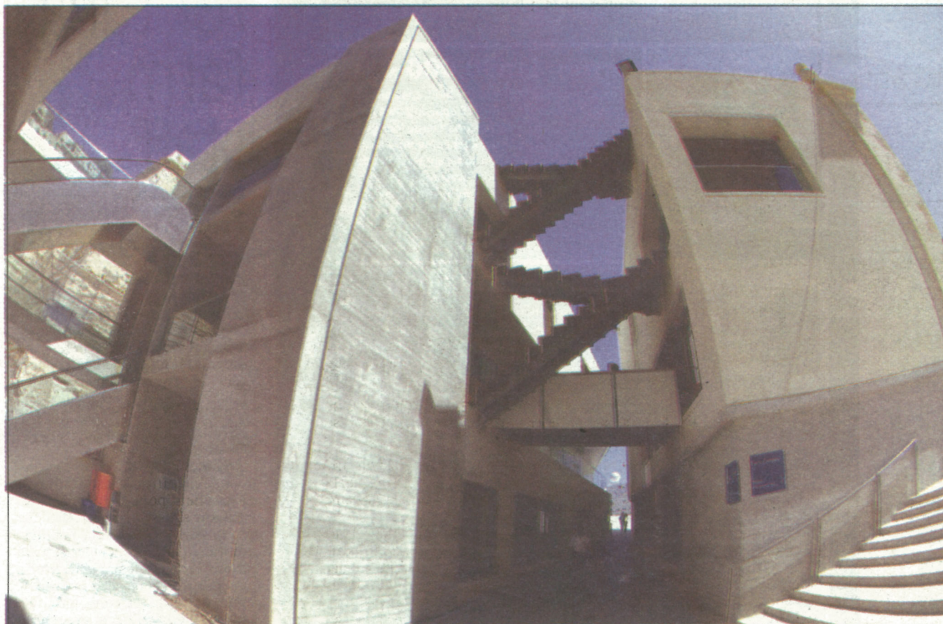
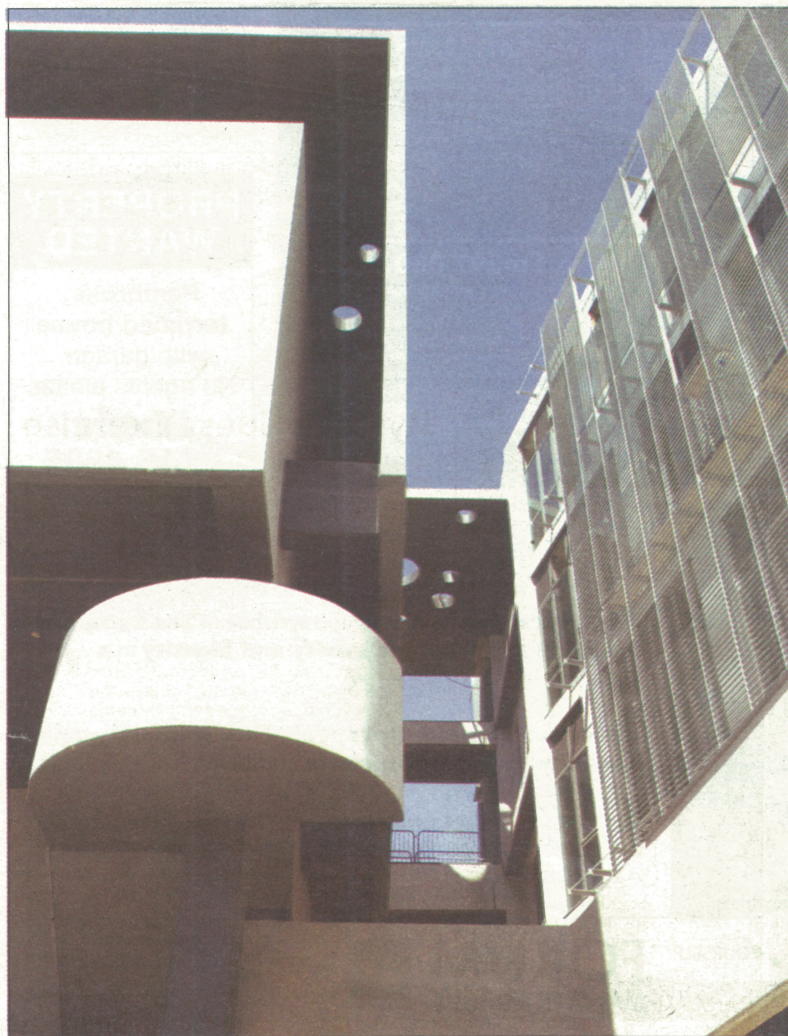


Quality construction at Valletta Waterfront



COMPLEX construction techniques were used at the Valletta Waterfront – an architectural gem. Below: the Malta Maritime Authority – a modern building created in 'F3' finish – the very latest in construction techniques



The Valletta Waterfront, admired by many, has been a breakthrough in the construction industry.

Angelo Xuereb, chairman of the AX Holdings Group, tells **SIMONNE PACE** that quality construction is what really makes the project tick

UP TILL around ten years ago Maltese contractors used to marvel at the quality of workmanship overseas.

But, Angelo Xuereb, founder and chairman of the AX Holdings Group, believes we have now achieved that standard and can compete very well with international contractors.

However, there is a shortage of skilled labourers in the construction sector in Malta, especially formwork erectors. The first skilled formwork erectors, who were foreign, had contributed to the construction of the Excelsior Hotel.

"There is definitely a shortage of well-trained labourers in the construction industry," Mr Xuereb recently told *The Sunday Times*. Various trades have been introduced but formwork erecting is a new trade and foreign instructors need to be brought to Malta to train our people.

The construction industry in Malta has made leaps forward and the Valletta Waterfront has been a breakthrough in construction techniques and quality of workmanship, which are of the highest standard.

The majority of the development and construction of the Valletta Waterfront, projected as the ultimate international cruise liner and ferry terminal in the Mediterranean, was awarded to the AX Holdings Group as part of VISET, of which it is a main shareholder.

AX Construction Ltd and The Constructors Ltd, subsidiaries of the group, were the companies responsible for most of the construction and renovation works which have taken place at Valletta Waterfront over the past couple of years.

Here work consisted of modern methods coupled with restoration on 17th century buildings and historic façades, which required the employment of specific building and restoration techniques, such as mortaring and painting, which carried out in the traditional way.

The construction of Forni Shopping Complex, which is to officially open its doors shortly, took almost a year. Forni's design is mostly modern and "the architects responsible deserve an award for it". Modern is mixed with the old and the end result is impressive.

Although not a large building, Forni has a complicated design, with six-metre cantilever beams. David Drago from Architecture Projects, and structure engineer Joe Calleja were the two key persons who worked together on Forni.

Construction works on the cruise and ferry terminal are under way. Work on part of the cruise terminal, which started nine months ago, has now been completed. The company is currently working on the construction of the main entrance to the cruise terminal and hopes to finish it by next month. The quay, which needed repairs, has also been restored and tarmacked.

VISET is now waiting for a MEPA permit to begin major construction works on the atrium.

Restoration work on the Pinto Wharf façade was carried out meticulously and professionally. To start with, low-pressure water was used to clean the stone and remove the black layer of dirt absorbed over the years.

"It took us a long time to find water with right PH content. The only suitable water was found at the reverse osmosis plant in Pembroke. To remove the dirt we used clay packs (clay placed on the façade and removed after a while). Skilled craftsmen also followed traditional methods, such as using a lime treatment to bring the façade as close as possible to the original," Mr Xuereb said.

Traditional painting methods were also used, whereby the sticky extract from prickly pears was cleverly mixed with various treatments to obtain the required dye.

"Some of the original standard size hardstone bricks (*gebel tal-qawwi*) used in the first six courses of the façade at Pinto Stores, which originated from Sicily, had to be replaced with stones from a quarry in Gozo. Some stones also needed to be treated."

The Malta Maritime Authority project, which is to be a one-stop shop, was also constructed in 'F3' finish: pure, raw concrete that would not be painted or painted at all due to its particular design and construction technique requirements.

These parameters put great demands on the work's finishing that eventually proved to be the highest standard ever achieved in Malta in concrete construction. The MMA should officially open this summer.

"The MMA building was designed to stringent specifications and we managed to achieve these standards. It's a modern building and its special concrete protection will make it last for hundreds of years," Mr Xuereb explained.

Now that VISET has managed to prove to the cruise industry its quality standards both in design and construction, it is attracting more cruise liners to Malta, with some cruise lines deciding to use Malta as their home port.

"Through home porting tourists can spend a few nights in Malta before leaving on a cruise and perhaps even consider spending a few more days in Malta after the cruise. This will definitely generate more wealth into our economy," Mr Xuereb said.