

THE ISMAILI CENTRE LONDON



The Roof Garden by night showing the central fountain connected by radial channels to the four corner pools.

Photo: Gary Otte



An alcove for quiet gathering draws light in, but filters out the distractions of the city below.

Photo: Crispin Boyle

FOUNDATION CEREMONY
SEPTEMBER 6, 1979

OPENING CEREMONY
APRIL 24, 1985

ARCHITECT
CASSON CONDER PARTNERSHIP

"It is a splendid contribution to the architecture of London, fitting in easily with the other fine buildings of South Kensington, yet having its own distinctive character too. It is a monument to the determination of your community to play a full part in the life of our society, while at the same time retaining their own identity and independence. As I believe a great Islamic poet of the 19th century, Mohammed Iqbal said: "For the individual to be bound to society is a blessing: it is in a community that his work is perfected."

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at the Opening Ceremony



Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher officially opens the Ismaili Centre, London in the presence of Mawlana Hazar Imam.

Photo: Nick Hewer



An aerial view of the Ismaili Centre, London.

Photo: Sadru Verjee

ISMAILIS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

In 1951, a religious, cultural and social centre was established by the Ismaili community at Kensington Court, and in 1957 it was moved to Palace Gate in the Borough of Kensington. However, in order to meet the increased needs of the growing community, a majority of whom had settled in or around London, a site for a new centre was acquired. Located in South Kensington, the Ismaili Centre occupies a prominent island site on Cromwell Road, facing the Victoria and Albert Museum on one of the major thoroughfares leading out of London.



THE ISMAILI CENTRE LONDON



LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

“This building is more than simply a place of congregation. Through the quality of its design and workmanship, it will be a bridge between the culture of the community’s roots and that of its future as well as a symbol of the hopes of people who have lived through change and turbulence and have ultimately found security here in Britain.”

His Highness the Aga Khan at the Opening Ceremony



An alcove for quiet gathering draws light in, but filters out the distractions of the city below.

Photo: Gary Otte

ARCHITECTURAL PHILOSOPHY

The architects, the Casson Conder Partnership, were presented with an unusual design brief. They were requested to design an institutional building in an area of London which had a very great architectural diversity but which clearly had Western inspiration. The Centre sought to be compatible with its surroundings, but at the same time to meet the specific requirements of the Ismaili community and reflect the mood of Islamic architectural tradition.



The honey comb ceiling (muqarnas) designed by Karl Schlamminger is a relief seeking design that gives a sense of greater height.

Photo: Crispin Boyle



The geometric designs and symmetry are visible in the décor and furnishings in the Social Hall.

Photo: Crispin Boyle

MATERIALS + FEATURES

The design of the building had to be such that it could deal with relatively large numbers of people entering and leaving the building, without causing major disturbance. The Ismaili Centre is opposite the Museum of Natural History and the Victoria and Albert Museum. The area presents a variety of imposing and elaborately modelled facades, very different from each other in terracotta, brick and stone.

One of the few elements which these buildings, built in different materials at different times, has in common is the light colour of their facades. The Ismaili Centre’s exterior has used materials and colours which are compatible with those of the surrounding buildings while at the same time in keeping with the traditional Islamic idiom and its colours of whites, light greys and blues.



THE ISMAILI CENTRE BURNABY



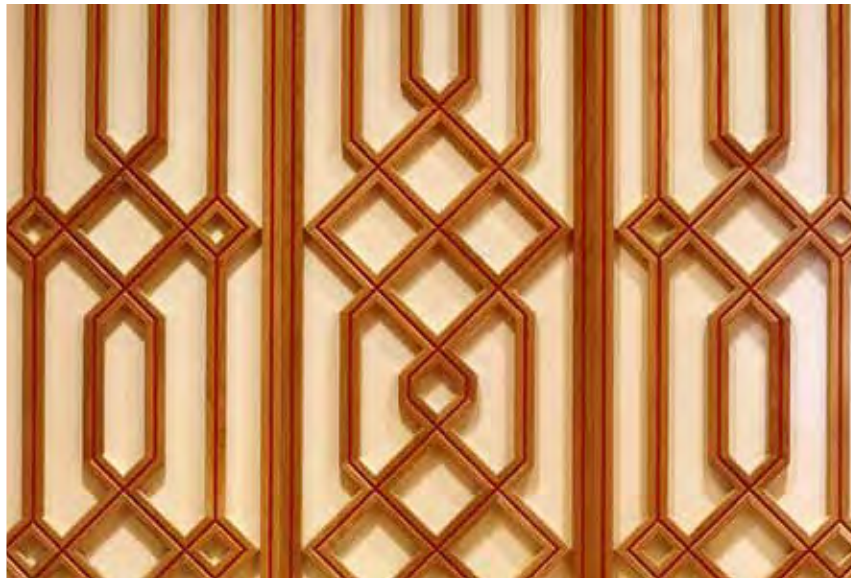
BURNABY, CANADA

"This will be a place of congregation, of order, of peace, of prayer, of hope, of humility, and of brotherhood. From it should come forth those thoughts, those sentiments, those attitudes, which bind men together and which unite."

His Highness the Aga Khan at the Opening Ceremony



A winter view of the Ismaili Centre, Burnaby from the south-west
Photo: Gary Otte



Geometric patterns inspired by the traditions of Islam are repeated in interior decor.
Photo: Gary Otte



Looking past the fountain at the entrance of the Centre.
The building is clad in Carrara marble and Italian sandstone.
Photo: Gary Otte

ARCHITECTURAL PHILOSOPHY

A firm of architects, led by the well-known Vancouver architect Bruno Freschi, was commissioned to prepare the plans for the building. In addition to meeting the religious and social needs of the Ismaili community, the new Ismaili Centre would, at the same time, need to blend harmoniously with the environment.

A pursuit of geometry, enclosure, symmetry, mass and the layering of symbolic decoration have generated the architectural concept of the Burnaby Jamatkhana and Centre. These architectural principles and use of materials have structured and characterised the building. The setting of the building, with its well laid-out garden, provides a serene and peaceful space for contemplative spiritual experience. The sound of moving water, the touch of varied surfaced textures, the richness of colour and the play of light and shade upon the vision, the scent of plants are all reminiscent of the finest in Islamic tradition.



Reflecting the ceiling, the octagonal theme is present on the carpet inside the Prayer Hall
Photo: Gary Otte

FOUNDATION CEREMONY JULY 26, 1982

OPENING CEREMONY AUGUST 23, 1985

ARCHITECT BRUNO FRESCHI

"This building, I toured it a little earlier, makes our senses dance to the music of visual art, a great tribute to the architect and an art which tests not just our appreciation of form and light, but of the intellectual and spiritual messages revealed in the marble, sandstone and glass, brought to this beautiful city from so far away."

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney at the Opening Ceremony



Mawlana Hazar Imam and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney shake hands following the unveiling of a plaque commemorating the opening of the Ismaili Centre, Burnaby.
Photo: Gary Otte



The centrepiece of the Council Chambers is a Carrara marble table from Italy.
Photo: Gary Otte

MATERIALS + FEATURES

Access to the building is gained through a courtyard garden, which is enhanced by fountains, trees and flowers. Inside, a prayer hall provides facilities for communal services and quiet contemplation. The facility also includes a social hall, administrative offices, council chamber and classrooms for religious instruction.

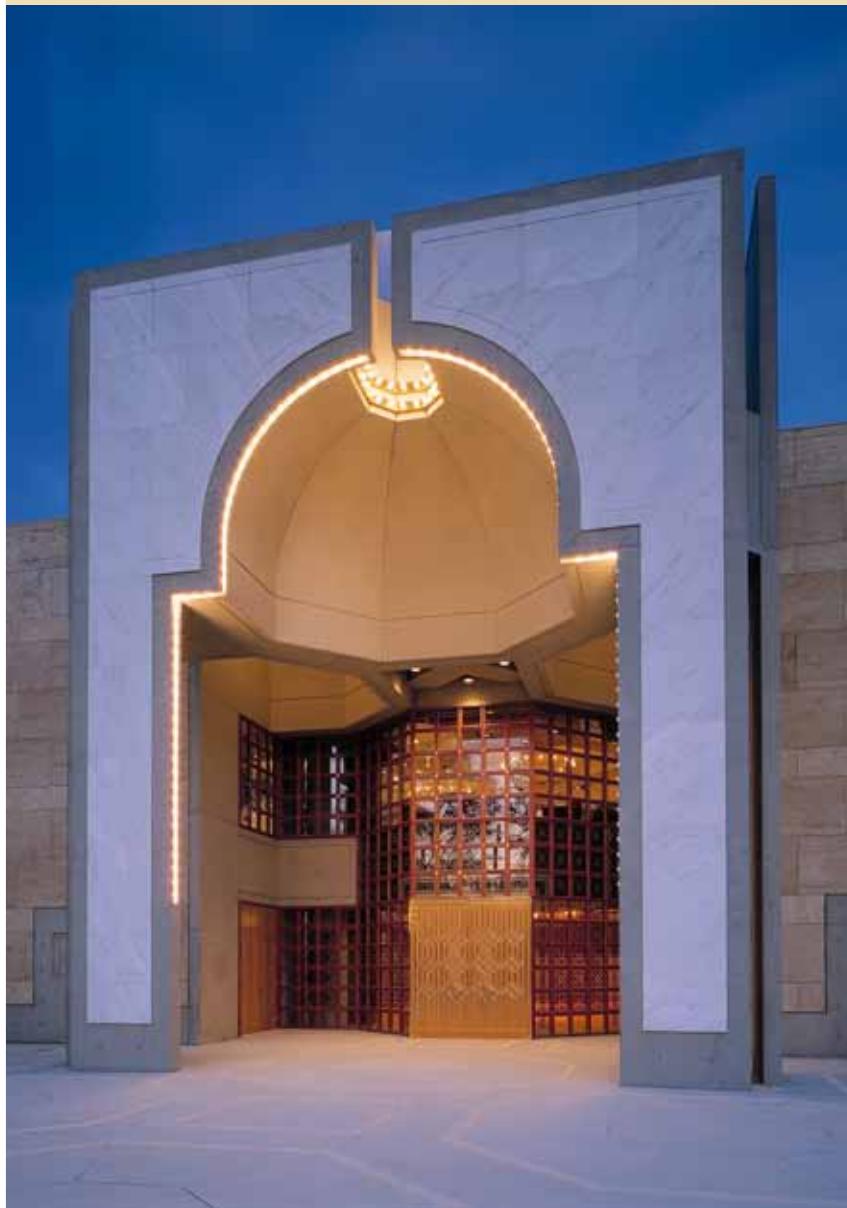
The calligraphy which adorns much of what is built is a constant reminder of spiritual content through its common design and expression of the name of Allah. The basic forms are balanced and ruled by geometry and there is a sense of stability, tranquility and equilibrium. Space is framed, with each area being defined; a physical context being constructed for each activity in daily life with a definite delineation between privacy and community, areas in light and in shadow, small and large spaces, and interiors and exteriors.



An aerial view of the Ismaili Centre, Burnaby, which is aligned along an east-west axis on a 1.5-hectare site.
Photo: Gary Otte

ISMAILIS IN CANADA

Starting in the 1970s, Ismailis across Canada established religious, cultural and social centres, mainly in rented accommodation in major cities and towns. In many cases, school halls were used as places of worship in the evenings and at weekends. However, in order to meet the permanent needs of the community, more definitive accommodation was sought. The site in Burnaby was acquired in 1979, for it was here that the first Ismaili congregation was established in Canada.



THE ISMAILI CENTRE LISBON



A view into the Centre from the outside.

Photo: Gary Otte



Cool water courses through the courtyard at dusk.

Photo: Gary Otte

FOUNDATION CEREMONY
DECEMBER 18, 1996

OPENING CEREMONY
JULY 11, 1998

ARCHITECTS
RAJ REWAL AND FREDERICO VALSASSINA

"By its very concept and design, this Centre will bear witness to the re-encountered of two heritages that moulded the Peninsular civilization, that of the East and that of the West, that of Islam and that of Judaic-Christian tradition. By its inherent vocation the Centre will be a place of diversity, of plurality and tolerance, which constitute the richness of our condition."

President Jorge Sampaio at the Opening Ceremony



Mawlana Hazar Imam and President Sampaio applaud following the unveiling of the commemorative plaque.

Photo: Gary Otte



A bird's eye view of the Ismaili Centre, Lisbon.

Photo: Gary Otte

ISMAILIS IN PORTUGAL

Beginning in the 1970s, Portuguese Ismailis created places of gathering for cultural and social purposes in major cities and towns where they settled. They also found office space for the establishment of philanthropic organisations that they sponsored. As they developed and expanded, these organisations involved increasing numbers of institutional partners and the wider Portuguese public.

In order to meet the growing needs of institutions and the Ismaili community itself, a permanent and comprehensive facility was acquired in 1986. The site, in the prime location of Palma de Baixo, in close proximity to prominent universities and principal hospitals in Lisbon, is easily accessible to all parts of the city.



THE ISMAILI CENTRE LISBON



LISBON, PORTUGAL

“The space that the Centre will create in the midst of this historic city will, I hope, serve as a bridge linking and enriching various cultures of Europe with others of Africa and Asia, as it draws upon associations both from within and outside the Portuguese-speaking world”

His Highness the Aga Khan at the Foundation Ceremony



Textures and patterns.

Photo: Gary Otte

ARCHITECTURAL PHILOSOPHY

For Indian architect Raj Rewal, himself from a non-Muslim tradition, the diversity of architecture across the Muslim world and the building traditions of the Iberian Peninsula contributed to his understanding of composing space.

The design brief called for a centre which would draw upon traditional design approaches from Muslim civilizations yet avoid transplanting any idiom particular to a specific locale in its entirety. Significant emphasis was placed upon technological innovation and on construction that would be appropriate to the area. The architects' response was influenced by the morphology of traditional spatial arrangements, by the notion of Islamic gardens and by the patterns in architecture that have served different Muslim societies.



The intricacy of the façade glimpsed in the motif detail.

Photo: Gary Otte



All together, One: The walls recite the 99 attributes of Allah.

Photo: Gary Otte

MATERIALS + FEATURES

The objective was the creation of a complex of spaces and buildings whose cultural and social dimensions would complement each other as well as functional, educational facilities and institutional offices, whilst also providing reflective space for the Ismaili community's own use.

A geometric fusion of gardens and courtyards as well as buildings embodying in hewn stone surfaces, polished tile and delicately balanced cupolas, an unusual multi-cultural and multi-functional complex, constitutes the architectural concept of the Ismaili Centre.



THE ISMAILI CENTRE DUBAI



Entrance into the Ismaili Centre, Dubai
- A plurality of perspectives -
Photo: Gary Otte



Fountains of arboreal calm
- Takhtabosh Courtyard at dusk -
Photo: Gary Otte

FOUNDATION CEREMONY
DECEMBER 13, 2003

OPENING CEREMONY
MARCH 26, 2008

ARCHITECTS
RAMI EL-DAHAN AND
SOHEIR FARID

"It is my humble prayer that, when built, the Ismaili Centre in Dubai will be a place for contemplation and search for enlightenment, where people come together to share knowledge and wisdom. It will be a place of peace, of order, of hope and of brotherhood, radiating those thoughts, attitudes and sentiments which unite, and which do not divide, and which uplift the mind and spirit."

His Highness the Aga Khan at the Foundation Ceremony



Mawlana Hazar Imam is joined by His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum (left) and His Highness Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan for the unveiling of the ceremonial plaque marking the opening of the Ismaili Centre, Dubai.

Photo: Aziz Islamshah



Inspiration and aspiration: the Ismaili Centre against the Dubai skyline.
Photo: Gary Otte

ISMAILIS OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND GULF

The Ismaili Community's roots in the region go back to the early centuries of Muslim history. Many Ismaili traders settled in the port cities of the Indian Ocean in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. The rapid growth of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Kuwait, Qatar and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia attracted migrants from Syria as well as India and Pakistan. Ismailis arriving in the 1950s and 1960s started out as merchants in the fast-growing local souks and then began to establish themselves in commerce, hospitality and manufacturing.

Today, Ismailis are settled in all of the United Arab Emirates, as well as in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar. They are professionals and investors in diverse sectors of the region's economy, from banking and tourism to electronics and construction, and from performing arts to real estate related services. The community is also active in supporting programmes launched by the Aga Khan Development Network in humanitarian relief and social, cultural and economic development in the wider region.



THE ISMAILI CENTRE DUBAI



DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

“At a time when the search for mutual understanding remains essential to assuring peace and stability, the creation of spaces that will enable that search becomes a greater imperative than ever.”

His Highness the Aga Khan at the Foundation Ceremony



A façade of interspersed openings facing the courtyard

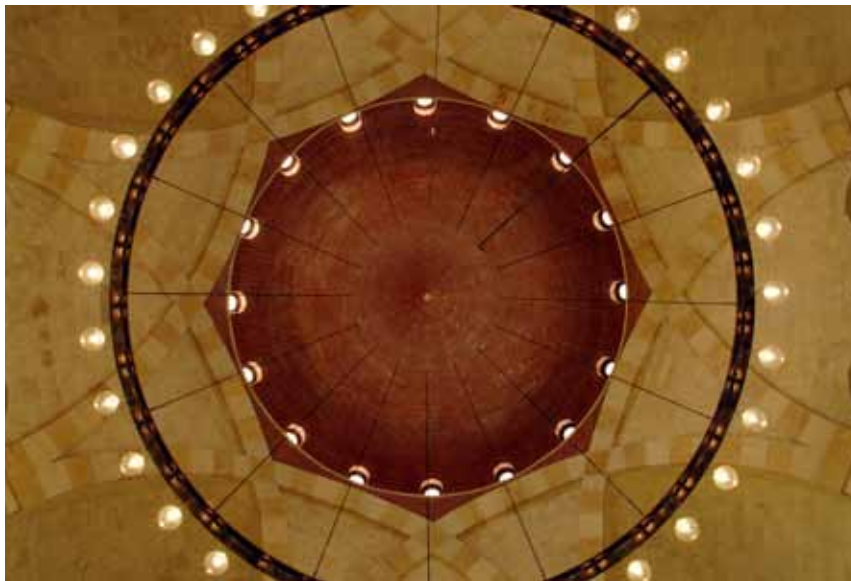
Photo: Gary Otte

ARCHITECTURAL PHILOSOPHY

The Ismaili Centre's design brief placed a clear emphasis on ensuring order and harmony and on fostering mutual respect and understanding both within the Ummah and across society at large. At the same time, the Ismaili Centre was expected to be a metpahor for a time of renewed vigour, growth and commitment.

In an environment where glass and concrete towers have often set the trend, the objective was to allow innovation to draw on tradition, all the while preseving symmetry, rhythm, unity and continuity. Respecting a history of tolerance and opennness, Egyptian architects Rami El-Dahan and Soheir Farid sough inspiration from the Fatimid mosques of Cairo.

Reflecting a cosmopolitan synergy, the volumes and open spaces, angular views and integrated natural elements of the Centre create a sense of familiarity for people of many different cultural backgrounds without introducing a foreign idiom.



Illumination in concentricity: the chandelier of the main dome

Photo: Gary Otte



A space for learning in the Ismaili Centre, Dubai

Photo: Gary Otte

MATERIALS + FEATURES

Located on a corner site in Oud Metha, a small residential community with a growing commercial and cultural character, the Centre suggests an oasis of refreshing clam and refined distinction.

The building is built primarily in Aleppo limestone, practically each piece being precision cut before assembly. From the brickwork in the domes, the marble interiors and tiles inlaid in the water channels, to the carved, shaped or assembled hardwood floors, fittings and furnishings, the range and placement of materials testify to rare artisanal detail and celebrate a sharing of talent.

The largest exterior feature within the Ismaili Centre is a courtyard with a takhtabosh (loggia) along one side providing both shade and seating. A separate wing comprises meeting rooms, classrooms and recreational areas including a small courtyard. On the ground floor is the Early Childhood Learning Centre operated by the Aga Khan Education Services (AKES).



THE ISMAILI CENTRE DUSHANBE



Looking across the lawn towards the Administrative area of the complex with the Main Entrance on the right.

Photo: Gary Otte



An evening view of the Ismaili Centre, Dushanbe. Pedestrian walkways line the cascading water feature, leading to the building's Main Entrance.

Photo: Moez Visram

FOUNDATION CEREMONY
AUGUST 30, 2003

OPENING CEREMONY
OCTOBER 12, 2009

ARCHITECT
FAROUK NOORMOHAMED

"I would like to express with confidence that this Centre, as a place of promoting humility, friendship, dialogue, openness, generosity, kindness and charity in society, will uphold high standards of activities with the aim of bringing together cultures, advocating moral and social values, and serving as a symbol of friendship and patriotism"

President Emomali Rahmon at the Opening Ceremony



Mawlana Hazar Imam and President Rahmon share a joyful moment, following the unveiling of the plaque marking the inauguration of the Ismaili Centre, Dushanbe.

Photo: Gary Otte



An aerial view of the complex shows the Main Entrance on the right, the Social Hall Entrance on the left and one of four corner water features in the middle.

Photo: Moez Visram

ISMAILIS IN TAJIKISTAN

The Ismaili Centre, Dushanbe is the first such Centre in Central Asia. The Centre marks a milestone in the history of the Ismaili Muslim community, whose presence in Central Asia dates back more than 1,000 years. Linguistically and ethnically diverse, Ismailis are widely spread across the region. During the 10th century, Ismaili teachings became known in Central Asia through the work of influential philosophers, natural scientists, thinkers and poets, including the pre-eminent Ismaili thinker Nasir Khusraw, known and respected across the region for his contribution to philosophy and the sciences of the time as well as to poetry and the development of Persian-based languages.



THE ISMAILI CENTRE DUSHANBE



DUSHANBE, TAJIKISTAN

“Like its counterparts elsewhere, the Ismaili Centre in Dushanbe will stand for the ethics that uphold the dignity of man as the noblest of creation. It will bring down walls that divide and build bridges that unite. These are the ethics that inspire the work of the Aga Khan Development Network.”

His Highness the Aga Khan at the Foundation Ceremony



A view from the foyer towards the Prayer Hall Ante Room. Brick patterns and the calligraphy crowning the walls are among the prominent textures that characterise this space.

Photo: Moez Visram

ARCHITECTURAL PHILOSOPHY

The site of the Ismaili Centre Dushanbe is located on Ismoili Somoni Avenue, named after the founder of the Samanid dynasty (early 10th century) and considered Tajikistan's national hero.

The direction was to design a building that represented the great architectural traditions of this region, including its construction techniques, materials, and decorative motif. It is in this context that clay bricks, punctuated with blue and turquoise glazed bricks, have become the most distinctive visual aspect of the overall complex.

Inspired by some of the region's most distinctive monuments, the architecture of the Ismaili Centre blends many different craft and artisanal traditions of Central Asia. Designed to facilitate cultural and intellectual exchange, the Centre aims to re-invigorate and promote the spirit of enquiry characterised by scholars whose contributions over the centuries were encouraged by the Ismaili Muslim community under the patronage of its leadership



A view from the Main Entrance shows a seating alcove on the left, a reception desk on the right, and the axial corridor of the Administration area leading to the Great Courtyard.

Photo: Moez Visram



Looking out from the Prayer Hall Portal, across the Great Courtyard, towards the Administration area.

Photo: Moez Visram

MATERIALS + FEATURES

Located amidst gardens and waterfalls off a main thoroughfare in Dushanbe, the Centre in sandstone baked brick and glazed blue and turquoise tiles, acknowledges the vernaculars of the 10th century mausoleum of the Samanids as well as the grand courtyards of Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. Equipped to host exhibitions and conferences, concerts and recitals, the complex includes a resource centre, classrooms, multi-purpose spaces, courtyards and an amphitheatre. Technical innovations include an elastic roof diaphragm to transfer structural stress in this highly seismic region, a heating and air conditioning system based on water-source heat pumps used for the first time on this scale in the region, as well as a heat recovery wheel for energy efficiency.

SPECIAL FEATURES:

- Total number of bricks: approximately 3 million
- Area of corner water features: approximately 1500 square metres
- Height of the ceiling: 7.5 to 16 metres
- Five towers: four of which are 21 metres, the fifth is 25 metres

