

Fleur hails decade of Sino-French cooperation

Editor's Note: Coinciding with the visit to China of the French Prime Minister Francois Fillon, French architectural firm AREP is celebrating the 10th anniversary of doing business in the country. China Daily reporters **Tang Ying** and **Wang Danna** interviewed Fleur des Diguères, director general of AREP China, who was the catalyst for AREP entering the Chinese market 10 years ago and has participated in every step of its development.

Q: AREP has created many landmark buildings in Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and other large cities, such as Wuhan, Chengdu and Shenzhen. Could you briefly tell us what AREP has achieved during its first decade in China?

Fleur: AREP participated in consultations to rebuild Nanjing Railway Station in 1999 and established a representative office in Beijing in 2000. Thanks to the fast pace of the Chinese construction industry, AREP has enjoyed rapid growth from a one-person representative office to a company with more than 40 architects.

We are proud to see our buildings in many Chinese cities are now landmarks. To give you an example, we worked on the Beijing Capital Museum, the Xizhimen Transportation Hub and Business Center, the South

Shanghai Railway Station, Wuhan Railway Station and the Tianjin TEDA Financial Center.

Q: As one of the most senior figures in AREP China, are you satisfied with these achievements?

Fleur: I dare not say that all these projects have been huge successes. That should be judged by the people who live in the cities and the owners of these buildings. Some of our architectural designs have won considerable credit and praise. I see these achievements as the result of sound cooperation between China and France.

Q: What do you think is the key factor in the popularity of your designs? Why do local governments, private citizens and project owners opt for your firm?

Fleur: I attribute our success to our excellent architectural team, both our innovative French architects and our talented Chinese designers, who turned the original ideas into landmark buildings.

Our President Jean-Marie Duthilleul and General Manager Etienne Tricaud are outstanding architects, engineers and artists. They have rich experience and many of their works are highly regarded by the French people. Both of them genuinely respect



Fleur des Diguères

Chinese history and culture.

Duthilleul was enchanted by Chinese philosophy when he was a university student. He read a lot of Chinese Confucian classics and made friends with the famous Sinologist Claude Larre. He said that Chinese philosophy inspires his designs and Chinese culture makes him passionate when talking about his design for the Beijing Capital Museum.

Duthilleul took inspiration for the eaves from *hutong* courtyard houses and gave them an avant-garde look for the museum. This combination of traditional and modern Chinese culture makes the museum a prime example of fundamental Chinese urban architecture blended with a newfound contemporary character.

Duthilleul and Tricaud are

keen to communicate with Chinese architects. AREP has sponsored 50 Chinese architects and urban planning designers to work in its French headquarters for a year. This is a part of a Sino-French architecture exchange program called "150 architects in France."

Through the intensive exchange of architectural theories and thoughts with these architects and urban planning officials, Duthilleul and Tricaud have acquired a deep understanding of Chinese culture and architecture.

When designing the Wuhan Railway Station, Tricaud used the yellow crane as the shape to underline his understanding of local culture and tradition.

Q: Talented people are usually distinct and have very much their own personalities. Is it hard to work alongside famous architects, such as Duthilleul, Tricaud and your Chinese colleagues?

Fleur: Duthilleul and Tricaud are very talented, but very genial. They are very cooperative when communicating and cooperating with Chinese architects and design institutes. Our Chinese colleagues are very cooperative and easy to get along with.

Q: How do you evaluate the contribution of your Chinese colleagues?

Fleur: That is exactly what I am proud of. AREP aims to be a bridge between France and China, especially in the architectural field.

I would like to point out that my Chinese colleagues have done an enormous amount to implement the French architects' idea. They are professionals in the architectural field with a good educational background from famous universities and with rich working experience in Chinese design institutions. They are very aware of Chinese culture and history. They are extremely efficient and flexible. Without them, these innovative ideas could not be realized and accepted by the Chinese people.

I am so happy to see that some of my Chinese colleagues have become well-known figures in the architectural field after years of training and practice. Tang Jun, general architect of

AREP China, Wang Zheng, Li Ling, Wang Xiang and Shen Xiang stand out.

Wang Zheng, who graduated from Tsinghua University, is able to do concept design himself. He fully understands the masters' original draft and add his own creativity in the detail design. Some of his ideas are highly praised by Duthilleul and Tricaud. His talent is fully displayed in the design of South Yunnan Railway Station and Yunnan Theatre.

Wang Xiang and his design team did a wonderful job in the design of Qingdao Railway Station. Inspired by the typical geographic location, he designed the outlook of the railway as a seagull flying between the blue sky and sea. The Ministry of Railway, Qingdao municipal officials and citizens highly praise the design and it won the bid.

Shen Xiang, with an English name Sunshine, is our female backbone. She has been working for AREP since 1991 and did excellent jobs in Xizhimen and Wuhan projects. She is gentle and always smiling, but she is also resolute and hardworking. She is now in Hangzhou leading a 20-person team and working for design development for the Hangzhou Qibao Complex project.

We are sure that the project, to be started late this month, will shine on the Chinese land just as her English name Sunshine.

Q: How do you think your Chinese colleagues regard the projects designed by AREP?

Fleur: I guess they feel both proud and little regretful. They are proud to see that their works stand out in the city as landmarks. They have a strong feeling for these projects, which remind them of the sleepless nights they spent to ensure the design was perfect. They may also regret that not all of the original concepts can be fully realized, due to funding, cultural differences and specific situations.

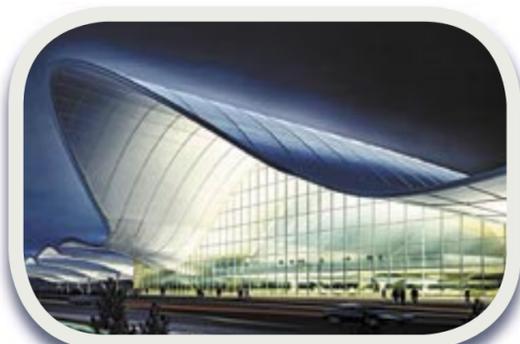
Q: You have been working at AREP for 10 years. I can see that you are very enthusiastic when we talk about



Capital Museum opened in June 2006 on Chang'an Avenue, which crosses Beijing from east to west. Its design is a blend of the past and present.



Xizhimen transportation hub is located in the northwest of Beijing at the 2nd Ring Road and Xizhimennei Street. It was completed in 2006.



Wuhan Railway Station is one of China's four biggest railway centers, helping bringing new travel experiences to passengers.

these projects. Do you love your job?

Fleur: I really love it. If you buy an item of clothing, you can throw it away if you don't like it. But a building will stand there no matter whether you

are proud of it or ashamed of it. Architecture is a part of our history that cannot be undone. We must be very careful and spare no effort to make every project an example of unique and practical architecture.



Completed in 2006, the South Shanghai Railway Station has become more than a simple rail juncture. It now serves as the city's southern gate.

A panoramic view of the Hangzhou Qibao Complex, which is started this year and will be completed in about three years with a total construction area of 1.03 million sq m and a total investment of 3.3 billion yuan.



Hangzhou's Qibao Complex: a vision of life in the future

By **WANG DANNA**

One day in my life of 2015 might start like this - In the morning I will send my baby to the kindergarten located within the apartment community and then drive my car to Jianhua road, which provides access to the Hangzhou business center and the company I work for.

In the evening I will meet one or two of my friends for supper or for business in the commercial area or in the hotels and office buildings near the metro, Hangzhou's Qibao Depot (Jianhua Station).

After that we will go shopping in the block's shopping malls. When finish, I will drive across the ramp, which links the residential community with other parts of the block above the city's metro yard.

Yes, that will be typical of my life after I move to the block above Hangzhou Qibao Metro Depot (Jianhua Station), which is a highly convenient setting, integrating all of the factors that constitute daily life, including education, business, entertainment, shopping and public services.

What I describe above is my vision of future life when the Hangzhou Qibao Metro Depot Development project is completed in two or three years time. It is also the result of a talk with Tang Jun, general architect, and Fleur des Diguères, director general of AREP China.

Designed by France-based AREP, a multi-disciplinary architecture and town planning design firm wholly owned by the French government and launched in January 1997, the block is located in Hangzhou's northeast quarter and connected to the Desheng road to the north, Beitang Zhonglu to the west and Jianhua road to the southeast.

The whole block is set above the Jianhua subway station, which is one of the best examples of its kind in the world. Another example of a similar project is Paris's Montparnasse, on the left bank of the River Seine, another masterpiece devised by AREP.

Addressing the design and concept of the block, Tang said the designer, Etienne Tricaud, general manager and architectural engineer of AREP, with a noted penchant for things *Chinoise*, planned a "Seven Diamond" - seven main sections - for the residential community, which coincides with the subway's Chinese name "Qi Bao", which has the same meaning in Chinese. Tang has contributed to building a bridge between the design concepts of the projects for French and Chinese architects.

Tang told me the idea of the internal courtyard for the residential community came from the Chinese architectural style known as "Siheyuan", one that was traditionally adopted for courtyard houses. He

said that Chinese people like this particular style as Siheyuan looks like a closed architecture from the outside, but provides an open space for the people living in the courtyard.

One of the main residential community internal roads is called the "Valley", this is a place where people and vehicles enjoy their own space surrounded by plentiful green land. It is a good interpretation of the designer's concept of ensuring the land use is completely in keeping with its surroundings.

With all-around facilities, including green spaces, apartments and residential communities, education, commercial and services apartments, offices and hotels, police and fire stations, the block is extremely well planned, presenting a coherent functional design concept of a radiant layout corresponding to the site and creating an impressive landscape.

The green slopes and housing blocks in the north and the continuous urban facade in the south create a harmonious street view with a distinct urban rhythm. The green slope, which connects to the city's road network is a ground level, combined with slab above the metro, some nine meters higher, it will create an impressive spectacle.

As the whole world is advocating a low-carbon lifestyle and economy, the designers of the block have not neglected this requirement when developing their overall masterplan, said Tang.

It is small wonder that Tang is one of the leading experts in his area. He is extremely vocal when commenting on the design details of this ecological architectural complex. The designers have made ample consideration for the drainage system, damping system and noise reduction requirement. For example, they use a spring for the structural column and a vertical well for drainage. All of the buildings are designed to withstand earthquake intensity of level six.

One of the most difficult aspects of design concerns the structural column as it is bearing the load of all the buildings above the metro. The problem was solved through several insightful solutions. Most of the structures above the metro are parallel with the subway line and no heavy buildings but green lands are immediately above the "Throat" (the rail bifurcation points) which proved an excellent solution to the bearing problem.

It was the perfect design and concepts of the AREP team that won it the chance to work on the project of urban and conceptual design of the Hangzhou Qibao Complex back in April, construction work on the project to begin later this month. The short period of the whole process - from the bidding to implantation - is an appropriate reflection of China's social development, according to Fleur des Diguères.