

The page title 'Liw'an (اللبوان) is a traditional Qatari room facing north. It is the coldest part of the house where the Qataris used to receive guests.



Barzan Tower, located in the West Bay, which was designed by Ibrahim Mohamed al Jaidah.

Ibrahim Mohamed al Jaidah, who started his career as the Head of the Architectural Section for Qatar's Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Agriculture is acknowledged as a pioneer of a new architectural movement which combines the far-reaching influences of Islamic art with a modern style to create memorable landmark structures that are literally shaping Qatar's development.



The Diplomatic Club, designed by Ibrahim Mohamed al Jaidah.

MUSINGS OF A MASTER ARCHITECT

RAMY SALAMA
DOHA

THERE are many buildings in Qatar, both old and restored, which are of interest due to their characteristic construction. There are the forts scattered around the country such as Al Zubarah Fort in the far north, and, closer to home, there is old Souq Waqif.

Qatar Tribune went to the man who literally wrote the book on Qatari Architecture (his work is titled *The History of Qatari Architecture 1800-1950*), in order to seek more information on Qatar's heritage buildings. Ibrahim Mohamed al Jaidah, who started his career as the Head of the Architectural Section for Qatar's Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Agriculture, has become CEO and Chief Architect of Arab Engineering Bureau, an award-winning firm with offices in countries across the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

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Speaking about the beginnings of his interest in architecture, Ibrahim recounted, "The greatest thing that influenced me as I was growing up was the old downtown area of Doha, Al Jasra, the Souq Waqif area, which was sort of our back yard. This is where we played and sometimes got lost in the paths (or, in Arabic, sikkas) of that place. Later on, I went to university in the United States to study engineering. I soon realised that this wasn't what I wanted to do for the rest of my life and I decided then to study architecture, for which I had had such an early passion, having wanted to design something ever since I was a kid."

Discussing places in Qatar where one might see historical buildings which convey the coun-



Ibrahim Mohamed al Jaidah (JALAL PATHYLOOR)

try's traditional architecture styles, Ibrahim said, "It was a great thing for the government to have preserved Souq Waqif, although, admittedly, large parts of it were reconstructed. Still, among the structures are some beautiful original heritage buildings. On a wider scope, within Qatar, there are several forts, which have been preserved throughout our history. There are also some interesting mosques scattered around the country, in the older villages. In the latter case, this is simply because no one would want to demolish a mosque, so they were preserved. And now they're being renovated as authentic examples of heritage buildings. In fact, we are currently seeing a strong determination to renovate all these old buildings in the country, which serve as standing documents of Qatar's heritage."

Ibrahim spoke of the return of his early interest in buildings and



The Shaqab Institute for Girls as it appears on the QR100 note.

its deepening into a study of the architectural history of Qatar and the wider Gulf region. He said, "on my return to Qatar after studying the history of architecture around the world in university, I regained my early passion for the local architecture. However, when I started analysing the history of architecture in the country, about 20 years ago, I eventually realised that there wasn't much documen-

ing between societies. All of these different elements have combined together to create what we can call the Gulf identity, which wouldn't be complete in the absence of any one element. It's a melting pot that resulted in the way we talk, the way we dress, the way we eat, what we eat and, of course, what we build. I think this identity is extremely unique and characteristic, limited to the shores of the Gulf, so you see a lot of similarities in the architecture around all these villages, in this region. I would consider these all to fall within a single school of architecture, which is the Gulf school of architecture."

Underlining the long period before oil was discovered in the region as being of particular architectural interest, Ibrahim explained, "In the pre-oil period, there were gatherings here several hundred years ago. This period is

interesting in that it's a blend of several distinct influences. Within the Gulf region, in all the villages, we see lots of similarities and these architectural influences are the result of the mixing of different cultures. There is a strong influence from Najd, a plateau in the middle of the Arabian Peninsula, which is now Saudi Arabia. This is because most of the tribes came to the shores from Najd. There is also a strong influence from Basra, in Iraq, as the trade has been ongoing for centuries between these societies. There is influence from Iran as tribes have migrated back and forth, with a lot of Arabs living on the Iranian shores for centuries before coming back. Then, of course, there is the Indian influence, which is also noticeable in our cuisine and furniture. There is a tremendous Indian influence even in our accent. Then, there is the Omani, as well as an influence from Zanzibar, again due to trad-

ing between societies. All of these different elements have combined together to create what we can call the Gulf identity, which wouldn't be complete in the absence of any one element. It's a melting pot that resulted in the way we talk, the way we dress, the way we eat, what we eat and, of course, what we build. I think this identity is extremely unique and characteristic, limited to the shores of the Gulf, so you see a lot of similarities in the architecture around all these villages, in this region. I would consider these all to fall within a single school of architecture, which is the Gulf school of architecture."

While there is a general classification under which many of these buildings fall, there are also subtle distinctions. Ibrahim said, "There is a slight variety from one town to another that makes each unique. You tend to see more wind towers in the old Dubai, for instance, and Qatar was never really known for wind towers. As you get deeper into the heart of the Arabian Peninsula, you see more of a fortress type of architecture. As you come closer to the shores, the architecture changes with more arcades and open spaces rather than fortresses. If you look closer, you will realise there is a uniqueness to every single village, depending on such factors as the builders, the style, the building materials available and even the environmental topography."

Ibrahim mentioned examples of the many buildings he has designed. He said, "One of the buildings I've designed, which I'm most proud of, is the building portrayed on the 100 Riyal bill, which is Al Shaqab Institute. Others include the Diplomatic Club, Shaq Village & Spa, and quite a few of these buildings have actually won architectural awards, in addition to becoming distinctive landmarks around town. I also design a lot of embassies for Qatar, in different parts of the world, and all of those buildings reflect the Qatari architecture."



Qatar's Embassy in Turkey, one of the prominent designs by Ibrahim Mohamed al Jaidah.



The Shaqab Institute for Girls, which was designed by Ibrahim Mohamed al Jaidah.