It was the second time that proved to be the charm in the Azerbaijani capital as a beautiful landmark hotel rose from the excavation of an earlier, abandoned project. The design team for the Four Seasons Hotel Baku also had to contend with the site’s close proximity to the Caspian Sea and with medieval walls included on the World Heritage List.

By Robert L. Reid

The Four Seasons Hotel Baku was constructed step by step in deep excavation from an earlier project that had been abandoned.

HURR IS A LEGEND in Azerbaijan of how a beautiful rose bloomed in a garden—but only after certain plans and wishes went wrong and a village was destroyed. The legend, as recounted in the spring 2005 edition of the magazine Azerbaijan International, could serve as the metaphorical prelude to the real-life drama of how the Four Seasons Hotel Baku was designed and constructed in the Azerbaijani capital, for here again success came only after the early plans of the original developer had gone wrong, a new developer took over the project, and some of the early work was demolished by the new design and construction team.

The 10-level, 50,000 m² luxury Four Seasons hotel in Baku (Baku) was designed by London-based ReardonSmith Architects and engineered by URAL Engineering Co., Ltd., based in Arsk, Turkey, for the new developer, Baku-based DASHA Construction, LLC. This was the same design team and client that recently completed another landmark hotel in Baku, the JW Marriott Hotel Absheron Baku (see "Urban Oasis," by Robert L. Reid, Civil Engineering, April 2013, pages 46–50). But while the construction of the Four Seasons hotel had actually started earlier, the distinctive modern-style Absheron hotel opened first, in the spring of 2012; the far more ornate Four Seasons property, designed in a French classical style with Beaux-Arts detailing, was not completed until later that year. It was partially opened late in the summer of 2012, and full opening came in January 2013, according to Conrad Smith, RIBA, the managing director of ReardonSmith.

Like the rose that bloomed only after earlier trials, the Four Seasons hotel was constructed on a site that, as mentioned above, had been excavated as part of an earlier project under a different developer and design team but never completed. When the Four Seasons hotel opened in 2008, the site featured an approximately 12 m deep excavation for the three basement levels, a partially completed concrete raft foundation, the start of the lower-level shear walls and columns, and a partially completed secure pile wall along the perimeter to prevent water ingress, explained Ahmet Serdyuk, Ural, the company director of URAL Engineering, who provided written answers to Civil Engineering questions.

An early challenge for the new project involved the infiltration of water at the construction site. Ural noted. Located within 300 m of the Baku waterfront and overlooking the Caspian Sea, the site is separated from the water by a major arterial road, Neftekhim Avenue, and by a long promenade and park. The lowest of the basement levels is more than 12 m below sea level; indeed, most of Baku near the Caspian is as much as 25 m below sea level, making the city what is believed to be the lowest-lying national
The ballroom itself is located on the hotel’s second level above grade but is outside the footprint of the main structure of the building and is separated by a movement joint. The entrance lobby features a grand staircase that is clad in marble and has an intricate ironwork railing. The central, decorative arch conceals the concrete column from which portions of the stair connect. 1.5 m.

The entrance lobby is a large grand staircase that is oval in plan and ascends through the first three levels of the hotel, ending in the ballroom lobby, a “grand journey” that “holds an element of spectacle as you make your way to the ballroom,” explains Bhattacharjee. Clad in marble and featuring an intricate ironwork railing, the stairs wrap around a central decorative arch that conceals the concrete column from which portions of the stair connect. 1.5 m. Smith says. The grand staircase is also supported by the floor slab at each level through which it passes.

Baku is a city of more than 2 million people in which “East meets West and where sculpted high-rise towers coexist with centuries-old buildings,” according to Rashid Smith’s press announcements relating to the Four Seasons project. Within that context, the Four Seasons Hotel Baku serves to provide the “highest level of comfort with the most modern amenities within a classical design. It is like a legendary rose, and while it may not grace a garden, it is at least very close to an urban park.”

Robert L. Reid is the senior editor of Civil Engineering.

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