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**Łódź  
waits  
its turn**

**Miasteczko  
Wilanów changes  
the face of Warsaw**

Dom Dochodowy o Trzech Frontach – Rafał Chmielewski/WBJ

# Horses, trams and (not too many) automobiles



An artist's impression of the main entrance to the retail section of Miasteczko Wilanów – view from Przyczółkowa Street, looking west.

by Richard Stephens

Guy Perry's vision of a new town, a place crossed by horse trails and bicycle paths and dotted with small parks and landscaped gardens where most day-to-day errands can be run without getting into a car, is gaining momentum. The US/French architect, whose company **Investment Environments** is supervising the design and development of **Prokom Investments'** 'Miasteczko Wilanów' project in Warsaw's upmarket residential district of Wilanów, believes the scheme, which will eventually include approximately 1,000,000 square metres of buildable space, will be a model for a "sustainable urban environment" which could serve as an example to other developers in Central and Eastern Europe.

The momentum comes from the fact that hypermarket operator **Auchan Polska**, which has applied for perpetual lease for 15 hectares of the 170-hectare project on which to build a hypermarket, is in advanced talks with a foreign investor to co-develop the retail 'town centre'. This will be part mall and part outdoor shopping street; the 'New Nowy Świat', as it is currently known. Talks are also being held with Warsaw's tram-network operator ZTM about extending an existing tramline into the project, and, says Perry, discussions are underway with a number of potential investors interested in developing individual sections of the project.

According to Wojciech Okoński, vice-President of Prokom Investments, one of these investors is a Scandinavian developer, already active in Poland, which plans to build a 250-room, 4-5 star hotel in the scheme. The name of the investor,

said Okoński, will be announced next month, adding that in three or four months Prokom Investments should be in a position to announce financing for residential and office schemes the company itself plans to develop. "As we move forward the risk is getting less and less," said Okoński. "We started four years ago by purchasing the land, then the masterplan was drawn up and now construction is underway on some projects," he said, referring to **Robyg Development's** 150-apartment 'Queen Marysienka's New Residence' residential project, which is 50% owned by Prokom Investments, the other 50% divided between 3 Israeli developers (shortly to be two as one of the three, Rubanenko, is selling its stake).

Much of the success of the scheme in general rides on how popular the residential dimension of Miasteczko Wilanów proves. The Robyg scheme is so far 20% sold, said Artur Ceglarczyk, a board member of the company, who added that people would be able to move into the first 60-apartment section before the end of the year. Despite being on the north-east tip, he said, the new home-owners very much saw themselves as being part of the whole project.

## Discretion, discretion, discretion

The architectural emphasis for Miasteczko Wilanów, according to Perry, is on discretion. "We're moving ahead with the design of the (retail) project and as of today I will incorporate five local firms to shape the exterior of the buildings so it really has the feeling of being the town centre as opposed to being a mega-project that comes from one architect."

## FEATURE



Inside the retail area.

All these architects, stresses Perry, are Polish and the emphasis is on youth. "We will purposefully be picking young architects who will have to live with what they do for the next 50 years. I think it's about getting a generation that perhaps hasn't fully formed its habits, so that it's not about making an architectural statement but about making an appropriate building for the location near the Palace (Wilanów Palace, located across Przechyłkowa street)." What Perry defines as appropriate are buildings which "don't scream". "It's about making buildings that are quiet and elegant. It's not about a fashion parade and we certainly don't want to make an Expo site."

Discretion is not a quality hypermarkets are usually associated with but according to Krzysztof Zieliński, Auchan's regional director of expansion, a similar scheme in Luxembourg, where the local authorities were also against a typical hypermarket structure, has proved one of their most successful hypermarkets. So they are not worried, he says.

### Old notions

The multi-architect approach, claims Perry, is nothing new. "When they were building the most beautiful European cities there were very strict

urban design guidelines and the architects collaborated to make sure the city was going to look coherent. It's the opposite of the Jerde approach. I have an enormous respect for John Jerde, but to me it's a 20th century notion that one firm designs these big projects."

Guy Perry's views on architecture and urban design merit attention because, more than anyone involved in Miasteczko Wilanów, which on completion will be Warsaw's largest single new construction project, he is shaping the design guidelines. And more than anything he has a bone to pick with the post-war automobile-centred communities that sprung up around the United States and have dominated suburban America for the past 50 years. With Miasteczko Wilanów, says Perry, the idea is to create the very opposite of the standard American model. Much of Perry's belief in 'sustainable urban environments', (i.e., "communities that have a tightly knit mix of life's activities and give inhabitants a choice about how to get around"), stems from his experiences growing up in two very different environments; Saint Germain-en-Laye outside Paris, which, like Wilanów, has a palace very much at the heart of the community; and the suburbs of St. Louis, Missouri. "In Saint Germain-en-Laye you got around on foot or by public transport. In St Louis you couldn't get anywhere except by car," he said.



The 'New Nowy Świat' shopping street, looking north.

### Reverse trend

Now, however, there is a trend against the automobile-oriented, box mall-centred community in the US, he says. He cites the example of a scheme called Easton Town Center in Columbus, Ohio, which has sought to re-create the evocative 'downtown' of the country's midwestern past. "When Steiner (the owner of Steiner + Associates, co-developers of the scheme) was looking for financing less than a decade ago he couldn't get any. People thought he was nuts to put shops outside. Now he's driving the highest rents. The proof of the pudding is in the rents."

Perry talks at length about the negative aspects of the "overly suburban" society in his home country. "The main reason why the US couldn't sign the Kyoto Protocol was because of the way the cities are laid out. Energy consumption of American cities and subsequent emissions are the highest per capita in the world. People drive everywhere. Metropolitan St Louis doubled in area without increasing in population – energy hungry single-family houses now surround a hollow core. And it's not healthy. In the US the life expectancy is beginning to decrease, one key reason being the lifestyle that is based on that suburban model where too many people no longer get basic exercise. Miasteczko Wilanów is a community in which you should be able to do 70% of what you have to do on foot." For this reason Perry says he was "extremely excited" when he heard that ZTM wanted to extend a tram-line into the scheme, most likely the line that runs south along Puławska Street to Służew. "One of the things that was weak about the project was that we'd created this sustainable environment internally but it was actually pretty dependent on the automobile or buses to get people into town."

Another mode of transport, albeit one with legs rather than wheels, which Perry sees as integral to the spirit of the scheme is the horse. "We would like to create horse-trails that go through the community and cross the street and go into the palace grounds." Leisure in general he sees as integral to the success of any project such as Miasteczko Wilanów. As well as the horse trails there will be bicycle paths, tennis courts and a winter ice-skating rink in the central plaza. Perry is also supportive of utilizing the potential of fields adjacent to the Palace for a possible golf course and riding trails. "We're working closely with the palace so it's not like we're doing our thing here and we don't know what's happening across the road. They and the agricultural university have a lot of land which right now is under-utilized."

Within Miasteczko Wilanów itself much of the land, as stipulated in the masterplan drawn up by local authorities, must be set aside for 'green purposes'. To this end Perry has used his connections at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where he is a visiting lecturer, to make Miasteczko Wilanów's park and green areas the subject of a design study course for landscape architecture students. The semester course will be under the guidance of both Perry and the world-renowned landscape designer Martha Schwartz, and the students will be visiting for a week during February. Although this is purely an academic exercise, Perry says that in the past similar exercises have resulted in aspects of students' designs actually being adopted.



View of 'The Royal Plaza', looking east

Prokom Investments is currently considering commissioning Martha Schwartz for one of the Town Centre plazas.

### Holy anomaly

Perry has not been able to influence the design of all parts of the scheme, however. This is most evident in the grandiosely titled 'Temple of Holy Providence', whose design in anything but discreet. First proposed over 200 years ago to give thanks for Poland's first constitution, the idea was resurrected by Warsaw primate Cardinal Glemp in the early 90's. At 40 metres high it will be an anomaly to the rest of the scheme, and despite Guy Perry's assertions that places of worship should be a part of the community, it is obvious that it will be a big challenge integrating that particular design into Miasteczko Wilanów.

With all the emphasis on sustainability, the question arises as to whether the whole project is economically sustainable. Perry says that three factors make it so: location, planning and timing.

"We have a unique location between the Palace and the escarpment, at the heart of the premier residential district in the country. It's also the only planned community based on the notion of a lifestyle that's a safe working, living and leisure environment, and the third thing is that it's really optimal timing. If you look at the next ten years Warsaw is going to benefit exponentially by entry into the European Union." He cites the examples of Madrid and Dublin, where demand for quality housing, he says, rose dramatically after EU entry. "The advantage that Warsaw has is that there is no number two city to compete with it, like Barcelona in Spain, and vis-a-vis Ireland, Poland has a population ten times larger." Other factors influencing the scheme, although on a more technical level, include whether the A2 road slated to run west-east through the southern part of Warsaw actually forms the southern side of the project. A business park is currently earmarked for that area, but Guy Perry says that if the road is moved then it could be that a residential development is built there instead.

Guy Perry has worked on a number of large-scale urban developments in the past, including designs for the Barcelona Olympics, and is currently leading the design of a 70-hectare scheme to be built on the riverbank in Prague. For him the significance of Miasteczko Wilanów is that it's an opportunity to close some of the gaps created by the past. "Warsaw has had a challenging past 100 years and it's an opportunity to really do a first-class neighbourhood in a city which really lost many of its first-class neighbourhoods."