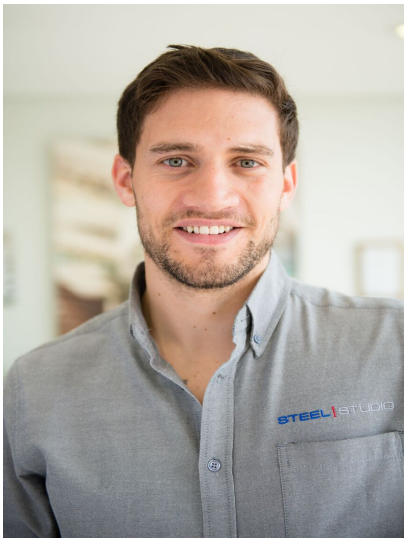
STEEL | STUDIO

Saving Lives One Balustrade at a Time

By Daniel Oosthuyse
Authors Bio



Daniel Oosthuyse matriculated with a full academic and sports scholarship at King Edward VII School in Houghton. He has a Bachelors of Business Administration in Marketing and Business as well as a qualification in Applied Project Management and is registered with SAQA. As an all-rounder, Daniel has experience in a wide variety of industries and an even wider scope of skills. He is an asset to Steel Studio and a name that will be in the business for many years to come.

A little background

In the early 2000's, Stainless Steel as a material for balustrade systems was the new kid in town. It fast became the specified material on large commercial projects and architects started incorporating stainless steel into their balustrade designs for homes and offices.

Back then, Steel Studio didn't consider itself as a professional in balustrade safety regulations, but rather a professional in working with Stainless Steel and the quality of its craftsmanship and finishes. It was therefore accepted that we were not responsible for the design and safety engineering of the balustrade that architects put forward for their projects. Steel Studio would receive a design and would manufacture and install according to the architect's specification trusting that the drawings received were done according to the set industry standard.

Up until 2010, balustrade contractors were indemnifying themselves from the balustrade designs and the risks involved with the safety of these designs. It was accepted that the architects who were the specifiers were the professionals and had the necessary tools to design a safe balustrade system.

New Legislation

Then in 2011, changes were made to the South African National Standards (SANS) in regards to balustrades and almost immediately engineers were requesting spontaneous load bearing and impact tests on balustrades in commercial buildings in South Africa. Quickly we discovered that we had to closely scrutinise the designs that we were working from. Manufacturing and installation had to answer to some very specific standards of safety concerning load bearing and impact and we decided to accept the design responsibility for the work and products we were delivering to the market.

The evolution of the balustrade

We decided to enlist the help of a well-known structural engineer to assist in developing a range of materials and products that would ensure a balustrade system that would withstand any accidental impacts it might face. Manufacturing artful balustrades was not the be all and end all and our aesthetically pleasing work evolved using a more technical point of departure.

Historical injuries, accidents, spontaneous load and impact tests on site caused us to take a closer look at our materials, our manufacturing processes and our installation processes.

The Unbearable Load of the Unscrupulous

Unfortunately unscrupulous balustrade contractors disregarded the new laws and still do, continuing to install unsafe balustrade systems and staircases and risking lives. Professionals in the building industry and home-owners continue to appoint balustrade contractors purely based on the bottom line. They ignore material thicknesses, quality and installation specifications that

balustrades need to comply with. Thinking only about the bottom line is short-sighted as non-compliance may end up being a costly exercise when building inspectors do not accept the installation and insist on the installation of compliant systems. The unfortunate part about the corrupt state of our country is that it is far too easy to slip a couple thousand under the table for a sign off with no consequences whatsoever.

Systems designed with your safety in mind

We have made it our task to educate the industry. This includes professionals within the building industry and consumers. We place a very high premium on the education of professionals and consumers. Our aim is to teach them what to look out for when appointing a balustrade contractor. The main question we ask, as a socially responsible citizen is: Will the balustrade we install keep our clients' children or the people using their home or building safe.

Steel Studio are specialists in safe balustrade systems. We no longer indemnify ourselves from the design of the balustrade installation. We have invested years in dissecting and understanding the codes and can specify a balustrade system for any occupation purpose accurately, taking the full design and installation responsibility for our products. Our catch phrase "Systems designed with your safety in mind" rings true.

The all-important Form 3

We provide an engineer's sign off for every type of balustrade that we manufacture and install. This sign off is in the form of an official Form 3: Declaration by a competent person appointed to design a component or an element of a system, from the National Building Regulations and Building Standards Act, 1977 (Act No. 103 of 1977)

We continue to deal with refusal from competitors to comply with the codes. They undercut compliant installers by installing inferior materials that are unsafe thus creating an uncompetitive environment.

Keeping good company

The South African Balustrade and Handrail Association (SABHA) has been formed and the first industry meeting has been held in Gauteng. The intention of this association will be to drive compliance and level the playing field. Steel Studio's aim is to continue educating building inspectors and other building industry professionals to stop looking at the bottom line and to appoint compliant products that ensure consumer safety.

We are experts in the industry in terms of what complies and what doesn't. We can comfortably say that we are THE professionals.

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