



Grasdakke ◦ Thatchers

## **RECOMMENDED PROCEDURE TO FOLLOW WHEN BUILDING, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO A THATCH ROOF**

SA has lost much of its technical expertise over the past twelve years due to the emigration of trained personnel. The client can limit the risk of choosing an incompetent contractor by following certain procedures.

Generally the building of a new home is one of the bigger investments people make. To ensure a medium to long term return on this investment the client must guarantee as far as possible that value for money is attained in terms of material quality, technical expertise and workmanship.

The first step in the process is to employ a competent experienced qualified architect. When selecting an architect choose one that designs the style of home you wish to build. Most architects have fairly specific preferences with regard to style, a look at an architect's portfolio will indicate if you are at the right place. My personal attitude towards competent architects has changed dramatically through time and believe that a successful project is totally dependent on the architect in that he/she is the only person involved on the project that understands the building holistically and the implications with regard to changes, so do not whimsically make changes as it will invariably impact elsewhere on the project, also do not dictate design criteria, the architect is the person qualified in the field.

Architects charge according to a fee structure which ranges from sketch plans through to site supervision. If you do not have an adequate knowledge of the building industry it would be advisable to appoint the architect to oversee the project through to completion. Part of the architect's job is to ensure that no money is paid to contractors until the material supplied and the work is completed to his satisfaction. This adjudication is based on the detailed drawings generated by the architect and approved by you, the client prior to tendering.

Most architects through experience use preferred specialist contractors with proven track records, ensuring that both quality and time constraints are met. Quality issues are generally covered by reference and detail on drawings to accepted and or approved building standards. More often than not the client's decisions are based on budget constraints rather than the advice of the architect resulting in dire consequences. Competent experienced professionals such as engineers eventually save money by designing correctly and efficiently the first time around.

My specific interest is with the thatching industry, which prior to 2004, in which year a specification for thatch roofs was published by the South African Bureau of Standards, SANS10407:2004, relied on the competence, integrity and experience of the Thatcher. Numerous thatching companies enter the market annually due to the low capital outlay required only to disappear again after a short period of time leaving behind a trail of sub-standard roofs and bad debt. Only in recent years have certain municipalities made it a requirement that a structural engineer sign responsibility for the

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construction of thatch roofs, which is a misnomer in that all other structural elements of a building have always been subject to this requirement. Many roofs including thatch roofs are still constructed today without the approval of a specialist engineer which can result in major expenses to the consumer, sometimes many years after construction due to age destruction (tearing of fibres in the timber from overloading). Age destruction of the pole structure, if under-designed, can cause building walls to crack or collapse and in the worst case scenario the entire collapse of the roof. The rate of age destruction is dependant on the percentage overload to the structural element.

I am firmly of the opinion that should you wish to build a thatch roof building a specific path should be followed, which is outlined as follows:

Firstly make use of an architect that has knowledge of thatch roofs or an architect that will consult with a specialist Thatcher, beginning at sketch plan stage. It is of no use that the Thatcher be presented with a design for tender purposes that contravene all the basic rules for thatch roof design. This will result in expense to somebody and possible that the end result is not what is required aesthetically.

Appoint an engineer who is competent in the design of pole structures. This same engineer will be able to handle all the other design aspects of the building as well. Two engineers on the same project will increase the cost to you, the client.

Appoint a structural designer to generate detailed structural drawings for the thatch roof. These drawings are then analysed by the appointed engineer and the necessary criteria in terms of pole diameters and bolted connections determined and specified on the drawing. From these structural drawings an exact pole list and bill of materials may be determined.

Lastly request thatching companies of your choice to tender, this choice should preferably be made from members of the SA Thatcher's Association who in terms of their status as members will comply with the SANS 10407 document. It may be wise to request your bank manager to do a credit check on the contractors of your choice prior to appointment. This check can normally determine the contractors conduct as well as the age of the company. Determine at this stage who will take responsibility for the insurance during construction. Some contractors do have contract insurance in place when appointed by the client directly.

Together with the structural drawings, bill of quantities and SANS 10407 you will be assured that all tenders received are on par with one another in terms of materials and design. The appointed engineer will then inspect and approve the structure on completion by the appointed contractor. When appointing the Thatcher it is preferable to use a suitable standard JBCC contract. JBCC contracts are generally the accepted document to use as both the client and contractors interest is catered for.

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