

SEPTEMBER 16, 2007

A five-star dream comes true

by **Simonne Pace**

HAVING established a track record in the hotel construction industry did not make building a fourth hotel any easier for entrepreneur Angelo Xuereb. Mr Xuereb told *The Sunday Times* last week that his biggest pride and joy was opening his first five-star hotel, The Palace, on time, welcoming the first guests on August 1.

The ten-storey hotel in the heart of Sliema, adjacent to The Victoria and Palazzo Capua, is operated by Claire Xuereb, who together with her father also put her heart and soul into seeing the project come together.

Furnishings on the hotel's top two floors are nearly completed and final touches are being added to a few suites in time for the hotel's official opening in November.

In his various roles as project manager, developer and contractor, Mr Xuereb is overwhelmed by the outcome, "especially when one takes into consideration that a full construction programme only kicked off in December 2006".

"It was a difficult, fast-track project, the toughest challenge being having to work in a tightly-constrained area. Being in the heart of Sliema, our workable space was pretty limited, and we constantly had to make it a point to cause the least inconvenience possible to residents. This requires good management," Mr Xuereb said.

The Palace, in High Street, has four floors below street level and ten floors above. Luckily, the Xuerebs could work from the 'comfort' of their own sites at the back of The Victoria and Palazzo Capua, where most of the building materials were stocked. Other material, such as beam reinforcements, were taken on site in a semi-manufactured state.

"My past involvement and experience in the industry were highly instrumental in finishing the hotel on schedule," Mr Xuereb said. "Having



THE FATHER-DAUGHTER team: Claire and Angelo Xuereb in The Palace lobby (Photo: Jason Borg)

AX Construction, an AX Group subsidiary, working non-stop on the project also made an incredible difference, especially at a time when major contractors and sub-contractors were taken up with Mater Dei."

A complete change in the hotel's interior design was another tough challenge, Mr Xuereb admits, as were the changes in architectural design, electrical and mechanical works, and air-conditioning and structural engineering.

This is where Mr Xuereb took on his role as project manager to see to quick decisions and alterations, ten-

dering processes and working towards achieving the opening deadline, "especially since every new aspect needed to adapt to the already existing structure".

"We literally had to go back to the drawing board and start afresh. But The Palace is now a designer hotel, based on an original and modern concept. The effort was worthwhile, and the hotel looks great," Mr Xuereb said.

"I wanted to have one of the most beautiful hotels in the area, and I'm pleased with the overall outcome, which was definitely the result of an

excellent project management team that pushed and pushed."

AX Construction was responsible for most of the construction work, including the intricate, three-dimensional marble and tile laying inside the hotel. The project team, however, worked extremely hard, trying to get quotations on time, chasing contractors and suppliers, and working around tight delivery dates.

The hotel's unique finishes, such as the lobby's gigantic and intricate chandelier, and the transparent Murano glass shades, designed by architect Martin Xuereb, were

thought of specifically with The Palace in mind.

Each and every item is a designer item, from chairs and sofas to carpets, doors and bars. The three-dimensional theme is evident throughout the hotel.

The Palace, together with its annex, Palazzo Capua, has a total of 161 rooms, half of which are suites, including six designer suites with themes connected to the five senses, two ambassador suites, which can be booked as one or two separate suites, and another eight classical suites, which will be in the connecting annex to Palazzo Capua.

"My motto has been to create something different, something new, something original," Mr Xuereb explained. "There is also the three-dimensional effect in the lift lobbies and other public areas. The hotel rooms are quite unusual in design, with bathrooms integrated within the room, and the designer suites are in a class of their own, having tiles and items specifically designed for each suite.

The TemptAsian restaurant on the hotel's top floor will be unique and should open in October. Excellent views all round, together with the spa and a beautiful knife-edge pool, which is already in operation, can also be enjoyed from the top floor.

The Palace currently enjoys 90 per cent occupancy.

The father-daughter relationship has been through a few rocky patches, Mr Xuereb admits with a chuckle. The father was adamant to complete the project on time, while the daughter wanted to have a smooth handover to start operations. These two factors created conflict.

Wearing his many hats, Mr Xuereb feels his contribution to The Palace has served, among a host of other things, to determine budget and time constraints, crucial aspects in the decision-making processes.

"Obviously, both Claire and I have worked hard on this project, and naturally want the best for The Palace."