

## trends

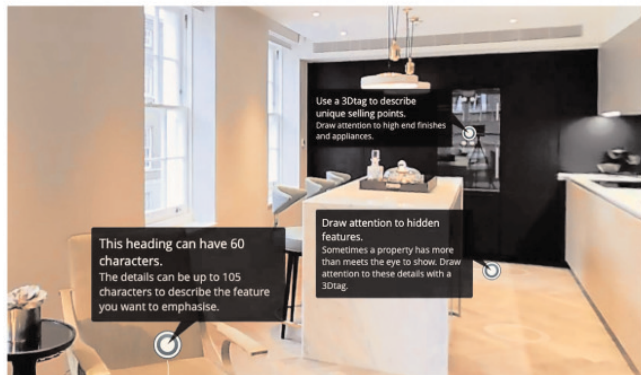
## Armchair viewing

**THE BEAUTY** of using virtual reality in the real estate world is customers can view houses in the comfort of their own homes.



PICTURE: 3DSCANN – WWW.3DSCANN.CO.ZA

# A VIRTUAL WALK



EXTRA: Tags give additional information as the viewer walks through the home.

PICTURE: 3DSCANN – WWW.3DSCANN.CO.ZA

Viewing property has become a lot easier, with technology giving a guided tour without the potential buyer leaving their chair

By **Bonny Fourie**

**V**IRTUAL reality is fast transporting the world into a future of seemingly-limitless possibilities as cutting-edge technology and its ever-advancing capabilities continue to revolutionise the way people think, businesses operate and industries evolve.

This groundbreaking innovation has fast permeated the daily functions of countless sectors of the global economy and spanned various industries from gaming, media, and health care, to tourism, education and space. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that virtual reality (VR) is set to change the face of the South African real estate industry.

Already proving an invaluable tool in the luxury and high-end real estate markets of the US, UK, Germany, Canada and Australia, to name just a few, VR real estate tours have taken property viewing to another level as smart goggles make viewing homes and properties possible at any time and from anywhere. It is already a \$1billion industry globally and is set to triple in the next four years.

In a recent article published in the UK's Building Design & Construction magazine, global real estate giant Savills – which has already launched VR viewings at its head office in London – explains that in a VR viewing, a property is filmed using a mixture of laser scanning and 360° capturing equipment. The images then go through a post-production process, after which they are delivered to the viewer via a head-mounted display, such as smart goggles. These goggles then track the user's head movements

and show each eye a slightly different image, "giving the illusion of being in a 3D space".

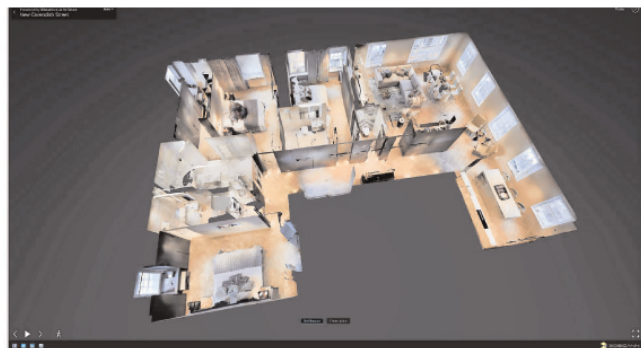
"Soundscape is added at certain points of the tour for an additional sense of presence. The user is then able to 'move' from room to room and out into the garden via a number of hot spots," the company reported.

This VR trend is particularly popular in prime international markets, where foreign investors are unable to view properties due to their locations. The technology also makes it possible for off-plan buyers to "see" the finished product before building even starts or prospective buyers to visualise properties in development.

Recently, Deloitte Global stated some architects were using VR to "create interactive visualisations of construction projects in place of 3D models, or fly-through videos, an approach that can enable clients to make changes before work starts".

Gerald Ferreira, founder of South African enterprise virtualreality.co.za, said, however, although VR was "relatively new technology", the concept had been used in real estate for most of the past decade.

"In the past it was a very cumbersome process. We shot with a static SLR camera on a tripod in all directions – including up – at the same time. The cameras are positioned in a rig printed with a 3D printer, so the overlap is perfect. We can take video and pictures at the same time and then do minor cor-



DOLLHOUSE: A 3D view from above on a computer screen.

PICTURE: 3DSCANN – WWW.3DSCANN.CO.ZA



PANORAMIC: The view using 3D smart goggles.

PICTURE: GERALD FERREIRA - [HTTP://VIRTUAL-REALITY.CO.ZA](http://VIRTUAL-REALITY.CO.ZA)

# WITH REALITY

## The future looks bright

**SMART goggles make viewing homes and properties possible at any time and from anywhere. It is already a \$1 billion industry globally and is estimated to triple in the next four years.**



PICTURES: GERALD FERREIRA - [VIRTUAL-REALITY.CO.ZA](http://VIRTUAL-REALITY.CO.ZA)



rections in our software. Last, we stitch the different scenes together and programme the "walk."

The technology is expensive though, leaving South Africa lagging behind the global trend. But local companies are already prepared for the future boom and have the technology ready and waiting to be used.

Adrian Goslett, regional director and chief executive of RE/MAX of Southern Africa said this technology would allow potential buyers to take 360° virtual tours of homes for sale all over the country without having to travel.

"The buyer will be able to virtually tour multiple properties from the comfort of their own home in a matter of minutes. This will reduce the stress of relocating to a new city or even a new country. The process will allow potential buyers to check through several homes and quickly narrow down the field to a few choice homes that they would like to

take a second look at in person."

In fact, Erika Borman, South African manager of 3Dscann – which also operates in Norway, the UK and Spain – said this was possibly the biggest benefit of VR and even 3D model viewing.

"Basically, what both VR and 3D

“Technology would allow potential buyers to take 360° virtual tours

modelling do for estate agents is give them 24/7 show houses without inconveniencing homes owners, which is an issue in the high ends of the market. By the time agents take buyers to view homes, only the seri-

ous ones are left.

"This method of home viewing will also attract out-of-town viewers and increase the chances of sole mandates as sellers will be interested in having their homes sold with this technology," she said.

Although 3Dscann has the technology for VR viewings, Borman said she had not yet had any South African clients using it. A number of private sellers had, however, used the 3D models of property viewing.

Explaining this model she said: "Our cameras are equipped with infrared sensors and so we create a 3D model by knitting together photographic and dimensional data of a space. The result is an actual, complete digital replica of the real space, creating an exceptionally real navigational experience where users can actually 'walk around' the model. It has been described as a 360° tour on steroids but it's actually much more than that."

Although her company had been using his technology since October last year, Borman said it had been in the US for about 18 months. Its VR technology was also "growing in leaps and bounds" she said, but not many people in SA own VR goggles – yet.

When the technology does grow, an estate agent can use it in two ways. "They can either have the headsets in their offices where buyers can go to view, say, 10 homes for example, or they could create an app whereby people in their own homes can use their own goggles to view the properties."

But Borman believes the 3D models – which can also be converted to VR models – will "take off" first in SA. This is because anyone with a tablet, smartphone or iPhone can use it. "The 3D virtual tour is interactive, so you can go upstairs or go into the rooms you want to. It is like Google Street View but

much more advanced."

One of these new capabilities, she explained, was recently added "tags" which alert viewers to additional information about aspects of the home they are looking at, for example, the details pertaining to the counter tops or finishes.

It is all remarkable technology and Ferreira believes that the next two years will see the "high tide of VR viewing" before it becomes "standard fare". "However, the industry is trying to find the sweet spot between the technology's obvious usability and price."

He said the beauty of VR though, was one could experience it in the comfort of one's home.

"You could even shoot a short three-minute virtual video where the estate agent 'walks' the client through the property and points out highlights, while discussing important details."