

Beirut House of Arts and Culture

Our proposal for the *Beirut House of Arts and Culture* takes the transformation of the traditional Middle Eastern Iwan courtyard house to a space for collective cultural events at the scale of the city as its point of departure. The mass of the program is pushed to the perimeter of the site to create an oasis of public space that welcomes artists and visitors into its lush environs. A dynamic coiling form lifts key spaces of public creation, performance, and repose into the sky while sinking the main performance hall in order to avail the ground plane as an active, visible and available domain. This building mass, clad in a tiled system of stone screens over high performance glazed curtain walls provide both a compelling set of interior daylit spaces, and a forward looking symbol of the diverse, optimistic and ambitious forces that compel this vision of Beirut's newest cultural landmark. A vision of sustainable futures that embraces environmental, economic, and social dimensions has been integrated into the planning and design of the project to ensure its long-term success as both a *repository* of collective imagination, and an active *agent* of positive change.

Urban Ambitions

The project develops two key lines of thinking that reinforce the urban presence of the *House of Arts and Culture* in the daily lives of Beirut's citizens. To the North of the site, and extending along the visual axis to Parliament Square (Place d'Etoile), the elevation of the project's northeast corner physically connects the space of the oasis court with the space of the city, while simultaneously reinforcing the space of the street. This engaging urban experience invites public encounter without necessitating entry into the facility and generates a central character for the institution that is always active and highly animated. Planting strategies combined with the presence of the waterfall tower generate a unique and refreshing aural environment that offers a memorable space of retreat from the intensity of the surrounding climate. The court is a 24-hour event space, a new place to meet in the city, and a curatorial opportunity that extends and connects the *House of Art and Culture* with its constituents. From the high speed experience of the General Fouad Chehab highway, the building form and its illuminated cladding present a compelling iconic image of this forward-looking institution that will maintain its intensity as the proposed district plan is developed.

Functional Programming

The oasis court forms the primary space of arrival and entry for the project from which the diverse programs available are immediately comprehensible as they wrap and enclose the space. Visitors enter this sunken court activated at its edges by café and commercial programs and connect immediately to key program areas via the lobby for ticketed event spaces, or the tower that leads to the library bridge, and cascading space of the workshops.

The primary gallery space forms an 'L'-shaped wing to the West and North of the courtyard, giving prominence of place to the revolving programs it will house. In order to generate the compelling conditions of public access and visitation at grade, the primary theatre hall, and all major service and access spaces are buried below grade. This move frees the functional servicing requirements necessary to generate a smoothly operating facility from characterizing the public experience of the project. Ample service circulation for loading, staging, and preparation are connected by high-speed service lifts. Within each of the primary performance and exhibition spaces, strategic planning combined with flexible hydraulic staging systems ensure maximum flexibility within each area to support a range of anticipated and future cultural events.

Environmental sustainability

Central to the conception and formal development of the project and its systems is a strategy that combines natural cycles of water, wind and light with passive and active mechanical systems to reduce energy loads while delivering a high quality of environmental comfort. Rainwater collection in excess of 3500 litres annually is combined with a deep geothermal cistern system and circulated via a hydronic cooling system embedded in the structure and floor plates of the building that will be refreshed following diurnal cycles. This same water resource is cycled through the waterfall tower and reflecting pools of the project to generate a unique microclimate within the courtyard and irrigate all planting areas forming an extended closed-loop hydrological system at the heart of the project. A combination of the stone cladding shading system over a high performance glazed curtainwall with mechanically operable windows maximizes the opportunity for passive ventilation across the narrow wings of the building and delivers diffuse daylighting to the building's interior reducing energy costs while delivering invigorating interior spaces.

Economical sustainability

The central organization of program access combined with physical distribution of key program areas provides a framework that is capable of adapting to the dynamic and changing program needs of current and future users. This structure will allow for multiple entities to rent space and conduct events simultaneously that will ensure maximum financial return to the facility while maintaining its unique and holistic identity. The public draw of the courtyard will ensure that café, retail and commercial spaces are highly visible and active throughout the day, generating highly desirable address for potential operators. The environmental systems of the building and its palette of highly durable materials will assist in reducing long term operating facility costs, while the compelling form and presence in the city is sure to capitalize on opportunities for cultural tourism, creating a globally significant

destination that serves to further the creative dissemination and financial interests of the institution.

Social sustainability

The organizational and circulation systems of the project has been designed to provide a diverse set of spaces that encourage free exchange between artists and visitors to the site, fostering a sense of creativity and possibility. The oasis courtyard and its public space character that will foster participation within the project by a range of constituents and publics will become well known as a destination within the city that can support new art, dance, music, poetry: programmed and non-programmed community and cultural events, ensuring an active institutional presence. Both future public transit systems and global media connectivity will benefit from physical connection to the project, as the new center aggregates activities around its perimeter, influencing the future development character of this district.

Through the radical transformation of the traditional Middle Eastern Iwan courtyard type, a memorable, dynamic, active, and compelling vision for the *Beirut House of Arts and Culture* is proposed that juxtaposes passive and ancient strategies for sustainable architecture with the most forward looking technologies of our time. At the heart of this scheme is the proposition that the creation of memorable public space connected with the daily lives of Beirut's citizen will generate an iconic and active identity for this important new institution.