

Haleine dedans

Foreward

After years of uncertainty and instability, in which the identity of the country struggled to find a serene and prosperous image, Beirut is now ready to jump in the new millennium.

The position between the middle east and the Mediterranean countries, makes Lebanon, since ever, a bridge country, where western and eastern cultures meet, creating an interesting hybrid.

It is with this attitude that we started approaching the task of designing the first cultural centre of the capital.

We believe that, neglecting the tradition and essence of the place, even more in a country with a recent difficult past, would be a huge mistake.

We share the idea of creating a building with identity but not dominant; a building capable to find its dignity into the new capital, without screaming loud its presence.

A building that could still become image of a rebirth, in which old values and ancient beauties could meet the contradictions and the rhythms of contemporary society.

“Haleine dedans” is a new location that, surrounded by different urban actors, skyscrapers and highway, will define a punctual portion of the city that will act as cultural magnet.

An epicentre capable to unveil its richness and complexity by exploring it, by diving its contents and discovering its secrets.

“Haleine dedans” is a mix of tradition, of the hedonism and luxury that shines through the amazing beauties of middle east and Mediterranean architecture.

Rough and gentle, the building becomes a case with secret happenings that can be discovered only by exploring it.

Concept and program

The volumetric composition of the building is intentionally simple and unique.

The solid occupies the possible building outline, keeping a constant maximal height of 32m.

On the ground floor, a huge pendentive dome carves the solid, creating a 55 by 55 m shaded square, open on the front green space and to the east and west sides.

The side on the highway stays closed and hosts the administration facilities.

On top of the dome, the volume is cut on three sides by a deep wound, opening the whole level on the highway.

This level hosts the actual public entrance, where the visitors are shuttled directly by a long escalator.

The lower square and the upper hall offer an exciting and various range of public spaces where people can find a continuous environment with foyers, cafeteria, commercial spaces and info points.

The definition of the structural pillars which support the dome and the upper levels, operates at the same time a clear programmatic distribution.

The lower administration levels in fact, work independently from the upper cultural program, keeping an autonomous operational timetable.

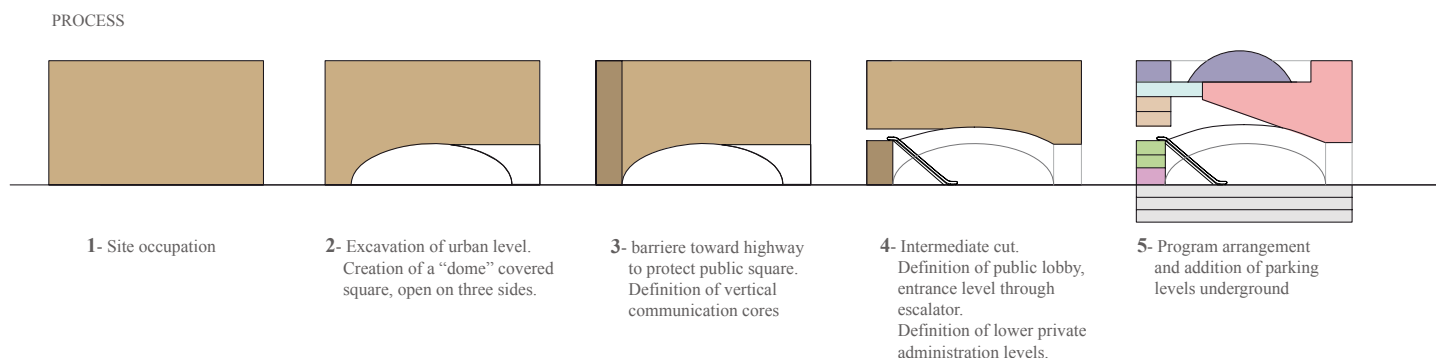
Moving up, into the upper monolith, the unique spatial experience of the square turns into a very complex mix of flows and superimposed levels and voids. Performing halls, cinemateque, documentation centre and workshops meet on the central foyer that becomes a real Piranesian void, collecting human activities and cultural debate.

On top of the box, a new unique space revolts the view onto a central courtyard. The exhibition space, with a peripheral donut circulation, offers a very light and airy space, fully open on the central courtyard. Here a huge sculptural space rises to the sky: a new dome, echoing the breath of the lower dome, preserves an enclosed, almost secret “grotto” space, where special artwork can find a completely different exhibition environment, with artificial light control.

The collaboration of the two types of exhibition space offers architectural flexibility and, most of all, more curatorial possibilities for a competitive museum of contemporary art.

The basement of the building hosts three parking levels, for a total of 7900 sqm. On the first level below ground, on side of the parking a loading area with autonomous entrance for lorries allows the logistic functions of the centre, in strict proximity to the freight elevators and miscellaneous spaces.

This strategy guarantees the perfect supply of goods for the restaurant, artworks for the museum and scenography and music instrument for the performance halls.



Structure

Coherently with the idea of a “contemporary traditional” building, we reserve a particular attention to the combination of new technology and handicraft.

The interpretation of traditional space typologies and archetypes is our tool to experiment new unexpected results for the evolution of Islamic architecture.

It is for this reason that the whole concept is based on the combination of simple Euclidean volumes.

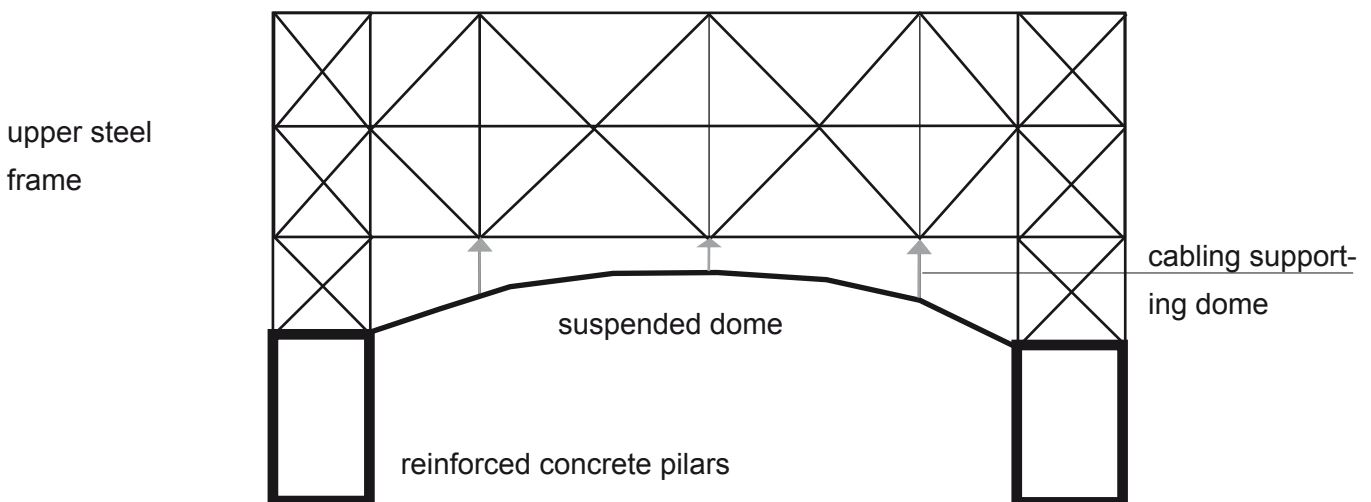
A parallelepiped block is carved by the “whiff” of the lower dome, which provokes an inner expansion and becomes a tool to challenge the structural concept of the building.

The lower pillars in fact, working as generators of the geometry of the pendentive dome, contain also the four circulation cores that cross the whole building, from the underground parking levels to the top attic exhibition level.

Those cores become as well the main structural actors. Their reinforced concrete structure turns into a steel frame from the hall level till the top of the building.

This strategy will unify the upper program into a unique steel cage that unloads the whole weight to the four lower concrete pillars.

In order to make the upper steel structure collaborate with the lower pillars, the dome is suspended to the upper cage through a frame of steel cables, capable to control at the same time weight and shift of the structure.



Materialization

The concept of the “contemporary traditional” is achieved by the materialization that combines, an external rough appearance, with astonishing inner treasures.

Sublime and brutal meet together in the perception of the homogeneous stucco finishing, with rough surface, addicted with sand and golden pigmentation that gives the building the nuances of the Mediterranean hearth and deserts.

As a counterpart, ceramic surfaces clad the inner soft light surfaces of the domes, which resemble, with their deep blue colour, the brightness and intensity of the Mediterranean sea.

The ground floor plaza becomes an amazing public space, where filtered natural light and exceptional artificial light come through the upper openings and the arches of the dome.

The plaza reminds the roman ruins that sign the history of Beirut.

A huge mosaic covers the whole plaza. The reflected ceiling of the dome, clad with reflecting aluminium foil, reverberates and deforms the image of the mosaic, generating a space of exceptional quality and recognizability.

A vernacular image becomes extremely contemporary by its technological application. A “deformed” perception of a classical element generates a new concept.

The window system of the building integrates very wide openings in the entrance hall and the exhibition attic, with small openings. Three variable dimensions, a square 55cmx55cm, and a long one (55cmx100cm) alternatively rotated, generate an apparently random composition of windows, distributed according to the program behind.

The openings combine a normal window with a pseudo “bow-window”, a fold of the same façade that deviates the entrance of the light, grazing into the working spaces to avoid dazzling.

“Haleine dedans” celebrates the new cultural breath into the Lebanese capital.

