

The Architects

ENTASIS ARCHITECTURE



Perspective Rendering by Gordon Grice

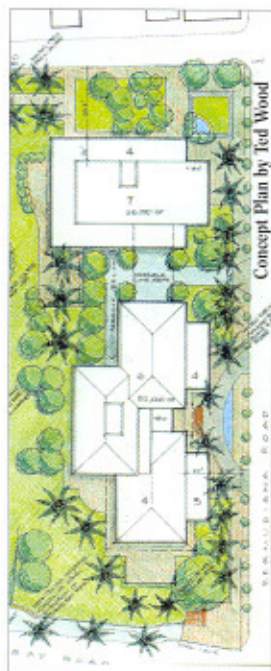
Entasis, a Bermudian architectural firm, designed XL House.

If the physical reality of XL House can be said to reflect any one individual's idea of how best to combine the special character of the site with the needs of XL Capital Ltd, it would be that of Entasis director Ted Wood who would be the first to admit that a building the size of XL House is constructed from the dreams, visions, ideas and skills of dozens of people.

XL first contacted Entasis in October 1996. Mr. Wood and his colleagues listened to the ideas XL had for the potential use of half the space on the site formerly occupied by The Bermudiana hotel, and drafted some very preliminary sketches. Designs change, but one of the most striking features of XL House is the close similarity between the architect's original drawings, four and a half years ago, and the finished product.

Due process

In relatively short order, the board of XL decided to proceed on the basis of those drawings. *The Bermudiana Site Rehabilitation Act 1997*, the legislation that enabled XL and another international company to purchase the land, was enacted into law. Planning permission in principle was sought, embodying the Entasis drawings, and granted. XL then committed to building XL House. The broad



approval from the Planning Department, which was granted, would later be augmented by more specific approvals, as the project was refined.

Entasis, interior designer Joan Murdoch and project managers Somers Management formed the core team that would design and build XL House. Mr. Wood assembled the consultant team, many of whose stories are told in the following pages.

The work of Entasis then unfolded in three distinct stages: the detailed design phase, the contractual documentation phase, and the contract administration phase.

Design

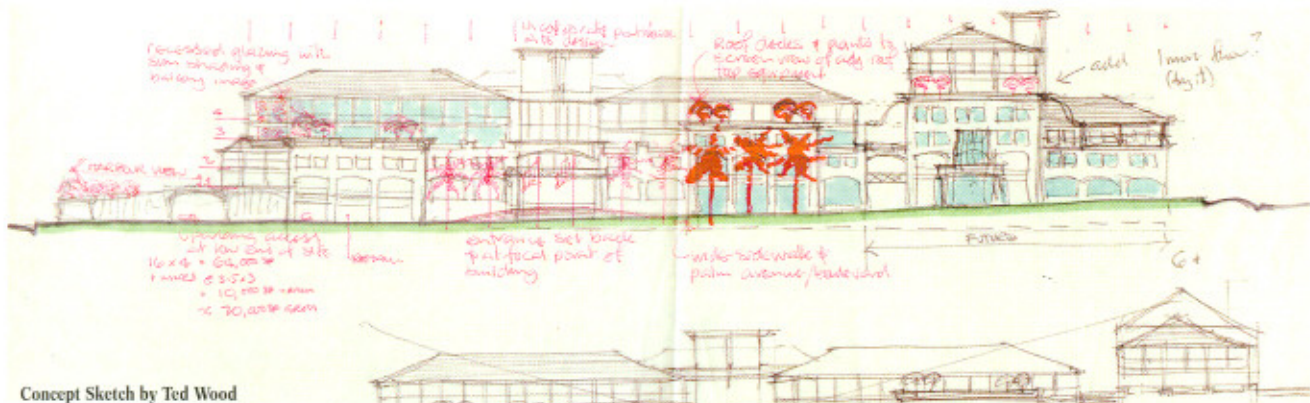
A series of meetings between executives of XL and all the key players helped define XL's needs. Entasis began work on the detailed drawings that would define the functionality of XL House and lead to the more detailed application for planning approval necessary to allow building to begin.

"XL was very receptive to our ideas," says Mr. Wood. "There was a feeling that, while the building should accommodate XL's functional requirements, it must reflect XL's strength and make a statement. The form developed from the creation of high-quality interior spaces and the notion of a building set in the landscape. Enveloping the building in landscaping, reflecting pools and the whales' tails water feature gives the building a special public presence.

All along, Mr. Wood envisioned "a white building with palm trees", to reflect Bermuda's island location. "The fun part was to find a style that broke new ground, but was respectful of the building's environment," he says.

One challenge Entasis faced was the incorporation of raised floors and deep beams. "That makes the height from floor to floor 13 feet 4 inches, higher than normal in Bermuda," Mr. Wood explains. "That, in turn, affects all the proportions of the building."

A decision was made to place the entrance to XL House on Bermudiana Road, rather than Pitts Bay Road, drawings were went



Concept Sketch by Ted Wood

completed and the plans for "a modern building in a style compatible with the existing streetscape" including a second building that no one expected to build any time soon went to the Planning Department.

Documentation

It would be tempting to call XL's new headquarters "the house that Brian built". XL's President and Chief Executive Officer is Brian O'Hara; its Chief Financial Officer at the planning stage was Brian Walford; and the Bermuda Government's Director of Planning at the time was Brian Rowlinson.

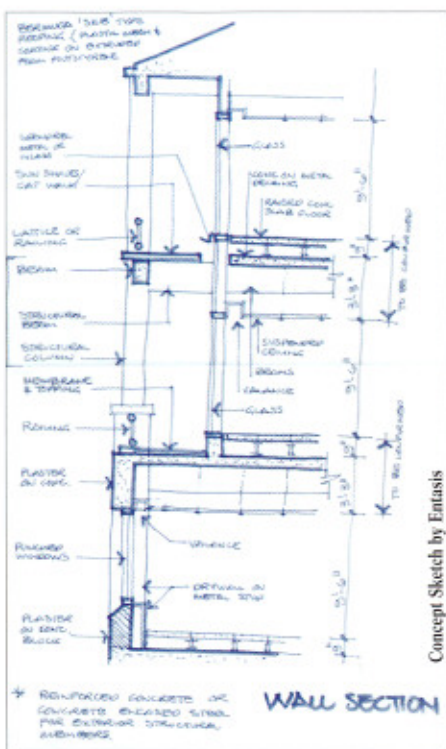
Mr. Rowlinson and his staff were very enthusiastic about the project and approved the planning application. The original permit number was B828-97, although a series of others was granted as the building proceeded and Entasis set to work on the detailed documentation from which general contractor D&J Construction and the many construction crews would operate.

Working with the structural, mechanical and electrical engineers, and other specialist consultants, Mr. Wood and his colleague David Thompson, together with their team, set to laying out the huge quantity of blueprints and specifications XL House required. The decisions made at this stage would result in the reality of XL House today.

Contract administration

To anyone but an architect, this final stage, the longest, would be known as the construction of XL House.

"During this period, theory becomes practice, as the builders put



Concept Sketch by Entasis

flesh and bones - or in this case, concrete and steel onto what until now has only really been ideas, albeit very detailed ideas," Mr. Thompson explains.

No building exactly follows its original blueprints. A thousand changes, most minor, occur as the building rises from below the ground and then takes shape above it. "XL House did not present any major changes as it was being constructed," Mr. Thompson recalls, "although every change requires consequential changes all along the line. For the architect, the contract administration stage is the acid test of how well you've designed the building."

Mr. Wood, Mr. Thompson, and their colleague Scott Armstrong, processed the extensive paperwork required to administer the many individual contracts for the project and to enable the individual contractors to work as a team. "Construction people are strong-minded individuals with ideas of their own, and the courage to tell you what they think," Mr. Wood says. "Sometimes, that can lead to sharp differences of opinion. But on XL House, everyone worked together for the common good, and the result is highly rewarding."

Ancient Greece to Bermudiana Road

Entasis is a Greek word meaning "a slight convexity given to a column or tower so as to correct an optical illusion". The optical illusion at XL House, courtesy of Entasis Architecture, is that a building of nearly half a million square feet fits so comfortably into the community in which it sits.

Presentation Drawing by Entasis & Landplan

