

The house of arts & culture

The lebanese-omani centre

How to create a house of culture open to its developing neighborhood and city?

Concept synopsis

The Beirut house of arts and culture is a simple cube of 40 by 40 by 40 meters placed on a hill site in downtown Beirut.

The site is excavated to permit to have the desired connections and avoid unnecessary adjacencies. The south side is accessible from the road, and so is the north side that acts as main entrance to the building.

The required program is within the building envelope and is excavated in 3 places to provide public spaces. The concept of the facility is to let the visitor go through the building in an 'outdoor' climate. The working and performance rooms are all climatized to the required level but there's the option of, especially in tempered evenings, appreciate the real outdoor climate while strolling in and out of the controlled zones.

A walk through the new Beirut house of arts and culture:

This building is a new breath of culture for Lebanon. Its anticipated arrival has raised expectations from all sides of the Arab and mediterranean world.

Rather than articulating our explanation around intricate concepts and historical references we have decided to explain our project in simple words and through architecture and the experience of it:

From outside, the building appears as a light concrete monolith, precisely excavated on 3 levels to create 3 specific spaces of public interaction.

Firstly the building announces its entrance by opening itself up to the Ahmad el Gabbouri road and towards the city. This large open mouth is the main access and where most people will enter the house of arts & culture.

The sober access square will be slightly planted to provide shading for people gathering outside. The façade will stay rather minimal offering multiple opportunities for media projections at night from the facing square.

When entering the house of arts & culture one is immediately taken into its active world of creation: the entrance hall is simple and frames the arrival and departure of 2 main escalators climbing a central piranesian space revealing the various connections for the upper programs. The direction of the escalator matches perfectly a vista to the sky outside the building towards the south.

Behind the 2 escalators is the access to the cinema on the left and to the administration on the right. The project tries to assemble the public and the staff into one entity where the people linked to the day to day functions of the building, the administration and the curators and creative responsible are all part of the same 'family'.

The opportunity for the house of arts and culture to be a permeable facility that allows for people to enter and meander around its rich facilities was taken very strongly in this project: the most clear urban take was to create 3 voids in the building interconnected to one another by escalators (this solution could also be replaced by staircases) allowing for the public to visit the facilities very casually. The idea was to try to break out with the pompous attitude that some cultural institutions sometimes have and instead propose a porous building for the people of beirut.

We believe that this cultural entity has been awaited for so long that it is necessary to make it in a modest and generous manner, allowing the citizens and the artist scene of Beirut to use it at their own pace and will.

In order for this to occur the new house offers well positioned outdoor spaces:

The space located to the south as what could be understood as the back of the building is such a welcoming square that it will surely function as the urban front of the building, probably dedicated to more alternative expressions and cultures... this space is in continuation with the general Fouad Chehab road and will let people have outdoor concerts, improvisations and performances. It will also let visitors immediately enter the exhibition gallery space to the west or take the escalators up to the urban balcony located above the city on the north façade and overlooking the development of Jean Nouvel, the renovated theater, the city and the sea in the horizon...

The exhibition space, literally in between the performance halls and the cinema, acts as a more flexible space, allowing for various arts to be displayed. The lay out is purposely

generic and flexible. A large central core of circulation is flanked of a freight elevator for goods and 2 standard elevators for handicap accessibility to the entire facility.

When reaching up to the urban balcony the visitor can proceed towards the auditorium above or enjoy the chilled shaded terrace over the city and take a break at the restaurant café. The urban balcony is stepping down towards the city allowing for the view to enlarge and for the terrace to serve as an alternative outdoor auditorium for smaller events to take place, in the atmosphere of the city right below.

The rise to the 2 auditoriums takes one to the last experience of the house of arts and culture: the one of an enclosed and intimate experience for the senses, where at times, music, theater, contemporary dance and performances take control.

Structure:

Structurally the building relies on a simple concrete structure where 2 main cores insure a lot of the stability in the center aided by a column system towards the periphery. The cantilevers are therefore reduced to strict necessary. This system can be further studied and refined in design development.