



**Parallel Collisions - Karachi Biennale 2019**

**Echoes of Silence**

**Design of Silence - Bamyar Medical Facility**

**Islamabad Art Festival 2019**





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was 20 years ago.

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# Design of Silence

Bamyan Medical Facility, Afghanistan

TEXT | MARIA ASLAM

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## Project Details

**Architects**  
Arcop (Pvt) Ltd.

**Area**  
12312.0 Metres<sup>2</sup>

**Total Site Area**  
6.66 Acres

**Location**  
Bamyan Valley, Afghanistan

**Altitude**  
2,800M

**Population Of Bamyan Town**  
61,800

## Project Team

**Lead Architects**  
Yawar Jilani & Mahboob Khan

**Project Architect**  
Syed Muhammad Hasan

**Structural Consultants**  
Mushtaq & Bilal Consulting Engineers

**M&P Consultants**  
Y.h Associates

**Electrical Consultants**  
Eleken Associates

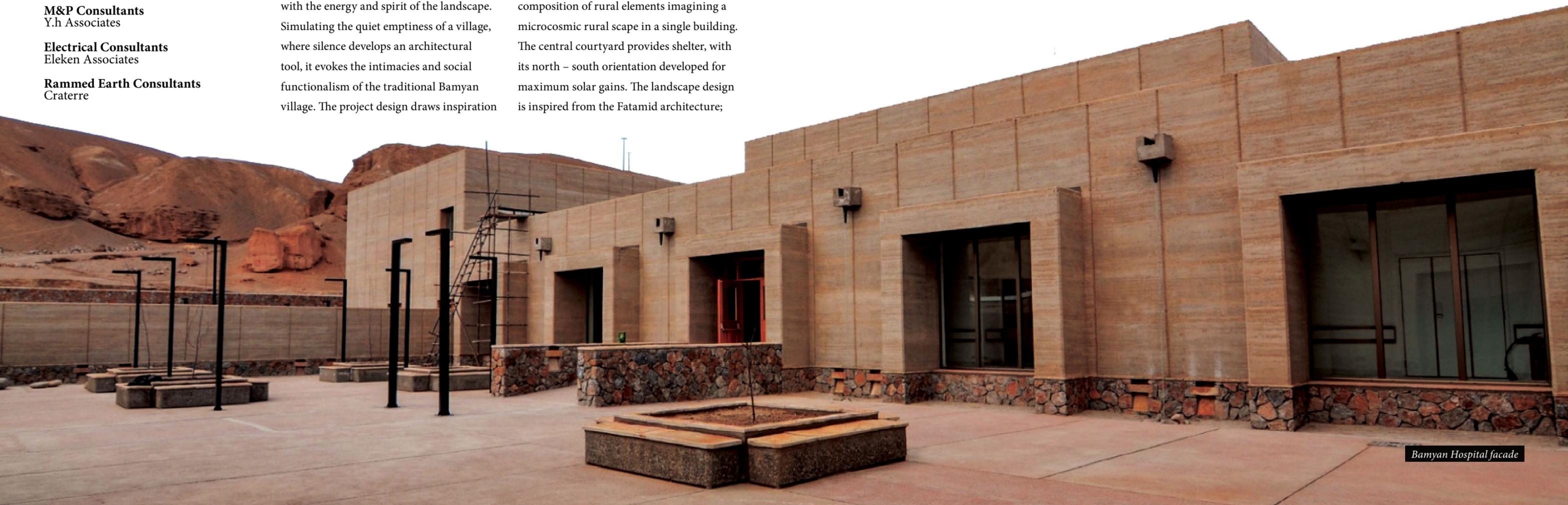
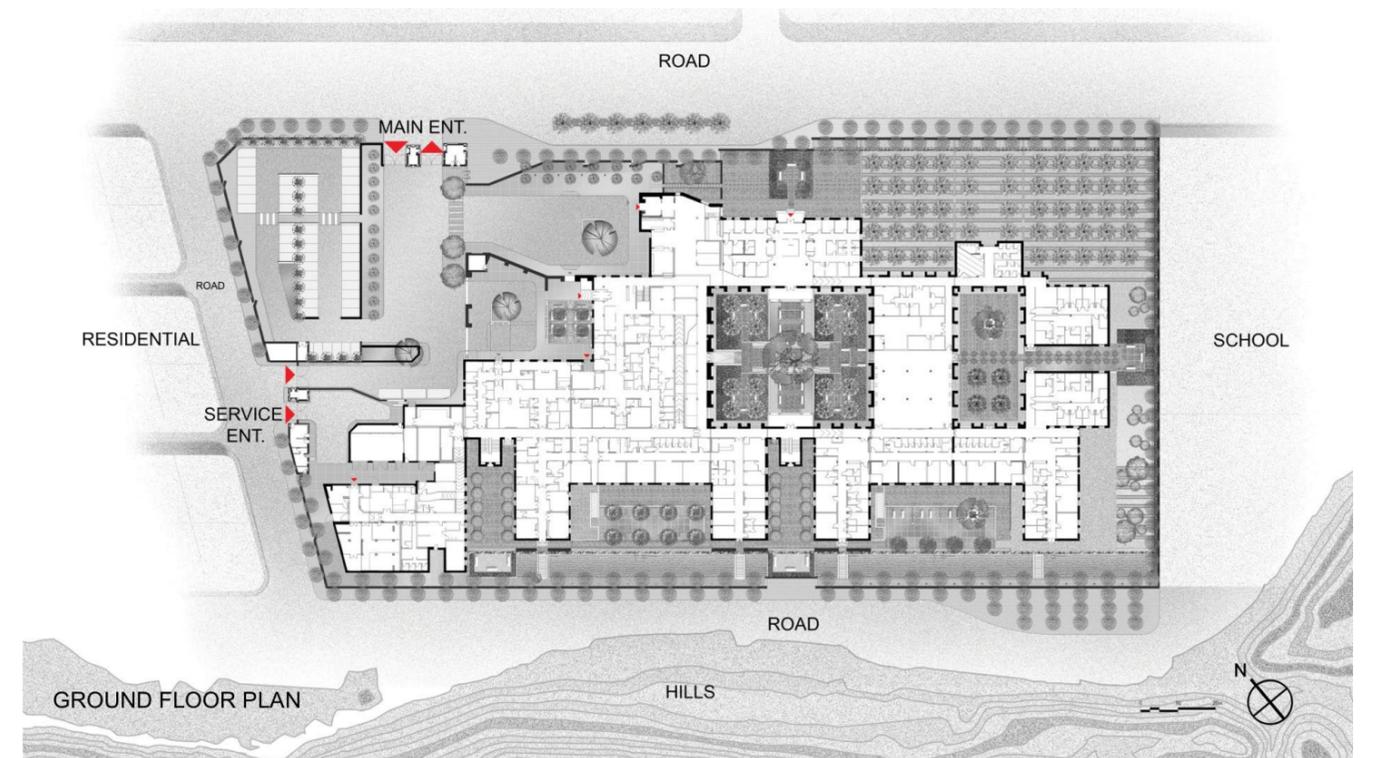
**Rammed Earth Consultants**  
Craterre

Medical institutes, research laboratories, and hospitals are structures that are unlikely to cross one's mind as a space to visit for recreation or even as a curiosity. However, there are some significant medical facilities that overpower the landscape with their poignant architecture. The embalming nature of the edifice humanizes the pain, suffering, and the alleviation that resonates within the walls of such structures.

This project is located in the Bamyan Valley in the Hazarajat region of Central Afghanistan. A rugged mountain terrain, that dictates the lives of its inhabitants in severity and stringent access to many life amenities. A landscape where the eye is used to the high mountains and rolling rocky grounds, but the heights reconcile with the energy and spirit of the landscape. Simulating the quiet emptiness of a village, where silence develops an architectural tool, it evokes the intimacies and social functionalism of the traditional Bamyan village. The project design draws inspiration

from the traditional methodologies of the built environment, while the simplicity of forms are derived from the local vernacular in the context of home and village settings.

Strategically placed within the village the biophilic architecture seems to grow from within the mountainous terrain and becomes part of the whole. The legacy of the ancient architecture of the region, dictated an architectural intervention drawing its roots and inspiration from basic fortress prototypes, archetypal forms relating to the origins of primitive architecture. Placed in the middle of a flat land within a rugged terrain the interior spaces are pushed to the sides forming courts and open spaces. The colours, complexity of derived spaces, and symbolism of form explored, formulate a composition of rural elements imagining a microcosmic rural scape in a single building. The central courtyard provides shelter, with its north – south orientation developed for maximum solar gains. The landscape design is inspired from the Fatamid architecture;



Bamyan Hospital facade

juxtaposing the two extremes of stark arid mountains and green valleys – a design methodology based on the tradition of Central Asian landscapes, Charbagh and water courts. The green spaces modulate the structure through reflection, light, and vegetation, while the stone and pigmented concrete echo the colours of the dry earth in which the building sits low, like fragments of an ancient fortress. The interplay of green and built spaces creates a mesmeric atmosphere, defining the building's character, reflecting the light and darkness that is emanated from its structure.



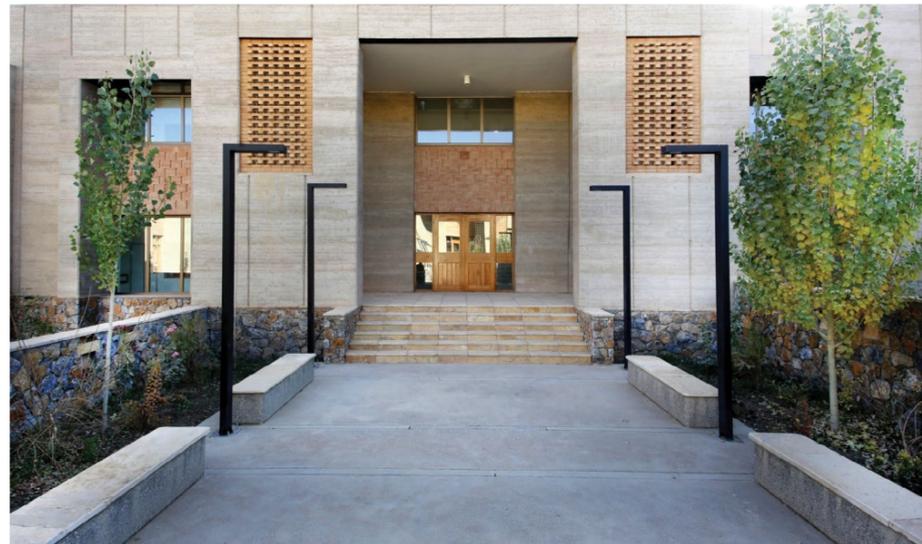
Aerial view of Courtyard

However, the design is conscious of sustainable parameters that is further accentuated by the use of indigenous vegetation and gravel as ground cover due to the paucity of water. The hybrid construction of rammed earth and stone meets the rigorous demands of seismic design for this particular high-risk area. Stone plinth enhances protection of the structure from moisture and erosion. Due to the extreme climate conditions, natural lighting and ventilation are the main guiding factors in the development of built spaces; courtyards screens, double glazed glass, and solid walls help achieve high insulative values. The sustainable parameter also includes solar power for power generation of the medical facility so that it is not incumbent on the state power.

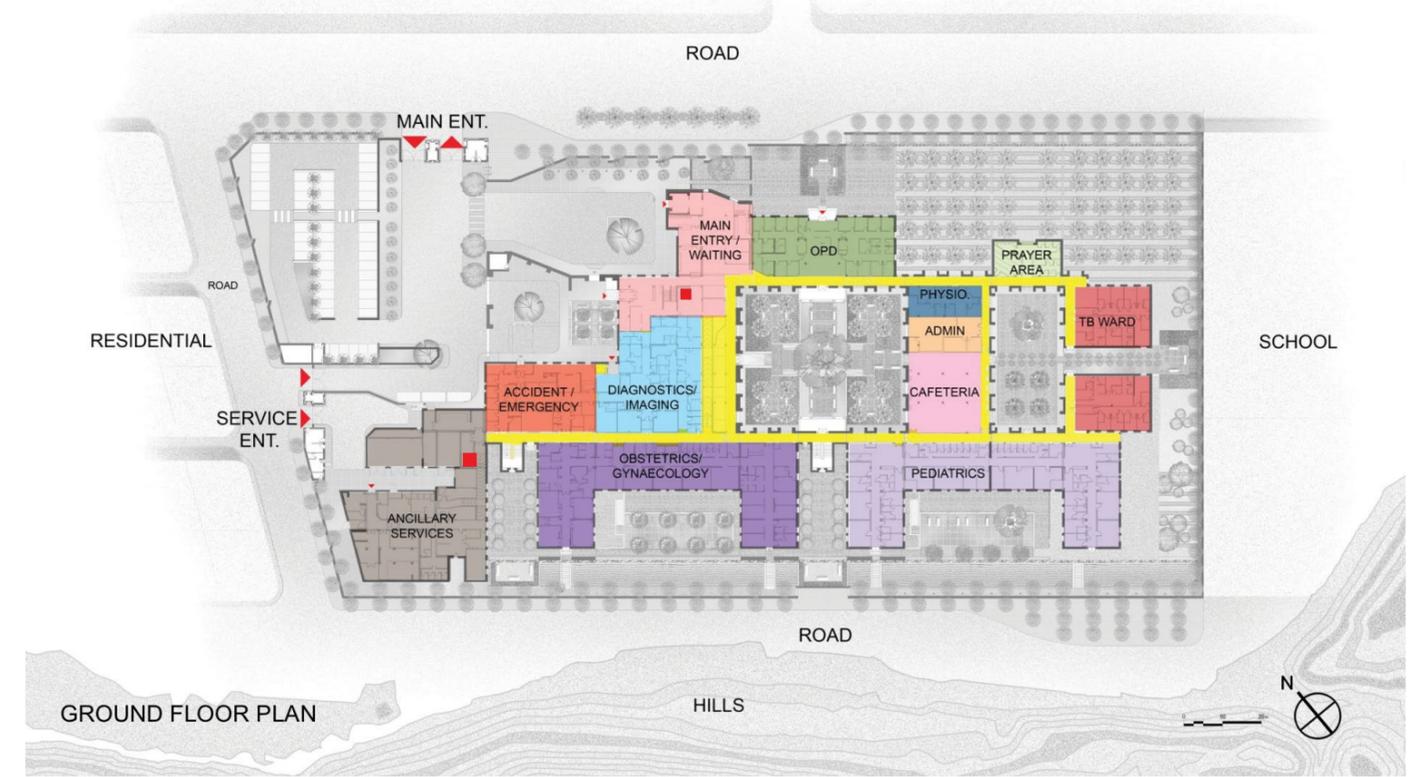
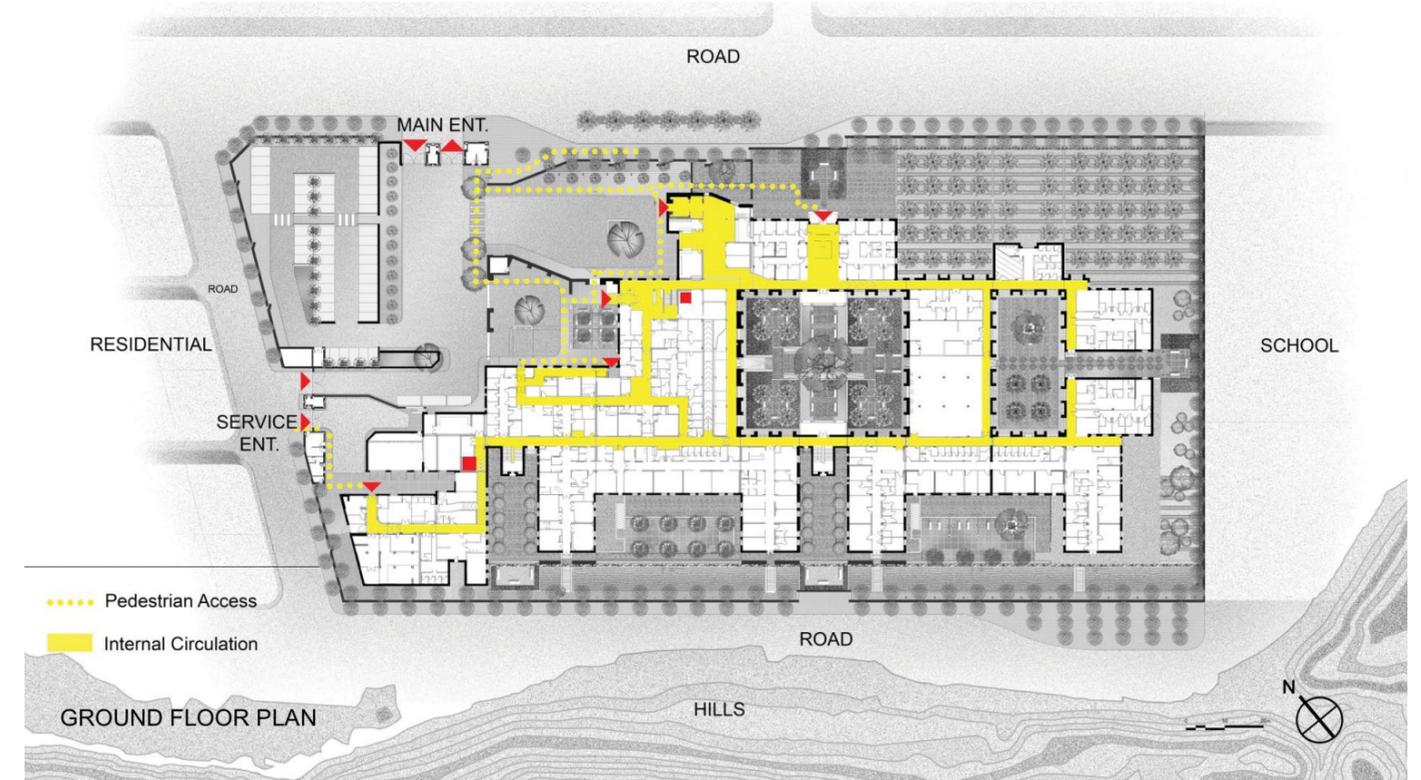


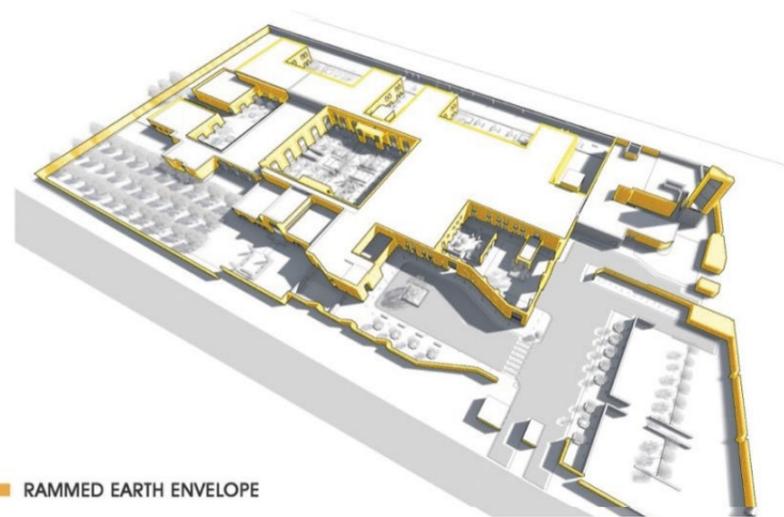
Interior Courtyard

The design is sensitive and coherent to the knowledge that Bamyan lacks technical skilled craftsmanship or labour, hence the architectural modulations of detailing are relatively simple. The edifice manifests its context to the situatedness within the terrain. Complexity and symbolism fuse into a composition of rural elements, imagining a



Entrance to one of the facility buildings





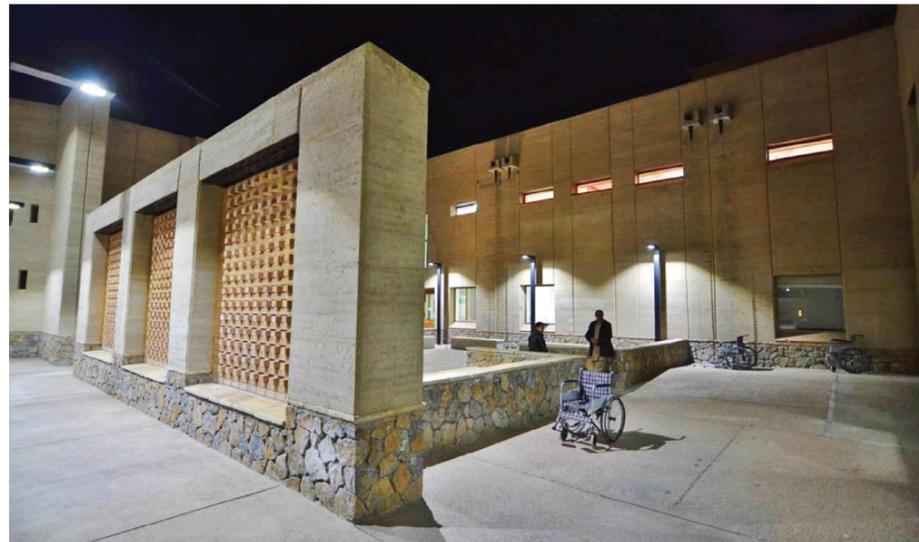
RAMMED EARTH ENVELOPE



The high tower microcosmic rural scape in a single building. Integrating existing exterior site elements with newly formed concrete structures, the project creates a funnel view towards the expansive landscape.



Rammed earth facade of the building



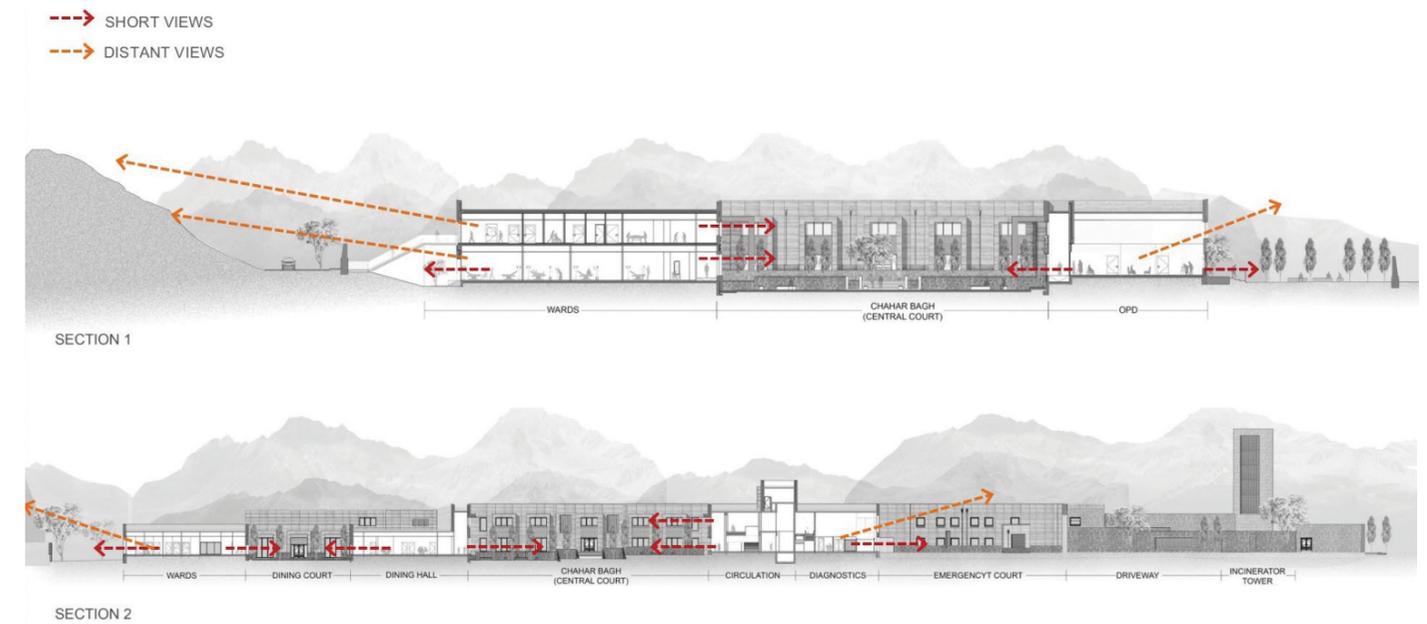
Interior Courtyard at night

Designed on a linear grid and layered sequence of a court, the project gently slopes 5 metres from its highest point at its south eastern corner, culminating at the lowest point in the north west that acts as the main entry to the medical facility. With a defined axis, the medical facility is laid out with distinct zones of public to private, with restricted areas placed at the rear for better care. Linear stone screen walls are theatrically placed, receiving and guiding with their tectonic language, acting like screens, passageways, and platonic solids that enhance the play of undulating shadow casting upon the green. The material palette is restrained resulting in a collection of dense and layered forms of varied composition. Different heights and a constant play of scale are used to blur the boundaries between foreground and background, while the space between outlines an intricate network of pavements and courtyards. The open areas

and the formal interventions of built spaces expose a hierarchy of glimpses towards the constructed and the surrounding natural landscape. The horizontality of the composition of this fortress is split by the high tower that stands out from the distance evoking the many taller peaks surrounding this magnificent mountainous landscape.

The project has a great significance in its architectural context primarily due to its design philosophy and ideology. The design team, comprising of Yawer Jillani and Mehboob Khan, admit they faced a daunting challenge undertaking this massive project. The momentous inhospitable site, the limited resources in building technology, and more importantly, the enormously discerning

client resulted in a sensitised and sustainable approach towards design, which is both a pragmatic and poetic rendering of a design language rooted to its land, the place, and inhabitants. The Bamyan hospital stands as an enclave of commonalty and a sanctuary in alleviating suffering of the region's population.



View of High Tower and Interior facade



Interior of Hallway



Hospital room interior



Women's waiting area separated through wood screen



Aerial view of Gents waiting area



Men's waiting area



Detail of wood screen in sitting area

**Maria Aslam** is a prolific writer, architectural historian, and environmental activist, working in the fields of interior design, architecture, and heritage conservation. As the founder and editor-in-chief of ADA Magazine, she has pioneered the ADA Awards, the first of its kind, in the disciplines of Architecture, Design, and Art. Alongside her architectural and interior design practice, ArchWorks, she is the chairperson of Pakistan's Institute of Interior Designers.



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