

New book highlights the 40-year history of SRK

One of several functions that I attended at the recent Mining Indaba was hosted by SRK Consulting and saw the launch of *SRK: 40 years in the deep end*, a history of the group from its start up in the 1970s to its global presence today.

The event – held at the Shimmy Beach Club at the V&A Waterfront – was presided over by SRK’s global chairman, Mike Armitage. None of the founding partners was able to be present but two of them, Hendrik Kirsten and Oskar Steffen, were on hand to sign copies of the book when it was launched internally to SRK staff late last year (see our photo). Andy Robertson, the third founding partner, left SRK in 1994 (and was last year inducted into International Mining magazine’s Hall of Fame).

Mike was introduced, incidentally, by Graham Howell, who has just recently taken over the chairmanship of SRK Consulting (SA). A structural and geotechnical engineer who joined SRK in the mid-1980s, he succeeds the hugely respected Roger Dixon, who retired at the end of last year after six years as chairman but who remains at SRK as corporate consultant.

Although I cannot claim to have read the book yet, I did spend some time at the launch browsing through it and it looks like a wonderful read. It also has a fabulous selection of photos dating back to SRK’s earliest days, both of the people who formed and shaped the group and of the many projects it has undertaken over the years.

I’m old enough to remember the formation of SRK – it was established in 1974 in Johannesburg – and can recall some of the early projects highlighted in the book. In those days I was editor of a civil engineering magazine and SRK was primarily a geotechnical specialist and hence I frequently found myself covering its activities. Of course, the group has subsequently diversified and become a true multi-disciplinary engineering, mining, environmental and scientific consultancy, with over 45 offices in 20 countries on six continents.

Addressing guests at the function at the Waterfront, Mike Armitage said, “Reliving SRK’s past through the stories in this remarkable book has reminded us of the main reason for SRK’s success – the high calibre

of its people. Thrown in at the deep end and expected to swim, numerous individuals have risen to the challenge and performed at levels exceeding even their own aspirations.”

One of the points that comes out in the book is that the founders were determined to break the mould with SRK. For a start, they decided that employees would own the company, being allowed to purchase shares when they joined the firm with the proviso that they would sell them back to SRK on leaving.

Then there was the relentless focus on recruiting only the best talent. “We set out to take on young people every year so that we could continually bring the latest technologies into the business,” Hendrik Kirsten recalls. Oskar Steffen adds that what mattered was “getting the best people in their field ... and keeping the best by giving them the freedom to grow.”

I understand that *SRK: 40 years in the deep end* – which I should mention is authored by Ian Mulgrew – is very much an initiative of SRK’s Vancouver office. In fact, its initial launch was in Vancouver in August last year, with Andy Robertson and other influential consultants from SRK’s formative years in attendance.

Only a limited number of the books has been printed but interested readers can download a digital version from the SRK website (www.srk.co.za). Happy reading, if you do – I don’t think you will be disappointed!

Arthur Tassell



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SRK founders Hendrik Kirsten (left) and Oskar Steffen sign copies of the book.