

THE SLATIN] REPORT

REAL ESTATE INTELLIGENCE

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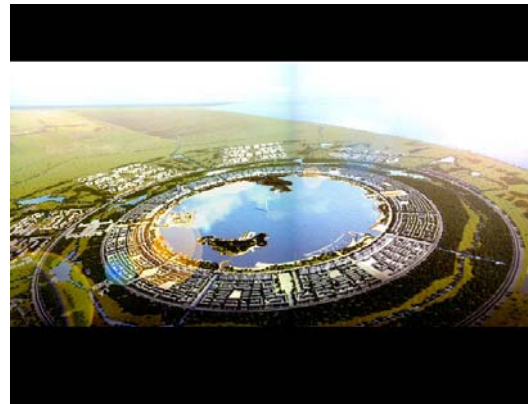
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EAST MEETS SOUTH BEACH

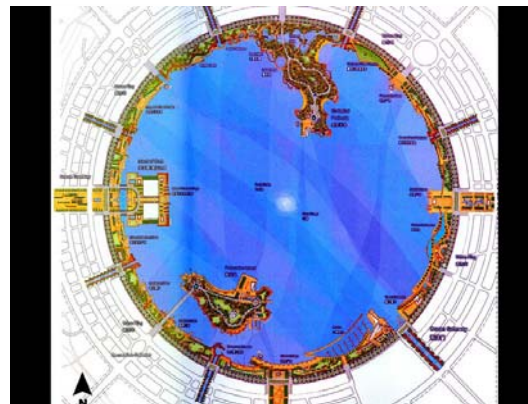
Clotilde Luce

American financial, business and political leaders are scrambling for advantage in dealing with burgeoning China. But one U.S. tourist capital, more typically known for its Latin beat than its ties to Asia, is stoking a vibrant relationship with the enormous nation's powerful unofficial capital, Shanghai – a relationship based on a shared heritage in Art Deco design.

In early December, South Florida's search for feng shue brought dedicated preservationists together with developers and Chamber of Commerce boosters for a frenzy of cultural exchanging with Xing Tong He, possibly the world's most prolific architect. Xing's best-known building is the 1996 Shanghai Museum, designed in the form of an ancient bronze pot. Since then, Xing's powerful Shanghai Xian Dai Architecture Design Group has reportedly been behind more than 70 percent of new development in Shanghai, a city that gives special meaning to the concept of "new development." Forget China's "one child policy"; this beaming 67-year-old is fathering a thousand skyscrapers, such as the future 558-meter-high Shanghai Center, and Shanghai's upcoming Expo 2010, a hypersteroidal World's Fair. As a part of a whirlwind weekend visit, Xing introduced Shanghai and his firm in early December to the arts, business and planning



Aerial rendering for Drop of Water City, under construction in Nan Hui district of Shanghai.



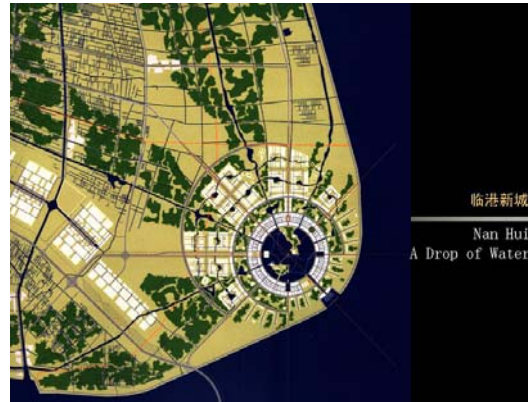
Schematic for now completed man-made lake for Drop of Water City.

community of Miami Beach in a two-hour presentation entitled “Continuity of Change in Shanghai.”

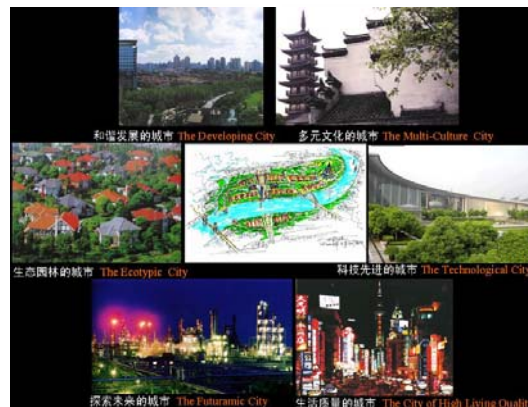
Before launching into the show, Xing received a key to the City of Miami Beach from Mayor David Dermer, and a praise-filled introduction from Bernard Fort-Brescia, principal of Arquitectonica, which has spread the Miami design beat around the world. Fort-Brescia lauded Xing’s intellectual curiosity as a professor and theoretician, and noted that Xing has been instrumental in welcoming international influences and firms to Shanghai architecture – including Arquitectonica, for its first project there fifteen years ago.

Working with his jovial translator, Xing flashed images of future Finance, Trade, Aviation and Transport centers, renderings for a host of museums and cultural centers, and a city to strategically encompass universities. There were schemes for projects such as Drop of Water City, built around a manmade lake; Futuramic City; the City of High Living; Technological City; and Multi-Cultural City – all under the heading “endless originality.” But unlike the city-building fantasies of Western architects, which generally languish on shelves (or hard drives), these schemes are finding their way into Shanghai's continually expanding cityscape.

South Beach then gulped when Xing casually asserted that 400 kilometers of – on certain routes – maglev metro would be completed for the 2010 fair, expected to draw some 400 000 visitors a day. On the abacus, that’s 70 million in six months, or twice what Las Vegas sees in a year. Spring break on South Beach feels like 70 million, but getting even 4



Plan for Drop of Water City, under construction.



Shanghai development : Views of completed theme cities and projects, and Xing Tong He's sketch for upcoming Expo 2010



Master plan for Expo 2010.

kilometers of maglev metro will not happen in our lifetime.

Images of Expo 2010, which Xing has spearheaded all along – yes, he is an uber-booster for his city – showed the 5.28 square kilometer site spanning both sides of the Huangpu River. Architecture animations then showed a dragon-like articulated bridge tossing its head and writhing before connecting to cross the river, under fireworks exploding in the future perfect sky. Back out on Lincoln Road, our world-famous sun looked kind of dim in comparison.

The scope of development that Xing displayed continued to stun at an informal meeting with the Miami Downtown Development Authority, comprised of private sector and elected pro-growth leaders. There was some clearing of throats after the Miami side presented its Brickell to Omni master plan, taking pride in the number of cranes already in the sky – despite the prevailing view of the whole region as being in overdevelopment overdrive. Then, the Xing team rolled out the “Continuity of Change” show, WITH the 31K-long bridge, the huge metro on schedule, the cities and skyscrapers sprouting with the speed of bamboo. One observer reacted to Shanghai’s frenetic stylistic borrowing, murmuring, “He gets to build dozens of Epcots.”

Attorney and former Miami Beach Mayor Neisin Kasdin, who invited Xing to the breakfast and showed him a panoramic view of Miami from his downtown office, will be traveling to Shanghai for the World Cities Conference. Miami boosters at such forums can now brag that Xing Tong marveled at Miami’s exceptional air quality, an oxymoron in Shanghai. (Air itself is a commodity found in the



Xing Tong He with Don and Nina Worth at the Standard in Miami Beach. The Worths lured Xing over with a kitschy Miami Beach kitchen mitt made in . .



Rendering for Expo 2010 showing site of national pavilions



Xing Tong He's Shanghai Museum.

interstices between hard-to-sell new condo towers marring residential pockets along still scruffy Biscayne Boulevard.)

With Shanghai's sun rising in the East – sources claim it can still be glimpsed through the haze of construction dust and greenhouse gas emissions – Miami Beach sunset worshippers raised glasses for Xing at the Standard, André Balaz's acclaimed transformation – notable for not having a condo tower addition – of the former Lido Spa. (Balasz can be lauded for being alone among Miami Beach's waterfront developers for not jamming a tower on the site, as has happened at the Fontainebleau, Ritz Carlton and many others.) Next for Xing was a dinner hosted by developer Robert Wennet, president of Urban Investment Advisors/Starwood Urban Group, now known for bringing in Florida's first Herzog & de Meuron project, 1111 Lincoln Road. It's a parking enclosure so luminous and swerve-inducing that its inner loop will attract drivers, like some deconstructivist Monza.

Also on the Xing schedule was an Arquitectonica tour: the firm's Miami Heat Arena, its prismatic new Federal Courthouse tower, and their signature Brickell Avenue condo, sure to some day be placed on UNESCO's list of "Miami Vice" heritage sites. Xing also endured a review of student architecture and a discussion of sustainable growth with the Miami AIA. At the Wolfsonian, he took in an exhibit featuring silver Prohibition-era cocktail shakers in the form of Deco skyscrapers, dating from the era when Miami Beach and Shanghai shared a kindred design spirit.

After a tour of the Art Deco district with historians from the Miami Design

Preservation League, Xing again gave assurances that the building of vast amounts of housing can coexist with a policy that increasingly values heritage, although there are certainly those in Shanghai and elsewhere who would take strong issue with that notion. Much architectural history has been lost in Shanghai, although many historic buildings are now preserved along entire streetfronts, with high rise housing looming up immediately behind. "We believe heritage is a world treasure, of value to human beings around the world," declared the builder of mammoth cities. "We now try our best to protect ours."

Coincidentally – or not – his remarks were made at a press conference in the understated luxury of the Setai, a high-rise condo where the vintage bricks are salvage brought over from Shanghai.

Xing's visit was made possible by a number of institutions, including the Wolfsonian, Florida International University, and the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau. It was instigated following an impulsive meeting with him in Shanghai by Miami Beach preservationists Don and Nina Worth during their tour of Shanghai's Art Deco buildings in 2005; the Worths were a driving force behind the movement to preserve buildings from the Miami Modern era of the 1950s characterized by the hotels of Morris Lapidus and Norman Giller.

Since that meeting, a hundred flowers have bloomed. At Miami Beach's annual Art Deco weekend this coming January 12-14, the connection between the two cities will be intensified; the event is themed "East meets West : Art Deco from Shanghai to Miami." Films old and new

shot in Shanghai will be screened and a line up of experts on Deco in Asia and Australia will speak, introducing new books and photo exhibits. An event calendar can be found at www.ArtDecoWeekend.com.