

Partners Rena Graham and Louis deAraujo in studio boardroom with finished samples of Terej Hotel.



by Peter Mitham

GRAND SCALE

Graham & deAraujo create a unique hotel in Mongolia.

ITS BACK TO THE RIVER, THE IMPOSING STRUCTURE of the weathered hotel looms over the rolling steppes with a ragged grandeur that suggests the best thing for it might be to tear it down.

But with the financial backing of one of Mongolia's 10 wealthiest men and a talented team of consultants from Canada, the 50-year-old Terej Hotel in northern Mongolia is set for a resurrection.

Originally a Soviet resort, the hotel sat vacant through the 1990s. Six years ago it was purchased by a Mongolian business-

man active in agriculture and gold mining who saw an opportunity to diversify his business holdings and create Mongolia's first five-star resort.

To achieve his dream, he hired Graham & deAraujo Design Studio Ltd. of Vancouver, a small five-person firm headquartered in a live-work building overlooking False Creek.

Over the past year, Graham & deAraujo principals Rena Graham and Louis deAraujo assembled a team of architects, engineers and other consultants who are striving to restore - and improve upon - the Terej's glory.

Formed in 2002, Graham & deAraujo was chosen for the project thanks to an introduction to the Terej's owner by Phil and Marji Paskal of Surrey, B.C.-based Hotel Concepts Ltd., a hotel supply company.

The Paskals knew of deAraujo's work, and arranged a meeting.

"Louis talked with them and there was just a natural synergy that developed from that first meeting," Graham says. "A week later we got a call from the [owner's] daughter in London saying her parents really, really liked us and liked the firm."

A trip to the hotel in the first week of April 2004 sparked some ideas but it was clear the task of renovating the Soviet-era structure would not be simple.

"It was literally left to the elements, and the elements are very harsh," deAraujo says of the hotel, located a 90-minute drive north of the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar just inside Gorkhi-Terelj National Park.

Though stripped of its elegance, the structure had potential.

"What really turned us on about the building was the spatial quality. It's got a

a wedding garden, an innovation for Mongolia where weddings generally take place at government offices.

The scale of the renovations has put Graham & deAraujo in the rare position of coordinating other consultants. The firm's leadership has also made design a major concern of the project, which has no set budget.

"Now, more than ever, people want comfortable accommodation - and comfortable to them means luxury," deAraujo says, underlining the effort being put into designing a world-class property.

The hotel will not only be a landmark project for the country, it will be the last development allowed in Gorkhi-Terelj National Park, birthplace in the late 12th century of Genghis Khan.



grandeur about it without being overwhelming or intimidating in any way," Graham says.

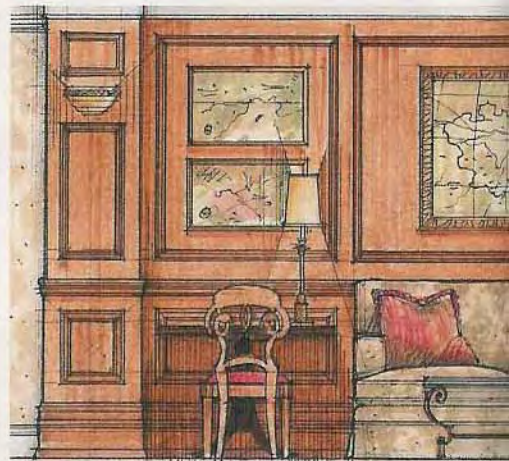
The hotel's 100-plus rooms were less spectacular, but when renovations are complete in 2006, the resort will have just 57 suites. These will include a spacious presidential suite overlooking the river and a honeymoon suite catering to couples.

The new resort will be about 150,000 square feet, and include conference space, a pool pavilion with spa facilities and recreational areas for families. There will also be

Graham & deAraujo naturally turned to other Vancouver-area companies for the expertise they required to handle the project.

Loy Leyland, an established Vancouver architect well-known for his work on upscale homes in the toney Shaughnessy neighbourhood, was brought on "to put the frosting back on the cake," Graham says.

Perry and Associates Landscape Architects is handling site design and landscaping, while Total Lighting Solutions is developing interior and exterior lighting arrangements and North Vancouver's Keen



Engineering is overseeing mechanical and electrical work. Vancouver-based Braidwood Hospitality Management Inc. is taking care of front- and back-office systems as well as hiring the hotel's executive team.

Graham & deAraujo are also hiring resi-

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“The more we get to know one another, the easier it is,” deAraujo adds. “We were expecting a lot more cultural sensitivity, and we’ve been surprised.”

The open attitude has even extended to the incorporation in the décor of local motifs. Many of which are drawn from Tibetan Buddhism, common in Mongolia. Mouldings, carpet design and furniture in the new Terelj will incorporate the motifs, just as buildings do in Ulaanbaatar.

The few limitations Graham & deAraujo face regard use of Buddhism’s eight auspicious emblems as well as swastikas, a common Buddhist symbol, that could offend Jewish guests.

Getting every detail right is important for Graham & deAraujo, because the hotel



(Clockwise) Terelj Hotel Site Plan: this is a conceptual site plan showing both existing and new buildings being added to the resort.

Designer renderings for luxury suites and library.

dent coordinators for the project, who will live on-site and work directly with technical staff, many of whom are from North Korea.

Though site instructions are being communicated through three languages - English, Mongolian and Korean - Graham and

deAraujo say relationships between the various groups have been smooth.

“[Mongolians] have a very, very casual culture. They’re not Japanese, they’re not Chinese. They’re not like any other Asian group,” Graham says. “They’re very, very informal.”

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The hotel will cater both to the diplo-

Graham & deAraujo design studio ltd

t: 604.251.9040

f: 604.251.9070

513-1529 W. 6th Ave
Vancouver, BC
V6J 1R1

Please visit our website
www.gdstudio.ca

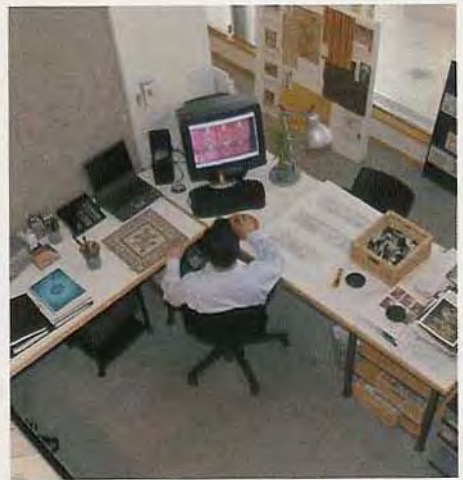


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(Clockwise) Finished samples being reviewed for project, Louise at desk in studio and the Graham & deAraujo design studio, lower level.



matic community in Ulaanbaatar and the growing number of international tourists visiting Mongolia each year.

Foreign visitors totalled 201,153 in 2003, up from 158,473 in 1999. Ulaanbaatar is the primary destination but the Mongolian Tourism Board reports that 39 per cent of visitors also travel to Terelj, where many treks into the Mongolian wilderness begin.

Graham and deAraujo have both worked with large international design firms on projects in Africa, Asia and Australia, but the opportunity in Mongolia is one they would never have enjoyed as part of a larger company. They hope the hotel they're creating will reflect both the splendour of the surrounding wilderness as well as the richness of local culture, noting that there will be space adjacent to the hotel for the



felt tents, or gers, that are the traditional homes of the country's nomadic people.

"This is a real dream, because we're learning things," says Graham, whose youthful aspirations to become a cultural anthropologist are being fulfilled in the

Terelj project. "There's only so much you're going to learn about furniture, fabrics and plumbing fixtures. It's what you learn about people and their culture, and their land and their history. That's what makes a job rich." ●

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Metro Wallcoverings would like to extend their congratulations to Graham & de Araujo Designs Ltd. for their innovative design on the Terelj Hotel, Mongolia.

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