

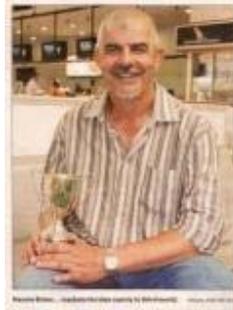
Posted to the web on: 05 February 2007

## Home-grown building an instant success

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SA is already exporting what could turn out to be the solution to the domestic housing crisis, writes Siphso Masondo

IT IS no secret that the South African government is struggling to provide houses for the masses. The housing department says there is a backlog of about 2, 4 million houses, despite construction of almost the same number since 1994.



However, a home-grown "instant housing" technology is being used successfully in a number of countries, and questions have been raised because it is not being used in local mass construction projects.

Port Elizabeth entrepreneur Hennie Botes has been successfully exporting his "instant housing" technology for the past decade. His company, Moladi, markets his idea mainly to third world countries like Panama, Mexico, Angola, Botswana, Brazil and Kenya.

Negotiations are currently under way for Moladi to set up shop in Tanzania, Namibia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Sudan, Algeria, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Ecuador and Venezuela. "Most of the business we get has been generated by our website."

Botes says the concept came to him in 1986, when he was building a wall around his first home, which took a long time. "I thought there must be an easier way to do it than laying a brick on top of another."

And there was. Moladi's "instant house" is formed in a mould. He does not export whole houses, but rather the technology and systems to build and complete a house in a day.

"It is simple to mould the planned house and cast it with brick or block material," he says. "This eliminates the slow process of construction, although obviously the moulded shutter has to be strong enough to withstand the pressure of the mortar."

The mortar dries within 24 hours and is then ready to receive the top structure, plumbing, conduit window and door frames.

The advantages of such houses, Botes says, is the speed and quality of construction. They do not require skilled labour. The houses are socially acceptable, in that they are solid rather than prefabricated, and banks have no problem granting bonds with the structure as collateral.

"It reduces time, waste and cost, and eliminates chasing for plumbing and electrical pipe work, plastering and beam filling. It's a cost effective, holistic design-and-build technology that far outweighs poorly designed costly concrete-block and masonry structures," he says.

"If you have one mould you can build one house in one day, and if you have 100 moulds, you can build 100 houses in one day."

Botes has patented and received the South African Bureau of Standards' approval for the concept, and patents are pending for improvements on the original design as well as complementary products.

Botes is adamant that Moladi homes do not fall into the low-cost housing category, which has negative connotations in SA because of a history of sloppy workmanship by contractors. "Moladi is all about low construction cost technology and has nothing to do with low-cost housing systems. The principle can be applied to any house, whether low-cost housing or a mansion."

He is also quick to say that Moladi is not in the business of building houses, but rather selling the concept to contractors. "We sell the idea to contractors, who then build cost effectively. We dispatch project managers to the countries we operate in to help contractors build the first show house, so transferring skills."

Thereafter those who are interested buy the mould from Moladi. It is still only available to builders who want to build 50 or more houses.

The moulds are manufactured in Markman, outside Port Elizabeth, and exported from the city's harbour. Botes says an 800-house project in Mexico is currently under way, and the company is bidding for a contract to build classrooms in Iraq.

Although the concept has proved viable overseas, Botes says the South African government and property developers remain skeptical.

Botes is convinced the Moladi method is the solution. And there is light at the end of the tunnel; Botes says local interest is picking up, and has even received a fax from Education Minister Naledi Pandor who wants to know more about Moladi.

Last year Botes won a subsidy housing merit award at the Innovation Housing Competition sponsored by the National Homebuilders Registration Council and Absa Bank. In 1991 he won the PRW award in the UK, and in 1997 he won the SABS design for developmental award.

Looking at the future, Botes is confident that Moladi will reach the milestone of having facilitated the construction of 1-million houses worldwide.

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