



Aga Khan Award for Architecture

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WINNING PROJECTS

Khudi Bari

Various locations, Bangladesh

Bangladesh's *chars* are a landscape of constantly shifting rivers and sandbars with a population of people living in a permanent state of precarity. Aggravated by climate change, the annual monsoons and river erosion bring frequent floods that destroy homes and livelihoods. In 2018, a self-initiated research project by Marina Tabassum Architects (MTA) into land rights led them to these agrarian communities, and sparked the idea of creating a flexible, affordable, self-build housing solution adapted to their needs. And so the Khudi Bari – Bengali for “Little House” – was born, through extensive consultation with *char* community members.

Its simple, space-frame structure using chevron-braced bamboo is joined together with specially designed steel connectors fabricated in a Dhaka foundry that has a long working association with the architects. The upper storey, essential to ensure storage and sleeping space even during floods, has front and rear openings for cross ventilation. The roof is of corrugated tin produced in Chittagong – chosen by the community in preference over thatch, for its durability and reusability. Wood-framed panels are provided for the upper facade, while the lower walls are left to the owner-users' initiative: from grasses or sticks to jute fabric or salvaged corrugated metal sheets. Allocated by the communities themselves to those in greatest need, the basic Khudi Bari kits cost the equivalent of only US\$450 – a fraction of the roughly US\$2,500 starting price of commonly available wooden prefabricated houses already being produced in Dhaka.

Ongoing monitoring assesses the structures' performance over time, and MTA established the non-profit Foundation for Architecture and Community Equity (FACE) to facilitate their take-up. By early 2025, over seventy-eight structures had been erected at various locations. Owners attest that they fulfil their promise of being buildable within three days and dismantlable within three hours. Some have already withstood several cycles of flooding and/or removal to new sites.

MTA have also successfully scaled up the modular system to create several strikingly and thoughtfully designed women-led or women-oriented facilities in Bangladesh's vast Rohingya refugee camps, whose predominantly Muslim communities have fled persecution in neighbouring Myanmar.

Fast-growing and abundantly available across Bangladesh, the bamboo is treated in the *char* communities by soaking in water for twenty-four hours. In the Rohingya camps, it is treated with borax and boric acid to protect against fungal decay and insect infestation, in a special facility created by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Jury citation



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“The Khudi Bari project has been granted the Award for developing a flexible system that addresses global challenges with vernacular solutions, reframed through a contemporary lens to evolve and scale up so as to deliver a wider, regional impact.

Based on a module of elementary geometry, its rationalisation – paired with the adaptation of vernacular bamboo techniques – puts humanity before aesthetics, and it is humble enough to allow for an open-source use that enables communities to build and localise by themselves. Its easy and rapid deployment and disassembly provide an engaging solution for the nomadic condition of the climate-displaced communities in the flood-plains of Bangladesh, for whom it was first designed, already impacting the lives of hundreds of families.

As it grows into larger-scale communal projects, the Khudi Bari maintains the simplicity of its structure while still delivering grace and beauty, reminding us that design for survival doesn’t exclude architectural quality. Thanks to the flexibility and open-endedness of its geometry, the design allows for the individual module to scale from a single shelter into collective communal buildings, widening its impact from personal dignity to social infrastructure, in the form of classrooms, community kitchens, and humanitarian aid centres.

The project has a deep ecological framing, contributing to the global advancement of bamboo as a material. A living, regenerative resource widely available across the Bamboo Belt in the Global South, it is increasingly being adopted as perception changes from that of a precarious material to a viable, scalable, sustainable solution, delivering value that goes beyond style.

Clear and powerful architectural ideas have the possibility to reach and inspire others worldwide, but then have to be downloaded into specific contexts to be built with local resources. Ideas can and should go global, but materials need to stay local.

The Khudi Bari project is profoundly optimistic, as it reframes the role that architecture can and should play in times of difficult global realities – as a hopeful, actionable, and human-centred solution that is grounded and systemic.”

Project data

CLIENTS

Khudi Bari, various locations, Bangladesh

Communities living in Char Hijla, Char Juan Satra, Porar Char, Char Bajradiator Katha, Char Shildaha, Tahepur, Bangladesh

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Dhaka, Bangladesh:

Nathalie Chuard, *Swiss Ambassador to Bangladesh*

Syeda Zinia Rashid, *senior programme officer*

Kamalesh Ghosh, *senior financial controller*

Khudi Bari in Rohingya Refugee Camps, Ukhiya, Teknaf, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh



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World Food Programme (WFP), Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh:

Richard Ragan, *country director*

Naila Sattar, *political advisor*

Diane Taylor, *project director*

Biniam Michael, *lead engineer*

Argha Saha, Kazi Akif Akash, *architects*

ARCHITECTS

Khudi Bari, various locations, Bangladesh

Marina Tabassum Architects (MTA), Dhaka, Bangladesh:

Marina Tabassum, *principal*

Arman Abedin, Kazi Akif Akash, Anusha Alamgir, Tasneem Farah Siddique, *architects, research and development*

Protap Biswas, *site engineer*

Sharif Hossain, *accountant*

Khudi Bari in Rohingya Refugee Camps, Ukhiya, Teknaf, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Marina Tabassum Architects (MTA), Dhaka, Bangladesh:

Marina Tabassum, *principal architect*

Khondaker Hasibul Kabir, *landscape and community architect*

Mahmuda Alam, *community architect*

Tasneem Farah Siddique, *architect and administration*

Moslah Uddin, Sarina Khan, *architects*

Protap Biswas, *site engineer*

Sharif Hossain, *accountant*

Design Solutions, Anwar Hossain, *structural engineer*

IMPLEMENTATION

Khudi Bari, various locations, Bangladesh

Foundation for Architecture and Community Equity (FACE), Dhaka, Bangladesh:

Khondaker Hasibul Kabir, Md. Shafiul Azam Shamim, Faria Sharmeen Akbar, Sabiha

Ambareen Haque, Tasneem Farah Siddique, Arman Abedin, *FACE team*

Teresa Albor, *grant consultant*

Arman Abedin, *architect, project coordinator*

Saad Ben Mustafa, Afsary Islam Toma, Mushabbir Muttaki, *architects, project managers*

Alamgir, Masud Hossain, *carpenters, builders*

Protap Biswas, *site engineer*

Ali Haider Mohammad Sayeed, *accountant*

Khudi Bari in Rohingya Refugee Camps, Ukhiya, Teknaf, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Women-Led Community Centre, Camp8E, Ukhiya:

WFP Engineering Team, *construction management*



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Gono Unnayan Kortripakkha (GUK), *supervision and site management*
Rohingya refugees under “Cash for food program”, *daily workers*
Protap Biswas, *site engineer*
Alamgir, *carpenter, builder*
Mohammad Akhter Hossain, Mamun Engineering, *steelmaker*

Women-Friendly Space, Camp9, Ukhiya:

WFP Engineering Team, *construction management*
Mukti, *construction supervision, site management*
Protap Biswas, *site engineer*
Rohingya refugees under “Cash for food program”, *daily workers*
Alamgir, *carpenter, builder*
Mohammad Akhter Hossain, Mamun Engineering, *steelmaker*

MTA Residence, Ukhiya:

Arman Abedin, *architect*
Protap Biswas, *site engineer*
Local Ukhiya community, *daily workers*
Alamgir, Masud Hossain, *carpenters, builders*
Mohammad Akhter Hossain, Mamun Engineering, *steelmaker*

WFP Aggregation Centres, Teknaf:

WFP Engineering Team, *construction management*
Shushilon, *construction supervision, site management*
Protap Biswas, *site engineer*
Local Montolia and Lomboghona communities, *daily workers*
Alamgir, *carpenter, builder*
Mohammad Akhter Hossain, Mamun Engineering, *steelmaker*

Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner Model Unit, Cox’s Bazar:

WFP Engineering Team, *construction management*
Protap Biswas, *site engineer*
Local Ukhiya communities, *daily workers*
Alamgir, *carpenter, builder*
Mohammad Akhter Hossain, Mamun Engineering, *steelmaker*

WFP Material Lab, Modhuchhara Hub, Ukhiya:

WFP Engineering Team, *construction management*
Protap Biswas, *site engineer*
Local Ukhiya communities, *daily workers*
Alamgir, *carpenter, builder*
Mohammad Akhter Hossain, Mamun Engineering, *steelmaker*



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Project Data

Location	Number of units	Total floor area (m ²)	Cost US\$	Construction
Dhaka	1	12	250	2020
Char Hijla	4	18.4–22.3	250–290	2021
Taherpur	14	18.4	410–490	2022
Kurigram	20	18.4	410–490	2022–23
Char Shildaha	23	18.4	410–490	2022–23
WFP Food distribution outlet, Camp 9, Ukhiya	2 (4 modules)	770	60,000 (total project cost)	2021–23
Women-Friendly Space, Camp 9, Ukhiya	1 (4 modules)	409	16,530 (total project cost)	2021–23
Women-Led Community Centre, Camp 8E, Ukhiya	1 (5 modules)	440	18,185 (total project cost)	2021–23
MTA Residence	1 (3 modules)	90	3,305 (total project cost)	2021
WFP aggregation centres, Teknaf	2 (4 modules)	120–165	12,400 (total project cost)	2023
RRRC model unit	1	41.8	2,480 (total project cost)	2022
Material Lab, WFP, Ukhiya	1	41.8	2,000 (total project cost)	2021

Marina Tabassum Architects

Marina Tabassum is a Bangladeshi architect and educator who founded Marina Tabassum Architects (MTA) in Dhaka in 2005. Her architectural philosophy focuses on creating contemporary designs deeply rooted in ecological, cultural, historical, and climatic contexts. Tabassum's work emphasises sustainability and a strong connection to place, seeking what she calls "Architecture of Relevance".

One of her most acclaimed projects, the Bait Ur Rouf Mosque, was recognised by *The New York Times* as one of the "25 Most Significant Works of Postwar Architecture" worldwide. She was awarded the prestigious Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2016 for this project. Another notable work is the Independence Museum and Monument of Bangladesh, designed in 1997.

In addition to her architectural practice, Tabassum is an educator, currently serving as a professor at Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands. She has taught as a visiting professor at several leading universities, including Yale, Harvard GSD, University of Toronto, University of Texas, and BRAC University. She was also the academic director of the Bengal Institute from 2015 to 2021.

Tabassum is active in social causes, chairing Prokritee, a fair-trade organisation supporting over 5,000 women artisans in Bangladesh. She also established the Foundation for Architecture and Community Equity (FACE). Recognised internationally, she has received awards such as the Soane Medal (UK) and the French Academy of Architecture Gold Medal.



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WINNING PROJECTS

West Wusutu Village Community Centre

Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, China

The long-standing presence of China's Hui Muslim community around the Inner Mongolian capital Hohhot is evidenced by its early seventeenth-century Great Mosque – one of eleven mosques in the city. However, West Wusutu Village, adjacent to Hohhot and officially recognized as an exemplary 'Ethnic Minority Characteristic Village' of pluralistic coexistence, has long lacked public spaces such as a community centre or a mosque, capable of accommodating the everyday life of its multi-ethnic community within reasonable walking distance. Many of the village's working-age natives migrate to the city. Conversely, its abundant apricot blossoms and mountain scenery have long brought a regular influx of visiting artists.

A government rural revitalisation initiative initiated in 2018 saw several vacant vernacular buildings transformed into premises for artists, while others were demolished. Among the architects involved was Zhang Pengju, whose rapport with residents made him the natural choice when they secured permission for a cultural and social space to be built on the site of a former Buddhist temple. Villagers and artists together raised the necessary funds. The project took just seven months from design to completion, coming in below even the modest budget that had been set. Instrumental in its low cost was the approach of building it almost entirely of bricks salvaged from the earlier demolitions.

A neighbourhood café and restaurant opens directly onto the side street. The rest of the facilities are accessed via a narrow entrance corridor that leads straight into the off-centre circular courtyard. Forming the heart of the plan's sophisticated geometry, its sunken central area can be turned into a temporary pool through a mechanism to block the rainwater drainage channel. From the courtyard, visitor circulation is fluid throughout, with no solid divisions between spaces. Yet, it is choreographed in such a way that outsiders coming for cultural events or art exhibitions are unlikely to disturb the locals' communal activities – mahjong or cards for the older generation, pottery for the youth.

Breaking into the courtyard's circular shape, a staircase leads to a roof terrace where seating steps invite social gathering, and from which people can watch performances in the courtyard below. This is also a place for children's play, and the forms of the four ventilation towers – which are connected to an underground cooling system – make this open space fun and intriguing, as well as signalling the centre's presence from a distance.

The centre has already boosted the local economy by attracting more tourists and sparking the opening of new guesthouses and restaurants.

Jury citation

“The West Wusutu Village Community Centre shifts the paradigm of contemporary architectural design



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beyond object-based and aesthetic end-results, orienting it towards translating users' daily community needs into a well-conceived architectural vehicle. The dynamics of this project significantly enhance social interaction, cultural experience, and environmental resilience. Thus, by integrating diverse users and embracing a high multifunctional articulation through its fluid spaces, the centre has generated a valuable shared and inclusive communal microcosm within a rural human macrocosm.

The project's architectural performance is based around integrating multiple communal activities not through rigid functional and confined spaces, but rather through a permeating circular courtyard at its core. Beyond its tangible form, this courtyard orchestrates continuous circulation and orientation to different, openly linked rooms. With a ramp linking the ground level and the rooftop as a continuous public space, the architectural ensemble ingeniously rethinks notions of public and private spaces as well as rigid level boundaries.

Accordingly, it demonstrates how sensitive and sensible design can be in a rural open environment, by encapsulating villagers' communal interactions in a compact physical envelope to generate inclusiveness, resilience, sustainability, and well-being. The project pursues a spatial-articulation strategy which has been painstakingly translated via a material form, yet being careful not to fall into a dichotomy of space versus function.

In addition to its highly optimised form, the structure presents a transcendent, impactful landmark in the village's landscape. The architecture takes advantage of the beauty of its natural environs, with its views towards the Daqing Mountains, while remaining anchored to the site by surviving trees as a marker for villagers' collective memory.

In terms of tectonics and feasibility, the West Wusutu Village Community Centre embraces a clear, non-alienating geometry where horizontal and vertical permeability are exemplary. Whereas the cooling towers enhance the overall aesthetics of the envelope, they also link the ventilation systems to enhance passive performance. In addition, the large-scale reuse of bricks conveys a critical message of sustainability – especially in a rural context, where nature is predominant.”

Project data

CLIENT

Local community, Hohhot, China:

Haifeng Li, *community lead*

Cheng Guo, *project liaison*

ARCHITECTS

Inner Mongolian Grand Architecture Design Co., Ltd., Hohhot, China:

Zhang Pengju, *lead architect*

Wenjun Zhang, *on-site architect*

Lili Huang, Zhonglong Ren, *assistant architects*

Xin Zhou, *structural engineer*



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Runing Tang, *mechanical engineer*

Haichun Ma, *electrical engineer*

School of Architecture, Inner Mongolia University of Technology, Hohhot, China:

Xiaoming Su, *building physics specialist*

COLLABORATORS

Inner Mongolia Grassland Oil Painting Academy:

Jiangze Gao, *artists' representative*

Inner Mongolia Art College:

Mr. Asibagen, Yong Li, Yufeng Yun, Danqing Shi, Lina Wang, Kun Zhang, *artists*

Pioneer College, Inner Mongolia University:

Pengqian Jiang, *artist*

Hohhot Food and Medicine School:

Zhiyong Huang, *artist*

Pei Yang, *bar and restaurant operator*

CONTRACTORS

Inner Mongolia Yinglihong Construction and Installation Co., Ltd.

Zaisheng Niu, *construction supervisor and project manager*

Zhan Gao, Jun Xie, Jianguo Zhang, *craftspeople*

Tianxi Bu, Yongmao Du, Wei Gao, Mr. Jiliabi, Mr. Jiliweiri, Zaizai Liu, Jungqing Niu, Ermao Qin, Zhigang Xing, Huibing Zhang, Ping Zhao, Ruifeng Zhao, Xiangfu Zhao, *craftspeople*

Project Data

Site area: 2,346 m²

Ground floor area: 1,276 m²

Rooftop area: 786 m²

Cost: 443,000 US\$

Schedule

Commission: January 2023

Design: January – May 2023

Construction: August 2023

Occupancy: September 2023

Inner Mongolian Grand Architecture Design Co., Ltd



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Inner Mongolian Grand Architecture Design Co., Ltd., is known for creating architecture that blends traditional Mongolian cultural elements with sustainable, context-sensitive design. The firm focuses on environmentally responsible and culturally resonant projects, such as the Zhengxiangbaiqi Grassland Community Centre and the Hohhot Qingshuihe County Museum. Their work integrates traditional building techniques with innovative approaches to meet modern needs, reflecting a deep respect for local heritage and natural surroundings.

Zhang Pengju is the principal chief architect of Inner Mongolian Grand Architecture Design Co., Ltd., and a professor at Inner Mongolia University of Technology. He also serves as chair of the Committee on New Regional Architecture of the Architectural Society of China and as director of the International Joint Laboratory for Human Settlements in the Eurasian Steppe Zone. With over four decades of experience rooted in Inner Mongolia, Zhang has dedicated his career to the research and development of regional architecture in remote areas of northwest China. His design philosophy emphasises inheriting tradition, integrating with nature, and adopting low-tech construction methods.

Zhang has published more than eighty academic papers and monographs, and he has led the design of over 200 architectural projects. His work has been recognised by many prestigious awards, including the ARCASIA Gold Medal, the Architecture MasterPrize (AMP), and the International Architecture Awards.



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WINNING PROJECTS

Revitalisation of Historic Esna

Esna, Egypt

Located by the Nile about 60 kilometres south of Luxor, Esna is best known for its temple devoted to the ram-headed Ancient Egyptian creator god Khnum. The small city's dense and richly layered urban fabric – from the Graeco-Roman, Coptic, Islamic/Fatimid, and Mamluk-Ottoman periods through to nineteenth- and twentieth-century vernacular domestic architecture – testifies to millennia as a commercial and cultural hub. Yet its entire historic core had been earmarked by the government for demolition, left dangerously fragile through decay since a river barrage built in the 1990s had caused a 95 per cent reduction in the cruise-ship tourism on which it had come to depend.

Egypt's national planning body invited the Cairo-based urban development company Takween, experienced in participatory upgrading, to offer an alternative vision. The strategy they devised to save this precious living heritage site is one of understated yet transformative urban acupuncture: small interventions in the living urban tissue, combining cultural sustainability with inclusive economic development.

The initial phase, titled Rediscovering Esna's Cultural Heritage Assets (RECHA), received USAID funding – a first for an Egyptian-led cultural heritage initiative. It focused on restoring and/or adaptively reusing some twenty key historic structures, employing the region's traditional techniques – from mud brick to lime plastering, terracotta tiles, and fine wood-carving – and using salvaged materials wherever possible. Among these structures are the Wakālat al-Geddāwī – an eighteenth-century caravanserai that had been closed to the public since 1951 – and the vast Qīsāriyya Market, with its 144 shops, frequented by locals and visitors alike. The Temple of Khnum was also upgraded, improving accessibility and public services to the site that is sunken some 10 metres below today's ground level.

A second phase, Value Investment in Sustainable Integrated Tourism in Esna (VISIT-Esna), went on to establish a broader socio-economic urban revitalisation framework by developing small and micro businesses alongside tourism services and cultural branding. Two of the new businesses are entirely female-led – the Okra kitchen restaurant, serving distinctive local dishes that visitors will not find in other parts of Egypt, and a woodworking workshop – empowering many women who previously had no paid employment.

A model of bottom-up sustainable development, the project has reversed Esna's decline and created hundreds of lasting jobs for locals, revitalising age-old crafts and passing them on to a new generation. Since its launch, visitor numbers have tripled.

Jury Citation

“The initiative to revitalise historic Esna goes beyond the usual limits of an urban conservation project



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that is formally framed in advance and instead presents a bottom-up strategy through an inclusive, socially structured programme to gradually improve the heritage environment. Hence, residents play a major role in maintaining the urban synergy through its living heritage, sparking sustainable regenerative momentum in what had become dilapidated built fabric.

By restoring or reusing buildings – commercial, residential, and spiritual – the project is stimulating a whole historic urban metabolism to cope with the contemporary challenge of improving human conditions and working infrastructure for craftspeople. Its community-driven initiatives are a catalyst for upgrading the local economy through small and micro enterprises. Accordingly, the project echoes local techne and know-how through innovative small and accumulative results to actively generate the conservation of the urban core, the city's identity, cultural dynamism, and economic resilience.

In doing so, the project clearly shifts the paradigm of urban conservation to another level, prioritising the role of residents' collective intelligence in transforming their challenging and derelict built environment. Rather than only addressing monuments and other tangible historic fabric, the focus is also on intangible cultural capital as leverage to revitalise both the material and immaterial dimensions.

The key gain from the revitalisation of historic Esna is how it reactivates historic spaces through incremental and accumulative actions to synergise the social, cultural, environmental, and economic potentials through the community's ingenuity. Thus, it introduces social innovation as a creative tool for urban upgrading, such as the Okra women-run initiative for gender inclusion and local economic growth.

With its highly participative approach towards urban heritage conservation, the project became the first "conservation plan" for a non-monumental urban area to be approved by the Government of Egypt. Unprecedented in its combination of adaptive reuse with community empowerment while stimulating the local economy, it could bring balance to Egypt's otherwise more formal heritage conservation strategies and policies."

Project data

CLIENTS

Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Cairo, Egypt

Luxor Governorate, Luxor, Egypt

United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Cairo, Egypt, *principal donor and strategic partner*

SPONSORS

Government of the United States of America, financial support

Government of the Netherlands, financial support

Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), financial support



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Owners of community-based MSMEs, Esna, Egypt, *financial support*
Luxor Governorate, *financial support*

ARCHITECTS

Takween Integrated Community Development, Cairo, Egypt:

Kareem Ibrahim, *managing director, project lead*

Nevine Akl, *design and conservation management director*

Sherine Zaghow, *tourism and socio-economic development director*

Ahmed al-Biblawi, *site conservation and rehabilitation director*

PROJECT LEADERSHIP

Yasser Ahmed, *deputy design manager*

Younn Faisal, *senior architect*

Khadiga Farouk, *senior architect*

Amr al-Qamary, *senior architect*

Yasser al-Shahhat, *senior conservator*

Hisham al-Komy, *senior conservator*

Taha Said, *conservation, site engineer*

Sultan Sadek, *rehabilitation, site engineer*

Mohsen Mikhael, *programmes director*

Zeinab al-Bakry, *community and government liaison officer*

Asmaa al-Gendy, *community officer*

HERITAGE AND PROJECT CONSULTANTS

May Al-Ibrashy, *conservation consultant*

Amr Ibrahim, *tourism marketing and promotion consultant*

Maissa Moustafa, *tourism experiences and interpretation consultant*

Carol Westrik, *intangible cultural heritage consultant*

Mamdouh Sakr, *handicrafts development consultant*

MARKETING, BRANDING, AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS

CID Consulting, Cairo, Egypt

Tandem Branding, Cairo, Egypt

Marian Nosschi, *product display consultant*



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Yousry Zaghow, *hospitality consultant*

Omar Marsafy, *culinary consultant*

Digital Experts, Cairo, Egypt

Gemini Africa, Cairo, Egypt

STRUCTURAL AND GEOTECHNICAL CONSULTANTS

Al-Madina Consulting Office, Cairo, Egypt:

Mohamed Al-Esawy

NileConsult, Cairo, Egypt

Geotechnical and Structural Consulting Engineering Office, Cairo, Egypt

ELECTROMECHANICAL CONSULTANT

Infra Group Consultants, Cairo, Egypt

COMMUNITY-BASED ENTERPRISES AND BRANDS

Al-Tayeb Mehrez and Khaled Hashim, *co-owners, SEBA Bazaar*

Essam Moustafa, *owner, Khnum Bazaar*

Moustafa Abo-Douh, *owner, Fakher Stamps*

Wael Yousry, *owner, Yousr Bazaar*

Hussein Ali, *owner, Ali Baba Bazaar*

Ahmed Abdel-Ghaffar, *owner, Tayet Bazaar*

Hussien Saad, *owner, Tabarak (Iron Man) Bazaar*

Emad Abdel-Qader, *owner, Kings T-shirt Bazaar*

Omar Abdel-Mottaleb, *owner, The Pottery House*

Abdel-Raouf Tahsin, *owner, The Art House*

Omar Abdel-Wahab, *owner, Omar's Cafe*

Ramadan Mohamed, *owner, Ramadan Restaurant*

Hamada Al-Nouby, *owner, Zalabya Dessert Cart*

Mohamed and Aboul-Hassan Hassan, *co-owners, Al-Hagga Restaurant*

Khaled Al-Fakharany and Alaa Tafoury, *co-owners, Al-Salam Hotel*

Osama Mohamed, *owner, Al-Haramain Hotel*

Local women collective, *Okra – Esna Women's Kitchen initiative*

Local women collective, *Karoot – Women-led Wood Workshop and Showroom initiative*



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PROJECT COMMUNICATIONS AND CULTURAL PROGRAMMERS

Farah Mansour, *communications manager*

Youssef Halim, *graphic designer*

Moustafa Zohdy, *graphic designer*

Ahmed al-Zanaty, *interpretation, graphic designer*

Ahmed Moustafa, *photographer*

Samar Ramadan, *photographer*

Mohamed Salama, *communications officer*

Karim Badr, *researcher*

Pakinam Khalil, *researcher*

Rehab Sakr, *interpretation officer*

Well over 100 additional stakeholders were involved in the project, from various fields of expertise.

Project Data

Site area: 107,100 m²

Ground floor area: 107,100 m²

Total built area: 107,100 m²

Cost: 8,800,000 US\$

Schedule

Commission: October 2016 – ongoing

Design: February 2017 – ongoing

Construction: July 2018 – ongoing

Occupancy: August 2021

Takween Integrated Community Development

Takween Integrated Community Development, founded in 2009, is an award-winning Egyptian urban development firm led by a team with thirty years of experience. Its mission is to empower communities through innovative, research-driven, and practical solutions. It focuses on creating inclusive urban spaces that are sustainable and responsive to the specific needs of each built environment, aiming to improve quality of life for residents across Egypt.

Beyond traditional consulting, Takween specialises in crafting integrated urban development services, including in-depth research and documentation, tailored programme development, project



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implementation, and capacity development. All of these services are focused on both built environment upgrades and socio-economic development. This holistic approach empowers communities while enhancing physical spaces. Supported by specialised units in design and planning, project implementation, and urban research, Takween's diverse team of over forty professionals ensures integrated, high-impact interventions.

To date, Takween has collaborated with numerous local and international institutions, successfully delivering over a hundred projects across Egypt.



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WINNING PROJECTS

Majara Residence and Community Redevelopment

Hormuz Island, Iran

A fifth of global oil supplies are shipped via the Strait of Hormuz. Long plagued by the political and military tensions that come with such a strategic position, Hormuz Island's population of under 6,000 people were living mainly from fishing and illegal goods trafficking. Recognising its potential for eco-tourism, in 2008 a group of Iranian artists led by Ali Rezvani launched an annual "Soil Carpet" land-art event on the island using natural ochres from its spectacularly colourful mountains and valleys. Unfortunately, this did not bring the hoped-for economic boost, tending only to attract day-trippers and backpackers due to the basic nature of available accommodations.

Seeking a more structured strategy, they turned to the Tehrani artistic producer Ehsan Rasoulof, who brought a multidisciplinary team of experts on board, including ZAV Architects. The new approach, also known as "Presence in Hormuz", began with gradual small interventions of architecture and urbanism, to empower the community to develop organically.

So as to encourage interaction between islanders and outsiders, the Rong Cultural Centre was then built next to the dock where tourists arrive. It is formed of two domes – one containing a café serving south-Iranian dishes, the other a visitor centre – connected by a strip of stepped seating as a social gathering place or vantage spot for open-air cultural activities. The construction technique, known as "superadobe", involved layering bags filled with local earth, sand, and a little cement for cohesion, here reinforced with steel and covered in a weather-resistant, cement-based finish. Labour-intensive but with low material cost, it is a method that favours employment opportunities and was executed by locals trained on the job.

The same construction method was used to create the initiative's largest element, the Majara Residence: a gateless complex comprising 200 domes of varying sizes, their shapes recalling both the mountains and the local vernacular water storage structures. Their colours, too, echo the landscapes – although with artificial paint, avoiding overuse of natural resources. Interconnected in clusters with pathways meandering around and over them, they host accommodations for up to seventy-five guests and ten artist residencies, plus service spaces and open-to-all functions from restaurants and art/craft retail to a worship space and a public library.

Still ongoing, the project now includes Typeless, a plain, flexible hub used mainly for activities related to monitoring the overall initiative's impact, and Ozar, an old boat fragment transformed into a mobile film projection facility amongst new elements.

Jury citation

"Set within a breathtaking geological context that dates back millions of years, these projects on Hormuz



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Island, Iran, are framed in relation to a vast mountain range typified by colourful mineral and salt deposits. So, while being intricately geo-referenced to the site, they are meaningfully embedded within the social and cultural fabric of the land.

The project can be understood as a vibrant and colourful archipelago of varying programmes that serve to incrementally define a truly alternative model for tourism in this context and beyond. Following on from its first new structure – the simple viewing and interpretation organisation called Rong Cultural Centre – the Majara Residence presents an offer within a growing global industry. Choosing not to follow a hyper-luxurious and resource-demanding typology, it leans instead towards a pluralist and inclusive framework that counters excess and becomes part of a community-driven evolutionary process of growth.

Predominantly built using a sandbag “superadobe” structural system, alongside more conventional building processes, the project exploits knowledge systems that leverage both local and wider global expertise, realised with the community. It complements the remoteness of Hormuz with a comprehensive off-grid suite of solutions that reduce pressure on the island’s limited energy and water resources.

As well as the new structures, which include the “Typeless” building used largely for activities related to monitoring the scheme’s impact, the ongoing urban acupuncture interventions in the town of Hormuz are another key strength of the initiative.

While the Majara Residence project has won many awards and has received worldwide attention on social media, what has tended to remain unsaid until now is how it sits at the intersection between geology, community life, and tourism – an industry which can be so destructively globalising. In its deep sensitivity to context, this project exemplifies how architecture can become a formidable force of optimism and rigorous resolve to shift the social, cultural, and material pendulum.”

Project data

CLIENTS

Ehsan Rasoulof, Ali Rezvani

ARCHITECTS

ZAV Architects, Tehran, Iran:

Mohamadreza Ghodousi, Fatemeh Rezaei, Golnaz Bahrami, Soroush Majidi, *principal designers*

Payman Barkhordari, Sheila Ehsaei, Soroush Majidi, *supervisors*

Payman Barkhordari, Sheila Ehsaei, Sara Jafari, Hossein Panjehpour, Mohsen Safshekan, Kaveh Rahidzadeh, *design assistants*

Fereshteh Assadzadeh, Sara Fallahzadeh, Arshia Hashemipour, Dorsa Tavakoli, Somayeh Saeidi, *presentation*



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ENGINEERS

Farhad Beigi, *civil engineer*

Pejman Moradian, *electrical engineer*

Saeid Afsharian, *mechanical engineer*

CONTRACTORS

Amir Tehrani Nobahari, *project constructor*

Hormat Ghasemi, *construction manager*

Ramin Koulaghani, Amin Timas, *construction vice-managers*

Davoud Etamadi, *floor constructor*

Javad Irandegani, Hamid Haji Post-e-Gol, *mechanical constructor*

Mehra Company, *fenestration builder*

Gholamali Abbasi, Esmaeil Salimi, *plasterers*

Farzad Moharami, *construction painter*

Nabiollah Timas, Borhan Pouyan, Ali Ghanbari, Ayoub Owj Hormozi, Khalil Owj Hormozi, Abdolhamid Hormozi, Davoud Hormozi, Ali Ghalandari Zehi, Farhad Shadan, Assad Gedri, Abbas Gedri, Ali Ghazi, Majid Bazmandeh, Ali Nasernia, Rahmat Ghalandari, Davoud Mohtaji, Morteza Mohtaji, Mohammad Vahedi, Mosayeb Zarei, Kambiz Naroui, Yasser Naroui, Nassir Narouii, Din Mohammad Naroui, Mojtaba Farhadi, Abbas Nasaji, Esfandiar Khorshidi, Khoubyar Khorshidi, Jalal Bameri, Ghassem Bameri, Enayat Karami, Reza Amirian, Eshgh Ali, Nabi Akrami, Mohammad Moallemi, Sajad Gholampour, Seyfollah Rasouli, Ali Golzari, Soheil Khedmatkari, Hosein Zohouri, *construction team*

CONSULTANTS

Behrang Baniadam, Rouhi Touski, *structural design*

Contextlogic architecture studio, Tehran, Iran:

Morteza Adib, Maryam Yousef, *landscaping consultants*

Salman Rasouli, Roya Yazdizadeh, *environmental consultants*

Taraneh Behboud, Sara Nikkar, Mohsen Dehghan, Sara Jafari, *interior designers*

Tajang Light, Tehran, Iran:

Nima Bayat, *lighting consultant*

Nasim Mosavar, *accommodation consultant*

Matbakh Ara, *culinary manufacture*

Project Data

Project name	Site area (m ²)	Ground floor area (m ²)	Total floor area (m ²)	Cost US\$
Rong Cultural Centre	2,000	200	300	16,000
Majara Residence	10,300	4,000	4,300	1,000,000
Typeless	477	180	550	35,000
			5,150	1,051,000



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Schedule

Project name	Commission	Design	Construction	Occupancy
Rong Cultural Centre	2015	2015–16	2016–17	2017
Majara Residence	2017	2017	2017–20	2020
Typeless	2019	2019	2019–21	2021

ZAV

ZAV is a Tehran-based architectural practice established in 2006 by Mohamadreza Ghodousi and former partner Parsa Ardam. The office explores how architectural innovation can embody resilience in response to socio-political and economic challenges, by incorporating processes that go beyond the discipline's conventional boundaries. ZAV draws inspiration from traditional Iranian practices of resourcefulness, such as rug-making, which transform simple, at-hand, and often overlooked resources into valuable products – embracing imperfections and the realities they reflect. This approach is self-reliant and rooted in the present – for the here and now.

ZAV first gained national attention with Barbad Fruit House (2008, featured in *The New York Times*) and Pedari Guest House (2011), establishing itself as a young practice with a distinct voice. In the years that followed, it became a prominent figure in Iran's alternative architectural scene through projects like Habitat for Orphan Girls (2014), Farsh Film Studio (2017), and Rong Cultural Center (2017), working across Iran and engaging local communities and subcultures.

Having received several international awards, ZAV gained wider global recognition with Majara Residence (2020) and continues to expand its international presence.



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WINNING PROJECTS

Jahad Metro Plaza

Tehran, Iran

Unchecked, car-oriented urban expansion in the four decades since the Iranian Revolution had seriously diminished Tehran's liveability, and the role that public spaces have played in past political demonstrations had fed the authorities' reluctance to invest in them. Aiming to foster a "pedestrian-oriented city" through multiple small-scale interventions, a group of urban specialists, together with members of the previous municipal administration, embarked on a project titled "Meydangah" to identify and activate underused spaces that could be made into vibrant urban nodes. One of the 100 sites that they pinpointed was Jahad Metro Plaza. They sought out young architecture practices for the commissions – in this case KA Architecture Studio, led by Mohammad Khavarian.

The original idea was simply to redesign the pavement in front of the metro entrance, but the architects successfully argued the case for a more impactful intervention that also involved replacing the entrance building. Located at the intersection of Valiasr Street, which runs north–south through the city's historic core, Dr Fatemi Street and Ghazali Street, with its buildings dating back to 1980s urban planning initiatives, the triangular site offered a prime location for a structure that would resonate with its cultural and historical setting.

An assembly of interlocking barrel vaults, both monumental and welcoming, has transformed the metro entrance into an all-weather social hub that buffers traffic noise. In a series of indoor or outdoor spaces that offer varying levels of intimacy, people can take a restful pause, gather to chat, or listen to street musicians. Differences in vault heights make the building permeable to both air and light, while establishing strong visual and functional connections across the site levels.

Construction was completed economically in just seven months, using a modular steel-mesh framework on which traditional bricks, handmade in the primary contractor's local workshop, were applied – a familiar technique requiring no specialist skills. Subtle variations in the brickwork reference Iran's history of geometric brick patterning. For resistance to vandalism, there are no loose furnishings, and lighting is embedded in ceilings and walls.

The plaza in front is organised for street vendors, including Afghan immigrants who previously operated illegally and can now continue to work in a safe, officially approved setting.

Jury citation

"With 159 stations and a length of over 250 kilometres, the Tehran Metro is one of the most extensive in the world, carrying millions of passengers every day. As critical urban infrastructure, the functionality and appeal of the Metro are central concerns for the municipality, the client for this project.



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The redevelopment of the station entrance transformed a once conventional and modest access point into an open public space: a plaza that encourages passage, encounters and events. Unlike the former structure, which closed off stairways at ground level, the new design opens the station to the sky and neighbourhood, converting former stair areas into a pedestrian zone with direct street access and improving accessibility.

The wide facade enhances ventilation and provides a welcoming space for public interaction, informal commerce and urban life, acknowledging the need of metro passengers for space beyond transit.

The project's architecture is characterised by its striking volume and integration of vaults, arches and circular forms, which reference Iran's rich civilisational heritage. The use of brick further strengthens this historical connection, and its warm, subtle texture emphasises the station's status as a new urban monument. At the same time, the station blends in with its contemporary surroundings, standing out among the newer buildings that frame the site.

This renewed identity imbues the station with energy and distinction, establishing it as a landmark within the neighbourhood and the wider city. Its strategic location further enhances its potential to become embedded in the collective memory of Tehran's residents and visitors.

Aesthetically, the design draws upon Iranian architectural traditions. Daylight penetrates through large openings in the ceiling, illuminating the interior and improving the station's environmental quality. The widened entrance brings in light and air, creating a sense of openness and flow.

Through its subtle strength, attention to heritage and craft, and its aim to revive pedestrian space and social interaction, the project exemplifies the role of architecture in shaping public spaces as living dialogues between history, people and ideas."

Project data

CLIENT

Municipality of Tehran, Tehran, Iran:

Seyed Javad Mirhosseini, *design representative*

Hadi Haghbin, *construction representative*

Majid Amani, *site representative*

ARCHITECTS

KA Architecture Studio, Tehran, Iran:

Mohammad Khavarian, *lead architect*

Mehrasa Nikokar, *project manager*

Mohammad Ali Panahi, *structure designer*

Meghdad Amiri, *lighting designer*



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CONTRACTORS

Mehdi Firouzi, *construction manager*

Behnood Goharbin, *brick constructor*

Masoud Goharbin, *brick constructor*

Project Data

Site area: 1,500 m²

Ground floor area: 800 m²

Total built area: 1,500 m²

Cost: 200,000 US\$

Schedule

Commission: March 2020

Design: February – October 2019

Construction: November 2022 – June 2023

Occupancy: June 2023

KA Architecture Studio

Mohammad Khavarian is an Iranian architect and the founder of KA Architecture Studio, an independent architectural firm established in 2013. KA Architecture Studio focuses on creating spaces that engage with context, function, and human experience, while offering a platform for experimentation, inquiry, and the development of contemporary architectural prototypes.

The studio's design approach is rooted in a spirit of experimentation and analytical exploration. By investigating spatial patterns and constructing new prototypes, KA Architecture Studio rethinks conventional models and seeks to generate architecture as an ongoing, research-driven process rather than a fixed end-product.

Mohammad Khavarian emphasises a reflective design methodology where drawing, building, and prototyping are seen as tools for questioning and reimagining spatial narratives. His work explores the intersection between everyday life, urban textures, and material presence – often aiming to challenge expectations through experiential, site-aware interventions.

KA Architecture Studio has completed a range of projects, from small-scale buildings to urban-scale proposals, with a consistent focus on architecture as an evolving practice grounded in curiosity, dialogue, and innovation.



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WINNING PROJECTS

Vision Pakistan

Islamabad, Pakistan

Moved by the plight of non-literate young men let down by the system and subject to depression, violence, and/or drug abuse, Rushda Tariq Qureshi decided to devote her zakat donations (tithing) to helping turn lives around through training in tailoring. Relatives and friends joined her, and with their pooled resources she established the Vision Pakistan initiative.

After fifteen years operating in rented office spaces, she was able to commission this custom-designed facility in Ghauri Town, a post-2000 development about 10 kilometres from Islamabad. Alongside the vocational training, its holistic year-long programme supplies meals, teaches literacy, and uses daily chores to instil skills for social independence such as critical thinking, time management, cleanliness, and tolerance, while also encouraging a peace-focused understanding of Islam.

Qureshi's chosen architect was Mohammad Saifullah Siddiqui, who had designed her family home. Together they swiftly agreed on an efficient plan to house five flexible classrooms, a dining room, recreation spaces, management offices, exhibition areas, two shops, and a rooftop prayer area with a student-maintained kitchen garden. The shops offer students the chance to take their first commercial orders, and some spaces can be rented out, for financial sustainability. The structural system – in-situ concrete frame with brick infill – is seismic-resistant. A triple-height staircase atrium, with a tall anchor tree and other greenery, unifies the spaces and, along with operable windows, helps drive passive ventilation.

Although Qureshi first suggested Pakistan's historic brick architecture as stylistic inspiration, Siddiqui drew primarily from Islamabad's 1960s modernism. The facades are a layered grid. Pierced window screens (*jaalis*) lend privacy and an element of joy. Repeated in the stairwell, these screens were locally made and powder-coated in colours that reference neighbourhood vernacular features. Each pattern is symbolic: the blue *jaalis*, of Islam; the green ones, of Islamabad's modernist buildings; the yellow rattan-like ones, of craft; and the plain-weave red ones, of the school itself.

The care in detailing is exceptional for such a low-cost project. The grid continues inside through fine strips of marble inlaid in the hard-wearing terrazzo flooring, and the entrance steps have marble trim – all locally donated offcuts. Even the ceiling-mounted electrical conduits align with the same grid.

With forty to fifty male students aged sixteen to thirty-five benefiting from the school each year, Qureshi hopes to extend her initiative's reach by building a women's facility on an adjacent empty site.

Jury citation

"Two people – one an experienced educator, the other a young practising architect – work together and



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invent a new wellspring of respect, a new skills training centre, a place where young people feel that they matter, where not-yet-discovered talents will be trained and encouraged.

The educator, Rushda Tariq Qureshi, had a vision: to educate, to involve the youth, and to form a community where students will feel useful and valued.

The architect, Mohammad Saifullah Siddiqui of DB Studios, was trusted with the task of understanding Rushda's vision. Together they transformed a plot of land close to public transport and invented a building that would not only contain a new type of education, but be full of light, spatially interesting, economically efficient, and highly distinct.

The six-storey building's two lowest floors, with their future-proofing storefronts, are designed to relate to the major street. Arranged across the storeys above, the cared-for, plant-filled classrooms and prayer hall interlink and are visually connected through the 10-metre-high atrium. Students can see each other, benefiting from being able to observe each other's training and progress, aware that they are part of a caring community. The roof-level dining area and kitchen provide precious opportunities for further personal development beyond the vocational programme.

The life within this three-dimensional cube is held by strategically important environmental values: good natural light, cross ventilation, solar protection, low maintenance costs, and robust materials.

The architectural expression of this new building is provided by its concrete screen, held in front of the two street facades. This applied grid of 9 squares high and 10 squares long both protects the interior and expresses this contemporary building to the city. It does this by reinterpreting the familiar and historic *jaalis*, metal screens, both in various geometric patterns and in different colours. This combination of interpreting history to provide a visually controlled, yet joyful facade gives this building an easily recognisable and distinct surface."

Project data

CLIENT

Rushda Tariq Qureshi, Islamabad, Pakistan, *chairperson*

ARCHITECTS

DB Studios, Islamabad, Pakistan

Mohammad Saifullah Siddiqui, *lead architect*

Mohtasim Rehman, Hamza Munir Awan, Waseem Jamal, *assistant architects*

Mian Israr Ahmad, *landscape architect*

Awais Arshad, *lead draughtsperson*

CONTRACTORS

Abdul Waheed, *building contractor*

Najib Khan, *site supervisor*



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CONSULTANTS

Talha Afzal, Mujeeb Ahmad, *structure consultants*

Saleem Niazi, *MEP consultant*

Project Data

Site area: 130 m²

Ground floor area: 158 m²

Total built area: 848 m²

Cost: 120,000 US\$

Schedule

Commission: November 2019

Design: January 2020 – October 2022

Construction: May 2021 – April 2023

Occupancy: May 2023

DB Studios

DB Studios was founded in Pakistan in 2006 by the architect Saifullah Siddiqui, a graduate of the National College of Arts in Lahore. Since its inception, the studio has followed a context-sensitive and nature-inspired design philosophy, focusing on how form organically evolves from function. The studio emphasises architecture rooted in local culture, geography, and materials, creating spaces that are both functional and meaningful. Through thoughtful planning and the integration of landscape, history, and local identity, DB Studios designs environments that harmonise with their surroundings and enhance the user experience. Nature serves as a key source of inspiration, offering principles that inform both form and problem-solving. In response to the architectural identity challenges in Pakistan, the studio promotes designs that reflect a strong sense of place rather than imitating foreign trends. The firm works closely with clients to deliver efficient, sustainable solutions, while contributing to the social and cultural fabric. The studio's portfolio spans residential, institutional, and public projects across Pakistan and internationally.

Architect Saifullah Siddiqui is a member of the Pakistan Council of Architects and Town Planners (PCATP), the Institute of Architects Pakistan (IAP), and a former member of the CDA Design Vetting Committee. His work has received multiple awards, including the IAP Young Architect Excellence Award (2013) and two IAP Design Excellence Awards (2022, 2024).



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WINNING PROJECTS

Wonder Cabinet

Bethlehem, Palestine

Exploring and promoting new forms of making based on Palestine's rich but threatened heritage of both craft and industrial production, the Wonder Cabinet is a non-profit cultural and educational platform established and designed by local architects Elias and Yousef Anastas. Despite being known primarily for their work in stone, they here sought material anonymity by using a simple, rough-finished concrete grid frame. Glazed, extensively openable front and rear facades, along with a largely open-plan interior with just a few glass partitions, ensure transparency throughout and natural climate control through airflow. The focus is entirely on the making, as a means to support fulfilling livelihoods that sustain Palestinians' presence here in the West Bank, and on the landscape setting.

Nestled into a hillside at the edge of Bethlehem – a city that previously lacked any dedicated contemporary arts venue – the building looks out over the Al-Karkafeh Valley. Its views towards the Jordanian mountains on the horizon are interrupted by an Israeli settlement on a once-forested hilltop in the near distance.

A giant mural by the artists Somnath Bhatt and Ayed Arafah adorns its west elevation. The street facade gives access to the upper level, housing a café and a shop showcasing locally made products. Between the two, a diagonal void that cuts through and connects all three levels draws the gaze downwards, offering a sweeping perspective of the multiple activities taking place inside, and on to the valley beyond.

The architects' studio and several other open offices are also accommodated on the upper floor. The mezzanine below hosts a production area, artist workstations, a radio station, and a restaurant. The lower level mainly houses a performance and production space, with facilities for various craft activities, from wood- and metalworking to casting, textiles, and photography. An outdoor patio offers a relaxed spot for socialising or informal meetings.

The only enclosed areas of the rear facade are the masonry-walled sound studio and the metal-fronted staircase bay, which has two conical protruding porthole windows. Crafted by Mohammad Husni, who specialises in steelwork for factory silos, these windows are angled to frame particular parts of the surrounding landscape. Furniture, lighting, and other details are likewise made by local artisans, including the prominent rooftop installation by Bishara al-Hadweh, of staggered stainless-steel letters spelling out "WONDER CABINET" that gently spin – weather-vane-like – on tailor-made ball-bearing mechanisms.

Jury citation

"Initiated by the architects to fill a gap in the cultural offerings for youth in the city, this project expands



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the agency of architects to the roles of client, designer, cultural practitioner, and activist.

Designed as an open, flexible, and transparent beacon of cultural production and resilience in the Al-Karkafeh Valley, the spatial organisation of the building facilitates exchange, dialogue, and community-building. With a mixed programme of artists' studios, production spaces, a radio station, a restaurant, and the architects' offices spread over different platforms, the cross-sectional void traversing its three floors encourages physical and visual connections, both within the building and towards the surrounding landscape.

Borrowing from the contemporary language of the concrete frame construction prevalent in Bethlehem and its environs, the project demonstrates that spatial complexity and richness can be achieved through the judicious application of standardised construction methods and minimal material use. The concrete grid becomes an inhabited infrastructure of cultural production as well as a domestic monument – anonymous in its expression and scale, yet monumental in its impact. The building manages to both blend in with the other buildings in the city through its architectural expression and stand out through its transparency as an open and welcoming gesture in the landscape. Its bare concrete frame is complemented by locally produced artisanal elements such as the spinning signage, portholes, and murals that celebrate contemporary Palestinian production.

Firmly nestled within a deeply charged setting, the Wonder Cabinet offers new horizons: reintroducing making, music, wonder, and joy in the city. By imagining both the cultural institution and the physical structure that hosts it, the architects have created a building that transcends its immediate political context, providing a model for an architecture of connection that is rooted in contemporary expressions of national identity and asserts the importance of cultural production as a means of resistance.”

Project data

CLIENT

Wonder Cabinet, Bethlehem, Palestine

SPONSORS

Drosos Foundation, Zurich, Switzerland

Anastas Family, Bethlehem, Palestine

ARCHITECTS

AAU Anastas, Bethlehem, Palestine:

Elias Anastas, Yousef Anastas, *lead architects*

Georges Anastas, Pauline Anastas, *architects*

CONSULTANTS

Wael Zeit, Issam Zeit, *electrical engineers*



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ARTWORK

Somnath Bhatt, Ayed Arafah, *artists*

CONTRACTORS

Local Industries, Bethlehem, Palestine

Bishara alHadweh, *artisan*

Mohammad Husni, *steelworker*

ELECTRICAL INSTALLATION

Issa Haroun, *electrical contractor*

MECHANICAL INSTALLATION

Elias Zarouk, *mechanical contractor*

Project Data

Site area: 800 m²

Ground floor area: 265 m²

Total built area: 950 m²

Cost without land: 758,120 US\$

Cost of land: 400,000 US\$

Schedule

Commission: January 2021

Design: January – September 2021

Construction: November 2021 – May 2023

Occupancy: May 2023

AAU Anastas

AAU Anastas is an architecture and research studio founded by Elias and Yousef Anastas, with offices in Bethlehem and Paris. Their studio explores the intersection of craftsmanship and architecture across a range of scales, from furniture design to large-scale territorial studies. They promote a contemporary approach to working with structural stone in architecture, in Palestine and beyond. Their work is particularly attentive to the political implications of stone use, with an emphasis on lowering carbon footprints, fostering more resilient urban environments, and encouraging more responsible sourcing and application of materials. Projects like Stone Matters explore the social and historical significance of stone in Palestine while proposing innovative contemporary applications. They also co-founded Radio AlHara, a community-based online radio station that builds unexpected networks of solidarity through sound. Their practice centres on connecting hyper-specific – sometimes seemingly unrelated – contexts to open up new forms of dialogue and resistance.

Elias Anastas worked with Yves Lion in Paris before returning to Bethlehem to lead projects such as the



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Edward Said National Conservatory of Music and the Hebron Courthouse. Yousef Anastas gained experience at Kengo Kuma & Associates and RFR and now leads the studio's research division, SCALES, focusing on contemporary stone construction techniques.