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Menzies wins award as South London's Best Business for Training and Development



Ralph Mitchison

Accountancy firm Menzies LLP has won the award as Best Business for Training and Development at the 2010 South London Business Awards.

At the awards ceremony held at Selhurst Park Stadium the firm was selected from a shortlist of six companies. The judges commented on Menzies' commitment to maintaining its investment in staff training, even through a deep recession. While many companies cut their training budgets, Menzies increased its commitment to staff development programmes as part of its strategy to maintain the highest standards in client care and advice.

Ralph Mitchison, Partner at the firm's London office, said: "Menzies LLP is heavily investing in training and development. In order to provide our clients with the best advice and services, we always focus on selecting and training talented staff "

Commitment to training and development has always been a strong feature at Menzies, which has a reputation in the accountancy profession for cultivating teams of professionals.

The South London Business Awards are open to any company located in one or more of the twelve London Boroughs south of the River Thames, and recognise the achievement of those companies that excel in the South London Business district.

Menzies advises privately owned businesses and individuals in the London and South East area. If you require any business advice or accountancy services, please call Ralph Mitchison at our London office on 0207 387 5868



WORKING LUNCH

Yintong Betser dines with Peter Budd, director of Ove Arup & Partners



THE venue was the elegant Goring Hotel, a favourite haunt, my guest Peter Budd, told me, of Lady Thatcher. Under the playful spring blossom chandeliers and over a very British meal of potted Lytham shrimps, deep fried whitebait and grilled Cornish sardines I delved into Peter's special interest in China.

Peter is chairman of the aviation arm of globally renowned structural engineering and architectural firm, Arup. The firm has made its mark just about everywhere and is responsible for the Sydney Opera House, the 'Gherkin', the Angel of the North, Terminal 5 and the Beijing Olympic Stadium. Peter has been part of the firm's evolving relationship with China since the 1970s. He told me: "It was an amazing time. When Mrs. Thatcher was having challenging meetings with Mr. Deng Xiaoping over the Hong Kong handover, I was working on the HSBC building in Hong Kong and started some of our first projects in Mainland China. There was an air of secrecy and there were very few foreigners. Kids would come up to me to practice their English. Everyone was dressed in the blue and grey Mao uniform.

"In the Shanghai summer, air-conditioning wasn't available in a normal household and you would see people bringing



their beds onto the streets." Recalling his early days working with Chinese people, Peter is full of respect and affection: "I was astonished by how well-informed my Chinese colleagues were. They must have been working tremendously hard to gain such a level of knowledge when during the Cultural Revolution there were hardly any reading materials available, or even allowed." He finds the Chinese very honest and honourable; always trying their best and never wanting to disappoint. "However, you do have to scratch the surface of politeness to get down to a real discussion. As a young man, I was a loose cannon, we had heated arguments but everything would be resolved over a good meal."

In those days the height of the hotels symbolised the status of the owner. "The JingAn Hilton Hotel – which we designed – was 46 floors high, towering over the other



buildings. We really pushed the boundaries on many aspects of the existing 'rules and regulations' and only later realised that our Chinese partners had to take responsibility for our 'over the top' activities."

In recent years, airports have become a reflection of a city's status. Arup has been involved in 20 of these projects throughout China, Beijing International Airport Terminal 3 being the most significant. It is now ranked as the eighth largest airport in the world. Peter comments: "It was executed beautifully largely by the local Chinese team, retaining all the principles of the original design."

Knowing how complicated and political the Chinese systems can be, I asked Peter to give me a brief account of the bidding process: "We normally hear first about a project gaining approval by the council. Then it takes time before a tender invitation is released. This is the point at which things move quite quickly. The committee often assesses the tenders over the weekend and responds on a Monday. The shortlisted companies (usually six including foreign and local companies) enter into a rigorous competition focusing on design and architecture.



Commercial negotiations come later."

Once you've been successful and won the project, is it profitable? "Fees for Chinese projects are significantly lower than in the West but we certainly don't set out to lose money. We can normally convert a project into a profit by allocating the right level of resource and working with less expensive local partners. Sometimes it's a balance between profit and profile. For example, the publicity we generated by working on the Olympic stadium was immense. We are careful at Arup about which bids we go for however. You need to intuitively assess whether the client is simply fishing for ideas." But how can you decide? "We've been in China for many years now, so we use our experience and solid local network to make a judgement. There is also a lot of lobbying. Sometimes a close contact will subtly suggest a meeting with certain personnel, and sometimes we will ask the British ambassador to write a letter to make some enquiries. Many of our projects are in the public sector, so it can be very political."

What advice would he give to other companies looking to do business with China. "You can never do enough to establish rela-



tionships. It is an intimidating market that's a long distance away with a completely different culture. However it has huge potential for those with patience." So, the ability to understand different cultures to develop relationships slowly and to capitalise on Britain's inherent expertise in international trade is the ideal blend. Peter is a board member of three major universities and pointed out "We as British companies also need to cultivate a linkage with the young generation in China, for example by doing more to help Chinese students when they are studying here. They are the future."

Yintong Betser is a China business specialist and author of Active Business Travel - China.

www.activeukchina.com

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BA's Willie Walsh is new LCCI President

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