

ZOOM IN AND TYPE IS PERFECTLY LEGIBLE.

NEW OPENING

KATH HUDSON, JOURNALIST, SPORTS MANAGEMENT

OLYMPIC DREAMS

Azerbaijan is investing in architecture, sport and tourism to establish itself as a major destination. This year, it hosts the inaugural European Games at the newly opened Baku Olympic Stadium

Baku, Azerbaijan's capital city, was awarded the inaugural 2015 European Games in December 2012. The oil-rich country was the only bidder, which makes it no less of an achievement, since other bidders were frightened off by the tight timescale. Keen to become a leader in global sport, by securing a major international sports event – as a precursor for its ambitions to one day host the Olympic Games – Azerbaijan committed to be Games-ready within two years.

Tekfen Construction was appointed and tasked with an aggressive build schedule, which necessitated having to design and construct simultaneously. Nonetheless,

COMPANIES WHO WORKED ON BAKU STADIUM

Heerim Architects & Planners Co. Ltd. design architect
Thomson Sansonetti structural
Anpa International Ltd. geotechnical
Vector Felice facade subcontractor
Support in Sport Eastern Europe pitch subcontractor
Mondo S.p.A. athletic track and sport flooring subcontractor
Anel Group MEP subcontractor
Blue Circle GB seating subcontractor
Smerly interior fit out subcontractor

the challenge was successfully completed, with the stadium finished in early March 2015, in plenty of time for the European Games in June.

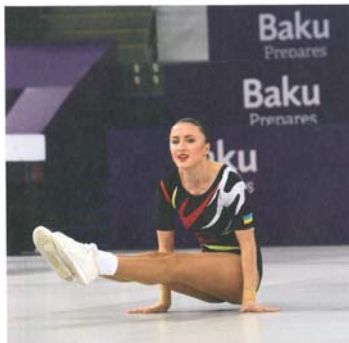
Europe is the last of the major continents to have its own Games. They will be held every four years, in the year before the Olympics. The first Games will use 7,000 athletes, from 49 countries, taking part in 20 sports. It will be the biggest sporting event Azerbaijan has ever seen and has sparked investment in cutting edge architecture.

"The government sees sport as an excellent vehicle through which to engage with Azerbaijan's youth nationally, as well as raise the profile of the country on the international stage," says Jeremy Edwards, general manager, Venue Management Baku 2015 European Games.

"Not only are the Games a chance to inspire more people to lead a healthy and active lifestyle, but they also provide an opportunity for graduates to develop new skills and obtain experiences which will further help Azerbaijan develop a place on the world stage."

ASPIRATIONAL ARCHITECTURE
Azerbaijan has been aspirational with its architecture. Eager to secure international prestige, architecture is being used to present an image of modernity and the sports facilities are at the forefront of this campaign. The new stadium is part of a new village cluster, which includes athletes' accommodation and The National Gymnastics Arena, which hosted the European Rhythmic Gymnastics Championships last year. Designed by Broadway Malpas and Pasha Construction, this is another example of groundbreaking architecture. The form was inspired by the ribbons of rhythmic gymnasts and strobe lighting is used to make the building look like it is fluttering.

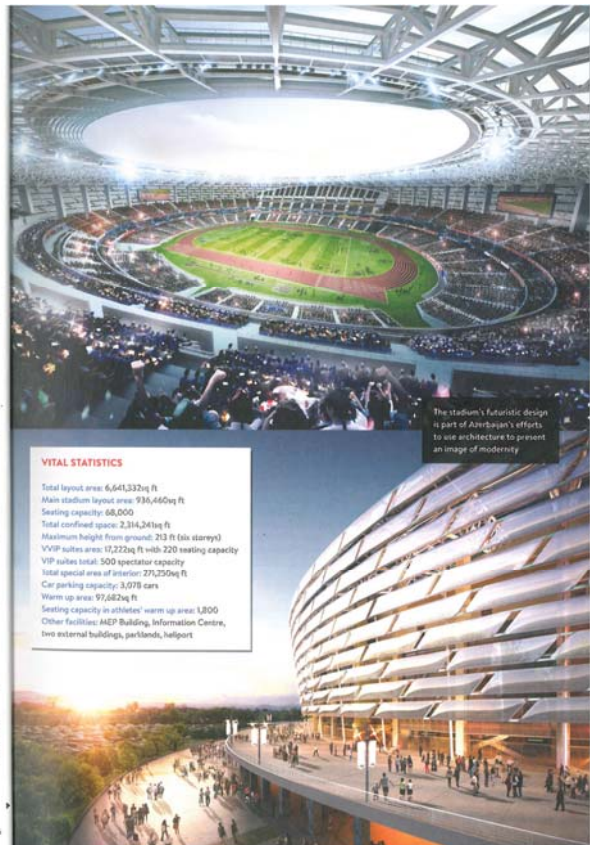
Now the US\$640m (£436m, €604m) Baku Olympic Stadium, situated near



This year's European Games will test Azerbaijan's capabilities to host a multi-sport event

38

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The stadium's futuristic design is part of Azerbaijan's efforts to use architecture to present an image of modernity

VITAL STATISTICS

Total layout area: 6,641,332sq ft
Main stadium layout area: 936,460sq ft
Seating capacity: 68,000
Total confined space: 2,314,241sq ft
Maximum height from ground: 213 ft (six storeys)
VIP suites area: 12,222sq ft with 220 seating capacity
VIP suites total: 500 spectator capacity
total special area of interior: 27,320sq ft
Car parking capacity: 3,078 cars
Warm up area: 97,682sq ft
Seating capacity in athletes' warm up area: 1,800
Other facilities: MEP Building, Information Centre, two external buildings, parklands, helipad

NEW OPENING

the city centre, with views over Lake Boyukshor, forms another prestigious landmark. Funded by the Azerbaijani government, the 68,000 capacity stadium will cater for international sports and cultural events and provide urban amenities. The development comprises festival, performing arts, concert and exhibition spaces, a health and fitness club, restaurants, office space and an information centre, as well as a shopping centre integrated into the six-storey stadium. With special covers to protect the turf, the stadium is also set to be used for spectacular concerts.

"It has been designed to reflect the youthful and energetic spirit of Azerbaijan," says Edwards. "It is equipped with the latest in mobile connectivity, HD large screens and seating configuration to ensure every spectator enjoys a perfect, unobstructed view of all the sports as they take place around the arena."

Additionally, infrastructure has been put in place to allow people to access and exit quickly and efficiently and link up to an extensive public transport network.

The stadium is formed by five interlocking structures, inspired by the cylindrical shape of Azerbaijan monument, the 12th century UNESCO World Heritage-listed Maiden Tower. The exterior facade resembles the burning flame, the symbol of the "Land of Fire."

Six hundred ETFE cushions cover the roof and facade, chosen for their sound insulation properties, ease of use and attractive appearance. Thousands of LEDs light up the stadium at night. A lighting study was carried out to determine the



Spectators with benefits from the latest in mobile connectivity and large HD screens

The stadium sits on the location of a former oil refinery so extra isolation layers had to be installed on the ground before the pitch could be laid

daylight UV transmission, to optimise spectator comfort and natural turf demands. Olympic stadia are usually elliptical in shape, because of the 400m running track. Baku Olympic Stadium, however, has been designed as a perfect circle, with pure geometry.

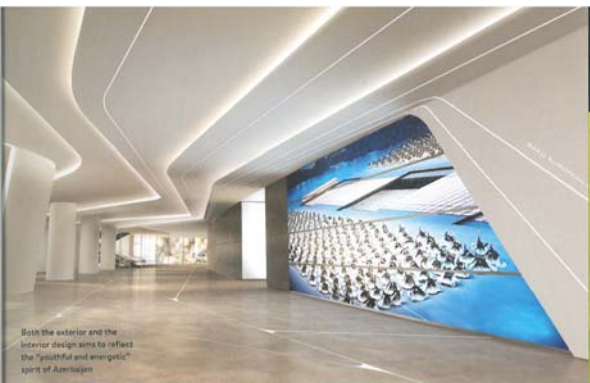
WORLD CLASS FACILITIES
Azerbaijan has yet to make much of an impact on the international football scene, but this stadium will boost its efforts, as the national football team will be the main

tenant. It meets the highest international standards for stadia set by FIFA and UEFA and will host tournaments and qualification games for the 2020 European Football Championships.

Being the world's fastest stadium build was not allowed to impact on the quality of the project. With hopes of one day securing an Olympic Games for Azerbaijan, the stadium has been designed in accordance with track and field standards set by the International Association of Athletics Federations. The main stadium has achieved IAAF grade A status, while the warm-up area is IAAF grade B.

Tekfen Construction and Installation, supported by Korea's Heerim Architects and Planners, were awarded the design and build of the stadium. The brief also included facade cladding, ETFE lighting, interior aluminium glazed systems, constructing the complementary sports facilities and infrastructure works as well as landscaping.

A tough brief for a 24-month project. To support the accelerated schedule, an advanced modelling approach was used: the engineering team developed an automated design routine to check beam and column reinforcement against seismic code provisions. Precast reinforced concrete, main and secondary steel structures were modelled, and piled raft foundations, more typical of high rise



Both the exterior and the interior design aims to reflect the "youthful and energetic" spirit of Azerbaijan

buildings than stadia, were used, all of which further speed up the build. Support In Sport (SIS) was contracted to design and build the two stadium pitches. The warm up pitch was completed in summer 2014 and seeded with Bermuda grass. The main stadium pitch has now also been seeded. It will be covered up for the opening ceremony of the European Games, after which turf from Austria will be laid. There have been a number of challenges involved in the project. "The field used to be an oil refinery in the past, so we

have installed extra isolation layers on the ground before laying the pitch," says SIS contracts manager, Burak Ertaş. "The warm up pitch is outdoors, so we sometimes had to deal with winds of up to 60km per hour. The quick turnaround of laying the turf after the opening ceremony will pose another challenge."

Having unsuccessfully pitched for the 2016 and 2020 Olympics, could the Baku Olympic Stadium, combined with a glitch-free inaugural European Games in the summer, be what Azerbaijan needs

to secure the holy grail of international sporting events?

"Our main challenge is to make the most of this opportunity," says Edwards. "With Azerbaijan set to host a F1 Grand Prix, the Islamic Solidarity Games and matches in the UEFA 2020 European Championships, a key part of the legacy of these Games is to ensure we provide young Azerbaijanis with the chance to develop the skills and experience that will help them deliver major international events in the years to come."

ABOUT AZERBAIJAN

Situated at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Western Asia, the Republic of Azerbaijan is an oil-rich state, bordered by the Caspian Sea to the east, Russia to the north, Georgia to the northwest, Armenia to the west and Iran to the south.

Azerbaijan proclaimed its independence in October 1991 and is the first Muslim majority democratic republic and the first Muslim majority country to have opera, theatre and modern universities. It has a high rate of economic development and literacy and a low rate of unemployment, with the population of 9m split equally between urban and rural. A high level of migration

means population growth is lower than in the rest of the world. Football is the most popular sport, although so far the national has failed to qualify for major tournaments.

Wrestling has traditionally been regarded as Azerbaijan's national sport, and it has won 14 Olympic medals in this sport. It is one of the leading volleyball countries in the world and the women's Super League is one of the strongest female leagues in the world. Its national women's team came fourth at the 2005 European Championships. Azerbaijan also has a F1 race track and will be hosting its first Grand Prix in 2016.



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40

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