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ALL IN THE FAMILY

# Who built Okada Manila?

By: [Queena N. Lee-Chua](#) - @inquirerdotnet Philippine Daily Inquirer / 05:20 AM March 23, 2018

The megaresorts surrounding casinos in the Manila Bay area have raised the profile of Philippine tourism.

However, I cannot accept the persistent smoky odor that permeates even the most powerful air conditioning, so I have yet to visit many of these resorts.

Friends say the design and construction of the newest entrant, Okada Manila, is the best by far.

Okada Manila is a beauty, but an engineering challenge. Half-hoping a local company is behind the project, I checked Google but immediately resigned myself to the reality: Which Japanese or German engineering firm is responsible for Okada?

The answer was still quite unexpected—I have never heard of Prime Structures Engineering until now. What's more, it's not a conglomerate listed on the stock exchange, but a dynamic family business based in Singapore.

In 1995, Sonny Bensily founded Prime Structures Engineering to serve as general building contractor for their steel structures. Specializing in building facades, the company grew steadily, and in 2008, it successfully cladded the belly of the ship-like structure (famous for its swimming pool, the longest in Singapore) on top of Marina Bay Sands.

Constructing such an iconic structure cemented the company's reputation. The firm was tasked to construct Changi Airport Terminal 3 and Orchard Central, and soon after, the Australian Embassy in Jakarta, the Ministry of Finance in Brunei, and of course, Okada Manila. The company plans to expand to Sri Lanka and the United Arab Emirates.

The Bensily family does not appear to like the limelight. The only feature on them that I was able to come across was a cover story for SME Magazine in its Sept.-Oct. 2017 issue.

In the profile, Sonny, 57, and his eldest daughter Julia discussed family principles and values.

Sonny's wife Diana, financial controller, is reportedly too diffident to be interviewed, but Sonny attests to her integral role. In the early days, Diana had to manage the house and raise their three daughters while Sonny was away on business.

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business development. Being the daughter of the boss initially raised brows in a still-macho industry, but Julia knows her worth.

“If there was a need ... I would be [in the business]. But if there’s no need for my input, I don’t want to ... sit around and earn a salary without doing anything.

“At the end of the day, whether you work for family or outside, you have to deliver in whatever you do.”

Middle daughter Sofia is about to finish her master’s degree in business in London, and is set to join the family business.

The firm’s immediate successors are not the daughters, however, but the nonfamily professionals. This move can indeed maximize the chances the business will last.

“To manage this company successfully, you need at least 10 to 15 years of experience,” says Sonny. “It doesn’t just come with a university degree. My daughters are like the third generation. The second generation are my staff who have been with me for a long time. When I retire, this second generation will be the ones who will take the helm.”

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