

OPEN HOUSE OPEN SPACE

The House of Arts and Culture (the Lebanese-Omani Centre)

will be a space for cultural and artistic production, for exchange and interaction between the largest number of Lebanese and especially the youth. It will be an independent space with the aim to contribute to social communication and cultural expansion and to promote creativity in different fields of art and culture. Therefore, the House should attract a large number of Lebanese every day of the year. Its public should be diverse and go beyond the few “regulars” that attend theatre halls, exhibitions or other cultural centres spread in Beirut and the country.

To achieve this goal, the House should be a free space of artistic expression and boundaries.

Its functions and agenda, multiple but equilibrated, should be open to all kinds of Art, including those that encourage interactivity between artists and their public, conferences, workshops, free initiatives, etc.

It is this description by the Minister of Culture Tarek Mitri that has inspired our proposal.

Thus the project title OPEN HOUSE OPEN SPACE

Project Statement

More than a house of arts and culture Beirut needs spaces of arts and culture. Although the house contains all of the components of “official culture” it should provide fertile ground for “spontaneous culture”. In order to do this the House needs certain attributes.

The House needs Open Spaces

The House needs Lush Green Spaces

The House needs an easy connection between Downtown and the surrounding City

The House needs Shady Outdoor Spaces and Spaces to watch People

The House needs to reach out further than its given site and infect its Environs.

The House needs Open Spaces

The site is small; it will be locked tightly between high rise towers to the east and west and is closed by a motorway to the south. To the north is a diminutive hotel, the Bacri House facing a small garden. This little building & garden are prominent through their almost insouciant under-use of prime land. Our project follows suit copying and stretching the hotel’s footprint to create a large plaza bordered in one side by a thin low House in the projected footprint of the hotel.

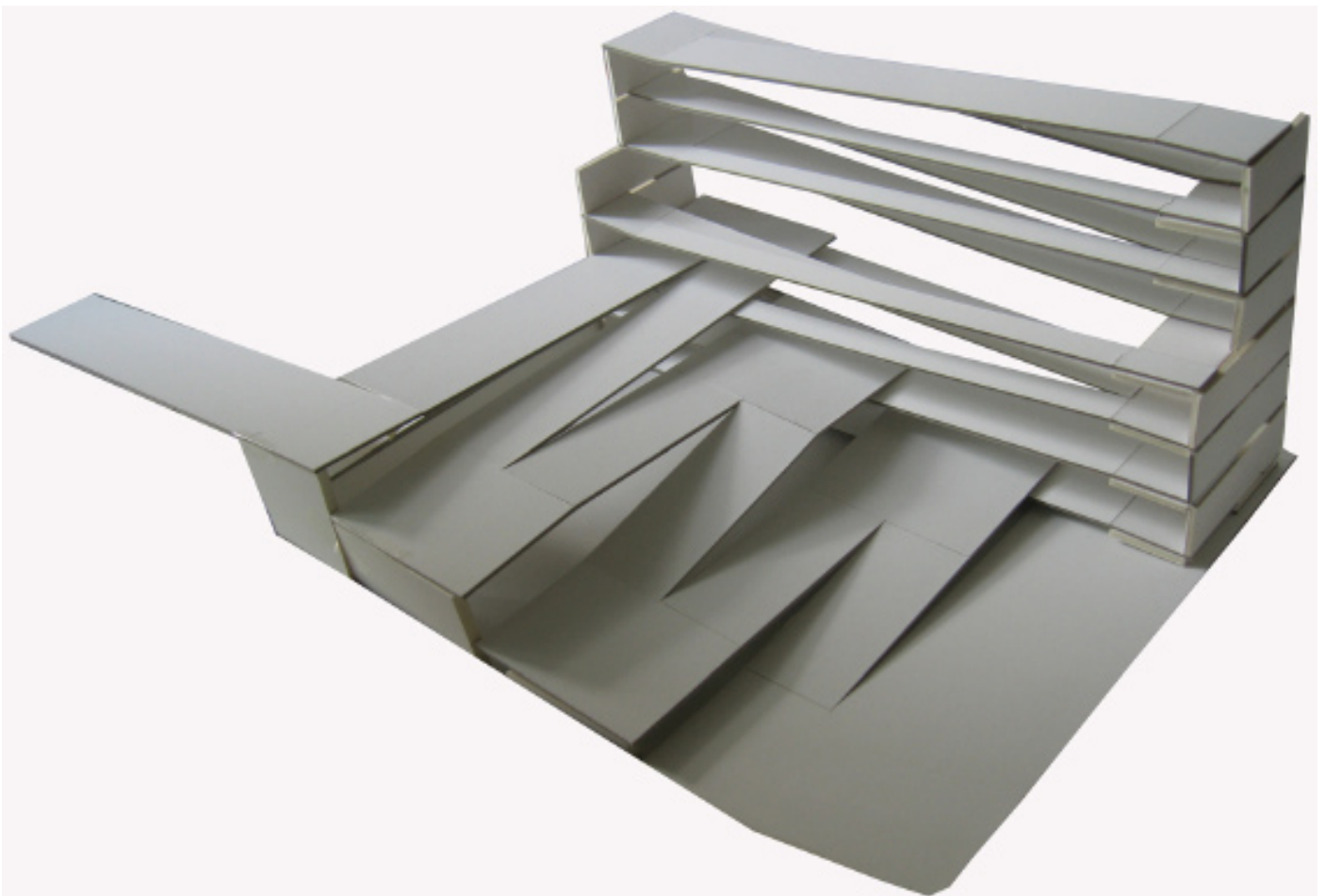
Thus the garden of the Hotel becomes an extension of the House and vice versa.

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Ramps and Open Spaces



The whole site is ramped from downtown on the south side to the Avenue General Fouad Chehab creating an Upper and a Lower Plaza. The Performance Halls and other spaces such as the cinema and meeting rooms which by their nature are closed to the exterior and demand climatical and acoustical controls are placed underneath.



Ramps running perpendicularly to this main movement snake sinuously along the hotel side moving towards the Avenue GFC and back to downtown intertwining with the ramped plaza. This thin volume relates directly to the Hotel and links the plaza to its garden. It contains spaces such as Restaurants, Shops & Exhibition halls which need natural light and direct contact with the city and the outside. The thinness of the volume allows the spaces to be naturally lit and ventilated.

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The House needs Lush Green Spaces

The surface of the Upper Plaza may continue over the motorway in the form of a Bridge and arrive at an empty piece of land on the other side. If this empty lot can be purchased easily it can be transformed into a pleasure garden giving a much needed reprise from the hullabaloo of the city. This piece of land is large enough to allow for a large diversity of plants, flowers and shady bowers where one can drink in heady fragrances or escape the madding crowd. Both the bridge and the pleasure garden can be part of a later extension of the House, illustrating its ability to evolve in time as requested in the brief.

The House needs an easy connection between Downtown and the surrounding City

We propose that the bridge arrive on a simple narrow pavilion clad in Travertine which is open to the pleasure garden and closed to the motorway defining the edge of the site. Another ramp moves down from this pavilion directly into the garden. The pavilion through its looseness can provide fertile ground for spontaneous performances and events. In the same way that one enters the pleasure garden from Downtown one may then enter the House of Arts and Culture directly from the surrounding city. Thus the House of Arts and Culture can truly begin to represent the whole population of Beirut.

The networks of ramps connect not only different parts of the House but the House to different parts of the city. The main entrance is from the Hotel side via the lower plaza but entrances on many other levels are possible via the steeply ramping environs. One may thus choose to enter at points which offer direct access to the Shops, restaurants or Exhibition halls. All of these spaces and the main foyers have direct access to generous public space outside.

The House needs Shady Outdoor Spaces and Spaces to watch People

The wonderful city climate allows an ample use of outdoor spaces once sufficiently shaded

Our project provides multiple opportunities to be outside in the House, direct access to large open and sheltered spaces are provided directly from the Main Entrance Hall, the Restaurants & Shops and the Exhibition Halls. The east side of the site is bordered by a high porous wall which exists purely to give shade. Its form and function are influenced strongly by Levantine architecture. A raised platform along the top of the Shade Wall allows the visitor to oversee the activities of the House and its Plazas. The ramps are generous enough to allow not only circulation but lingering. Plazas, Ramps, Bridges, Platforms and the open doors of the facades offer the visitor a multitude of opportunities to experience Culture to enjoy watching and being part of the crowd.

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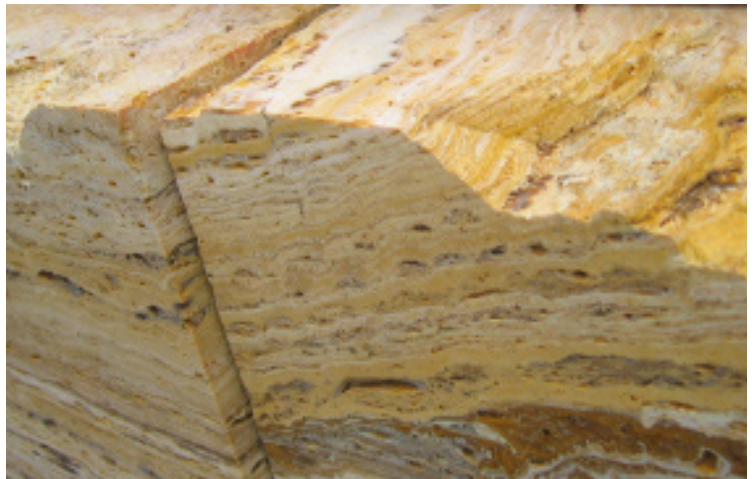
The House needs to reach out further than its given site and infect its Environs.

The House should be “useful” both in the strictest sense of culture and in the pursuance of everyday life. People who would not usually frequent a House of Arts and Culture might come here for such reasons e.g. to cross the motorway, to linger in shady places or to mingle in the crowd. Then slowly the threshold separating different segments of the population erodes and the cultural centre becomes a place for all. The Open Spaces this house creates give a greater quality to the whole area which is planned on such a dense and large scale.

Materials and Architecture

Our choice of Materials and Architecture respond to the request of the brief for a “physical permanent and timeless existence”.

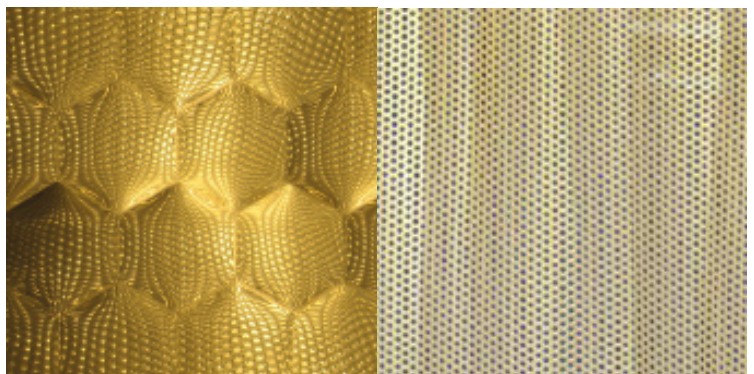
This is a project of planes and openings; there are no mechanized or double facades. Surfaces are clad in natural luxuriously rugged materials, absorbing the strong sunlight in cool massivity or continuously reflecting to bring it into the deepest recesses.



Golden Travertine

The exteriors are clad in Golden Travertine. Large glazed openings face the plaza displaying their contents like a cabinet of curiosities.

Facades to the north are fully glazed, to the west from the thin volume they are inlaid with a fine golden mesh for sun screening.



Pressed Golden Metal

Golden Mesh in Glazing

Interior Flooring is in large scale cool concrete tiles which are tinted in a purple shade in the foyers and in greys and whites in the exhibition and offices.

The Performance Hall exterior and the Levantine columns are sheathed in pressed golden metal.

Interior stairways are in white polyurethane.



Purple Tinted Concrete Tile

White Tinted Concrete Tile