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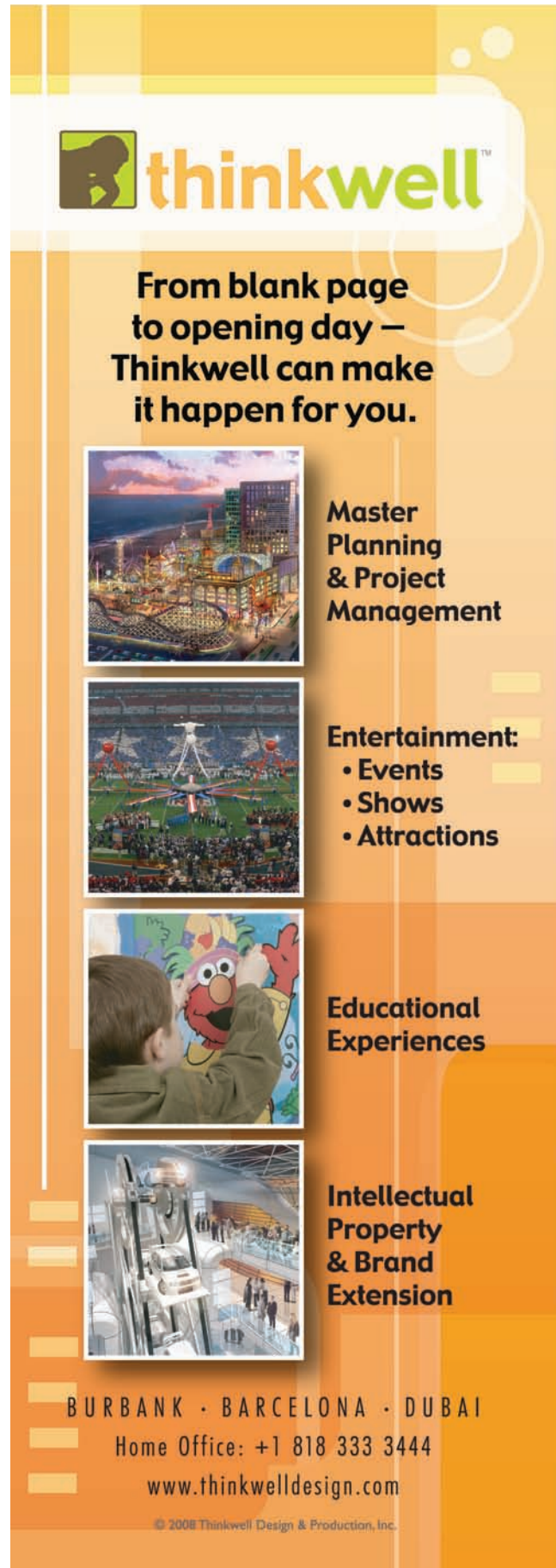


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As Visualizations Gradually Become Bricks and Mortar, What Will Spell Genuine Success in Dubai?

by **Charles Read**

When Elizabeth Taylor bumped into Princess Margaret many years ago at a wedding, the royal was rather stunned by Taylor's ring - a great chunk of a diamond, and utterly vulgar in the opinion of the princess. "Why don't you

Dubai doing? Billions of dollars' worth of leisure projects are on the table. By looking at those projects that have made it from concept to completion, we can begin to observe what factors will spell success in bringing about the planned

*The Ice Cave at Ski Dubai,
photo courtesy Thinkwell Design*



try it on?" Taylor offered coyly. Margaret obliged, and the two stood for a moment, taking in the brilliant, sparkling rock. "Not so vulgar now, is it?" Taylor said.

This favorite celebrity tale sums up how I feel about Dubai. I can sympathize with those who feel it is perhaps a little glitzy and ostentatious... but my, oh my, how it sparkles and beguiles close up!

Dubai is one of the seven emirates which make up the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and is located along the southern coast of the Persian Gulf on the Arabian Peninsula. Once a small fishing village, it has effected a staggering transformation in as little as 20 years into a bustling, thriving city, working rapidly to establish itself as an international entertainment and cultural capital. Fueled (literally) by its vast oil wealth, the emirate has set out to become the world's leading leisure destination.

So from the perspective of the themed entertainment business, how is

transformation of Dubai and the UAE.

A combination of good business practices and attention to supply and demand stand out for Darrell Metzger, Sr. VP - Venetian Resort (Macau). He cites two examples: Ski Dubai, an indoor skiing attraction that opened in 2005, and the \$1.5 billion Atlantis Resort, which opened this September. "Both are billion dollar projects and have used experienced consultants and designers, been well financed, professionally designed and built, and have filled a market void," says Metzger, whose previous position was CEO of Dubai's Ruwaad Destinations, a UAE-based real estate, hospitality and tourism investment and development company.

John Cussen, General Manager of Amusement Whitewater (AWW) is in no doubt as to why Atlantis looks set to succeed in the long term. "First class management from the client, payments always on time with no disputes, and



Darrell Metzger



John Cussen



Martin Barratt

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motivated, co-operating teams,” Cussen explains. AWW is a themed construction company involved in the Atlantis Resort, Dubailand (a gigantic complex of multiple theme parks and attractions, still in development/construction stages) and the Palms (a manmade island resort, still under construction). Indeed, at this writing, according to Atlantis resort Vice president of Marine Activities, Peter Doyle, Atlantis has been consistently exceeding its projected attendance.

Land value is also a primary factor, according to Martin Barratt of Vision XS, a UK-based consultancy working with a number of major clients in the Gulf. “They are making their money from the increasing value of the land rather than from the attractions themselves,” he says. “It is hard to see how most of the attraction developments could be successful as standalones.”

Metzger’s and Cussen’s remarks imply that a solid, professional business culture, evident throughout the construction and design phase of a project, augurs well for success in the operations stage. But operations does usher in new challenges, especially in regard to manpower. Cussen says, in regard to Dubailand, “The biggest problems will come if the contracts all

start together. Where will they get the skilled staff from?”

A recent article in the Saudi Gazette indicates that a shortage of skilled professionals is driving area salaries through the roof and may jeopardize some project budgets. Raed S. Haddad, senior vice president of corporate programs for ESI International, a leading business analysis company in the area, told the Gazette that “industry leaders in the Middle East cannot simply ‘buy-in’ the expertise they need. To sustain the current level of development, talent must be produced from within, through training and development programs.” The Gazette also reported that, according to database company Proleads, the total number of active civil engineering and infrastructure projects taking place in the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] countries is close to 2,081 with a combined value of \$1.3 trillion and quoted Haddad saying, “The sheer scale of all this activity is putting severe strain on the viability of some projects. For example, ETA Star Group recently announced that their Dubai Lifestyle City project had increased from an initial \$2.4 billion to \$4 billion. The significant proportion of that was consultancy fees which had risen anywhere from 40% - 70%.”

The situation of the laborers who built and are building the new Dubai also raises questions. Worker’s rights are high on the agenda in a country where 80% of the 1.3 million population are expatriates and tens of thousands work illegally (the UN recently estimated that the UAE was home to over 300,000 illegal immigrants).

It’s reasonable to speculate that not everything on Dubai’s drawing board is going to materialize. A Sept 2008 report in the UAE-based Gulf News estimates that only 44% of development projects due to open last year actually opened. But some of the projects forecast are truly tantalizing in terms of what they will add

to the worldwide attractions mix.

Metzger thinks the most exciting projects are “those that have never been built before. We are all quite familiar with parks such as Universal Studios, SeaWorld, Six Flags, etc. But what does a DreamWorks park [projected opening: 2011] look like? A Marvel park [2011], a Ferrari park [2009], a Formula One park [2009]? These should be creative and innovative concepts.”

Cussen is confident that once complete, Dubailand alone (the mega-theme park complex set to be twice the size of Florida’s Disney World, of which some of the above parks will be components) will “compete with Orlando as a main themed tourist attraction.” He is also looking forward to the opening of The Palms in two to three years. “It’s never been done before and many said it couldn’t be done. There are huge technical challenges, but it is almost there.” He is bullish about Dubai’s future, “Seven years ago nobody believed that [these projects] could be done. Now it is taken for granted that if Sheikh Mohammed is behind a project it will fly. He has extraordinary vision and the cash to support it.”

“Legoland [forecast to open in 2011] has the best chance of success,” according to Martin Barratt, “because the Lego development team will make sure it is commercially viable.”

The mood in Dubai seems upbeat despite the recent global economic turmoil. Indeed, the emirate recently announced a project to build the world’s tallest building at the Nakheel port and harbor complex, a tower more than a kilometer high and almost three times higher than the Empire State building. This is a bold and confident statement in these uncertain times. In truth though, no one really knows what will happen. There are simply too many variables. But, like the diamond on Liz Taylor’s finger, Dubai and its extravagant plans continue to entice and beguile us. ★

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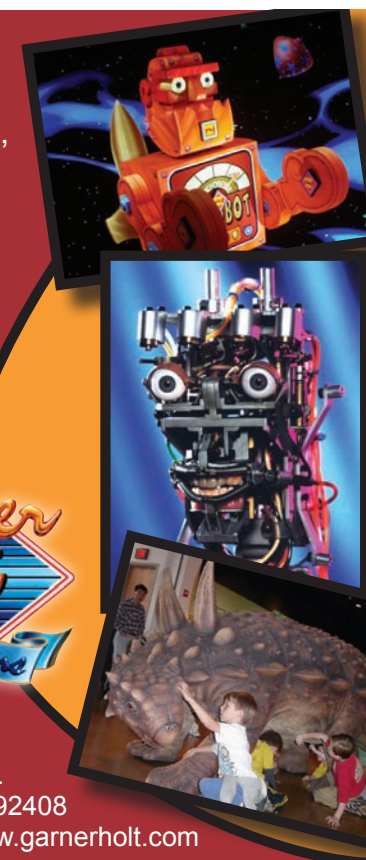
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Jeffrey Katzenberg shakes hands with Saeed al Muntafiq as their two companies arrange to build a DreamWorks theme park in the UAE.

Major International Amusement Park Chains:

A Guide to Who Owns What

by Tracy Kahaner



[Editor's Note: TEA believes the information in this article to have been well-researched and accurate at press time (late October 2008). We apologize for any inadvertent omissions or errors. We are indebted to the owner/operators who took the time to review this information for accuracy.]

Remember when figuring out who owned which park was easy? Those were the days of fewer operators and less complicated ownership trails. But with consolidations of individual parks and small chains, new players investing in parks, and an ever-growing international network of leisure destinations, these days you need a scorecard to keep track. And it keeps changing – by the time this appears in print, something will have changed, and over the 12 months this publication is circulated, more will change. For instance, Anheuser-Busch is scheduled to be bought by Belgian brewer InBev, and at this writing it was still unknown

what would happen to the parks division at Busch – which includes Aquatica, SeaWorld, and Busch Gardens. It appears that when the transaction goes through, the parks division will be spun off to a new owner, and there is much speculation on who that owner will be. Could it be Parques de Reunidos? Merlin?

In the course of acquisitions, new groups are created and others are broken up. Six Flags is an example. During 2006, Six Flags sold Wyandot Lake (Powell, Ohio) to the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, and in April 2007, PARC Management purchased several of Six Flags' domestic parks. A few years prior

to that, seven of Six Flags' European parks were acquired by a private equity firm and renamed Star Parks. All but one of these were later sold to Compagnie des Alpes, with Star Parks retaining only Movie Park in Germany (the former Warner Bros. Movie World). Six Flags Belgium became Walibi Belgium. Throw this together with the fact that Blackstone owns Merlin Entertainments Group and 50 percent of the Universal Parks in Orlando and the picture becomes more confusing.

TEA already compiles some excellent data on theme parks, in the form of the annual TEA/ERA Attractions Attendance Report, which is created in partnership with Economics Research Associates and published in spring. I drew upon the "Top 10 Amusement/Theme Park Chains

Worldwide" table from the 2007 edition of the TEA/ERA report as a starting point for putting together the following data to help illustrate who owns and or operates what as of today. The properties are first categorized by owner/operator chain or brand. Then, we ascend further up the ownership trail.

Several chains have branded smaller facilities in addition to their major parks. For the most part, these have been included in order to provide a complete list of attractions owned and/or managed. Dinner theaters such as Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede and Village Roadshow's Australia Outback Spectacular, along with attractions such as Hershend's Ride the Ducks and PARC Management's five NASCAR SpeedParks have been omitted.



Tracy Kahaner (kahanerR@aol.com) of Kahaner Research has been providing market and economic research services to developers, operators and consultants in the leisure time industry for more than 15 years, first with Harrison Price Company and later on her own. Types of projects studied include, but are not limited to, urban entertainment centers, movie theaters, theme parks, family entertainment centers, museums, aquariums, stadiums, and specialty attractions. Her expertise is in providing the information necessary for analyzing the market potential and competitive environment for leisure time projects. Kahaner is also the news editor for Blooloo.com.

(at left) Oakwood Theme Park in Pembrokeshire, UK;
(below) Planet Snoopy characters at Cedar Point.



1. Walt Disney Attractions

Blizzard Beach at Walt Disney World, Lake Buena Vista, Florida
 Disney's Animal Kingdom at Walt Disney World,
 Lake Buena Vista, Florida
 Disney's California Adventure, Anaheim, California
 Disney's Hollywood Studios at Walt Disney World,
 Lake Buena Vista, Florida
 Disneyland, Anaheim, California
 Disneyland Paris, Marne-La-Vallee, France
 Disneyland Park, Hong Kong, SAR, China
 Epcot at Walt Disney World, Lake Buena Vista, Florida
 Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World, Lake Buena Vista, Florida
 Tokyo Disneyland, Tokyo, Japan
 Tokyo Disney Sea, Tokyo, Japan
 Typhoon Lagoon at Walt Disney World, Lake Buena Vista, Florida
 Walt Disney Studios Park, Marne-La-Vallee, France

2. Merlin Entertainments Group

Alton Towers, UK
 Chessington World of Adventures & Zoo, UK
 The Dungeons, London, York, Edinburgh, Amsterdam and Hamburg
 Earth Explorer, Belgium
 Gardaland, Italy
 Heide Park, Germany
 Legoland theme park, Billund, Denmark; Windsor, UK; Gunzburg,
 Germany; California, USA
 Legoland Discovery Centers, Berlin; Duisberg, Germany; Chicago
 London Aquarium²
 London Eye, London
 Madam Tussauds, London, New York, Amsterdam, Las Vegas,
 Shanghai, Hong Kong, Washington DC, Berlin
 Sea Life³
 Thorpe Park, UK
 Warwick Castle

¹Acquisition of the LEGOLAND Parks occurred in 2005, Gardaland in 2006 and Tussauds Group in 2007.

²London Aquarium was purchased as of May 2008.

³There are 26 Sea Life attractions and 3 Marine Sanctuaries.

3. Universal Parks And Resorts

Islands of Adventure, Orlando, Florida
 Universal Studios Florida, Orlando, Florida.
 Universal Studios Hollywood, Universal City, California
 Universal Studio Japan, Osaka
 Wet 'N Wild, Orlando, Florida

4. Six Flags Inc.

Six Flags America, Largo, Maryland
 Six Flags Discovery Kingdom, Vallejo, California
 Six Flags Fiesta Texas, San Antonio, Texas
 Six Flags Great Adventure, Jackson New Jersey
 Six Flags Great America, Gurnee, Illinois
 Six Flags Hurricane Harbor, Arlington, Texas
 Six Flags Hurricane Harbor, Jackson, New Jersey
 Six Flags Hurricane Harbor, Valencia, California
 Six Flags Kentucky Kingdom, Louisville, Kentucky
 Six Flags Magic Mountain, Valencia, California
 Six Flags Mexico, Mexico City, Mexico
 Six Flags New England, Agawam, Massachusetts
 Six Flags New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana
 Six Flags Over Georgia, Austell, Georgia
 Six Flags Over Texas, Arlington, Texas
 Six Flags St. Louis, Eureka, Missouri
 Six Flags White Water Atlanta, Marietta, Georgia
 Six Flags Wild Safari Animal Park, Jackson, New Jersey
 La Ronde, Montreal, Canada
 The Great Escape, Lake George, New York

5. Busch Entertainment

Adventure Island, Tampa, Florida
 Aquatica, Orlando, Florida
 Busch Gardens Tampa, Tampa, Florida⁴
 Busch Gardens Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Virginia²
 Discovery Cove, Orlando, Florida
 SeaWorld Florida, Orlando, Florida.
 SeaWorld Texas, San Antonio, Texas
 SeaWorld California, San Diego, Calif.
 Sesame Place, Langhorne, Pennsylvania
 Water Country USA, Williamsburg, Virginia

⁴Park no longer known as Busch Gardens Africa.

⁵Park no longer known as Busch Gardens Europe.

6. Cedar Fair⁶

California's Great America, Santa Clara, California
 Canada's Wonderland, Toronto, Canada
 Carowinds, Charlotte, North Carolina
 Cedar Point, Sandusky, Ohio
 Dorney Park & Wildwater Kingdom, Allentown, Pennsylvania
 Geauga Lake's Wildwater Kingdom, Cleveland, Ohio
 Gilroy Gardens Theme Park, Gilroy, California
 Kings Dominion, Richmond, Virginia
 Kings Island near Cincinnati, Ohio

⁶Up until September 2008, this Partnership owned and operated Star Trek: The Experience in Las Vegas. The Partnership also operates Gilroy Gardens Family Theme Park in Gilroy, California under a management contract through February 2009. In May 2006, Cedar Fair acquired five Paramount Parks — Canada's Wonderland, Kings Island, King's Dominion, Carowinds, and California Great America.

7. Parques Reunidos⁷

Aqualud Waterpark, Le Touquet, France
 Aquarium of the Lakes Lakeside, England
 Aquopolis Waterpark (Costa Daurad, Cullera, San Fernando de Heares,
 Sevilla, Cartaya, Trre vieja, Villanueva de la Canada)
 Aquasplash Marineland, Antibes, France
 Big Kahuna's, Destin, Fla.
 Blackpool Zoo, Lancashire, UK
 Boomers! Family Entertainment Centers
 (California: El Cajon, Fountain Valley, Fresno, Irvine, Livermore,
 Modesto, Palm Springs, San Diego, Santa Maria, Upland, Vista;
 Florida: Boca Raton, Dania Beach; and New York: Medford.)
 Bo Sommarland Waterpark, Norway
 Bobbejaanland amusement park, Lichtaart, Belgium
 Bonbonland, Denmark
 Bournemouth Oceanarium, Bournemouth
 Delfinaria Costa Daurada, Costa Daurada
 Idlewild and Soak Zone East Ligonier, PA
 Kennywood amusement park, West Mifflin, PA
 L'Oceanografic, Valencia, Spain
 Lake Compounce, Bristol, CT
 Malibu Grand Prix Family Entertainment Center (Redwood City, Calif;
 Norcross, Georgia and San Antonio, TX)
 Mar del Plata Aquarium, Argentina
 Marineland, Antibes, France
 Mirabilandia theme park, Ravenna, Italy
 Mountain Creek Waterpark, Vernon Township, NJ
 Mountasia Family Entertainment Center
 (Marietta, Georgia and Dallas, TX)
 Parque de Atracciones of Madrid amusement park, Madrid, Spain
 Parque Warner Madrid, Spain
 Raging Waters, San Dimas, Calif.
 Raging Waters, San Jose, Calif.
 Sandcastle Waterpark, West Homestead, Penn.
 Silver Springs Nature Theme Park, Silver Springs, Fla
 Sea Life Park Hawaii, Oahu
 SpeedZone (Industry, Calif and Dallas, Tx)
 Splish Splash Waterpark, Riverhead, NY
 Story Land, Bartlett, NH
 Selwo Aventura, Costa del Sol, Spain
 Selwo Marina, Costa del Sol, Spain
 TusenFryd Amusement Park, Vinterbro, Norway
 Water Country, Portsmouth, NH
 Wet 'n Wild Emerald Pointe, Greensboro, NC
 Wild Waters, Ocala, Fla.
 Zoo Aquarium of Madrid, Spain

⁷During 2007, Parques Reunidos purchased Palace Entertainment from MidOcean Partners. At this time Palace Entertainment owned some 39 waterparks, family entertainment centers and theme parks. Palace's parks included Castle Park and Silver Springs. Waterparks included Big Kahuna's, Mountain Creek, Raging Waters Sacramento, Raging Waters San Dimas, Raging Waters San Jose, Splish Splash, Water Country, Wet n Wild and Wild Waters.

⁸This Hawaiian park was purchased on April 23, 2008

8. Compagnie Des Alpes⁹

Aqualibi, Wavre, Belgium
 Aquapark, Switzerland
 Aquarium du val-de-loire, France
 Avonturenpark Hellendoorn, Netherlands
 Bagatelle, Merlimont, France
 Bellewaerde Park, Belgium
 Bioscope, France
 Dolpinarium, Netherlands
 Fort Fun Abenteuerland
 France Miniature, France
 Grand Aquarium, France
 Grevin, Paris, France
 La Mer de Sable, France
 Mini-Chateaux, Ambrose, France
 Parc Asterix, Plailly, France
 Planete Sauvage safari adventure, Port Saint-Pere, France
 Pleasurewood Hills, Suffolk- Angleterre
 Walibi Aquitaine, Rocqufort, France
 Walibi Belgium, Belgium
 Walibi Rhone-Alpes, Les Avenieres, France
 Walibi World, Netherlands

⁹In June 2002, Compagnie des Alpes acquired Grévin & Cie. Between 2003 and 2006, another five parks were acquired and then in May 2006, Compagnie des Alpes acquired five new leisure parks in Europe including four operated under the Walibi name.

9. Hershend Family Entertainment

Adventure Aquarium, Camden, NJ
 Celebration City, Branson, Mo.
 Dollywood, Pigeon Forge, TN
 Dollywood's Splash Country, Pigeon Forge, TN
 Newport Aquarium, Newport, KY
 Silver Dollar City, Branson, MO
 Stone Mountain Park, Atlanta, GA
 White Water Waterpark, Branson, Mo
 Wild Adventures Theme Park, Valdosta, GA



The following three chains have been included in this scorecard due to the fact that these names often appear in the trades. It should be noted, that the inclusion of these attractions, has nothing to do with the ERA/TEA Top 10 Chain listing.

Aspro Ocio Group

- Alpamare Zurich, Switzerland
- Aqualand Algarve, Portugal
- Aqualand Bahía de Cádiz, Spain
- Aqualand Bassin d’Arcachon, France
- Aqualand Fréjus, France
- Aqualand St. Cyprien, France
- Aqualand Port Leucate, France
- Aqualand St. Cyr sur Mer, France
- Aqualand St. Cap D’Agde, France
- Aqualand Ste. Maxime, France
- Aqualand Torremolinos, Spain
- Aqualeón, Spain
- Aqualand Magaluf, Spain
- Aqualand Costa Adeje, Spain
- Aqualand Maspalomas, Spain
- Aqualand El Arenal, Spain
- Aquarium Du Grand Lyon, France
- Blue Planet Aquarium, Cheshire, UK
- Blue Reef Aquarium, Portsmouth, Tynemouth, Newquay, Hastings, UK
- Boudewijn Seapark, Brugges, Belgium
- Captain Jako, France
- Deep Sea World, Fife, UK
- Deltapark Neeltje Jans, Vrouwenpolder, Netherlands^{10 11}
- Marineland Catalunya, Spain
- Marineland Mallorca, Spain
- L’Aquàrium de Barcelona
- Oakwood Theme Park, Pembrokeshire, UK¹²
- Palmitos Park, Maspalomas, Spain
- Puuhamaa, Tervakoski, Finland
- Jungle Park, Tenerife, Spain
- Serena, Espoo, Finland
- Smugglers Adventure, Hastings, UK
- Tropiclandia, Vaasa, Finland
- Visulahti, Mikkeli, Finland
- Wasalandia, Vaasa, Finland
- Western Park, Mallorca, Spain

¹⁰Neeltje Jans was acquired In August, 2008
¹¹Blue Reef Leisure Co. was purchased during April, 2008
¹²Oakwood was acquired by Aspro in March, 2008

PARC Management / CNL Lifestyle Properties¹³

- Darien Lake, Buffalo, NY
- Elitch Gardens, Denver, CO
- Frontier City, Oklahoma City, OK
- Magic Springs & Crystal Falls, Hot Springs, AR
- Myrtle Waves Water Park, SC¹⁴
- Splashtown, Houston, TX
- Waterworld USA, Concord, CA
- White Water Bay, Oklahoma City, OK
- Wild Waves and Enchanted Village, Seattle, WA.

¹³Parks purchased from Six Flags in April 2007.
¹⁴This park was purchased, along with all five NASCAR SpeedParks in North America from Burroughs & Chapin Company, Inc.

Village Roadshow¹⁵

- Aussie World¹⁶
- Hawaii Waters Adventure Park, Oahu¹⁷
- Phoenix Waterworld Safari water park¹⁸
- Seaworld, Gold Coast, Au
- Sydney Aquarium, Au
- Sydney Wildlife World, Au
- Sydney Tower – Oztrek, Au
- Sydney Skywalk, Au
- Oceanworld Manly, Au
- Sharkdive Extreme, Au
- Wet’n Wild Water World, Gold Coast, Au
- Warner Bros. Movie World, Gold Coast, Au

¹⁵Village Roadshow acquired Sydney Attractions during the later part of 2007.
¹⁶On May 20, 2008, Village Roadshow announced that it had entered into a conditional agreement to acquire “Aussie World” on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland and their plan for a Wet’n’Wild Water Park on the property.
¹⁷Village Roadshow acquired Hawaii water park during March 2008.
¹⁸On July 9. 2008, Village Roadshow announced that it has (through its US subsidiary Harvest Family Entertainment –Arizona LLC) secured the long-term management rights for the Phoenix Waterworld Safari water park.

Chain Ownership

Walt Disney Attractions

The US parks are owned and operated by Walt Disney Parks and Resorts division of The Walt Disney Company. The Company has a 51 percent effective ownership interest in the operations of Euro Disney and a 43 percent ownership interest in the operations of Hong Kong Disneyland. The Government of the Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region) is the majority shareholder of the Hong Kong park. Tokyo Disneyland is owned and operated by an unrelated Japanese corporation, the Oriental Land Co., Ltd. of Japan. The Walt Disney Company licenses the operation but has no equity in the two parks.

Merlin Entertainments Group

Since 2005, the private equity company Blackstone Group has owned the majority of Merlin Entertainments Group. Additional owners include: Dubai International Capital, LEGO Holdings A/S, and Management.

Universal Parks and Resorts

NBC Universal is 80 percent owned by General Electric and 20 percent owned by Vivendi. NBC Universal wholly owns Universal Studios Hollywood. The Universal Orlando Resort has two owners, each with a 50 percent interest -- Universal City Property Management and Blackstone Group. USJ Co. operates the theme park in Japan, (Universal Studios Japan™) under a license from NBC Universal. Since, March 2007, when USJ went through an IPO, NBC Universal has had no equity in this park.

Six Flags Inc.

Six Flags, Inc. owns and operates most of their theme, amusement, and water parks. The Six Flags Over Georgia park and Six Flags Over Texas park, however, are considered (“Partnership Parks”) and in these cases Six Flags owns approximately 25 percent and 38 percent, respectively. The Partnerships own the balance of each. In addition, Six Flags New Orleans (currently closed, due to Hurricane Katrina) is leased from the City with an option to buy, while the Six Flags Discovery Kingdom park, formerly owned by the City of Vallejo, was purchased outright by Six Flags in 2007.

Busch Entertainment

Busch Entertainment Corporation is a wholly owned subsidiary of Anheuser-Busch Companies, Inc. InBev has tendered for Anheuser-Bush and the outcome is yet to be finalized.

Cedar Fair

Owned by Cedar Fair Entertainment Company.

Parques Reunidos

Parques Reunidos has Candover, a private equity house, as its majority shareholder.

Compagnie Des Alpes

Parent company of the Group is Compagnie des Alpes SA.

Hershend Family Entertainment

Hershend Family Entertainment Corporation (HFE) owns and operates or is partner in all of their parks. HFE is an operating partner with Dolly Parton in the Dollywood Company, which owns the Dollywood theme park and Dollywood’s Splash Country water park in Tennessee. In Georgia, HFE operates Atlanta’s Stone Mountain Park under contract with the State of Georgia

Aspro Ocio Group

The Spanish Group ASPRO OCIO S.A

PARC Management / CNL Lifestyle Properties (earlier known as CNL Income Properties), Jacksonville FL

In 2007, PARC Management purchased a group of parks from Six Flags, Inc. The underlying property was sold to a real-estate investment firm, CNL Income Properties (currently known as CNL Lifestyle Properties) and leased back to PARC, who now operates the parks under a long-term agreement. In addition to the Six Flags parks, PARC later purchased Magic Springs and Crystal Falls in Hot Spring, Arkansas and Myrtle Waves Water Park in South Carolina.

Village Roadshow

Village Roadshow, Ltd. 🇦🇺

Beijing's Greatest Show on Earth

by Sarah Rushton-Read



The opening ceremony of the 29th Olympiad in Beijing was perhaps the most extraordinary example of visual magic the world has ever seen. It was seven years in the planning, with full dress rehearsals for many of the complex scenes taking place well over a year ago. At 8pm on 08/08/08 - a lucky number in Chinese culture — this devotion to perfection paid off. Whatever the politics, in performance, in sport, and behind the scenes, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games was, indisputably, the greatest show on earth.

Centered around the theme of “Civilization and Harmony,” the Opening Ceremony featured costumes, sets, and overall production effects realized by the producer and artistic director Zhang Yimou, best known as the director of such films as *Raise the Red Lantern* and *House of Flying Daggers*. Yimou’s aim: to convey

the conception of harmony from an international perspective.

Leading-edge projection, lighting, and mobile sculpture technologies, along with an entertainment production stage and huge globe designed by Mark Fisher, were integral parts of the technical production. These, along with extravagant firework displays, kept the 95,000-strong live audience - including more than 80 heads of state, innumerable international celebrities, and other VIPs - absolutely mesmerized.

Assisting Zhang Yimou were his deputy artistic directors: Chen Weiya, who was also artistic director for the Closing Ceremony, and Zhang Jigang, also artistic director for the Paralympic Ceremonies, which followed the Olympics. The director of the technology group, responsible for all the stage machinery, stadium rigging,

and installation of the cauldron (for the lighting of the Olympic flame) was Yu Jianping, a senior executive at the Beijing Special Equipment Design Institute (BSEDI), while the production director of the opening ceremony, responsible for the performers and stage management, was Lu Jiankang.

The Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) also invited three foreign experts to act as consultants to the production: Steven Spielberg (who resigned in February 2008); Yves Pepin, head of ECA2, the French producer of multimedia spectacles; and Ric Birch, producer of the 2000 Opening Ceremonies in Sydney. Zhang Yimou and Chen Weiya also invited Mark Fisher to work alongside them on the technical design and realization of the show. Around the same time, Yimou asked the Eiko Ishioka, the

Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremonies. Photos courtesy Martin Professional.



costume designer, and Andree Verleger, the video artist, to join the team. In the months leading up to the event, technical specialists, designers, and engineers came from all over the world to prepare, install, operate, and program some of the most technically advanced entertainment systems available in the world today.

From the start, the stadium (the so-called “Bird’s Nest”) was painted with light, color, movement, and imagery. The event morphed from epic scenes of mass choreography to intimate, emotional moments of individual performers. It opened with 2,008 fou drummers - the fou is an ancient Chinese percussion instrument made of pottery or bronzeware - set out in a vast grid, beating countdown to 8pm. Based on an idea by Verleger, each drum, framed with an LED light, lit up when beaten. This effect transformed the stadium floor into

a vast, pixelated display screen, parading numerous fade-in and scrolling effects of huge Arabic and Chinese numerals.

The countdown ended with the now-controversial 29 pyro footsteps that appeared to march down Beijing city’s central axis, culminating at the National Stadium and signifying the arrival of XXIX Olympiad. The controversy centered on the decision to use CGI fireworks images as if they were live. Fisher explains: “The creative team had originally planned to film the footprints live from a helicopter, but were advised that it was impossible to do this safely or reliably. Instead, they made an HD video animation as it might have appeared in their “dream” chopper shot and then ran that inside the stadium and on international broadcast as the pyrotechnics were fired.”

A meteor shower of fireworks

fell into the Bird’s Nest, echoed by an ethereal starfield of LEDs embedded into the whole of the stadium floor; the sequence concluded with the appearance of the Olympic ring logo at the center of the field. Twenty fairies - actually, representations of Buddhist spiritual beings - clad in LEDs, descended from the roof, appearing to magically peel the rings from the LED floor and lift them into the air. Each ring, 10m (33’) in diameter, was comprised of an incredible 45,000 battery-powered white LEDs woven into a black net. This marked the beginning of the “Splendid Civilization” sequence - a visual celebration of 5,000 years of Chinese cultural achievement.

In the center of the field, a huge, Chinese-style scroll, 147m x 22m (482’ x 72’), became the focus of the action. “Yimou developed the idea of a giant scroll on the floor of the stadium that

China Re-Invents the Mega-Event by Gordon Linden



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could be opened and closed just like a real scroll," says Fisher. "In a natural development of this idea, the surface became an LED screen across which images could flow like a river of time." As the screen unrolled, at its center was an 11m x 20m (36' x 65.5') sheet of paper on which 15 dancers drew the outline of a simple landscape with paint-soaked mittens. Throughout, a mesmerizing river of electronic images was displayed beneath. This sequence paid tribute to Chinese ink and wash art.

In the second segment of the show, the huge LED scrolls unrolled further, while performers in LED-lit costumes converged to form the shape of a dove, then broke away to form an even more impressive human sculpture of the Bird's

Nest as, fittingly, the stadium filled with the sound of singing birds. At the same time, brightly colored images were projected onto the 600m (1,968.5') long screen around the stadium's upper rim.

Five thousand LEDs in the stadium floor, along with the huge LED screen, turned into a single starfield. Three "astronauts" flew from the roof, the floor cracked open and a blinding shaft of light blasted from the hole. There then emerged a huge globe, on top of which Sarah Brightman and the Chinese singer Liu Huan sang, as 58 acrobats stood with arms outstretched on its nine latitudinal rings.

Fisher, who was responsible for the design of this impressive set piece,

says: "Ever since the first pictures of our green and blue planet hanging in the infinite void of space were brought back to earth by the Apollo astronauts in 1967, the globe has been a powerful symbol for the unity of mankind. The creative team needed to find a way of uniting the idea of the globe (one world) with an image of aspiration (one dream). My idea for the globe included proposals for athletic artistic performance that would engage acrobats with the sphere and push them to their limits."

The performance began with the globe internally lit as the music reached its climax, with projections of a slowly revolving Earth. Images then morphed into those of athletes, swimmers and silk dancers, vaulters and runners. A total of 2,008 performers moved onto the stage and, as Brightman and Huan sang the final verse, the lighting brightened, the acrobats disappeared inside the globe, and each performer opened up an umbrella to reveal 2,008 smiling faces. At the same time, images of thousands more smiling faces were projected onto the rim screen of the stadium as fireworks exploded overhead. You couldn't help but smile.

As quickly as it appeared, the sphere vanished into the floor. Two hundred and five national teams paraded through the stadium, followed by the final torch bearer, Li Ning, a Chinese Olympic gold medalist. He appeared to run around the rim screen, high above the audience, as images of China unscrolled behind him. Flown from a winch car on a perimeter track mounted behind the fascia, he lit the taper to ultimately ignite the Olympic flame. ★

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To fully appreciate Beijing's achievements, we need to look back at the experience of prior Games. After the Montreal Olympics of 1976, which were a major financial disaster, there were few takers to host future Games. Moscow was awarded the 1980 Summer Olympics in competition against only one other city - Los Angeles - which subsequently hosted the 1984 Games after facing no competition for that year.

The LA Games were a watershed event in the history of the Olympics. Perhaps the most enduring legacy was the transformation of what had been basically a spectator event, attended by those living in the host city and treated mainly as news by international news organizations, into a major international media event. Not only did this transformation create a much larger domestic and international audience for the Games, it radically altered the income structure of the Olympics - from an event dependent on spectator ticket sales to one receiving millions

of dollars in revenues for international broadcast rights.

Architect John Jerde and designers Debra Sussman and John Preja were enlisted to create "The Look of the Games," which consisted of a variety of temporary banners and structures decorated with a TV-friendly palette of colors and symbols; these elements provided a unifying visual environment that substantially enhanced the appearance of facilities ranging in age from a few years to decades old.

Fast-forward to Beijing, which added some things to the mix. One was spectacular architecture. The Bird's Nest, designed by a team led by Swiss architects Herzog & De Meuron with Arup engineers, and the Water Cube, designed by Australian architects PTW and Arup engineers command attention, curiosity, and admiration. Another standout was the human tide of performers in the ceremonies. China was able to tap a vast, well-organized and funded inventory of performers to achieve its historically huge cast.

But there are spectacles and spectacles. When tiny Lillehammer, Norway, host of the Winter Olympics in 1994, faced a severe budget crunch and a looming deadline to finalize plans for an elaborate Opening Ceremony, organizers scrapped the standard script for a relatively inexpensive, yet stunning ceremony held at the base of a ski jump rather than in a large stadium. This ceremony and the intimacy that it evoked caught the public's imagination and the Games went on to a very successful conclusion. In hosting what is becoming the world's most expensive event, the need to be creative on a budget can inspire great results.

China will shortly have another chance to show the world what it can do when Shanghai hosts Expo 2010, a six-month event sanctioned by the International Bureau of Expositions (BIE). Organizers of Expo 2010 forecast 70 million visits, which would make it the most attended world's fair in history. ★

