

Solving urban loneliness one estate at a time

Urban South Africans are increasingly moving to cities alone, away from extended families, away from established social networks, and into apartments where they may not know a single neighbour. Purpose-built multifamily rental developments are finding ways to meaningfully address this lonely reality.



Across the data-driven multifamily rental housing sector, operators are reporting a striking finding: the amenity that moves residents most, the one that drives the highest rental uptake, the strongest tenant retention, and the most enthusiastic referrals, is not the gym, the pool or the fibre connection. It is community. The biggest attraction is the sense of belonging that comes from living in a place designed for human connection, not just human occupation.

“Every time we run an event, whether it is a games night, a poolside gathering, or a sports screening, the response tells us that people are hungry for connection in a way the rental sector has historically underestimated,” says **Jacolien Botha, Marketing Manager, of Divercity Urban Property Group and Ithemba Property Management.**



“Urban renters are not just looking for a unit,” she adds. “They are often far from home, building new lives in cities, and the sense of belonging that a well-run community creates has real value to them.”

Designing for spontaneous connection

For Africrest, community is not a programme. It is an architectural and operational philosophy.

*“In most urban rental environments, people live in the same building for years and do not know the person next door,” says **Africrest Director Justin Blend**. “In our estates, that changes, because we curate the community intentionally.”*



Africrest's approach combines a rigorous application process, ensuring a shared resident profile of professionally employed renters, with communal spaces designed for spontaneous interaction rather than staged photography. The result, Blend argues, is not an amenity. It is the conditions under which genuine community can form naturally.



Houss Rentals has arrived at a similar philosophy through a different route. Its most recent estate evolution has transformed traditional clubhouses into what it describes as “active lifestyle hubs”: seated restaurants for weekend evenings, R14 express coffee shops for the

daytime workforce, convenience stores that eliminate the need to leave the estate for daily essentials. Free-to-resident Padel courts, strategically chosen as the fastest-growing social sport in South Africa, are a centrepiece of this vision.

“We made the strategic decision to provide Padel as a free amenity with regular tournaments and workshops at no charge, fostering a genuine sense of community rather than just providing a facility. We aren’t just giving tenants a place to sleep; we are providing a fully serviced urban village,” says **Martin O’Connell, Head of Marketing, Houss Rentals.**



Building communities, not just buildings

Diversity, Africrest and Houss are all members of the South African Multifamily Residential Rental Association (SAMRRA), the representative body for South Africa’s institutionally owned and professionally managed multifamily residential rental sector.

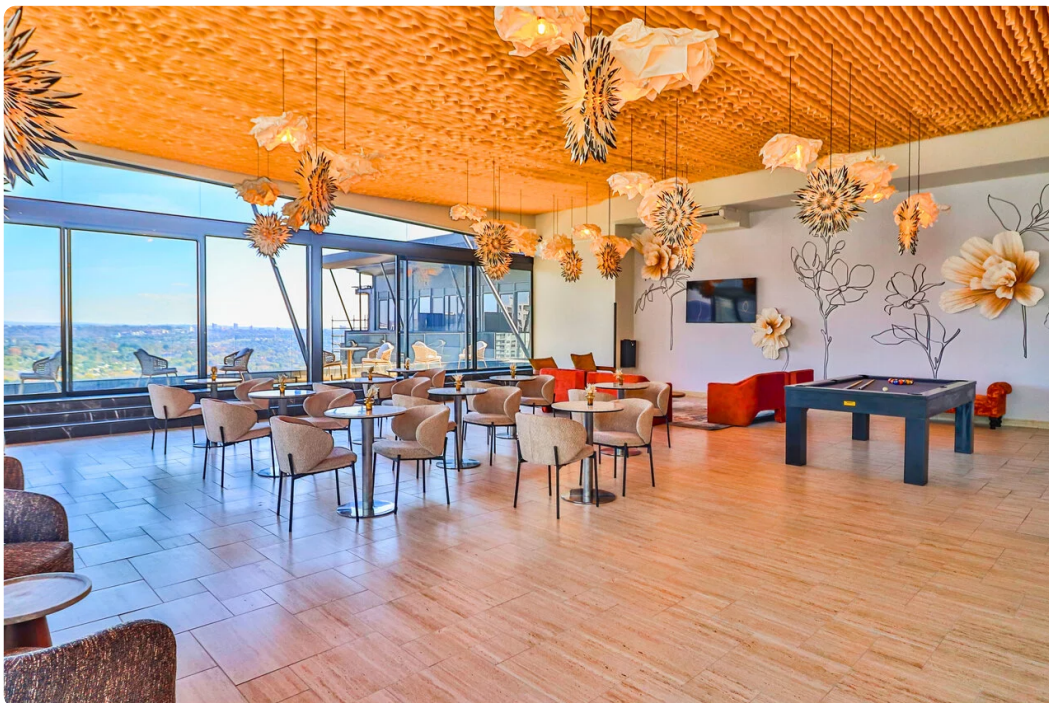
SAMRRA’s membership includes institutional landlords managing over 75,000 residential units across approximately 550 properties, valued at over R72 billion.

This privately owned residential stock is designed specifically for renting. It is typically owned by institutional investors and managed by specialist operators. These assets are large-scale residential property rental estates or precincts, which provide consistent long-term income for investors.

The scale of their developments' positions institutional multifamily rentals uniquely to create and nurture community connection. It is a strategy that is good for people and good for business.

Community as a tenant retention driver

The business case for community investment is increasingly clear. Divercity's Botha is candid about the relationship between community and commercial performance. *"Residents who attend events, who use shared spaces, who feel their building responds when something goes wrong, stay and tell their friends. The data reflects that, but the data is the outcome, not the cause. The cause is community."*



Africrest corroborates this from its own renewal conversations. *"When you ask a resident why they are renewing, they rarely cite the gym or a pool,"* says Blend. *"They cite the fact that when they had a problem, someone came. They cite the fact that they feel safe — not because of a gate, but because of the community around them."*

Providing housing and belonging

For **SAMRRA CEO Palesa Mkhize**, the community dimension of multifamily is inseparable from the sector's broader social purpose.



“Housing that works is housing where people feel at home. That starts with a well-maintained unit, but also means neighbours who look out for each other, spaces that bring people together, and a management model that treats residents as members of a community rather than co-parties to a contract. That is what our members are building, and it matters far beyond the balance sheet,” points out Mkize.

As South Africa’s cities continue to urbanise, the capacity of the multifamily rental housing sector to provide not just shelter but belonging will become an increasingly important measure of its social value, and its investment case.

.../ends

RELEASED BY CATCHWORDS FOR:

SAMRRA – South African Multifamily Residential Rental Association

Palesa Mkhize, CEO

info@samrra.co.za

Image Captions:

- **Palesa Mkhize, CEO of South African Multifamily Residential Rental Association (SAMRRA)**
- **Jacolien Botha, Marketing Manager, of Divercity Urban Property Group and Ithemba Property Management**

- **Justin Blend, Director of Africrest**
- **Martin O'Connell, Head of Marketing, Houss Rentals**
- **Indawo Lifestyle Apartments Padel Courts managed by Houss Rental**
- **Africrest's The Maestro Sky Lounge 3**
- **Divercity Urban Property Group's Jewel City**



Contact details

Angie Di Giovamapolo

PR and Portfolio Lead

angie@catchwords.co.za

[0834536668](tel:0834536668)

Copy link

<https://www.catchwords.co.za/273601-solving-urban-loneliness-one-estate-at-a-time/>