

LOCAL NEWS

Victorian values in a new Maltese hotel

At the time, a lot of controversy and anger was aroused among the residents of the posh Sliema district of the former Victoria Avenue, today renamed George Borg Olivier Street after the former prime minister whose house is a neo-Gothic jewel still standing there.

The residents had been up in arms about the new hospital and hotel venture being set up in the top end of the staid and normally placid wide street.

Architecturally, it is true, the mass of buildings far outshadows the two-storey town houses all around, but that is what is happening to Sliema all around.

The hospital was built and has been functioning for the past months now. When the hospital was opened, there was a mass of ugly concrete and rubble nearby.

That mass has now been turned into a gleaming four-star city hotel which is preparing to receive its first visitors in the coming days.

More, the hotel has ironically been the one to preserve the name of the area which the street name change had obliterated. The Victoria Hotel, however, is not just Victorian in name.

Its interior design, coordinated by Valerie Loporto and Chris Paris, the principal designer of AX Holdings, is Victorian too, based on dark oak, brass fittings and Art Nouveau stained glass in the ceilinged restaurant. Fittingly also the first group to be hosted by the hotel will be a historical studies group which is expected over the Easter weekend.

The hotel will have full occupancy over the Easter period with guests coming mainly from Italy, Germany and Belgium, the three principal mainstays of the Suncrest group of hotels.

A visibly proud Angelo Xuereb accompanied tourism minister Karmenu Vella on a pre-opening tour on Tuesday. Mr Xuereb said this hotel is another link in the AX chain: the

Sunny Coast is a timeshare venture, the Suncrest is a resort hotel and the Grand Hotel Verdala, after its refurbishment, will be a five-star hotel and the group's flagship. With the Verdala in operation, the group will have 2,200 beds in the hospitality sector and will be one of Malta's leading tourism ventures.

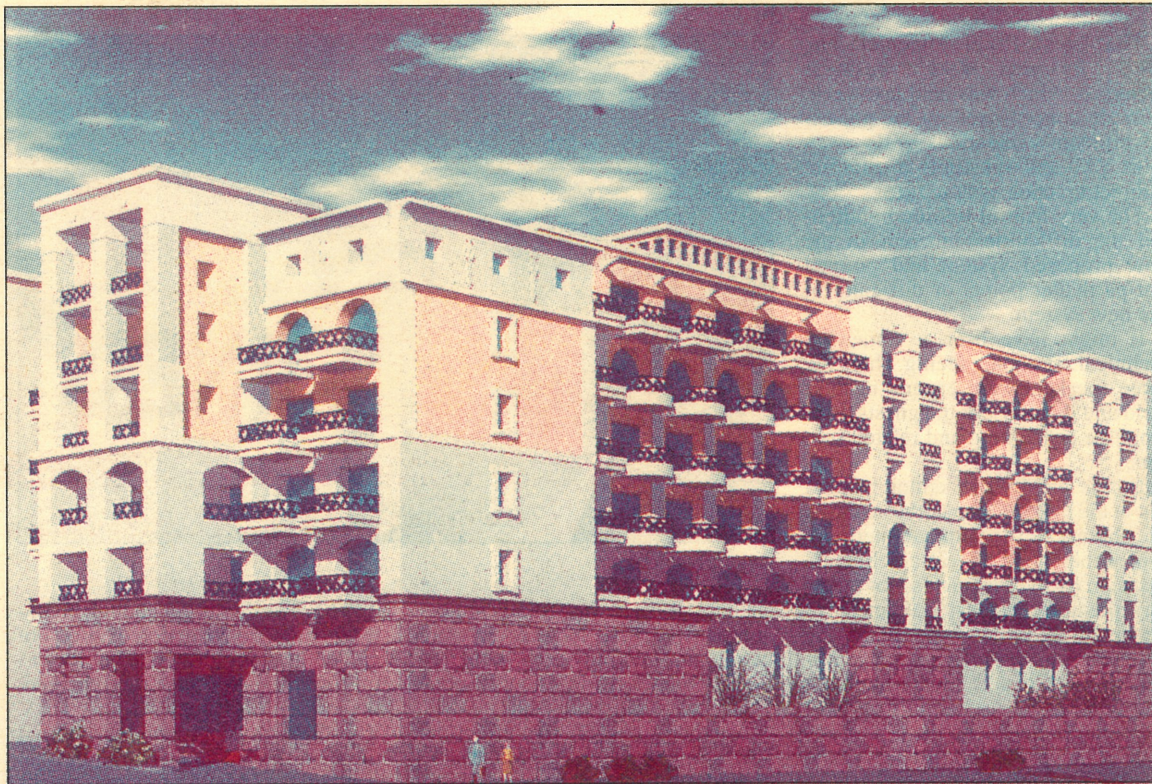
The Victoria is a superior four-star hotel with 120 bedrooms on five floors, including 10 suites and rooms specifically designed for disabled persons. The twin-bedded rooms are designed to offer guests maximum comfort with ensuite bathrooms (with telephone), air-conditioning, mini-bar, safe, colour SAT television and direct dial telephone.

One of the floors is solely dedicated to the business traveler with fax/modem facilities in the rooms. The hotel also houses a conference hall on the first floor which can take up to 180 persons in theatre style and 200 persons at a reception. This hall can also be partitioned into three separate suites, fittingly named after Shakespeare, Dickens and Lord Tennyson, to host simultaneous meetings. The conference hall is equipped with a multi-media projector, retractable projection screens, VCR equipment, a PA system with a sound mixing panel, computer points and direct dial telephones.

The Business Centre offers a range of audiovisual facilities. It provides overhead and slide projectors, modem and Internet facilities, personal computers, VCR equipment, fax and photocopying machines, mobile and cordless telephones apart from secretarial assistance.

The Penny Black bar takes its name from the very first postage stamp used in Victorian times. It will be offering snacks, lunch and afternoon tea in a cosy atmosphere inspired from the Victorian tearooms of Dickensian times.

The restaurant is named after David Copperfield while the roof-top sun terrace and coffee shop includes



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a swimming pool and whirlpool. The roof-top terrace, with views of the surroundings, will also cater for functions such as weddings and engagement parties.

The hotel is one of the first in Malta to have its own internal car park, three floors down with a maximum capacity of 100 cars.

Speaking after touring the new hotel, minister Karmenu Vella praised Angelo Xuereb's progression from a building contractor to an entrepreneur in the hospitality sector, unlike many other developers who looked at the buildings they built just as real estate investment. The hospitality sector needs to be and become ever more professional in its attitude.

Minister Vella then went on to

make a few salient points on the whole tourism sector. First of all he corrected the impression, given by the just published January figures, that tourism from Germany is on a downward trend.

What actually happened, he explained, was that last year Frosche brought 25,000 German tourists between November and February. That was why last year's January figure was such a good figure for German tourists.

This was also why both this January and February's figures were bad compared to 1996.

But the truth is also that Frosche this year is going to bring over some 33,000 German tourists, only they will all come in April and May. The

tourism figures for this year look good.

This does not however mean that they will immediately start climbing back up, but at least we can hope that the slide has been arrested. Things look good for the future too but all Maltese sectors must work hard to present a good product to the visitors.

Minister Vella then compared tourism to manufacturing. Three quarters of the manufacturing industry is foreign-owned but the value added it leaves in Malta ranges between 40 and 50 per cent.

Practically the whole tourism industry is Maltese-owned and the value added it contributes is around 90 per cent.

Telecell launches GSM



(From left:) Gabor Kovacs, Aldo Ziberna, Alfredo Sandri, Joe C. Grioli, and Joe Muscat.

Telecell has announced that it has signed a contract with Siemens/Italtel for the provision and installation of its GSM mobile network. The network is expected to accept its first subscribers in June this year.

The Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) is a digital system which offers GSM subscribers a wider range of services and advantages than those offered by the present analogue network. The most important feature of GSM is that it allows subscribers to roam in many countries around the world with their own GSM phone whilst retaining one mobile phone number wherever they go. Bills are eventually settled in the subscriber's local currency in one bill back at home.

It also allows subscribers from foreign networks to use their GSM phones in Malta. Currently GSM network services are available in some 80 countries around the world.

When contacted Joe C. Grioli, managing director of Telecell Limited, confirmed that the present analogue system is intended to be retained for a number of years. How-

ever, as from June, subscribers will have a choice as to which network to subscribe to. He continued by stating that the company is investing very heavily in Malta during the current year.

New summer schedule



Air Malta has launched its new timetable for scheduled flights in the summer season. Featured inside the timetable booklet are flight details of Air Malta flights to over 40 destinations. Destinations that have been added include; Budapest, Abu Dhabi, Monastir, Copenhagen, Barcelona and Tel Aviv.

Air Malta will continue to operate a weekly service to New York, in collaboration with Balkan Airways. Air Malta will also be operating a number of charter flights during the summer season. The charter operation compliments the scheduled flights by servicing a large number of regional airports in the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic and Russia.

Spirited by a London taxi

Joseph Farrugia of Hansa Stores, Tourist Street, Bugibba was lost for words when a London taxi drew up by his store.

George Attard, sales manager, wines and spirits division, Paolo Bonnici Ltd, called at his store with the distinctive J&B-branded London taxi loaded with 15 cases J&B Rare Scotch Whisky to inform him that he had won 180 70cl J&B Rare Scotch Whisky bottles.

Director Paul Bonnici said that his promotional lottery, which was organised for retailers, wholesalers, bars, restaurant and hotel owners by Paolo Bonnici Ltd, sole importers of J&B Rare Scotch Whisky was a tremendous success.

He also said that it was a pleasure that a valued customer such as Mr Farrugia turned out to be the lucky winner.



The J&B London taxi and the lottery prize in the background. Paul Bonnici (right) seen congratulating the winner Joseph Farrugia (centre). Looking on is George Attard.

Union Print doubles its directors

Union Print Co. Ltd, the company which runs the Union Press, the printing side of the General Workers' Union, has just doubled its directors to six.

According to an amendment to its memorandum and articles, registered on the 29 January, its board will now consist of six directors in comparison to the previous three.

The quorum was set to be three directors. GWU officials Tony Zarb, Alphonse Meli and James Pearsall were appointed directors of the printing press on 20 January.

GWU secretary general Jack Calamatta had replaced Anglu Fenech after the latter's resignation.

The other two directors are Norman Mizzi and Edmond Mallia.

New director for Chambray

MIMCOL chairman John Cassar White has just been appointed to the board of directors of the Fort Chambray Ltd instead of former MDC chief executive officer Anthony Diacono.

The other directors of the Gozo enterprise are still the same. They are Avv. R. Memmo, Dott. F. Rago and Dott. M. Minciaroni, all with a registered address in Monaco; and L.E. Galea.