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# LANDMARK ARCHITECTURE

*AWARD-WINNING ARCHITECTS DESIGN INTERNATIONAL SPECIALISE IN SHOPPING CENTRES THAT COMBINE CONTEMPORARY CREATIVE THINKING WITH A BESPOKE LOCAL SENSIBILITY*

The transformation of the shopping centre from utilitarian box to design-led leisure space has provided one of the great playgrounds for contemporary architecture. Retail architecture, and destination malls in particular, provide communities with landmark buildings that serve an enormous variety of purposes. And Design International, a leading architectural practice, has been at the forefront of this revolution.

Specialising in retail and shopping-centre architecture, Design International has completed projects in 45 countries with a combined area of more than 10 million sq m. Founded in Toronto in 1965, the company operated initially in North America but soon grew into a global practice with divisions in architecture, interior design, lighting, landscape, master planning, signage and branding.

## GLOBAL EXPANSION

In 1982, Paul Mollé, founding partner and still active in the company today, opened the London office. One year later, after recognition for the company's significant involvement in the redevelopment of Toronto's Queen's Quay Terminal in 1983, the firm opened another office in Singapore, with operations expanding globally. Today, Design International has an international staff of around 130 and additional offices in Milan, Cairo, Mumbai, Shanghai and Jakarta.

CEO and principal architect Davide Padoa has had a major impact on the practice's current direction, and the company's projects have won recognition for their organic design and successful integration into their surroundings. The growing recognition is reflected in a recent wave of awards, which includes the 2010 Mopic Award for Best Shopping Centre with with Odysseum in Montpellier, France; Best Future Project at the Global RLI Awards 2011 with Cleopatra Mall, Cairo Egypt; and perhaps most remarkably a Guinness World Record for the 'largest in-store façade in the world' with Morocco Mall (pictured opposite), the latest and currently most talked about project of the company.

'It's important to us to design buildings for the people who use them,' Head of Communications Rupert Jaeger says. 'Architecture can produce great buildings that are not always practical. We try to strike a balance between strong design and a building that fulfils its purpose.'

Casablanca's 75,000 sq m Morocco Mall is a case in point. When Davide, who was the principal architect of the project, developed the architectural concept for the mall, he had two key objectives: to create a unique architectural landmark for Morocco and, equally important, to contextualise the project's surroundings and respect the cultural heritage of Morocco.

This philosophy was implemented by the design team led by Lead Design Architect Kuncara Wicaksana, who incorporated traditional Moroccan patterns and styles in the details of the building design. The project also includes a large traditional souk. The end result is a striking example of Design International's philosophy at work.

Recognised internationally for its innovative contemporary design, the mall is equally popular with the local population. 'People in North Africa embrace development, but for us it is important this does not disregard the existing culture,' Rupert says. 'It's a philosophy that is reflected in our architecture.'

## FUTURE PROSPECTS

The success in the last few years has opened new opportunities and also brought a greater variety of projects. The company is increasingly active in China and has recently worked on a number of large mixed-use developments.

'We specialise in shopping centres, but we have done everything from office towers to museums,' Rupert says. 'One of our largest projects at the moment is called Haichang Stellar, in Wuhan, eastern China. It's a mixed-use development including residential towers, office towers, and a retail component. Clients are asking us more and more to do these kind of projects.'

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