

Inside Cotton On's new R300m head office and warehouse in Gauteng

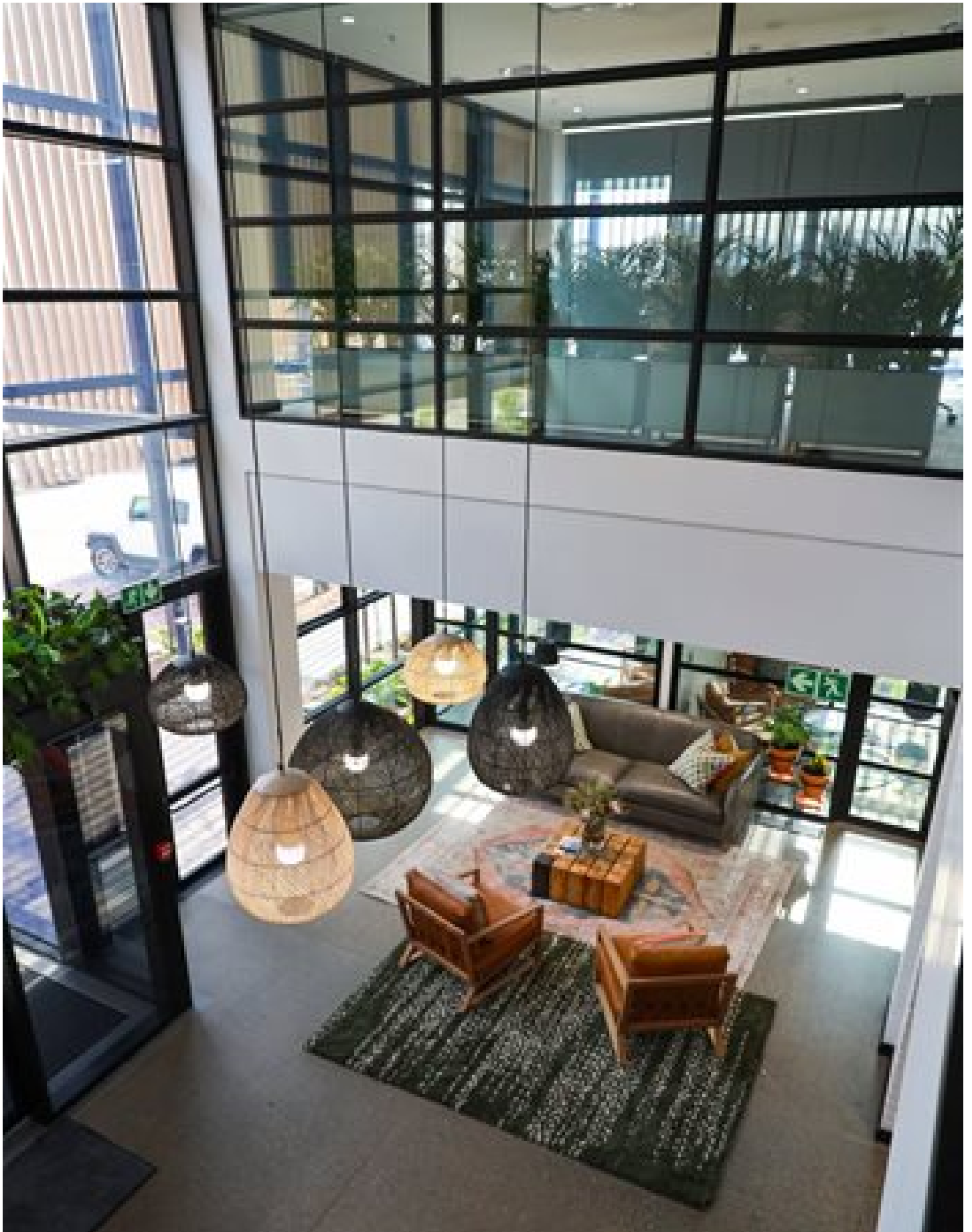
 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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The Cotton On Group has unveiled its new R300m custom-built head office and distribution centre (DC), located at the Waterfall Logistics Precinct in Johannesburg. The new DC will fulfill retail, online and wholesale orders across the group's six brands, including Cotton On, Factorie and Typo.



Source: Lauren Hartzenberg



Source: Supplied

The development marks a milestone for the Australian-born retail group, which has steadily grown its presence in South Africa since launching locally 11 years ago.

With 167 physical stores dotted across the country and an established e-commerce platform, Cotton On outgrew its former

warehouse in Kempton Park, and the new campus in Waterfall City provides much-needed distribution space and the ability to have the head office and DC located under one roof to enhance collaboration.



Source: Supplied

After the deal with Waterfall owners Attacq Limited was struck, construction on the building commenced in January 2021. Over the last month, Cotton On Group has shifted over 2.2 million units of stock (120 truckloads full) from the old facility to the new one, without any noticeable disruption to service.

For the Cotton On Group, the investment in the premises is a display of its confidence in the local market, and the spacious DC will help the company ramp up the speed of delivery and improve customer service.



Source: Supplied

Upping distribution capacity, efficiency

The 22,000m² warehouse is geared to process 6,000 e-commerce orders per day, 200,000 units to the group's retail network daily and over 20 million units per year. An additional 50% of space will cater for future e-commerce processing.

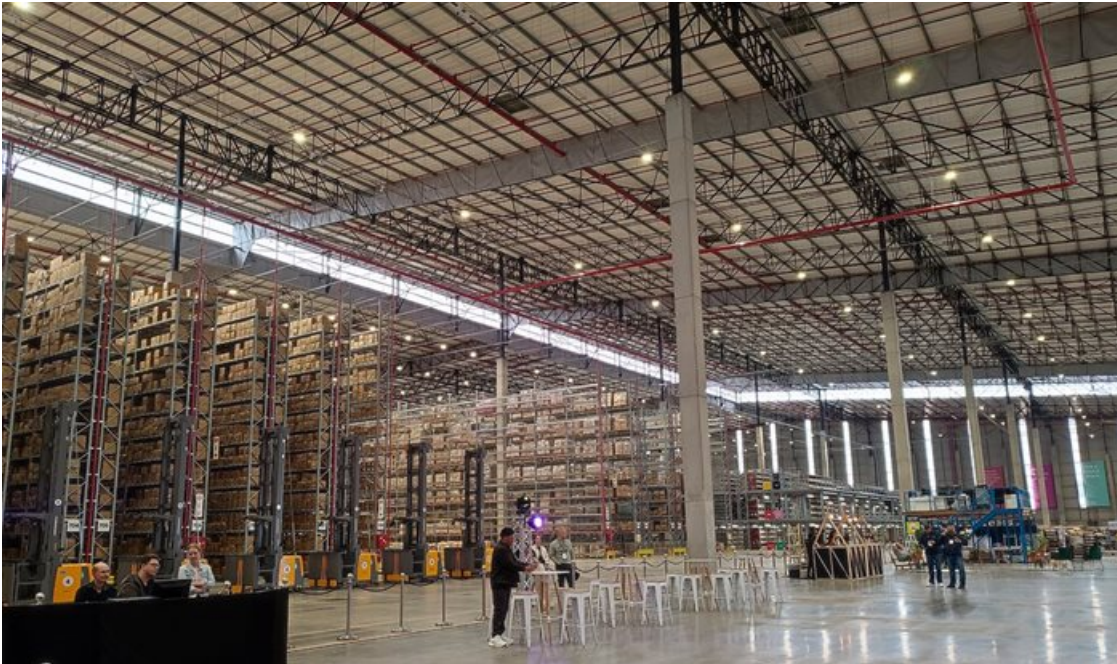
During a walking tour of the facility, Natalie Wills, Cotton On Group country manager explained that the campus was built for growth and scale, allowing the company to expand operations both inside the walls and beyond them if the need arises.



Source: Supplied

The DC has been designed to optimise efficiency and features Very Narrow Aisle (VNA) storage and a pick mezzanine for unitised picking for store, wholesale and e-commerce orders. Cotton On has shifted from a pallet-based DC to a carton-based DC, and changed the way stock is moved and handled to make it safer, easier and quicker to do.

Phil Marais, head of supply chain for Africa and Brazil at Cotton On Group, explained during our media visit that the distance that pickers travel to pick orders has been reduced by at least one-third. “Pickers are less tired, so they’re able to concentrate better, so we’re delivering a better service at a higher productivity rate. And because my team is feeling less fatigued, it’s safer.”



Source: Lauren Hartzenberg

Sustainable design

The opening of the new premises follows the launch of the Cotton On Group’s [inaugural impact report](#), dubbed *The Good Report*, earlier this year. The report makes public sustainability-focused commitments to water, plastic and waste reduction,

carbon neutrality, ethical sourcing, the use of recycled materials, sustainable packaging, uplifting women, and the use of natural materials.



Source: Supplied

Cotton On describes its new South African campus as an extension of the pledge, adding that the ethos of “doing good in all areas of operations” was central to the design and construction of the new premises.

Combining grey water harvesting, a 200 kWp solar power plant, LED lighting, proximity sensors to reduce energy usage and an indigenous landscape, the new site was designed to operate with minimal impact on the environment. The company is also currently transitioning all plastic polybags to be made with recycled plastic.



Source: Lauren Hartzenberg

Inclusive space

Marais highlighted that the new Cotton On campus is devoid of any sense of “us and them”, which often permeates DC

environments where swankier workspaces are reserved for head office employees.

Instead, the retail group's head office and warehouse staff enjoy the same facilities and services at the Waterfall campus, with welcoming entrances and chill areas replicated at the two entry points.



Source: Supplied

Employee wellness

Guided by the policy of 'people first', Cotton On sought to create a harmonious work environment that supports employee wellness and safety.

Employees all have access to a well-equipped gym and personal trainer, fresh fruit daily, meal delivery services, coffee machines, and greenery and quiet rooms to recharge. Staff entry uses a facial recognition system.



Source: Lauren Hartzenberg

Each of the company’s retail brands has its own boardroom designed and decorated with the core themes of the brand in mind. Break-out pods and sitting areas are available for meetings, to take calls or just to catch a breather. And in true Cotton On fashion, uplifting slogans feature throughout the office and warehouse spaces - whether painted on walls or printed on boxes.



Source: Lauren Hartzenberg

Despite the significant investment funnelled into the head office, Cotton On has retained its flexible work policy that allows office employees to work from home three days a week.

Wills commented, “The new bespoke site has been designed to deliver the best possible experience for our customers and to provide our team with a great place to work. The campus was designed with a ‘people first’ culture approach, which underpins what our brand stands for, puts us in good stead to continue our excellent customer service processes, and is an extension of our commitment to making a positive impact in all areas of our business.”

ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

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