

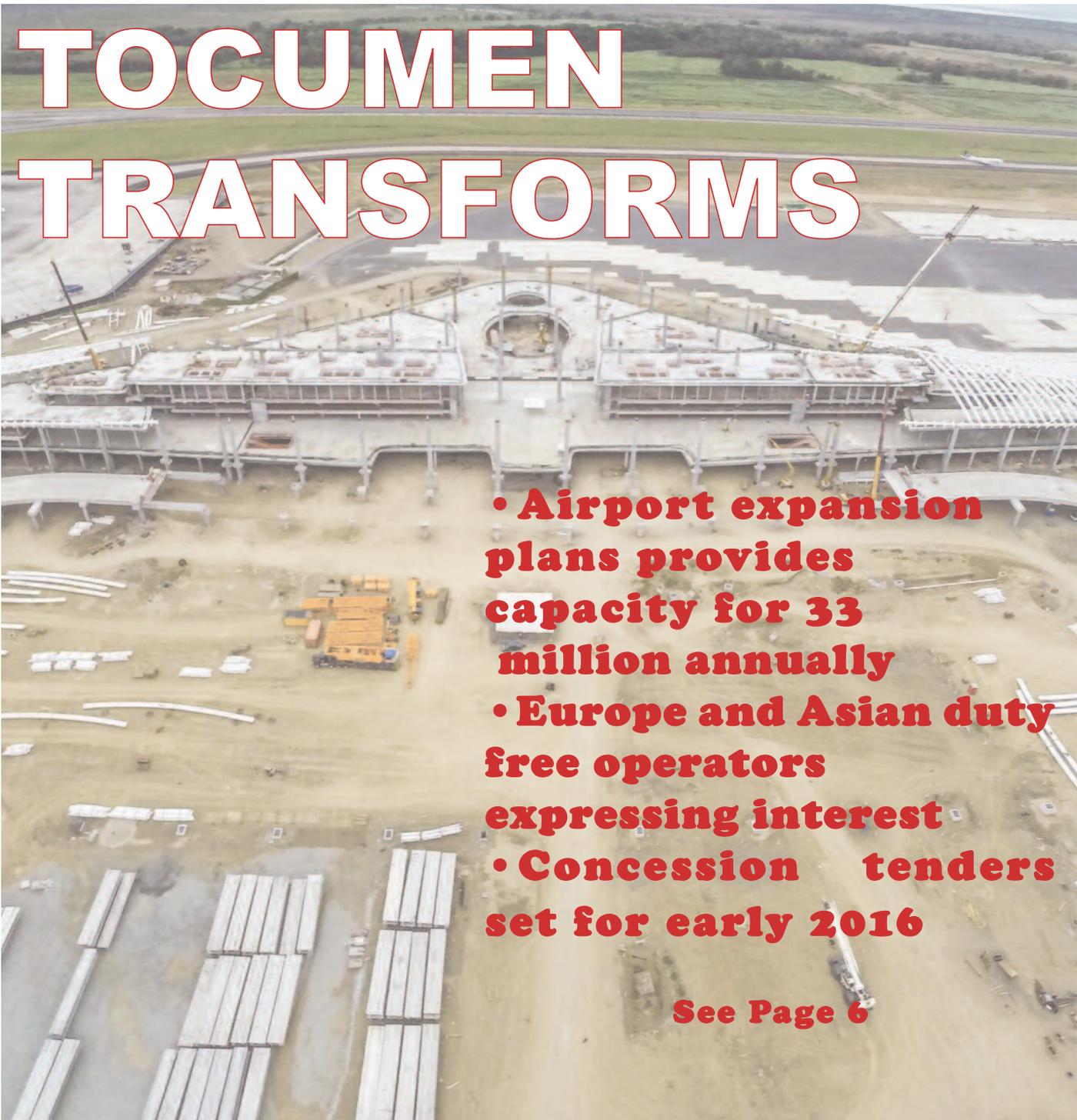
The *Latin* America Report

News and views on the airport, airline and travel retail sectors in the region

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AIRPORT SHOPPING 'BORING'

Architect calls for more diversity in airport retail experience

By Wendy Gallagher

Expect the unexpected for the facelift about to take place at Rio de Janeiro's international airport.

Architect Robbie Gill, owner and director of The Design Solution says airport retail needs to be shaken up. "Jesus it's boring," he tells The Latin America Report. "They (airports) all look the same."

Gill and his team are working with Rio Galeão (airport operators consisting of Changi, Odebrecht and Infraero) planning the spaces for the renovation. "Odebrecht has been absolutely brilliant to work with," says Gill.

"The privatization in South America has really opened up opportunities," says Gill, adding some of the bigger, older terminals are in need of an overhaul. The Rio terminals are "big chunks of concrete. There is a brutal feel to those terminals," he says.

His plan is to give the terminals "heart, smiles, colour and experience." Included in the renovation is a level in T2 that is under utilized and repositioning the operational aspects of the building. "There will be a compelling change to the way the airport operates," he says. Stating that his firm has worked for both sides of the fence in airports (designing airport space as well as commercial use) "puts us in an interesting position. Architects usually like to control things," he laughs.

Gill firmly believes that when planning airport space, "every passenger needs to see an airplane." He adds unlike a shopping centre, "airports are like a sausage factory. In one end and out the other. The key is to manipulate the flow."

Offering a wider variety of retail stores will be a "bit of a learning curve," says Gill. He agrees quality,

popular retailers have a proven track record of making money for airports, something he calls a "most unfortunate trend" because it causes airport operators hesitation in making any changes.

However, spend per passenger is declining in most airports, says Gill. Airports that are reporting increased retail sales figures are doing so because passenger numbers have increased, not the spend, he says.

Because limited space means an airport is never going to offer a huge choice of options, Gill says it's important for commercial directors to attract stores that "give people a surprise...an opportunity to buy things that aren't offered on the high street.

"We need more diversity," he says. "The best spenders are people going on holiday. They are great consumers and customers," Gill says, adding they should be treated to a greater and more unique shopping experience.



Firm planning Rio airport renovation. 'The privatization in South America has really opened up opportunities.'

**--Robbie Gill
The Design Solution**

One of his proudest projects was his involvement in the expansion of Gatwick's North Terminal 15 years ago. "To me that was the start of the airport revolution." Gill says it was the first attempt the British Airport Authority (BAA) made in bringing in quality retailers. "We were right

at the forefront." It was after this project, Gill says he decided to focus strictly on airports, with 45% of his work done on airport terminals and another 45% on working with leading travel retail and duty free operators worldwide creating retail spaces.

Naturally Gill has his favourite airports, which vary according to category. He likes Changi Airport in Singapore for its customer service and wide-open spaces; Hong Kong International Airport for its architecture; and London's Heathrow International Airport for its retail offer, which he acknowledges, was a project his firm worked on.

We're confident that after Gill puts his touch on airports in Latin America, a new favourite will appear on his list.

