

Family private domain - The domestic space of family or home in Islam with its private space for the women or *harami* of the household is qualified as *haram*, a word that is also related to *harami* which means taboo or off limits, and *M. H. Haram*, the sanctified space of the Holy Mosque of the Kaaba. The tabulated wall, *haram*, therefore, relates the meaning of the four words to the sacred. The space of the family and the space of the mosque are both sacred. In fact, the family unit itself assumes a manner of sacredness seldom achieved in other civilisations.

QASR SULEIMAN

The head of the family is the 'leader' of his domestic community and much of Islamic Law revolved around the family as an autonomous private entity functioning within and along boundaries of familial or other relations of the tribe or clan. This religious and cultural factor had a particular effect on the morphology and layout of the city. One notion in the physical layout of the Islamic city highly differentiated space. One starts with the private family courtyard that opens on to a *cul-de-sac* that is shared by other closely related family



gypsum detail ceiling



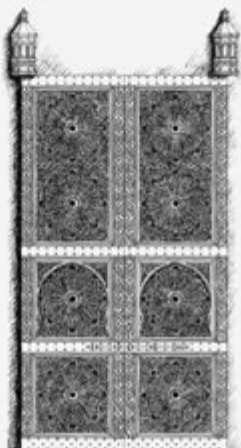
view across through main entrance porch and main reception hall



view across through central courtyard and secondary galleries

Households which in turn leads into alleysways around which are arranged other more distant family relations. This in turn leads into the main thoroughfare connecting the large *tahal* unit to the way or the mosque through a hierarchy and along a continuum of private to public space.

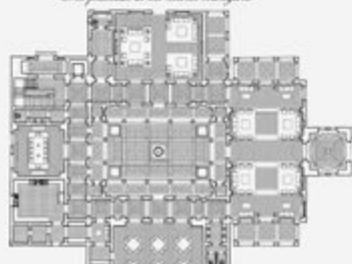
The residential areas of the Islamic city, therefore, were shielded off from the main avenues of public life through passageways, narrow and narrow alleysways, *cul-de-sacs*, and thresholds that demarcate the progressively more private spaces. The houses are built wall to wall around the intimate courtyards forming inward looking spaces that were safeguarded against casual intrusions and simultaneously provide a more efficient use of space and private cooling against the heat.



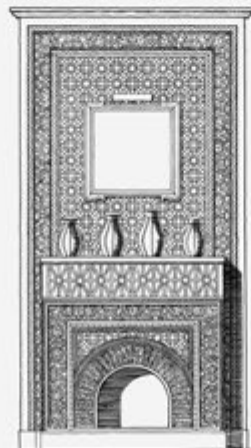
main doorway detail



The fountain in the central courtyard



flooring layout ground floor plan

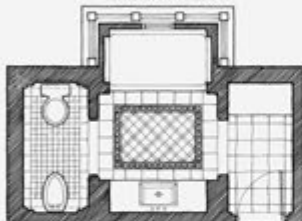


fireplace detail

Two, from *Tawa* is a space surrounded by walls, buildings, or *secluded* tents placed in approximately a circle. In the Maghrib, the *Palace* arrangement is called *Dawara*. The concept of a house placed around an open space or courtyard appeared in the Middle East with the earliest sites there. Symbolically, however, the first Islamic house is that built by the Prophet Muhammad on his arrival in Medina, as a dwelling place for himself and his family, and as a meeting place for the believers. The courtyard surrounded by walls is its essential feature. It differs from the *sun*, to protect the faithful or *prophets*, was along the wall facing the *Qibla* or Mecca. This first series of rooms, which include the *Tawak*, and the *musalla* were of the *secluded* tent.



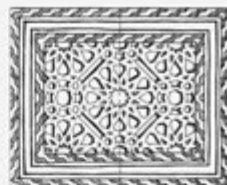
bathroom cross section



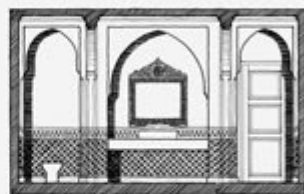
bathroom floor plan



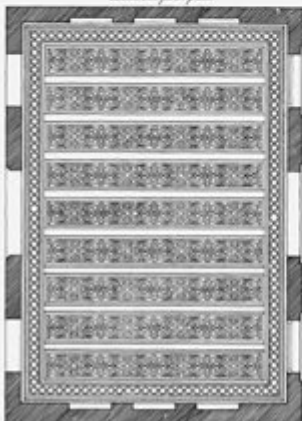
garden side elevation looking towards the bedroom terrace



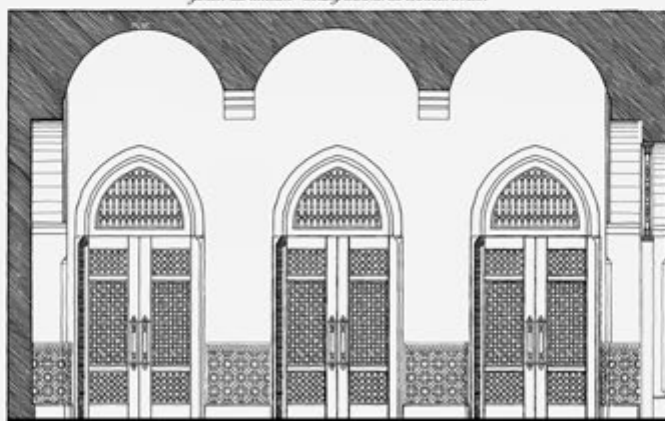
gypsum panel detail



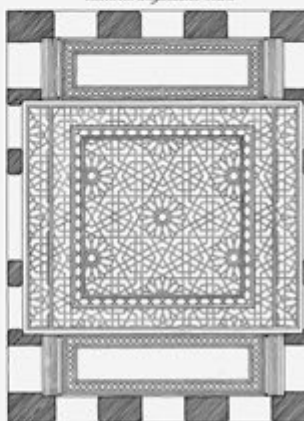
bathroom longitudinal section



living room reflected ceiling plan



daily reception room longitudinal section



decorated reflected ceiling plan

Mohamad Hamouié

The Builder-Architect

El constructor-arquitecto

O construtor-arquiteto

Abstract | Resumen | Resumo

Today we have failed in creating built environments that serve our wellbeing. Rather such environments alienate us and cause anxiety and other pathologies of the soul. Modern buildings rarely touch us deeply because they are produced with an ethos of profit, self-absorbed egotism, stale utility, and mass production. History shows that there is an alternative. Few buildings today possess the quality that moves us, and yet traditional buildings seem to have it unfailingly. What is this quality that emanates from traditional buildings and that modern ones are devoid of? What values can we learn from past generations of Builder-Architects? And how can new buildings capture a spirit of place while responding to contemporary demand for sustainability?

Hoy en día no conseguimos crear entornos construidos que favorezcan nuestro bienestar. Al contrario, dichos entornos nos alienan, y nos causan ansiedad y otras patologías del alma. Los edificios modernos raramente nos llegan a lo más hondo porque se construyen siguiendo un *ethos* del beneficio, del egocentrismo, de la utilidad obsolescente y de la producción en serie. La historia demuestra que hay una alternativa. Muy pocos edificios de ahora poseen esa cualidad que nos conmueve y, sin embargo, las construcciones tradicionales parecen tenerla indefectiblemente. ¿Cuál es esa cualidad que emana de los edificios tradicionales y de la que carecen los edificios modernos? ¿Qué valores podemos aprender de las generaciones anteriores de constructores-arquitectos? ¿Y cómo pueden captar los edificios nuevos el espíritu del lugar y responder a las exigencias actuales de sostenibilidad?

Nos dias de hoje, falhámos na criação de ambientes construídos que servem o nosso bem estar. Pelo contrário, tais ambientes alienam-nos e causam ansiedade e outras patologias da alma. Os edifícios modernos raramente nos sensibilizam profundamente porque são produzidos com um caráter de lucro, egoísmo egocêntrico, utilidade obsoleta, e produção em massa. A história mostra-nos que existe uma alternativa. Hoje em dia, poucos edifícios possuem uma qualidade que nos comove, e no entanto os edifícios tradicionais parecem tê-la infalivelmente. Que qualidade é esta que emana dos edifícios tradicionais, e da qual os modernos são desprovidos? Que valores podemos aprender com as gerações passadas de Construtores-Arquitetos? E como podem os novos edifícios captar o espírito de um lugar, enquanto respondem à procura contemporânea de sustentabilidade?



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1: Watercolor view of the central courtyard of Qasr Sulaiman, Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia

2: Watercolor view from the garden of Qasr Sulaiman, Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia



1



2

- 1: 3D detail of the repeated barrel vault in the living room of Dar Al Qasir
- 2: 3D detail of the domed entrance portico of Dar Al Qasir

Places have an effect and leave traces in sensitive hearts.
Ibn 'Arabi

Living Nature

It is common today for us to seek refuge in nature from the insanity of our modern cities. But why do we need to escape to the natural environment? This was not always so for urban societies of the past. According to traditional principles, the built environment is intrinsically part of the natural one. It is only modernist egotism that has suggested otherwise, at a great cost to our souls and lives. Our current return to nature, due to our prolonged alienation from it, makes the lessons of traditional architecture more pertinent.

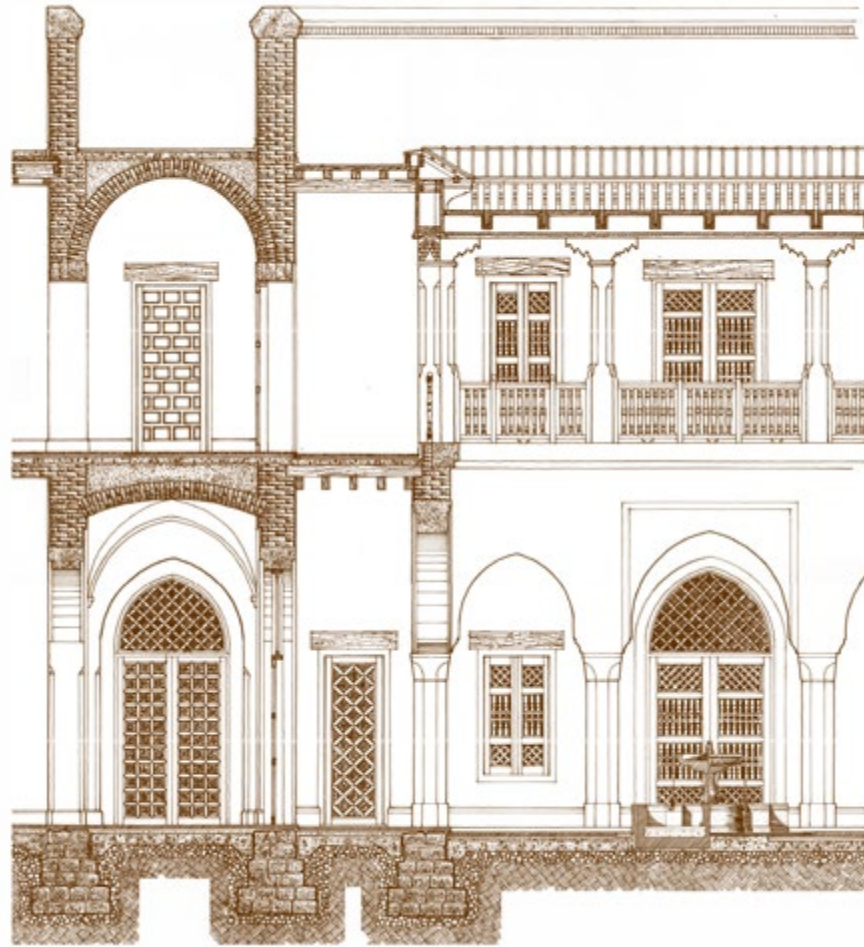


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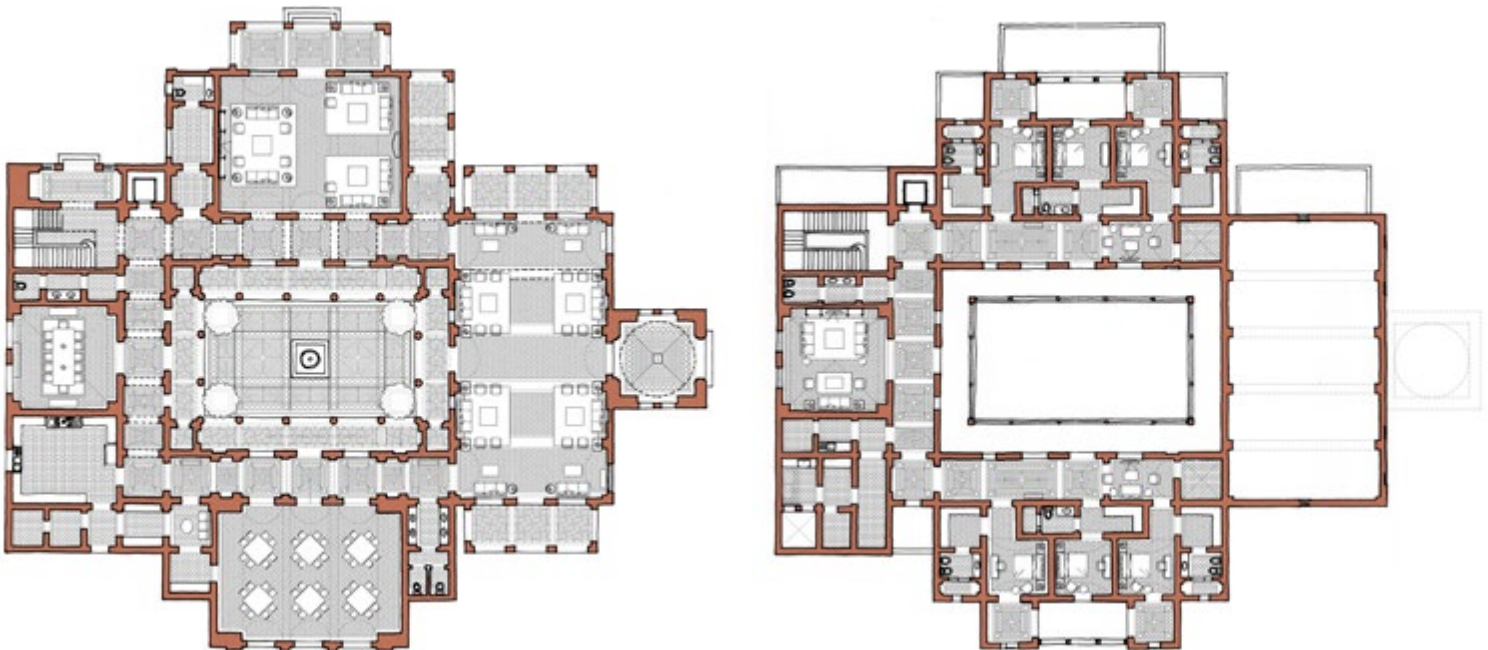
- 3: 3D detail of the *Malqaf* windcatcher tower of Dar Al Qasir
- 4: 3D detail of cross-vaults on the ground floor of Dar Al Qasir

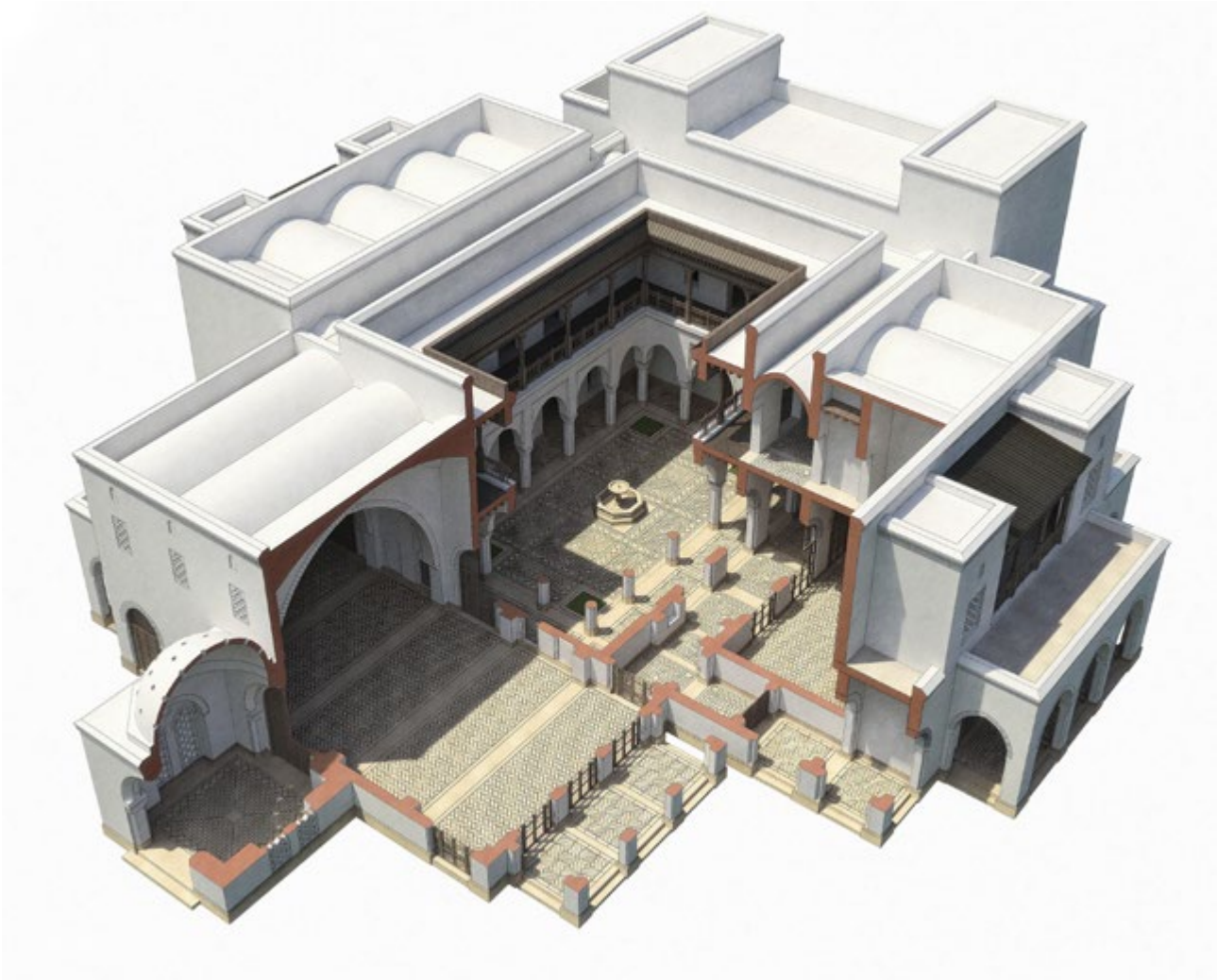


Partial detail section through the central courtyard of Qasr Sulaiman

The ancients had a deeper understanding of life than we do. They believed that every existing entity, including what we may mistakenly see as inert or dead, possessed a degree of life. Life is a quality that inheres in space; it is in every brick, every stone, every structure of any kind. Everything is alive.

Ground and first floor plans of Qasr Sulaiman





Section-cut model of Qasr Sulaiman showing various interior spaces arranged around the central courtyard

Where there is life, there is beauty: a primordial, objective beauty that lies deep within all things, as opposed to subjective beauty. Objective beauty is eternal and universal; subjective beauty is time-bound and relative to sociocultural and personal taste. Objective beauty – that of nature – heals and completes us because it flows from the fount of life and courses through all things. It is not determined by culture, nation, or individuality; it elicits the same deep movement of the soul and triggers the same train of meditation in us all. Though objective, it is nonetheless experienced subjectively.

Living Architecture

If nature is objectively and universally beautiful and alive, can buildings be so equally? Can buildings partake in that objective beauty that is eternal and transcends time, taste, and style? To do so, manmade objects must pulse with life, like nature.

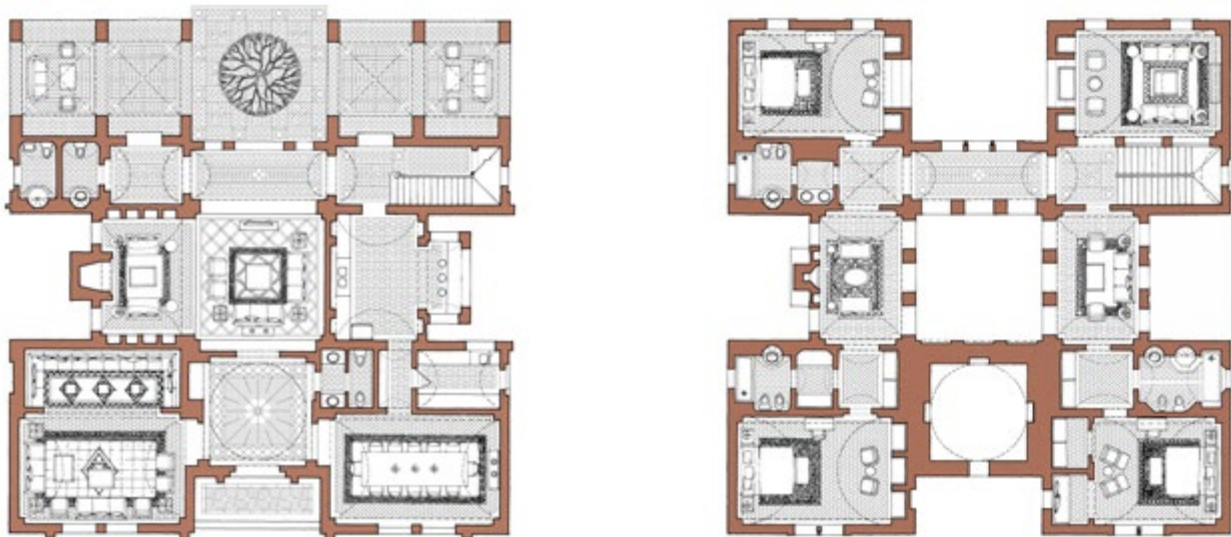
Most traditional towns have this timeless, even numinous quality – the quality of being alive. Though manmade they feel organic as though nature herself had produced them. They were molded into their present form over a history which despite upheavals and cultural diversity possessed a shared vision and values. It is true that their buildings are the product of ad hoc acts of construction over long periods. But despite this intermittent and incremental character, pre-modern towns emerged over the centuries with coherence. Together these buildings form an ecosystem of living structures that could not be other than what they are and where they are, much like any ecosystem of flora and fauna.

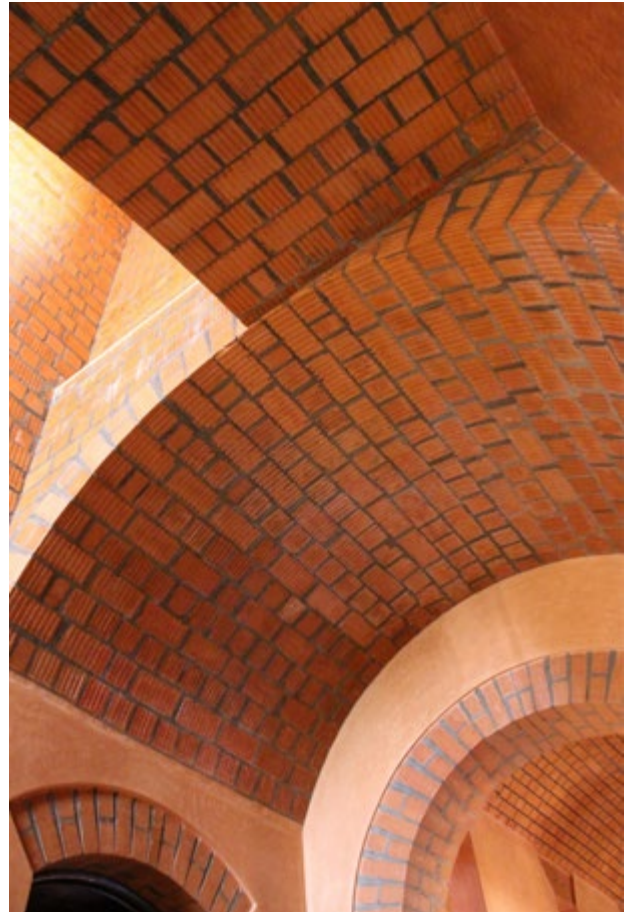
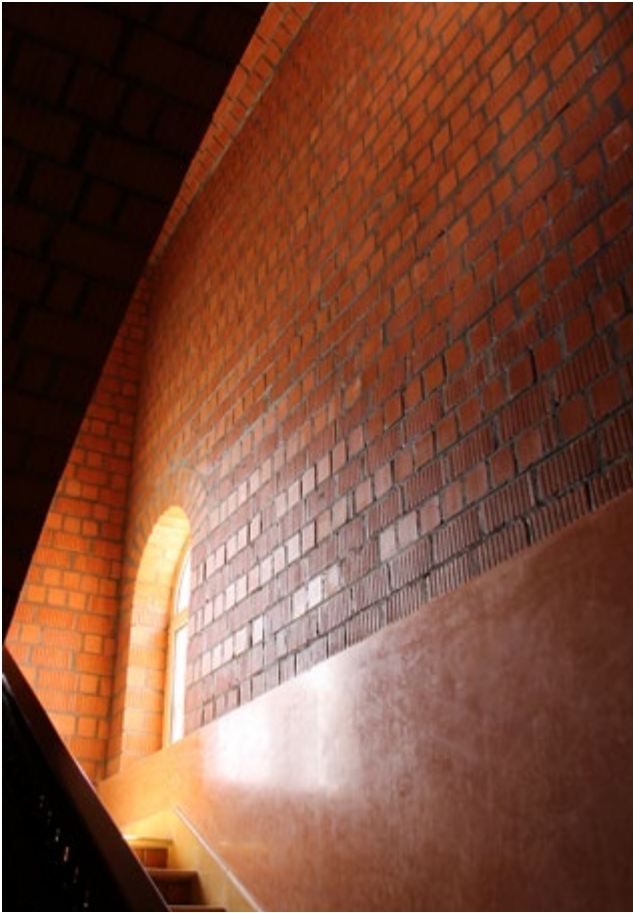
Detail section through the central atrium of Dar Abu Saoud



Notice the effect that these towns have on us: they elicit a deep feeling, an echo of our soul, a mirror of our deepest self. Ibn 'Arabī put it nicely: "Places have an effect and leave traces in sensitive hearts". In the atmospheric embrace of old buildings it is easy to lose track of time, as nature and artifice collude to produce an effect that is magical, mysterious, and sacred. Indeed the same living quality animates the beauty of nature and that of traditional townscapes: a "unity of feeling" expressed by an overall harmony.

Ground and first floor plans of Dar Abou Saoud





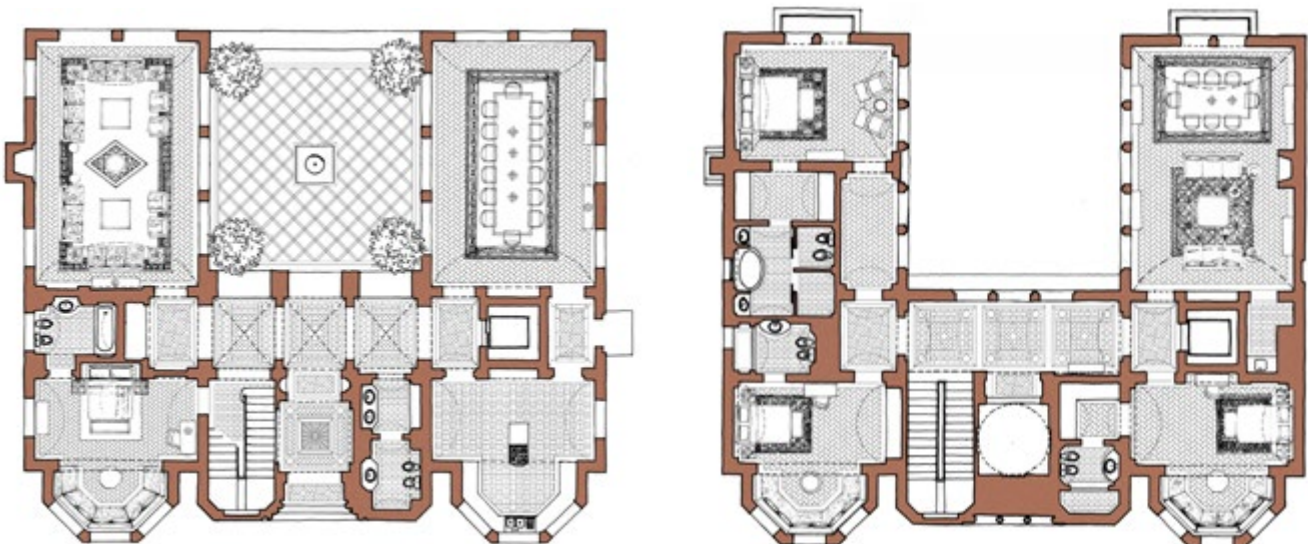
Interior details with glazed brickwork and tadelakt finishes



Partial detail cross section and partial elevation of the entrance portal of Dar Al Fahim

The builders of the past knew that if artifice is to intervene in nature it should do so by generating buildings that sympathize with nature. Since it is impossible to reproduce the same beauty, for man cannot compete with the Creator, we can produce only modest beauty in emulation of nature. This is the best we can hope for or desire to achieve, while humbly recognizing the Divine Model we emulate.

Ground and first floor plans of Dar Al Fahim





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- 1: View looking towards the wooden mashrabiya of Dar Al Fahim
- 2: Detail of the interior ribbed vaults in the ground floor gallery
- 3: View of the carved stone and brick entrance portal



Construction of Dar Al Qasir,
Manama, Bahrain, 1995

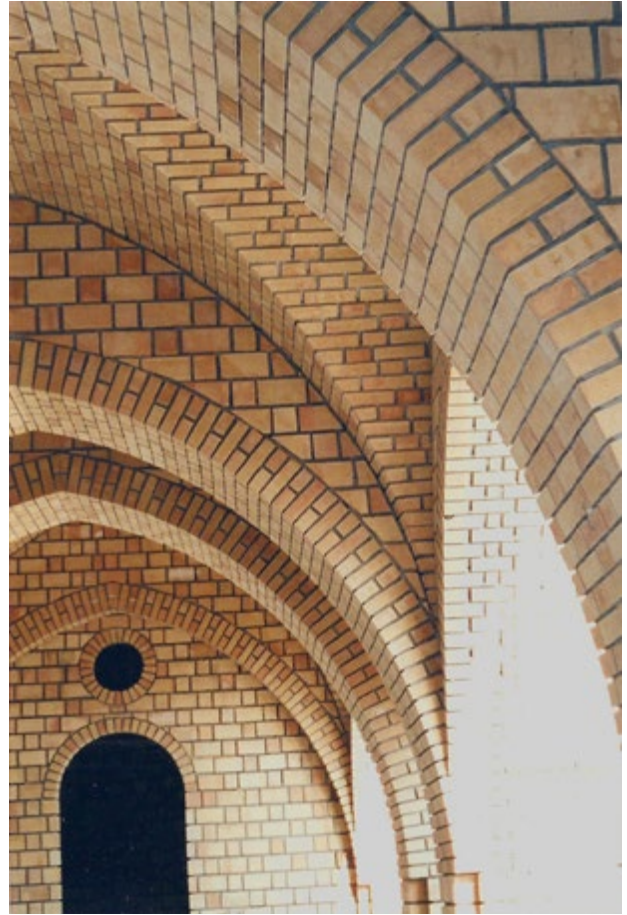
The Builder-Architect

Before the modern world gave us the “artist-architect”, concerned with self-expression and innovation for its own sake, there was the “builder-architect”, who expressed the needs of a community, the wisdom of a tradition, and the truth of techniques.

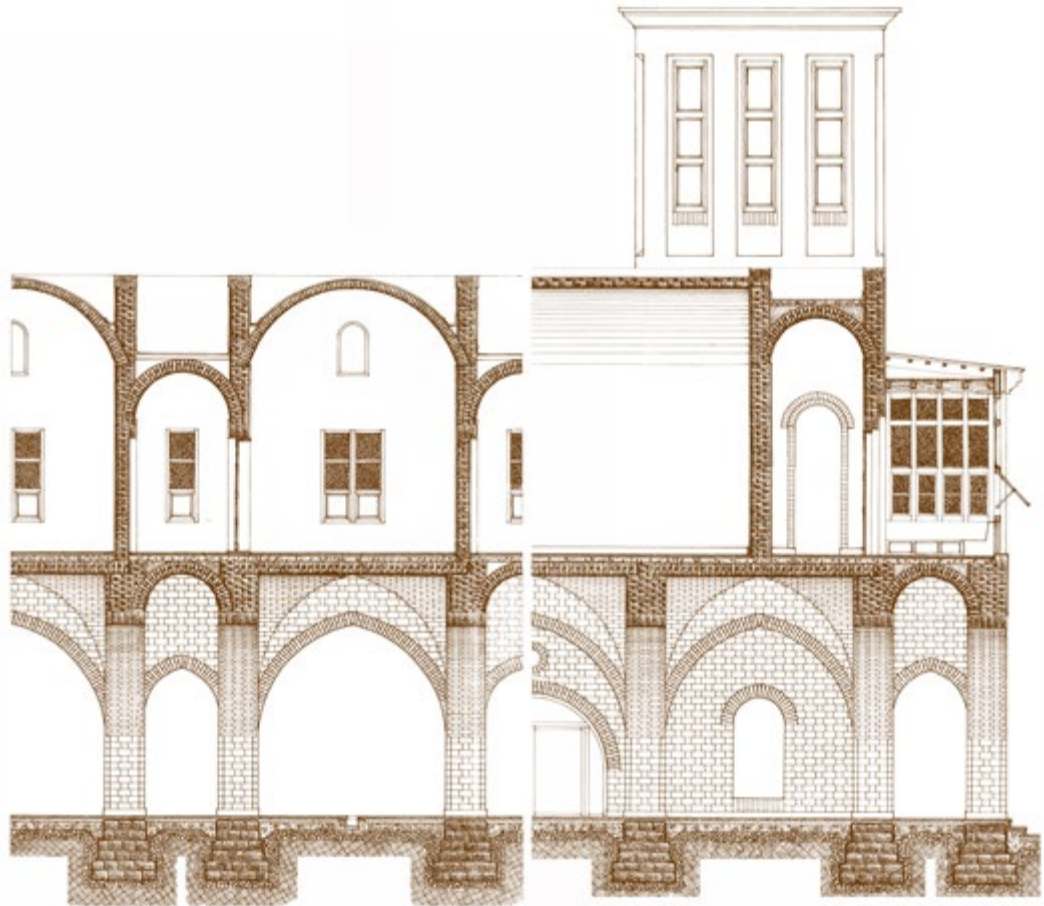
For the most part these builder-architects were endowed with something we have sadly lost: a faculty to appreciate the world as it is. They were more in tune with the nature of the universe and their own spiritual depths, and that is why they were able to build living structures reflecting this harmony. The unity and coherence of their worldview was reflected in a built environment that “spoke” to them. As Ruskin put it, these were “buildings raised by feeling”, a deep religious feeling that originates in the basis of things, as opposed to “those corrected by rule”, such as the sterile one-dimensional theories of modernism.

Ground and first floor plans
of Dar Al Qasir





Interior details showing brickwork during construction



Partial detail section of Dar Al Qasir

Contemporary critiques and reflections on the state of our built environment unfortunately neglect the need to inject life into our constructions and express only a need to embrace an architecture that is ostensibly “sustainable” and yet soulless in its essence. Over the past two decades, schools and interpretations calling for change in the trajectory of the building industry have proliferated. Some insist on the use of natural materials without regard for local culture or for achieving a sense of place. Others seek to innovate, implementing active mechanical and digital systems to respond to the local climate without concern for embodied energy, durability, or integration into the natural environment.

Before modernism, society was at heart sustainable, authentic, and alive. Tradition teaches us through a correct use of typological planning, massing, orientation, and spatial organization that our buildings can achieve adaptability and utility. Through construction and innovation with locally sourced materials our buildings reduce energy consumption, respond to the climate, blend into the natural surroundings, and withstand time. Through the hands of skilled builders, our buildings mirror and emanate the life that was transmitted to every brick and stone, every carved beam and door, by graceful tradition.

Innovation within continuity

But tradition is not a blind handing down of knowledge. Rather it is a dynamic process in which the past can guide, direct, and transform the present and the future, and also be transformed in the process. This dynamism is evident when we explore the relationship between tradition and innovation and is visible in buildings separated by centuries yet standing side by side within a single spatial rhythm. Such is the power of tradition: to harmonize and synchronize otherwise discordant tones.



View from the open-air vaulted lounge area of Dar Al Qasir

Innovation within continuity is the principle of change in traditional cultures. When change is called for, the adaptive processes inherent in construction do not impede it. When change is not called for, the culture's conservative habits allow existing building types and practices to persist and be reproduced because they have proven their ability to meet a need, and generate affection by connecting people to something intangibly deeper.

Biography | Biografía | Biografia

Mohamad Hamouié

Mohamad's private research and practice have made him one of the leaders of New Traditional Architecture in the Middle East. He is a member of the INTBAU College of Traditional Practitioners, a Professor of Practice and the Founding Chair of the INTBAU Levant Chapter. In 1993, Hamouié established his private practice. His first project, the Central Mosque in Shkodër, Albania, was nominated for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2001. He was nominated for the Driehaus Architecture Prize in 2020. Through his comprehensive knowledge of history and awareness of local context, Mohamad has designed and built more than 300 projects. In collaboration with master craftsmen worldwide, his buildings are guided equally by contemporary theories and traditional values.