

KF1057

'Silence, the unmeasurable, desire to be, desire to Express, the source of new need, meets Light, the measurable, giver of all presence, by will, by law, the measure of things already made, at a threshold which is inspiration, the sanctuary of art, the Treasury of Shadow.' --Louis I. Kahn

The principal idea of this design proposal for the House of Arts and Culture in Beirut is to create a sequence of spaces that will nourish reflection, creativity, and pleasure through the use of light in spaces that are autonomous from but deeply rooted in the city and its history. The building skin has a dual function; during the day it captures and filters the light, allowing for varying depths of shadow within the entry-level. At night, the building acts as a beacon within the city, emanating light from the interior spaces and patios through its perforated skins creating a distinct presence; a cultural house glowing with life within the heart of the city.

The architectural strategies used in order to achieve this are as follows:

**1. Divide the program into two parts: performance and non-performance.**

Performance spaces with all their technical and acoustical needs are situated in "protected" zones, as seen in section, while at the same time they are accessible from the entry level off of Ghalghoul Street. Non-performance spaces are organized in more exposed areas of the building in terms of accessibility and their exposure to light and the elements. This move frees these spaces to interact more directly and intimately with the public and amongst themselves.

2. **Use the main building circulation to mediate between General Fouad Chehab Avenue on the upper level and Ghalghoul Street on the lower level.** Both the upper (exhibition/administration spaces) and lower (performance spaces) program elements integrate at the unifying entry-level space, which runs from the Avenue down to Ghalghoul Street. This entry level acts as a welcoming patio-space off of which the various program elements are accessed and also as a space of encounter within the building and at the urban scale. Electrical stairs are used in order to assure a continuous and uninterrupted flow of users.

3. **Organize the building *inside* a patio.** The patio is recognized as the paradigmatic Mediterranean space of welcoming and domesticity, and can be understood as a unifier. This peaceful space will unify circulation, functions and people with nature, the universal spring of creativity. Its relaxed mood is accentuated with a cafeteria and commercial spaces, contained in a free-form plan. The idea, as is the idea of the House of Arts and Culture, is to attract and encourage interaction, and to foster new ideas.

4. **Create a “building skin” that will provide light while also protecting the work of the House of Art and Culture.** The skin of the outer face of the building is formed of pre-fabricated glass-fiber reinforced concrete (GfRC) panels that follow four patterns representative of Beirut’s urban morphology. Thus, the patio will be continually defined by filtered light that will reflect textures of the city. This outer skin will also protect and will give a greater degree of privacy to the spaces inside the building. The only exception to this, will be the punctures caused by the pedestrian bridges that are organized centripetally to the exhibition spaces and perforate the GfRC wall in the form of windows. These windows will allow direct views of and interaction with the city.

5. **Guarantee continuous penetration of light into the interior spaces and accessibility to views from them.** The inner skin of the building is composed of opaque, clear, and jalousie glass panels.

6. **Use the roof as a learning, practice and meeting space.** This minimally defined space alternates interior and exterior spaces in order to facilitate exchanges impromptu exchanges.

7. **Simplify construction to aid in accessible final construction pricing.** In general terms, the structure is composed of a basic post and beam system that employs a steel and concrete structure. The internal facades are curtain walls. The external GfRC façade is supported by internal an steel frame that operates as a beam.

8. **Use sustainable building practices as much as possible.** Most of the principal spaces are ventilated and lighted naturally (except those required by the program to have air conditioning). The 'exterior' patio functions as a spatial and climatic mediator, cooling the upper floors during the day and protecting them from direct wind at night. The green-roof reduces the heat-island effect of the building within the city and helps to control water run-off on site and minimize heat gain within the building. Prefabricated pieces used throughout the construction will minimize waste and construction time. The fountain in the patio has a dual function – as both an aesthetic element and as a source for passive cooling of the performance spaces below, which would reduce the load on mechanical units.

9. Other main components of the program are as follows:

- a. **Large performance hall**— the square shape facilitates its multiple uses. In the Italian style arrangement, which is usually the most common, its entrance is direct from the street level. For other uses, the chair arrangement could be folded back in order to use the whole space. Delivery and service areas are directly accessible from the street.

- b. **Plaza level**— Major public amenities share this space that accommodates a continuous fountain that reflects light into the space. The free-plan of the plaza is contained by GfRC panels and.
  
- c. **Exhibition spaces**—The open-plan will be able to house a major exhibition or several smaller exhibits at the same time. This space may also spread out onto the bridges that lead to the windows with a direct view of the city. These bridges to the façade double as canopies for the patio area below.
  
- d. **Administration area** -- The office windows flank a double-height space that is filled with natural daylight.
  
- e. **Documentation level** –Is located in a day lit but quiet zone of the building. The exterior light is neutralized through skylights that puncture the level above.
  
- f. **Roof terrace/workshops level** – The workshops share a continuous space that flows into patios and skylights. Some of the patios are filled with vegetation or with steps that can double as bleachers. This organization aims to foster diverse informal activities that will lead to the interchange of ideas and creative endeavors.