

The RIBA Journal

Gulf Issue 02

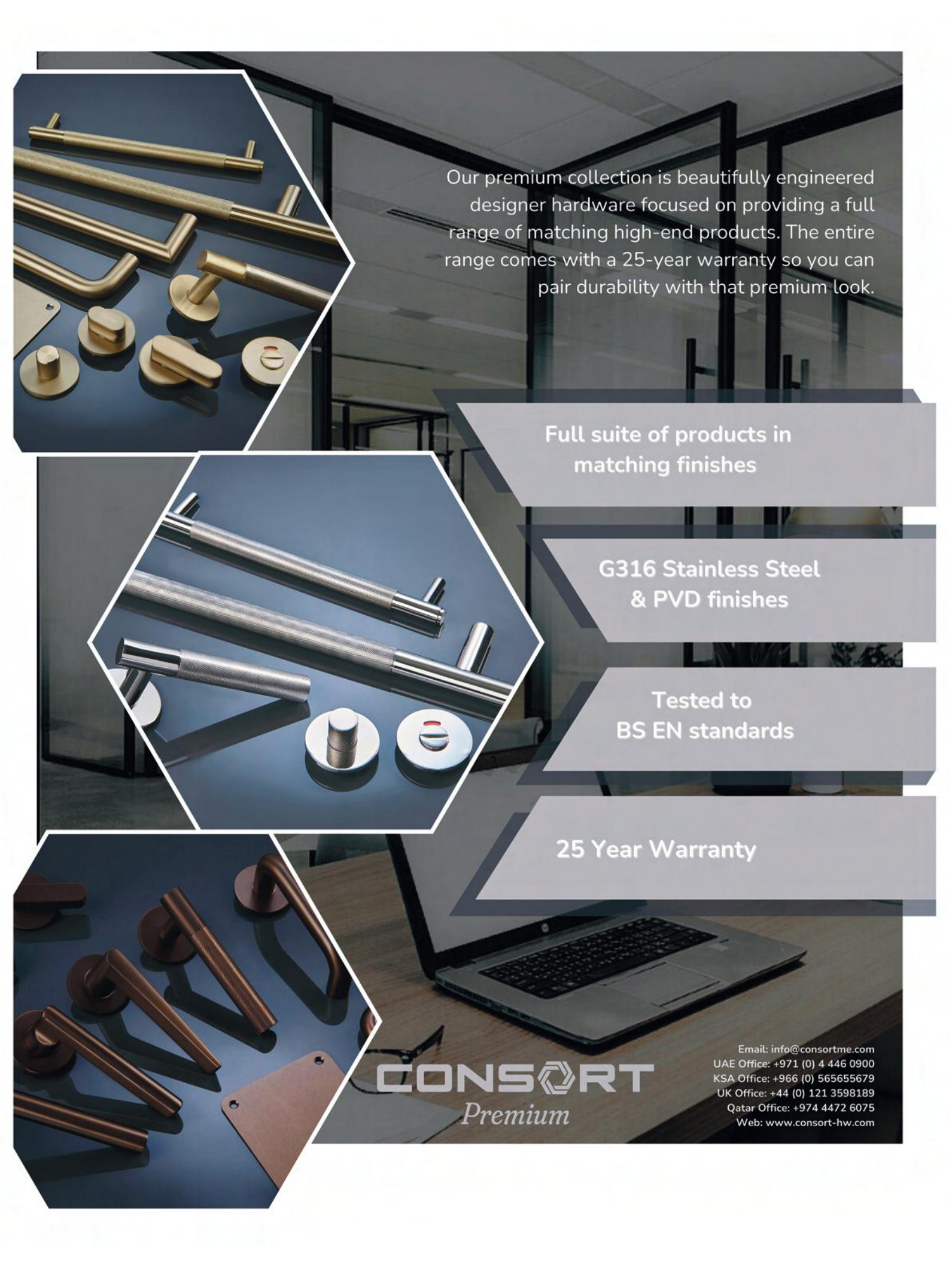
Spring 2025

Women's mosque by Diller Scofidio + Renfro

Grimshaw's Oman Botanic Garden

Gulf pavilions at Venice and Osaka





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National Bank of Dubai headquarters building, Dubai, 1959, by British architect John R Harris

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1: Buildings

**DESERT ROCK, RED
SEA, SAUDI ARABIA**
OPPENHEIM
ARCHITECTURE

Read the full story:
ribaj.com/desert-rock

At first glance, images of Desert Rock might be taken for products of AI image generator Midjourney. There's something implausibly fantastical about a warren of high-spec cave-bedrooms bored through the Hejaz Mountains of Saudi Arabia, spilling onto azure plunge pools, jutting from rocky faces like birds' nests, high above the desert plain. But they are real enough, and the luxury resort designed by New York-based Oppenheim Architecture for giga-developer Red Sea Global recently opened to guests.

Visitors enter a 'hidden valley', where the components of the 30,000m² complex – 54 villas, 10 suites and sundry spas and restaurants – are composed to immerse visitors in the landscape. 'The design emerged from a comprehensive understanding of the valley's geography and the desire to blend luxury with nature,' says architect Timothy Archambault. At ground level, angular villas are in conjoined groups of two or three, formed

in concrete in colours and textures that echo the rugged terrain. Angular, pitched-roofed 'cliff-hanging villas' are set into ravines in the side of the massif. And the suites are carved into the mountain itself, with glazed, arched openings in a chain across a sheer face. Access is via a long tunnel. There is a deliberate evocation here of the rock-carved architecture of the Nabataeans, ancient inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula.

Excavation, as well as the elevation and remote location, created the principal challenges, says the architect. Though resource-intensive, Oppenheim emphasises a concern for sustainability: excavation spoil was reused, and passive cooling integrated. 'By combining luxury, sustainability and cultural engagement,' says Archambault, 'the resort aligns with global trends toward responsible tourism, setting a benchmark for future hotel developments in similarly sensitive environments.' ●



Magic carpet



The wavy roof rises toward the qibla and shades outdoor space.

Diller Scofidio + Renfro's mosque for women, on the edge of Doha's new Education City, is a calm contrast to its outscaled urban setting

Words: Edwin Heathcote Photographs: Iwan Baan

It seems a little extraordinary that this might be the first purpose-built contemporary mosque in the Muslim world designed specifically for women, but that is the claim. And there is no doubt that this, the Al-Mujadilah Center and Mosque, is a contemporary place of worship. All the elements are here, but not necessarily in a familiar form. Designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, it is a dazzling, surprising and generous structure which both reiterates and upends conventional notions of the language of the mosque.

The new building sits on the edge of Doha's Education City, a vast 12km² campus which has, through design, grown into an architectural menagerie in an eccentric, not always coherent, but occasionally brilliant way. There are big buildings here by OMA, Arata Isozaki, Grimshaw and Legorreta + Legorreta, and even a huge stadium by Fenwick Iribarren. There is also, it might be noted, another large mosque here. Designed by Mangera Yvars, it has a streamlined parametric form with a pair of ski-jump towers as its minarets.

The whole campus was envisioned by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, the chairperson of the Qatar Foundation and mother of Qatar's current emir, and was seen as an effort to shift away from the flashy commercial skyline of downtown Doha with a more purposeful, socially driven project, and begin to diversify the small, gas-rich state's economy and culture. And it was Sheikha Moza who drove this new women's mosque.

Below An internal courtyard divides the carpeted prayer hall from education space.





Left The undulating qibla wall creates two focal points: the minbar and the skylit mihrab.

Credits

Architect

Diller Scofidio + Renfro

Mosque architecture advisor

Ziad Jamaledidine

Lead consultant

Halcrow

Landscape

Atelier Miething

Structural and facade engineer

Werner Sobek

Technology specialist,

AV, acoustics

Charcoal Blue

Lighting

Buro Happold

Signage

IN-FO.CO

Sustainability

Qatar Green Leaders

Project manager

ASTAD

Minaret, minbar, and light cone fabricator

Metalex

Long section



If it's not too Orientalist a metaphor, the best way to describe the impression of the new mosque might be as a magic carpet. This is a building defined almost entirely by its roof – a gently undulating concrete membrane that subtly responds to the uses beneath it to give them expression within the section, through both height and light. The roof is cantilevered to overhang the structure, creating a shaded public zone around it, an all-round porch with deep eaves. It sits in the middle of an enclosed garden, a gesture towards traditional evocations of paradise, using planting that is more robust and suited to its climate than the almost ubiquitous and thirsty lawns elsewhere in the city.

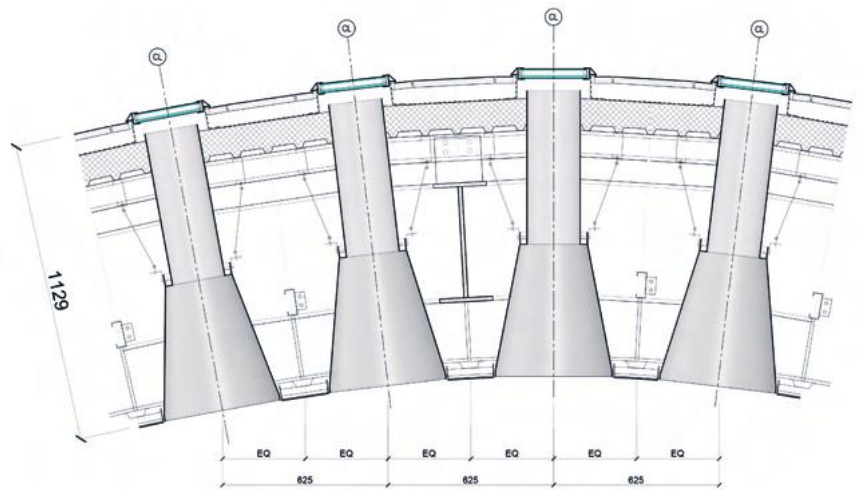
That slim concrete roof is aligned with the urban grid of Education City but the building beneath is rotated by 17 degrees to align with the direction of Mecca. It creates a disjuncture, an odd architectural throwback to the deconstruction of the 1980s – the moment, in fact, when what was then Diller + Scofidio rose to prominence in New York with its intense layered drawings, art-adjacent installations and explorations of surveillance, electronic media, performance, the body and parasitic (rather than parametric) design. Since then the architect with avant-garde roots has become a big global player, across cultural and commercial sectors, designing not only the Shed in New York but the huge 15 Hudson Yards skyscraper behind it. From the Broad in Los Angeles to the V&A East Storehouse in London, it remains a major player in culture, notably revisiting some of its earlier themes with explorations of the archive, the machine and storage. Here, in the heat of Qatar, the shady eaves announce a building that is determinedly contemporary but also decidedly humane.

That enveloping roof embraces the visitor and is made to look even lighter by a grid of perforations – skylights calibrated to only allow in a certain amount of that dazzling desert sunlight. Together with the wavy stone walls, the effect is a little reminiscent of a parametric Aalto, a revival of a kind of Finnish organicism with some curiously mid-century touches (noticeable outside too).

The prayer hall is large and light, the mihrab only hinted at in a subtle undulation in the qibla wall. This would usually be the most intensely

- 1 Prayer hall
- 2 Courtyard
- 3 Education space
- 4 Outdoor meeting

It is a very beautiful building, well-considered, well-made, generous and calm



Above The concrete roof incorporates more than 5,000 lightwells to produce a soft, diffuse luminosity in the hall.

Below In the prayer hall, a 35x20m hand-tufted wool rug designed by DS+R pixelates a traditional pattern.



decorated aspect, so to see it here as only a slight wobble is an intriguing understatement. It is picked out a little by a wash of light from above where the rug-roof is allowed to separate from the wall for a brief moment. The most ornate element here is the prayer carpet on the floor, a pinkish-red, pixelated design, which affords space on its surface for up to 750 worshippers. The pattern, abstracted from that of a single prayer rug for an individual, has been designed to create within it small zones in which worshippers might find a personal place. As she was showing me around, practice founder Liz Diller told me that many of the worshippers were used to confined spaces in mosques designed mainly for men, and were unsure how to position themselves in such a large area. This carpet is intended precisely to allow them to feel a little more comfortable, identifying a space within the larger pattern. At one end of the hall is a 'multifunctional space' into which worshippers can expand when needed.

The prayer hall is preceded by an airy, modernist-looking ablution space with views

IN NUMBERS

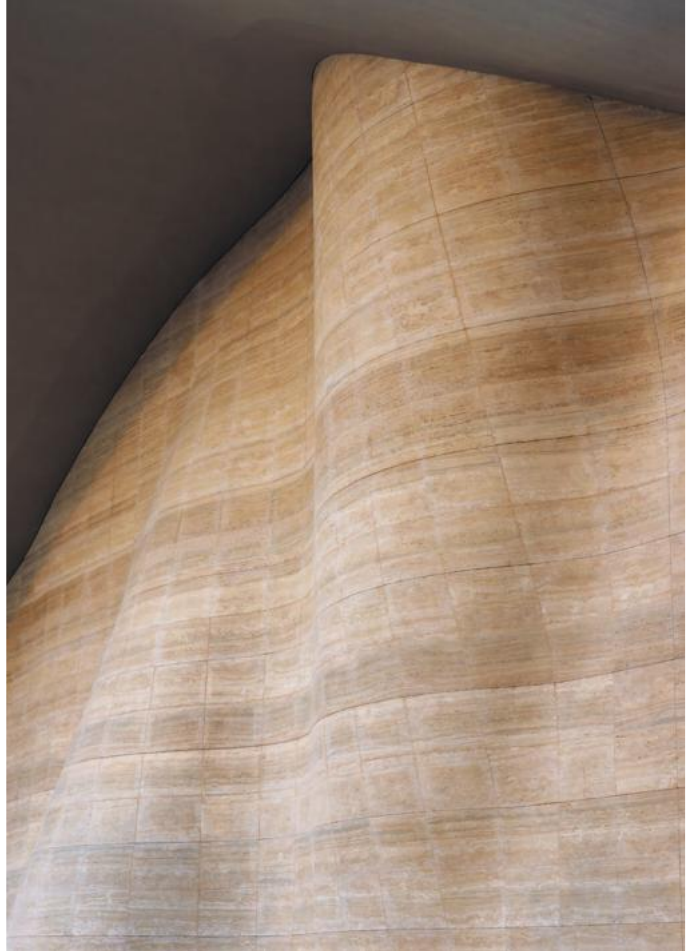
4,600m²
Covered area

875m²
Prayer hall area

750-1,300
Worshippers

8,000
Volumes on
library shelves

Right The materials palette suggests a connection to nature and includes travertine stone, basalt and limba wood.



Site and floor plan



- 1 Entrance
- 2 Ablutions
- 3 Café
- 4 Office
- 5 Classroom
- 6 Prayer hall
- 7 Courtyard
- 8 Education
- 9 Outdoor meeting

onto the courtyard garden – also very different, I am told, from the dark, secluded spaces usually afforded to women in mosques. There is also an education space and library, with intimate classrooms looking out onto the landscape – a landscape defined at its edge by a ring of sand dunes that occlude the broader grid of Education City beyond. This is partly to create a sense of enclosure (a hint of the Islamic walled garden) but also partly to shelter the women from traffic and passers-by. The transition is striking; the dry dunes and gardens becoming more lush and green towards the centre. When I visited, the planting was still taking shape but it did succeed in creating a series of something like external rooms. The undulations of the stone-clad walls become clearer here in the deep shadows of the strong sun, as does the swell of the roof.

The most striking external feature, though, is the minaret. A high-tech reinterpretation of the archetype, it resembles the Skylon designed for London's 1951 Festival of Britain. Suspended in a tensegrity structure above a circular enclosure of stone ringed with wooden seats, the cigar-shaped tower with a pierced screen contains a system of speakers that rise and fall with the call to prayer. In an echo of the muezzin's ascent of a stair, the speakers ascend in a carefully choreographed ritual before the call rings out across the campus. The screen containing them is made of a metal mesh, intended to recall the screens of mashrabiya windows. In a building that so stridently avoids the obvious architectural metaphors, there is something a little curious, almost anachronistic, in its retro-futurism combined with the slightly clichéd motifs of a digitally generated Islamic pattern.

If there is something concerning here it is the extent to which a building like this can ever be truly public. Mosques are open to all except at times of worship, but this is a space reserved for women and, although I was welcomed as a visitor with the architects, I would normally be excluded. But then it does address the particular problem of women's accommodation, which is often in basements, side rooms or on landings – even at many of the grandest of mosques. So it solves one problem while creating another. It is also a very beautiful building, well-considered, well-made, generous and calm, and all this in a landscape in which megablocks, too-wide roads and hostility to walking create not a sense of educational community but alienation in the dusty heat. It feels like a retreat, a wonderful refuge from all that. ●

Edwin Heathcote is the architecture critic of the Financial Times



Below The multi-use education space can host lectures or form an extension to the book-lined prayer hall.

Above Set in an area carved out from a dune, the 39m minaret has speakers that ascend the tensegrity structure.



Cultural leg-up

With scenography by OMA, the Islamic Arts Biennale gives a boost to Saudi Arabia in the Middle East's soft power game

Words: Tim Abrahams Photographs: Marco Cappelletti

IN NUMBERS

120,000m²

Total site area

10,000m²

Interior exhibition space;

70,000m²

Scenography

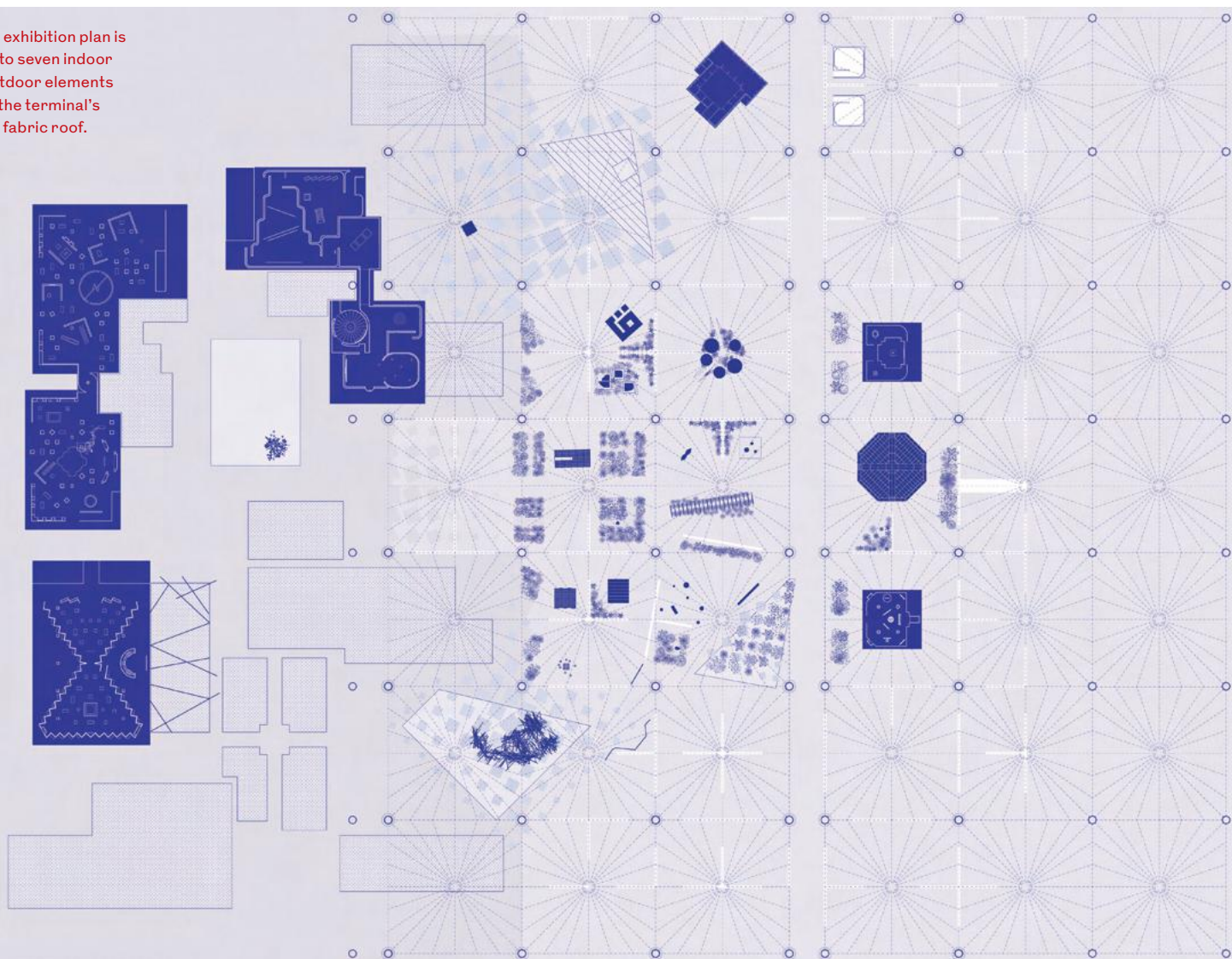
60,000m²

Landscape and outdoor exhibition space

Even for those who live and work in the Middle East, the Islamic Arts Biennale remains, both in concept and in existence, rather hard to grasp – perhaps because of its ingenuity and subtlety. Its location is key. As with the inaugural 2023 event, this year's biennale was held beneath the soaring canopy of the Hajj Terminal at King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah – designed by Bangladeshi-American architect Fazlur Rahman Khan of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, opened in 1981 and arguably the greatest moment of late modernism in the region.

In 2023, a cluster of simple cuboid buildings was placed at the northern end of the open ground beneath the tent-like Teflon-coated fibreglass structures

OMA's exhibition plan is split into seven indoor and outdoor elements under the terminal's tensile fabric roof.





AlMadar has exhibits from 30 institutions amid 37 abstract columns.

suspended from pylons. These new buildings, including five gallery spaces, were designed by the Italian architect Giò Forma to host the biennale, while scenography was by Dutch practice OMA, which has returned to the task for the much larger second edition.

Taken in architectural terms alone, the biennale is a fascinating exploration of what temporary architecture could mean in the modern Middle East – a truly welcome act given all the institution-building and heavy construction in the diversification to tourism over the last 20 years. It shows the potential for sensitive,



adaptive and economical design in the cultural sphere and, given the success of the event, the likely direction of travel in the field in several different ways.

The first aspect is the often overlooked act of valuing the existing. When OMA worked on the first biennale, there was an intention to build an additional cluster of four exhibition pavilions. While still factoring in future expansion, the practice advised the biennale team that the internal space they had was enough, and that they should cherish the flexible, open area beneath the spectacular canopy shaded from the sun, naturally ventilated, with views to aircraft arriving and departing. OMA suggested a series of low, canted walls to help structure the landscaping

near the biennale buildings, and this is where the majority of contemporary art pieces were successfully situated during this year's event, which opened in January and runs until the 25 May.

OMA's scenography negotiated four different display conditions brilliantly. Whereas the work it did for the 2023 biennale used single layers of different fabrics, including felt and varied lighting conditions, this year's expanded exhibition needed more visual continuity. The team led by Kaveh Dabiri opted for a double layer of white cotton materials throughout; a basic fabric to



Left Barrels by artist Takashi Kuribayashi formed part of the AlMidallah section, under the fabric roof.

Right and above The bowtie-shaped layout of AlMuqtani gives equal prominence to two diverse collections.



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the rear and an elasticated translucent composite to the fore, used in different ways. 'All of the rooms have some sort of architectural language, if you like,' says Dabiri, 'and are also unified through very simple implementation of the white, often translucent textile, which is then lit differently.'

In one section, AlMadar (The Orbit), 35 institutions, including Oxford's History of Science Museum, the Vatican Apostolic Library and Cairo's Museum of Islamic Art, presented selected objects, representing the engagement of Muslims with celestial navigation, the mapping of oceans and rivers, and mathematical calculations – a treasure trove including the oldest astrolabe in existence, ancient maps from Istanbul and tiles from the Alhambra Palace in Spain.

This was not an art fair or even a conventional biennale, but an impromptu museum, with OMA's simple scenography providing the required solemnity and grace to carry



Below The Kiswah is the highlight of the AlBidayah area, where curved fabric forms monumental walls.

Above Glass Qur'an by UK architect Asif Khan is shown in a biennale vitrine, custom-made by Goppion.

this off in basic hangar-like buildings. Different types of artefacts or themes in bespoke, minimalist museum cases were clustered together, with individual institutions represented by double fabric columns rising from the containers of key objects. Lit from their bases on top of the case, they created the effect of a beam from above. This was perhaps the most symbolic evocation of the biennale's theme: 'all that is in between' – a phrase that occurs 20 times in the Qur'an and alludes to man's attempts to comprehend the divine through his creation.

In the AlMuqtani (Homage) section, the scenography performed a diplomatic act, negotiating between two collections in one space: the Al Thani Collection, dominated by jewellery and superlative craft objects; and the Furusiyya Art Collection, devoted to weaponry, armour and metalwork. The double-skinned white fabric was legible as a wall, stepping in plan to a narrow central point, providing recesses for glass cases

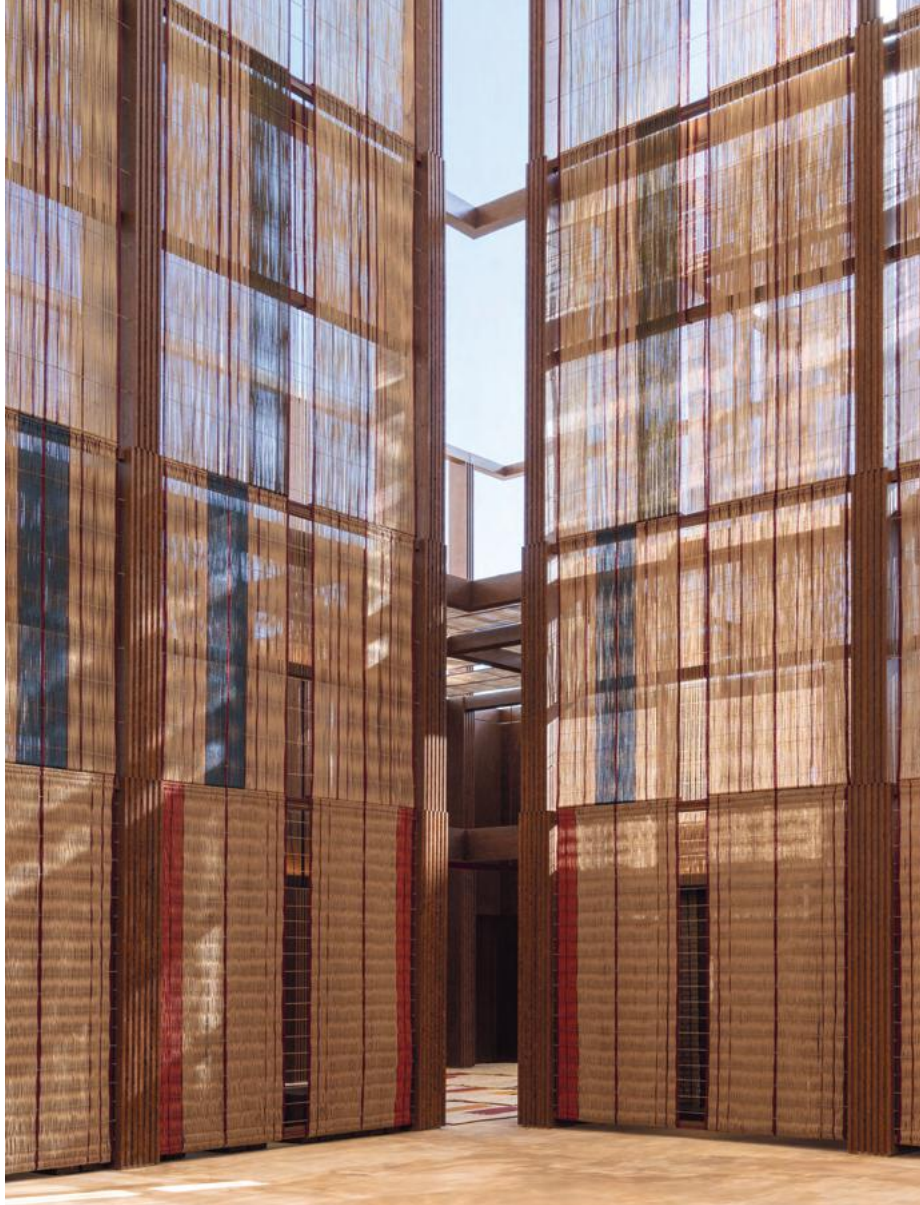


OMA's simple scenography provides the required solemnity and grace

to show objects before stepping out again on the other side of a central partition. The Al Thani collection was privileged by being first, yet the stepped profile walls began low and rise throughout the space so the Furusiyya section had a sense of greater grandeur. That suggested a balance in prestige but also a fair difference reflecting the scale of the respective collections.

Exhibitions could effectively be viewed in any order, given that Giò Forma's structures are arrayed around a central fountain area. Nominally the first section was Al Bidayah (The Beginning), and contained large objects. It occupied two buildings, the material stretched to near the full 13.6m height, and presented a smooth surface as a backdrop to the monumental objects of religious devotion, particularly the dark kiswah. This is the fabric that dresses the Kaabah at the heart of Mecca, which was exhibited in its entirety outside the holy city for the first time.

This section also contained contemporary pieces including Arcangelo Sassolino's Memory of Becoming, a perpetually rotating 8m-diameter steel disc coated with a viscous industrial oil, its surface a morass of slowly shifting forms. Here the double skin hid the steel truss that supports the motor and the disc. Culminating this section was a double artwork by British architect Asif Khan, whose current work includes the Museum of the Incense Road in AlUla, Saudi Arabia. At the biennale, OMA's design team worked closely with Khan, incorporating his suggestion that the chamber in which the main piece stands



Top On Weaving, by East Architecture Studio, was exhibited after winning the AIMusalla Prize.

Right The temporary prayer space was inspired by weaving traditions and made from palm tree waste.

should be in the centre of a circular space, with its floor rising inward by around 200mm.

According to Khan, who grew up in the Islamic faith, the proposal emerged from 'something which I saw that I had never quite noticed. Although the book is the essence of the religion, the physical spaces that house the book – our homes, the mosque or the bookshelf within the mosque – have no direct relationship with the book in terms of design.'

His project culminated in a luminous Qur'an made from 604 sheets of 0.1mm-thick glass, hand-gilded with 23-carat gold leaf, a process that took about 2,000 man hours in a hastily assembled static and dust-free room in an east London warehouse.

The Qur'an was originally proposed by Khan for a different section of the Biennale – an invited competition for a musalla or temporary prayer space. The connection to the nature of the biennale is emphasised by the jury chair, Prince Nawaf Bin Ayyaf, who points out that a mosque, once built, cannot be destroyed. 'The musalla is basically conjoined with the idea of adaptability, of ephemerality, of transience,' he says. 'A musalla stems wherever there is a need for prayer, and after that need is gone, the place is no longer there.' Khan's proposal included an exterior pavilion and came close to winning.

The successful proposal is in many ways a testimony to the benefit of an invited competition, which provided time and money for research. East Architecture from Lebanon, working closely with engineer AKT II, researched a construction material derived from waste palm fronds. This creates a board that is actually stronger than plywood. Having realised this was viable, the team found a small company in the suburbs of Riyadh that had already taken a similar product to market. They glue-laminated the product and were able to create a material they could not only build with but which was surprisingly alluring – dark but flecked with light moments, like almond chocolate.

It was used in a modular system to build the musalla in less than two



Above On Weaving comprises an open central courtyard flanked by prayer spaces.

Credits
Client Diriyah Biennale Foundation
Exhibition design OMA
Lighting design Les éclairieurs
Scenography and art production Black Engineering
Display case design Colin Morris Associates
Art handling Hasenkamp
Display mount design Cubic
Wayfinding signage Penguin Cube
Conservation Plowden & Smith
Display case fabrication Goppion
Graphic design Morcos Key
Musalla architect East Architecture Studio

Below The modular structure allows reuse and is intended to resemble a loom; gaps in the facades filter and diffuse daylight.



MANSOR ALSOFI

months, with a form redolent of houses in Al Balad, the old part of Jeddah, several miles to the south. The intention was that the structure could be relocated there at the end of the event, although other possibilities have since emerged.

This is just one moment in an event that was rich in content, yet contained within temporary structures; less a biennale and more a pop-up museum of historic artefacts and mediations on the Islamic faith. We are perhaps aware that Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is packed with ambitions for industrial development and construction, but it also makes clear that the country should celebrate and expand its role as the custodian of the two great holy sites of Islam: Medina and Mecca.

The biennale achieves this aim, giving Saudi Arabia a leg up in the Middle East's cultural soft power game, to which it is a late arrival. As Abu Dhabi looks forward to the inauguration of its billion-dollar Guggenheim building this year, in a far more modest way the Islamic Arts Biennale places Jeddah on an international map for cultural tourism and museological power politics. ●

Tim Abrahams is a writer and contributing editor to Architectural Record



A new horizon

Killa Design's maritime-influenced luxury seafront resort in Dubai, Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab, completes an iconic waterfront trilogy

Words: Rima Alsammarae

Above The newly created promontory incorporates a yacht marina to the north.

Emerging from Dubai's historic shoreline like a vessel poised for departure, Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab is not only a new luxury resort, but a bold architectural statement about the future of hospitality design in the city. Designed by Dubai-based Killa Design, the 155,000m² development completes Jumeirah's iconic waterfront trilogy, nestled between the sculptural form of Jumeirah Burj Al Arab and the sweeping curves of Jumeirah Beach Hotel.

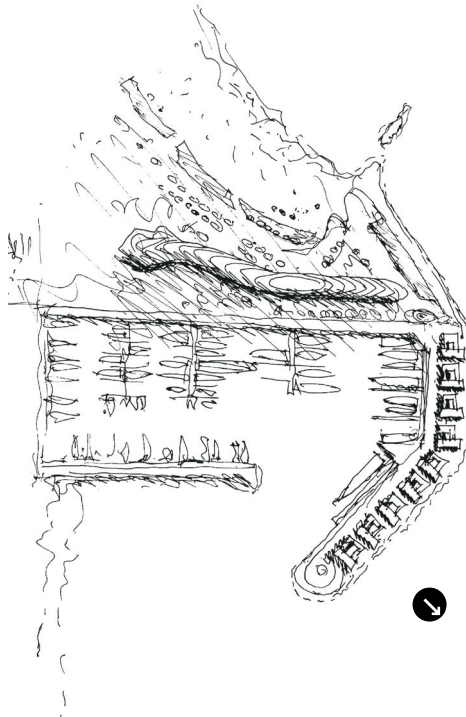
Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab is the first Jumeirah property to extend out into the sea, and its architecture draws directly from both Dubai's maritime heritage and contemporary luxury culture. It is also, says practice founder Shaun Killa, a response to Dubai's architectural evolution – a product of digital design and construction technologies which extends a 'narrative' beginning with the traditional architecture of Jumeirah Al Qasr and Jumeirah Mina Al Salam, and transitioning through the 'classic' design of Jumeirah Al Naseem, and the modern era represented by the neighbouring hotels.

DUBAI MEDIA OFFICE

The project comprises two principal buildings: a long, slender 16-storey hotel which snakes along the promontory; and a similarly proportioned residential block set inland. Their fluid, curving forms emulate the silhouette of a superyacht, with spacious terraces, overhanging decks and a refined material palette that blurs the boundary between land and water. From Jumeirah Street, the curved end of the residences extends progressively outward as it rises, like the stern of a boat. Tiered sun decks gradually lower the building's prow, before the larger hotel rises again, with asymmetric curves in both plan and section intended to create a dynamic sense of movement.

'Although the structure is stationary,' says Killa, 'the eye is drawn to perceive it as moving seaward, capturing the essence of motion and fluidity in its architecture.'

From the outset, the site played a pivotal role in shaping the vision for the complex. Situated on a newly



Above Sketch by Shaun Killa; his work includes Dubai's Museum of the Future and the Shebara resort for Red Sea Global in KSA (2025).

Below JMAA joins the wave-like Jumeirah Beach hotel and sail-shaped Burj Al Arab in a trio of nautically-inspired hotels.

reclaimed peninsula extending into the Arabian Gulf, the resort had to negotiate its relationship with two of Dubai's most recognisable landmarks. Instead of attempting to overshadow these neighbours, Killa Design carefully studied view corridors and existing sightlines to ensure the new development enhanced the overall beachfront composition rather than competing with it.

'We were mindful of preserving the view of Jumeirah Burj Al Arab from the beach to the north-east,' says Killa. 'That led us to intentionally separate the hotel and residences, creating an open sightline through the site.'

The layout responds to the peninsula's geometry through a 'shift' in the hotel's massing – a subtle rotation that divides the landward spa and dining zones from the seaward hotel guest rooms.

Killa Design's approach included a close focus on the guest journey. This is most apparent in the grand arch – a



RUPERT PEACE



‘Our design ensures that the moment guests arrive, they are greeted with breathtaking views’



RUPERT PEACE

JUMEIRAH MARSA AL ARAB

36m-wide, four-storey-high engineering feat that supports 11 floors of accommodation above. Positioned at the point where the building shifts in plan, and at the end of the approach road along the western side of the promontory, the arched passage through the hotel creates a dramatic arrival sequence, framing views of the Jumeirah Burj Al Arab and immersing guests in a world where architecture and landscape are in constant dialogue.

‘Unlike traditional hotels, where guests are dropped off behind the building,’ says Killa, ‘our design ensures that the moment guests arrive, they are greeted with breathtaking views. The fluted soffit beneath the arch is gently lit at night, creating a warm and inviting ambiance.’

From the lobby, a meandering path passes through bars, restaurants and lounges, all designed as distinct yet interconnected environments – a route that Killa likens to moving towards the bow of a yacht. Outdoor terraces, gardens and pools with 270-degree sea views extend the sense of immersion in the marine environment.

Accommodation includes 386 rooms and suites. In each, the architects aimed to foster a sense of indoor-outdoor living with floor-to-ceiling glazing and wide balconies that draw the horizon into the room. (Interior design was by HBA,

Above left The ‘grand arch’ spans 36m and incorporates 3,000 tonnes of steel.

Above right The drop-off under the arch frames views of the Burj Al Arab.

Below The nautical theme extends through interiors with polished wood accents recalling Riva speedboats.

IN NUMBERS

155,000m²

Total area

85m

Height

386

Rooms and suites

11

Restaurants

2

Beaches

260,000

Garden shrubs

Avroko and LTW Designworks.) The uppermost floors house four penthouses — each around 650m² — while 82 branded residences and a collection of over-water villas provide private luxury living integrated within the resort.

Design languages across the spaces were developed to respond to specific functions. While the penthouses were designed to be ultra-luxurious with expansive open-plan layouts and wraparound terraces, the apartments feature contemporary minimalism and maritime influences. Private villas, cantilevered over the quay wall of a new marina on the north-eastern



JUMEIRAH MARSA AL ARAB



This image Deep balconies help to reduce the cooling load by 40 per cent.

Below Curves continue in the hotel's interiors.

JUMEIRAH MARSA AL ARAB

side, feature their own pools and uninterrupted sea views.

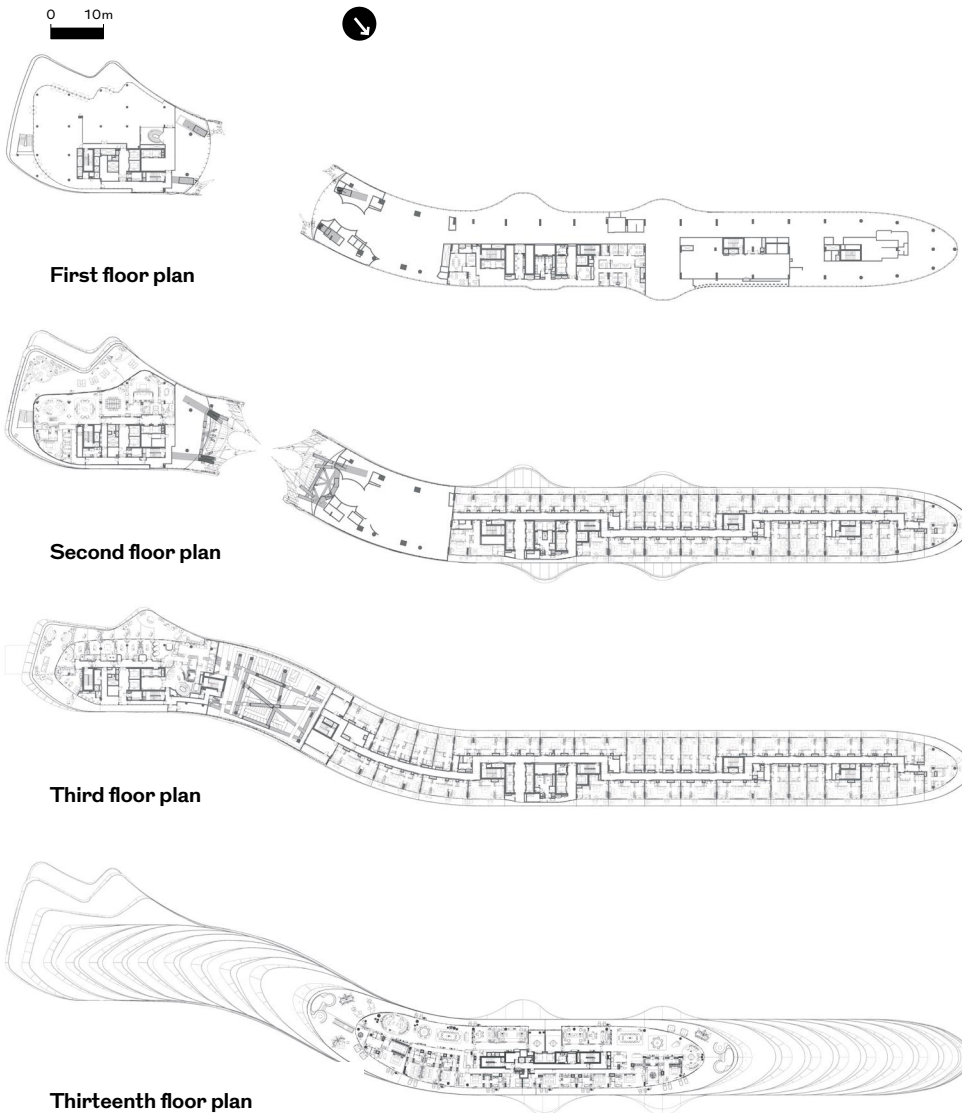
Perhaps unexpectedly given the opulence of the project, Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab is underpinned by a robust sustainability strategy that balances performance with luxury. Self-shading terraces are calculated to reduce energy consumption by up to 40 per cent, while landscaped roofs help with insulation, and grey-water recycling supports irrigation across the lush 260,000-plant landscape. Resort policies exclude single-use plastics, while LED lighting and energy recovery systems further minimise its environmental footprint.

'These measures reflect our commitment to creating architecture that is environmentally conscious without compromising luxury,' says Killa.

Material selection was fundamental to creating both durability and a

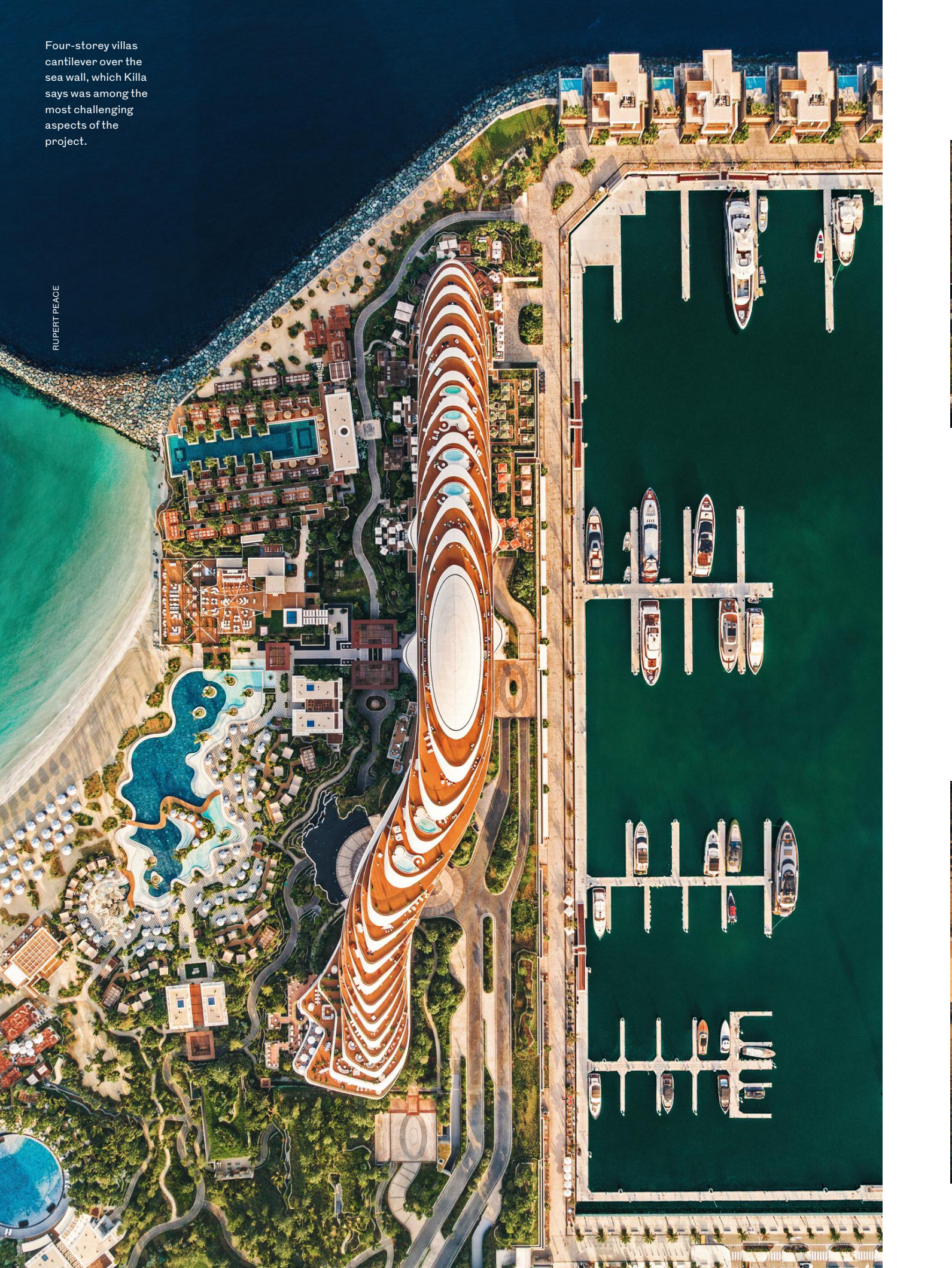


JUMEIRAH MARSA AL ARAB



Four-storey villas cantilever over the sea wall, which Killa says was among the most challenging aspects of the project.

RUPERT PEACE





LEFT: JUMEIRAH MARSA AL ARAB; RIGHT: DUBAI MEDIA OFFICE



contextual character. Natural stone, including limestone and marble, was used both externally and internally for its textures and ability to weather well in a coastal climate. Lightweight composite materials clad the facade, ensuring resilience against salt-laden winds while maintaining a crisp, contemporary finish.

Externally, landscaping softens the architecture, embedding the resort within a lush, green environment that contrasts with the sleek built forms. Water features and planting zones are integrated throughout the site.

Internally, the nautical narrative continues through the use of wood,

Above left Verdant landscape includes 3,100 palm trees and three pools.

Above right The dense planting is intended to create surprise, part-screening the hotel on approach.

Below At the hotel's southern end, a three-storey 3,500m² spa overlooks the water.

Credits

Architect Killa Design
Operator Jumeirah
Client Dubai Holding Real Estate
MEP Ramboll
Fire consultant Vortex
Specialist engineer/facade consultant Inhabit
Interior design Willson Associates/Hirsch Bender Associates
Concept interior designers, public areas LTW, Avroko
Kitchen consultant HCTS
Landscape consultant LMS/ U+A
Main contractor ASGC
Subcontractor Alec Fitout

intended to evoke the timber decks of yachts. In the lobby, tactile elements such as turquoise velvet seating and wave-patterned rugs subtly echo the movement of the sea. Throughout the interiors, bespoke furniture and handcrafted details draw on the region's vernacular traditions while maintaining a contemporary aesthetic. The palette includes coral stone, rattan and woven textiles.

'These elements reflect aspects of the region's history, such as pearl diving and fishing,' says Killa. 'Culturally, we were interested in how we could reference local materials and design traditions in a contemporary way.'

'Materials that reflect the coastal vernacular are layered with more modern finishes to create contrast and balance. It's not about nostalgia, but about making sure the building feels authentic to where it's located.'

In a city known for architectural spectacle, Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab distinguishes itself through refinement, innovation, and its sensitivity to context – both built and natural. It represents the culmination of Jumeirah's architectural narrative along the beachfront, but also a bold step into the future of resort design.

'This type of project embodies the spirit of Dubai,' says Killa, 'the city's entrepreneurial energy, its maritime soul and its vision for luxury hospitality on a global stage.' ●

Rima Alsammarae is a writer and former editor of Middle East Architect



JUMEIRAH MARSA AL ARAB

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2: Intelligence

EMBRACING THE VERTICAL

LAURA DIANU,
SELECT GROUP

Read more at:
ribaj.com/six-senses-dubai-marina

The appetite for tall buildings in the UAE is not only strong, it's evolving. Dubai embraced verticality as both a symbol of ambition and a practical response to urban density. We're now seeing a maturation of that mindset, and the UAE is becoming a global lab for smart, sustainable, meaningful vertical living.

From the city's perspective, there's a growing emphasis on vertical urbanism that reduces reliance on transportation and saves time. The regulatory environment is gradually aligning to support this shift, especially when projects demonstrate integration with public transport and district cooling, and minimise infrastructure strain. From the market side – particularly in the ultra-luxury segment – residents want panoramic vistas, exclusivity and to live in buildings that reflect their values. For developers like us, the logic of going vertical is rooted in gravity-driven services infrastructure efficiency and market differentiation. Land is finite, views are infinite. Tall buildings unlock premium sky-level experiences.

Six Senses Residences Dubai Marina – designed by Woods Bagot and currently under construction – reflects a combination of influences that will shape the design of high-rise buildings in the UAE. First, location and connectivity are key; proximity to public transport, pedestrian pathways and cycling infrastructure is shaping how we plan towers, as nodes in a larger urban ecosystem. Sustainability is also non-negotiable; aggressive waste reduction

policies and operational water reuse systems are going to be standard.

Wellness is now an architectural imperative, and towers of the future will be vertical retreats. We're designing for communities that want it all on site: yoga studios, gyms, cryotherapy, hyperbaric chambers, biophilic gardens and nutrition programmes. Our Sky Garden on Level 109 and Longevity Clinic are physical manifestations of this ethos. Likewise, community is the heartbeat of all great design going forward. Buildings must foster connection, support mental health and provide social infrastructure. It's not just about height or skyline presence anymore; it's about elevating quality of life.

In terms of technology in future towers, AI-led building management systems, occupant-focused climate control and real-time energy analytics will be expected features, not luxuries. Smart homes integrated with the building ecosystem are both efficient and personalised. Another emerging frontier is air transport integration, whether it's helipads or speculative links like ziplines connecting to destinations like the Palm. These mobility technologies haven't yet become mainstream, but they will.

Designing the next generation of towers is about weaving together innovation, resilience and humanity. That's the standard we're setting, and I believe it's one the region will increasingly embrace. ●

Laura Dianu is head of design at Select Group

Currently under construction, Six Senses Residences Dubai Marina will be the world's tallest residential tower.



Intelligence is officially approved RIBA CPD. Look out for icons throughout the section indicating core curriculum areas.



Urban emblems

Towers can be the built embodiment of a city's ambitions and values, both on the skyline and at street level, writes Kourosh Salehi

Above DIFC Living in its urban context.

Right DIFC Living comprises retail in the base, offices and a conference centre in the middle and homes above.



Towers play a significant role in shaping our cities – one that goes beyond architectural expression. They are crucial contributors to the economic, social and environmental fabric. Cities depend on tall buildings to fulfill their potential and aspirations, which requires that they reflect not only market forces but also the wellbeing of the wider community.

Growth in the number of tall buildings in the UAE is inevitable, driven by land scarcity and housing demand. So the challenge lies in how they are meaningfully embedded into the urban fabric, especially at ground level. While planning policies and infrastructure dictate their location, their micro-scale integration is within the domain of architects.

Key to this is the design of the building's base: the interface with the street. An active and appropriate edge condition can either reinforce or disrupt the logic of the existing context. Architects must consider how the building contributes to walkability, spatial continuity and public life.

A tower that is sculptural in form but disengaged at its base can quickly become an alienating object. By contrast,

urban cohesion can be supported by framing public spaces, improving pedestrian connectivity and enhancing local character. When well-integrated, tall buildings act as civic instruments – anchors of activity and legibility, shaping lively urban environments. Their potential lies not just in their ability to rise, but in their capacity to belong.

DIFC Living by LWK + Partners – currently under construction – is a key component of the DIFC Innovation Hub, a tech ecosystem in Dubai. Combining residential, office and retail spaces, the project embodies the live-work-play approach of an integrated neighbourhood, informed by a place and context-responsive philosophy.

The main challenge was to create a distinctive identity for the building, which is set among two imposing neighbours, as well as establishing a pedestrian flow from Al Mostaqbal Street to the Gate Avenue podium, which is 14m higher. In addressing this, we were mindful of climatic conditions – particularly in the summer – and hence sought to create a natural and biophilic environment with passive cooling. The pedestrian connection across the stepped podium introduces a series of cascading gardens and public plazas. These are activated by retail, art, galleries and an amphitheatre for events.

Technology has been a key research tool. VR walk-throughs helped us to communicate the effect of these features, and assess views from the multi-level public realm across the urban landscape.



Urban and spatial contributions

Towers allow for high-density development on limited land, and that consolidation can support more sustainable urban forms. Concentrated high-rise zones, like DIFC or Canary Wharf, become economic engines, hosting key industries and business clusters. And as both economic contributors and influential symbols, towers often attract significant domestic and foreign investment, spurring further economic activity.

Towers often become emblems of a city's ambitions and values. Skyscrapers have long pushed design and engineering boundaries, representing innovation and showcasing cultural aspirations and technological prowess.

This understanding is reflected in DIFC Living, where 170 residences, 13,400m² of offices and co-working spaces, and 3,560m² of retail space coexist in harmony, yet each presents a distinctive form and clear identity in the interlocking geometries of the building's

massing, and the articulation of its facades. A conference centre is expressed through a distinctive curved extrusion that cantilevers out from the facade, offering exceptional views of the district and creating a recognisable image for the tower. The twisted cube at the top, housing a signature restaurant, will become a landmark for the Dubai skyline.

Symbiotic coexistence

Cities and tall structures are mutually beneficial, as is evident in one of the earliest regional examples of vertical construction, the 16th-century walled city of Shibam in Yemen, with its mud-brick tower houses rising five to eight storeys. From the Pyramids to Persepolis, and from towering domes and observatories to slender minarets, the Middle East has consistently shown a bold appetite for brave, groundbreaking structures.

In the late 20th century, the sail-shaped Burj Al Arab emerged not just as a tall luxury hotel, but a statement of intent. Its construction on an artificial island off the coast of Dubai marked a turning point in the city's transformation from a relatively obscure trading port to one of the best recognised urban brands. This strategy quickly resonated across the Gulf. Cities such as Doha and Riyadh began commissioning similarly bold architectural statements to assert their presence on the global stage.

The complexity of urban organisation resists over-simplification. While such structures may serve symbolic or functional roles, they are only one component in a much more intricate system. Real discourse must continue to engage with the evolving dynamics of the city itself. This places a responsibility on architects and civic stakeholders to participate with intention, guiding urban growth in a way that sustains an equilibrium between the needs of human habitation and the natural environment. It is in this continuous, conscious negotiation that cities find their true resilience and meaning. ●

Kourosh Salehi is global design principal at LWK+P in Dubai and serves on the CTBUH advisory committee for the Middle East





Desert bloom

Grimshaw's Oman Botanic Garden features two biomes that recreate the country's diverse climates



Oman Botanic Garden is a symbol of national identity and a celebration of the country's unique landscapes and botanic diversity. Designed by Grimshaw working with Arup and Haley Sharpe Design, the 495ha site and 55ha garden are set against the backdrop of the Al Hajar Mountains, 35km from Oman's capital, Muscat.

When it opens, visitors will be able to immerse themselves in eight distinct landscape habitats. Six are nestled within natural ravines that traverse the semi-arid site, while the cooler, drier habitats of Oman's northern mountains and the warmer, more humid southern regions are recreated in two giant biomes.

Grimshaw partner Keith Brewis and project architect Abhi Chauhan spoke to Andy Pearson about how the need to strike a balance between human comfort and plant physiology informed the design.



Keith Brewis: Arriving at the site for the first time was breathtaking. Climbing its central rocky outcrop, Qurn Mubarak, revealed the scale and geological significance of this ancient landscape. From that moment, the project has brought a great sense of privilege and responsibility.

The late Sultan Qaboos wished to leave his people three lasting projects illustrating who they were and should be: the Grand Mosque, the Royal National Opera House and the Oman Botanic Garden. He had been anxious about the destruction of virgin habitats by modernisation.

In 2006, via royal decree, Sultan Qaboos instructed the establishment of Oman Botanic Garden with botanical experts in Omani flora collaborating with the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, which activated a 'green team' to lead work in research, seed banking, and horticulture. Thousands

Opposite top BIM was used to create a full site model including database tags for every single plant.

Opposite below Planted terraces descend from the Northern Biome; environments range from the sand desert in the east of Oman to its northern gravel deserts and the lush green mountains of Dhofar.

Above The location of biomes in the Grimshaw masterplan had to take into account foundations constructed before the architects' appointment.

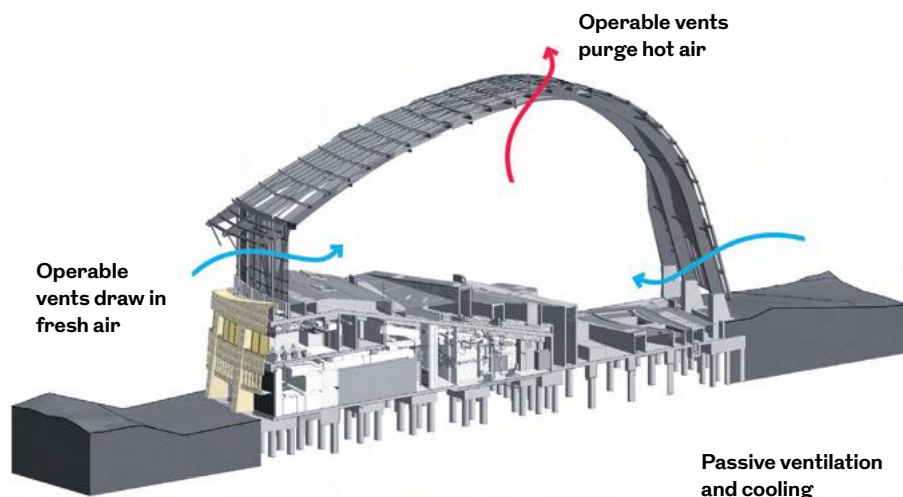
of extraordinary specimens have been collected, rescued and nurtured for the garden.

The exquisite site, adjacent to Al Khoud village some 15km inland, is separated from the coastal plain by the tectonic movement that formed Jebel Suffrah, lifting the ancient seabed 300m above sea level. In the Omani light the purple hues of the forever-diminishing mountains to the north and west leave their imprint.

These distinct geomorphic and climatic environments formed the conditions for our design, along with the need to incorporate some foundations constructed prior to our appointment, and the ambition to make as little impact as possible on this otherwise untouched place.

Our masterplan creates a necklace of buildings linked head to tail, creating an intuitive walking route. Central to this are two high-performance

'Our masterplan creates a necklace of buildings linked head to tail, creating an intuitive walking route'



enclosures – the biomes – alongside a series of interpretative pavilions within the gardens.

In the biomes we have reproduced the natural temperature, humidity and daylight needed for the flora to flourish while keeping visitors comfortable. Their geometries are driven both by the physiology of plant species and the provision of sufficient scale to immerse visitors in the place.

The synthesis of ecological, cultural and technical considerations makes the Oman Botanic Garden one of the most complex projects in the world. It will set a benchmark for the safeguarding of our planet's precious life.

Below The Southern Biome, closest to the paired pavilions of the visitor centre, recreates the climate of Oman's southern region, and is linked by a bridge to the Northern Biome.

The visitor journey

KB: Visitors will arrive at a car park blended into the mountain range at the site's northern edge. Entry and greeting facilities are in two circular, alien-looking buildings raised above the garden to offer uninterrupted 360-degree views of the journey ahead.

The route follows a ridge to the Southern Biome. From there, a bridge carries visitors across a valley onto Qurn Mubarak, where they enter the Northern Biome. Oman's northern mountains feature ancient, cultivated terraces and falaj irrigation, which we have recreated, staggered down the mountainside.

In the foreground are six habitats recreating Oman's wadis and various desert terrains. Centred among these is an explanatory pavilion. Visitors can walk back through these open habitat areas, but summer temperatures can reach 50°C, so there is the option of travelling back from the Northern Biome by cable car.



Although the environment can be very hostile, summer temperatures drop to about 30°C between 8pm and midnight, so this will become a place for family picnics. In winter it will be an absolutely stunning environment, with daytime temperatures peaking at about 29°C.

The biome design

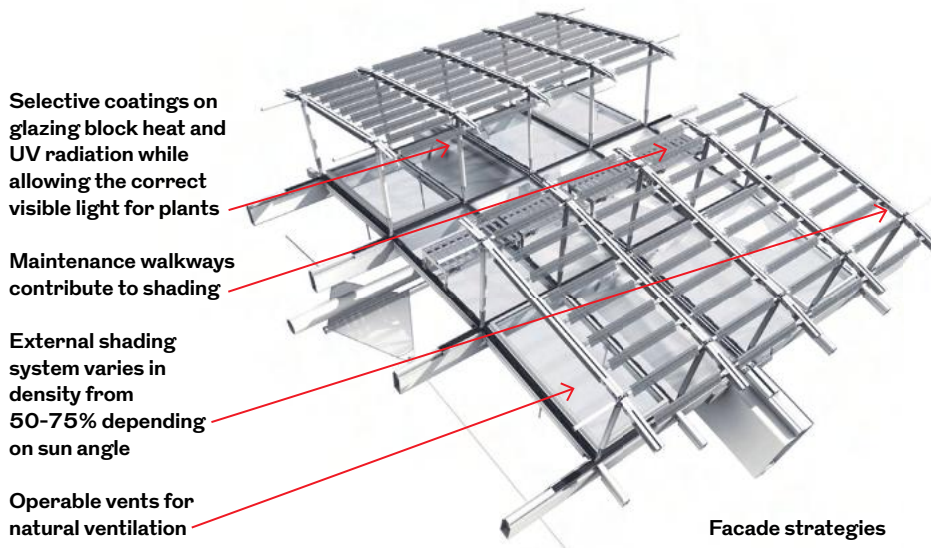
Abhi Chauhan: The structure of each biome is made up of steel arches with spans reaching up to 75m. Both biomes increase in height to the centre, which responds to the largest plant species within. Along with the facade, every layer of the primary, secondary and tertiary structure is optimised to admit light. The structure supports a faceted glass skin of double-glazed units with a fully tempered outer pane and inner panes of heat-strengthened laminated glass. Numerous penetrations through the glazing line support an extensive technical skin, with perforated shades set at different angles.

Optimising light

AC: For the plants to thrive, we needed to recreate the correct quantity and quality of light. Orientation of the building is important, but so is the layering of the facade elements. However, the requirement for high levels of sunlight conflicts with the need for visitor comfort and could therefore impose an increased cooling load.

Early in the process, we engaged with Kew Gardens in London to understand the necessary range of daylight intensity, and the biomes' design went through an intensive R&D process at Arup and Grimshaw. Though an iterative process, we developed the form and geometry, while at the same time testing that the internal conditions were within acceptable parameters. This delicate balance is achieved primarily through the performance of the glazing system, a complex external shading system and the ventilation and cooling strategies.

Along with defining the G and light transmission values for the glazing, it was vital to establish a PAR (photosynthetically active radiation)



value for the spectrum of light useful for photosynthesis. This is set at 70 per cent. To achieve this we worked closely with the supply chain and developed a special solar 'soft' coating for the glass.

The Southern Biome

KB: The Southern Biome mimics the climate and habitat of the coastal plains, foothills, dry plateaus and north-facing cliffs in the Dhofar region. The area is known for its unique Khareef monsoon season when rainfall saturates the summer air with a cool mist, lowering light levels and creating a cloud forest at high altitude. Recreating that within the biome produces one of the garden's great spectacles.

AC: A mixed-mode ventilation strategy allows the biome to operate in either a mechanical or natural ventilation mode,

with windows opening when external ambient conditions are suitable, between November and February. A series of large, automatic operable vents at the base draws in fresh air. Large vents in the crest purge hot air through the stack effect and provide natural cross ventilation. The quantity of fresh air is vital in preventing the depletion of CO₂ levels, which would affect photosynthesis.

Mechanical ventilation and cooling for the warmer months is based on an underfloor low-level air supply system, with air brought in through a network of supply trenches and grilles integrated into the path build-up and exterior landscape. Hot stale air is extracted at high level at the back of the biome via a series of feature ducts routed to the mechanical room below.

The Northern Biome

KB: In the northern mountains nighttime temperatures drop to 5°C in winter and rise to 35°C in summer daytime. We don't want that range because of the amount of energy needed for cooling.

Instead, we have achieved a reduced temperature amplitude with seasonal variations, which will enable plants to thrive that can coexist with conditions for human comfort. Like the Southern Biome, it uses mixed-mode ventilation: in the warm summer months natural ventilation is replaced by mechanical to supply cool, dryer air.

AC: Limiting solar gain while maximising daylight demanded a unique approach, and the enclosure design considers the potential of every element to offer shade while allowing light in. Perforated shades sit close to the glass surface, varying in angle and depth.

Metal walkway gratings also act as shading devices. A sawtooth geometry introduces long horizontal bands of solid cladding that sit at specific angles to block light. Integrated across the entire enclosure, these functional elements give rise to the beauty of the architecture.

A sustainable strategy

KB: With an ambitious target to achieve LEED Platinum certification, transport, landscape and hydrology approaches work together to achieve the necessary points. Arup developed an innovative water management system in which all irrigation water to the habitats is treated sewage effluent, processed at the on-site energy centre. A significant proportion of the energy demand is met by a vast solar array.

The evidence of success

KB: The Oman Botanic Garden is a technological feat and a project of cultural significance, but its success will be in the experience: a place where Oman's precious plants will thrive, and its visitors will create memories and connection with the unique land, flora and fauna. ●



Shows reflect scale and scope of region's design industry

INDEX, The Hotel Show, and WORKSPACE bolster Dubai's growing status as world-leading hub for design innovation



INDEX, The Hotel Show, and WORKSPACE – three co-located shows with a combined heritage of more than 30 years – are expected to attract more than 33,000 industry visitors to the Dubai World Trade Centre from 27 to 29 May 2025.

With a combined footprint of 55,249 square metres, and featuring participants from more than 70 countries, the trio of shows organised by dmg events reflects the scope and scale of the design and real estate industries in the MENA region, and Dubai's own growing status as a world-leading hub for innovation.

'Dubai's transformation into a global design and hospitality hub is driven by visionary leadership, world-class infrastructure and its strategic location,'



The co-located shows bring together more than 500 brands.

says Elaine O'Connell, dmg events' senior VP of design and hospitality. 'As a centre for business, trade, and innovation, it seamlessly connects industry leaders, creatives and investors worldwide.'

Visitors include architects, designers, buyers and specifiers from retail, hospitality, commercial real estate and procurement, and the co-located shows unite the full spectrum of interior design, hospitality and workspace innovation, making the combined event an ideal place for consultants, hoteliers, food and beverage (F&B) professionals and industry leaders to connect for business.

The co-location of the shows is intended to offer a fully comprehensive design and hospitality ecosystem where professionals can source products and gain insights from exhibitors, peers and the talks programmes, summits conferences and awards presentations that form part of each event.

At INDEX, the highly anticipated INDEX Design Talks will again serve as the industry's think tank, hosting debates and discussions that address the biggest trends and challenges shaping interior design.

'With a carefully curated mix of new and established brands, emerging talent, and transformative solutions,' says O'Connell, 'these shows embody the energy and creativity that make Dubai the region's leading design capital and champion its fostering of innovation and ability to set new industry benchmarks.'

INDEX exhibitors include service providers and product manufacturers, reflecting the broad sweep of the interior design sector, from furniture, lighting, décor, kitchen and bathroom to smart home technologies, flooring and surfaces and more.

INDEX visitors should make time to take in The Hotel Show, which over 20 years has evolved into the region's largest and longest-running hospitality trade event, connecting global suppliers with key buyers from across MENA. The event features an unmatched lineup of products spanning hotel technology, F&B services, textiles, wellness solutions and cleaning innovations.

This year, The Hotel Show will



Above Additional attractions at INDEX include the hosted buyers programme and opportunities to connect with clients and peers across the sector.

Below The INDEX talks programme includes three panel discussions hosted by RIBA, on design across generations, women architects and sustainability.



present three specialised conference tracks: HITEC – a powerhouse hospitality technology summit featuring next-gen innovations from industry leaders; The Hospitality Leadership and F&B Forum – a premier gathering of hoteliers and food service professionals shaping the industry's future; and The Engineering and Sustainability Summit – a vital platform for sustainable solutions in hospitality engineering.

Attendees can also look forward to high-energy features such as the Chefs Table, where culinary teams battle for the coveted Hotel Culinary Team of the Year title, and the exciting return of the Housekeepers' Challenge. This year on the show floor will be a dedicated VIP lounge for hosted buyers and VIPs invited to the event from across the hospitality and interiors industry.

WORKSPACE, celebrating its 22nd edition, is the Middle East's foremost platform for workspace design, office interiors and workplace technology. With businesses across the region prioritising wellbeing, hybrid working and technological advancement, WORKSPACE will showcase the latest solutions shaping the modern work environment. The WORKSPACE Summit will gather visionaries to explore trends such as AI integration, remote collaboration tools and wellness-focused design concepts.

Whether visitors are seeking information or inspiration, they will find it in abundance at the Dubai World Trade Centre, concludes O'Connell. 'Beyond showcasing groundbreaking products and trends, our free-to-attend conferences – endorsed by the globally recognised CPD Certification Service – offer unparalleled access to expert knowledge, industry foresight, and accredited learning opportunities.

'This ensures that attendees not only stay ahead of the curve but also gain valuable credentials to elevate their professional standing in an ever-evolving global market.'

Find exhibitors and information on talks and events at indexexhibition.com



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3: Culture



Left Al Ahli Housing,
Jeddah (1955).

While architects marvel over the historic heart of Jeddah, the city's equally impressive modernist heritage has been overlooked. That could change with the publication of a hefty new book, edited by brothers Abdulrahman and Turki Gazzaz, co-founders of Jeddah-based practice Bricklab.

'We felt that architecture of the period 1938-1964 had been glossed over as the frivolous product of a post-oil boom, which now needs rectification,' says Turki. 'In fact they reflect Jeddah as one of the few really cosmopolitan urban centres in the region.'

With an audience of professionals, students and even policymakers in mind, the editors point out the local specificity in mid-century works, which are often lazily lumped in with cities whose development followed a very different trajectory – from Abu Dhabi to Doha.

Essays by contemporary architects sit alongside excerpts of work by earlier historians, in a tripartite structure that looks at Jeddah's urban development, architecture, and people. Fifteen case studies include some buildings

that are already lost. The remainder have been captured by photographer Laurian Ghinitoiu.

Though diverse in character, the 'mish-mash' of buildings illustrated have some shared qualities: playful use of reinforced concrete; interest in the vernacular; civic ambition.

'Our aim is not to be nostalgic about these buildings,' says Abdulrahman. 'We wanted to put ourselves in the shoes of people who packed their bags and moved from the old city for something new, and allow people to take what they want from that in the creation of architecture today.'



**Saudi Modern:
Jeddah in Transition
1938-1964**

Edited by Abdulrahman and Turki Gazzaz (left) Contributors: Asaad Badawi, Lina Barnawi, Bricklab, Abdulrahman Gazzaz, Turki Gazzaz, Laurian Ghinitoiu, Safouh Naamani, Todd Reisz, Anhar Salem, Saudi Ethnographic Diary, Sumayya Vally, Abdulla Yahia Bokhari, Sameer Al Layali. Architangle, 336pp, €45.

A growing presence

The RIBA continues to increase its activities in the Gulf region through events, education and partnerships, writes Jordan D’Gama

Over the past six months, since the first Gulf issue of the RIBA Journal launched at Cityscape Global in Riyadh, the architectural landscape has continued to evolve with impressive projects and significant milestones that reflect the region’s commitment to sustainability, development of distinctive cultural identity, and architectural innovation. To align with these ambitions, the RIBA has continued to increase its activities in the region, supporting members and partners in their pursuit of excellence.

Our practice mission to Cityscape was the largest delegation we’ve ever hosted at an international event, showcasing British architecture and architects alongside the RIBA CPD Providers Network – manufacturers that work with the institute to provide specification services for architects. With the support of the UK’s Department for Business and Trade, our presence extended beyond the desert-based exhibition as we hosted talks and tours in the

Above A student with curator Maya Cochrane (right), an RIBA architect, at the DXBDW x RIBA Future Architects Student Exhibition.

Below Visiting an RIBA-validated degree course in the Gulf.



MAYA COCHRANE

city. The event also saw progress on a proposed agreement with the Architecture and Design Commission of Saudi Arabia to share knowledge in the kingdom.

‘As strategic partners, we’ve been doing quite a lot of exciting projects together,’ said the commission’s chief executive, Sumayah Al-Solaiman, ‘and perhaps the most exciting for us is that we are developing a partnership in the provision of continuous professional development, which we will be doing jointly to support Saudi talent and give them access to the best content that is available.’

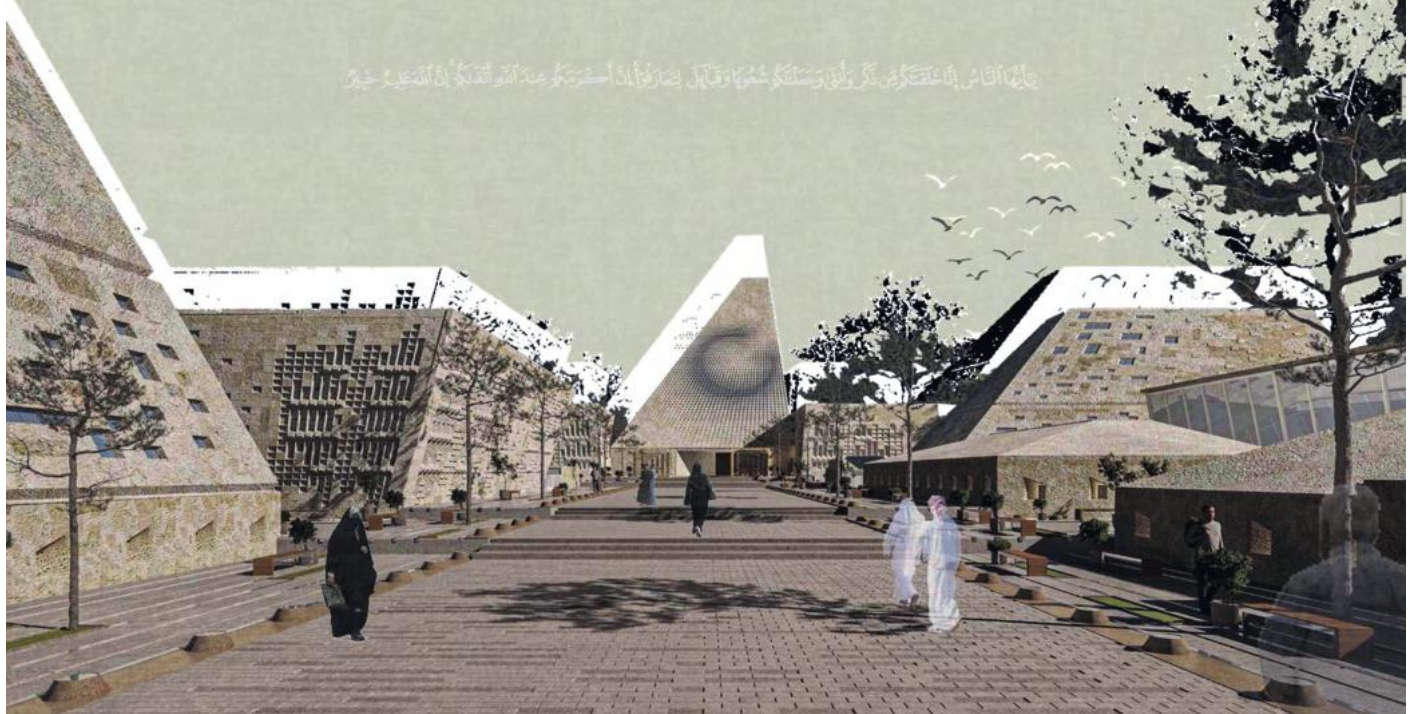
A subsequent event to showcase the British construction industry at the British Embassy in Riyadh attracted 200 delegates from industry and government, and was produced in collaboration with other professional institutes: RICS, CIOB and the Institute of Civil Engineers.

There is particular interest in the RIBA Plan of Work – the staged process for briefing, designing and constructing buildings – and we have been developing partnerships with government and industry in several countries to develop market-specific plans and provide the necessary training for architects, contractors and clients.

Other recent activities reflect the RIBA’s commitment to encouraging diversity in the profession, and to nurturing the next generation. Together with practices and members of the RIBA’s 400-strong Gulf Chapter, for example, we delivered International Women’s Day events in both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The DXBDW x RIBA Future Architects Student Exhibition, in partnership with Dubai Design Week, celebrated the exceptional talent and creativity of aspiring architects from universities in the Gulf. Reflecting the RIBA’s 2030 Climate Challenge, it aimed to inspire and





empower future architects to create sustainable solutions that address the challenges of our time. This exhibition, curated by RIBA member Maya Cochrane, was the first RIBA student exhibition in the Gulf and served as a platform to champion the pursuit of excellence in architectural design and the achievements of architecture education.

‘The exhibition empowered emerging architects to envision the future of sustainable design, while the exhibition framework demonstrates how we need to design differently for the future,’ says Cochrane. ‘Student projects from four UAE universities showcased resilient housing, timeless vernacular adaptation, urban integrated food security, and low-impact local materials. Their voices, amplified by the minimalism of the installation, underscored the urgency of change.’

Education is another field where the RIBA’s capability and influence in the Gulf is rapidly expanding. Manipal University in Dubai has recently been validated to offer Part 1 degrees, joining Abu Dhabi University and Heriot-Watt University Dubai among the region’s RIBA-accredited architecture schools. Others will follow in the coming months. The RIBA’s expertise

Above An Islamic Cultural Institute by Noura Alhameli of Abu Dhabi University was given the Overall Best Project Award at the DXBDW x RIBA Future Architects Student Exhibition.

in education and professional standards is also integral to a developing relationship with the Society of Engineers in UAE. Already, Part 3 training courses held at the society’s training centre are putting future architects on track for professional qualification.

This month alone, the RIBA is an architecture partner at Index in Dubai (27-29 May), where we are contributing to the conference programme as well as hosting visitors at our exhibition stand, while events organised by members of our Gulf Chapter range from tours of Adjaye Associates’ Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi to talks at the inaugural edition of Downtown Riyadh.

Looking ahead, the RIBA will be participating in conferences, events and seminars across the Middle East, from Oman to Dubai, Egypt to Qatar, before returning to Riyadh for Cityscape in November. Together with our members we will be doing even more to champion British architecture, deepen friendships and help to shape both the profession and places in the Gulf at this critical, exciting time. ●

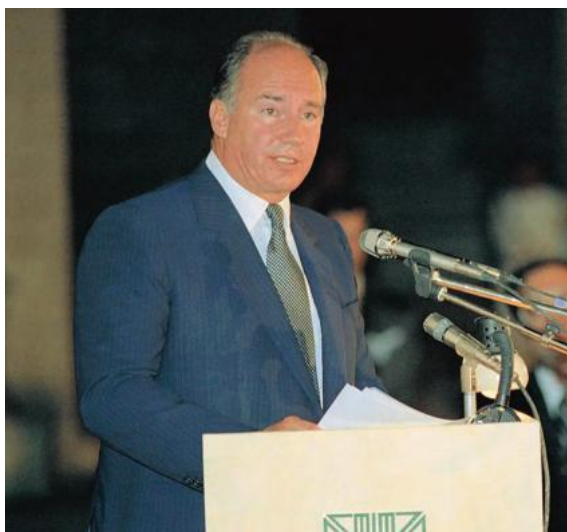
Jordan D’Gama is the RIBA’s director of strategic market development for the Middle East and Africa



Left The RIBA stand at Cityscape Global was a hub for more than 20 practices visiting from the UK.

Right Delegates from the UK on the RIBA’s practice mission to Saudi Arabia had briefings on working in the kingdom.





AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

The spiritual leader of the Shia Ismaili Muslims was an important champion of architecture

Tribute to Prince Karim Al-Hussaini, Aga Khan IV, 1936–2025

There is no other discipline in the world that touches all levels of society – from leaders to the commoners – and has a more direct impact on the quality of life of every individual than architecture. And in the realm of global leadership, few voices have been as consistent and compelling in championing the transformative power of architecture as His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan IV. The Aga Khan's perspective on architecture transcended mere aesthetics, positioning it as a fundamental force in shaping human experience, preserving cultural identity, and fostering societal progress.

From the age of 20, when he became the 49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, one manifestation of his hereditary responsibilities was a deep engagement with development to enhance the quality of life, not only for his 15 million followers but for society at large. And he identified architecture as an important means to that end.

His engagement with architecture started with building schools and health facilities in the most remote places in Asia and Africa, as well as creating high-quality projects in the developing world. As a patron and client he saw the lack of communication and understanding between the various parties involved in projects, and tried to reach his development goals through promoting research, dialogue and identification of examples of excellence in the built environment.

In the 1970s, he embarked on some major projects, such as the Ismaili Centre opposite the V&A in South Kensington, London, designed by Hugh Casson, and the major Aga Khan University and Hospital in Karachi, Pakistan, by Tom Payette. In 1977 he established the Aga Khan Award for

Architecture, which became an important voice in expanding the understanding of architectural discourse of the time, championing the social and community side of architecture – today an increasingly integral part of the discipline.

The 15 winners of the initial 1980 awards juxtaposed conservation, slum upgrading, engineering, heritage and contemporary architecture, and advanced technology, representing a plurality of approaches. This was complemented by other activities including the establishment of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT and Harvard – where the Aga Khan had himself studied after early schooling in Switzerland.

The Aga Khan Award – now in its 16th triennial cycle – has continued to promote new realities of architecture. Since 1980, it has recognised 128 projects from different parts of the world, including 56 from the Middle East – such

Top left His late Highness Karim Aga Khan IV at an Aga Khan Award ceremony in Cairo.

Below Aerial view of the Aga Khan University in Karachi (1985), which has become the leading academic medical centre in Pakistan.



AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY



Left The main spine of Al-Azhar Park, Cairo, Egypt, in 2006.

as X Architects' Wasit Wetland Visitor Centre in Sharjah, honoured in 2019. Engagement in preserving neglected historic urban centres and in creating new urban spaces led to the formation of the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme, which has implemented iconic projects in many cities including the Al-Azhar Park in Cairo, Humayun's complex in Delhi, and the Babur Gardens in Kabul.

Going through the list of architects and others involved in these various programmes, one notices that most of the leading architects of the late 20th and early 21st centuries have been involved in them in various capacities, whether as award jurors, steering committee members, winners, teachers or practitioners, and each contributed to the cause of making a better built environment – so central to Aga Khan IV's vision.

To take just a few examples, Fumihiko Maki designed three projects for him, including the Aga Khan Centre in King's Cross, London, while Arata Isozaki designed universities in central Asia. Henning Larsen designed a headquarters for the Nation Media Group in Kenya – one of the numerous enterprises established by Aga Khan IV around the world (the agencies of the Aga Khan Development Network alone have annual expenditures of around \$1 billion). Bruno Freschi and Charles Correa were responsible for Ismaili Centres in Canada, and Raj Rewal delivered one in Lisbon, Portugal. All testified that his vision led them to designing their projects in different ways to how they had worked with other clients. The Ismaili Centre in Dubai, inaugurated in 2008, was designed by Egyptian architects Rami El-Dahan and Soheir Farid, who sought inspiration from the Fatimid mosques of Cairo. Another important

project is to be completed later this year: the Ismaili Centre in Houston, USA, designed by Farshid Moussavi Architecture with engineer Hanif Kara of AKT II.

For Aga Khan IV, the essence of architecture was deeply intertwined with the concept of pluralism. He believed in architecture as a powerful medium for intercultural exchange and understanding. 'We shape our built environment – and then our buildings shape us,' he was fond of saying, expressing the sentiment that architecture is not a passive backdrop but an active participant in the human story.

During his lifetime, Aga Khan IV offered a compelling blueprint for how architecture can address some of the most pressing challenges of our time, creating spaces that not only shelter but elevate the human spirit. ●

Farrokh Derakhshani is director of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and an International Fellow of the RIBA.

Below Dubai Ismaili Centre (2008) was built on land gifted by the emirate's ruling family to the Aga Khan in 1982.



Cultural clout

Pavilions at this year's Venice Biennale and Osaka Expo provide high-profile platforms for Gulf countries to engage with an international audience, writes Pamela Buxton

Below The Qatar pavilion at Osaka, by Kengo Kuma, shows how the nation's coastline has shaped its culture and identity.

News that Qatar is to become a rare addition to the group of permanent national pavilions at the Venice Biennale's historic Giardini venue is indicative of the increased involvement of Gulf countries at major global cultural and commercial events. While Qatar's planned new pavilion, designed by Lebanese architect Lina Ghotmeh, is still at the concept stage, this summer's 19th International Architecture Exhibition features six Gulf countries among the national pavilions that take up temporary residence: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE and exhibition newcomer Oman.

Meanwhile, those same six countries have also built temporary national pavilions at Expo 2025 Osaka in Japan, which opened in April, the latest in the five-yearly series of world expos. Again, the growing role of Gulf countries in the expos is clear. Dubai hosted the 2020 event, while Riyadh will host in 2030.

IWAN BAAH





GREGORY GESTNER



Such events provide a high-profile platform for engaging with an international audience. The Venice Biennale, the leading event for architectural discourse, is curated this year by Italian architect Carlo Ratti with the theme 'Intelligens. Natural. Artificial. Collective'. Osaka, meanwhile, hopes to attract up to 28 million visitors over its six-month duration.

At Venice, Gulf participants have taken diverse approaches, some focusing on national concerns, others highlighting wider regional themes. Saudi Arabia's presentation may be a surprise to anyone expecting a focus on the gigaprojects currently underway in the kingdom. Instead, Riyadh-based Syn Architects is presenting *The Um Slaim School: An Architecture of Connection*. This builds on the practice's five-year archival and research work studying the displacement of traditional Najdi architecture in the centre of the city. As well as examining vernacular techniques, the ongoing collaborative project – the Um Slaim Collective – explores the values this architecture embodies, and how these can inform teaching, restoration and contemporary development.

Syn was co-founded by Nojoud Alsudairi and Sara Alissa, who studied together in London at the Bartlett. According to Alsudairi, while a lot of architectural knowledge is imported, their research through the collective is a way to focus on local knowledge and production, and bring this discourse into the city 'to come up with context-driven solutions, which has not been the case in the past years'.

Above Presented on the site of the future Qatar Pavilion in the Giardini, Community Centre is a temporary intervention by Yasmeen Lari and the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan. It is part of 'Beyti Beytak. My Home is Your Home', an exhibition that continues at ACP-Palazzo Franchetti, and marks Qatar's first official participation at the Venice Biennale.

'If we really plant the seed, this conversation can be more inclusive and collective,' she says.

The exhibition includes installations from collaborators Maha Malluh, an artist focused on material culture, photographer Laurian Ghinitoiu and sound artist Mohammed Alhamdan, and is accompanied by a programme of laboratorial and public sessions.

Syn is clear that it doesn't necessarily have the answers. Instead, says Alissa, 'we're raising questions as to how we can proceed in Riyadh and the region as a whole'.

She adds: 'Everyone associates Saudi with these mega projects, but we really wanted to convey that there are these collectives that are trying to start these conversations about how and why we build the way we do.'

Learning from the traditional is also one aspect of Qatar's presentation in Venice, which this year takes two forms: Community Centre, designed by Pakistani humanitarian architect Yasmeen Lari, has been re-erected in the Giardini on the site of Qatar's future permanent pavilion; and, off-site, the Beyti Beytak exhibition goes beyond national boundaries to explore the theme of hospitality across the MENASA (Middle East, North Africa and South Asia) world.

Community Centre, a bamboo structure with a palm frond roof, showcases Lari's approach to using local, vernacular materials to provide shelter in the aftermath of flooding and earthquakes. Appropriately for the emphasis on locality, bamboo from an Italian factory was used to replace some of the pavilion structure,

which had previously been erected at the National Museum of Qatar.

'It's good to make a statement that it's okay to build in such materials,' says Lari, who advocates innovation using traditional techniques and local materials to deliver low-carbon, zero-waste results. The concrete approach of the global north is, she says, 'no longer relevant'.

She adds: 'I feel that in many countries, as a profession we might become redundant if we don't embrace the vernacular and try to find the ways we can deal with this whole energy crisis.'

Qatar's Beyti Beytak exhibition considers the idea of hospitality in the broadest sense of 'the act of welcoming the other', according to curator Aurelien Lemonier of Qatar Museums. The exhibition features around 30 contemporary and 20th-century architects, with the work of Hassan Fathy, the Egyptian architect acclaimed for his embrace of the vernacular, a 'red thread' running through the show, according to Lemonier.

Ranging across multiple typologies, sections include the oasis, gardens, museums, housing and mosque. The latter features three mosques designed by women architects: Marina Tabassum, Sumaya Dabbagh (see RIBA Gulf issue 01), and Elizabeth Diller (see page 6). The architectural heritage of Qatar's capital Doha is also explored with exhibits including restored historic doors, which traditionally are reinstalled when houses are rebuilt.

Lari also features in this exhibition. 'The quality of hospitality starts with Yasmeen and her practice, which is both community-based and welcoming,' said Lemonier.

ISMAL NOOR, SEEING THINGS / NATIONAL PAVILION UAE



Above Pressure Cooker, the UAE pavilion at Venice, was curated by Emirati architect Azza Aboualam and explores the intersection of architecture, food security, and climate change in a reimagined greenhouse.

Below The Saudi pavilion at Venice, titled The Um Slaim School: An Architecture of Connection and curated by Beatrice Leanza, presents Syn Architects' research into local Najdi architecture in Riyadh.

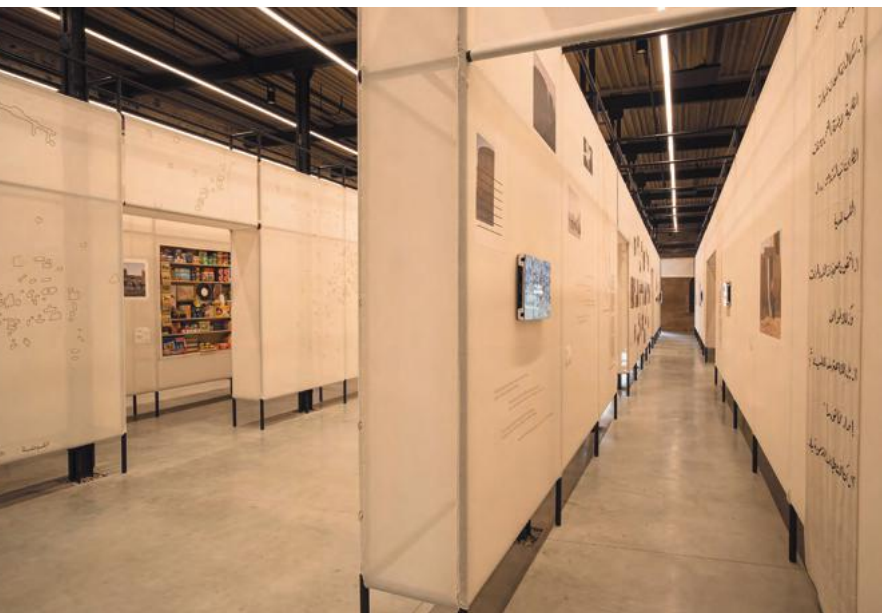
The Bahrain and UAE exhibitions both consider issues relating to the impact of climate change. While the former, curated by Andrea Faraguna, considers this in relation to liveability and health, the UAE's Pressure Cooker exhibition, curated by Emirati architect Azza Aboualam, focuses on the intersection between architecture and food security. Her interest in the topic was prompted by the post-Covid rise in the amount of locally grown food in the UAE, a response to national targets to increase this from 10 per cent to 50 per cent by 2051.

'We're looking at how architecture and food production overlap,' she says, 'because how else would you grow blueberries in a desert without a shield – a shade that would help them grow?'

While traditionally the design of such structures is driven by agricultural experts, her research seeks to 'flip the script' by bringing in architectural expertise. After extensive fieldwork with the agricultural community, documenting structures for different kinds, scales and contexts of cultivation, the findings formed the basis for architectural research into a modular kit-of-parts. This can be tailored to suit crops and locations, from domestic to neighbourhood and new community scales. These include consideration of various floor options and wall angles to suit different and changing needs. Experimental structures from this research are on show in the exhibition at Venice's Arsenale.

Aboualam plans to continue the research, and sees the potential to develop a guide to greenhouse construction and trouble-shooting. She hopes visitors will reflect on the relationship between architecture and food production at a time of increasingly arid conditions.

'I'd really hope that they'd think of where their food comes from,' she says, 'and how that could be potentially integrated within their cities and also their backyards and balconies.'



At Expo 2025 Osaka, the form of the pavilion itself, as well as the content, is a key way to communicate the host's national identity, and also, in some cases, to find resonances in Japanese culture. Architects faced the additional challenge of designing for demountability and reassembly.

Foster + Partners' pavilion for Saudi Arabia eschews a 'black box' exhibition experience, instead comprising an assemblage of stone-clad volumes rising up to 17m. A labyrinthine visitor route through naturally ventilated and shaded paths and courtyards is designed to evoke traditional village architecture. In ground-floor

Right At KSA's expo pavilion, a series of immersive spaces was designed by Foster + Partners and Journey (Squint Opera and 59 Productions).

Bottom right The 3,542m² KSA expo pavilion is faced in Saudi composite stone and designed to align with the Saudi Green Initiative.



Visitors to the Foster + Partners-designed KSA pavilion explore a 'village' of winding streets, recalling the organic form of historic settlements.



studios, visitors can interact with a rotation of resident Saudi artists and musicians, with hospitality areas located above and events held in the grand central courtyard.

'We wanted to create a concept where the visitors can actually feel the warmth and kindness of the people of Saudi Arabia, to break any barriers that they might have about the nation,' says partner Tony Miki.

The design showcases Saudi stone – an important natural resource – as part of a demountable lightweight system. The stone is used in 8mm-thick tiles adhered to a low-carbon, aluminium honeycomb panel and configured in 16 modular types. After the Expo, the plan is to



NIGEL YOUNG/FOSTER + PARTNERS ©



Above The Bahrain pavilion at Osaka, by Lina Ghotmeh, rises to four storeys, and takes inspiration from dhows and traditional Japanese joinery.

reassemble the steel-framed building in either Japan or Saudi Arabia.

References to traditional Arab sailing dhows can be found in both Kengo Kuma's Qatar pavilion and Ghotmeh's spectacular design for Bahrain. In the latter, this motif is also conceived as an intersection point with the tradition of craftsmanship in Japan, according to Ghotmeh, 'evoking the figure of the dhow as an open boat that's not finished, that's under construction, that talks about this meeting point between the two cultures ... For me it was important to find ways to build in a way that talks to traditions of building in Japan.'

Jutting timber fins suggest oars. Visitors enter the 14m-high structure as if walking through

Left Bahrain's 995m² pavilion is built from around 3,000 pieces of natural wood.

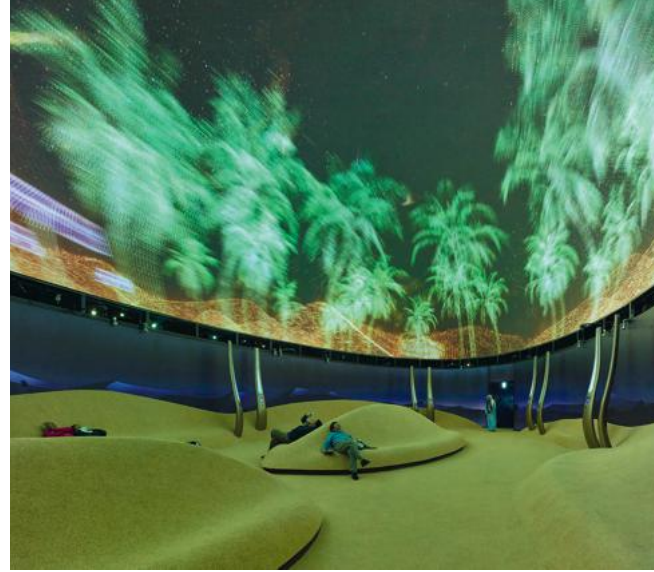
Right Bahrain sits in the Empowering Lives zone of the Osaka site, which is ringed by the world's largest timber structure, designed by Sou Fujimoto.





Left Rippling fabrics define the Kuwaiti pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka.

Right A domed hall in Kuwait's pavilion envelops visitors in a projection of a starry desert sky.



It doesn't try to be the most triumphant. But it is very refined and elegant,' says Wallisser.

His vision for the pavilion's afterlife reflects a key aspect of major events such as Venice and world expos, whether it be physical artefact or idea: 'Part of the brief was that it could be taken down and brought back to Kuwait,' he says. 'Kuwait brings its vision to the expo, and then brings a souvenir of the expo back to Kuwait. Because it's all about exchange.' ●

The Venice Biennale runs till 23 November. Expo 2025 Osaka runs till 13 October

Below The wing-like roof of the Kuwaiti pavilion is a gesture of welcome.

sails before embarking on a 'sensorial tour' of Bahrain. In addition, says Ghotmeh, Bahrain's relationship with the sea also resonates with that of Osaka, and the waterside location of the pavilion. Like the Saudi pavilion, another key strand to the design was demountability, using engineered timber in 3m and 4m lengths as supplied, to maximise possibilities for reuse after dismantling.

Ghotmeh hopes visitors will understand Bahrain as a progressive country that values craft, and find commonalities with it, as well as appreciating the capacity of humans, when empowered, 'to generate beautiful structures'.

With its butterfly-like tensile wings, Kuwait's pavilion, designed by the Australian practice Laboratory for Visionary Architecture (LAVA), is also highly expressive. Partner Tobias Wallisser described the concept as a 'visionary lighthouse' that conveys Kuwait's 'very inviting and very hospitable' nature. Inside, the design incorporates traditional elements such as a courtyard, a dune landscape and a dome with projections of stars. Exhibits convey both the country's past and its 'Vision 2035' future as a financial and trading hub.

At just 3,500m², it does not seek to fill its entire plot. 'It's not the biggest, not the largest.



Ibrahim Al Ghurair is founder of Muraba Properties, the developer behind RCR Arquitectes' the Veil tower in Dubai

Words: Vicky Richardson

High ambition

Below Ibrahim Al Ghurair (left) with Rafael Aranda Quiles of Pritzker Prize-winning RCR Arquitectes





Left and below

Visualisations of the Veil, a 380m-high, 22.5m-wide tower with 131 apartments set around high-level courtyards, wrapped in stainless-steel mesh.



Building and architecture are intrinsic to Ibrahim Al Ghurair, the founder of Dubai-based Muraba Properties, whose super-slim skyscraper, the Veil, designed by Spanish practice RCR Arquitectes, is about to begin construction. Al Ghurair was born in 1978 in the old part of the city, Deira, and his life parallels the development of the modern emirate. On the other side of the Creek, on a site surrounded by desert, the World Trade Centre (WTC) was nearing completion at the time. Designed by British architect John R Harris, who had devised Dubai's first town plan in 1960, the building symbolised the city's intent to become a global centre for business and trade.

Despite the passing of nearly half a century, the architectural approach of the Veil is remarkably sympathetic to that of the WTC. Both were designed to catch the eye; both have been depicted as modernist towers set against a backdrop of desert sand; but both also make serious attempts to respond to and define an architectural identity for Dubai in their cultural references and response to climate. Harris's WTC also featured a veil of sorts – a screen of modular elements which translated the traditional Arabic arch into a modern form and protected an inner glazed facade. In RCR's design, the veil takes the form of a stainless-steel curtain, but the reference to Arabic tradition is just as explicit.

Born into a family that was at the forefront of dynamic change – in materials, construction and manufacturing – Al Ghurair measures his life against the growth of the Dubai skyline. By the 1990s, when he was completing his secondary





HISAO SUZUKI

education, the WTC was still the tallest tower in the city. He also remembers the Nasser Rashid Lootah Building – popularly known as the Toyota building – one of Dubai's first residential towers, which was completed in 1974 when Sheikh Zayed Road was just a two-lane highway.

The growth of Al Ghurair Group is remarkable. In the 1920s, Ibrahim's relatives were pearl divers and traders who lived in mud buildings along Dubai Creek. Until the 1930s, when Japanese cultured pearls made their business less profitable, they would have spent months of the year at sea, living on rice and dates. Later the family repurposed their pearling boats for trading and went further afield to bring textiles, timber and gold to Dubai from India, Africa and Iraq.

Following the rapid economic development of the 1950s, the family diversified into sectors such as manufacturing, real estate and retail. Playing a leading role in delivering the vision of Dubai's ruling family, in 1981 they opened the first shopping mall in the Middle East on a site in Deira.

Al Ghurair was educated at Al Ittihad bilingual British/Arabic school in Jumeira and, having been inspired by an art teacher, his first instinct was to train as an architect. But reflecting that he needed to be prepared to play

Above Dar Al Marefa, founded by Al Ghurair and designed by RCR, is the only IB curriculum bilingual school in Dubai.

his part in the family business, he changed course to study management at Boston University. Nonetheless, university exposed him to new ideas in architecture through the public lecture programme at nearby MIT, where he heard talks by Frank Gehry and the Greek modernist collective Atelier 66.

Returning to Dubai to join the family firm, he recalls that the Emirates Towers by Hazel Wong were under construction, completing in 2000. Initially, Al Ghurair took a role as a buyer in commodities, later joining the real estate division. Maintaining his interest in architecture, he subscribed to the leading magazines and followed the work of favourite architects, including Toyo Ito and Renzo Piano. The years that followed saw some of the most ambitious construction projects Dubai had known, with Al Ghurair Group, for example, supplying concrete for the Dubai Metro and leading work on the Burj Dubai.

In 2014, a development opportunity came up on the Palm Jumeirah, and Ibrahim seized the moment to establish his own company. He clearly relished the process of finding an architect. 'I kept hearing through friends that Spanish architecture was really interesting,' he recalls, 'and we felt there was a link culturally through history and climate.' Having read about RCR in *El Croquis*, he arranged a visit to the practice's

Below left Built from modular components, the 22,262m² school campus is planned around streets and squares to resemble a beehive.

Below Lattice screens over windows shade interiors and lend a consistent identity to Dar Al Marefa.



HISAO SUZUKI (2)



studio in Olot near Girona. Meeting the partners, Rafael Aranda, Carme Pigem and Ramon Vilalta, was clearly inspirational. Instead of Al Ghurair interviewing them, he found himself answering their questions about Dubai, the orientation of the site and his aspirations to develop architecture that corresponded to Dubai's culture.

Since the completion of the first residential development of 50 holiday apartments, Muraba Dia, in 2017, there have been at least four further projects with RCR including Dar Al Marefa School (2019) and, most recently, the Veil.

In Muraba's first decade, Al Ghurair has become more conscious of pioneering a new trajectory for architecture, driven by the desire to create a specific response to the culture and climate of Dubai. The Veil does this conceptually as well as practically by reconceiving the traditional Arabic courtyard house as a 73-storey skyscraper. The location of open and protected spaces within the home is reversed, so that open-air gardens with cooling water features are located on the outside faces of the tower, filtering air and sunlight for the living spaces on the inside. The design is unashamedly urban, being located in the thick of the built-up Sheikh Zayed Road, yet evokes qualities of nature with its sand-coloured concrete, elemental form and visual connection with the sea.

For Al Ghurair, this is an architecture that is in harmony with the environment, climate and culture. 'To me that is the interesting side of architecture,' he says, 'to make buildings that are solving the problem of who we are.'

The next big challenge for Dubai, he thinks, is the question of livability. 'We would love to make Dubai a more interesting place to live,' he says. 'Muraba is a small company but where we see the opportunity, we will focus on making a contribution to creating places that prioritise people's physical and mental wellbeing, particularly through their interaction with their community, culture and natural environment.'

Positive responses to the design of the Veil have encouraged Al Ghurair to believe that Muraba is on to something with its promotion of a conceptual approach. He has found a new, perhaps more sophisticated, audience for architecture, who appreciate RCR's thoughtful approach to shadow, light and planning.

Meanwhile, the decade-long working relationship with the Spanish practice gets stronger. Al Ghurair feels no temptation to work with other practices because, he says, each project brings a new situation. 'Initially, we thought

Right and below
Kitchen and exterior
view of a four-bedroom
apartment at Muraba
Dia on East Crescent
Road, the Palm
Jumeirah (2017),
Muraba's first project
with RCR.



that we would work with a new architect on each project,' he explains, 'but we realised that our working relationship with RCR is just getting better and we are learning so much from them.'

Once the Veil is under construction, Al Ghurair will begin work on the next project. But he has wider, more long-term ambitions to shift the culture of Dubai architecture. A foundation for architecture is being planned, which he hopes will help raise awareness of the importance of the built environment through exhibitions and discussion.

'The Gulf is a young region,' he says. 'If you take a four-hour radius from Dubai, you have a population of two billion people. There is so much potential to make a new architecture for the future. Our aim is simply to contribute to this project by making the best buildings we can, that will be there for life.' ●

Vicky Richardson is a curator, writer and former head of architecture at the Royal Academy of Arts, London



MURABA PROPERTIES (2)



National Bank of Dubai headquarters building, Dubai, 1959

In 1959, when British architect John R Harris was commissioned to create Dubai's first town plan, it was still a small village of traders and fishermen. Harris, who had studied at the Architectural Association before and after the war, already had experience working in the Gulf. In 1952, in partnership with his wife, he had won the RIBA international competition for the design and supervision of the new state hospital in Doha, Qatar. Their project was selected on the strength of their forward-thinking approach to climate and environmental concerns. In 1960

John R Harris & Partners opened an office in Dubai. Its growth accelerated with the discovery of oil in 1966. Over the years, they carried out several important projects in the city, including the National Bank of Dubai, completed in 1971. Located near the waterfront and close to the old centre of Dubai, the building was praised for sensitively responding to its historical context. Its elevations were notable for their transparency and their shading devices. The bank was demolished and replaced by a high-rise building in the late 1990s. ● Valeria Carullo

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Above: Heydar Aliyev Centre by
Zaha Hadid Architects with DIA
Holding, Azerbaijan 2016
© Hufton and Crow

Left: Punchbowl Mosque by Angelo
Candalepas and Associates,
Australia 2024 © Rory Gardiner

* See website for full list of
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