"Do you want *fries*

By VILMA BARR
Photos by GIORGI KHMALADZE

with that?”

A glass-encased McDonald’s and Socar fuel station expand their architectural horizons on the Black Sea

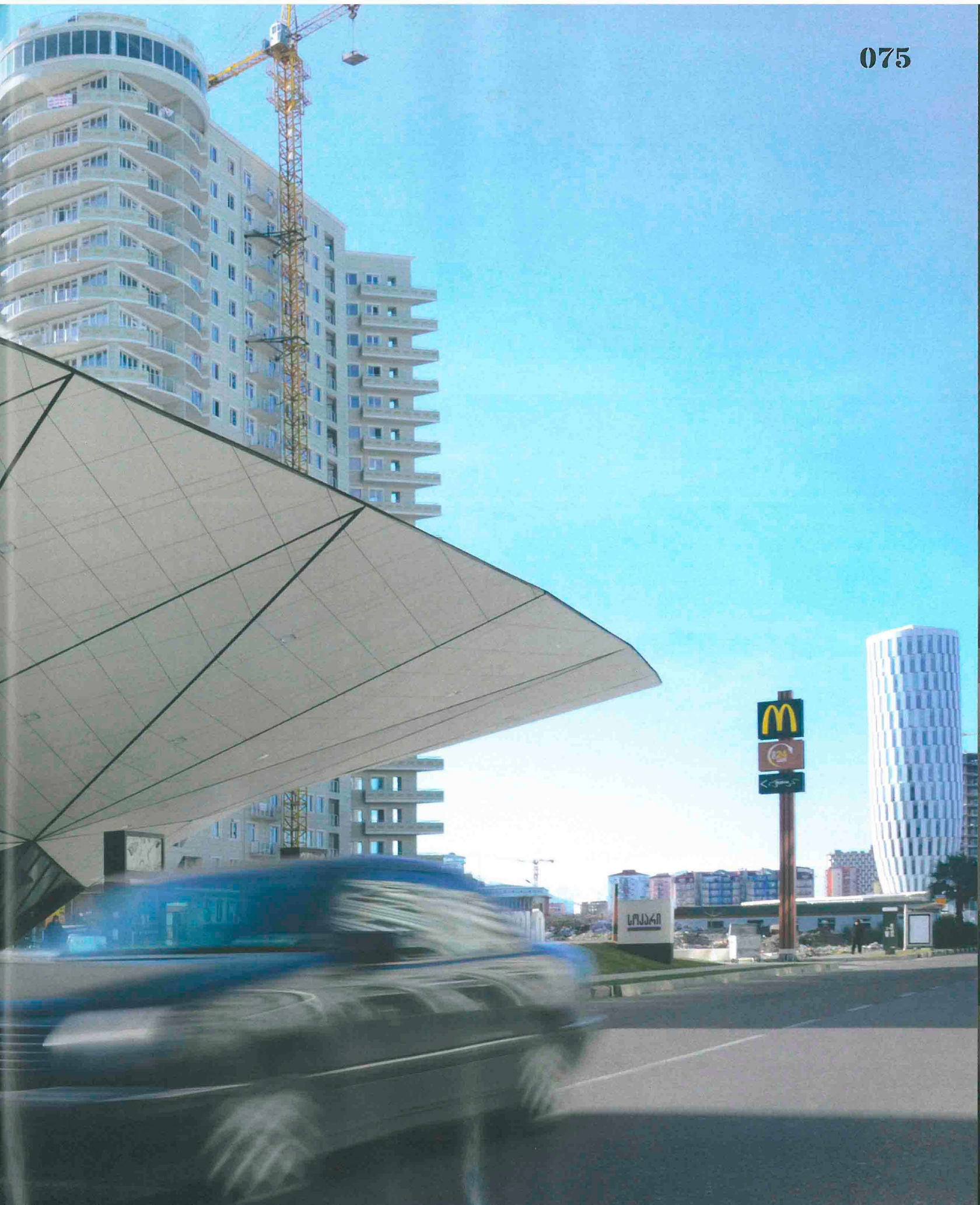
The most interesting McDonald's in the world just might be the one located in Batumi, a seaside city on the Black Sea coast in southwest Georgia. Boasting a futuristic, cantilevered glass enclosure, the restaurant is a far cry from the golden arches and drive-thrus that are ubiquitous with the fast-food chain.

The siting of a combined Socar fuel station and a McDonald's in the middle of a thriving port and beachfront city would appear to be extreme urban odd coupling. But now in operation for a year, the sophisticated and environmentally sensitive design has created a successful addition to a community's ambitious upgrading.

Once a classic seaside resort for the rich and famous, Batumi is undergoing a major facelift to become a popular international holiday destination. Located 12 miles from the Turkish border, this city of 150,000 claims a history that dates back as an ancient Greek settlement. So far, its urban makeover has attracted investments from international hospitality nameplates, like Sheraton and Radisson, plus three new casinos, upscale restaurants and clubs, and more than $100 million in government-sponsored infrastructure improvements.

Batumi's McDonald's isn't alone in communicating a high-design visual personality for the worldwide chain's restaurants. During the past six years, McDonald's and its European franchisees have implemented the spending of more than $850 million to remodel approximately 25 percent of its estimated 6,400 restaurants. The objective is to attract more young adults and professionals, and facilities created by top architectural practitioners recognized for their hip and creative approach to the integrated building package is high on the appeal list. Other amenities, such as Internet access and iPod rentals for McDonald's customers, go along with the paradigm image shift.

Industry observers predict that McDonald's new interior design program will help to boost sales volume by attracting more European customers, whose preference is to dine at the restaurant. Eat-in customers tend to have a higher average final tab than those of their U.S. counterparts, they report,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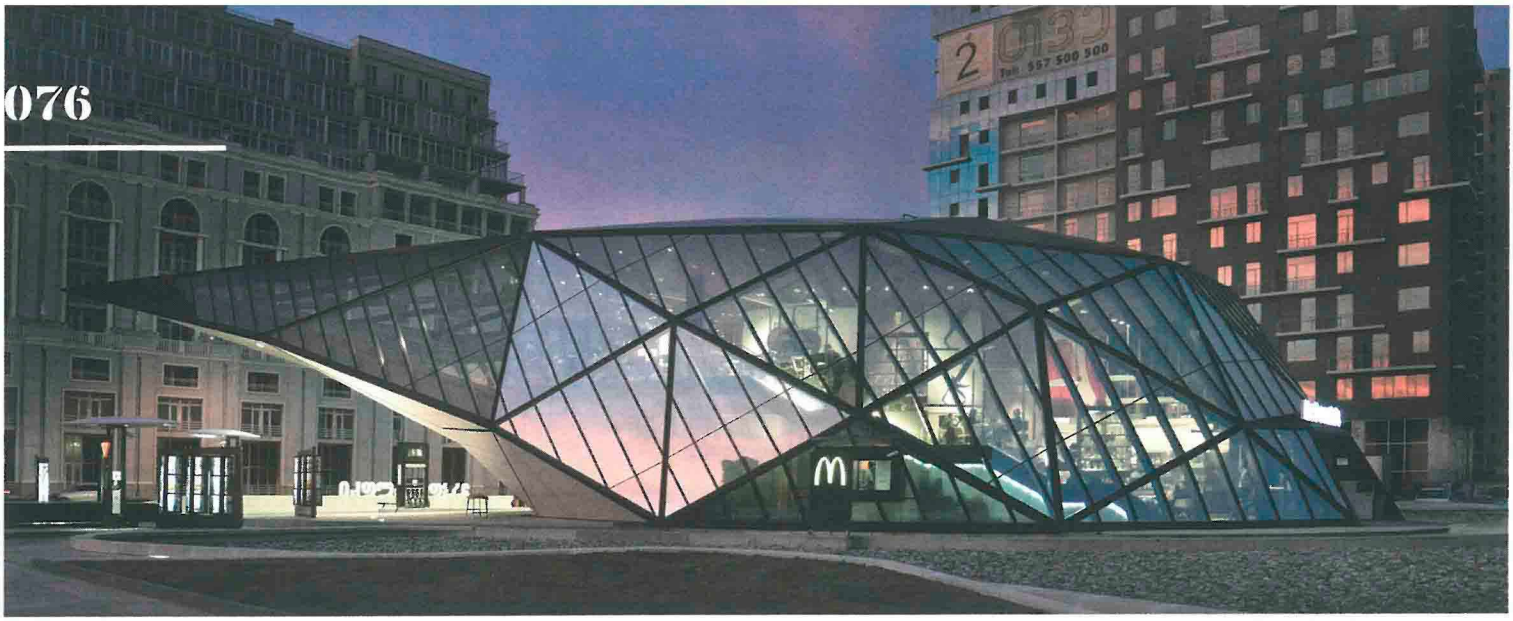


where a higher percentage of customers take their McDonald's food orders with them.

Selected to interpret the worldwide chain's reimaging program for Batumi was Tblisi, Georgia-based architect Giorgi Khmaladze of Khmaladze Architects. His design brief from McDonald's stressed such sustainable guidelines as lowering energy expended for illumination and HVAC; reducing water use; incorporating green décor options; enhancing indoor air quality; and increasing the use of natural light. The 54,000-sq.-ft. Batumi site was to be shared by the restaurant and the filling station.

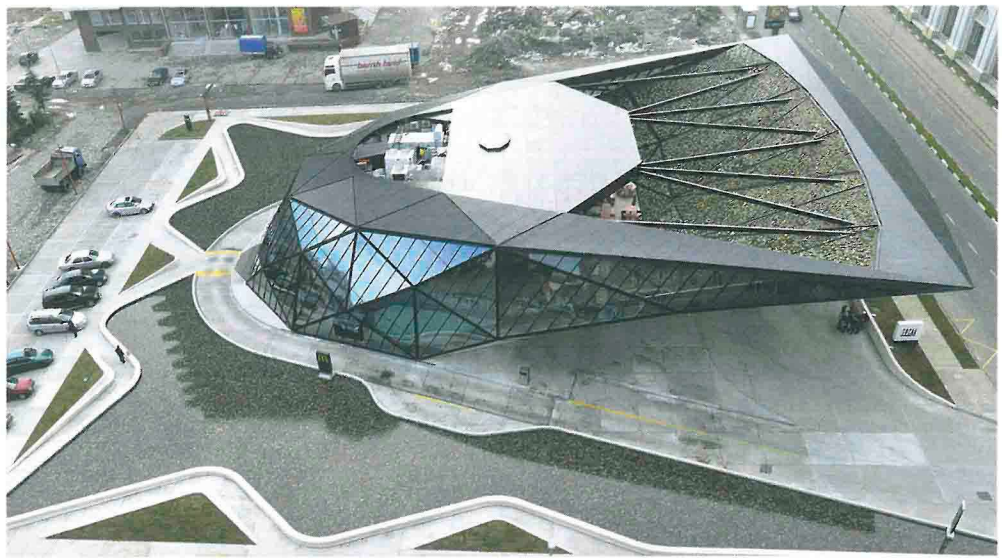
"We were given an important central location, surrounded by vehicular traffic and multi-level commercial and residential buildings, that would also include recreational spaces and a reflective pool," Khmaladze says. "To allow as much space for public use as possible, we proposed a 13,000-sq.-ft. building to be shared by McDonald's and the Socar filling station."

But, of course, no one wants to have a dining experience with views of people filling up their tanks, so the architect took this challenge to heart. He positioned the areas for the two occupants, so that they are visually isolated. "All operations of the fuel station are out of sight of the restaurant's customers," Khmaladze says. "Support and utility spaces are on the ground level; so diners use the upper level decks and enclosed patio seating areas. Part of the space offers views toward the outside water features."

Perhaps the most stunning element of the architecture is the natural green hue that blankets the space. A vegetation layer covers the cantilevered canopy extension over the fuel station's gas pumps, and acts as what Khmaladze identifies as an "ecological shield" for the terrace. Enclosing the restaurant is a tinted glass dome comprised of 460 panels, structurally outlined in black.

For the interior, Khmaladze followed McDonald's corporate "Qualite" design standards, developed for its European restaurants. For Batumi, instead of industrial steel chairs, there are curved-back slotted wooden chairs and benches, and wood slab tables. McDonald's signature red and yellow colors have been scaled back and almost totally replaced by earth tones and rich browns. Overhead, in place of fluorescent strip lighting, there are recessed fixtures or multi-lamp, ceiling-hung fixtures.

McDonald's Batumi restaurant does not exhibit any oversize "M" exterior signage. Instead, there is a white identifying logo over the front entrance to the restaurant. At night, the transparent dome glows as the structural supports carve the glass skin into interlocking triangles. Quite a change for a brand known for its iconic golden arches. dr

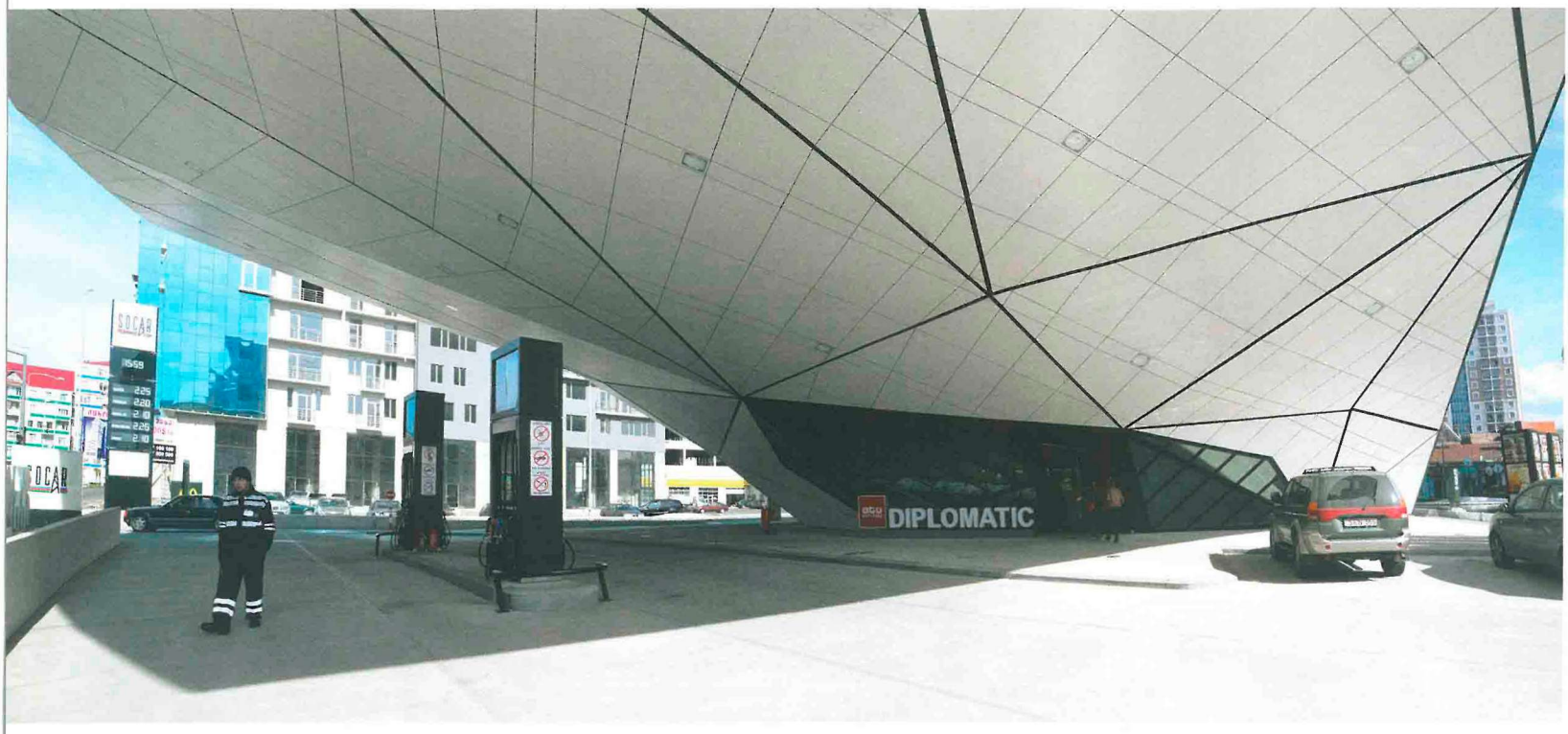


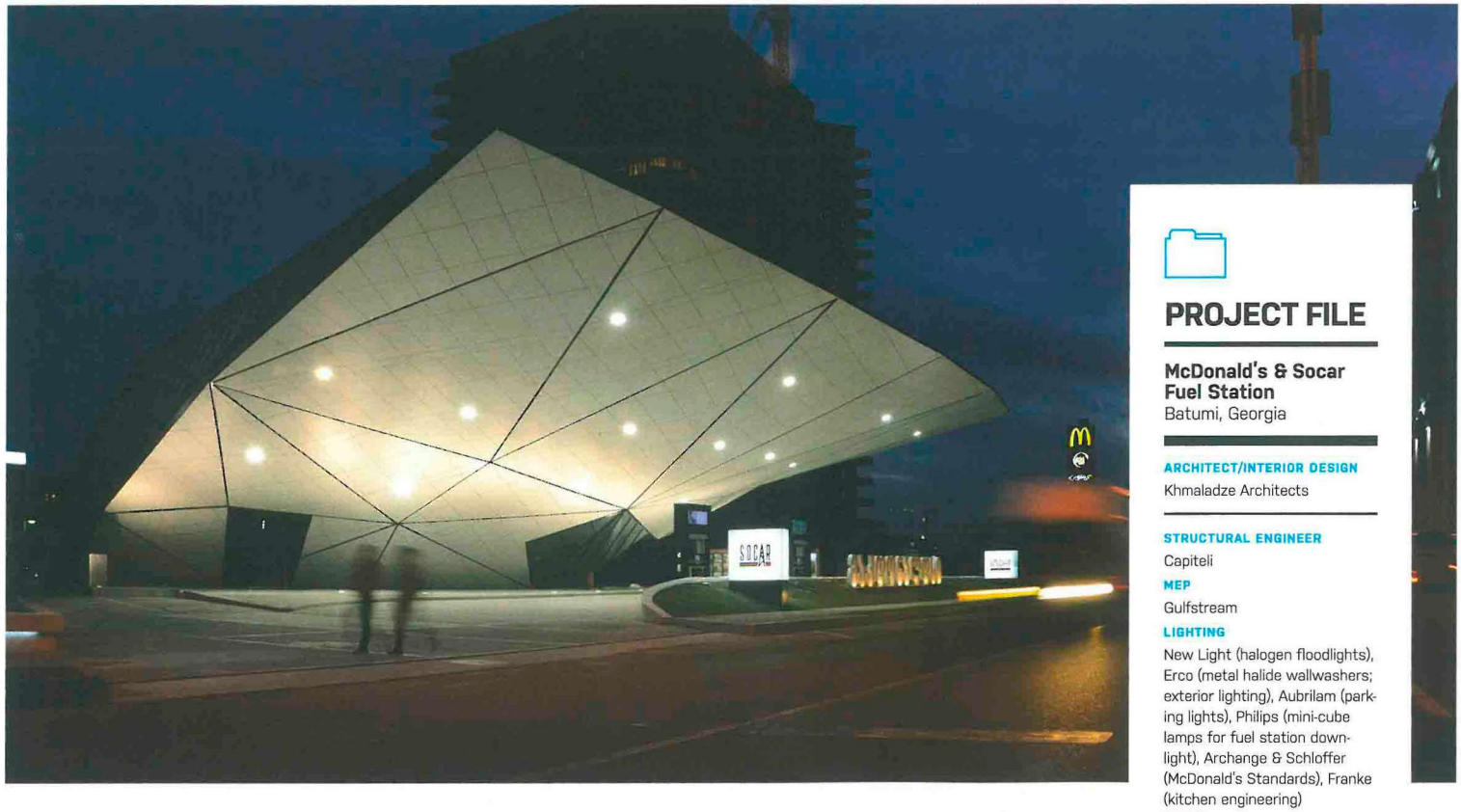
↑ [Top] The glass-enclosed McDonald's and Socar fuel station is a modern marvel on the Black Sea.

↑ Vegetation hides the view of the gas pumps from the diners.

"All operations of the fuel station are out of sight of the restaurant's customers."

-GIORGI KHMALADZE, KHMALADZE ARCHITECTS





↑ The cantilevered roof to the Socar fuel station separates it from the McDonald's on the other side.

PROJECT FILE

McDonald's & Socar Fuel Station
Batumi, Georgia

ARCHITECT/INTERIOR DESIGN
Khmaladze Architects

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER
Capiteli

MEP
Gulfstream

LIGHTING
New Light (halogen floodlights), Erco (metal halide wallwashers; exterior lighting), Aubrilam (parking lights), Philips (mini-cube lamps for fuel station downlight), Archange & Schloffer (McDonald's Standards), Franke (kitchen engineering)

GLASS
Gedik CAM

Information in the project file is provided by the retailer and/or design firm.