

BRAAMFONTEIN has always been less damaged by decay and exodus than the CBD partly because of the proximity of the University, providing a vibrant but relatively stable student population and the fact that it still has some key tenants on the north ridge near the campus, who have remained through economic slumps.

However the bottom end of Braamfontein, near the railway lines and the Nelson Mandela Bridge, had seen better days until the foresight and daring of a young entrepreneur created a new precinct that is becoming a sought-after address.

It is the area bounded by De Beer, Smit, Melle and Jutta Streets that Justin Blend of Rejuvenate Properties has rejuvenated as prime rental property.

"It began with the renovation of Bridge House, originally an old hotel on the corner of De Beer and Smit," explains Blend. "It was one of the first hotels in Braamfontein built around 1906 but of course it had coursed downwards through various tenants and uses into decay.

"With Danaug Investments, we turned it into a magnificent office furniture showroom of 800 square metres for Ayanda Solutions, an upmarket corporate office furniture company. We retained many of its attractive architectural features, notably the lofty pressed ceilings, shuttered windows and character fireplaces, which complement the traditional style of much of Ayanda's stock.

"The second building, in Smit

Engine of growth



Melhof – prime office space about to get the Rejuvenate Properties makeover for a tenant eager to be aboard the engine of growth.

Street, was an old butchery that was completely abandoned – we revamped the rear section into a chic office loft and let it to African Cream Music, a successful independent record label. The rest of the premises are still being redone but we are leaving the little touches of the original butchery – the small tiles, the old sign and the windows – so that the character of the area still remains.

"Next door to that was another building which had been standing vacant for many years. We stripped the building, replaced the lift, removed the façade and replaced it with very modern chic plate glass windows and found the ideal tenant in Rosebank College, a division of the Advtec Group Ltd.

"This fresh styled building is an attraction to students who do not expect this level of modernity in this area. The building was so successful that Rosebank College requested more space, so

we built a new building of 1 500 square metres next door, making it one of the first totally new commercial buildings constructed in Braamfontein in many years.

"We linked the buildings with steel girders that echo the contemporary design of both buildings and designed a relaxation area for students on the roof – great view and a safe environment.

"In Jutta Street, almost directly behind Rosebank College we revamped the multi-storey building to provide NBC with a head office. This company relocated from Sandton, not only saving massive rental costs but materially improving the life of its staff in terms of transport costs and time. The building had an attractive marble interior, which we left, adding functional and attractive interior designs including boardrooms, gym and staff restaurant, which has a charming patio overlooking the Nelson Mandela

Bridge and the Johannesburg skyline.

"We have now acquired Melhof on the corner of Melle and Smit Streets which formerly housed a section of the Standard Bank. It is an excellent building in good repair and it has a breathtaking view over the Braamfontein railway lines with the Blue Train clearly visible. It has a public parking garage across the road (always a need in Braamfontein) and is a landmark building for a discerning tenant.

"As we have put so much into this area, we have excellent relationships with the Johannesburg council and its various divisions. All our properties on Smit Street front onto a little park that has been neglected for many years – so we and Johannesburg Parks will rejuvenate this into an attractive area for our tenants and the surrounding apartments.

"We have so far invested around R20 million in the Bridge Precinct because we believe that the Johannesburg CBD and Braamfontein will survive, as they have done before, and that these investments will prove very lucrative in the not too distant future. We are 500 metres from Park Station and the new Gautrain Station, the bus system is already improving and we enjoy easy access from motorways – combine these with our reasonable rentals and our problem is not finding tenants, it's snapping up more buildings before everyone returns to the city," concludes Blend.

