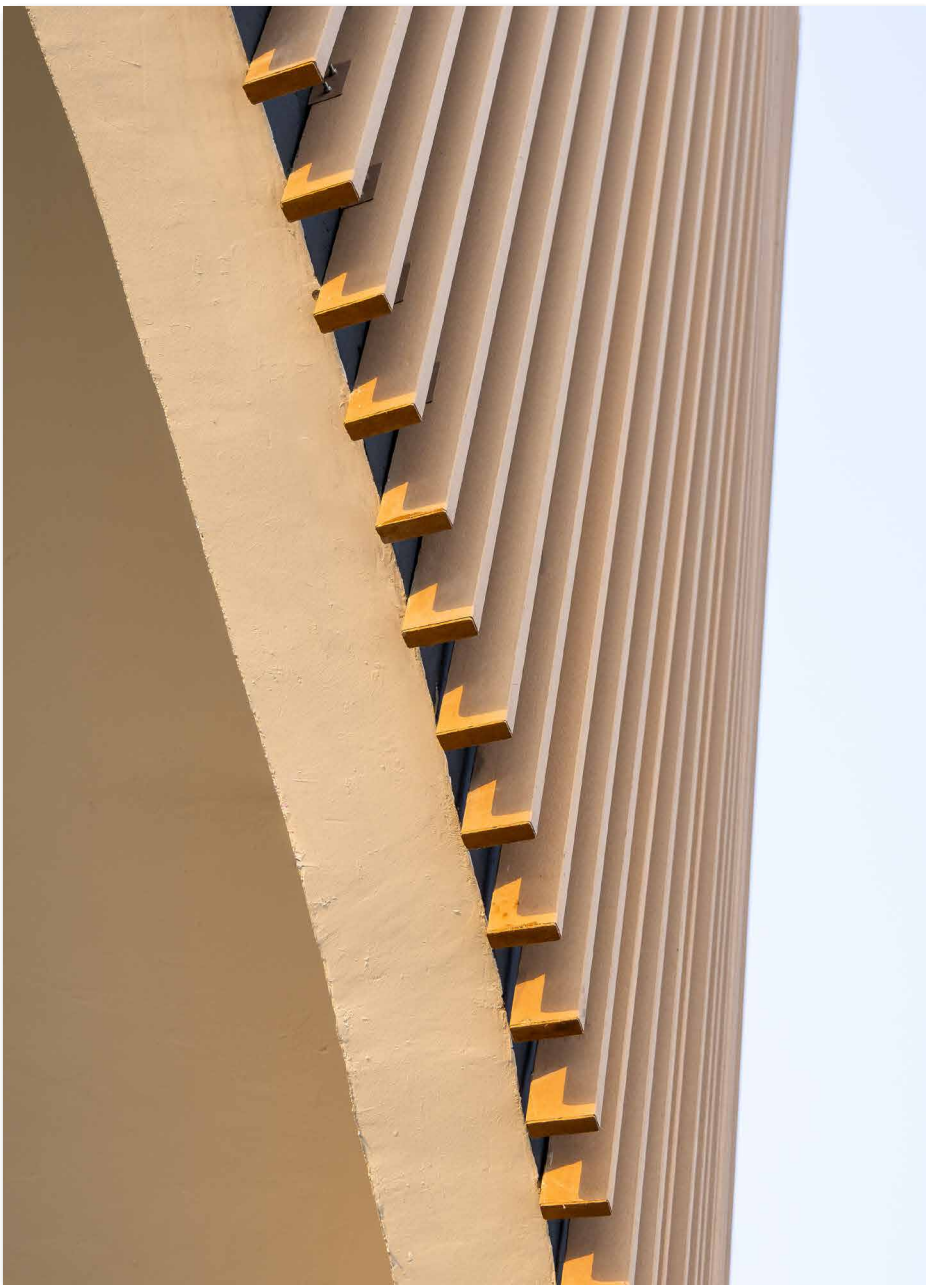


WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY, EAST LONDON, SOUTH AFRICA

The Walter Sisulu University of Science and Technology was formed through the merger of the Border/Eastern Cape Technikon and the University of Transkei in July 2005, and comprises of four campuses situated in Umtata, Buffalo City (East London), Butterworth and Queenstown. Given the cultural heritage of the various campuses including traditional Xhosa villages coupled with the modern materiality of science and technology, the University aims to upgrade the various faculties into a single space, starting with the Engineering Faculty in East London.

The new building consists of laboratories, offices, lecture halls and an elevated auditorium floating over the entrance hall, deliberately designed to expose the engineering elements of the structure as an experiential learning opportunity for students.

The facility had to be functional and practical with an authentic African appeal and able to withstand the coastal weather while providing a durable, low-maintenance and attractive finish for future generations.



ENGINEERING FUTURE FACULTIES

Anita Cartwright (nee Ferreira) of MDS Architects was appointed to conceptualise the new facility with a salute to traditional African style. What she created was a modern mix of contemporary building materials softened by the warmth and texture of wood-look elements, reminiscent of an old village “kraal” (wooden pen).

Beneath the prominent ‘brow’ of the elevated auditorium adorned with a wood-look façade, an imposing structure of bricks and steel heralds guests arrival at the entrance to the Engineering Faculty.

The curvaceous overhang – clad with Eva-Last’s low-maintenance Lifespan architectural beams – adds an organic shape and softness to the structure’s functional layout. Exposed struts and beams, a glass lift-well and all plumbing, electrical and HVAC installations are openly visible for all to see.

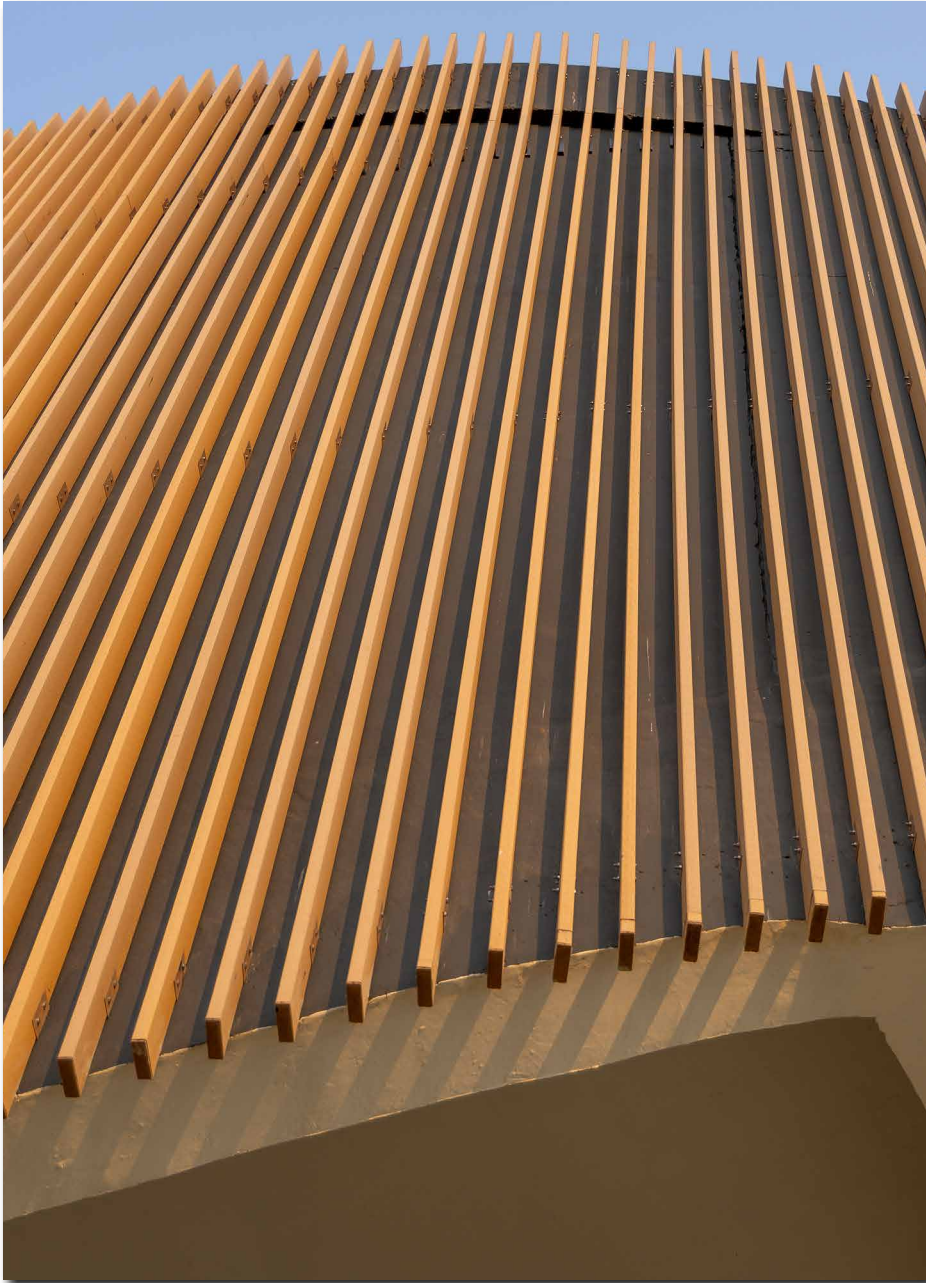
Inside, Eva-Last’s trendy, modern Revive castellated cladding was used at the architraves of the lift’s entrances to enhance the interior and hide unsightly finishes.



“Achieving an attractive aesthetic while allowing the students to inspect the machinations of the building and its materials was not easy,” said Anita Cartwright. “We relied on the natural warmth and appeal of Eva-Last’s wood-look composites to soften the hard elements and add shape and movement to the structure,” she explained.

Naturally, the cleaning and maintenance of the materials were major considerations, as was their longevity and attractiveness.

“The composites gave us both the durability and aesthetic appeal of wood without the usual concerns of degradation or care, whilst also offering us design flexibility to achieve the organic shape we wanted,” she concluded.



ENGINEERED FOR EASE

Eva-Last's lightweight Lifespan architectural beams offer composite material technology combined with superior performance properties of aluminium. The hollow aluminium core ensures lightweight strength and stability for easy overhead installation, while the protective polymer outer coating provides an attractive, durable finish in a natural wood-look tone and texture.

Shannon Leach and Roddy Anderson of the Glass Co were tasked with creating the decorative exterior and interior facades. Lifespan's 100 x 30mm profiles in Savanna were double-mounted vertically onto a special-bracket with 100mm gaps to create the castellated, curvaceous shape of the building's protruding 'brow'. The Revive castellated cladding was mounted to a frame around the lift shafts to hide the more unsightly elements in the interiors.

"We cut the Lifespan beams to size to create the shape and fitted Eva-Last's matching end caps to seal the ends of the beams, for the exterior application," explains Roddy Anderson, who added that they also butt-joined several profiles with HDPE plugs for the highest sections that reached up to 8.3m.

The result is a high-performance, low maintenance finish that adds a warm, natural feel that softens and breaks the industrial components.



KEY INFLUENCER QUOTE

“Eva-Last composites gave us both the durability and aesthetic appeal of wood without the usual concerns of degradation or care, whilst also offering us design flexibility to achieve the organic shape we wanted,” comments Anita Cartwright of MDS Architects.



SUMMARY

Walter Sisulu University's new Engineering Faculty reflects the institution's strong African heritage while deliberately exposing the engineering elements - and materials - of the structure as an experiential learning opportunity. Eva-Last's advanced composite building materials, Lifespan architectural beams and Revive castellated cladding, demonstrate the decorative design appeal and enhanced durability of modern composite materials technology.



ABOUT US

Eva-Last is a globally reputable brand that utilises a solution driven business model to create innovative, sustainable building materials and systems that add value to customers' lives. At the heart of Eva-Last is a team of highly capable, creative specialists united by a passion to promote environmental consciousness through eco-friendly building products and operations. By embracing low environmental impact manufacturing and cutting-edge composite technology, Eva-Last is revolutionising how building can be done. We design and deliver beautiful, long-lasting green alternatives that make our customers' lives easier, healthier, and just plain better.



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