

INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES R. BOTTA

"IT'S LIKE A DIFFERENT WORLD"

The extraordinary explosion of interest in world football and its growing ability to attract fans of both genders and all ages and social groups has been mirrored by breathtaking changes in stadium design and construction. Stadium planning and general project management expert Charles R. Botta tells *FIFA World* that the "revolution" is not over yet...



Having trained in both architectural drawing and engineering before working in various management positions for construction companies in his native Switzerland, Charles R. Botta founded his own company, Botta Management Group AG, in 1989. In the two decades since then, the firm has grown to become a leading player in the realisation of major and complex real-estate projects with a focus on sports

facilities and global events including the FIFA World Cup™ and the Olympic Games.

Following his latest site visit to the South African stadiums being completed for next year's FIFA World Cup, Botta sat down with *FIFA World* at FIFA's Zurich headquarters – also realised by Botta Management – to discuss the rapid pace of development in his industry and give some insights into the shape of stadiums to come... →

Charles R. Botta's company is helping oversee the successful completion of South Africa's 2010 FIFA World Cup™ stadiums.

FIFA World: Stadium design has undergone a rapid transformation in recent years. What would you say are the key requirements for a modern stadium?

Charles R. Botta: Well, if we focus first on World Cup stadiums, we need to understand that the requirements for the FIFA World Cup itself are very different from

Cup. The important thing is that this is planned from the start so that the final size of the stadium fits in with the existing structure. Beyond simply reducing the number of seats, however, there is the growing trend towards multi-functional stadiums which can host multiple events and also offer space for commercial usage. At Euro 2008, we saw many stadiums

this helped to attract more top architects to stadium projects?

Very much so! It is almost reminiscent of the glory of the ancient past, when you look, for example, at the Colosseum in Rome. Today, once again, all the best architects and designers have it as almost a "career target" to build an iconic stadium. Architects such as Norman Foster, Herzog & de Meuron or Santiago Calatrava had not been involved in sports building design in the past, but have now all introduced new dimensions to stadium development.

Do you not encounter clashes between the fantasies and perhaps "gimmicks" that an architect may wish to introduce, and the need for sustainability that you just mentioned?

Very rarely, because sports stadiums in particular are subject to so many clear requirements, particularly within the main body of the ground. There are strict limits when it comes to lines of sight, security, the amount of lighting that is needed, the orientation of the stadium with respect to the sun due to television requirements, and so on. So it is just not possible for an architect to dream up a 20-storey-high stadium for example. It is like the game of football itself, where everybody loves to see creative and passionate players – but even they have to stick to the rules.

Besides bringing great design to football stadiums, what have all these changes meant for the supporters?

It's like a different world. I remember as a child going to



the stadium's continuing life after the tournament. There are FIFA's own legally binding requirements concerning the size of the stadium, and of course vital aspects such as security, which would far exceed the future needs of the stadium, simply because of the nature and scale of the World Cup. So first the stadium designers have to meet the World Cup requirements, then they must consider the sustainability of the stadium.

How do they combine these two demands?

When it comes to the stadium capacities, the most effective way of course is to build stadiums that can be "scaled back" after a major tournament. The stadiums in Cape Town and Durban are examples of this, where capacities of around 70,000 will be brought down to 50,000 after the World

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which had rentable office space, large shopping centres and even indoor sports complexes within the stadium. I foresee tremendous growth in this direction as stadium owners look to avoid being stuck with white elephants, or "cathedrals in the desert".

According to last month's interview on sports sponsorship, the financial outlook is still looking very rosy for football, at the top level at least. Has



The arch over the Durban Stadium is set to become one of the most recognisable icons at next year's tournament.



stadiums that were cold and dark, and smelt a lot of sausages! And the toilets ... well, they were not the sort of places you would ever want to go! Now these stadiums are places where you can take the whole family, just as you would to a tennis tournament. Then there are the unobstructed views, which is perhaps what today's fans appreciate the most. If you look at photos from 25 to 40 years ago you will see roofs that had to be supported by pillars. Now we have new canopy-like materials, combined with improvements in structural engineering, to provide an almost perfect view.

Would you say that the new stadiums are even changing the face of the game?

Yes, in many ways. For a start, there are those new fans who are being brought in, who appreciate the new levels of comfort, as of course do the more longstanding fans. Then there are the technical changes, including the improvements in the television coverage of matches played in specifically designed stadiums. Another important trend is the increased use of artificial turf, or

football turf as it is now known. This is due partly to the new, steeper stands, which allow for less natural light, but also on account of the multi-functionality that I spoke about a moment ago, with stadium owners wanting to stage concerts and other events on the pitch. Of course there is still some opposition to artificial surfaces, but when you look at the improvements that have been made just in the past few years, I think the criticism will melt away. The FIFA President himself has already said that the future lies with football turf.

If we can turn to the immediate future, what can we expect from the stadiums at the 2010 FIFA World Cup?

We have already seen high-end design World Cup stadiums in Japan and South Korea in 2002 and then in Germany four years ago, and that will now be exceeded in South Africa. I think everybody involved, particularly the workers, deserves a great deal of praise, because when South Africa was first awarded the tournament we had so many people saying the stadiums would never get built. Now they are not only on track, but they are also being

Johannesburg's eye-catching Soccer City will form the centrepiece of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, staging the opening match, tournament final and six other matches.

completed exactly according to our requirements and specifications. And at least four of the ten are destined to be real architectural icons. The roof in Johannesburg's Soccer City, with its bright blend of colours, is like a mirror of Africa. The stadium at Port Elizabeth, with its wave-like roof, really seems to be rising out of the sea. The Green Point Stadium in Cape Town, with the setting of the sea and Table Mountain, is just fabulous, and then you have Durban Stadium, with its magnificent arch, which will be even more stunning when you have 70,000 supporters gathered in the stadium for the tournament's second semi-final. All the recent FIFA World Cups have taken stadium architecture to new levels, and South Africa is going to raise the benchmark even higher. ■