

IDEAS

The main idea that we tried to implement while designing the House of Arts and Culture of Beirut was to create a place that would enfold the different uses but at the same time keep a direct contact with the city. While we keep in the interior a very different formal approach on the various functions we wanted to keep the exterior simple and create scenery taking shapes from various local elements.

Despite the different limitations we aimed for an osmotic relationship between the House and the city. We believe that the most powerful way for a building to function is for it to integrate in the urban tissue. The city can inject life to a public building, especially when the building aims to host arts, a function that demands contact with people.

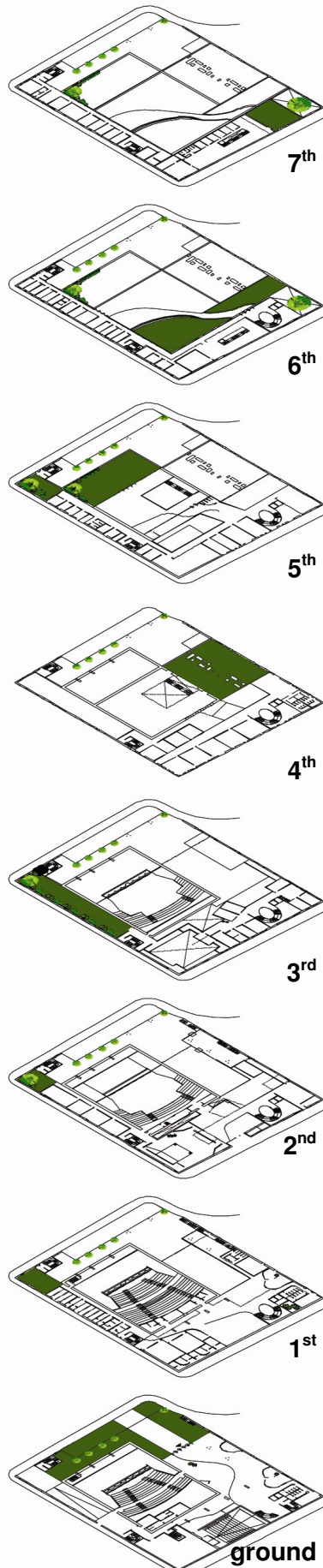
While looking over the city we realized that despite the radical changes that it's been through the last years, there is a strong imagery and urban context that demand of a certain simplicity on the façade, a sort of monolithic approach to the volume. By looking at the city from the top, one can spot the clear lines of the urban tissue and the tight densities. The different city planning squares are completed, outlining the streets in a very clear way. Towards this direction point the Building Regulation limitations as well, with the obligatory built to line borders on the south side (General Fouad Avenue) and on the north side (Ghalghoul Road) and the 32m facades. On the other hand the architectural program asks for a combination of various functions with very different characteristics.

THE SURROUNDING SKIN

In combination with these limitations there was our strong belief that the House of Arts is a unique building that hosts arts, one organization that works as a shelter for the artists, their works and art-lovers. Our idea was the existence of an epidermis that embraces the various spaces, a skin where the different uses attach to. This skin allows us to describe the lot in a clear way that would not dissolve the urban tissue, making the building part of the city.

Despite the monolithic volume that is created by the bounding of the site with this skin, we believed that this skin should allow an osmotic relation with the city. To achieve this we created a grid based on arabesque patterns on the facades. On the ground level the arabesque is deeply engraved on the façade and sometimes it is created by voids and solids, differentiating the first level from the rest of the floors where the shapes are simple scotias on the plaster. The various openings allow contact with the city and make the indoors activities visible to the outside. Especially during the nighttime with the lights that will glow and the shadow play. This way the

the ascending green diagram



street's live atmosphere is entering to the building and affects the way it works, transforming it from time to time to a canvas of artistic expression both literally and metaphorically.

THE ASCENDING GREEN

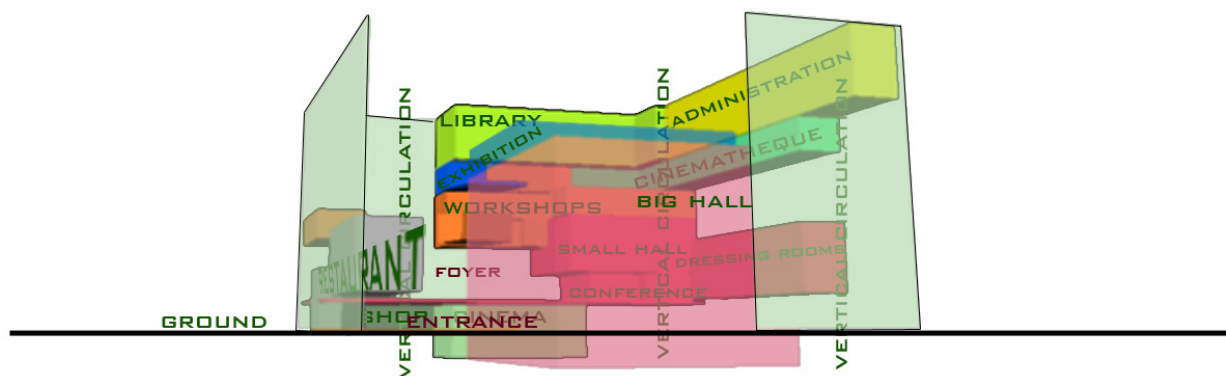
Still our aim was to make this building approachable to people, an open organism that welcomes the possible visitors, while offering the space and the freedom to the artist to express themselves in different ways. Our decision was that this strong skin that surrounds the site to open towards the city center. This desire was supported by the surrounding lots and the obligatory setback of the lot, on the north side. On this side the skin opens to the city and lets the green space in front of the preserved building in lot no 134-1 to enter into the building leaving the demanded non-built area in front of the building.

The idea of the planted open areas that intrude into the building was moved a step further as we started creating a climbing garden that elevates into the various levels in a carefully planned way. In every level we create various gardens that serve as an open space for the exhibitions and the performances, or as places of contemplation and relaxation both for the visitors and the staff working in the building.

Apart from its architectural function these areas work as an improvement on the macroclimate of the building. The plants cool down the air and protect the glass facades from the heat. We also took great care of the big glass facades to face north, so that the energy costs of the building would be reduced, while the others facades have small openings that permit the circulation of the air and the cooling of the building without allowing the heat to enter.

THE VARIOUS CELLS

The various functions are placed in the lot in an L shape plan attached to the peripheral skin while in the core of the building we place the large volume of the Big Performance Hall, while on top of it unfolds the exhibition space. The interior aimed a lot to the notion of the souk, the market with a covered internal circulation while on the two sides various activities take place. Putting this idea into practice, the main entrance of the building, on the north side, works as the “open” reception area because of its multiple height. It expands to the interior of the main volume containing the different spots of public interest (tickets, information, orientation, brochures), developing on an axis and ending to the vertical circulation of the building. As the visitor enters, one has a complete view of the way the building develops in three dimensions and conceives the magnitude of the large volume of the Performance Hall. The two halls have been designed to serve the multiple possible uses especially the Kabuki and No theatre performances that they will host.



VAGABONDING THE BUILDING

The building has three entrances. Two of them refer to the public and one of them to the working and performing staff. The public entrances are located, on the two main streets framing the building from the north and south side. On the north side (Ghalghoul Road) on the ground floor the main entrance is leading the to reception hall and the main stairs and elevators offering visual contact to the rest of the Cultural Centre. The secondary entrance for the public is located on the south side, on the General Fouad's Avenue, entering in the foyer of the Small Performance Hall and the Big Hall's balcony, on the second level, taking advantage of the height difference between the two sides of the site. The third entrance is located on the side street on the west side, functioning simultaneously as a service entrance and an independent entrance for the artists and the offices.

Further more the restaurant, located on the eastern side of the building can both function during working hours of the House of Art, and independently as it has a separate entrance for the public on the surrounding area outside the building.

There are three points of vertical circulation in association to the entrances, with stairs and elevators, offering different ways to access the building, and at the same time independence to the different functions (in order for them to be able to work during different times of the day), and also for proper evacuation purposes in case of emergency. The main elliptical stairs and the glass elevators serve the visitors of the exhibitions, the halls, the library and the conference rooms as well as the workshops. The transparent and open character of the vertical circulation allows the optical merging of visitors to the different spaces even when they are not using them. On the same time the common areas for the workshops, the Exhibition Lobby, the Foyer, the Restaurant, the Shop and the Reception Hall are visually connected working as a whole, because of the height of the entrance hall. The other two stairs function as security exits for the Halls, as well as secondary and more direct accesses for the dressing rooms and the offices, offering the necessary independency for the functions.

Cars can approach and enter the building's underground parking areas via a descending ramp on the north façade of the building. The parking is spread in 3 levels and serves approximately 280 cars. Lastly the first underground floor serves as delivery area and parking area for the staff and long term parking.

THE BEGINNING....

In today's fascinating era of globalization it is very important to design spaces open to cultural and personal diversity, spaces open to artistic expression that provide the sentiment of coexistence and acceptance. Places that permit direct contact with the process of creation and not just the finished work of art. Furthermore answering to the contemporary demands for bioclimatic approaches and low energy consumption it is necessary to incorporate green areas to the body of the building and use sustainable environment friendly materials. Behind the importance of these aims lies the need to express fundamental architectural values and combine them with the local character of the city. All the above mentioned factors were taken into consideration during the study of this project and are embodied to a building open to people and made for them.