

# Maltese magic

**Bay Street, St George's is a cutting-edge leisure and lifestyle destination under development in Malta. When it opens to the public in November 2000, it will offer an integrated mix of visitor experiences, all set in an exciting – and sympathetic – architectural environment. *Locum Destination Review* talked to three of the key figures responsible for conceptualising and delivering the vision and design for Bay Street: **Chris Grech, Jim Duffy and Richard Tibbott.****

Malta is one of the world's most densely populated areas, and plays host to an additional 1.2 million annual overseas visitors each year. Any new Maltese visitor destination will need to have a special mix of offers, which could appeal to local and international tastes alike, in a setting that would also reflect the true culture of Malta. Recognising the need for a substantial upgrading of the island's tourism offer, Chris Grech, Marketing Director of Bronville, put together a brief for the creation of an entirely new kind of destination, to be situated just north of Valletta. The development consortium set out to create a unique complex, which could be enjoyed by both the 350,000 strong local market and the throngs of foreign tourists.

Locum Destination Consulting was brought into the project at the conceptual planning phase. Richard Tibbott, Locum's Chairman, was well placed to advise on such a venture, given his broad experience with a variety of visitor destinations around the world. Applying some of the integrated thinking he brought to the highly successful Windsor restaurant and retail complex, Richard's approach was to bring a range of disparate yet connected elements into the destination mix, including a wide spread of aspirational leisure and lifestyle product retailers and service providers, themed and branded food and beverage outlets, and an anchor operator. As he recalls, 'The aim was to respond to the conceptual brief by marrying our vision of the destination mix to an understanding of the local culture,

in order to surround the visitor with a stimulating range of choice and experience. Locum advised the creation of a complementary rather than competitive mix of occupiers: an entertainment centre, a hands-on science centre, restaurants and bars, retail outlets and a language school.' Locum also recommended the all-important branding of the destination as 'Bay Street, St George's'.

BDG McColl was assigned by Bronville to bring the project's diverse elements together in a cohesive architectural manner. The site, which overlooks St George's Bay, enjoys good pedestrian links with neighbouring leisure facilities, tourist hotels and the thriving nightlife in Paceville. In architectural terms, it rests gently alongside a mix of modern and historic buildings, the most notable being the splendid Villa Rosa, the Italianate treasure that dominates views from the Bay. In conceptual terms, the architect recommended mirroring aspects of Malta's famous fortress structures, not to create enclosures but to reflect the way in which they open out internally to reveal very special environments. The result is an open street bordered by two tall buildings, which promote the activities of its retail and leisure operators and provide an architectural backdrop, the theatre for an always-entertaining experience.

The vision is best expressed in Chris Grech's own words at the project's outset:

**The complex must be all about discovery. For Bay Street's guests it must be as much about discovery on a repeat visit as it will have been on the first. Bay Street should flex and change to exceed the expectations of its visitors and ensure that they always find good reason to return, and to enjoy. Guests should become part of the theatre of Bay Street, playing against a backdrop of dynamic architecture unlike anything else on the Island. As if in a Broadway production, a visual story should unfold with lighting effects and a variety of colours blending in front of your eyes. The building and its various retail offers then become the stage set.**

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In order to meet these aspirations, BDG McColl's concept architect, Jim Duffy, set out to ensure that light would play a key role in the design. According to Duffy,

Sunlight will be diffused down through the levels, by using reflective finishes and glazed terraces and walkways. As the sun 'orbits' Bay Street, its light effects will be directed by the variety of reflective and absorbent materials to express movement for the observer. Then, after dark, visual energy should explode in the form of dramatic artificial lighting effects created to wash the stage set and the players in colour and contrast. The 'street' itself will be a very public street within the heart of the building, designed to enhance the sense of discovery. It will have a clean, crisp and very modern feel, yet will be aligned to respect tradition by visually framing the 'Villa Rosa' in the eyes of guests as they rise through the street.

The architects have also ensured that while guests are exploring Bay Street's various levels, they create the opportunity for chance encounter: for moving from light to shade, from shop to shop, bar to bar, in or out of the cool breeze. Even the staircase towers will be open at lower levels to permit the flow of air, while providing a visual signal for movement through the complex. Enclosed at upper levels, albeit with a permeable screen, these towers are designed to enforce the feeling of change, open to closed, from exposure to enclosure.

Further responding to the client's vision, Jim Duffy adds,

On upper levels, which are easily accessed by escalators, guests will discover theme bars and restaurants where they can relax in the partial shade of covered verandas. From there they will be able to observe the hustle and bustle of the courtyard in the street below, people-watching, as if from their box at the theatre. More places of intimacy and individual character will unfold towards the comparative tranquillity of the upper terrace. There they can enjoy close proximity to the beautiful gardens of Villa Rosa. A total contrast to the pace experienced at the mouth of the street far below.



The view through the street showing how Villa Rosa (top centre) can be clearly seen  
Picture courtesy of BDG McColl



Bay Street as it will appear after dark  
Picture courtesy of BDG McColl



Interior view of the Family Entertainment Centre  
Picture courtesy of BDG McColl

The Bay Street complex is due to open to the public in November this year. Among the dynamic retail and leisure offers it will make available are international brand names such as Marks & Spencer, the Hard Rock Café, Formula One, Naf-Naf, the Argentinian Steak House and McDonald's. In addition to the local retailers and restaurateurs who will occupy part of the street, an artisan's market has been included, which will promote Maltese crafts. The language school will be situated on an upper level, along with a hotel complete with swimming pool and roof terrace bar, with excellent views over St George's Bay.

Certain key interior areas within Bay Street were specifically set aside to be planned and designed by BDG McColl. These include the Family Entertainment Centre, which will be in a style that is unique to Bay Street, and the Science Discovery Centre – designed to entertain and inform while also providing considerable educational value for local children.

All of the operators, while given every opportunity to promote their own brand, will also benefit from the marketing of the whole complex under the Bay Street 'umbrella' brand. The concept could even lend itself well to the prospect of a roll-out in other locations, perhaps around the Mediterranean Rim or North Africa and the Middle East, where more people can 'discover' the delights of Bay Street.

To quote Chris Grech, the man with the original vision,

Wherever you go in Bay Street the light will be changing around you, day and night. When you approach from the Bay, or from Paceville or one of the other leisure areas in St George's, your first sight of Bay Street will be a brightly lit bridge, signalling your approach to something unique, to something very special, something you simply must discover.

### Bay Street, St George's: Cost of Development

	LM Maltese (million)	£ Sterling (million)
Site Cost	3.0	4.9
Construction	2.5	4.2
Mechanical/Engineering	2.5	4.2
Fit-out/Shell*	1.5	2.4
Contingencies	1.0	1.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>17.3</b>

\* Internal unit fit-out costs are to be the responsibility of the occupiers

### Summary of Unit Areas in Bay Street

Level/ Element	Bay m <sup>2</sup>	Piazza m <sup>2</sup>	One m <sup>2</sup>	Two m <sup>2</sup>	Three m <sup>2</sup>	Four m <sup>2</sup>	Five m <sup>2</sup>	Six m <sup>2</sup>	Total m <sup>2</sup>
FEC	1,042	1,135	1,130						3,307
Retail	1,602	1,490	745						3,137
F&B	331	384	1,348		314	314			2,691
Terrace					1,084				1,084
Night Club				786					786
Language School					439				439
Car park				2,199					2,199
Apartments						1,611	1,997	1,164	4,822
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,975</b>	<b>3,009</b>	<b>3,223</b>	<b>2,985</b>	<b>3,738</b>	<b>1,925</b>	<b>1,997</b>	<b>1,164</b>	<b>19,165</b>

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