The conservation of Old Jeddah is part of a broader master plan embracing the entire city. The Old Town preservation programme pursues a twofold task:
- to save buildings of architectural interest;
- to upgrade the urban environment.

**Site**

The Old City covers an area of c. 1.5 km²; it is delimited to the west by the corniche and to the north, east and south by the King Abdul Aziz ring road. Most of the structures which make up the dense city fabric are less than 200 years old. They essentially consist of two, three and four-storey houses, some 19th century merchants’ mansions, caravanserais and mosques.

Until the early 50’s these inner town houses were inhabited by extended families. Following Jeddah’s spectacular growth prompted by increasing numbers of pilgrims and oil revenues, the local residents left their traditional abodes to move to newly built suburbs. The Old Town houses are now mainly (over)-occupied by a high proportion of single, male foreign workers who rent a room (or part of a room) from Saudi landlords.

**Functional Requirements**

After the introduction of modern building materials in the 50’s, the construction of traditional coral limestone ("kasba") houses was abandoned, and the Old City was in effect left to deteriorate. In the mid-70’s the Jeddah Municipality, headed by Mayor M.S. Farsi, appointed consultants R. Matthew & Johnson-Marshall to undertake a general upgrading of the area. This implied preserving the original heights and volumes of buildings, repairing façades and landscaping.

**Description**

To date the Municipality has renovated some 30 buildings and another 200 were repaired by their owners. Renovations can range from barely whitewashing façades and painting the traditional woodwork (masuwbiiyyas,
shtash and rawashin) to reinforce deteriorated substructures. It seems no major infra-structural work was undertaken as a survey conducted in 1979 showed that most households offered modern facilities (electricity, piped-in water, sewage). One of the main problems in Jeddah is decay caused by constant humidity and a high concentration of soluble salts, both in the air and ground. Another potential risk is the high water table.

Streets and pavements were covered with marble, granite and basalt slabs laid to form geometric patterns. However, this could in the long term endanger adjoining structures because these slabs are laid on a concrete bed and the underground moisture therefore infiltrates contiguous walls. Outdoor public spaces have been adorned with vegetal elements, fountains and street furniture (benches and lamp-posts - the latter look somewhat incongruous). The Municipality keeps a store of materials salvaged from ruined houses to be re-used in renovation works. Some government loans for renovation works are also made available.

**Project Significance**

The project has been successful in putting a halt to the destruction of the Old Town. It is also the first time in Saudi Arabia that such care has been devoted to the preservation of the architectural urban heritage. However, some ambiguity remains in that the area is still inhabited by low-ranking social groups and current residency issues have yet to be addressed. Adaptive re-use, now mainly limited to shops taking over street level floors of buildings, could be further developed.

**Construction**

The Municipality has endeavoured to lay down building regulations (as none existed when the Municipality was established); nevertheless, some building codes are still loose and not uniformly enforced. The materials and technology involved in the renovation works are local (lime plaster is made from burnt coral blocks and cement from clay taken from the lagoon). The Municipality strove to revive some declining crafts by appointing old moallans (master craftsmen). Foreign artisans (Tunisians) were also called upon to execute gypsum decoration and woodwork.