

REGIONAL SPOTLIGHT

California

BY MIKE SHERIDAN

San Francisco-based SB Architects is designing the world's number-one golfer's first real estate development—in the Middle East. Tiger Woods Dubai is rapidly taking shape as an exclusive golf community that includes a signature 18-hole golf course, a golf academy, a 139,000-square-foot (12,913-sq-m) clubhouse, and a high-end destination spa; plus 22 palaces, 75 mansions, and 100 luxury villas.



Located in the United Arab Emirates, Tiger Woods Dubai is being designed by San Francisco-based SB Architects.

SB ARCHITECTS



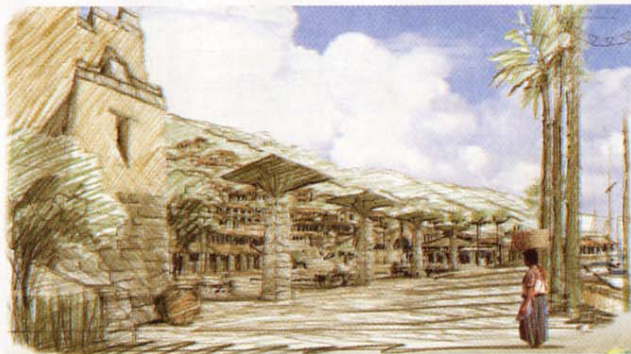
SB ARCHITECTS

When completed, Tiger Woods Dubai will include a signature 18-hole golf course as well as 22 palaces, 75 mansions, and 100 luxury villas.

Santa Barbara, California-based Zehren and Associates, Inc., a firm that specializes in resort planning, architecture, landscape architecture, and interior design, is working on projects in a number of countries ranging from Costa Rica and Argentina to Korea and Mexico.

And the Los Angeles firm of Altoon + Porter Architects, LLP, has 35 developments in progress

Zehren and Associates is involved with Peninsula Papagayo, a destination resort on the north Pacific coast of Costa Rica. The development includes a Four Seasons Hotel and golf course with a marina and village currently under construction. The developer is Ecodesarrollo Papagayo, SA, of San Jose, Costa Rica.



around the world, including Novgorod, Russia; Catania, Sicily; Brno, Czech Republic; Radom, Poland; and Bangkok, Thailand.

"We're seeing a lot more development occurring outside the U.S. now," says Scott A. Lee, senior vice president and principal at SB Architects. "Our offices in San Francisco and Miami have significant developments underway. Now, some 75 percent of our work is [abroad]. The Middle East seems to be where much work is concentrated now—not just the U.A.E., but also Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Cyprus, Oman, and Jordan."

Tiger Woods Dubai is perhaps the firm's highest-profile international project. "We're doing all the architecture at the resort and ESDA is doing the land planning and landscape architecture," says Lee. "It's a significant project for us because it's Tiger's first resort and there is global interest in it and it is being built in a place where we want to develop more business. The location has been a pretty blank canvas, but everything is oversized in Dubai and the villas are more elaborate and expansive than anything we've done."

SB Architects is also working on Cypress Equities' Royal Island Resort in the Bahamas, which includes the Montage Royal Island hotel and spa slated to open in 2011 with 44 guest rooms and 23 suites, 40 beachfront villas, and 39 marina-front residences. Royal Island's

The Himalayan Ski Village in northern India will include skiing, spas, hotels, restaurants, and shops within a series of discrete villages linked together by a gondola system. New Delhi-based HSV is the developer; Zehren and Associates is providing design services.



ALTOON + PORTER

Altoon + Porter designed the Marina City project in Qingdao, China. The development includes 1,151,738 square feet (107,000 sq m) of waterfront retail and entertainment, 150 specialty shops and restaurants, and 200 serviced apartments that can be rented on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.

private residential community will feature several hundred single-family residences on homesites ranging from 0.33 to 15 acres (0.13 to 6 ha), with occupancy beginning in late 2009. The project also will include a Jack Nicklaus signature golf course.

Why are California development firms selected for overseas projects? "Because California is a hotbed of innovative, sustainable design, with a concentration of award-winning resort designers," says Lee. "Owners and developers seek out the talent. They come here to have better access to it. Dubai-based Emaar—one of the world's largest real estate developers—opened an office in Orange County so [it] could work with [designers] in a more seamless way."

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Jack Zehren, founder and principal of Zehren and Associates, says more California designers are working abroad for a very good reason: That's where the development is. "Initially, we got involved because of our destination resort work," he explains. "Some of the people looking for resort design saw our developments in Vail, Telluride, and Beaver Creek, Colorado, and contacted us. We had done a vast amount of resort destination and hospitality projects in a full range of climates and places."

Among other developments, Zehren is currently involved in a 1,800-acre (728-ha) wine, golf, and equestrian development in the northwest corner of Argentina that is a 50-50 joint venture between U.S. investors and a local family in Argentina.

Working in other countries can be challenging, he adds. Design firms in California and throughout North America should first align themselves with local architects and engineers, especially for final construction documents. "They should try to find ways to adapt and apply U.S. technology and U.S. methods in terms of resort planning and operations and building technology," he advises. "But don't lose the context of local traditions and their sense of who they are. A balance must be struck."





Xsense Experiential Design is working alongside the developers of Smugglers Run Plantation, a 1,000-acre (405-ha) gated residential golf community that will provide guests with an experience that connects to the Mayan culture that once permeated this region, the smuggling trade that was once common in Belize, and the history and traditions of a multiethnic family that settled this site around 1799.

Building a relationship based on trust is important too, as is defining—very carefully and very clearly—the scope of work and the fee structure so they are understood by everyone going into the process. “In many countries, once you strike an agreement it goes into bureaucracy, and if you want to get paid, the bill and original agreement have to match up; otherwise, it gets kicked out of the system,” Zehren says. “You have to make sure the agreement itself contains all changes, and that it wasn’t just something you and the owner talked about verbally.”

Today, says Ronald A. Altoon, founder and partner at Altoon + Porter Architects, 60 percent of the firm’s work is outside the United States. “We have been working abroad since the 1990–1991 recession,

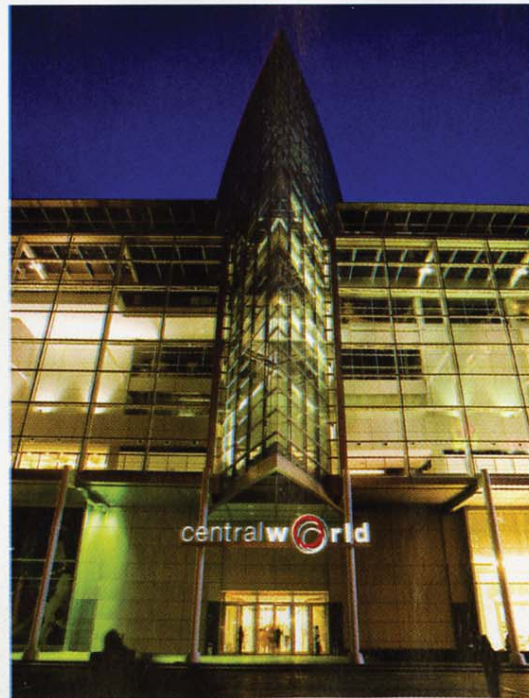
when we nearly tripled in size. After September 11, 2001, when every one of our foreign projects immediately stopped, we stayed afloat,” says Altoon. “In this global economic climate, we are positioned to balance like a catamaran. When we first ventured overseas, we had a national reputation for high-quality retail projects with the blue chip U.S. developers, and that opened doors for us to very large retail-based, offshore mixed-use projects. To date, we have been commissioned for master planning and architectural design in 35 foreign countries; have opened offices in Amsterdam, Shanghai, and Brussels; and have business entities in Moscow and Hong Kong.”

With 65 employees, Altoon + Porter usually competes against much larger practices with 250 to

Altoon + Porter recently finished the renovation and expansion of CentralWorld, a mixed-use development in the civic heart of Bangkok’s main shopping district. The redesign transforms the existing eight-story maze by opening up the plan and optimizing vertical circulation.

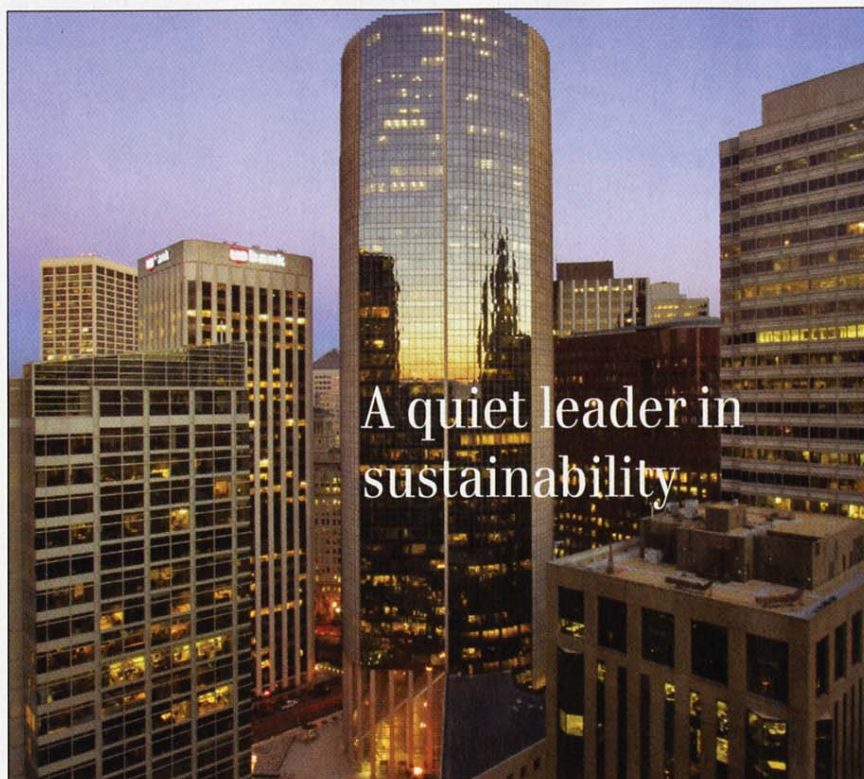


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Uta Birkmayer, founder of Xsense Experiential Design, says that with the slowdown in places like California, demand has increased globally for more unique development that will continue to attract investment interest.



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2,400 employees. "So, we are a bit out of character, and [yet] quite adroit at getting [the work] and getting it done," says Altoon.

The firm just finished the renovation of CentralWorld in Bangkok—including master planning a convention center as well as adding new roads and transportation links—and is involved with the Marina City project in Qingdao, China, the city that hosted the 2008 sailing Olympics. "When you work abroad you have to understand they have different rules than you do, and you can't apply the same protocol over there," he continues. "Instead, you have to deal with it like a strategic planning exercise where you define a desired outcome, keep an eye on the ball, and find a way to get there."

Uta Birkmayer, founder of Xsense Experiential Design, a San Luis Obispo, California-based firm that provides research on a site's history and regional traditions, says that with the slowdown in places like California, demand has increased globally for more unique development that will continue to attract investment interest. Xsense is working with the developers of Smugglers Run Plantation, a 1,000-acre (405-ha) condo, high-security embassy housing, and

opment in Belize that will provide guests with an experience that connects to the Mayan culture that once permeated this region, the smuggling trade that was once common in Belize, and the history and traditions of the Trevor Miles clan—a family that settled this site around 1799 and whose ancestry includes British, Scottish, Hawaiian, and Mayan lineage.

“More developments are occurring in Asia, Africa, and Central and Latin America now, so that’s where our new business is coming from,” she adds. “Developers want to spend less money on square footage and instead build a more sustainable place on a human scale that touches other dimensions. [Our clients] want to incorporate the local customs and culture to give [their] guests a totally unique, totally authentic experience that only makes sense in the particular location, giving the development a significant competitive edge.”

The research undertaken by Xsense helps inspire the design team to find ways of rooting the project into the land rather than merely placing it on the land.

Xsense is working on a number of projects from Tanzania and China to Panama and France. According to Birkmayer, “Every single destination has a past. It has legends, stories, and deep meaning. We may start with an old coffee plantation or a monastery, an old palace, a rice plantation or fishing village. Xsense seeks to honor the essence of the place, the local people, and their culture, and encourages them to live in their own authentic way. We want the locals to truly be themselves, and immerse visitors in [that] culture. It’s place making at a deeper level. It’s finding and honoring the soul.”

MIKE SHERIDAN, who studied real estate in Japan as a Fulbright Scholar, is a freelance writer in Parsippany, New Jersey.

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