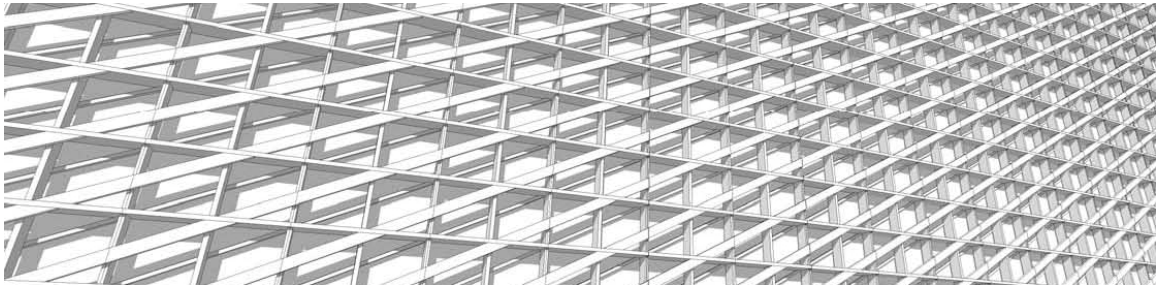


The House of Arts and Culture – The Lebanese-Omani Centre



An open society needs a place to gather, share ideas, display the fruits of a vibrant culture, and celebrate the commonality and diversity of its citizens. This place should remind the people of where they are from, conjuring the feelings of home, the land they know, the traditions they practice; but also give them a window to some other place, to some other culture. The willingness of a community to import, understand, and appreciate the contributions of other communities is what makes it truly modern. And to create a place dedicated to the expression of one community's culture and the reception of many others' gives tremendous opportunity for strengthening local bonds and developing global ones.

The House of Arts and Culture is conceived as a place to come together. It first celebrates what is unique about the culture of Lebanon; the piece of earth which has fostered this culture, the way the people inhabit this place. The building makes physical connections to the land and ancient building traditions, evoking the mountains, the cedars, the water, and how people inhabit the coasts and limestone hills of the Levant. It builds upon cultural esthetics developed by a worldly populace with a global understanding for art and commerce. Then the building puts the collective energy of the people of Beirut on display by revealing the products of that energy.

The ground floor is open to the north, south, and east to invite movement from south of the ring road through the building and on to Place D'Etoile, The Grand Theatre, and the Mohammed Al-Ameen Mosque. This openness attracts pedestrians from all directions into the interior plaza for respite from the sun, the shade of the pomegranate and fig trees, and the cooling of the fountains. The light and wind are filtered through a limestone screen which wraps the entire building, giving protection from the wind and

rain and summer sun, while allowing diffuse natural light and a gentle breeze to cool the interior space.

The arrangement of the programmatic elements around this central courtyard allows the occupants constant views into the exhibition spaces and energizes the courtyard with movement and activity on three sides. The Meeting Hall and Theater Volumes appear solid and massive while the corridors and vertical circulation are transparent to maximize viewing into the courtyard. The exhibition hall serves as an elegant glass vitrine which displays the work inside to both the visitors in the courtyard and the larger community of Beirut. The limestone screen which surround the building breaks at the moment of the Exhibition building to allow for this public display of its collection.

Apart from being a cultural building, The House of Arts and Culture also sets an example for progressive use of sustainable and renewable energy and conservation. The building's screen, comprised of a stainless steel frame with limestone panels covering the steel framework, gives the building almost fully shaded facades, and diffuse natural light to many of the spaces behind. The shading lowers the energy use for cooling the building and the abundant natural light lowers the electricity use for artificial lighting. As the screen comes across the roof, it incorporates thin film photovoltaic panels on fritted glass to allow light to transmit to the courtyard below. Where the screen is above one of the building volumes, the arrays of high-efficiency opaque photovoltaic panels screen the roof of the building from the full intensity of the sun while providing a great deal of the energy needed to power the building. The roof panels also channel the rain water that falls on them for use in irrigation of the courtyard and roof plantings as well as supplying grey water to the building's plumbing system. This ecologically sensible approach also helps fuel the cultural understanding of the built environment and the historical connections to an earlier way of living in the region which was by its nature sustainable and efficient.

The House of Arts and Culture provides a platform for many forms of cultural exploration and expression in Beirut. By its inclusiveness and welcoming, it helps to foster connections and nurture relationships between different cultures in Lebanon and visiting peoples from abroad. By its outward openness it displays the vitality and creativity of the people of Lebanon to visitors and neighbors alike. Above all, it provides a gathering

place to see and feel and talk and to be reminded of the simple beauty of sitting in the breezy shade with your neighbors.