


An aerial architectural rendering of Songdo City, showing a dense urban development with numerous skyscrapers, residential buildings, and green spaces. The city is situated along a river, with a large stadium and other public facilities visible. The rendering is in a warm, golden-brown color palette.

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GREEN BUILDING & DESIGN

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**SONGDO CITY**  
Korea's Green Gateway



An aerial architectural rendering of a modern city development. The image shows a dense cluster of skyscrapers and commercial buildings along a waterfront. A large, landscaped park area with winding paths and green spaces is visible in the upper left. A body of water with a few sailboats is on the right. The overall scene is a mix of urban architecture and natural landscape.

"The idea was to create  
an international hub that  
could be Korea's front  
door to the world."

—Tom Murcott, Gale International



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## Offices

**PRODUCTION** 53 W Jackson Blvd., Suite 315, Chicago, IL 60604

**SALES & RESEARCH** 28 E Jackson Blvd., Suite 300, Chicago, IL 60604

land to conservation but also wanted to build a house for her retirement. Thirty acres were conserved, and four house sites were created on eight acres with building envelopes and covenants that clustered the homes in the core so that they could not be seen from scenic corridors. The project was a turning point for us and the town in which it was located, because we drafted a new bylaw that made our narrow, unpaved, subdivision road possible.

The ECGA later hired ADI to create a headquarters for their operations. This was a real watershed project, as it was conceived to be completely green from reusing and salvaging structures through renewable energy. It is also a milestone in that we are pursuing LEED Gold certification—the first certification process for us to complete.

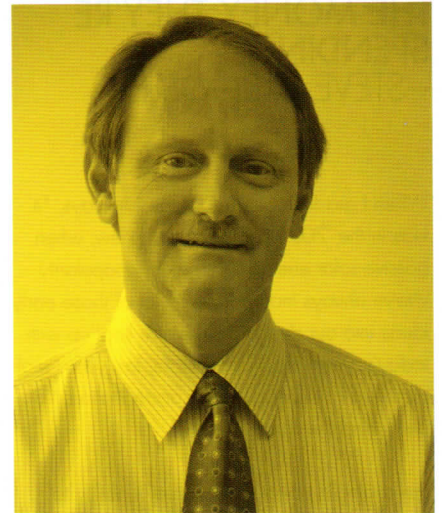
**What are your specific goals as a firm for the short-term and long-term?**

In the short-term, I want to develop a more effective marketing outreach to get beyond the obvious limitations of word of mouth. At this point, we are contracted on the design side mainly through attrition, and we are constrained from new hiring by our workload. It's a real catch-22; just a few more good projects in the pipeline, and we can hire, develop some critical mass, and get some momentum to pursue the type of work we enjoy the most. Solesqua, short-term, has provided good infill work for our crews. Long-term, I want to see the business develop into a completely separate entity that supports its own sales force and installation crews.

**What's one unique project you are currently working on?**

We are currently working on the Center for Agriculture and Sustainability for the Trustees of Reservations, a Massachusetts Conservation Organization. The project is a deep-energy retrofit of an antique farmhouse. The project is slated to be LEED Gold certified and net-zero. I think the biggest challenge we were facing was finding the balance between historic preservation and high-performance sustainability: restore windows or replace; a super energy-efficient shell versus period trim details; saving fabric when replacing it; not overlooking ADA accessibility requirements—it is more cost effective. —by Suchi Rudra Vasquez

## Steve Billingsley of Billingsley Architecture



Celebrating 20 years in business, founder testifies to the need and importance for constant education in an evolving market

Steve Billingsley recently installed a “new” green flooring material that he knows was actually quite old. “We have this one project that is in the middle of its LEED certification paperwork,” says Billingsley, founder and LEED AP for Billingsley Architecture. “We put linoleum flooring [known as Marmoleum] in from a lead manufacturer that’s basically made of linseed oil and paper. It’s something my grandmother would have had in her kitchen 50 years ago. [The material] went away, but it’s back now because it’s made out of renewable resources that everyone wants in their buildings.”

With Billingsley putting down a laminate that is a throwback to weekends at Grandma’s, how new, then, is “green”? Well, Billingsley Architecture was 20 years old in May. The company, which is based in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and licensed in 16 states, employs a total of six people, three of which, including Billingsley, are LEED APs. Billingsley Architecture has in effect grown up with the green movement.

**“WE’VE ALWAYS INCORPORATED A LOT OF THOSE EARLY [SUSTAINABILITY] IDEAS INTO OUR DESIGNS. BUT WE’VE KEPT UP WITH TODAY’S GREEN TOO.”**  
—STEVE BILLINGSLEY



**"MY INTENT IS ALWAYS TO DO EVERYTHING THAT WE CAN TO GIVE THE CLIENT THE BEST PRODUCT...FOR THE MONEY THEY'RE SPENDING."**  
—STEVE BILLINGSLEY

"When I graduated from college," he says, "it was in the '70s when green was new, when passive-solar energy was gaining popularity. We've always incorporated a lot of those early ideas into our designs. But we've kept up with today's green too. For example, last year I realized that if I didn't get LEED accreditation, I'd be behind the ball."

The example points to Billingsley's ability to grow, a skill that prepares him for new and innovative projects. For example, he recently incorporated a piece in a project that required him to educate himself on a totally new subject. "We're looking at adding vegetation to a rooftop," he says. "But in order to do that, we'll have to do more education, to learn the systems and products."

But Billingsley understands that learning—and then teaching—is all part of the game.

"I do educate clients about what's available," he notes. New products, better products, tax credits, and what qualifies for what—Billingsley is at times the liaison between the knowledge and the client. "We've got a foundation [in Chattanooga] that funds grants to property owners for sustainable projects," he adds. "So we help them try to navigate that. It expands our role to the client."

Billingsley's LEED-accreditation process, and the ongoing upkeep of the AP designation, is a learning process in itself.

"Having been out of college for a long time, taking a test at this point was unusual," he says. "It's a hard process, but it's a reasonable request. It's what you have to do—you have to grow with the business. I'm getting education

even as I'm working. With new stuff like the green roofs, you have to research it, learn it, maybe go somewhere and see what [a colleague] has done with it."

The extra work is paying off; Billingsley Architecture has thrived on word-of-mouth marketing efforts.

"Frankly, until recently, I didn't need advertising," he admits. "We were busy, and I grew the business at the pace that I wanted to. I like the size of the firm that I have now, and it's comfortable and manageable. Business fell off a little in the recession—we suffered like anybody else—but we're very busy right now."

He does advertise very generally, but the materials make sure to note the LEED APs on staff and that the firm is in the process of attaining LEED certification for a building under construction.

"The interest in sustainable building is about 25 percent of potential customers that we're talking to. Now, we don't get commitments out of 25 percent of those interested, as there is an offset in the cost," he notes. "Of course, the value is in the payback, in terms of dollars but also in sustainability and preservation of materials, among other things."

"My intent," Billingsley adds, "is always to do everything that we can to give the client the best product...for the money they're spending. We really work with the owners and clients to try to keep them happy. It's never a waste of time to help them get the most out of their project."

That attitude is why Billingsley Architecture has evolved with the market for 20 years and why it likely can look forward to a profitable 20 more. —by Allena R. Tapia



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## new york hospitality

With sustainability in its DNA, Omnibuild LLC is built on New York's hotels and restaurants, including the new Pizza by Cer Té, which is the city's first restaurant to achieve LEED Gold

by Allena R. Tapia

SLOW FOOD, LOCAL FOOD—THESE TRENDS AROUND IN New York City. But Pizza by Cer Té went one better, choosing to house its environmentally responsible fare in an equally green building, spending close to \$600,000 to pursue LEED Gold Certification. Omnibuild LLC, based in NYC, acted as the construction manager on the project, and LEED AP Bassam Tarazi, assembled the puzzle of teamwork and cooperation that pulled the pizzeria together in time for the mayor-attended grand opening in spring 2010.

"Gold certification is a hell of an accomplishment." Tarazi is frank. "On this particular project, we [were] the construction manager, but with our theoretical knowledge and having done the LEED consulting before, we were able to work with the engineer and architect. We were able to work as a team, and now it's the first LEED-certified restaurant in New York City."

But Tarazi and Omnibuild aren't complacent, even with this illustrious "first." In fact, when *gb&d* first contacted Tarazi for an interview, he and fellow Omnibuild execs were in Haiti, working on a combined farming/orphanage/school project.

"The reason [Omnibuild] got involved in Haiti is because [the client] wants to build a sustainable, new orphanage—they want to grow their own crops, they want to use solar energy, to be as self-sustaining as possible. We're trying to get involved and see how we can help," Tarazi explains. "It's a new project, just coming into fruition. We just assessed the site."

The work in Haiti seems to be a bit different from the type of project for which Omnibuild is more generally known—Omnibuild's website features photos of glossy, polished Manhattan properties, and the company focuses on the hospitality industry. But Tarazi, who is one of seven LEED APs and also functions as the company's carbon-reduction manager, says that building in the hospitality industry prepares the team for many different projects.

"Our bread and butter is the hospitality market—hotels and restaurants. But with the orphanage, we feel we're able to handle a job like that, because when you're working with hotels and restaurants, they're occupied 24 hours a day—you have a load all day long, there are people in and out, it's constantly occupied. We feel that if you can build a hotel, you can build anything."

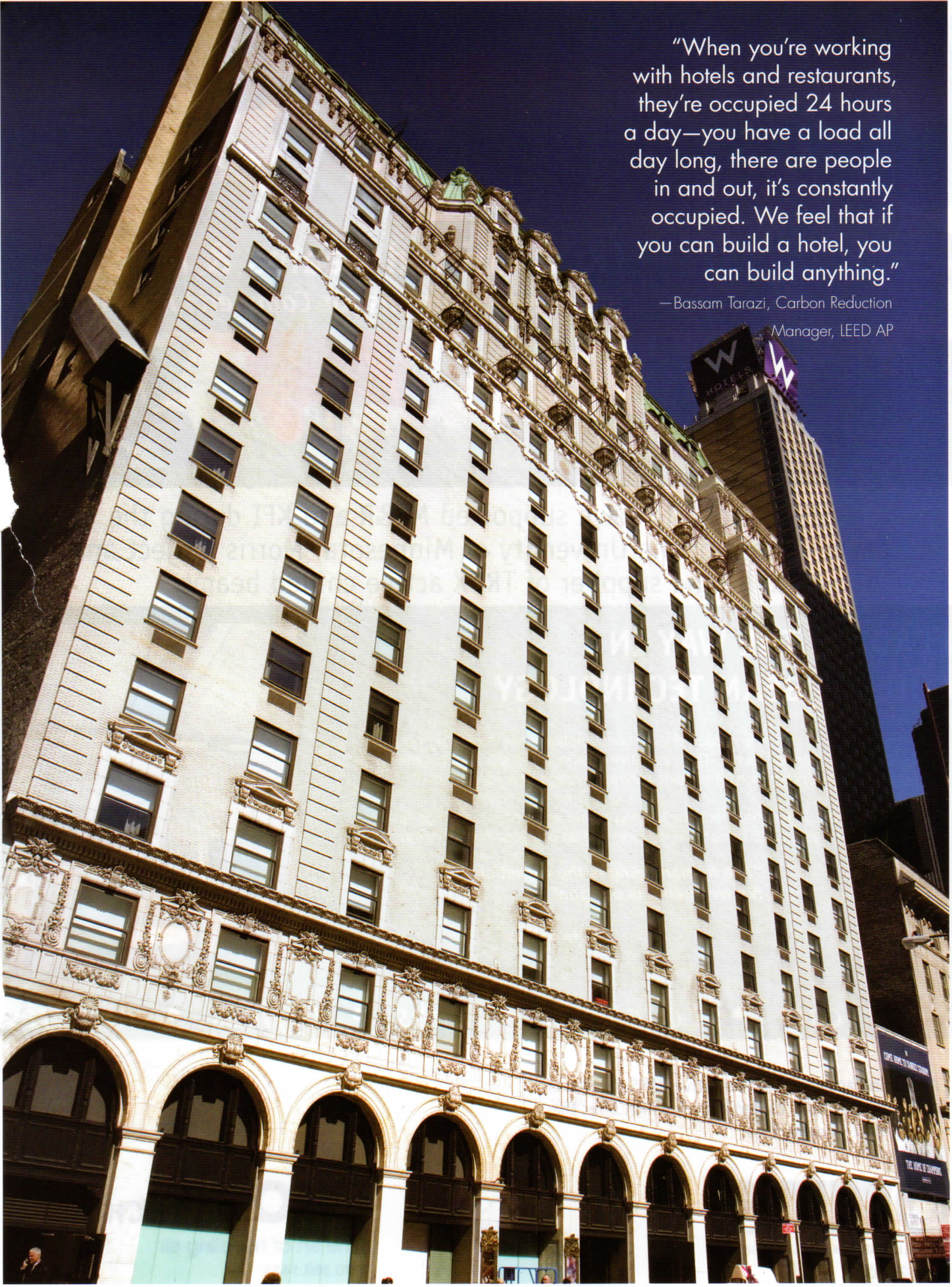
And they do. In fact, the men and women at Omnibuild managed to keep busy during recent hard economic times. "We didn't have to lay anybody off; even in the downturn in the market, we were able to sustain," Tarazi says. "Business is definitely increasing over the last six months. More clients are coming in and [Mayor] Bloomberg is pushing sustainability. We hired a new director of marketing and another marketing professional, so we have a dedicated marketing team. We are very proud of what we do, we think we've done a good job and word of mouth really helped us in the downturn economy, but we're staying aggressive. You have to keep putting your name out there."

The new hires will definitely have a solid framework of the company value system to fit into; Tarazi was clear about the direction and beliefs of Omnibuild. "Our culture is of 'let's build responsibly,'" he says, "even in our acronym, Organization and Management of New Innovative Building." And although a majority of their projects are still additional builds, they bring this responsibility to every project. "It's in our DNA, it's how we build," he says. "If there's an alternative that we find is more efficient or 'green,' we'll do something that we would hope to choose anyway, and we would bring it up to the owner."

"That's who and what we are as a team; that's what we're made of," Tarazi continues. "Integrity and accountability are very important here. If we have ways that we can improve ourselves, we want people to let us know, and since we're small, we're able to evolve and adapt in whatever the market ends up to be." **gb&d**

A MESSAGE FROM PRESTIGE PLUMBING & HEATING INC. Prestige Plumbing & Heating Inc. began its relationship with Omnibuild in late 2008. Since that time they have worked closely with Omnibuild's experienced project managers, architects, and engineers, providing plumbing and fire-suppression solutions at several NYC hotels including the Paramour Park Central, Double Tree Metropolitan, and Double Tree Times Square.





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—Bassam Tarazi, Carbon Reduction  
Manager, LEED AP