

Alumni Profile: Steve (Xiaoming) Hu (MBA '03) by Mary Ann Gratton

Since he graduated last year, **Steve (Xiaoming) Hu's** career has gone swimmingly. The Rotman graduate and architect is the project manager and design director on the construction of the aquatic facility for the 2008 Beijing Olympics – and it's "the most exciting and challenging job" he's ever had.

The Beijing 2008 National Swimming Center will host the swimming, diving, synchronized swimming and water polo competitions, and is one of 18 venues at China's first-ever Olympic Games. The \$100-million facility is being built by a consortium that includes the **China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC)**, two Australian firms (**PTW**, an architectural firm, and **Ove Arup**, an engineering firm), and a Chinese architectural firm called **CSCEC + Design**. The 70,000 square-metre facility will be used after the Games as a multi-purpose leisure and aquatics centre that includes swimming pools, a gym, ice-skating rinks and a cinema.

Steve has been putting in 16-hour days over the past year as the project moves forward. "My role is to manage the project and coordinate between all the partners. It's exciting, but also challenging, exhausting, and sometimes frustrating to collaborate on such a big project. I work with multiple clients and partners with different work styles and approaches from different cultures. I often feel like a firefighter, coping with many unexpected issues. However, what I learned at Rotman is the importance of understanding all perspectives before going forward, and that is very useful here."

Before coming to Rotman to pursue his MBA, Steve earned his Master of Architecture from the University of Minnesota and worked at several firms as an architectural designer in the U.S., Canada, and his native China. He also has a Bachelor of Architecture from Tsinghua University in Beijing.

One of his key challenges is figuring out how to transition the building from pre-Games to Games, to post-Games mode, says Steve, 33. "Each mode has distinctive planning implications and involves programming the building differently

to meet the functional requirements. We are dealing with multiple clients – the (BOCOG) **Beijing Organizational Committee of the Olympic Games**, the **International Olympic Committee**, the **Federation International de Natation (FINA)**, which is the international governing body for aquatic events, and a series of municipal departments to work out our strategy," he says. Budgeting has also been a challenge with all of the parties involved.

Heralded as an architectural marvel, the unique, award-winning design for the swimming facility or 'Water Cube' plays on the geometry of water bubbles. The steel frame building will be clad with a lightweight transparent 'teflon' known as ETFE pillow cladding, a novel but complex and technically-challenging approach. The building will perform like a greenhouse, trapping solar energy and channeling it to heat the pools. This energy-efficient facility will enable rainwater to be collected and stored, while backwater is filtered and recycled. The structure's shape is specifically designed to work in harmony with the circular main Olympic stadium, and both are to be built on Beijing's Olympic Green.

Rotman's emphasis on Integrative Thinking and seeing the big picture are particularly helpful to Steve during the consortium's meetings. "Architects have a tendency to get lost in the details and never get out. At meetings, I often stop to remind everyone why we are there, and what the big issues are, to ensure we don't get bogged down in the details. My MBA helped me learn how to focus on the big stuff."

"When I first took this job, I didn't think there would be much connection between it and my MBA education," he says. "But the fundamentals I learned keep coming back to me, even when I don't expect it. The lessons I learned related to organizational behaviour and how people are motivated are really valuable when working with such different groups and trying to keep everyone focused on the same goals."

Steve's wife Min Wang is an architect who is also working on the swimming facility. Steve and Min have a two-year-old daughter, Vivian. When not working, the family likes to relax with friends at dinner parties or drive out of town to the countryside to see sights such as the Great Wall of China, or to a small area outside of Beijing called Chang Ping. R

