

دار الثقافة والفنون

HOUSE OF ARTS & CULTURE

BEIRUT, LEBANON



MATR32

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The House of Arts and Culture will be a unique and important institution for Beirut, a city with a rich and densely layered history of invention, innovation, creativity, destruction, and persistent reconstruction. The HAC is poised to become the public heart of downtown Beirut, despite its location at the edge of the master-planned Central District. The house will operate as a spatial matrix of art, theatre, and culture, and must simultaneously perform as an **inclusive public space for all** Lebanese, of all ages and backgrounds.

Arts and theater programs and institutions are often associated with, and most used by, the elite segments of society. Our proposal for The House of Arts and Culture prioritizes the idea that this building, and its intervention into the urban fabric, be truly **public**.

This public space is achieved through strategic negotiation between context, form, and program. The first device, the **Podium**, is a high-performance container for large public lobbies, the theaters and their supporting program. Corresponding to the master-planned green space at the north side of the site, a **grand stair** stretches across much of the podium's façade, wraps and terminates at its northeast corner. The grand stair has two primary functions: first, it connects the ground plane to the large public surfaces at the top of the podium, which include: outdoor plaza, ramping green spaces, a café, shops, and the cinema, all raised 8 meters above the street. Second, the stair serves as an ascending public field for gathering, sitting, social interaction, and contemplating the views beyond. Glazing at the stairs' risers allows diffuse lighting and a unique visual connection to the theater lobbies below. This **podium-stair assembly**, and its relationship to the green-space on site and across the street, **form the HAC's 'public carpet'**. At the urban scale, the stair-to-podium surface flow is a continuation of the mandatory green-space in the BCD master plan; a flow of public, urban space to the top of the podium. The podium-top provides the site with a new ground surface, almost the size of the site, that is completely public. This raised position above the highway is unique to its context and instigates a new way of experiencing this site. This surface allows for structured or amorphous public occupation, 24-hours a day for all.

Above the podium floats **the tower**. Counter to the stone podium, the tower is completely glazed with much of the curtain wall allowing for complete floor-to ceiling transparency. On the southern face, an array of semi-transparent to opaque glass amorphous-silicon building integrated photovoltaics (asiBIPV) will be deployed for energy generation, supplementing some of the building's cost of operations. Programmatically the tower contains the entire program outside of the large and spatially demanding theaters that are within the podium. The tower's form is primarily pure at the exterior as its glass skin is taught to the zoning envelope

allowed when maximizing the 40 meter height. This maximizing of the exterior surface allows for excavation within, adjacent to the core, producing courtyard style floor plates throughout. The elliptical voids in the tower slabs grow in size from the first slab to the roof; a resultant of the program being dense at the first tower-floor, and less dense at the top. These slab-cuts also occur through all of the podium and subsurface parking slabs. This array of modulating openings in the slabs, from subsurface through the podium and tower, when connected, generate an enclosed, continuous surface that, like a skewer through a kebab, connect all levels of The House and takes the form of a conical-like tube. Conceived as a glass and steel assembly, the tube allows light to the interior of the tower, the middle-underside of the tower, atop the podium (which without the tube would be dark), to public lobbies at all levels within the podium, and to all subsurface parking levels below. For example, an occupant at the bottom of the parking garage is able to look up and through the entire building. Similarly, at the 'public carpet' (podium-top) level, one can approach the tube and look down to the bottom of the parking deck, and up through the tower to the sky. Catwalks to the circulation core which flanks the tube throughout allow users to stand within the tower at podium-top and top-of-tower levels.

Our proposal for The House can be summarized by three elements and their unique assemblage: the Podium, the Tower, and the Tube. It is conceptually a simple solution to a complex, demanding program that we believe produces high-performance, dynamic results. There is a timelessness to the scheme: the limestone podium, its grand stair, and its engagement with the ground plane evoke a monumental permanence that would be both contextually and programmatically appropriate. The Tower is simple and timeless in form but contemporary and high-performance in its cladding. The tower becomes extremely dynamic at its interior with the hollowing out for the Tube: a digitally manipulated iteration of a pure form implemented to produce environmental, programmatic, and atmospheric effects. By penetrating all levels of The House, the Tube, in its singular vertical gesture and continuous form, connects the House's entire spatial matrix in a way that can be understood visually and experientially throughout. The tube provides the subterranean parking levels natural light, ventilation, and direct visual connection to the surface.

Our intention was to successfully meet the demands of the program in an innovative, timeless, and flexible fashion, while considering the Lebanese Public in a real and inclusive way, both programmatically and formally, at both urban and building-element scales. The form of our proposal and its engagement with the site would set the stage for an exciting, productive, and public House of Arts and Culture in Beirut.

