

Money's really no object in Steyn City

JEREMY THOMAS

IF you squint your eyes from the Steyn City clubhouse piazza, you might just imagine you're in San Gimignano. Cast your gaze to the right, however, and your Tuscan reveries will vanish.

What is this? It is Douw Steyn's house. A R250-million pile of grey stone with 16 chimneypots, it appears to suck as much inspiration from a fevered Sol Kerzner dream of Rome as Sir Herbert Baker's Union Buildings.

Palazzo Steyn is a fat statement of intent by the insurance mogul who will have sunk R9-billion into his fantasy by the time he opens his golf course and starts selling slices of his 810ha estate to the public next March.

The mansion, encircled by two immense, vaulted aqueducts that squirt water into a gorge, is vulgar by any standards.

Yet, to appreciate the extravagance of Steyn's ambitions, one has to look beyond hubris. You need to see Steyn City with a Joburger's eyes.

The estate's gate, a folly designed on a Grecian theme that somehow also references St Peter's Square in the Vatican, is accessed via the William Nicol highway. Steyn has spent R900-million to widen the road, build pedestrian and cycle lanes, and constructed an entirely new junction.



FAT STATEMENT:
Insurance king Douw Steyn has gone to great lengths to move 'settlers' from his land and create employment for an army of workers in pursuit of his perfect city
Picture: KEVIN WRIGHT

The business zone of Steyn City is named Auto & General Park, at present home to 2 500 staff manning the phones for Telesure, the Anglo-South African direct-sales insurance venture that is perhaps the most visible generator of Steyn's wealth.

Once past the entrance massif, the scale of the enterprise becomes apparent. The roads and traffic circles are immaculate. Thousands of workers toil — as they have since the first sod was turned in 2009 — at transforming a former squatter camp and abandoned quarry on the banks of the Jukskei River into parkland paradise.

Steyn, a long-time ANC benefactor, sweetened a deal with the government to move 20 000 Zevenfontein settlers (the preferred word) from his land to new quarters in Cosmo City.

Today, the precinct is sur-

rounded by a 3m-high electrified wall which will be clad in native stone at a cost, estimated by quantity surveyor Willie Steyn, of more than R15-million.

It escapes nobody that up the hill and down the dale lies Diepsloot. Security is paramount, but so too is the imperative to employ and train the workforce on Steyn City's perimeter.

Already the development has given jobs to 10 000 labourers. They are given courses in plastering, bricklaying and paving, or in horticulture.

An on-site nursery has 750 000 plants, part of the long-term plan to plant a million trees and 2 million shrubs.

Golf Data chairman Robbie Marshall said that 140 000 wild olives, bushwillows and white stinkwoods have so far taken root around The Club at Steyn City.

Marshall's team works with Jack Nicklaus Design on what is certainly the finest new course on the highveld.

A helicopter flip reveals the startling contrast between the Steyn City track and neighbouring Dainfern.

The latter's kikuyu fairways are scorched brown in early spring; the newcomer is a gleaming dark-green thanks to tough American all-season fescue and rye grasses.

Irrigation comes via "grey" water from the nearby Northern Works effluent plant.

Steyn spent R100-million to upgrade the sewerage network and build a new reservoir that will serve not only his estate but the whole area.

So if you ignore the whiff of Dubai emanating from the home of the Steyn City supremo, it appears that money can indeed buy good taste.