

Jade Factory carves out China showpiece

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It started out as a small jade carving business in Rotorua, but The Jade Factory is hoping to attract up to five million visitors a year to its new development in China.

The Jade Factory and its retail outlets, now branded as Mountain Jade, has started work on phase one of an 742sq m four-building complex on a 3ha site in Sihui, southeast China.

Stage one of Jade City includes a carving display workshop, exhibition space to showcase jade and jade artists at work, an educational/cultural exchange centre for visiting jade carvers, and manufacturing premises. It will also have exhibition space promoting New Zealand to the Chinese through a range of products — including Rotorua goods.

This first phase is expected to open in December this year, to coincide with Sihui's annual jade fair. It will be followed by a jade museum in 2012 and on-site accommodation for workers, apartments for visiting jade artists and hotel rooms for visitors by 2016.

Partners John Sheehan and Jin Hong Zhang joined forces in 1993, operating out of a single shop in Rotorua. The retail side of the business now has outlets in Roto-



INTERNATIONAL SKILLS: John Sheehan Junior will be travelling to Sihui with his brother Jacob to widen his skills and help develop The Jade Factory's new complex.

PICTURE / FILE

rua, Auckland, Hokitika, Christchurch and Queenstown.

They first established manufacturing links to China in 1995 and currently have a factory with more than 100 staff in Sihui.

Zhang said the Chinese had a deep appreciation of quality jade and quality design and his own family had a long tradition of involvement with the Chinese jade industry.

That is true of many of Sihui's 250,000 residents, with more than a third involved in the jade industry and more than a million buyers visiting the city each year.

Zhang said this made the location a critical part of the venture's success — particularly with a Government-funded express train

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

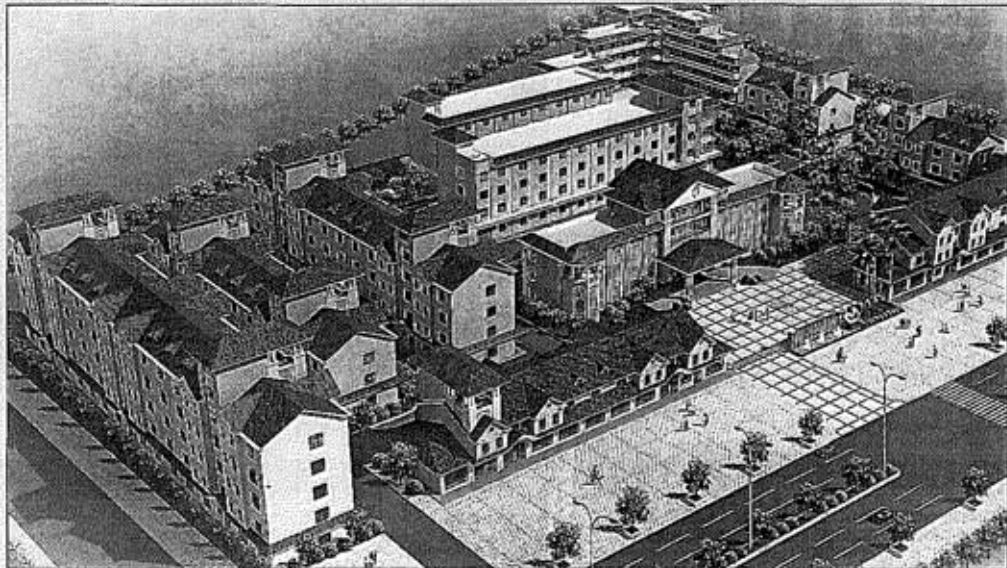
Jin Hong Zhang is keen to build wider relationships between China and New Zealand and said he would be happy to act as an intermediary for other Kiwis keen to explore business opportunities there.

"Chinese people have a prescribed approach to doing business and formal relationships and associations are important to them. Relationships are particularly significant as the Chinese tend to do business with those they know."

Jade Factory/Mountain Jade set up the New Zealand International Culture and Trading Association in 2008 to help smooth the way for its expansion there and other Kiwi businesses have now joined the association as a springboard for doing business in China.

system due for completion in October 2012.

"It will provide buyers and visitors with swift access from Guangzhou — the 50km journey will take a mere 20 minutes — and



Hong Kong which is a 60-90 minute ride."

The complex is predicted to attract about two million visitors a year by 2012, with expectations of up to five million within 10 years.

Rotorua will be a key feature of the complex. As well as an exhibition space to promote New Zealand and Rotorua products to the Chinese, the centrepiece building will be based on Rotorua's visitor

information centre with terracotta and cream heritage colours.

Two of Mountain Jade's Rotorua in-house artists — Sheehan's sons John Sheehan Junior and Jacob Sheehan — are travelling to

Sihui in spring to continue their training and to help develop the new complex. Key English-speaking staff from China will also come to New Zealand for training prior to the opening.

CITY RISES: This 3ha complex will be completed in China in three phases across the next six years.

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