

Aga Khan Award for Architecture

2010

WINNING PROJECTS

### **Madinat al-Zahra Museum**

Cordoba, Spain

*Architect:* Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos,  
Fuensanta Nieto & Enrique Sobejano

*Client:* Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de  
Cultura

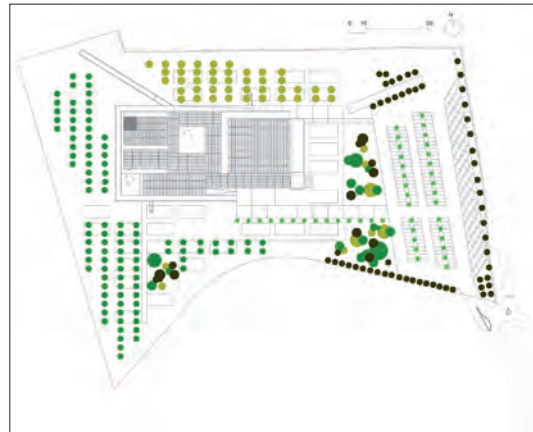
#### **Project Description**

The tenth-century palace city of Madinat al-Zahra is widely considered to be one of the most significant early Islamic archaeological sites in the world, and the most extensive in Western Europe. Excavations at the site are still ongoing. The museum was conceived as a place to interpret the site and display the archaeological findings, as well as to serve as a training and research centre and the headquarters of the archaeological team. A refined and subtle design by the architectural firm Nieto Sobejano, the museum complex blends seamlessly into the site and the surrounding farmland - a series of rectangles composed of walls, patios and plantings which, taken together, seem more like a landscape than a building. The architects took the ground plans of three excavated buildings as a starting point, as though the museum had been waiting to be revealed from the ground. Visitors are guided through a sequence of covered spaces and voids. The main public functions are arranged in a cloister around a broad patio, a form found at the archaeological site and in the old town of Cordoba. Two more courtyards define the research centre and the external exhibition area respectively. A restricted pallet of materials and simple details, with walls of poured concrete, interior walls clad in iroko wood, and limestone paving for the courtyards, are intended to evoke the rough retaining walls and temporary structures of an archaeological site.



## Jury Citation

“The Madinat al-Zahra Museum is a unique celebration of the link between museology and archaeology. It harmoniously and humbly blends into the landscape, understanding itself as serving the heritage being revealed in the site to which it is organically connected. This humility only adds to the powerful message it represents, one that is of particular significance in and for our times. Because the Madinat al-Zahra museum springs out of the soil and remains incorporated with it, it presents with superb architectural eloquence the spirit of an Islamic culture which was-which is-indigenous to Spain and Europe, as it emanates from the ground itself, one of the region’s multiple roots.



“The Madinat al-Zahra museum is a symbol of the *convivencia* evoked by the name Andalusia and bears testimony that indeed, Cordoba is the future, not only the past.”

## Project Data

*Client* Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Cultura, Spain

*Architect* Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos, Spain:

- Fuensanta Nieto, Enrique Sobejano, partners in charge of design; Miguel Ubarrechena, project architect; Carlos Ballesteros, Pedro Quero, Juan Carlos Redondo, project team

*Museological Concept and Programming* Antonio Vallejo Triano, Director of Madinat al-Zahra Archaeological Site, Spain

*Content programming* Manuel Ación Almansa, Spain

*Site supervisor* Miguel Mesas Izquierdo, Spain

*Structural Engineers* N.B. 35. S.L., Spain

*Mechanical Engineers* Geasyt S.A., Spain

*Exhibition design* Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos; Frade Arquitectos, Spain

<i>Museographic production</i>	Empty, S.L., Spain
<i>General Contractors</i>	Ecasur 10, S.A., Ejuca, S.A., Spain
<i>Built area</i>	9,125 m <sup>2</sup>
<i>Site area</i>	53,897 m <sup>2</sup>
<i>Cost</i>	US\$ 20.7 million
<i>Commission</i>	2001
<i>Design</i>	2001-2003
<i>Construction</i>	2005-2008
<i>Occupancy</i>	2008
<i>Website</i>	<a href="http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/cultura/museos/CAMA">www.juntadeandalucia.es/cultura/museos/CAMA</a> <a href="http://www.nietosobejano.com">www.nietosobejano.com</a>
<i>Bibliography</i>	Philip Jodidio, <i>Architecture Now! Museums</i> (Taschen, 2010)

### **Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos**

Fuensanta Nieto and Enrique Sobejano trained as architects at the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid (ETSAM) in Spain and the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation at Columbia University in New York. They are founding partners of Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos, with offices in Madrid and Berlin. Fuensanta Nieto is professor at the School of Architecture of Universidad Europea de Madrid, and Enrique Sobejano is professor of architecture at the Universität der Künste Berlin. Both have been visiting critics and lecturers at several international universities and institutions. From 1986 to 1991 they were directors of the architectural journal *Arquitectura*, edited by Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Madrid. Their work has been published in many international magazines and books and has been exhibited at the *Biennale di Venezia* (2000, 2002 and 2006) and at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (2006). They have been awarded the Spanish National Prize for Restoration (2008). Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos recently completed the Moritzburg Museum in Halle (Germany); their projects under construction include the Contemporary Arts Center in Córdoba, Spain, and the Joanneum Museum in Graz, Austria.

