

The House of Arts & Culture

The Lebanese - Omani Centre

Introduction

The House of Arts & Culture – Lebanese Omani Center is a site-conscious building which encompasses all functions essential for the thriving creative scene of Lebanon. It brings together all mediums of art under one roof, facilitating the progress of creativity as well as making it accessible to those who are spectators of it.

The Center is a modern interpretation of the Lebanese vernacular, achieving a break-through in the way public buildings are utilized and the manner in which they function. This approach has been adopted with the idea that “without a past there is no future”.

In this document, the main points that will be discussed take the reader through a step by step account and description of the House of Arts & Culture, and will outline the following:

- House of Arts & Culture in the Surrounding Context
- Façade, Ventilation and Building Envelope
- Divisions and Distribution of Functions
- Use of Building and Capacity for Change

House of Arts & Culture in the Surrounding Context

The House of Arts & Culture is the first of its kind state of the art building set in a scene of a culturally rich and diverse district in the heart of Beirut. The Center's strategic location in line with the Ring Road allows for a connection between Downtown Beirut and the city's outer suburbs without detracting focus from the city centre.

An indispensable connection is made between the two parts of town by this incubator for creative thinking and productivity.

Reflecting the city's attributes, the House of Arts & Culture is a station wealthy in functions and services, though equally as generous with its spaces while maintaining a closely knit network in between.

General Form

Evident in the design, the importance of this building is underlined in its uniqueness as well as compatibility with the context.

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A site-acquainted 'lifting' (a reflection of the distant mountain-scape) of the clearly labeled corners takes place to allow for a more fluid and directional pedestrian circulation. Entry points are either from the North for pedestrians, and the South for vehicles coming from the Ring Road.

While transforming the city block, the House of Arts & Culture makes use of the size of the site as well as location. The juxtaposition and placement of its internal functions are reflected in an interpretation of partnering urban blocks. The general form however is derived from making efficient use of the plot size while maintaining the 70% buildable surface limit.

Surrounding buildings raised above the House of Arts & Culture will look onto a landscaped platform. Users of the center may enjoy the open-air 'garden' with glimpses of the sea and mountains that are so fundamentally a part of the Lebanese landscape.

Façade, Ventilation and Building Envelope

Enveloping the building in a traditional 'Arabesque' patterned façade; it traditionally operates as a heat regulator. In addition to maintaining the building cool during warmer summer days, the façade allows for light regulation internally while providing natural light for reading and exhibition spaces.

When approaching the building during daytime, the semi-glossy brass façade reflects its surrounding environment with some distortion. As time passes the façade will weather, giving a chance for novel observations of the surrounding context.

During night time, the varying functions light-up and glow, producing a pattern that brings the building to life and illustrates the different depths of the building. At the same time, internal spatial organization and sculptures are revealed.

The secondary layer consists of the main building frame where openings in the North side allow for the Lebanese prevailing winds from the North to naturally ventilate the building.

Divisions and Distribution of Functions

Entry into the House of Art & Culture

On the main ramped entrance, visitors will find themselves amongst benches and a sculptured outdoor seating area. Upon reaching the building visitors enter through low ceilinged main doors. They will be greeted by a large, open main hall. This emphasis on change in scale of the space offers an astonishing experience.

When indoors, the visitor is met with the reception desk as well as the first point of reference: A sculptured spiral staircase connecting most functions and all levels together.

Circulation and Primary Spaces

Overhead, the network of bridges and walkways (a contemporary interpretation of the Lebanese 'Lemans') adjoin the two sides of the great central hall and offer access to 'balconies' from which users may look down onto the main foyer.

Further into the hall, one finds themselves amid the large performance theatre and the smaller performance theatre. These two halls look onto the centre of the building and are acoustically and visually separated. If required, they are capable of opening up to the main hall, transforming it into a communal performance space with the Lebanese city life as 'the performance'.

The main entrance hall may also be accessed via the café which acts as a filter between the exterior and interior. Once there, the bookshop and other commercial sites are apparent and easily accessible.

Apart from the reception and information desk, the main hall provides orientation to functions by clear signage as well as staff members who guide and usher visitors. Not only does this create more employment opportunities in the centre as well as interaction, but it avoids any unnecessary clutter of desks and information points in the principal foyer.

Its openness must not be undermined as this leaves room for visitors to metamorphose the space and utilize it in a in which they please.

On either side of the reception desk and spiral staircase are a set of lifts for rapid access to upper levels and balconies ensuring disabled access throughout.

Use of Building and Capacity for Change

Wrapping around the side of the building and independent to the narrow walkways, the exhibition space embraces the side of the center. This multi-purpose space is adaptable due to partition screens, lights, stands and display platforms. The ramped shape of the exhibition space allows for an indoor public arena whereby users are able to and personalize their space due to the 'lifted' corners of the building.

This variable space may be sectioned and divided while an exhibition is in construction or preparation, nonetheless preserves the ramped and stepped access to both performance halls.

Above the small performance hall readers enjoy the tranquil library while looking down from either balcony onto the main hall or exhibition ramp. To one side of the small performance theatre are some performers changing rooms adjoined to the main performance theatre with an 'artist's foyer' known as the 'Pont Des Arts'. This walkway is multi-functional and links both performance theatres as well as all dressing rooms. This encourages circulation and adds a new dynamic to the center all while maintaining optimum functionality.

The spatial organization of functions within the Center allow for a buffer for the rearrangement of spaces as most spaces have achieved more than their required surface area, and therefore offer an unparalleled flexibility in building costs.