

# Asset

Issue 72 | June 2019



**Sun control  
solutions that  
are good for  
the planet**

**Ben Blignaut, MD of  
Blind Solutions®**



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Sun  
control  
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planet

Ben Blignaut, MD of  
Blind Solutions®

Blind Solutions® shakes  
the market up with  
its new Nature's Choice™  
Low-e SUNLUX® Architect  
blind collection



Read time  
approximately  
11 min

Interviewed by Tony Korsten  
Written by Claire Cole  
Ben photographed by Tony Korsten

**R**apid advancements have been made in building technologies over the past decade – in large part because of the strong drive to develop greener and more efficient buildings. South Africa can be proud of the number of extremely high-tech buildings that have been built in recent years, many of which Blind Solutions® has proudly participated in and supplied products for. In order for a highly engineered building of this kind to function as intended, all the materials and components used need to play their part.

**Ben Blignaut**, MD of Blind Solutions®, says that this is where a gap in the market has existed when it comes to blinds. He's not referring to the off-the-shelf kind that you put in your home – he means high quality, commercial grade blinds, including the sophisticated automated and mechanised kind used for sun control in many of our top green buildings.

“When Blind Solutions® first started, it was (and still is) an agent and re-seller for many of the blind manufacturers around South Africa,” he tells **Asset**. What the company now offers is considerably different – and the reason for that is to fill a very obvious gap in the market for new sustainable, green and low-e blinds which have not previously been available from the general blind manufacturers and suppliers. This gap has two distinct aspects to it: the first is the limited choices that have been available to specifiers when it comes to blinds, and the second is the relative lack of sophistication in

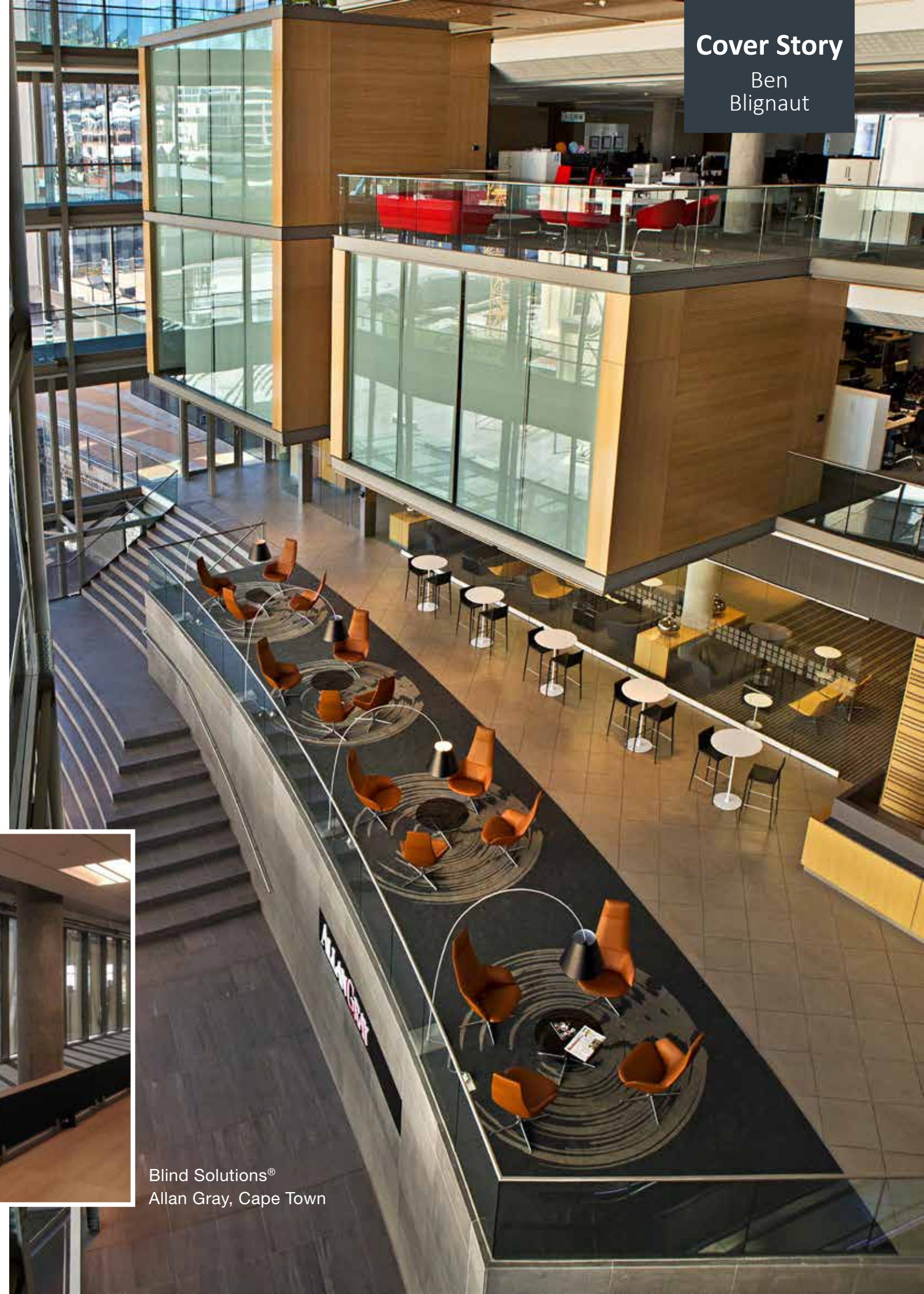
the market with respect to the ability of local suppliers and installers to put in the kind of complex automated sun control systems that are now increasingly being specified on high-tech buildings. Blind Solutions® has developed its unique product and service offerings around these needs, and consequently, is about to revolutionise the sun control industry in South Africa.

#### Offering a broad range, manufactured locally

The first aspect of the business involves providing and proposing a wide range of quality options for blinds to clients and specifiers such as architects and developers. “When we decided to take our business in this new direction, the market was very limited in terms of choice.



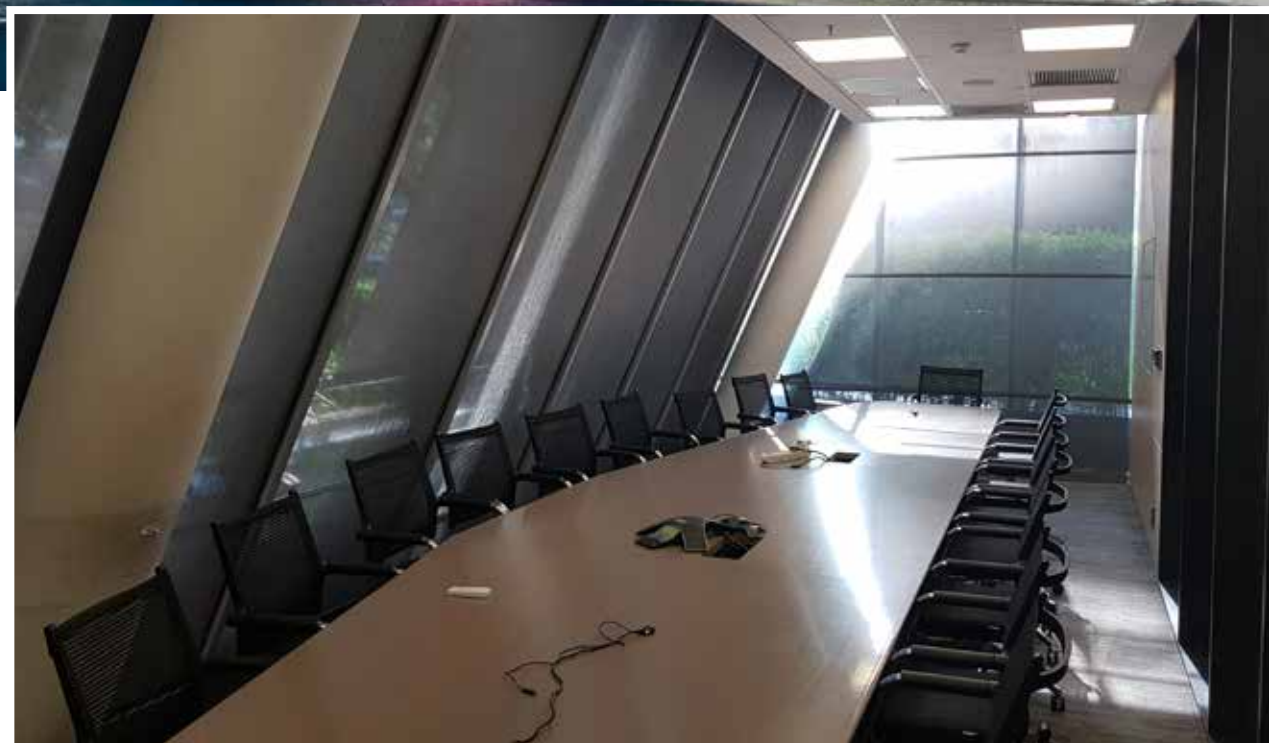
Blind Solutions®  
Allan Gray, Cape Town







Blind Solutions®  
Alexander Forbes,  
Sandton



There are a couple of blind manufacturers operating in the market, and they have generally manufactured a limited range of products because of the high costs associated with bringing in full product ranges from international suppliers. This is due to budget limitations and a smaller market share per capita than Europe and America,” Ben explains. Whilst this is understandable from a business point of view, it doesn’t offer architects and developers a very wide range to choose from and they often have to settle for what is available in the market, rather than having complete freedom to choose the correct product for the project – especially if that product needs to fulfil requirements for a Green Star SA rating.

“We decided not to manufacture but to retain an agent role, combined with offering our very own Sunlux® range of products, which frees us from those limitations. We have successfully negotiated with a number of local and international manufacturers to collaborate to bridge the local gap with Sunlux® products, to offer a full and comprehensive range to our clients. This allows architects to design essentially any type of building style, and we will be able to offer at least one product solution in our range that will offer the required sun control,” he explains. “Furthermore, this collaboration allows us to bring in a far wider range of products, essentially making Blind Solutions® the first sun control company in SA to offer the widest range of external and internal sun control solutions under one roof.



“The launch of our low-e Nature’s Choice™ range is effectively the cherry on the cake, as we are the only sun control company offering an exclusive and unique low-e range of venetian and roller blinds manufactured with Green Star SA ratings in mind, and it is our absolute objective to change the way blinds are specified and procured in SA – in fact, we have access to most of suppliers full range of products and we bring them in on a project-by-project basis,” he continues. What is beneficial is that through this collaboration, a wide variety of material can be sourced from the international suppliers and then manufactured and assembled locally. This gives end users far more choice, and means that South African businesses are still able to benefit not only from a wider choice range, but from a cost perspective as well.

The range of available products is now extremely comprehensive, and includes everything from what one would think of as a ‘standard’ blind to awnings, fabric tensioning systems, aluminium ceilings, sun louvres, sliding shutters, composite cladding panels lattice sunscreens, aerofoils, punched panels, external venetian blinds, bespoke customised shaped or angled blinds and more. There are even curtains and patio umbrellas for domestic-type applications available. The value in what Blind Solutions® does is that where a very specific product is required, the company carries out all the relevant background research in collaboration with teams of green building consultants, sources the most appropriate materials at an affordable cost, and gets the

system manufactured locally where possible. This packaged service has been branded as Sunlux® in South Africa.

### Supplying truly green solutions

When it comes to green buildings specifically, there are two important aspects to consider when specifying any product. The first is its performance, and the second is the ‘greenness’ of the product itself – its embodied energy or carbon footprint, its cradle-to-grave life cycle, and the degree to which it has been responsibly sourced and made. Both of these aspects are addressed through the Sunlux® Nature’s Choice™ range of products by Blind Solutions®.

Nature’s Choice™ roller blind fabric products are all manufactured sustainably – either from plant sugars which are made into yarns, or from 100% recycled PET plastics. The Carbon Earth and Titanium Metal range of blinds is manufactured from recycled PET bottles, whilst the new and exciting Sunlux® Sea Tex® range is made from harvested sea plastics – something that the company takes great pride in given that pollution from these plastics is devastating our oceans. This ticks the first box that specifiers will be concerned about when designing a green building – particularly one which is being submitted for a Green Star SA rating.

In terms of performance, Nature’s Choice™ is a low-e (low emissivity) range of products – meaning that the products emit low levels of radiant energy. Our market is familiar with



View  
brochure  
here

Nature’s Choice™  
Architect **SUNLUX**®  
Low-e Collection

[www.blindsolutions.co.za](http://www.blindsolutions.co.za)

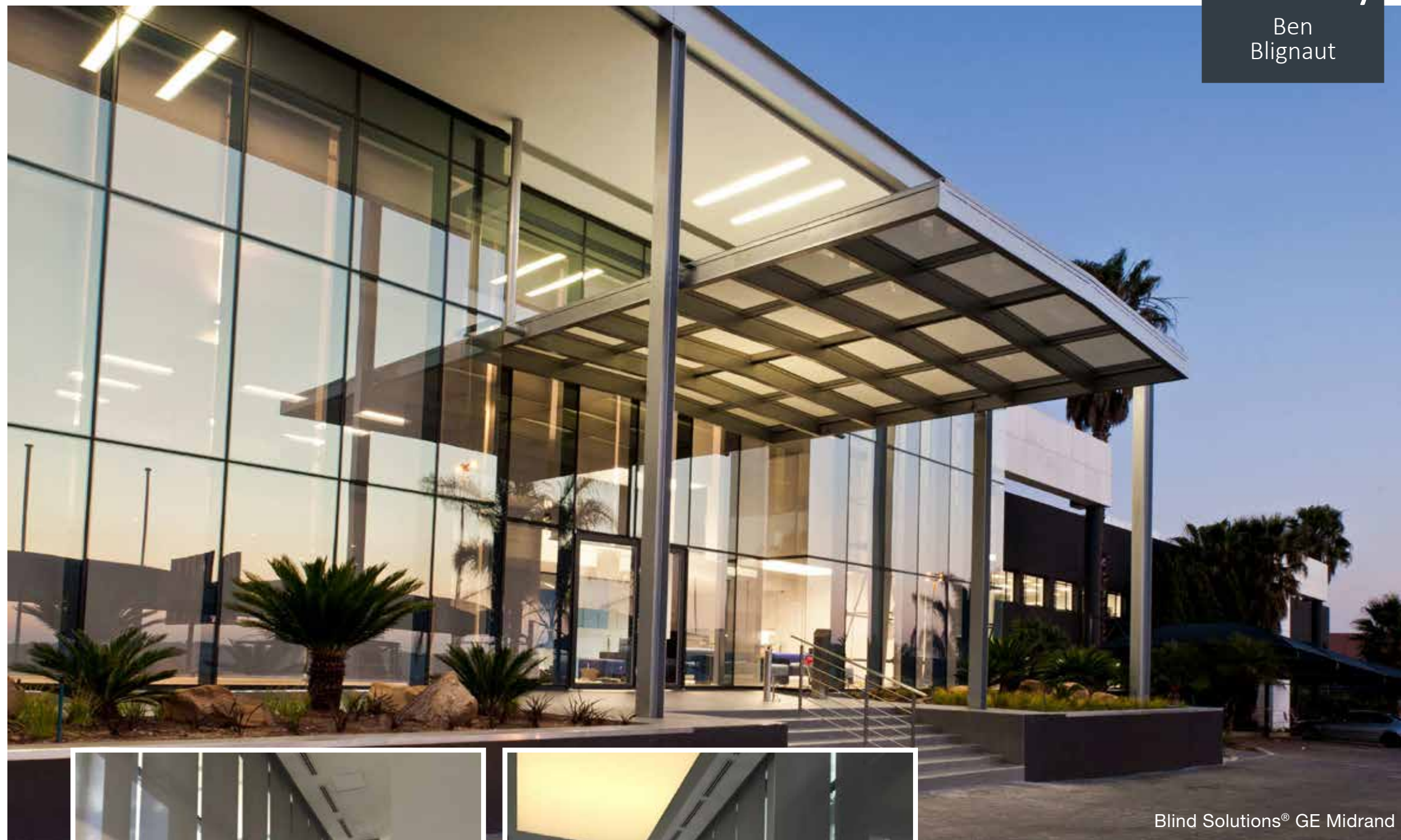




low-e glass, which has been used on many a building. Blinds which do the same thing, however, have not been available until now. “We have a block-out range, a screen range and a metallised backing range of Nature’s Choice™ venetian and roller blinds. These are also the only blinds that are available in South Africa with a variety of openness factors in the weave,” Ben says.

The openness factor is important, because it allows customers to have blinds which all have the same colour scheme and fabric throughout a building, but which essentially perform slightly differently, depending on their openness. “In the past, if one used a fabric with a 5% openness factor throughout a building, there would be insufficient glare control on the north and west façades where the sun is harsh, yet the south side of the building would be too dark because the blinds cut out too much natural light. We can supply a system which offers a 1% openness factor on the north and west façades, 3% on the east façade and 8% on the south façade – all in the same colour and weave,” he adds. This translates into much better heat and glare control on all the façades.

Why is it so important? Because in the days before green building principles were applied, and due to the fact that 40% of our heating and cooling goes through our windows, one would simply add an extra air conditioner if a space was too hot, or install stronger lighting in a space that was too dark.



Blind Solutions® GE Midrand



Such decisions were usually the domain of the mechanical engineers at a consultant level, or in the case of older buildings, facilities managers at an operational level. Today, however, with the emphasis on maximising natural daylight and on designing thermally efficient buildings which rely much more on passive heating and cooling systems for natural building ventilation. Ben points out that the importance of full smart sun control and glare control cannot be overstated.



## Putting the right solutions into the right buildings

Given this importance of sun control systems, it stands to reason that one needs more than just an off-the-shelf solution when it comes to providing and specifying the correct blinds or sun control products for a building – especially a high-tech one. This is where the third important aspect of Blind Solutions® business has developed. “We offer a consulting service to clients – we will assist the mechanical engineers, green building consultants and other professionals at the feasibility study stage for a building and work as part of the professional team to offer our clients the correct sun control solutions for every project that is undertaken, and we endeavour to deliver on that promise. We’ll help them understand what the latest trends are in sun control products and systems so that they understand what is available to achieve the kind of sun and glare control that would be needed for a building. They also then have access to, and a knowledge of, our products right from the outset,” says Ben.

Essentially, the requirement for high performance sun control systems has become extremely sophisticated, and the market just hasn’t kept up. “Our aim is to educate the professionals in the as built environment on our range of products for current and future projects,” he adds.

Ben points out that what has happened on many an occasion is that the understanding of exactly what is required from a sun con-

trol perspective and in terms of the sun control technology is lacking in the construction industry. When it comes time to tender; the professional teams and main contractors don’t have a full understanding of what is required, and the information is not readily available out there, so their pricings and specifications don’t necessarily cater for the kind of system that will perform correctly for the building. What happens then is that either the appointed sub-contractor runs into financial difficulties trying to address the problem retrospectively, or an inferior non-compliant green sun control product or system is used, which compromises building performance and delivery of the required Green Star SA rated building.

“We would really like to be more involved in professional teams, especially at the feasibility study stage. Key to that is Blind Solutions®

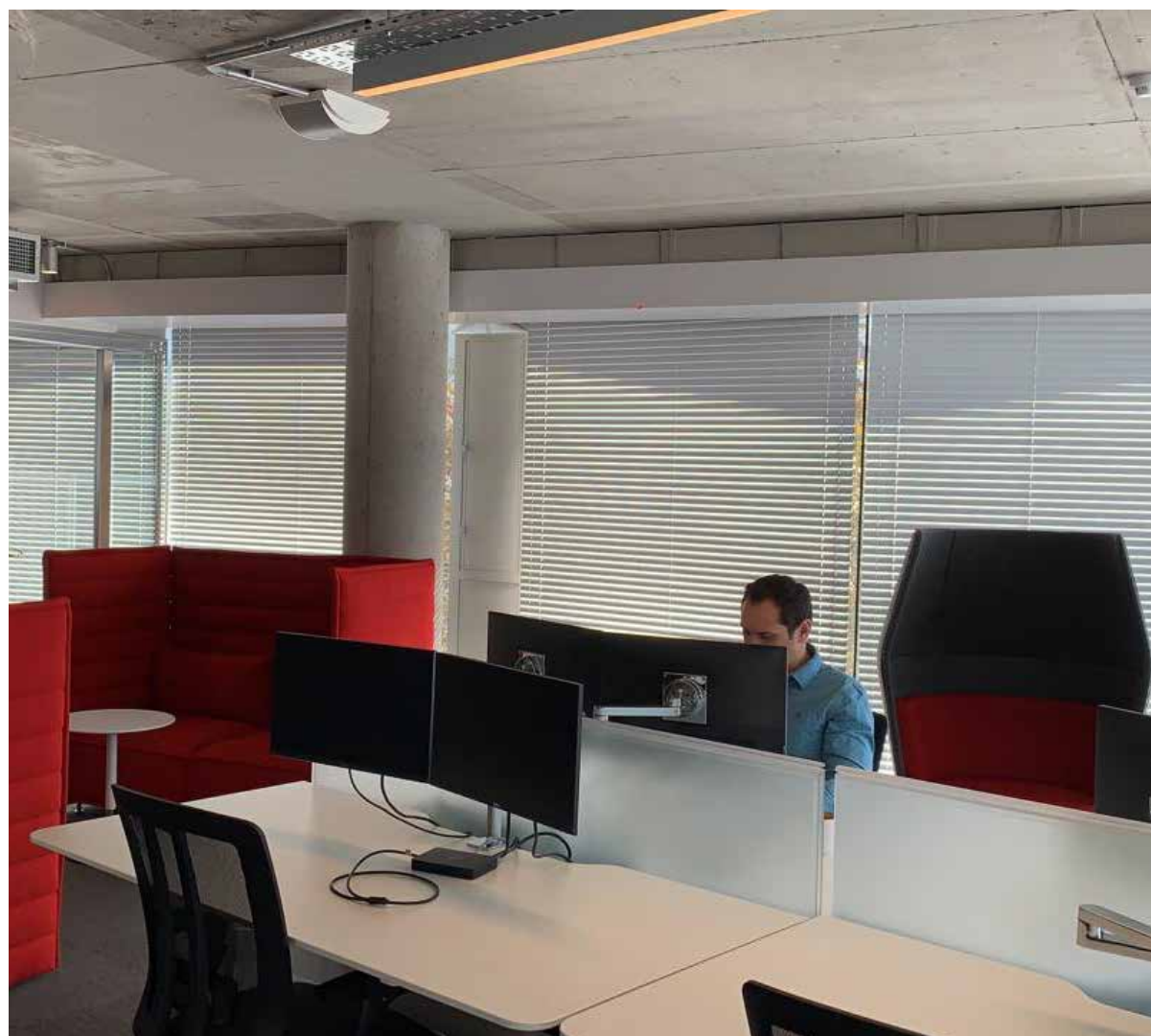


Grain Silos Hotel, Blind Solutions® specialist blinds automation consultants

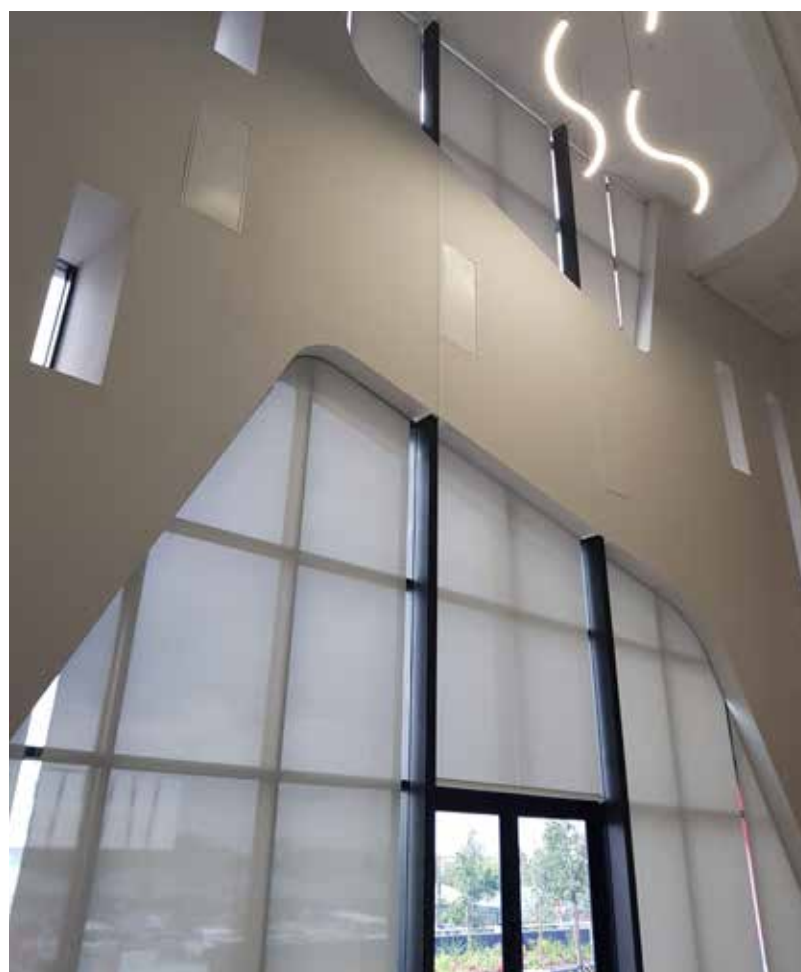




Blind Solutions®. 20 Vineyard, Cape Town



Blind Solutions®. Oracle, Woodmead, Johannesburg



being engaged and appointed as part of the professional team very early in the process, so that we can help address gaps in understanding that might affect tender documents and specifications,” he says. Ultimately, it’s for the benefit of all that a system is correctly designed and specified for a building. Blind Solutions® will design a full sun control system for a building, and obviously first choice for the company would be to act as the supplier as well. “We can provide a full Sunlux® solution for a client including blinds, fabrics, all components and control systems – and we’ll also project manage the installation. In addition, we do training and put together handover and maintenance documents for the system, or alternatively, we are happy to sign a service level agreement through which we come in and do periodic maintenance and repairs,” he continues.

### An international standard of quality

What all this adds up to is giving clients products and services of an international quality standard. One cannot deny that with the green building movement becoming mainstream, it makes sense to be able to offer the latest technologies (supported by an appropriate level of service) to the designers of buildings – not least the flagship ones. Ben points out that for all of the really sophisticated head offices that have been built in South Africa in recent years, international companies have supplied and installed the sun control systems. However, these companies then have to send their engineers and technicians out to service and maintain those systems. While one certainly would not want to compromise on the performance of these buildings, this must come at a considerable cost.

Ben maintains that Blind Solutions® can now offer that same level of quality and service, based on the relationships and buying power that it has with both international and local suppliers. By combining this with a “first of its kind” sun control consulting service, the company is able to find the best solution for a building, supply the products, and do the installation and integration from start to finish. It’s something he is confident will be the game-changer in his pioneering niche. **A+**