

time to go home. She took a flight to Mogadishu with her children, aged 8 and 12. They landed at Mogadishu airport on December 8 last year and saw a city that had some streets reduced to rubble akin to Stalingrad during World War II. She tried some droll Aussie humour on her parents: "Hey, you guys destroyed the city. You should have looked after it." Her parents did not quite get the joke.

At first it was only going to be an extended visit but then she sensed the opportunities. A rich Somali who lives in Saudi Arabia had bought a lavish villa on the waterfront and wanted it rebuilt to house his family. The building had miraculously survived the war in reasonable condition but it needed a refit.

A telco named Somtel then contacted her about refitting its head office. The telco sector in Somalia is booming, largely

because it has become the financial industry, too. Normal banking is too dangerous so almost all significant transactions from buying groceries to paying a taxi are settled by a mobile phone-based payment system.

Then a rich Somali investor with interests in the Gulf asked her to design a hotel with 600 rooms and conference facilities for 1000 to cater for expatriates, aid workers and returning Somalis. In a uniquely Somali twist, the hotel won't be built for a while because there is still a problem with clan-related gunfire in the neighbourhood, but the investor wants to be ready when the area is pacified.

The name Mustaf chose for her company, Yaglel, is the word Somalia's traditional nomads use for setting up camel and goat pens and shelters at a desert camp. She employs four

architects, all educated overseas, and three surveyors who have the crucial job of deciding whether a building has been too damaged by the war or if it needs to be knocked down. Mustaf is increasingly the networker and front person, dealing with clients and doing pitches.

A whole new field opened up as a result of helping an aunt do a pitch at the Jazeera Hotel, the beachfront watering hole for the expatriate community that was the target of a bomb attack in 2012. Her aunt did not raise enough cash to build the factory but another opportunity emerged from the event. Mustaf met an official from the President's office with an interest in education. He realised she was a women with an architect's training who had, incidentally, sat in on parent-teacher meetings at Ivanhoe Primary School.



Home and away: (clockwise from main picture, opposite page) the Bell Street Mall in Heidelberg West, the centre of Melbourne's ex-pat Somali community; an agency where Somalis send money to family back home; street talk with community leader Hussein Nur Haraco; greeting an Australian friend Mustaf hadn't seen since moving back to Mogadishu; showing off her children's accomplishments.