

Allard's 'Matarazzo City' Vision for Brazil Gets New Funding

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French real estate tycoon Alexandre Allard said he secured new funding for his vision of Matarazzo City, an ambitious renovation of a decaying hospital in Sao Paulo that was once owned by the late Brazilian industrialist Francesco Matarazzo.



Photographer: Jean Baptiste Mondino via Rubenstein PR

Allard said that his Groupe Allard and a subsidiary of Hong Kong-based developer [Chow Tai Fook Enterprises Ltd](#) have agreed to a joint capital increase of 295 million reais (\$95 million), following a previous injection of 395 million reais. Banco Votorantim's asset management arm has also approved a credit line for 250 million reais that can be used for the project, a big bet in a country facing its worst recession in a century.

“Brazil’s crisis is mostly behind it, and its rebound will depend on the

creative economy and not commodities business,” Allard said by phone from Sao Paulo. “We will be the first project that will be the symbol of the recovery.”

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Allard co-founded Consodata in 1995, a French direct marketer that was sold in 2002 to Turin-based conglomerate [Seat Pagine Gialle](#), the publisher of the Italian version of the Yellow Pages. He became a multimillionaire and opted for a career change, pursuing his passions for art and architecture. He began refurbishing old Parisian “slumbering jewels,” including the five-star Royal Monceau hotel, the fashion house Balmain and the Hotel Particulier de Pourtales.



After Paris, the Washington D.C.-born entrepreneur who spent his early childhood in the Ivory Coast found a new obsession: Brazil. For nine years, he’s focused on building Matarazzo City from the ruins of the hospital that takes its name from the Italian immigrant who was considered to be Brazil’s richest man when he died in 1937. For the task, he hired Jean Nouvel, winner of the Pritzker Prize.

Allard promises an eight-acre site with 274 hotel rooms and suites by Nouvel and designer Philippe Starck, seven ball rooms, a refurbished chapel, cultural center with theater, exhibition hall, a music studio and cinema, a retail village, 20,000-square meters of garden and 34 restaurants. The project will be managed by [Rosewood Hotels & Resorts](#),

owned by Chow Tai Fook Enterprises.

The tycoon says the project will be completed in 2019, eight years after he bought the site for 200 million reais following many legal battles. He wants it to become a creativity hub in a system “rendered sterile by globalization and standardization.” Groupe Allard says the pricetag of the project can reach 1.2 billion reais.



He said that his curiosity about Brazil was piqued by his encounter with Chico Buarque and Toquinho at a festival in Corsica in 1980s, after which he invited the musicians to hang out and play tunes on his yacht.

He and his staff traveled to the far reaches of Brazil to locally source the materials for the project that will showcase the country’s natural riches, including trips to the Amazon to source the wood for 70,000 square meters of panels and visits to 700-some quarries to find the marble.

Despite its massive size, Sao Paulo -- unlike Rio de Janeiro with its Sugarloaf mountain and Christ the Redeemer statue -- lacks the icons needed to cement the megacity into the world’s imagination, he says. Epic traffic jams and endless concrete edifices earned it the moniker of the city of grey, but Allard sees an untapped culture industry here.

“It’s a cultural powerhouse,” he said. “It’s a city with a strong background in music, painting, architecture, design, fashion, gastronomy.”

