

## MULTI-HOUSING NEWS

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### U.S. Architecture Firm Expands in Middle East, India

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For the past two and a half years, Humphreys & Partners Architects L.P. has been working in the United Arab Emirates and last month opened its first office there, in Dubai. It's also operated an office in India, in the city of Chennai, since last year. This Dallas-based firm, which runs eight offices across the U.S., is doing work in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan as well. Its international projects include condominium, hotel and office developments.

While for years, conventional wisdom has said “buy land — they’re not making more of it,” that saying doesn’t actually hold true any more in the Middle East, where man-made islands are creating valuable new waterfront property. Humphreys will be working on one such project in Abu Dhabi.

To learn more about the firm’s overseas experiences, *MHN* Managing Editor Teresa O’Dea Hein recently spoke with CEO Mark Humphreys, who founded the company 17 years ago.

**MHN:** Please tell our readers a little more about this new island community that you’ll be helping to populate?

**Humphreys:** The Seahorse ecological island in Abu Dhabi will consist of a resort and spa, water cabins, undersea world oceanarium, ecological park and an electric railway.

**MHN:** Why have you expanded into overseas markets?

**Humphreys:** Since we started our firm, we’ve always done work in different parts of the world. Years ago, we worked in the Soviet Union through a Canadian partnership. By building a multinational company, we tend to be less tied to economic downturns in the U.S. It is for the economic betterment of all our employees. But at the same time, it does take a lot of time and money to establish an international practice.

**MHN:** How different is multifamily design in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)?

**Humphreys:** Arab clients typically want iconic buildings, with great views. Often the projects are bigger, with up to 10,000 units, versus about 250 units in a big multifamily building here in the U.S. There’s just never been construction on a scale like we’re seeing now in Dubai. And yet most of the building sites themselves are very small, often a half acre, so the density is incredible.



**MHN:** Overall, how is the market in the UAE and Pakistan different from that of the U.S.?

**Humphreys:** They've enjoyed explosive growth and are not constrained by the financially hesitant markets we have in the U.S.

**MHN:** Are there any differences from U.S. trends in the desired architectural designs/styles you're seeing in the Middle East and India?

**Humphreys:** In many ways, they are similar to the U.S.-- depending on if you've got a client who is an expatriate European or Indian or Pakistan. Often, as in European floor plans, the rooms are very closed off, separated from each other. And in general, we're not seeing as much planning for parking as will be needed.

**MHN:** Are there particular challenges to working in the UAE?

**Humphreys:** It does test you because in the U.S., we're programmed to do an efficient building and that's very low on their list of priorities. Americans and Europeans are planners and many people in the Gulf States don't really believe heavily in planning-- they believe that what will be, will be--so that's why they need Americans and Europeans.

By contrast, in India, people tend to be much more pragmatic and very business-oriented. As in the U.S., they are much more bottom-line focused and efficient.

**MHN:** Looking at the array of overseas markets, what advice would you share with other American companies?

**Humphreys:** Learn how to operate multiple U.S. offices before you venture overseas. And if you're coming to Dubai now, you're coming at the end of the party.

**CAPTION:** Mark Humphreys is pictured in Dubai at the site of the Burj Dubai, slated to be the tallest building in the world.

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