

## West Gorordo “Green” Hotel

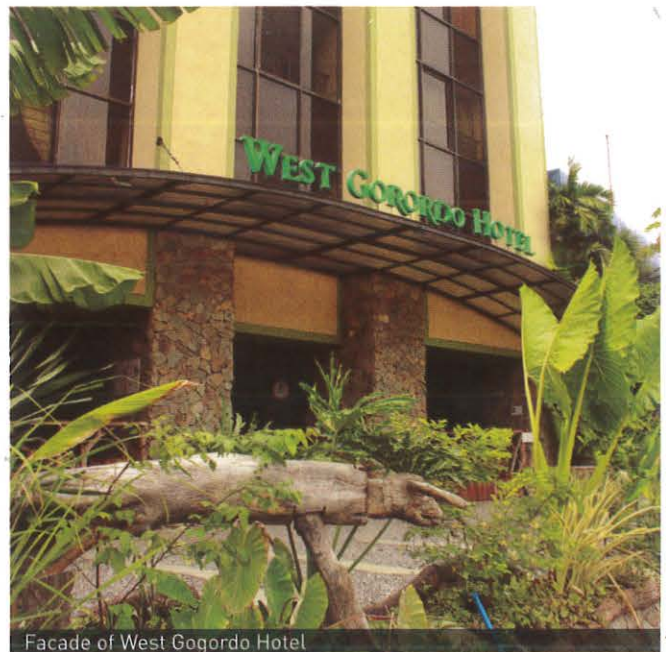
■ Christopher Estacion

### Background

Mayflower Realities Incorporated (MRI) is a family owned enterprise that has been engaged in the accommodation sector for over 20 years. Their establishments include West Gorordo Hotel, Mayflower Inn and Elicon House, all of which are located in Cebu City. In 2008, the company undertook extensive renovations of the three establishments and introduced a shift in management operations to permaculture inspired philosophies. Since then, the hotels have demonstrated reduced operational costs, gained new clientele and have been recognized for their efforts to help the environment.

### Stakeholders

MRI is run by the family matriarch Lourdes Vilma Lee. In 2005, her daughter Edna was in the U.S.A. attending a summer training experience on alternative construction when she was introduced to permaculture. Permaculture is the philosophy of developing and integrating an ecological design system. It was developed in the 1960's and is based on the principle that nature has already developed a web of relationships within an ecosystem. And by understanding the functions and importance of each component, an individual may formulate and adopt a sustainable, non-polluting, agriculturally productive and healthy system. Upon her return to Cebu, she attempted to introduce the concepts she learned by trying to convince her family to install a rainwater catchment system in the Mayflower Inn which was



Facade of West Gorordo Hotel

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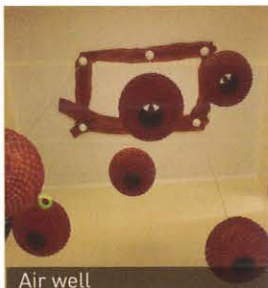




Solar lighting tunnel



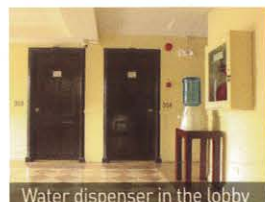
Unpackaged soap offered to guests



Air well



Lamp design recycled



Water dispenser in the lobby



Recycled bottles as bookends



Tree cuttings used for decorative finishes

undergoing minor renovations. However, the Architect disapproved the suggestions and proceeded with the construction as planned.

In 2008, Edna's brother Joel also expressed interest to learn more about permaculture. The siblings attended a training workshop at Cabiokid, a permaculture development site located on a 5.5 hectare property in Cabiiao, Nueva Ecija, Philippines. Joel further enhanced his knowledge on the approach by enrolling in a certificate course at the Permaculture Research Institute, Diversity Farms in Channon, Australia, where the philosophy is promoted as a holistic way of life covering all its facets, including running a business.

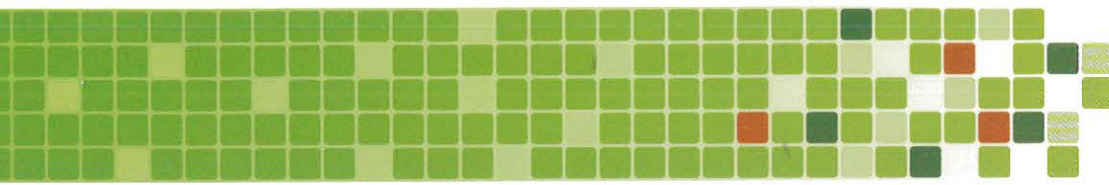
The proposal to renovate the establishments adopting the principles of permaculture was met with resistance due to the costs. However, after they integrated the approach into their way of life, the family came to the realization that a change of their business operations was a natural consequence. The switch from the traditional design and management of the hotels to the permaculture way was both a lifestyle and business decision.

## Strategy

In 2008, the family decided to integrate the permaculture philosophy into their business. Two steps were undertaken to facilitate the transition. First is the formulation and implementation of transitional policies. The five R's were adopted, namely: Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Restore.

- Refuse single use disposal items and polluting chemicals
- Reduce, only use what is necessary.





- Reuse, by investing in long service items.
- Recycle, once the item has reached the end of its normal life cycle it is time to find an alternative use for it.
- Restore, by allowing nature to regenerate itself.

The purchase of single use items was minimized. Some examples of these include: replacement of plastic bags with newspaper linings for trash bins, offering unpackaged soap bars, installation of soap and shampoo dispensers in the bathrooms, serving beverages with straws only when necessary, and placing water dispensers on each floor for refilling water bottles. Recyclable wastes were sorted and stored in a small warehouse until they found ways for reusing them.

The second step was the renovation of the establishments. Function was given priority over form. Each site was redesigned with passive cooling, natural lighting and ventilation systems which reduced monthly electricity costs by 20%. Recycled material, such as driftwood and salvaged wood from old houses were incorporated in the design. Renovations were done one at a time, beginning with Elicon House, followed by West Gorordo Hotel, then Mayflower Inn. Construction started with the lobby then moving up by floor, in order to ease renovation cost and reduce risks.

The new policies and design were perceived by some to be a decrease in standards of the hotel. Guests would complain to the management about the new policies. And because the staff was not trained on how to properly address these concerns, they did not succeed in appeasing the guest complaints. The management realized there was a need educate both the staff and guests in order to facilitate the shift. They conducted an orientation for the staff so that

they can better explain the rationale for the new policies. And for the guests, they printed information sheets and signs to educate them on the practices and features of the hotel. At one instance, officials from the Department of Tourism (DOT) conducted a site visit to West Gorordo Hotel. In spite of the absence of the owners, the room boy who greeted the DOT group ably informed the guests on the facilities and green practices the hotel had in place.

However, sensitizing the guests and staff took time. Some of the old clientele did not accept the new system and stopped going altogether. On the other hand, as recognitions for their green innovative practices started coming, so did new clients. Lonely Planet, one of the largest travel publishers in the world, classified the establishments as green hotels in their Philippine travel guide, which greatly helped their marketing efforts. The establishment also became member of the Zero Carbon Resorts (ZCR) Project, 4-year project funded under the European Union (EU) SWITCH Program which aims to reduce the energy consumption and carbon dioxide emission of the Philippine tourism industry through a three step approach of reducing energy consumption, replacement of inefficient technologies, and redesign buildings and systems. . Being a member gave them access to technical advice on how to further improve the hotel's energy efficiency practices.

## Learning and Innovation

The establishment's permaculture practices are not yet perfect, but they continue to apply them. Because they are innovators, there were no past experiences that they could learn from. It was necessary to learn and adapt along the way. The designs for the building renovations were prepared by the brother and sister team. In the meantime, they continue to apply new

ideas they come across to improve and maximize the given space. Some of the recent the improvements they have implemented include:

- The installation of vertical herb and vegetable gardens in unused areas. Some of which have medicinal qualities, and shared to the neighbors.
- An air well doubling as a natural cooling and ventilation feature and as an indoor rock climbing wall.
- Provision of parking spots for smart cars, and bicycle railings to encourage environment friendly transport.
- Converting all light fixtures to LED.
- At top floor of Elicon House, an improvised solar lighting tunnel was installed, by cutting out strategically place small rectangular holes in the roof and replacing it fiber glass.

- The lights in the hallways are turn on by a light sensor, which are activated when dark outside.
- The uniform of the staff have been changed shorter sleeves and shorts for greater comfort.

Continuous education of the staff and guests is still necessary. Not only from a business stand point, but also in the promotion of a sustainable lifestyle. Optional introduction to permaculture trainings will soon be offered to staff members.

## Lessons Learned

The Proprietors of West Gorordo Hotel are among the pioneers in establishing the business case for “going green.” In spite of the skepticism and challenges they faced, their commitment to the permaculture lifestyle and its benefits have shown that these pay off in the end. By way of this experience, it is hoped that others will see the light and follow suit.

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### About ProGED

The Promotion of Green Economic Development [ProGED] Project, a development cooperation project between the Republic of the Philippines and the Federal Republic of German, aims to improve the competitiveness of enterprises through the adoption of climate smart and environment friendly strategies. The project will focus initially on the tourism sector in the Provinces of Bohol and Cebu with its high potential for investment, employment and poverty reduction due to its linkage with upstream and downstream industries in other economic sectors. It is implemented in partnership with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and GIZ on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The project duration extends from January 2013 to December 2015.