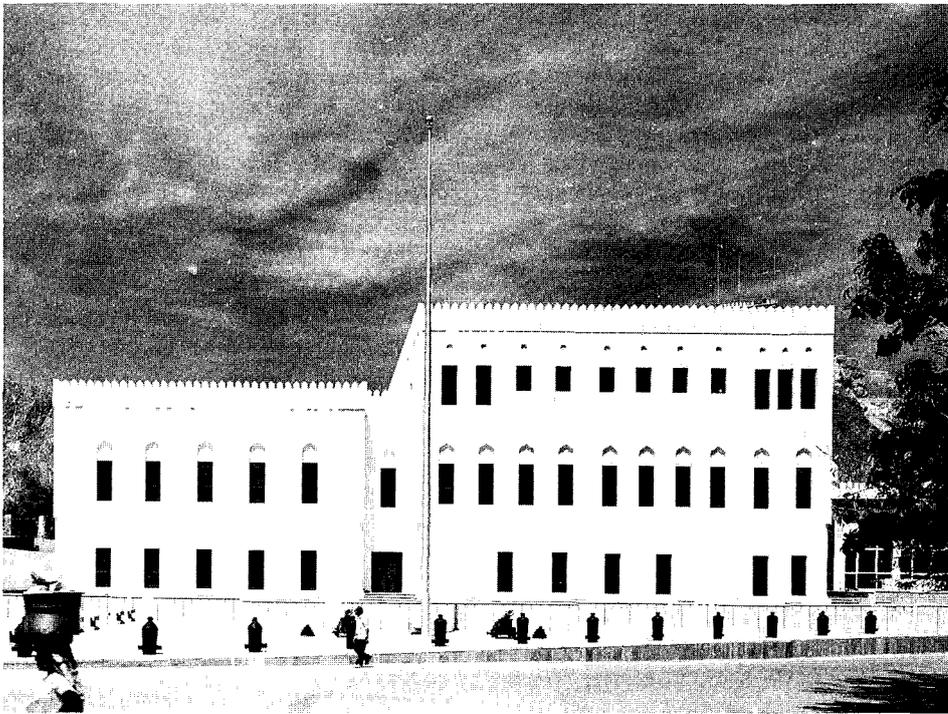
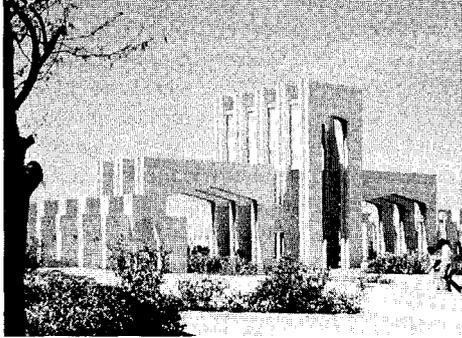


Mohamed Makiya*Beit Greza, Muscat: façade and interior views**Photo: Makiya Associates*

In talking about the challenge of evaluating the Islamic heritage and the criteria and objectives for dealing with urban transformation in the Islamic world, we have one common denominator regardless of time and space. This is human scale, a phrase often bandied about by architectural professionals, but one which still means a great deal. Regardless of technology, the human scale is the human scale, a consistent measure. It answers a lot of questions and suggests many more. It yields an idea of the social conduct of space; it expresses itself in the pattern of the city or town through the vertical and horizontal scale values. The human scale can be considered a criterion, an objective and a philosophy for the built environment.

A second common denominator is the physical environment—the earth we tread on, the climate, the nature of the materials at hand. Here we can also include laws and mathematics that affect our understanding of architecture and our evaluation of our heritage. A third unifying factor is the physical fact of life and its temporal and spatial dimensions. Once one knows every aspect of life and unity in Islam, the present and the future become one. It is an appreciation of inherent values that creates the synthesis which is the physical environment, both in the shape of things to come and in what has already been established. Another concern is the quality of life, or whatever you want to call it. It is a human demand, not a luxury.

A note about conservation. Conservation is not a rigid thing. It is not simply a matter of saying, “We’ll keep it because of its emotional quality, because it is like an open book which should be preserved for the next generation.” It is something money cannot buy, a thing beyond value and an irreplaceable asset. Conservation is flexible: it can include restoration, creation, or simply respect for the environment and climate. It implies a desire to live in harmony and sympathy within the global scheme. So it is not a rigid word, and its interpretation can differ. There is no “one right way” of conserving. Certainly we are concerned with giving priority to the original way of doing things—if you have a good carpet, best to



Isa Town, Bahrain, town gate

Photo: Makiya Associates

restore it using the skills of a good craftsman. No decision is needed apart from the initial decision to restore; it is clearly something worthy of restoring, because it is a valuable part of our past that should be maintained for the present and the future. But conservation has a broader meaning, one which includes an attitude of the creative mind willing to delve into the past. This eclectic attitude requires dedication and sincerity. We have to face the future, and I

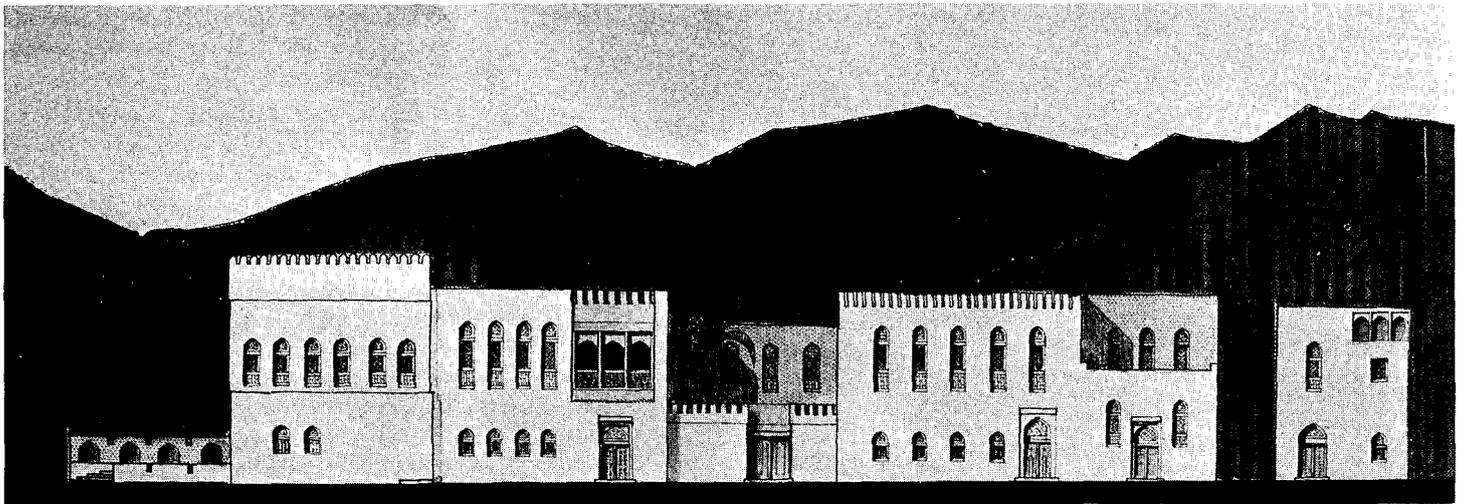
think approaching it with the attitude that we should be the guardians of our heritage is really what this seminar should encourage. I feel it is impractical just to talk about history and the past; we must see a living dimension, an attitude toward a much more worthy environment for the human race.

When I was first informed of the aims of this seminar, I realized that here was a great opportunity to contribute toward what I like to call the "regional identity of our global settlement." Our world is becoming ever more unified through increased international mobility and economic development. However, we are paying a price for this. We are in danger of losing much of the remarkable variety in the kinds of specific environments which human beings have created over the centuries. In the name of cross-cultural exchange, we are losing those architectural qualities which identify localities and regions. It is evident that, at least in the Islamic world, a reaction to this trend is beginning.

The desire and search for a regional identity has, until recently, been largely unconscious; however, as a practicing architect and planner in the Islamic world, I observe that

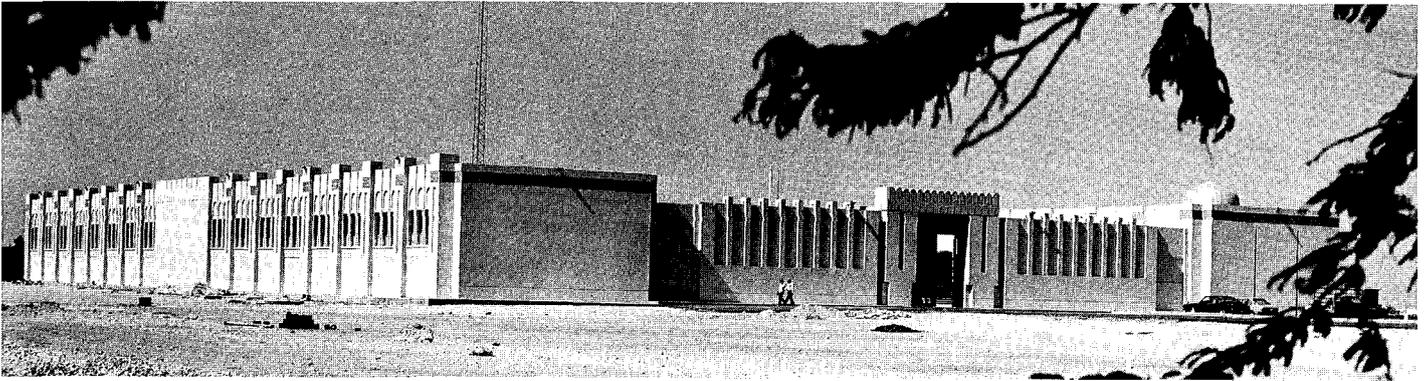
it is a desire now being loudly voiced. Despite this new degree of public support, the realization of cultural and regional specificity still poses many intellectual and practical problems. Nonetheless, a public awareness of design alternatives would help to overcome the lack of vision that has unfortunately become commonplace in the built environment of many Islamic countries.

It is becoming increasingly difficult for an individual architect or planner to competently fulfill the dual roles of thinker and builder. If one is in the fortunate position of thinking, one may well be isolated from doing. If, on the other hand, one is in a position to build, one is often too busy with the practicalities of work to formulate ideas and synthesize experiences fully. The builder seldom has time to conceive of his work as more than a practical and physical mass; he cannot consciously seek an architecture that is not only modern, but also uniquely associated with the culture into which it is inserted. The "thinking versus building" dichotomy, a process of fragmentation and specialization, may be responsible for the distressing professional situation in which so many of us find ourselves.



Muscat, view of a reconstructed street

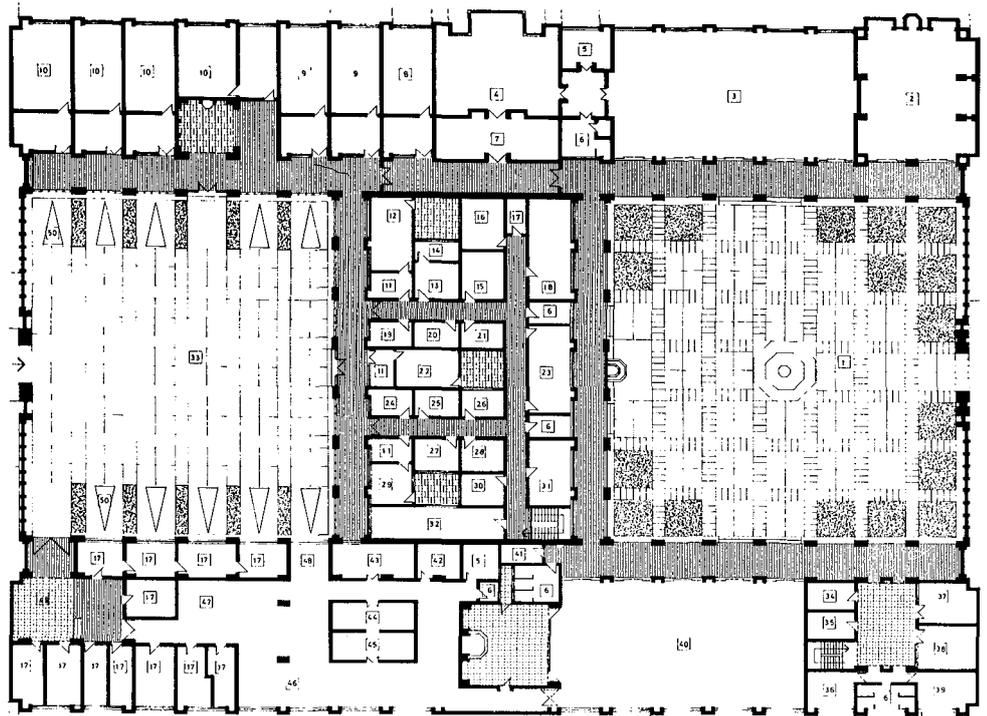
Photo: Makiya Associates



Rifa'a, Bahrain, Office of H E the Heir Apparent

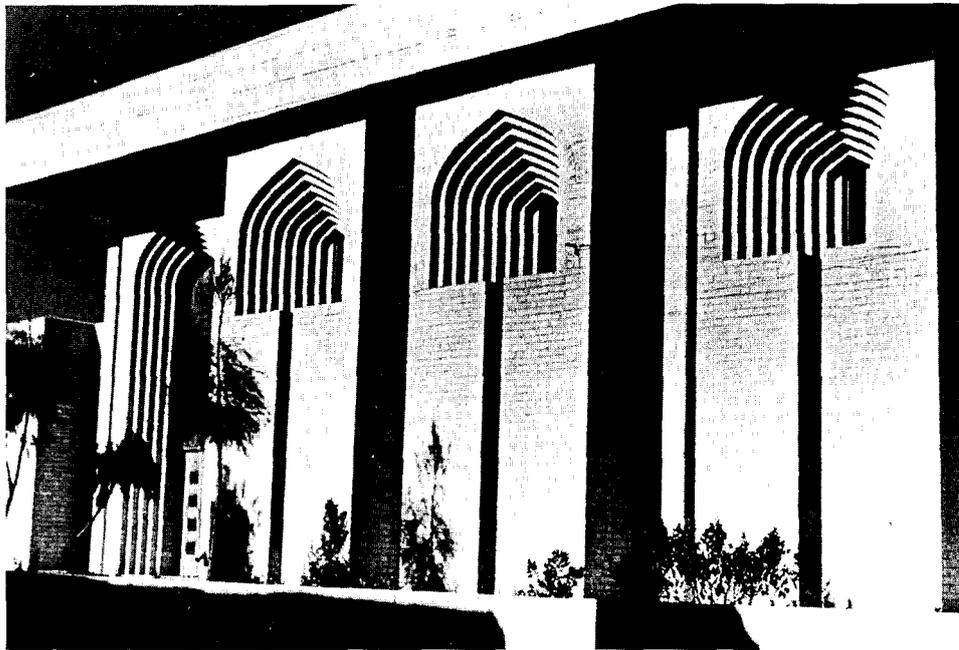
Photo Makiya Associates

The successful design of any urban or regional environment depends upon sympathetic understanding and mastery of the elements that make up the whole culture. True abstraction and synthesis can only be arrived at by long and studied acquaintance with the indigenous character. The monuments and materials of the past are often useful for the present. Any aspect of the local past may be incorporated into contemporary construction, assuming that a dignified and appropriate synthesis results. I continue to use the traditional desert vocabulary and scale in my projects in Muscat, Bahrain and Iraq, because it is still appropriate there. The rhythm of façades articulated by niches, crenellated borders, brick construction, use of walls as membranes shielding the internal structure, all reflect the past while respecting the design capabilities of the present. I hope the illustrated examples of my work effectively convey my attitude toward the past and to the theme of this seminar.



Rifa'a, Bahrain, Office of H E the Heir Apparent: plan of the ground floor

Photo Makiya Associates



Kufa, Iraq exterior of the Rafidain Bank by Mohamed Makiya

Photo. Makiya Associates

Comments

Kuran

The two great periods of architectural synthesis in Anatolia were the Seljuk and Ottoman empires; let us examine the latter. The Ottoman synthesis was not an imitative process, but incorporated significant features of existing local architecture. Its achievements were dependent both on new materials and on available technology. In any period, the challenges posed by new materials and new technologies yield positive results only when architects are in control of these variables, not enslaved by them.

Fathy

I just wanted to comment on the nature of change, the importance of continuity and

the preservation and conservation of our monuments and towns. Change has taken place in our countries at many different times. In Europe and the West, change has continued along the same lines, while in our countries change has been diametrically contrary to our traditional culture. This movement toward Westernization has been described by one French sociologist as autocolonization. In the past, cultural change has been forced and Westernization superficially imposed. But the new phenomenon we have now is that of the people imposing a different culture upon themselves, and this is what we call Westernization. They are even trying to deny their colour, to get out of their skins, because this is what autocolonization means. In Europe traditions continue; in our countries they do not. I think we have to remember that the importance of conservation is not limited to maintaining the forms of historical buildings for posterity; conservation is also the mechanism for the carryover of the old traditions,

from the conceptual as well as the functional viewpoint.

Grabar

The Muslim world, and for that matter any world, develops, creates itself, changes, evolves, it constantly works in a kind of dialogue with its own past. What is important to know is whether there are permanent, consistent tendencies characteristic of city A or area B which we can subdivide to the point of saying that every street, every quarter, has its own peculiarities, or whether there are only consistent long-range tendencies that exist within a given ecosystem. But then the question arises: how old is what we consider to be old?

One paper, for instance, pointed out that some things we think are old—say, the Anatolian city—are not so very old; these cities are a nineteenth century phenomenon. Should we, in developing our understanding of Turkish architecture, put them into the same bag as Mr. Kuran's examples that go back to the thirteenth or to the fifteenth century? How old is the old we should use in evaluating the relationship of an architectural creation to its setting and to its own past? Or is this not a pertinent question? The past is the past; what counts is a series of totally different kinds of criteria, including the contemporary criteria that have been developed at this seminar. It seems to me that the slides and presentations of Professors Eldem and Makiya have strikingly pushed to the fore the question of degree to which an architect should relate to the past.

S. Batur

I would like to say a few words about the nineteenth century Istanbul phenomenon, although as our Turkish participants know, it is not a simple matter to be discussed in a short time. Almost all nineteenth century mosques in Istanbul were designed and built by architects from the same Christian family. Thus, after contact with the West, communication between the two worlds was