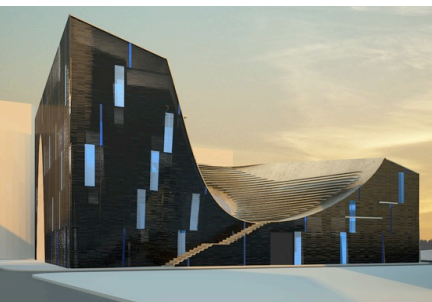
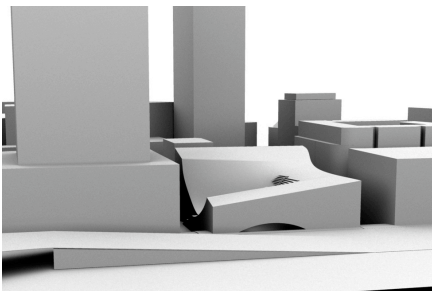


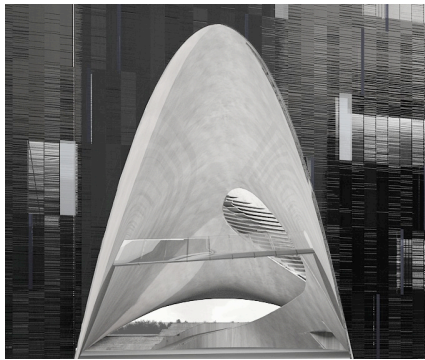
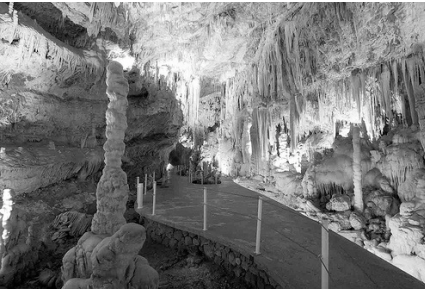
## Liwan Bayrut

*If it form the one landscape that we, the inconstant ones,  
 Are consistently homesick for, this is chiefly  
 Because it dissolves in water. Mark these rounded slopes  
 With their surface fragrance of thyme and, beneath,  
 A secret system of caves and conduits; hear the springs  
 That spurt out everywhere with a chuckle,  
 Each filling a private pool for its fish and carving  
 Its own little ravine whose cliffs entertain  
 The butterfly and the lizard; examine this region  
 Of short distances and definite places:  
 What could be more like Mother or a fitter background  
 For her son, the flirtatious male who lounges  
 Against a rock in the sunlight, never doubting  
 for all his faults he is loved; whose works are but  
 Extensions of his power to charm? From weathered outcrop  
 To hill-top temple, from appearing waters to  
 Conspicuous fountains, from a wild to a formal vineyard,  
 Are ingenious but short steps that a child's wish  
 To receive more attention than his brothers, whether  
 By pleasing or teasing, can easily take.*

W.H. Auden, In Praise of Limestone



Liwan Bayrut looms large and monolithic, like a singular geological event erupting in the city. Much like the Lebanese rocky landscape whose physiognomy is shaped by the persistent action of natural and human forces, Liwan Bayrut's hard-edged constitution is carved out and softened by the teaming forces of its urban context.



In negotiating environmental and urban flows through a densely packed block, Liwan Bayrut rehearses the geological and historical processes that have sculpted the land: carving, eroding, tunneling, terracing, smoothing. Above, its slopes are moulded and contoured to capture sun, rain and crowds. Below it opens with its great cavernous hall to the flows of visitors, pedestrians and flaneurs on their way down to the CBD or lingering in the shaded café. In between, a dense but

porous environment where diversified chambers and conduits offer myriad paths and possibilities of occupancy within the block.

If the massing of Liwan Bayrut evoke the Lebanese landscape in the principles of its formation, its external surface is all about the culture of a cosmopolitan urbanity. The building is uniformly clad in cast textured glass. The intricately contoured surface aligns advanced building technology with artisanal glass casting practices. Occasionally it yields glimpses of the complex and animated interior behind its tailored simplicity.

**Site: the building provides and links public spaces.**

Liwan Bayrut occupies the entire block but more than 50% of the ground area is dedicated to open public space. The central souk-like space—the Great Liwan—is the heart of Liwan Bayrut

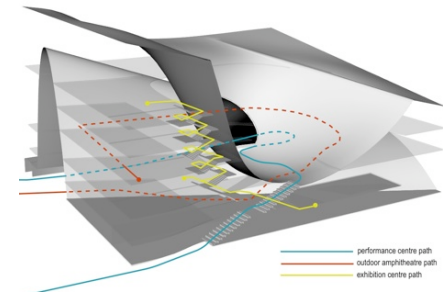
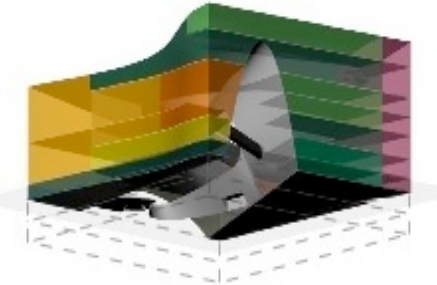
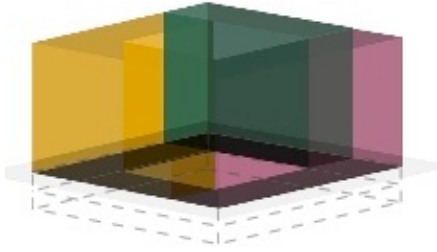
and a convergence point for multiple urban trajectories. Entirely open and accessible to the public 24/7, it is conceived as a seamless extension of the urban realm. It prolongs a major diagonal axis into and through the bloc, culminating in an ascending link to General Fouad Shehab Avenue or tunneling further across to reach the neighborhood on the opposite side of the Ring—we propose to relocate the projected tunnel to this site.

The building is also publicly accessible on the west side via a staircase that leads to an open-air theatre—the Bowl. The

theatre is carved out the building mass, dedicating 30% of it's volume to open public space. Multiple paths can be picked up from the elevated theatre, spiraling down into the Great Liwan or heading south toward General Fouad Shehab Avenue.

**Program and circulation: a courtyard-like distribution of discrete but interlocking facilities**

The building adapts the familiar courtyard type to distribute the



program in separate but interlocking wings. However discretized and differentiated the various functions come together as unified whole in their intense and sustained rapport with the central figures: the Grand Liwan and the Bowl.

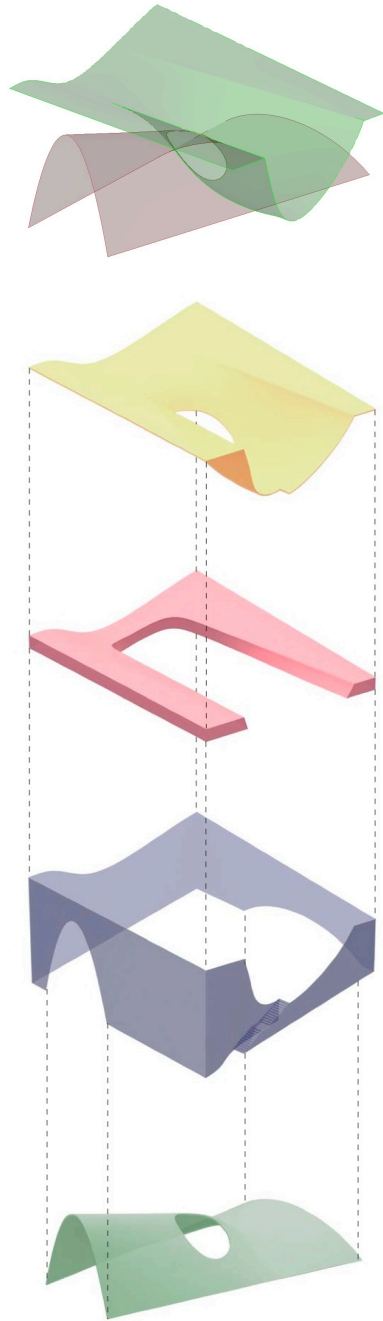
The performance-related program—theatre/congress hall/cinema—is located in the southern and eastern wings. it is orchestrated as a linear sequence that engages and showcases the buildings most dramatic feature. It begins in the lobby under the looming underbelly of the Bowl with a diagonal axis leading to the cinema and a grand staircase that climbs twisting along the sloping vault of the Great Hall. The stair ascends to a curvilinear Gallery that provides access to the two theaters and a bar/terrace overlooking the lobby. the Gallery, along with a mezzanine linking the theaters’ balconies, swing around the vortex-like intersection of the Great Liwan and the Bowl, leading to a foyer overlooking Ghalghoul Street. Here a glazed tubular passages bridges across the Great Liwan to land in the multi-purpose hall/gallery where a staircase reaches back to the Lobby thus completing the looping promenade.

The ascent to the exhibition spaces moves in the opposite direction from the lobby towards the northern wing. A straight-run stair leads to the multi-purpose/exhibition hall. This large room is an amenity we propose as a compliment to the programmed exhibition facility. It is a versatile space that can accommodate more widely accessible or non-ticketed exhibits an events. Both programatically and physically, as a site where theatre and exhibition path intersect, this is a space that mediates between performance and exhibition functions. From here the upwards course become a tilting switchback stair that follows the curvature of the Bowl. it reaches two floors of workshops and training rooms before surfacing in the upper exhibition hall that overlooks the entire sequence. form this vantage point the two exhibition halls are joined vertically in the canyon-like gap between the sloping bowl and the floor plates to become one unified space.

**Sustainability: traditional strategies align with new technology**

The design capitalizes on the intelligence sedimented in local vernacular types. The central hall found at different scales in many of the indigenous type—domestic and institutional—here also serves to adapt the building to the local climate and culture. It creates a temperate buffer zone that is suitable to the Lebanese lifestyle of public outdoor gathering and passively





participates in moderating temperature extremes and fluctuations in the building.

While the vaulted space relies on traditional strategies for sustainability, its inverted counterpart, the Bowl is optimized for the deployment of new technology. The south-facing face of the bowl is designed with a capacity to accommodate embedded photovoltaic cells and is meant to maximize their efficiency with the calibration of the slope, curvature and orientation. The Bowl is also designed for collecting and channelling rainfall. All precipitation is filtered and recycled for grey-water usage on-site and a reflecting pool in the vaulted hall.

### **Structure: a hybrid system of interlocking shells yields column-free spaces**

The building has a structural system comprising a variety of interdependent components. The hybrid system minimizes the need for dedicated structural supports and relies on the load bearing capacity of the building's major space forming features to support or suspend the floor plates. The main structural components include the following: a reinforced concrete outer shell; a reinforced concrete vault; a reinforced concrete bowl; a horseshoe-shaped space frame. These elements are locked into a complex rapport of mutual reinforcement much like soap bubbles trapped in a box.

Throughout the building and wherever possible the floor plates reach for these vertical and sloping concrete shells for column-free support.

### **Envelope: uniform glass cladding modulates daylight and allows glimpses into a complex interior**

The outer concrete load-bearing shell is clad with glass. The cladding system consists of cast glass panels that are heavily textured with a horizontal striation. These translucent panels are punctuated with slivers of clear glass that expand into larger operable windows when a direct connection to the exterior is preferred. The glass wall is back lit with a computer-controlled array of LED that are programmable for a variety of day and night-time effects. At times and especially in daylight, the building appears like a monolithic structure with barely a hint of the interior suggested behind the shiny glass. At night the building sheds its impenetrable veil: large openings in the concrete shell reveal a variety of spaces behind the vitreous surface.

