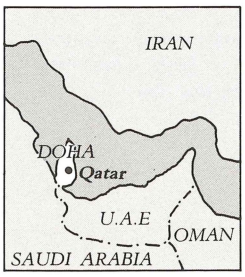
Zoo, Doha



Project Data

Doha Zoo, Doha, Qatar.
Architect: John S. Bonington Partnership, London.
Client: Municipality of Doha.
Completion: 1983.

The concept for a zoological garden in the Emirate of Qatar began in 1973 with a small existing menagerie outside the capital city of Doha. A collection of animals and birds suited to the hot arid climate, and a selection of insects, reptiles and mammals of Arabia was programmed. A plan for the facilities was devised in such a way that they might be achieved in phases, beginning with the new exhibition building and surrounding paddocks. These were erected in the desert to the north of the existing gardens.

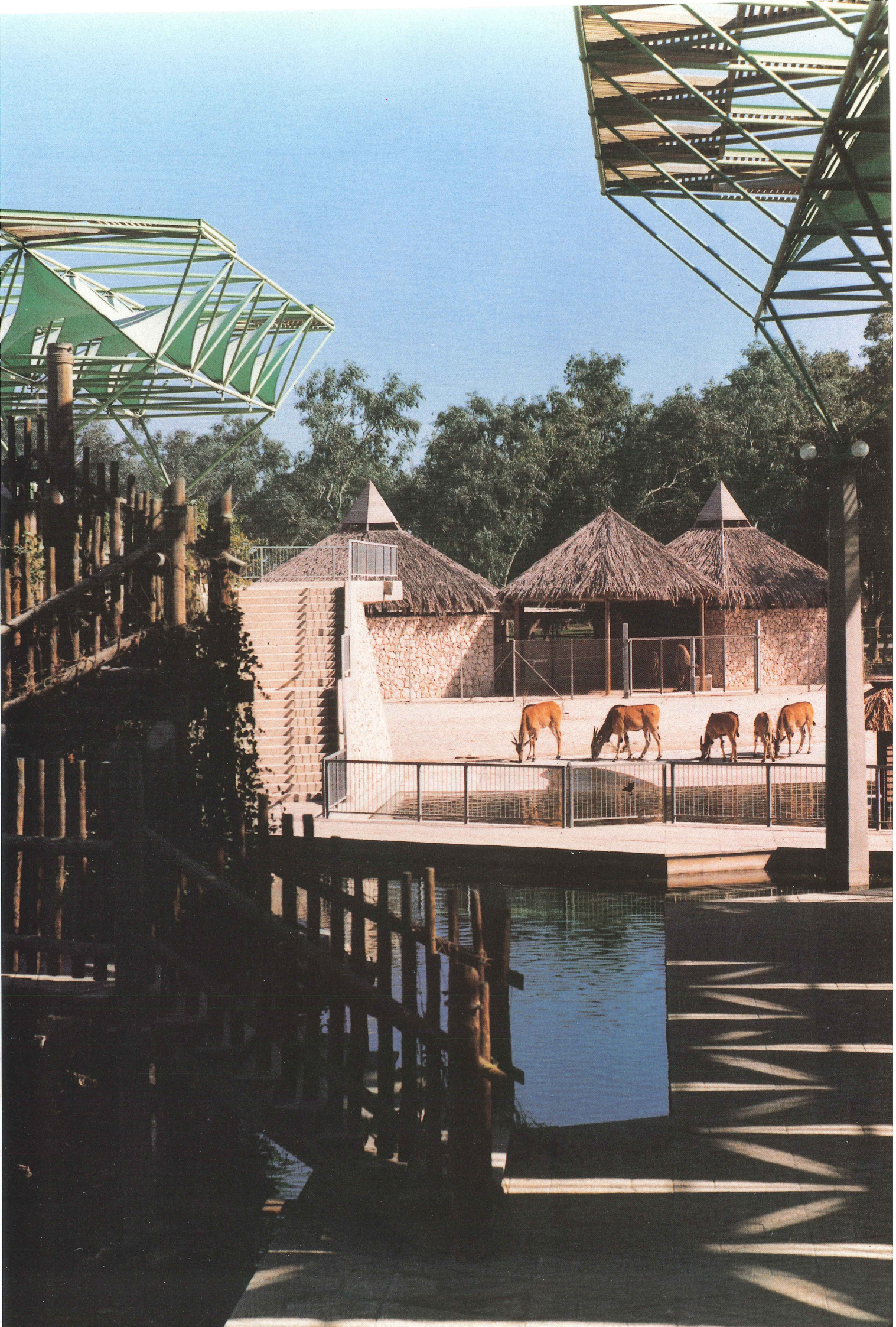
As for the building itself, it is clad in desert stone raised above the ground, carved out to form a central lagoon. The whole complex is covered with a vast metal structure to provide a shady protective roof. Water moats have been employed as paddock boundaries within the zoo grounds. These offer a natural environment for a large variety of ducks, geese and swans. The inclusion of a waterfall, under which visitors may walk, serves to provide cooling for the air-conditioning — and a novel experience for a desert population.

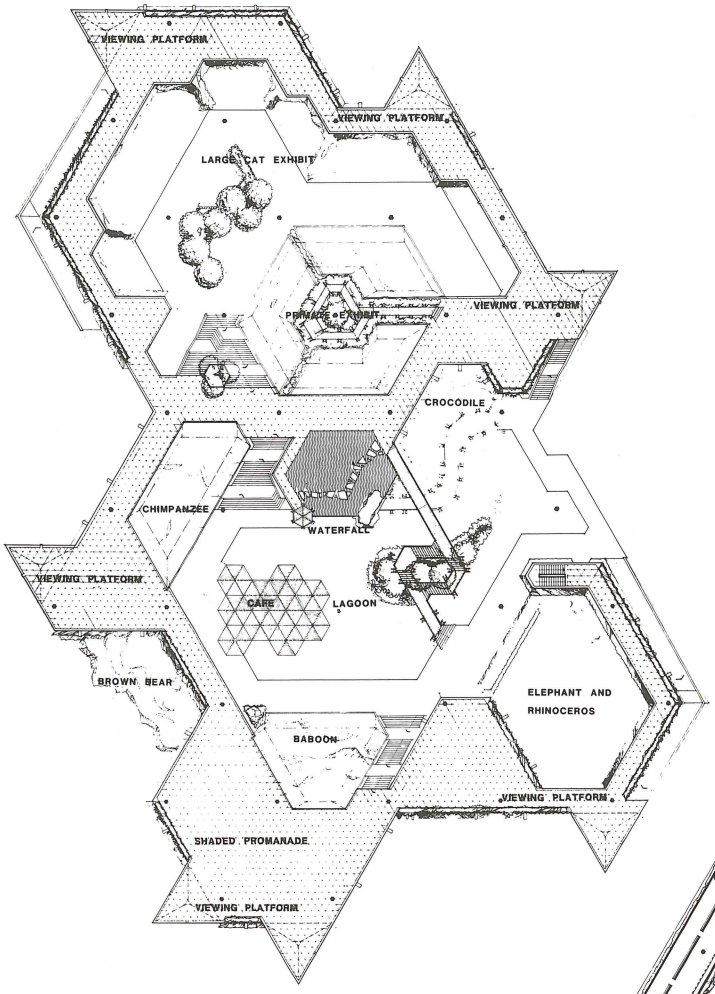
The public which frequents the Doha Zoo, whether Qatari citizens or the large expatriate community, does so presumably in order to indulge in leisure-time amusement or for an edifying educational experience, these being to the two principal purposes of zoological gardens in the past. Circuses, too, have traditionally provided the same opportunities in a slightly altered context to be sure. Yet there are some of the same incongruities present in both, namely the confinement and exploitation of animal species in an artificial man-made environment. Such facilities are the reverse of the game reserve where animals continue to reside in their natural habitat, although some zoos claim a protective role as well for certain endangered species.

There is a remarkable architectural character indeed inherent in the Doha Zoo, particularly in the striking juxtaposition of local stone with the 'high-tech' *tour de force* of the roof structure. Development of a hexagonal grid in the plan creates an interesting pattern of diagonal movement from one sector to the next, working on two different levels. And, the introduction of a waterscape and wooden structures offset the stark contrasts of stone and metal. Moreover, the 800 or so animals in the collection undoubtedly benefit from the most up-to-date scientific care. Yet, the validity and necessity even for a zoological garden in the cultural context of Qatar itself, as well as anywhere else, ought to be debated.

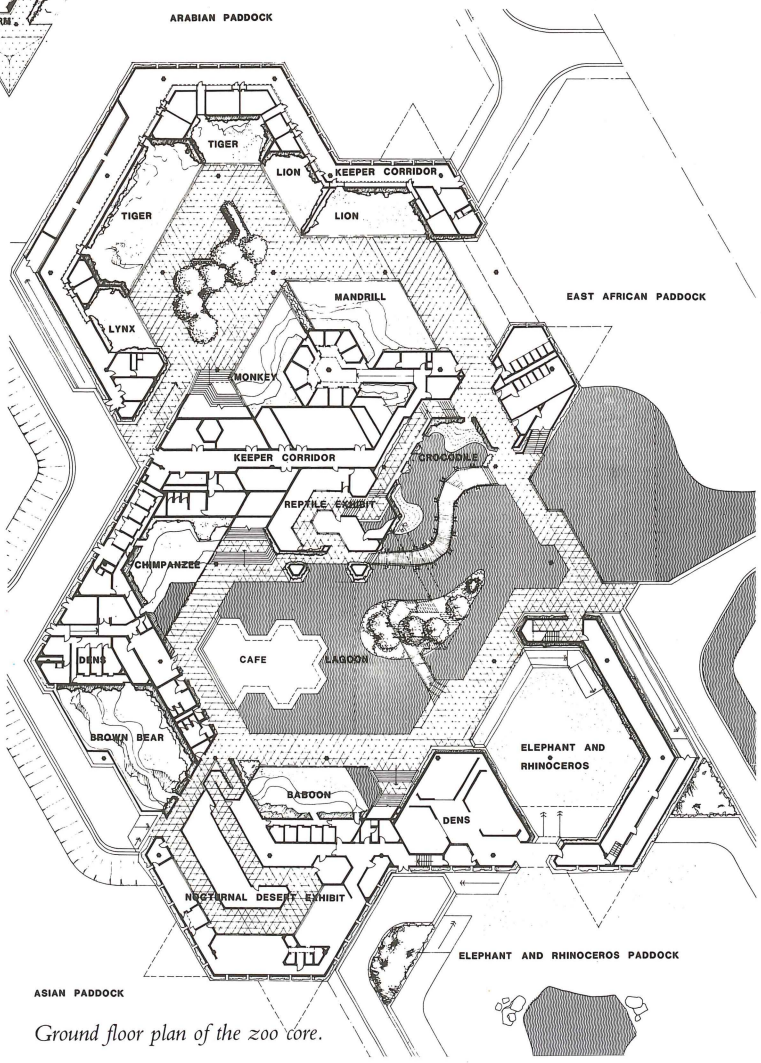
Below: Entrance to main complex with waterbird lagoon in the foreground.
Right: View of Eland paddock from the upper level of the main zoo complex.

Text compiled by the editors. Documents and photographs courtesy of the architect.

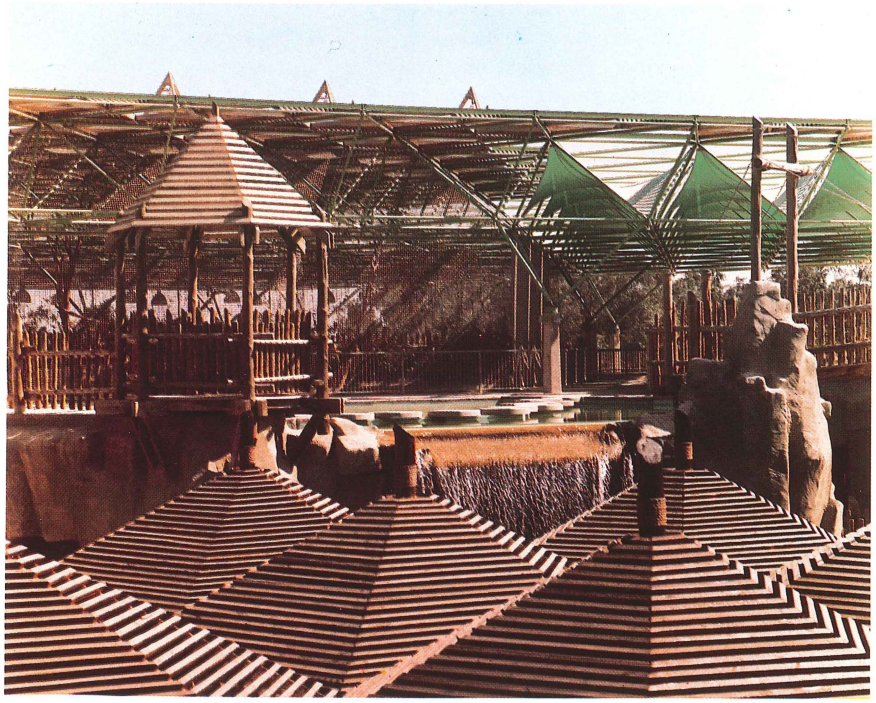


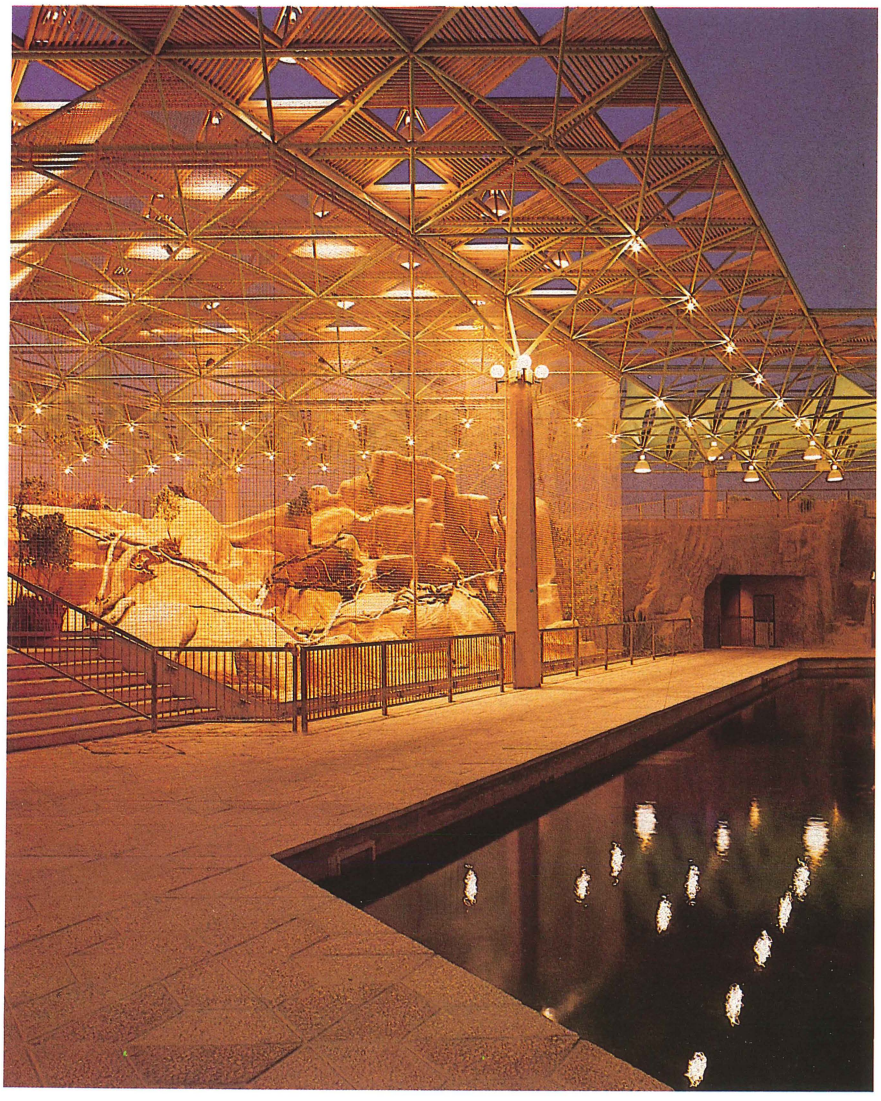


First floor plan of the zoo core.



Ground floor plan of the zoo core.





Left: Roof of the cafeteria (in the foreground) with waterfall and upper level pool (in middle distance).
Left below: Night-time view of an animal display.