



Atkins won an international competition to design the three new TEDA towers in Tianjin, China.

► internationally in 1991, following an incentive from the Dutch government to bridge communities between the Netherlands and Hungary. Now, all staff are recruited on the basis that they are willing and able to rotate between offices.

“It wasn’t a money-making opportunity for us or a corporate client that made us go. We worked out there because we were interested in improving cultural relations,” said van Eggerat, who has a personal presence in all international offices by travelling to each country every two weeks. This is a system that he finds exhilarating but also necessary to maintain a consistent quality.

Since van Eggerat started working internationally, the quality of construction has increased dramatically: “To be blunt, it was impossible to find someone to paint a window 15 years ago. But now Hungarians and Czechs

adhere to international construction standards. The improvement is not about just a level of professionalism, it’s also about the way that architecture is appreciated in these countries.”

But if quality isn’t a problem, sustainable design is. Sustainability is only just beginning to be appreciated in some parts of the world, especially the Middle East, where it appears to be some way off. This bothers some architects. Steve Howe works in Dubai for a major master-planning office and has concerns about the way many of the projects around him are tendered. “A lot of the buildings are just there to make a fast buck. The pace doesn’t allow you to do the best job you can. People simply do not have time to think or care about sustainable design. There isn’t even a public transport system. It’s something that really does concern me.”

Howe went out to Dubai through Archi- ►

The young architect

Sebastian Kepner, from Munich, works for Node Office in Hong Kong

I work in a small office of 14 people in downtown Hong Kong. I moved here in 2005 because of the poor economic conditions in

Germany. Many people think China is cheap money, but I’m paid pretty much the same as I would back at home. It’s around €15,000. You’re not as free here to go for cigarette and coffee breaks as you are in Germany, but you get used to the social differences.

The real difficulty I have had to adjust to is maintaining a quality of design from the first step to the finished product. Because construction is booming,



most of the construction workers are farmers and the contractors don’t train them properly. Last week I visited our site and all the edges, the details, how they put material together was so bad I simply couldn’t believe it. You have to explain exactly how to put the materials together, how to make the edges smooth — these are things they would do themselves in Germany.

The senior architect

Steve Lyon, from Bournemouth, works for Halcrow in Dubai

I used to run my own practice in Bournemouth, but moved out to Dubai after seeing how much construction work is going on and the obvious demand for architects. What would be a once-in-a-lifetime project in the UK comes up every week here.

Back home we would be delighted if we were commissioned to build a house and here we’re working on building entire cities, even islands. The money here is tax-free so I’m

earning 30-50% more than I would do at home.

The pace that things happen here and the rate buildings go up is remarkable. But I feel that the industry is losing out because of its speed. We’re going through a phase where the end result is most important and not enough is being done to conserve energy. I hope that when things slow down clients will be able to reflect and take more care.