In addition to the SRK Group’s reasons for reforming the way North America was doing business in the 1990s, the internal North American corporate dynamics required attention. What was a top-down model had to be transformed into a partnership model, where a broader range of senior staff participated in decisions. But that desire to better reflect the values of the group and put power into the hands of those who made it work could triumph only as an evolution and not a revolution. Allowing time for the change to happen organically rather than imposing it was critical.

As a result, the SRK Group in the final years of the 20th century and the first few years of the 21st spent significant time making sure it got the transition to an international consultancy right.
In January 1996, Andy Barrett proposed that a new position, based in Vancouver, be created to co-ordinate the globalisation changes. His appointment to fill that role also gave him a chance to directly address the issues within the North American unit.

“We thought at the time that Andy was a good ambassador for the SRK way of doing things and people liked the issues within the North American unit. He faced a daunting task. Keith Robinson and Rob Dorey, two of the key players, were both Type A personalities who liked to get their own way, and the culture in the North American offices reflected that.

Soon after arriving, Barrett organised a two-day meeting of the important participants. The talk wasn’t about profits or whether the unit was performing; they were about what made SRK, SRK.

The meeting was about empowering the people within the North American office to have a say in what the company wanted to do with the group. He and the culture. Dave Bentel, Keith Robinson, Rob Dorey, Neal Rigby, Joe McGinley and Chris Page were among the important participants. The talks weren’t about profits or whether the unit was performing; they were about what made SRK, SRK.

Barrett arrived in Vancouver in August 1996 as the chief executive officer of the Global geotechnical business unit with the intention of devoting a quarter of his energies to North America. He faced a new role. It made sense for them to lead us forward into this new global mode.

Barrett created a recognition system that valued technical leadership and gave those who achieved consulting success a say in the running of the global company. Leadership was no longer limited to managerial appointments. It made sense for them to lead us forward into this new global mode.

As the cultural shift started emerging, and the truth was that the original North American and new SRK Global cultures were incompatible. Barrett recognised that quickly. In his decade with the firm, he came to know SRK and its people intimately. He got to know them well when they were in their part of the world and he was in his. It wasn’t that he disagreed with them, it was that the company was acting on the philosophy of one person, one vote, and expanding that group to be ultimately the strategic and policy-making group within the organisation — that was a major change in the management in the company.

It was a radical change for NA, and it took probably five years to implement,” Barrett says. “And the culture doesn’t change overnight, and it couldn’t be any one single individual who drove it. It wasn’t that kind of process. It appealed to the values and the beliefs of a broader group. We were evolving the consensus model that had worked well for us elsewhere in SRK.”

Resistance

In earlier years, Robinson had run SRK with a more centralised approach. The changes triggered by the larger SRK Global group were about how the company wanted to grow.

“SRK was a great firm, but I was feeling that the way things were happening and you were going to contribute at the level you were capable of, rather than being restricted by hierarchy.”

Everyone recognised that such a structure required buy-in to succeed — people had to have a particular kind of psyche, they had to be entrepreneurs and simultaneously recognise the value of collaborating with colleagues. This was a change of emphasis from a culture that was based on a more traditional command-and-control model. The new approach reflected a desire to lead people where and how they could contribute, rather than telling them how they would contribute.

Robinson joined JW in September 1998, specialising in soil investigations and civil work.

Office in Columbia, South Carolina, did little mining work and no longer made sense within the group in the light of a mining-focused strategy. It was sold. In comparison, the environmental remediation part was sold to Jacques Whitford (JW). Robinson joined JW in September 1998, specialising in soil investigations and civil work.
Renewal and Rejuvenation

The new structure was more diverse than the old. It was timely, more transparent and better suited to the group’s needs and to those who believed in its core values.

Peter Healey had transferred from SRK-Boise in the early 1990s to focus on mining projects with Andy Robertson, whose recognized expertise in acid rock drainage had helped bring in projects such as Mt. Washington, Vangorda and Sa Dena Hes. Healey worked with Robertson and Cam Scott on Vangorda and Sa Dena Hes, designing tailings and water-management facilities.

In the early 1990s, Daryl Hockley and John Chapman also joined SRK, and the combined experience of the team led to the creation of a geo-environmental group. Its initial focus was on supporting the mining industry with specialty civil/geotechnical services relating to mine operations and closure. Kelly Sexsmith returned to SRK in 1997 after completing her master’s degree, and was followed less than four months later by Stephen Day. With these additions, the group — known as the Vancouver Geoenvironmental (GE) Group — achieved a critical mass in geochemistry. It was able to take on projects than four months later by Stephen Day. With these additions, the group — known as the Vancouver Geoenvironmental (GE) Group — achieved a critical mass in geochemistry. It was able to take on projects 

In the late 1990s, projects such as Grandon, Jericho and Wismut kept the GE Group busy. Then, in 2000, Hockley won the contract for closing the Giant Mine in Yellowknife. This was a challenging project involving the reclamiation of 257,000 tonnes of arsenic trisulde underground.

“Giant is a good example of a challenge that no other company could have taken on,” Hockley says. “It had chemistry problems, physical problems and social problems. We did really well coming in as a technical advisor who, right from the get-go, we would not be part of the final implementation. We knew that would allow us to give the client unbiased advice. We went in expecting to be there for three to five years and were rewarded with longer-term involvement.”

In 2001, the GE Group took on the British Columbia Mine Project together with Vancouver’s mining group. The same year, Dylan MacGregor joined the geochemistry team and commenced an extensive field investigation at the Faro Mine. After that, the number of geochemists in Vancouverquickly grew to 12, and in 2002, SRK Vancouver hosted the first SRK Global geochemistry workshop. This drew a wider range of challenging projects such as mine water management, the permitting of new coal mines in British Columbia, Canada. He started in Vancouver and did a master’s in geochemistry before moving into the environmental side of mining in the late 1980s.

In 1998, Gencor asks Rigby to provide technical support for a geological team to support the mining activity. Although the GE Group had always offered water services to SRK’s clients, these services had been provided on an ancillary basis. In 2010, Hockley championed an initiative to develop a dedicated water services team, and in early 2011, he hired John Duncan, a distinguished water management consultant, to head the new division.

SRK had been providing hydrogeological services since the late 1990s, through Michael Royle. The award of the Giant contract acted as a catalyst for the expansion of the hydrogeological team. Dan Mackie was hired in 2003, and the hydrogeology specialists developed a closer relationship with the geochemistry and mining teams. The integrated team was able to tackle a wider range of challenging projects such as mining water management, the permitting of new coal mines in B.C., engineering studies for uranium projects in Saskatchewan and work with other commodities around the world.

Like the geo-environmental consultants, Jakubec of the mining team welcomed the GE Group’s restructuring in the late 1990s. A geological engineer who fled Czechoslovakia in 1987, Jakubec had made his way to Canada, where he successfully recruited him to join SRK’s geo-environmental group. Since then, Day has specialised in developing innovative approaches to waste management, and assessing existing waste-disposal facilities to identify ways of minimizing contaminated drainage.

Profile: Stephen Day

Stephen Day was born in the U.K. but did his bachelor of science degree in geology at the University of British Columbia, Canada. He moved to Vancouver and did a master’s in geochemistry before moving into the environmental side of mining in the late 1980s.

In 1993, while working for Damo & Moore, Day began noticing SRK consultants competing with his company or working on other projects. Over the years, Day says, the biggest change he has witnessed is a shift in the primary focus of mining firms from resource extraction to the environment. If not greater, concern about what happens when the resource is exhausted and the mine closes. “When I first joined SRK, I joked that my environmental report would be Appendix Z and didn’t play any real role in a project’s outcome,” Day recalls. “Now the work we do in our group can be critical to a project’s success.”

Day has worked on the Red Chris copper/gold project for several years now.
found a job in northern B.C., working on the Cassiar mine. It was there that he met Dennis Laubscher, a world-recognized mine-tunneling guru and SRK associate at the time. This kicked off his professional journey. “Cassiar was a very difficult mine, and Laubscher always said that I got my second engineering degree there. He was damned right.”

During this time, he became an SRK client and met Steffen Page, who had assumed oversight of the diminished mining team. That allowed Jakubec to rediscover the SRK culture he had admired. 

“SRK was a week in a shabby hotel on the North Shore. A suitcase to downtown Vancouver and all I got from there. He was damned right. “

SRK’s team identified a total of 56 possible methods for remediation of the arsenic trioxide dust and led a diverse group of consultants through investigation and scoping of arsenic trioxide dust. In 2004, SRK’s role was expanded to include development of an overall site-closure plan. SRK’s team assisted with an extensive program of stakeholder consultation, including three multi-day workshops where community groups evaluated the design options. The ultimate decision was to freeze the rock around the dust-storage areas to trap the arsenic.

“My second engineering degree there. He was damned right.”

Although the market soured in 1997, over the next few years Cassiar was a week in a shabby hotel on the North Shore. Had I been a weak person, I would have cried.”

SRK designed the freezing process. Combinations of active and passive freezing systems were analysed and then tested at full scale. The active systems, similar to those of indoor ice rinks, circulate cooled liquid through a series of underground pipes. The passive systems employ pipes filled with carbon dioxide; the carbon dioxide vaporises within the pipe wherever it contacts warm ground and condenses in a radiator exposed to the cold air. Gaseous carbon dioxide travelling up the pipe and liquid carbon dioxide flowing down create a fully passive heat pump that requires no external source of power. During the project’s lengthy period of approvals and environmental assessment, SRK assisted with a number of stabilisation projects, repairing the underground workings, upgrading the water-treatment systems and replanting several hundred hectares of a creek that flows through the mine site. SRK also prepared a comprehensive plan for closure and reclamation of the site. Environmental assessment was completed in 2013, and the project is now in the next stage of licensing.

OUTCOME: SRK continues to act as senior technical advisor to the client’s project team, reviewing detailed designs for what has become one of the largest mine closures in Canada.

In 1999, SRK won an international competition for the best technical advisor for remediation of the arsenic trioxide dust. In 2004, SRK’s role was expanded to include development of an overall site-closure plan. SRK’s team identified a total of 56 possible methods for remediation of the arsenic trioxide dust and led a diverse group of consultants through investigation and scoping of arsenic trioxide dust. In 2004, SRK’s role was expanded to include development of an overall site-closure plan. SRK’s team assisted with an extensive program of stakeholder consultation, including three multi-day workshops where community groups evaluated the design options. The ultimate decision was to freeze the rock around the dust-storage areas to trap the arsenic.

SCOPE: Between 1948 and 1999, Giant Mine produced gold by roasted arsenopyrite ore. This process produced 237,000 tonnes of arsenic trioxide dust that was stored underground in mined-out stopes and purpose-built chambers. The dust is over 60 percent arsenic and its solubility represents a significant risk to groundwaters and to nearby Yellowknife Bay.

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OUTCOME: SRK continues to act as senior technical advisor to the client’s project team, reviewing detailed designs for what has become one of the largest mine closures in Canada.
The Pogo mine was established in 2006 and is Alaska’s largest producing gold mine. In 2010, the client commissioned SRK to conduct a regional structural geology interpretation of the Pogo district. The objective was to increase the understanding of gold mineralisation and to aid exploration targeting.

**OUTCOME:** This project resulted in the important discovery of a new zone that significantly increased the Pogo deposit’s resource inventory. SRK had performed staged site visits to collaborate with the deposit’s structural geology. Integrating these results, it prepared a regional structural geology interpretation, which Sumitomo used to define and evaluate potential exploration target areas.

Pogo’s gold mineralisation occurs within a structurally controlled, stacked system of laminated veins. At the time of SRK’s site visits, the system was being mined to the south of its point of truncation by a post-mineralisation diorite. SRK recognised that the system probably extended to the north of the diorite’s margins and Sumitomo confirmed this hypothesis with targeted exploratory drilling, resulting in the discovery of the new East Deep zone.

"Our consultancy’s success in building a diamond practice is evidenced by our involvement in nearly every diamond project in Canada," he says, "in many cases for a decade." The most significant projects include the Ekati, Victor and Snap Lake mines. In 2002, Page decided to leave SRK, but to remain an associate. Although Jakubec regretted the loss of his colleague as a day-to-day presence, the change did present new opportunities.

"After Page left, only Chris Lee and myself were left in the Vancouver mining and geology business unit," says Jakubec. "Andy Barrett asked me if I would be interested in developing and leading the unit, and I agreed."

New additions to the mining and geology team included Ryan Campbell, Bruce Murphy, Chris Elliott and Marek Nowak. Working with Campbell and Murphy, Jakubec recruited a dozen bright young associates with exploration backgrounds to provide high-quality, integrated geotechnical field services. The team has been involved in numerous high-profile projects around the world, including Oyu Tolgoi in Mongolia, Voisey’s Bay in Canada, Kumtor in Kyrgyzstan, Chuquicamata and El Teniente in Chile, Sadiola in Senegal, Kમa in the DRC, Silangan in the Philippines, and Venetia, Cullinan and Finsch in South Africa.

Construction underway of No. 1 shaft at Oyu Tolgoi – the largest financial undertaking in Mongolia’s history.
PROJECT: Ekati Diamond Mine Open Benching
Northwest Territories, Canada

CLIENT: BHP Billiton Diamonds Inc.

SCOPE: In 1998, Canada opened its first diamond mine, Ekati, which is operated and 80 percent owned by BHP Billiton. Having successfully commissioned an open-pit mine, BHP invited SRK to help select and design an appropriate method for underground mining.

SRK’s team, including Jarek Jakubec and Chris Page, recommended the use of open benching — a new mining method previously not commissioned in North America. Although the method had been successfully used at several De Beers’s diamond operations in South Africa, it had never before been tested in an Arctic environment.

Open benching involves accessing a deposit from a ramp, developed down from the surface. At Ekati, access to the production levels was provided via routes branching off the ramp at regular intervals to reach the kimberlite pipes. These level-access drifts for stope production were also used for exploratory diamond drilling and mining infrastructure — including sumps, refuge bays and electrical installations. Production cross-cuts were built into and across the kimberlite pipes for slot access, stope drilling and production mucking. Due to kimberlite’s geomechanical and weathering characteristics, development and production blast-hole drilling had to be completed dry.

OUTCOME: When Ekati’s underground operation was commissioned in 2002, Canada became the third country — after South Africa and Russia — to open an underground diamond mine. When the pit (right) reached its maximum depth, continued recovery of high value ore was achieved using underground methods. At Ekati the pit ramp continued underground — corkscrewing downward — and branched off at regular intervals to access the kimberlite pipes.
Change in Denver

As Barrett was moving to Vancouver in 1996, Neal Rigby, who had chaired the board of SRK Global, was transferring from Cardiff to Denver to build a practice in the U.K. He established a mining-finance team, similar to the one he had helped put together in the U.K., to handle due diligence and cutting-edge financing work in North America.

“Of the other ones that I was across was that I got sick and tired of bumping into people on my travels around the world and hearing them say, ‘SRK in the U.S. only does geotechnical, tailings, acid-rock drainage, water and environmental work. You’re not noted for doing any mining or mining finance at all’,” Rigby explained.

Rigby successfully put together 8 to 10 mining and geological experts, in spite of the collapse of the commodities markets during which many mining companies left Denver, merged or relocated.

In the wake of the deal, Brown left Denver to anchor Henderson. Ten and a half months later, he pulled together several technical teams from South Africa, Australia and the U.K. Some 50 to 60 consultants were required. A month and a half later, they finished the final competent person’s report on a copper project in Zambia. The report generated opportunities, as hoped, and SRK became involved with more large-scale geotechnical design work. This reinvigorated group almost immediately landed the Barrick Pascua Lama project and the Zambian government to help negotiate the exit of the Zambian government to help negotiate the exit of Anglo from Zambia.

Back in the U.S., Henderson’s network of contacts generated opportunities, as hoped, and SRK became involved with more large-scale geotechnical design work. This reinvigorated group almost immediately landed the Barrick Pascua Lama project and the feasibility study for INCO at the Gomo project, working with many of the SRK global offices. Bob Dorey had a counterpart of similar calibre in the office who could sell work. Together they raised the profile of the SRK geotechnical group in Denver and periodically moved into a Rio Tinto project in the U.K. That led to an offer to move to the U.K., to handle due diligence and cutting-edge financing work in North America.

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In terms of the organisational issues in the U.S. practice, Robinson and Barrett had been looking for potential partners. One option was Mike Henderson, who had worked for SRK earlier and was now running Westec, originally founded by John Welsh and headquartered in Reno.

With the reorganisation of the Canadian office underway, Barrett negotiated the takeover of Westec with the idea of bringing Henderson into SRK as a potential agent of change. Westec was in rough shape with the collapse of the copper market and some difficult clients. Barrett was in a position to take over a full-fledged office, to sell consulting work, and to provide financial and other support to SRK.

In Denver, though, regardless of the successes SRK enjoyed in the market downturn that began in late 1997, organisational conflict bled into the new millennium. The hoped-for rainmaker, Henderson, had taken it badly. As a partner and a long-term investor in the business, he thought his judgment deserved more respect. He had acted in what seemed like the best entrepreneurial spirit of the organisation and become involved in a very innovative deal. He thought it was an ambitious and far-sighted vision.

In the end, though, the client defaulted on a large sum. Payments were extremely slow — financing charges as well as the demands on the firm’s cash flow inflamed tensions among the senior partners. Dorey’s roots in SRK were as deep as anyone else’s. He had helped build and sustain the firm in the U.S. over a golden era — with metals still on the down cycle — he took it badly. As a partner and a long-term investor in the business, he thought his judgment deserved more respect. He had acted in what seemed like the best entrepreneurial spirit of the organisation and become involved in a very innovative deal. He thought it was an ambitious and far-sighted vision.

Eventually the Ankara office grew into a full-fledged SRK unit, and the experience of slowly moving into the market provided some of the senior partners with a chance to make a mark in the Turkish market. In early 1999, the Ankara office won a $500 million project in Turkey that led to the creation of an office in that country staffed initially by Crista Er, an environmental consultant. They were extremely slow — financing charges as well as the demands on the firm’s cash flow inflamed tensions among the senior partners.

In mid-2003, Brown returned from Tucson, where the office was thriving thanks to mine-closure work. In that role, Brown had continued to focus on building the business in the U.S. and expanding the firm’s footprint into new markets. He had helped build and sustain the firm in the U.S. over a golden era — with metals still on the down cycle — he took it badly. As a partner and a long-term investor in the business, he thought his judgment deserved more respect. He had acted in what seemed like the best entrepreneurial spirit of the organisation and become involved in a very innovative deal. He thought it was an ambitious and far-sighted vision.

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December 2001, we had drunk back down to essentially four guys in the mining team and about six people who had worked with Rob," Braun says. "I laid off a few folks as we just didn’t have the backlog. Neal had returned to the U.K. in the fall. At the end of 2001, Denver was as small as we’ve been at any time with SRK. Morale was at an all-time low and we had nowhere to go but up."

Fortunately, in 2004, things started to turn around and the market recovered. In spite of the loss of four guys in the mining team and about six people who had worked with Rob, “Braun says. “I laid off a few folks as we just didn’t have the backlog. Neal had returned to the U.K. in the fall. At the end of 2001, Denver was as small as we’ve been at any time with SRK. Morale was at an all-time low and we had nowhere to go but up."

For the first time since perhaps those early band-of-brothers days of united, hither-and-yon, gung-ho enthusiasm, the group felt like it was united.
Reno and Elko

Dave Bentel’s background in the South African practice and his experience in working with SRK’s founders were invaluable to the Reno office during its early years. Bentel not only brought with him not only the SRK culture and vision, but also seasoned management experience that helped him build a solid and professional business unit.

Bentel spent the early 1990s helping members of the Reno office hone their technical expertise and experience. With the downturn in gold and copper markets later in the decade, SRK Reno became well versed in temporary closure as well as care and maintenance plan preparation. As a result, Reno — and Jeff Parshley in particular — became a recognized leader in mine closure.

“It’s probably the most multidisciplinary consulting that we do,” Parshley says. “You have to think big picture. You have to learn a lot, about a lot of things, and you have to know when to call in the specialists and which people to call.”

Initially these opportunities arose primarily from the environmental and closure people on due diligence teams, mostly from the Denver mining group but also from Cardiff and Santiago,” Parshley says. “Later, clients asked us to do straight-up environmental due diligence reviews as well.”

By 1995, SRK was attracting significant national and cross-office co-operation was on the rise. Rob Bowell of SRK’s Cardiff office joined forces with Reno to develop a geochemistry sub-practice for Nevada and the rest of the southwest U.S. Both Bowell and SRK’s reputations grew exponentially through their work on projects such as the Getchell and Robinson mines in Nevada and Copper Flat in New Mexico.

SRK’s acquisition of Weston in 1998, the Reno office acquired some new engineers and environmental scientists. Mark Willow also transferred to the office from Denver in 1999 to provide support to the environmental group under Parshley’s leadership. Over the next 15 years, Willow would become an expert in mine permitting and environmental due diligence, affording Parshley the opportunity to expand his services beyond the southwest U.S. and become an international corporate consultant in mine closure and environmental due diligence.

Meanwhile, the Elko office was also thriving, under the capable leadership of Val Sawyer. Sawyer was the backbone of the Elko office. She had founded the Westec office with a folding-table, a chair and a telephone in the early 1990s. The Nevada mining centre provided a steady supply of work, primarily in gold. Newmont Mining Corporation was a major client, as was Santa Fe Pacific Gold’s Twin Creeks open pit gold mine in the northern part of the state. Sawyer piloted Elko through the rough seas of the late 1990s downturn to become a formidable presence in the northern Nevada mining arena. When business started improving again, the group hired resource geologist Jay Pennington and civil engineer Steve Boyce.

Members of the Elko team worked on all of Nevada’s biggest mines, especially in the regions of Winnemucca and the Carlin Trend. Some of the biggest gold projects in which they were involved included the Carlin Trend for Newmont Mining Corporation, the Twin Creeks mine for Santa Fe Pacific Gold, the Bald Mountain Mine for Barrick, and the Cortez Gold Mine for Placer Dome and its successor Barrick. More recently, Elko’s consultants have worked extensively for Halliburton Energy Services on their barite mines, for Graymont’s Western US Inc’s limestone quarries in Nevada and Utah, and for General Moly on the Mount Hope Molybdenum Project.

Joins in 2005 with global

Joins in 2006; opens

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Joins in 2006; opens

With SRK’s acquisition of Weston in 1998, the Reno office acquired some new engineers and environmental scientists. Mark Willow also transferred to the office from Denver in 1999 to provide support to the environmental group under Parshley’s leadership. Over the next 15 years, Willow would become an expert in mine permitting and environmental due diligence, affording Parshley the opportunity to expand his services beyond the southwest U.S. and become an international corporate consultant in mine closure and environmental due diligence.

Meanwhile, the Elko office was also thriving, under the capable leadership of Val Sawyer. Sawyer was the backbone of the Elko office. She had founded the Westec office with a folding-table, a chair and a telephone in the early 1990s. The Nevada mining centre provided a steady supply of work, primarily in gold. Newmont Mining Corporation was a major client, as was Santa Fe Pacific Gold’s Twin Creeks open pit gold mine in the northern part of the state. Sawyer piloted Elko through the rough seas of the late 1990s downturn to become a formidable presence in the northern Nevada mining arena. When business started improving again, the group hired resource geologist Jay Pennington and civil engineer Steve Boyce.

Members of the Elko team worked on all of Nevada’s biggest mines, especially in the regions of Winnemucca and the Carlin Trend. Some of the biggest gold projects in which they were involved included the Carlin Trend for Newmont Mining Corporation, the Twin Creeks mine for Santa Fe Pacific Gold, the Bald Mountain Mine for Barrick, and the Cortez Gold Mine for Placer Dome and its successor Barrick. More recently, Elko’s consultants have worked extensively for Halliburton Energy Services on their barite mines, for Graymont’s Western US Inc’s limestone quarries in Nevada and Utah, and for General Moly on the Mount Hope Molybdenum Project.
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**Toronto**

Michael Michaud, a geologist who joined the mining team in Vancouver in 1996, offered to open a Toronto office at the turn of the millennium. He worked with David Wahl, a veteran geologist who had previously run his own geology contracting firm and was well connected in the Toronto market. SRK took over Wahl’s office space and furniture, and the new office opened in mid-2000.

Michaud hired two mining engineers named Ken Reipas and Andrew Bradfield. Prior to joining SRK in early 2001, Reipas worked for Kernwerk Engineering in Toronto for 3 years after spending nearly 14 years in operations including Western, Hemlow and Westman. Jean-François Couture joined the office in July 2001. A Montrealer by birth, Couture had earned a geology degree before completing a masters and PhD at the Université du Québec (Chicoutimi). He initially worked with the provincial geological survey, spending most of his career in Val-d'Or, Quebec, before quitting in 1996 to join an exploration company. Five years later he was out of work. A friend with SRK in Perth urged him to apply in Toronto.

Within a year, Michaud and Bradfield had accepted a lucrative offer from a client, a diamond mining company in China, leaving Couture and Reipas as the only Toronto-based employees. Over the next decade, they established a second office in Sudbury and built up the combined entity to 35 people.

“We established long-term relationships primarily through friendly personal contacts with people,” Couture says. “Most of our clients have stayed with us.”

The office handled smaller projects typically lasting a few months rather than the years-long projects that Vancouver attracted.

“Our typical client is a small to medium-sized mining company,” Couture says. “They operate one or a few mines for different commodities, but primarily gold. Some are located here in Canada, but many of our clients are operating in West Africa. We accompany them on targeted assignments that may last for a few weeks or a couple months, but it’s recurrent. We know that next year they will have new work to undertake and that we will be asked to update the work from the previous year — that would be our typical assignment on resource geology, resource evaluation or mine design.”

Over the years the office’s credibility has grown significantly, attracting larger and higher-profile clients worldwide. Key employees during this period included Glen Cole, Brian Connolly and James Siddorn.

**Saskatoon**

In 2000, after five years of interacting with SRK as the representative of the Government of Canada at the Giant Mine, Mark Liskowich joined the company and opened an office in Saskatoon. Based on the Prairies, Liskowich graduated from the University of Regina with a geology degree. He ended up working for the provincial government in Saskatchewan in the environmental management practices of that team.

After roughly a decade, he moved to the Northwest Territories to become manager of technical services for the Giant Mine closure. He inherited SRK and the demanding contract that had Daryl Hockley as the point professional.

Liskowich formed a strong working relationship with that team. “After my first week-long project meeting in the Vancouver office, I came back and I told my wife that SRK was a super company, that I could see myself really enjoying working for them if we got tired of ‘Yellowknife,’ he says.

“She said, ‘Maybe after Yellowknife, you can get work for SRK’. I looked at her and replied, ‘Don’t be silly. The secretaries have more degrees than I have’.”

When he contemplated leaving his government job six years later, Hockley and Barrett heard about it and persuaded him to join SRK.

Up until then, SRK had been doing a lot of work in Saskatchewan for Cameco — the firm formed in 1996 by the merger of two Crown corporations, the Saskatchewan Mining Development Corp. and Eldorado Nuclear Ltd. It controlled about 14 percent of the world’s uranium production. SRK was also working for Areva Resources Canada Inc. and other uranium producers in the province. A Saskatoon office allowed the company to expand its client base and introduce existing clients to a broader range of services. The largest potash-producing companies in the world are also based in Saskatchewan.

“The expected to lose money for approximately two years,” Liskowich says. “I think it took us about 11 months before we started to turn a profit. After the first year, they immediately became an SRK client. After the first year, Jeffress was joined by Steve Sellier, a geologist with a track record in permitting and cold regions hydrogeology. Later on, Dan Neuffer transferred from the SRK Elko office and became the firm’s first resident professional engineer in Alaska.

The cultural changes started in the late 1990s had borne fruit by the mid-2000s.

**The cultural changes started in the late 1990s**

had borne fruit by the mid-2000s. The period after 2004 saw strong growth and performance in the North American practice, with good co-operation between the offices. ◆