

JCB Backhoe is on point for Noktada Construction

As university towns go in South Africa, Stellenbosch must be the jewel in the crown. Nowhere else is there such a sense of history and a bit of romance as students, academic staff and the good people of the town wander along oak tree-lined roads and avenues.



Bell Sales Representative, Fiona Johnson, and Hansie Botha of Noktada Construction.

But it's also a busy town with traffic frequently slowing down as sheer volumes of townfolk, students and the many wine and fruit growers of the area fill up the narrow streets with all types of vehicles.

In one such street, we find Hansie Botha directing activities around a metre-deep trench that is cut halfway across the street with traffic whizzing by fairly close to this chasm. Hansie is one half of a young civil construction company called Noktada Construction of which 'Noktada' is Turkish for 'on point'. And judging by the pace of the construction activity in the excavation, 'on point' is what is called for.

Hansie's partner in the business is Hanru Hugo and the pair had been school friends before both studying to become civil technologists. "We started our business in 2017 and formally registered it in 2018," Hansie says.

"Starting with modest projects such as paving for family members and friends, we've gradually grown into tackling larger and more demanding projects and feel we can now confidently provide a full turnkey service from the initial drawings to completion and sign-off of true civil engineering projects such as layer works, building manholes and, as we're doing here, installing underground sleeves that will carry essential power and cyber infrastructure."

Working from their base at Fisantekraal in Durbanville, Noktada Construction gained experience working with other companies in joint ventures as well as doing sub wcontract work for larger contractors. The radius of projects included Paarl, Ceres, Wellington, Klappmuts and the Cape Winelands. It was however not long before they were successful in landing standalone contracts as the main contractor.

Being involved with civil construction implies that mechanical assistance would be needed at some stage to ensure a faster turnaround than using manual labour could do. Hansie and Hanru learnt valuable lessons from hiring plant as Hansie explains: "We at first hired equipment like backhoe loaders as being a young business, our cashflows didn't yet allow us to consider buying such equipment.

"Not all hired plant is in good condition and although replacements could most often be found when breakdowns occurred, we discovered the hard way that when working in more rural areas, this would not be the case, which doesn't always make for happy clients overseeing one's progress."

Once Noktada Construction had landed two bigger standalone contracts that called for the laying of 185mm copper cables around Stellenbosch and

Klappmuts, the pair realised that it was time to invest in their own earthmoving equipment that could be available to them constantly.

"We had found that hiring such reliable equipment was becoming more and more difficult and with pressure building through looming deadlines, we could no longer delay the decision to obtain our own equipment," Hansie says. "On doing research as to the most affordable and reliable backhoe loader in the industry and getting advice from a mentor of ours, all indications were to look at JCB machines. This took us to Bell Equipment, the South African distributor, where we met Fiona Johnson, Bell Equipment's energetic Sales Representative working out of the Cape Town branch."

Hansie mentions that from the outset Fiona gave them sound advice and enough information to make their choice of machine easier. Their choice fell on a JCB 3DX Eco Backhoe Loader because working near the coast means that the naturally aspirated 4,4 litre JCB Dieselmox engine purrs along as it delivers 63kW of power.

Hansie and Hanru arranged their own finance over 48 months and the machine came with a standard warranty of 12 months and unlimited hours. They are considering entering into a service contract with Bell Equipment once the machine's warranty has expired. "Working on this present contract, which is mainly in busy traffic in the streets of Stellenbosch, we could not have done it without the use of our JCB Backhoe Loader," Hansie adds.

"To prevent damage to the in situ infrastructure, all trenching is done manually but we use the JCB 3DX Backhoe Loader as a sophisticated and fast wheelbarrow to move the excavated soil and rocks away from the trench as we have only about 10 hours in which to excavate, do the installation and reseal one half of a street. The other half is then done the following day so as to not have to close streets to traffic."

Hansie says the JCB Backhoe Loader is further used to bring the all-important sand that is used as both a bottom 'bedding' on which the installed sleeves rest and an upper 'blanket' that then covers the installed material before the road is resealed and this all happens with frenetic activity.

"Having our own machine available to us all the time is a great confidence booster and it also shows our clients that we're serious players and in it for the long haul," Hansie continues. "We use the JCB 3DX Backhoe Loader on average for 7,5 hours in a day and could really not have undertaken this project successfully without it. Our experienced operator, Johnatan Natel, who has been working on similar machines for the past seven years, enjoys the JCB's smooth and responsive controls and it shows in the machine's productivity."

Noktada Construction's two owners may be young but they're certainly not short of ideas, energy and plans for the future. They're already aiming for their next piece of earthmoving equipment to be a 20-ton excavator that will allow them to dig deeper trenches, and they could be consulting Fiona Johnson again soon.

