

INTRODUCTION TEXT

The urban area where the new cultural centre is to be erected is rapidly expanding and at the moment lacks marked individuality; the surrounding buildings are anonymous.

Given the importance of the cultural centre, the building is to become a well recognizable piece of architecture, with which people can identify and where the spaces are designed to become a place of cultural meeting and exchange.

The architecture of the building is simple and was generated by adding and combining the main bodies that were required.

The building consists of three blocks:

1. a large black cube structure that rises three metres from the upper road level and sinks twenty-five metres underground, which houses the Italian-style theatre, conference and cinema halls, the garages, the theatre foyers. The emerging facades are covered by a black interlaced steel decoration that encloses all the openings, windows, entrances and ventilation elements.
2. On top of the cube a multi-storey block, which is covered by an outer "lacunar" skin, houses the library, think tank spaces, the administration offices, the museum and the restaurant.
3. The atrium space between the base and the upper block.

Hollowed out voids and fine play of light are the distinguishing features of this project.

"I approach the cultural centre from the upper road level. The truncate cone with its golden lacunar skin on top of the black base immediately attracts my attention: it evokes a precious jewel displayed in its dark velvet casket. The closer I get the more I notice the finely designed architecture: the base is not only plain black; it is covered by a black steel interlaced texture that enhances its preciousness. (It conceals and uniforms all the openings, the ventilation elements, the garage entrance and the theatre service gate).

The base unit is three metres tall and bears the name of the cultural centre. I climb up a wide staircase, which leads to the level above the road. I am facing a dark, bold and sleek surface, which is perfect, with nothing left to chance. I feel bewildered. I do not know where or what to look at. I decide to look up at the facade. I am able to touch the external skin, feel it with my hand. I enter. The ceiling is sleek black. My eye is drawn to the beam of light that originates between the outer skin and the central body just above the glass wall of the atrium. The light hits the concave glass surface and reflects onto the white diamond-like aluminium surface of the outer skin. It elegantly bends towards the centre as if it were to defend its precious content.

There are many features that attract my attention. At a certain point the black ceiling blends with the curving lines of the stairs, the shops and the information area.

The whole prospective from this point of view is particular. Looking outside is like watching a film, where the changing images are framed in a black frame.

The ceiling is pitched towards the centre of the atrium and features a square opening to allow natural light into the hall. I look upward and I see the opening widen towards the top, I look downward and I see a wide rectangular opening over two very long light-flooded escalators. I decide to go up the stairs. From the first balcony I look into the void and see the wooden structure. I then reach the library where I enter and look around. The library, as well as the theatres and think tank space all have double height ceilings.

On the fourth floor I am attracted by the museum.

This area features a mezzanine level that houses extemporary exhibitions.

I leave this area and walk along the balcony, I am fascinated by the depth

and the light that comes from above, but I still do not exactly understand where from. I leave this area and walk along the balcony, I am fascinated by the depth and the light that comes from above, but I still do not exactly understand where from.

I walk into the restaurant where everything is white: the wood, the vertical and horizontal elements and also all the interior design decor and accessories. The light that filters through the cones of the “external skin” projects a pattern, which reflecting on the internal surface of the skin creates several types of play of light according to the different time of the day. Finally, I reach the top floor and enter the museum. The entire space is fascinating. Just below the external skin, I find myself at the edge of the world. The white aluminium diamond-like internal surface of the skin has many different faces that reflect the light. The different faces reflect the light in many different ways according to how the beams penetrate the cover. I feel as if I were at the highest top of the world. I feel estranged from everything else. The feeling the fifteen-metre-high space confers with the regular pattern of small, square openings in the white ceiling is remarkable. I finally understand that this is something different, new.

I look down and see the bottom of the building, nearly thirty metres below. I take the lift down and get off at the black atrium.

I take the escalator suspended in space down to the level, which is two metres below the lower road level. The entire surface is covered with planks of apple tree wood. The colour varies but is very soft, elegant, rich and never oppressive. I look around. Looking up, I see the void in the pavement of the hall above; moving sideways, the ceiling slopes down like a drape and nearly touches the floor below, then slopes up towards the glass panel covered with the steel decoration through which a blinding light penetrates. This is the theatres foyer, which opens on to a small green area amidst palms (existing) and on to the lower road level.

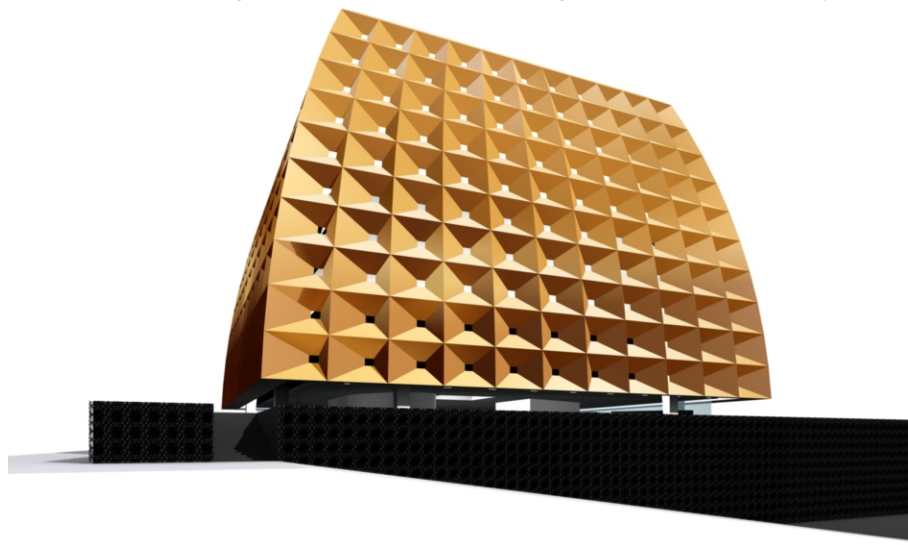
The large drape above the foyer houses two large cinema theatres.

With my back to the glass panel, I can see the escalators and the glass wall on the left. I go closer. I look over the apple wood railing and my eye is drawn towards the open space, which is limited on the left by the white glass wall and on the right by four levels of balconies and the area that houses the Italian-style theatre. This space, organised between full and empty is breathtaking. Once again I go down an escalator and reach the stalls. Here too the space is ample; the lighting is soft and carefully designed.

My attention is drawn to the pattern of openings in the ceiling, set at different heights.

I am in the theatre. The Italian-style theatre has four levels of balconies on the sides. It is totally finished in ebony, the seats are upholstered with black Frau leather, woollen carpets cover the floorings and the chandelier is made of thousands of silver and gold Murano glass thin plates. The technical, lighting and audio plants are concealed above the balconies.

Contented by the experience, I take the lift back to the foyer and slowly make my way to the exit. I am now out on the lower road level and after a few couple of metres I turn around to have a last look at this little piece of architecture. It shines in the sunlight; it is not a mere building, it is a precious little jewel displayed in its casket.



LOT 127-2

LOT 134-1

LOT 135-4

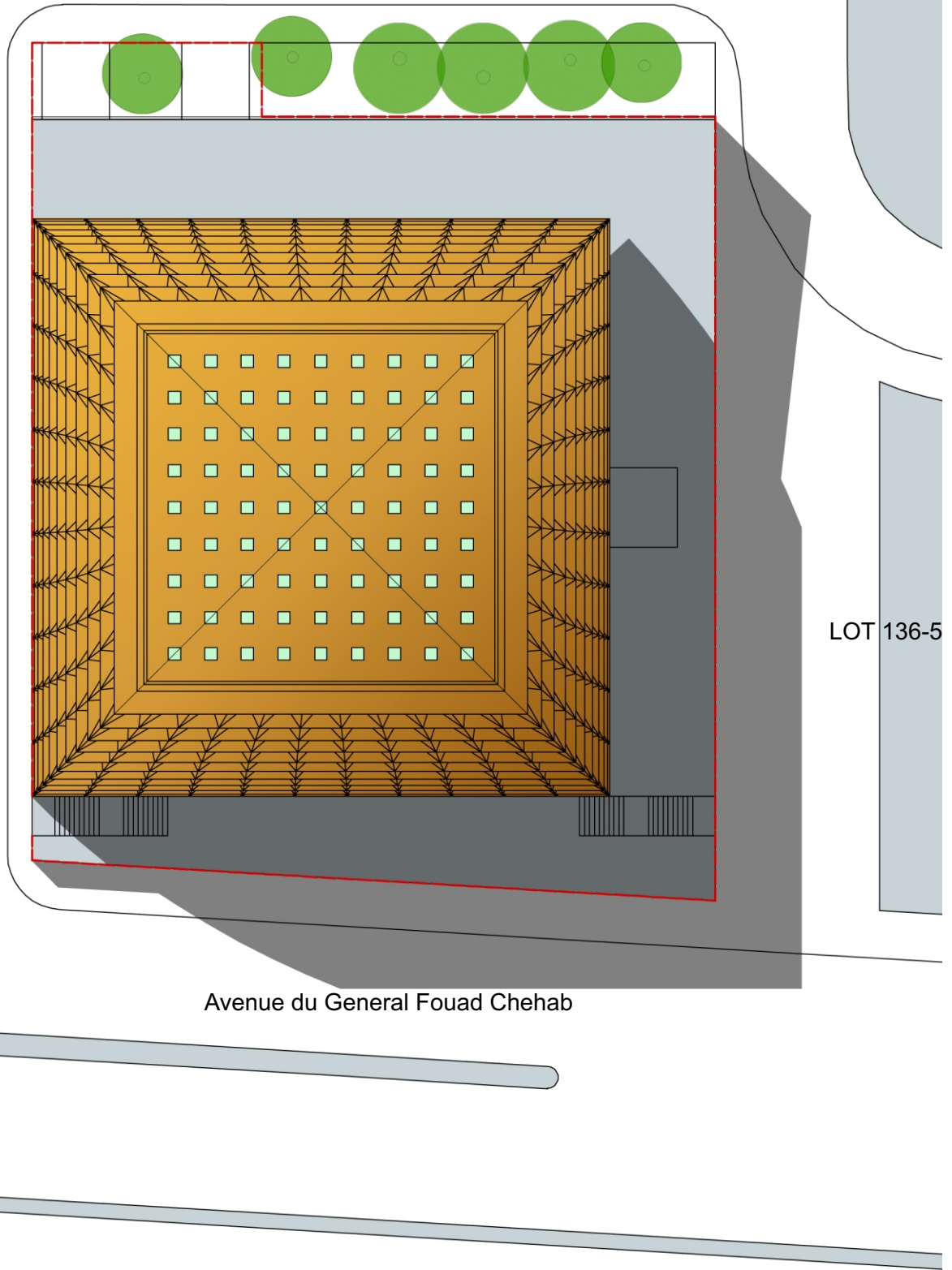
Rue Ghalghoul

LOT 128-3

LOT 136-5

Avenue du General Fouad Chehab

OVERALL PLAN SCALE 1:500

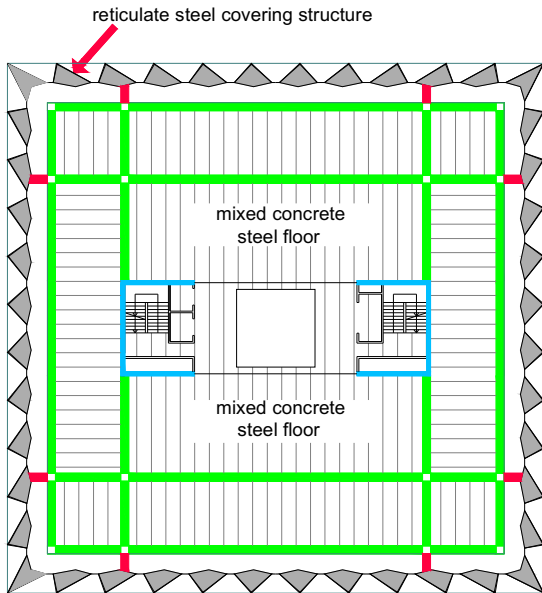


■ concrete columns

■ concrete walls

■ reticulate steel beams

■ concrete beams



structure scheme to +6.00 share



structure scheme to -10.00 share

The realisation of two different structural typologies is assumed.

For the external one, will be realised concrete columns and stairwells in order to support slabs made with reticulate steel structure to hold up mixed concrete steel floors.

The use of such technology will allow to obtain a fairly good load reduction on stairwells and on top of the eight columns built up to sustain all the external floors.

Such choice involves the decrease of dynamic actions due to seismic stress that will be analysed since the nature of the land.

The covering external walls will be made with a tridimensional scheme of reticulate steel beams directly substained by the eight columns. For the covering, aluminium elements and toughened glass will be realised. All the connections between structure and covering will be realized with steel wings that will be able to give the desired shape/form.

The internal part will be mainly made by concrete columns and reduction walls.

Some floors, due to their length, will be made in prestressed elements and some other will be made with concrete (entrance hall).

Due to the geometric structure of the external part of the building, will be necessary to distribute the loads to the below structure through the connecting reinforced concrete and steel elements.

