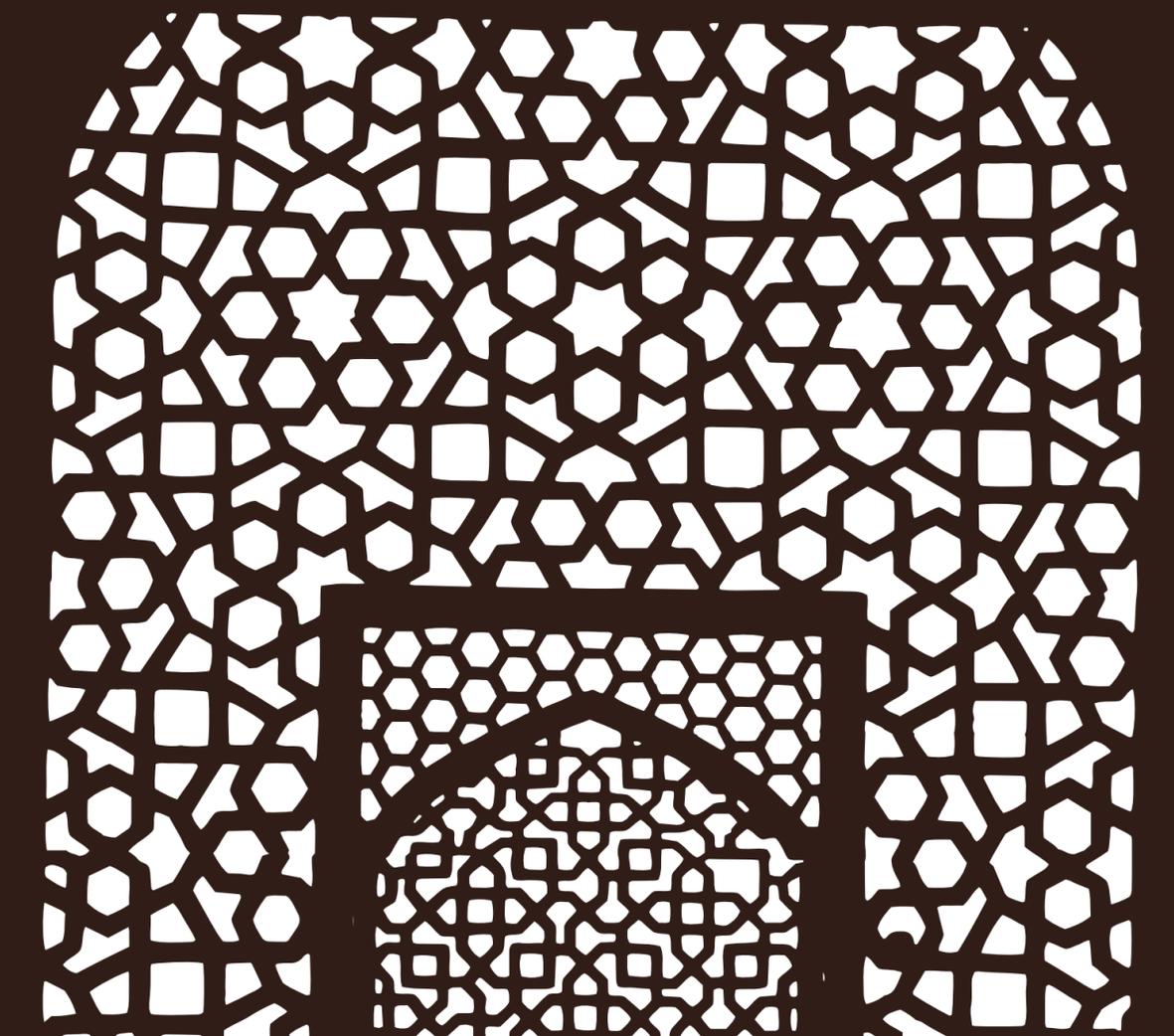


Text | Zarminae Ansari
Visuals | KKM Studio

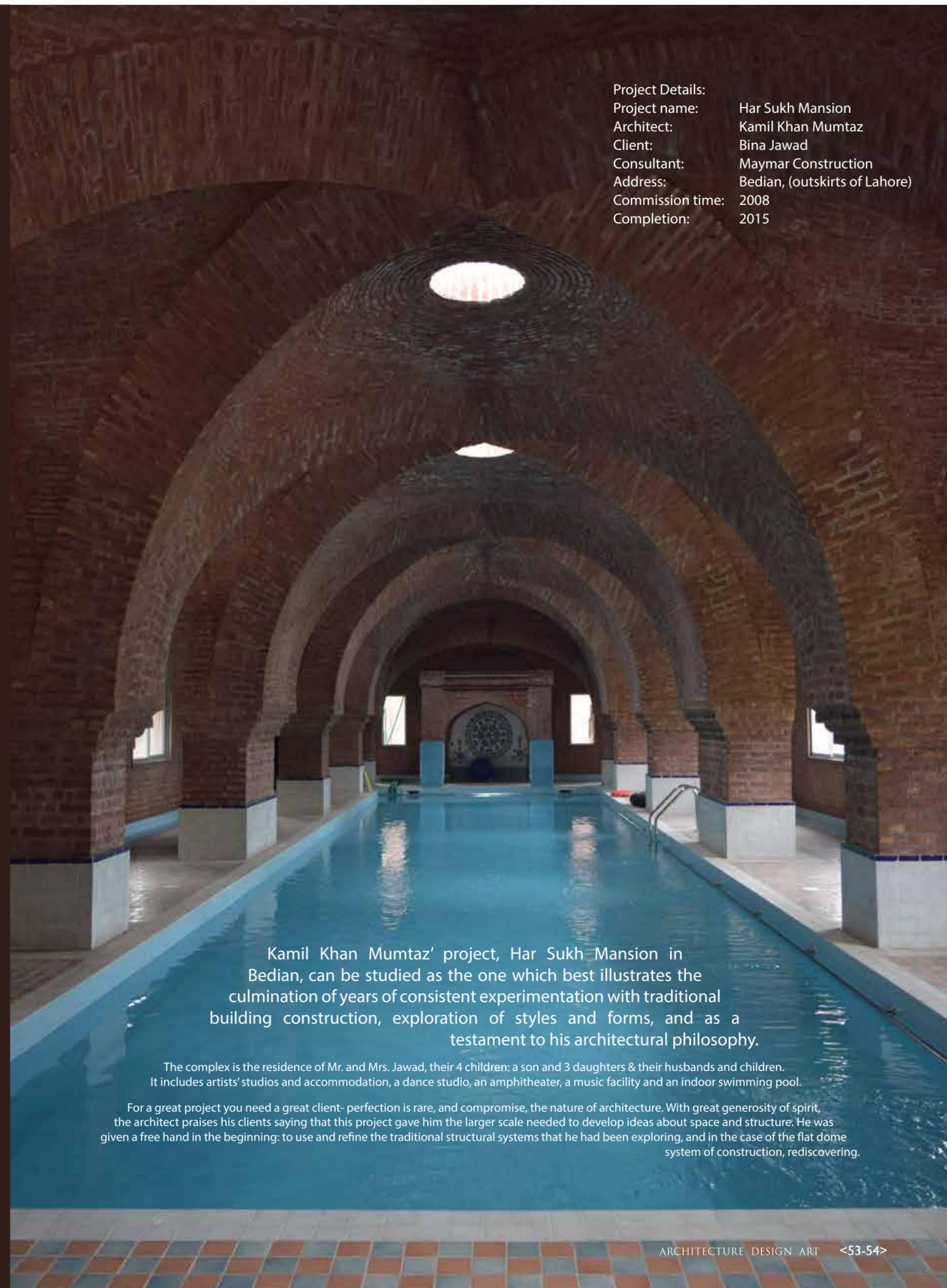


Reinterpreting traditional structural systems

**Kamil Khan Mumtaz designs
Bina Jawad residence, Lahore**



Project Details:
Project name: Har Sukh Mansion
Architect: Kamil Khan Mumtaz
Client: Bina Jawad
Consultant: Maymar Construction
Address: Bedian, (outskirts of Lahore)
Commission time: 2008
Completion: 2015



Kamil Khan Mumtaz' project, Har Sukh Mansion in Bedian, can be studied as the one which best illustrates the culmination of years of consistent experimentation with traditional building construction, exploration of styles and forms, and as a testament to his architectural philosophy.

The complex is the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Jawad, their 4 children: a son and 3 daughters & their husbands and children. It includes artists' studios and accommodation, a dance studio, an amphitheater, a music facility and an indoor swimming pool.

For a great project you need a great client- perfection is rare, and compromise, the nature of architecture. With great generosity of spirit, the architect praises his clients saying that this project gave him the larger scale needed to develop ideas about space and structure. He was given a free hand in the beginning: to use and refine the traditional structural systems that he had been exploring, and in the case of the flat dome system of construction, rediscovering.

Structurally, it is the most successful contemporary example of the use of traditional flat and ribbed dome brick construction. The flat dome is a relatively flat spanning system, which allows another floor above it, doing away with the need for steel reinforcement and concrete. These traditional building systems, including the art of "pukka kali" or highly polished lime plaster, not only bring the carbon footprint of the building down, they bring the interior temperature down as well by a couple of degrees in the summer. In Lahore's climate, and Pakistan's general state of electricity shortage, this is, naturally, highly desirable.

On the outskirts of Lahore, in Bedian, the building rises up from the fields surrounding it as something that has always belonged to this land, to the earth of the Punjab. Its aesthetic, the brick "haveli": imposing but not ostentatious, is perfectly contextual, reminiscent of the abode of the landowners and/or officials within this historically agricultural region.

There is immediate clarity in the division of space as you enter the high, double height rib-arched porch entrance. One enters upon an open garden. On the left are housed the family living quarters organized around a private central courtyard, and to the right are the public buildings.

The public buildings include the open-air amphitheater, immediately to the right of the entrance, and the artists' and dance studios. These are connected linearly by a colonnaded verandah, which doubles as the potential backstage area, and can be separated by curtains during public performances.

As the building progressed, the designs and structure of the ribbed domes improved. KKM first tried his hand at the highly complex geometrical and structural challenges of muqarnas in a 2005 project and has been studying and analysing this form, recently developing some original prototypes. He has

also used the more traditional Iranian type Muqarnas at the Sally Town Mosque and at a Holiday Retreat named 'Bagh-e-Arifin' at Wah Village. KKM has experimented with, rediscovered and reintroduced through his patronage of traditional master craftsmen, many traditional building and decorative techniques. He often mentions the long journey that helped them rediscover the lost art of flat dome construction after much trial and error until they were able to reuse it successfully and repeatedly.

The efficient acoustics of the double-height ribbed dome-covered dance and music studio make it a perfect setting for the practice, performance and patronage of traditional classical dance and music. The lofty, airy and ethereal quality of the traditional design makes it particularly appropriate for the intended purpose.

On a recent visit during the summer monsoons, it seemed that the clients chose not to implement the architect's design for drainage around the open-air amphitheater, so one wove one's way through the water-logged entry and made one's way to the left part of the complex, housing the living areas. One enters at what should have been the tour-de-force of the complex, this intimate, yet impressive courtyard, surrounded on 3 sides by the living quarters and the balconies of the second floor looking down into it, is perhaps the only jarring experience in this otherwise harmonious whole, unless one chooses to ignore the surface decorations which are, of course, the prerogative of the client, and concentrates on the spatial experience only. Surrounding this courtyard are the first floors of the apartments. The apartments, all identical, are accessed both from the ground floor through the verandah that surrounds the courtyard on 3 sides, and the first floor verandah with balconies overlooking this courtyard. The client chose to install jharokas over these balconies; fortunately, they are skillfully carved and not too jarring since they stay within the traditional vocabulary of the whole scheme.

Among other surface treatments that work, are the colourful traditional glazed tiles from Sindh.





Brick arches were used as supports for the treads of the staircases going to the second floor. In the finished state of the house today, one misses their almost musical, delicate, sinuous quality, as the light filtered through them. Similarly, while the frescoes on the plastered domes covering the double-height living rooms and lounges of the apartments are wonderful works of painstaking art, skill and craftsmanship- one almost misses the poetic quality of the exposed brick under construction.

As one climbs to the higher level terraces, one could be mistaken for thinking this was a haveli in the walled city, with its charming roof levels and massing. However, this is neither a dramatic set, or even inspired kitsch, nor is it a self-conscious recreation of a spatial experience: it is, in fact, completely integrated into the design, and arising from the design and practical requirements, which gives it a certain integrity and simultaneously references the traditional roofscapes in a natural way. It is at the roof level where one can also see the finished outer structure of the ribbed dome.

Behind the house lies the most stunning part of the complex: the magnificent swimming pool with a rib-vaulted roof. Here, the beauty and poetry of brick and the structural system is clearly visible. The enormous size of the pool and its building allows the rhythm of the spanning structure: ribbed vaults punctured with circular skylights, to echo the steady rhythm of a swimmer below.

Traditional building methods are not for everyone. There are those who condemn this philosophy as regressive (even though it may be the most forward-thinking in terms of environmental concerns) or irrelevant. Then there are others who might not desire living in such a building, but can nevertheless respect the mastery of design that can only come from a deep understanding of structure, not a superficial application of "style".

In a 2010 Art Talk radio interview, KKM's youngest son, the artist Murad Khan Mumtaz explained the traditional philosophy that he, like his father and brother, architect Taimoor Khan Mumtaz adhere to:

"... I think it is also a matter of continuing a Tradition ... in a contemporary sense when you speak of Tradition we think of something which is already dead and buried, ... literally closed up in a museum. But for me Tradition is something, which is alive, and to keep it alive you have to practice it everyday. And art-making is one of [its] aspects ... but ... you also have to look at your environment, and your situation and your context ..."

Kamil Khan Mumtaz has been living his philosophy and practicing "Tradition", and in some cases, rediscovering it.

More about KKM's philosophy in an interview with Christopher Lydon for a series of podcasts called Another Pakistan, produced by Zarminae Ansari, a project of the Asia Society and The Watson Institute at Brown University:

<http://radioopensource.org/kamil-khan-mumtaz-bac-k-from-a-modernist-hell/>

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