

Cahners

INTERIOR DESIGN

\$7.95

NUMBER 8

India's White Palace
Residential Rites of Summer

\$7.95 US / \$8.95 CAN



0 75470 64667 6

Jean-Pierre Heim renovates a 30-year-old Club Med resort in Senegal, bringing the property up to date without compromising its original aesthetic vision.

It Takes a Village

INEVITABLY EXHAUSTED AFTER long flights, Club Med guests, upon arrival in Senegal, should relax, have a drink, and immediately feel as if they were within an African village, not a stylized version of Adventureland. So goes the thinking of international architect Jean-Pierre Heim. Tackling an extensive—and exhaustive—renovation of the middle-aged, seaside resort just outside of Dakar, Heim earns kudos for the authenticity of his

work. To create a valid African experience, he based his entire project on the use of native materials, art, and craftsmanship. He also relied almost exclusively on the talents of the local populace to execute his plan.

Heim's project is part of a worldwide rejuvenation program on the part of Club Med, the 50-year-old organization that, with a current count of 70 facilities, revolutionized vacations. The logical choice to renovate this West African resort, Heim has not only hotel experience in France, but also a history with Club Med; he's previously designed two sites in Morocco.

In Senegal, where the landscape is lush with tropical greenery and the seaside resplendent with white sand and black volcanic rock, work focused on a complete overhaul of the 30-year-old hotel. This included its 450 rooms and public spaces encompassing circulation, lobby, bars, four restaurants, and a new shop created for African artifacts. But that wasn't all. Heim's commission entailed site analysis, surveying, and program preparation in collaboration with the client. As a result, the French-born architect, who maintains offices in New York and Paris, reconfigured exterior zones, too: a theater, poolside bars and restaurants, plus a dramatic new pool that was dug and built virtually by hand. "It was like building the pyramids in six months," he comments. He also enhanced the site with two new constructions, one a single-story restaurant with seating for 900 people, the other a hut-like structure or →

Opposite: Despite its seaside location, Club Med's guests prefer the pool to the ocean, which is often rough and cold. Both the 100-ft.-long pool and main bar, resembling an oversized hut, are new constructions on the site.

Left: View of the 30-year-old hotel constructed of brick and concrete with decorative tile detailing.

PHOTOGRAPHY: FABRICE RAMBERT





palapa for the all-important main bar. Landscaping and signage completed the project's scope.

"Working in Senegal was a challenge of organization," Heim says. Employing locals, who lined up daily for day labor, "avoided job site difficulties," he continues. Their knowledge of construction techniques with such indigenous materials as adobe brick, palm tree leaves, straw, and hand-broken seashells (used like terrazzo) sped up the building schedule. "Almost 1,200 men participated as a dedicated crew, working under all circumstances of weather and social factors such as sun, heat, rain, nights and Ramadan. Workers were divided by skills," Heim explains, "working mostly by hand without machine equipment."

While construction indeed proved demanding, furnishing the project's extensive facilities posed challenges similar in com-

plexity. Almost every aspect of the scheme—from fabrics printed with African motifs to woven rattan lampshades—was custom designed and produced in nearby villages. Exceptions to local production were twofold. Lamps, resembling the ceramic pieces that served as prototypes, were fabricated of injection-molded plastic in Europe for economic reasons. Chairs, the majority in teak, were made in France to conform to strength →

Above: Sculptures in reconfigured hallways are part of an indigenous art program encompassing sources throughout the Ivory Coast.

Right: Folk sculpture signals a sign-up stand for fishing expeditions in the lobby.

Opposite: Teak, woven rattan, adobe brick, and concrete slab flooring, the primary elements of the materials palette, are seen in this lobby view. The structure with the interlaced wood roof marks the sign-up area for excursions.



and durability codes. The furnishings schedule also called for a prodigious amount of woodworking, executed primarily in teak. A complete bedroom and bath prototype, set up in a warehouse in Paris, assured client approval before Heim's work force was engaged at full strength. When questioned about his research methods and sources, the architect, normally forthcoming, turns enigmatic. "I travel. I know the villages and I know the culture," is all he would say.

To supplement the production-line furnishings, Heim explored African bazaars. One-of-a-kind pieces obtained from these expeditions further distinguish lobby/reception areas while, of course, emphasizing the architect's overriding premise. Art, too, was acquired via native sources located throughout the Ivory Coast.

Branding, the current mega-marketing ploy touching virtually all entrepreneurial operations, has extended its reach to West Africa with this project. Heim devised a "three-bar" logo for Club Med, Senegal, and designed it into elements from chairs to lamp shades. There's no doubting the scope of Heim's work. The renovation, however, also encompasses technical aspects beyond our visual field. Technical and engineering work credited to the client's internal organization includes updating rooms to American standards with air conditioning, fax machines, and televisions; upgrading restaurant and kitchen facilities; plus altering bathrooms and hallways to meet codes, especially for accessibility, that have changed over the past 30 years. The Club Med team cited for credit comprises Philippe Bourguignon, P. Dague, C. Leroy, B. Fazan, and R. Camoin. The project was completed in 18 months.

—Edie Cohen

Above: Acoustics and air conditioning were Heim's chief concerns in the new restaurant seating 900. Shaped rattan panels below the ceiling vaults help absorb sound.

Right: Heim's three-bar logo, devised for the project, is subtly incorporated in teak tables and chairs, rattan lamp shades, and counter detailing. General contractor was Becod, Paris.

