

## **Hilton Durban Executive Lounge Re-Opens for Business**



Virserius Studio was contracted by Hilton Durban in South Africa for both the casual dining restaurant Big Easy Winebar & Grill (working with the design team of pro golfer Ernie 'Big Easy' Els and Beyond Hospitality) and Hilton's executive lounge. The early design presentations were completed in 2014 and work began in 2015. Big Easy had a soft opening in Fall 2015 followed by a grand opening in January 2016, and the executive lounge was completed in Spring 2016.

Creating the vision for the executive lounges marked a successful and supportive collaboration between Virserius Studio and the Hilton EMEA design team, which allowed us to seamlessly overcome typical challenges when working across cultures and time zones. Hilton Durban made the specific request that the executive lounge have an international feeling with specific nods to South Africa's diverse geographic and demographic beauty. They asked that the design pay homage to the country through subtle patterns that challenged perceptions of Africa and instead showed its richness and variety. The result was a lounge that possesses a casual yet upscale sophistication that is respectful to South Africa as its status as an international travel destination continues to grow.

South Africa's diverse geography and history are evident in subtle ways in the lounge's design; for example, the patterns in the carpet were inspired and derived from South African wicker baskets. Durban's location near the Indian ocean informed a great portion of the color palette, which comprised a lot of sand tones and blues to reflect the shore and water. The city's subtropical climate is reflected in the gold and yellow hues of the curtains along the curved walls. Lightness was anchored by dark woods which added traditional elements to the space that would appeal to the international visitors and prominent dignitaries who stay in the hotel. It was very important from both a financial and environmental standpoint that the majority of the project be sourced regionally and that the local community be engaged. The artwork and furniture were specifically sourced from local African artists and furniture manufacturers.