

Vancouver entrepreneurs spearhead luxury Mongolian hotel venture

Five-star 50-suite project scheduled to open in 2007 would be a first in the largely undeveloped Asian country



Asian enterprise: Rena Graham and Louis deAraujo are heading a consortium of consultants who are working with a Mongolian gold mining company in a project to build a luxury hotel in the Far East

Bob Mackin

A team of Vancouverites is turning an old Soviet military dormitory on the fringe of Mongolia's most famous national park into a five-star resort hotel.

Interior designer **Rena Graham** is leading a consortium of consultants helping **Gatsuurt Co. Ltd.**, a Mongolian gold mining company, build the Asian country's first such property for opening in spring 2007.

Terelj Hotel and Spa is 50 kilometres north of the capital Ulaan Baatar at Gorkhi-Terelj National Park, near Khan Khenti Strictly Protected Area. The latter is said to be the burial place of 13th century warlord/emperor **Chingis Khan**.

Gatsuurt general director **Chinbat** bought a decaying 50-year-old Soviet dormitory with the hope of turning it into a tourist destination. He was introduced to Graham by purchasing agents he knew

through his dealings with Alberta agri-business concerns.

"This really seemed like a longshot," said Graham, a partner with **Louis deAraujo** in **Graham & deAraujo design studio ltd.** "The people were obviously very educated and interesting people, but new to the hospitality industry."

"This really seemed like a longshot"

- Rena Graham, Graham & deAraujo design studio ltd. partner

The 150,000-square-foot resort will have 50 suites, conference facilities, a wedding garden, pavilion, spa, restaurants and tennis courts. When it's finished, it will resemble a 19th century Russian summer palace near the Terelj River and its pine-covered mountains.

Almost 40 per cent of Mongolia's 200,000 annual tourists come to Terelj. The complex will include a 6,800-square-foot spa and 4,200-square-foot meeting and banquet space.

Mongolia's nomadic society has no traditional architecture, save for the Tibetan-style Buddhist temples, Graham said.

Terelj will open year-round.

Most of the tourists in Mongolia are Koreans and Japanese, with many coming from around Europe. Graham expects the hotel will attract North American visitors who would normally visit Mongolia and stay in a ger, a circular tent traditionally used by Mongolian nomads.

"The glamour tourism has certainly not hit 'U.B.' yet, because there is not a place for them to stay yet," Graham said.

Chinbat and wife **Naranchemig Namsrai**, Gatsuurt's managing director, are Soviet-trained geologists who are diversifying the once-state-owned company.

"Being a real Mongolian patriot, (Chinbat) wants to feed his country, simple as that," Graham said. "They've never been an agrarian society. He wants Mongolia to be more self-sufficient. It's good for their long-term independence."

Graham has travelled four times to Mongolia on the project and is expecting the client to visit Vancouver next month. She co-ordinates the team of western consultants in the Lower Mainland

and is in daily contact with site supervisor **Ray Taylor**. Taylor has worked on construction projects in Botswana, New Delhi, Dubai and Malaysia. Graham said he's natural for the Terelj job, managing a diverse team of Korean, Mongolian, Chinese and Russian contractors.

"He has been building difficult projects in difficult places for a long time, that is his specialty. He's on that side, I'm on this side, so there's 20 e-mails going back and forth, any day of the week, weekends included."

Vancouver design architect **Loy Leyland** devised the summer palace look. **Harold Stewart** and **Met Ulker** of **Keen Engineering** handle the mechanical and electrical engineering. **Galina Zbriezher** is the lighting designer, while **Rob**

Barnes of P+A is the landscape architect. **Phil and Marjorie Paskal** are in charge of hotel concept. **David Hodgins** of **Pacific Restaurant Supply** is the kitchen designer.

John Garden is in charge of hospitality management, while general manager will be **Sam Sallam**. **David Allison** and **Marcus Braun** are creating print and signage material.

Graham does a weekly newsletter for the whole project team.

"Ambition, youth, curiosity and patriotism, all of those things have come to the fore with the hotel venture," Graham said. "They've taken on something which is a huge project, this is not some hotel in the middle of town; a resort hotel in the country with a whole bunch of Canadians they're dealing with."

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