

Leon Krier, Jamshid Sepehri

Sehpolis, Tonb-E-Kochak: A Pilot Project for a New Town in the Persian Gulf

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Abstract | Resumen | Resumo

The Iranian government has announced the development of its uninhabited Persian Gulf islands in order to secure their territory against claims by neighboring Gulf States. On hearing of Teheran's decision to develop these islands we decided to prepare and donate a pilot project, showing what a new traditional Iranian city of the future might look like if Tonb-e-Kochak, the smallest of the islands, were to be developed. We hope above all to stimulate discussion among Iranian authorities, professions, and citizens as to what the country's future architecture and urbanism are to be.

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O governo Iraniano anunciou o desenvolvimento das suas ilhas desabitadas do Golfo Pérsico, a fim de proteger o seu território contra as reivindicações dos Estados vizinhos do Golfo. Ao tomar conhecimento da decisão de Teerão de desenvolver estas ilhas, decidimos preparar e doar um projeto-piloto, mostrando que aspeto teria uma nova cidade tradicional Iraniana do futuro, se Tonb-e-Kochak, a mais pequena das ilhas, fosse desenvolvida. Esperamos sobretudo estimular a discussão entre as autoridades, profissionais e cidadãos iranianos sobre o que virá a ser a arquitetura e urbanismo do país no futuro.

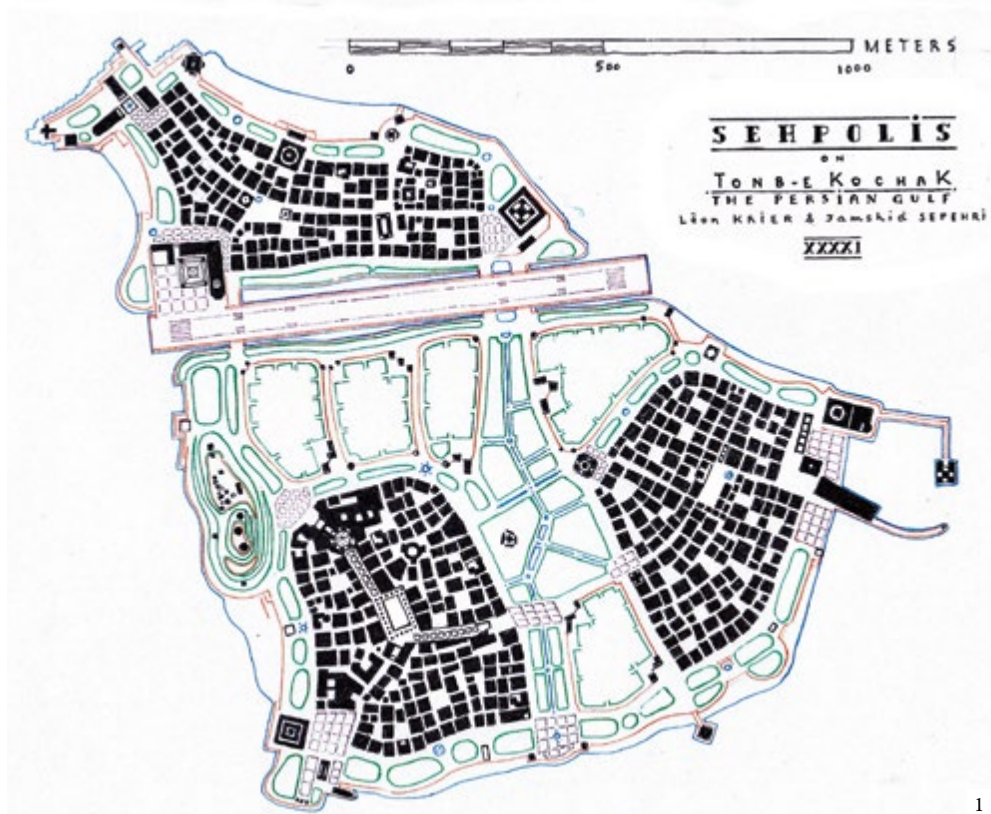
The Iranian government has announced the development of its uninhabited Persian Gulf islands in order to secure their territory against claims by neighboring Gulf States.

Bird's eye view of the island



As architects we have had a lifelong fascination with classical Persian art, architecture, cities, and gardens. We believe that architecture and stylistic trends are not a matter of mere fate but that choices exist, as is being proven by many New Traditional Architecture and Urbanism projects. We are part of a worldwide movement practicing, teaching, and propagating new traditional building

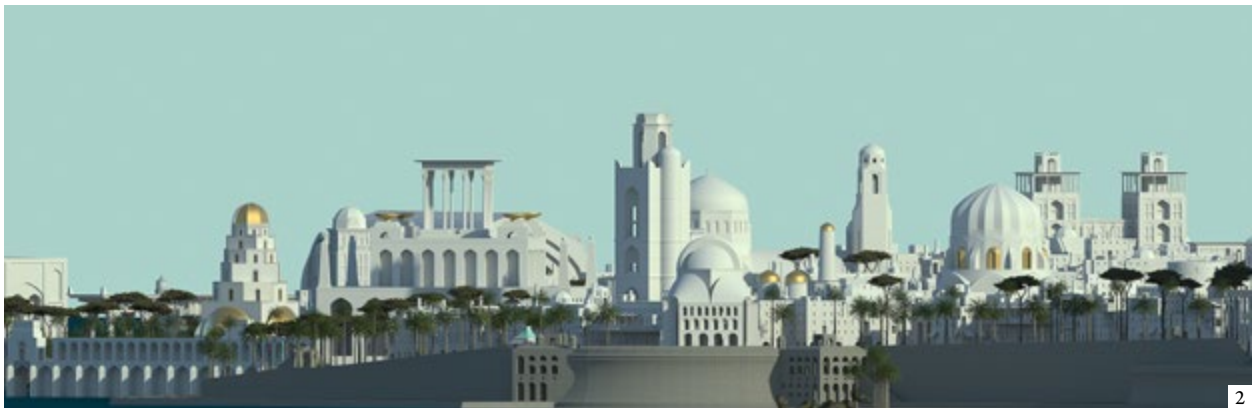




1: Plan of Sehpolis

2: View from the north-east

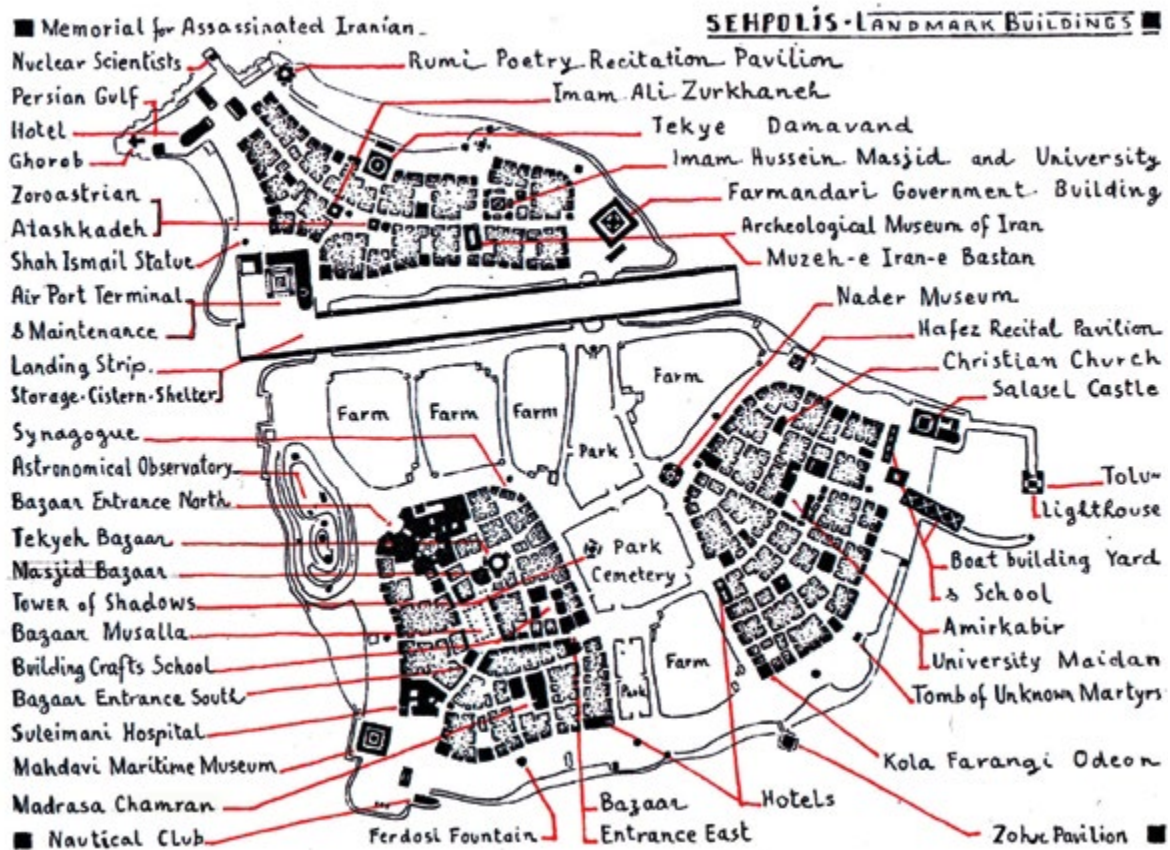
3: View of the east corniche; Tolu lighthouse to the left, Farmandari government palace and tower to the right



2



3

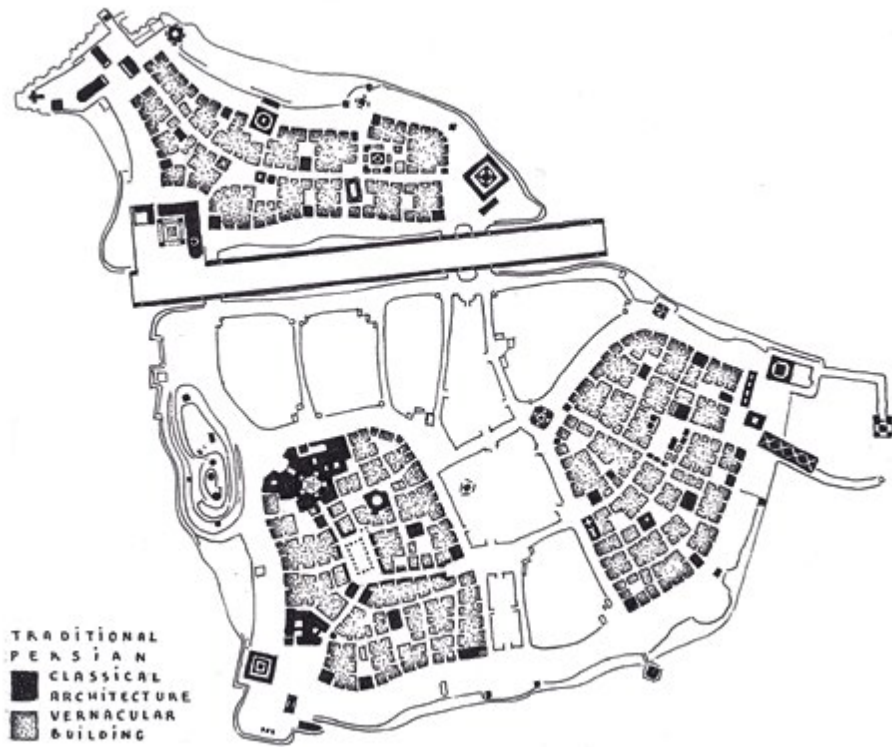


Plan with building names

crafts, architecture, and urbanism as part of our living heritage. These are matters which transcend passing ideological, political, or economic regimes. If practiced with the right methods, techniques, forms, scales, and materials, they give physical reality to an essential part of “the common good”: the urban public realm. This has been second nature for generations and yet is under attack, as the vast spatial restructuring and cultural revolutions engineered by modern industrial economies have eroded the nature of traditional cities and their public domain.

Public space on the south cornice





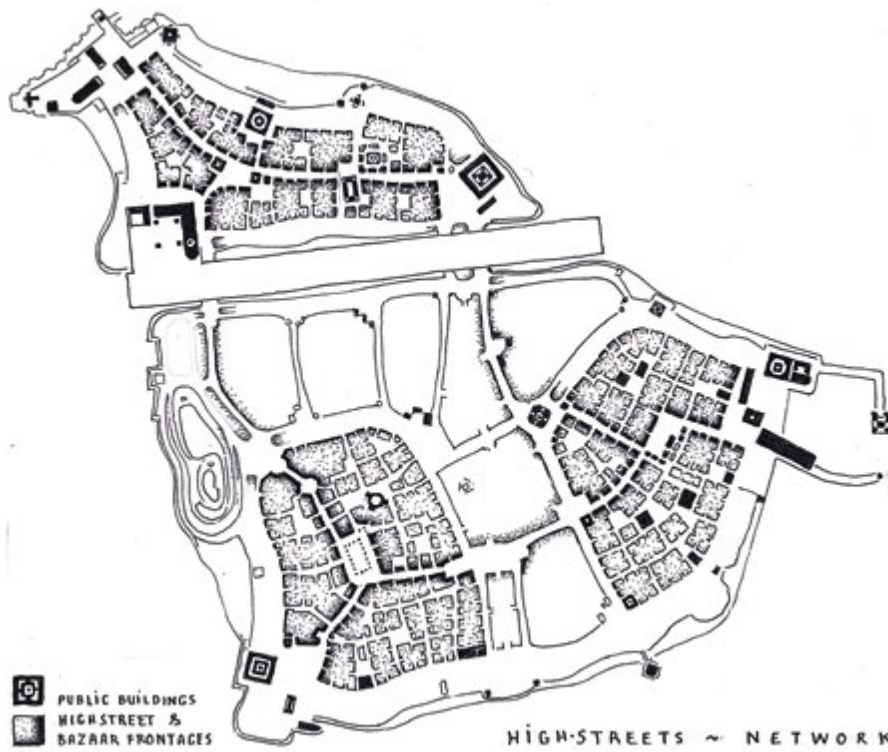
Plan with classical and vernacular buildings

Few people perceive the inextricable connection between good public space and “the common good”. Few are aware of how decisively “the common good” is given substance by the form of traditional cities and their built fabric, their streets and squares. These have knitted societies together despite profound divisions in customs, religions, languages, economies, politics. The urban public realm, a unique gift of the Persian-Greek-Roman-Christian civilizations, is a neutral ground on which the spectrum of human diversity unfolds peaceably and interacts in constructive rivalry. Without this public space, active citizenship could not have developed, and where it is lacking, democracy fails.

1: Acropolis elevation and Sehpolis skyline

2: Skyline from the north-east

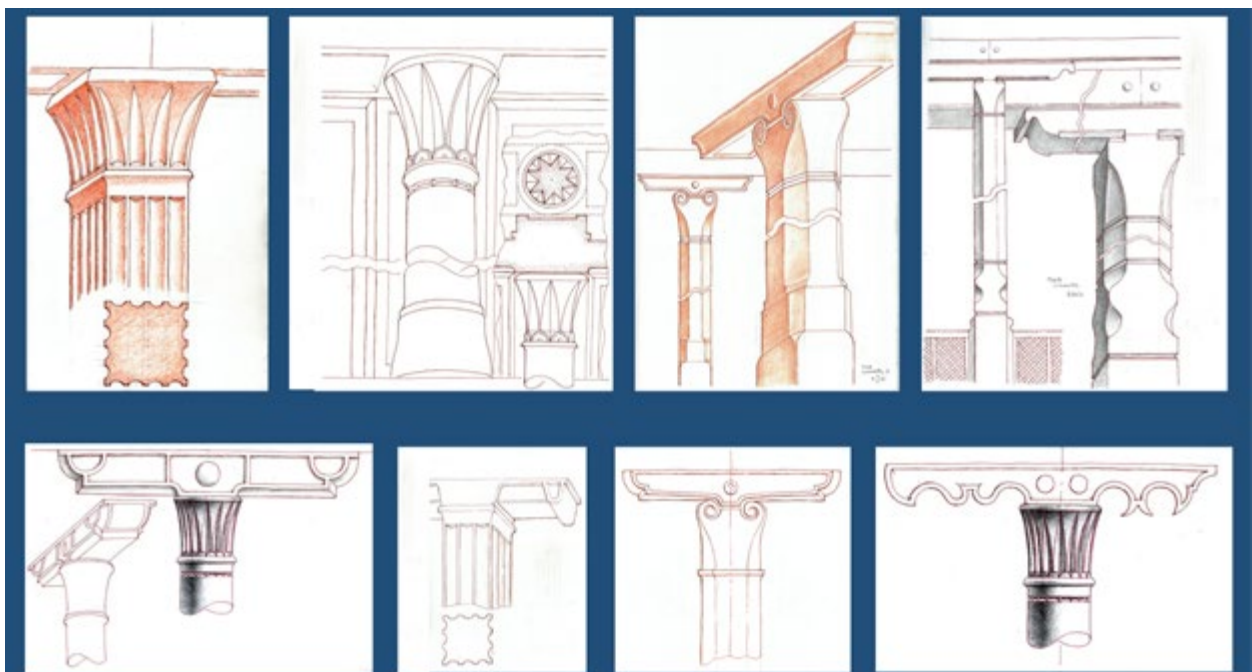




Plan with street network and public buildings

We observe with alarm that since World War II Iran too has, like most countries, suffered a profound change in the fabric, appearance, and organization of its cities and architecture. The loss of human scale, character, and beauty and the shocking contrast with the country's precious traditional built heritage and landscapes are commonly perceived or justified as inevitable. Yet to the majority of Iranians too, modern buildings and settlements are awkward and discordant, confirming that "an unspoiled landscape is not a landscape without buildings but merely a landscape without modern buildings", as Quinlan Terry says.

Column orders



On hearing of Teheran’s decision to develop its Persian Gulf islands we decided to prepare and donate a pilot project, showing what a new traditional Iranian city of the future might look like if Tonb-e-Kochak, the smallest of the Persian Gulf islands, were to be developed. This “gift” is sponsored by us, independent designers working without outside help, in a symbolic gesture intended to help temper the reigning climate of hostility toward Iran. We hope above all to stimulate discussions among Iranian authorities, professions, and citizens as to what the country’s future architecture and urbanism are to be. Such a national effort could enable Iran to lead new traditional development policies based on the country’s stellar technical and artistic heritage, and its age-old tradition of crafts and stewardship of land and resources. Persia was for centuries the standard-bearer of architectural refinement, influencing cultures as distant as those of India or Spain, Uzbekistan or Yemen. Iran

1: Bazaar (south entrance)

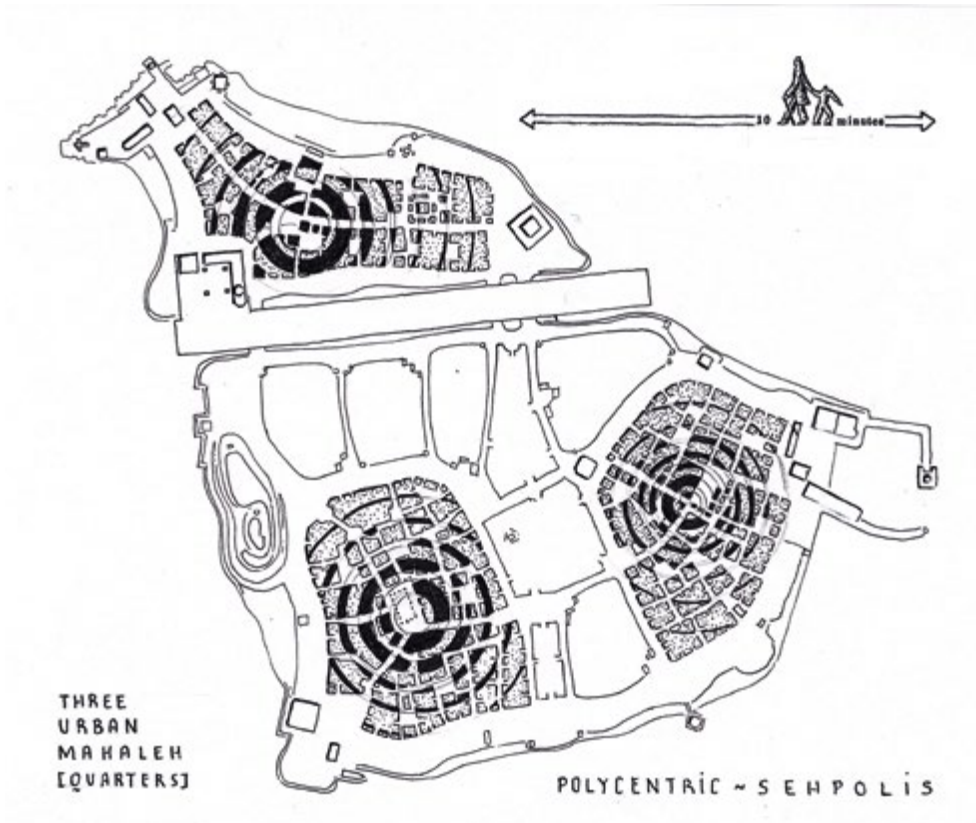
2: Mosque dome viewed from the Musalla Maidan arcade



1



2



Plan showing the three mahales

may on this tiny island realize an inspiring pilot project, a much-needed counter-model to the garish developments of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, and particularly of Saudi Arabia's futureless Neom vision or Egypt's New Capital City.



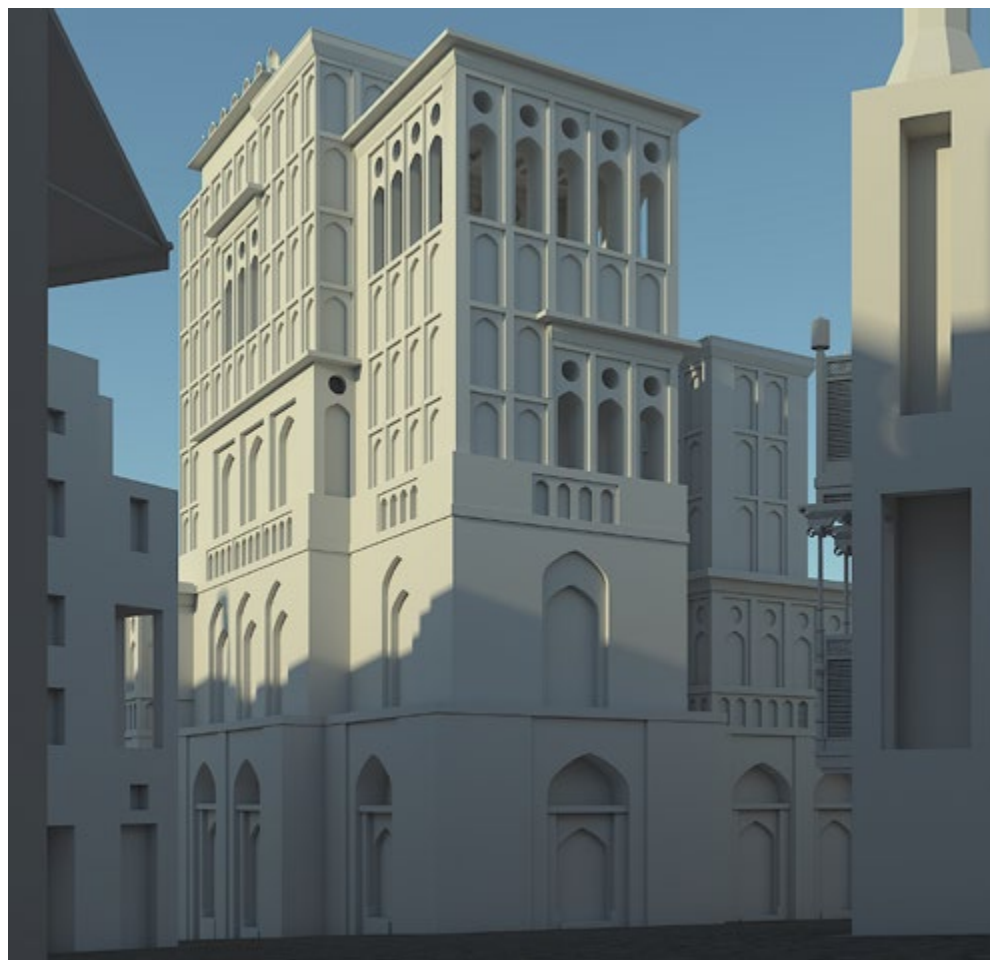
1: Airport terminal

2: Bird's eye view of the landing strip and the north mahale seen from the south-east. The urban fabric is formed of 3- or 4-story buildings above which rise the domes, roofs, and spires of public buildings



Masterplan of Sehpolis

Sehpolis is divided into three *mahales* (urban quarters with a 5-10-minute walk diameter). The three *mahales* are separated by formal water gardens, walled market-garden blocks and an airport complex. Each *mahale* houses some 1400 to 1600 residents in 3-4-story buildings (walkable building heights). The basic *mahale* fabric is modeled on traditional settlements in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of



Mixed-used block

- > 1: Harbor buildings and square at the south-east tip of the east *mahale*
- 2: Salasel castle
- 3: Amirkabir University maidan in the east *mahale*





1: Nader Museum, inspired by the Khorshid Palace in Khorasan

2: View east toward the Farmandari Palace and the east-gate tower past the Imam Hussein Mosque and university to the left

Aden. The vernacular geometry of *mahale* streets and squares, generated by a loose arrangement of small apartment blocks as realized in historic Shibam (urban space type II), contrasts with the spatial formality of the bazaar and maidan (urban space type III), and the institutional and transport ensembles (urban space type I).

The typical residential buildings hold up to 12 apartments, duplexes and penthouses. Their ground floors and mezzanines are reserved for non-residential uses, work, retail, or storage. Public buildings, such as a museum, public baths, schools, poetry recitation pavilions, a college for 38 building crafts, a college of marine architecture, an astronomical and oceanographic research station, a local government building, hotels, a hospital, a *zurkhaneh*, memorials, water towers, fountains, etc., are

designed as landmarks, marking a unique skyline, adorning prominent locations, vistas, squares, gardens, promenades, and promontories. The walled market gardens supply the local market with fresh produce.

The vast vaulted 1000 x 100 m undercroft of the airport runway is divided in three compartments. The largest, holding a water cistern, is modeled on the monumental Kish and Constantinople cisterns. The smaller sections hold a dry store and car park, a repair shop, and a bomb shelter. On the observatory mound is a meteorological and astronomical observation station, seminar rooms and scientists' residences. Hotels are located along the ocean promenades and parkways. Park-promenades and small white sand beaches border the island on all sides.

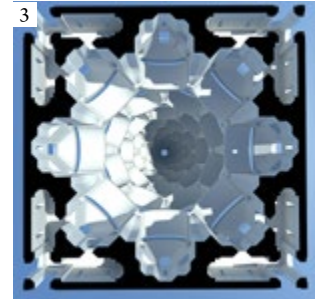
It is hoped that Sehpolis be developed not as a place of mass consumption but as a civilizational and cultural counter-project – a model of what physical form best allows individual human talents and independence to flourish in communities.

3: Faceted conical dome of Tekye Damavand, a Ta'zieh performance space, seen from below

4: Tekye Damavand and portico

5: Monumental wooden portico of Tekye Damavand

6: Front of a mosque





1



2



3

1: Synagogue

2: Christian church

3: Summit astronomical observatory on the acropolis overlooking the terminal building and landing strip.

The walled compound contains research installations and scientists' residences

Biographies | Biografías | Biografias

Leon Krier

Born in 1946 in Luxembourg City, Leon Krier is an architecture and urbanism consultant as well as a designer, author, and teacher. He is renowned for his pioneering role in promoting the technological, ecological, and social rationality and modernity of traditional urbanism and architecture. He studied at Stuttgart University in 1967, then left to work with James Stirling from 1968 to 1974. Since then he has combined an international urban planning and architectural practice, including projects in Mexico, Guatemala, the US, England, France, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Romania, Cyprus, Italy, and Spain, with writing and teaching. He has taught at the Architectural Association and the Royal College of Arts in London and at the Universities of Princeton, Virginia, Notre Dame, and Yale, and has lectured at numerous institutions. From 1987 Krier was advisor to the Prince of Wales, now King Charles III, in charge of master-planning and architectural coordination at Poundbury, the Duchy of Cornwall's urban development in Dorset. Also in England Krier has been responsible since 2018 for the Fawley Waterside Masterplan. Other outstanding model new-town developments of his are: in Belgium, Heulebrug, built according to his 2000 masterplan in collaboration with DPZ; and in Guatemala, with Estudio Urbano, the developments of Paseo Cayala, since 2003, El Socorro, since 2015, and Nogales, since 2020. Currently Krier is starting two new urban projects in Virginia and Colorado. He has also worked in parallel as an industrial designer for Giorgetti and Assa Abloy since 1990.

Jamshid Sepehri

Jamshid is a licensed architect in Washington, DC. He was born in 1960 in Tehran, and holds an undergraduate and a graduate degree in architecture from Maryland University and a graduate degree in architecture from Columbia University. He has been chief designer in various international architecture firms and has realized many large-scale residential, commercial, and institutional projects in America, Europe, and Asia. The Katzen Arts Center and American University Museum, the Saint Elizabeths Psychiatry Hospital, and the new addition to St. Albans School in Washington DC are just three examples. Since 2006 he has been collaborating with Léon Krier on many architecture and urban design projects.