**PRESS RELEASE**

Paragon remains stalwart in its support of gender parity as it navigates the Covid-19 crisis

**20 July 2021:** It is so important to demonstrate opportunities for career advancement at present. “Morale throughout the profession is not at its best during these extraordinary and trying times, yet we continue to grow and excel and produce great work for our clients,” says [Paragon Interface](http://www.paragon.co.za) Senior Associate **Kirstin Cavanagh**.

Recently appointed to her new role, Kirstin perceives this as a much-appreciated milestone along her career path. “On a personal level, it is a great achievement as it really confirms that one can continue to progress in a career and establish a family simultaneously – something that I was afraid would not be possible for me when I became a parent two years ago.”

Paragon Interface, the interior architecture company of the Paragon Group, has a particular expertise in workplace strategy. Covid-19 has motivated many organisations to start thinking about what the office space means and how the office will, should and could be used going into the future.

“This has given us great opportunities to explore new ways of working with our clients, as they have become a lot more open to ideas around flexible and hybrid work practices. The challenge is that we do not know how long the coronavirus is going to be around for, and exactly what we should be planning for in that regard – flexibility and agility are therefore key considerations.”

Kirstin adds that family structures and home and work life have all been disrupted by Covid-19. “I have tried to keep things like daily routines as normal as possible to give myself some semblance of control. I have also managed to keep extremely busy, which is always a great coping mechanism when things are turned upside down.”

**Pull Quote**

“This has given us great opportunities to explore new ways of working with our clients.” – Kirstin Cavanagh

“I always wonder if I am really making a difference and reaching my goals,” reflects newly-appointed Paragon Architects Senior Associate **Antoinette Kloppers**. “This great recognition and the congratulations I received have brought a refreshing perspective on how I have grown in my career. The world is going through a lot of challenges at the moment. Paragon sees those challenges as opportunities to grow and evolve, instead of stagnating due to difficulties.

“In the past year, we have had to rethink everything. We have had to create opportunities and new ways of learning and mentoring, especially when you have to explain math to your child on equations you have forgotten about. One cannot grow without trials, and as much as we faced many difficulties, you can find at least one lesson learnt in every challenge faced.”

A notable achievement for Antoinette is that, after five years of balancing work, family life and studying, she has completed her studies with the Association of Arbitrators and is now qualified as an arbitrator. Her message to her fellow female colleagues and the profession on the occasion of Women’s Day 2021 is: “Work hard and follow your own unique growth path.”

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“We have had to create opportunities and new ways of learning and mentoring.” – Antoinette Kloppers

**Kim Newell** has just been appointed an Associate at Paragon Architects. “From a personal perspective, I am really proud. It means a lot to me to be recognised within the company. In terms of my professional career, it gives me the opportunity to grow further and contribute towards growth at Paragon. I am looking forward to the journey ahead. The last year-and-a-half has been tough for the industry as a whole, and the entire team at Paragon has worked incredibly hard.”

Remote working has been challenging, notes Kim. “As architects, we are so used to sitting around a table brainstorming design challenges. We have had to rethink the way we do this, and working over video calls is not the same. As we slowly move back into the office, this will become easier. Balance is not easy – it is more about juggling priorities. Exercise and time off help me manage stress levels.”

On the occasion of Women’s Day 2021, Kim reflects how fortunate she is to work at an architectural firm that prioritises gender parity. “There are strong women in the team who chose to build each other up rather than break each other down – this is not always the case in the construction industry, and something we should work towards.”

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“As architects, we are so used to sitting around a table brainstorming design challenges.” – Kim Newell

Newly-appointed Paragon Interface Senior Associate **Kirsty Schoombie** says she is very excited about the challenges presented by her senior role. “I will continue to strive for excellence in design, to learn and grow every day, while mentoring the younger generation of talented designers. As we navigate through this uncertain journey, the recognition shown is of paramount importance. Paragon has a culture of growth and collaboration that pushes individuals such as myself to climb the ladder and better ourselves every day.”

Kirsty acknowledges that Covid-19 has brought about both opportunities and challenges for the team. “We have pulled together during this time to build a stronger base, ready to face the future.” In this regard, hybrid working has brought about a new way of collaborating with both the team and clients.

“We have completed several beautiful interior fit-outs, secured additional clients, and retained strong client relationships in these trying times. Paragon Interface has researched the new hybrid way of working in depth and is busy implementing it for several clients, which is both challenging and an exciting new way of design and communication.”

As a company, Paragon Group strives to remain positive and productive, while keeping the creative juices flowing. “Our staff are motivated through constant collaboration with our clients and consultants, as well as the team. We have endeavoured to instil a balance between work and home lives by creating a strong support system within the group.”

Kirsty concludes: “As a woman in the architectural profession, I endeavour to accomplish all of these goals on a daily basis, with my team and the larger female community of designers. There is no limit to what we as women can accomplish.”

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“There is no limit to what we as women can accomplish.” – Kirsty Schoombie

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**About Paragon**  
Paragon, established in October 1997, is an internationally-active design business, based in Johannesburg. We deliver commercial architecture, masterplanning, interior design, and space planning to visionary clients in all property sectors, from retail to residential and education.

We are committed to global urban development. We are able and agile. Paragon is flexible and diverse in its approach to design. Each project is unique and not driven by style, but by lifestyle and a response to user needs. Elegant and efficient planning form the core of our designs. We understand the needs of our clients, and know how to generate ever new architectural forms in a competitive property market.

We are known for hands-on engagement with all opportunities present in the modern global building industry. The true measure of our skill is our ability to engage at all levels and with all players that make up the colourful world of construction and property development. Our buildings look forward. We embrace the future, because we will be a part of it – part of its problems and responsibilities, and part of its great freedoms and achievements.

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