

BUILDING SUPPLIES

Corobrik pins hope on new, greener bricks

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Catapulted into the future by investing in manufacturing technology advances, Corobrik CEO Nick Booth says the manufacturer aims to treble production and target new clients with environmentally friendly bricks.

Corobrik, which traditionally specialised in making clay bricks, has added glazed, perforated and lightweight bricks to its offering with the April rollout of its new R800m 18,000m² factory, Kvasitina (Zulu word for home of the brick) in Carletonville, west of Johannesburg.

The automated factory raises group output from 48-million bricks a year to 100-million, enabling it to supply nationally and not only regionally.

The new, energy-thrifty bricks are fired in a gas kiln and weigh about 2kg. Traditional bricks weigh 3.2kg. This weight reduction enables the factory to produce faster than before.

"We've more than trebled the productivity of the plant," said Booth. "To be competitive in the world you need to get energy costs down. You need to increase productivity. That is what the technology of the new factory has allowed us to do."

Kvasitina is flexible enough to produce small lots of bespoke bricks for the topline architectural segment.

"Because of the footprint and the type of bricks we are making, we are not limited to Gauteng as a market, even though the factory is in Carletonville. We see the whole of SA as our market for this factory," said Booth.

Established in 1902 with 16 factories across SA, the company makes face bricks, nonface bricks, clay pavers, concrete masonry and pavers as well as earth-retaining systems.

Targeting traditional and new customers, Booth said the lightweight nature of the new bricks meant that transportation was easier. The product would be suitable for large construction groups and large government housing projects.

The SA economy has been bogged down by more than a decade of stagnant growth and an infrastructure backlog, which President Cyril Ramaphosa has vowed to address with the backing of the private sector.

The government's economic reform programme includes infrastructure development that is expected to boost jobs and the economy.

"As the president said, the infrastructure is not just roads and rail, it's also schools, police stations, prisons, clinics and hospitals that need to be built. We are looking forward to participating in that," said Booth.

He said that the potential for further exports is also in the pipeline.

Corobrik now exports bricks and paving materials to Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi, with the occasional request from Indian Ocean islands such as Mauritius and Reunion.

Corobrik has an edge partly because it makes bricks in sizes similar to that of the old British standard "so we don't have to adjust too much to export in terms of sizing", he said.

Corobrik said that the factory will have paid for itself within five years.

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