



3rd Quarter

ELEVATEafrica

The voice of the elevator industry in Africa

September 2023



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Rising above the divide

In the annals of history, there are stories that touch our hearts, stories that remind us of the indomitable human spirit and its ability to rise above adversity. This is one such story, a tale of a family-owned elevator business that not only defied racial segregation but also soared to new heights in the world of high-end elevator service and products



James Bowie, a mechanical genius with a passion for elevators, set out to break the chains that bound him

In a time when racial segregation cast a long, dark shadow over SA, the Bowie family dared to dream. In the early 1990s, apartheid was still in full-force, and opportunities for coloured entrepreneurs were few and far between. But Bowie, with their unwavering determination, was about to change that narrative.

James Bowie, a mechanical genius with a passion for elevators, set out to break the chains that bound him. Armed with little more than hope and a vision, he together with his family, decided to establish their own elevator business.

His mission: To deliver the highest quality elevator service and products, regardless of race and colour.

From humble beginnings, Bowie is the epitome of a family-owned business that started with a simple idea and a passionate dream. A true living example of the two. James Bowie is a determined individual, an entrepreneur who defied the odds to establish a groundbreaking elevator company, demonstrating resilience and a commitment to equality. He aimed to create elevators that were not just functional but also works of art, and so Bowie Lifts, Elevators and Escalators, Global, South Africa's first fully independent lift and escalator company came into being.

In 1996, after he left the service of the Western Cape Government, as Senior Mechanical Inspector Bowie embarked on his new journey in the elevator industry, sharing his extensive knowledge and experience and forged ahead to establish his own elevator company, where inclusivity and equality were to be the company's guiding principles.

James's aim from the beginning, was to create an entity that would provide seamless hi-tech lift maintenance solutions and world-class services to a diverse client base with its professional ability, as well as to build strategic alliances with established service providers to develop sustainable relationships built on trust.



James Bowie has fought a tough battle in SA's vertical transportation industry and continues to do so daily to bring about and have his legacy live on for many years to come.

The road ahead was challenging, filled with obstacles and naysayers. Bowie faced them head on, and in a competitive market he refused to yield. Bowie knew that the only way to triumph was through hard work, dedication, and a relentless pursuit of excellence.

Bowie Lifts, Elevators and Escalators (BLEE) provides opportunities to individuals from all backgrounds and walks of life. Says Bowie, "Females are the cornerstone of our business in which we are striving to change the narrative in this white male dominated industry, fostering a diverse workforce that reflects the rich tapestry of our nation. We also have a generation of proud women leading the change in the elevator business, shattering stereotypes that once confined them to the kitchen and proving that our talents and aspirations rise far beyond the confines of any traditional role. It isn't just about elevators; it's about elevating people and breaking down barriers."

"When we talk about change, this is what we are trying to achieve," continues Bowie. "Over the years, we have proved our mettle. We didn't just meet industry standards; we set them. Our elevators became synonymous with quality, safety, and innovation. Our client lists are growing daily, spanning commercial skyscrapers, residential complexes, luxury resorts and universities."

Perseverance through the storm

Bowie's journey was far from smooth. The family faced setbacks, economic challenges, as well as discrimination. But as an elevator rises through a towering skyscraper, Bowie never stopped. They learned from their setbacks, adapted to change, and drove ahead with unwavering determination.

"Some 30 years into democracy, the government says that the work in the industry should as a preference be given to local companies, and only gives lip service to the ideal. We wonder

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just how committed our government is to help provide jobs and develop skills through employing South Africa's SMEs and our own people," questions Bowie. "As an example, The Public Works Department has over 5000 lifts, they can alone create and empower 200 local sustainable jobs. How many of these units are maintained by our locals?"

"Even though we have successfully united property owners, property developers, architects, and contractors and fostered a collaborative and harmonious environment for the advancement of vertical structures across the continent, we still face an uphill battle against the multi-nationals," Bowie explains, "when it comes to new business, it appears that the multi-nationals are favoured because of their names, whereas, we as BLEE, are as competent and have as much collective experience as they do. When it comes to maintenance and safety we act just as promptly and at the same time offer a personal service. What is more we are a South African company and many of our technicians have come through the ranks of those multi-nationals."

"Of course, a benefit of working with us a local company that is partnered with local independent manufactures, is that we can offer up-upgrades, modernizations, and new lifts competitively, on par with the multi-nationals and can be installed with lead times that are in most cases halved. To add credence to our standards we carry ISO 9001 accreditation for the service, maintenance, repairs, installation and modernization of lifts, escalators, and hoists. We are also a paid-up member of the Lift Engineering Association of South Africa."



The Legacy Continues

Today, BLEE stands as a shining example of what can be achieved when passion, resilience, and inclusivity come together. The Bowie family's legacy and commitment to excellence is unshakable.

As you step into one of Bowie's impeccably crafted and maintained lifts, designed to defy loadshedding in SA, remember that you're not just taking a ride, you're ascending a journey of determination, perseverance, and triumph. The Bowie family's story is a testament to in the face of adversity, we can all rise and touch the sky.

Over the years, BLEE has, with James's guidance, pursued the belief in striking a balance between modernisation and environmental responsibility, aiming to create sustainable living spaces that not only elevate the aesthetic appeal of cities but also preserve the natural resources for future generations.

"We actively engage with communities, organising workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns to promote the benefits of vertical living," says Bowie, "Through these initiatives, we strive to create a broader understanding of the advantages that well-planned vertical spaces can bring to urban centres, including optimized land utilization, reduced sprawl, and improved transportation connectivity."

The services and products offered uniquely cater to a continually changing and demanding environment. BLEE's solutions are tailor-made to their clients' needs with extra attention paid to operational efficiencies and system requirements;

- ▼ Lift technology maintenance
- ▼ Lift modernization and upgrades of escalators
- ▼ Installation of elevators, escalators, travellers and hoists
- ▼ Servicing of elevators, escalators travellers and hoists
- ▼ Inspection reports and recommendations

Manufacturing and installation of stair lifts with a wealth of features include:

- ▼ Easy to use joystick
- ▼ Smooth start/stop action
- ▼ Swivel seat –no need to twist your body to get on and off
- ▼ Hand-held remote control "call" the lift to where you need it
- ▼ 5 Safety cut-out sensors to detect possible obstruction e.g. Objects left on stairs
- ▼ Durable water-proof cover for outdoor stair lifts

"We strive to deliver the best possible end result and value through simple, easy and effective solutions, creating the most affordable options for clients without compromising on quality," he says. "We're proud of our dedicated team that services a variety of customers. Our reputation comes from our insistence for the highest quality workmanship, experience, and reliability as well as our responsive local service. Added to this, our personalised and friendly expert advice utilises only the highest quality of products to deliver excellent customer service."

"We are mindful of the continually changing and demanding environment in which we find ourselves, and so we tailor-make our solutions, adapting them to our clients' needs, operational efficiencies and system requirements," says Bowie.

Through trusted and established relationships, BLEE has partnered with larger international suppliers, which enables the company to provide its clients with most solutions that surpass current business standards, and which are in line with international best-practice standards.



7 Tonquani House
6 Gardner Williams Avenue
Paardevelei, Somerset West
w: <https://bowie.co.za/>