



The hard work of designing paradise

S.F. architects make a business creating vacation playgrounds

Building resorts is a complex task, which keeps the business interesting, says Eller.

SNAPSHOT: SB Architects

Founded: 1960 as Sandy and Babcock; changed to SB Architects in 2002.

2007 revenue (projected): \$16.5 million.

2006 revenue: \$14.8 million.

2005 revenue: \$12 million.

2004 revenue: \$7.7 million.

Employees: 130.

Locations: San Francisco and Miami.

Web site: www.sb-architects.com

BY CYNTHIA KINCAID
San Francisco Business Times Contributor

SB Architects works hard on vacation. The San Francisco firm designs resorts in far-flung locales: Panama, Croatia, Morocco and the Bahamas. The 48-year-old firm's current project is a destination resort for Cypress Equities' Montage Royal Island Bahamas.

For President John Eller, the complexity of resort design keeps the work interesting.

"There are a significant number of aspects to the (Montage) project, which are a challenge," said Eller. "There is a hotel, a spa complex, the villa complex, the recreational facilities that are supporting them, and the beach club and tennis facilities. It's really a resort mixed-use project that brings all of these components together."

SB Architects will also design the newly approved Hard Rock Hotel in Palm Springs and five Ritz-Carlton hotels, as well as resorts in Panama, Croatia, and Morocco.

Resort work combines all of SB Architect's specialties: high-end residential, hospitality and mixed-use projects. In San Francisco, SB Architects is building apartments in Mission Bay, a new residential building in Bryant Square, and a multi-family, mixed-use project by the AT&T Park. With 130 employees in its San Francisco and Miami locations, SB

Architects posted 2006 revenues of \$14.8 million.

Welcoming a new market

SB's decision to move into the hospitality market was a conscious one. They accomplished the transition by partnering with time-share groups, as time shares are a cross between residential and hospitality/resort products.

The work mushroomed from there: a hotel on the island of Cyprus, a hotel in Jakarta, Indonesia, work in Singapore, Hong Kong and Taipei.

"We managed to survive a very down domestic market, from the late 1980s into the mid-'90s, by doing a significant amount of work internationally," Eller said.

Eller joined SB Architects in 1977 as a junior designer and worked his way up to the CEO position 11 years later. When the firm's founders left in 1998 and 2001, he took full control.

"We still had our Miami office, and we wanted to build a greater presence in San Francisco," he said. "I realized that there was more work for partnership-level people than what I could command myself, so it was critical that I identify other people to help carry the leadership role and market the firm. So I brought on some remarkably talented people to take up that challenge."

Drawing on talent

Eller attributes most of SB Architects' success to the talent he's helped gather. Each day he works with architects, clients and consultants to produce a collaborative project.

"It's all those things that take us from the sketch in the first conversations with a client to the occupancy of that project, watching people enjoy, use, and inhabit the spaces that we have created," Eller said.

Cypress Equities appreciated this enthusiastic, collaborative approach to design. Cypress President and CEO Chris Maguire saw in SB Architects an "absolute dedication to a hands-on, design-driven and completely individual approach."

sanfrancisco@bizjournals.com ■