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## **The Ager Group, a Chinese landscape architecture firm, opens new office at 175 Portland St., Boston**

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AGER Group, Inc., is proud to be making history by opening one of the first U.S. offices of a Chinese design firm. Offering the full range of commercial and residential landscape architectural services, the firm is scheduled to move into its new offices at 175 Portland St., on February 1st, 2009. The convenient location in the Bulfinch Triangle is just a block from TD Banknorth Garden.

True to its vision, AGER insisted that the open office design take its cue from the landscape and combine sustainable choices with a bold artistic vision. For example, a stained glass artist, inspired by Tiffany art nouveau glass, is transforming a drab light well view in the main workspace into a magical landscape vista. The artist lives in Shanghai.

Opening its first overseas office in the city was only natural for the Shanghai-based landscape architecture-centered design firm. The city has long been considered the fountainhead of landscape architecture—home of Olmsted, pioneer in the profession (he even coined the term), the first professional school for the profession, the Harvard Graduate School of Design, a high concentration of award winning landscape architectural firms, and recently a center of sustainable thinking. Of course, ties between the city and Shanghai go back to the China Trade era of the nineteenth century. For Xiaowei Ma, who spent many years in Cambridge working at Sasaki, before moving back to China in 2001 to found AGER, Inc., it is like coming home. From his grad school days at the University of Minnesota, he envisioned a world in which east and west learn from and benefit each other in designing a better world.

When Tom Paine, head of the area's office, moved to China for a year in AGER's Shanghai office in 2007, he was shocked at the number of SUVs and Hummers, and posh neighborhoods of palatial villas with estate style outdoor entertainment areas, swimming pools and spas, the trappings of China's rapid growth into a consumer economy in its own right. The timing was perfect to start talking seriously about sustainability, as China was moving to a leading position, not just in its export of inexpensive goods but in the generation of costly greenhouse gases.

If the country looks to the west for style and for substance, notably in the form of technological expertise, the city office provides just such service to the company's 80 employees based in Shanghai and Beijing. Its clients in China insist on the best from the west, that is, design that both performs well and remains true to Chinese culture, old and new. That is what fusion design means in China. Here, fusion design includes eastern thinking beyond zen. That excitement is what keeps the city's office up at night—that, and the 12-hour time difference from China.

What also sets Ager Group apart is its uniquely global business model. To name his firm, Ma chose

the Latin name Ager, for field, the same root as in agrarian and agriculture. As one of the top five private firms in China, the firm is well known for its work with the leading private developers such as Boao Forum, a resort on Hainan, the largest island off the Chinese coast, Taihu International Golf Club in Suzhou, the classical garden center of China, and Jinlin Tiandi at Xintiandi, Shanghai's success clone of the city's own Quincy Market.

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