



ANDALOUS RESIDENCE





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Sousse, Tunisia, completed 1980. Client: Consortium Tuniso-Kowëitien de Développement. Architect: Serge Santelli.

Master Jury's Citation: For the search toward a contemporary expression of the structural principles underlying the traditional architecture. The simplicity and functional elegance of the design, the successful use of local architectural elements such as courtyards, interior gardens, pools, stream water, and of traditional materials such as tiles make this apartment hotel one of the best examples of the search for a new synthesis of the traditional and modern architectural vocabularies.

Particularly praiseworthy is the restraint with which materials and forms have been used and the subdued nature of the color scheme, which enable this group of buildings to achieve its imagery while avoiding pastiche.

Objectives. The design of the Andalous Residence, an apartment hotel in the Diar el-Andalous resort complex near Sousse, is simple and regular, and it avoids the falsely exotic character of neo-Moorish architecture now widespread in Tunisia. This was intended deliberately by the architect, whose objective was to achieve a contemporary expression of the structural principles that govern traditional Arab-Islamic architecture. He therefore avoided adding Moorish decorative features such as arches, sculptured capitals, and green tiles to the facades, believing that such additions correspond to standards that are essentially international and Western in origin.

Location. Located 140 kilometers south of Tunis in the newly created resort of Port el-Kantaoui, 7 kilometers north of Sousse, the Diar el-Andalous complex consists of a 282-room luxury hotel, two apartment hotels, and various recreational and entertainment facilities situated on 19 hectares. The 3.3-hectare site of the Andalous Residence is a gentle slope 300 meters from the sea.

Historical Background. Built on a Phoenician foundation, the city of Sousse revived at the end of the seventh century after

Pages 110–113: The Andalous Residence turns its back on a flat, featureless site by the sea to create its own architectural landscape of inner and outer interconnected courts, laid out with pools, channels, fountains, pergolas, and trees. The view at left, showing a sequence of courts, crosses the main axis of the central oblong court.



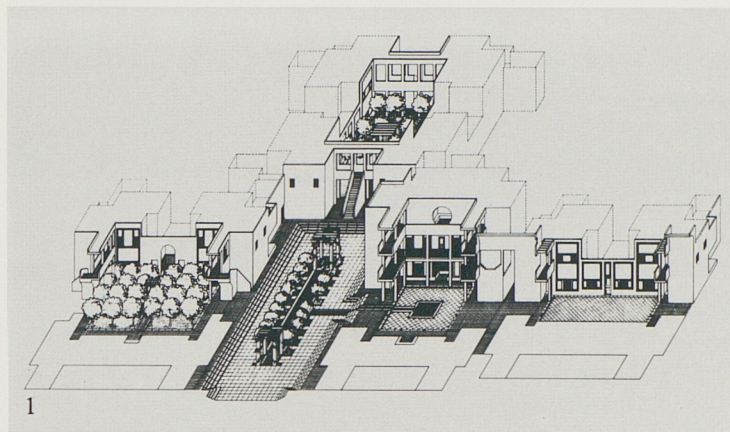
its destruction in Byzantine times. It developed under the Aghlabites and by the second half of the ninth century contained many fine public buildings and monuments, reflecting a prosperity derived from trade. This was interrupted during its subsequent history by Spain, France, and Venice. The modern city was damaged in the Second World War during the Tunisian campaign in 1942 and '43.

Local Architectural Character. Traditional Tunisian houses are designed around courtyards giving access to the rooms, none of which are connected with one another. Where an upper level exists, the rooms are connected by a gallery running around the four sides of the courtyard. All houses have usable terraces and roofs that are accessible. In traditional Tunisian Muslim homes, where privacy is all-important, the central courtyard cannot be reached by a straight path from the street door. Instead the hall imposes a zigzag route on visitors to prevent the interior of the house from being seen from the street. In larger houses the hall may also give access to service rooms or to secondary inside corridors.

Design and Construction. The relatively flat site limited the design options available to the architect. To take advantage

of the Mediterranean by giving the hotel rooms a sea view would have meant designing a tall building totally out of keeping with the horizontal lines of the site and its surroundings. An informal plan, ignoring the sea but reaching out into the landscape and making the most of the immediate environment, might have been a solution if the site had contained interesting physical features and not been an arid expanse dotted with a few olive trees.

The only approach was to make the project itself an architectural landscape that was at the same time in keeping



with its geographical and cultural setting. The architect achieved this by creating a new environment interesting and attractive enough to distract the user from the otherwise monotonous surroundings. The built area, about one-third of the plot, has sixteen studio apartments, thirty 2-room and seven 3-room apartments, a four-room restaurant, a bar, a terrace café, a reception area, and two other public rooms for guests. Offices and service facilities open onto a separate courtyard.

Plan. The three-story hotel is arranged around a series of inner and outer courtyards. The apartments are entered directly through the inner courtyards, which in turn link up with the outer ones. All the courtyards are connected along a main longitudinal axis, attached to which is a secondary network creating passages and sequences of spaces that recall courtyards and gardens in traditional Arab-Islamic palaces.

Paved and bordered by two or four porticoes similar to those in Tunisian *fundouks* (workshops), the outer courtyards are regular and simple in form—either square or rectangular. The size and form of the interior courtyards vary, but they are smaller than the outer ones, creating a more intimate atmo-

1, 2, 3: Flanked by trees and pergolas at each end, a long pool dominates the central court. At the center of each long side, porticoes, as in Tunisian *fundouks*, lead to smaller courts. Outside staircases lead to second-floor galleries, which in turn lead to the apartments. Small windows maintain privacy in the apartments, and recesses in the walls of the court provide built-in seating. The pool and steps are lined with traditional ceramic tiles and the smoothly rendered walls are painted white in the Mediterranean manner.

sphere. Some of the courtyards are paved and others planted with orange trees and jasmine. All the courtyards are treated as interior gardens, with such features as small streams, pools lined with traditional ceramic tiles, fountains, and pergolas. A small water channel links a square basin in one courtyard with a long basin of water in another. Most of the courtyards have built-in niches for seating, which offer satisfactory protection from the glare of the sun.

The Apartments. With the exception of the seven 3-room apartments, all the others have either one or two rooms. While one-room apartments are designed for up to three persons, the two-room ones can accommodate four or five persons and the three-room ones up to six. The rooms have French windows that open onto a private garden at ground-floor level or, in the case of the upper level, onto a private terrace protected by a high wall. Smaller windows with wooden *mashrabiya*s (latticework screens) open onto the inner courtyards. The private garden or terrace attached to each apartment is an important feature from the point of view of comfort. It allows the occupants to sunbathe and have a meal or a cool drink in the open air without being observed.

The design of the Andalous Residence creates subtle variations in the natural lighting from one place to another in the building. Luminosity decreases as one moves from the big courtyards located on the axis of the building to the smaller lateral courts and still farther into the apartments. There the light penetrates only through openings, all of which have *mashrabiya*s and curtains, allowing the occupant to obtain whatever intensity of light he desires.



Each apartment is equipped with a kitchenette, which includes a stove, a refrigerator, and all the necessary utensils, dishes, glassware, and cutlery. Household linen is provided, and the apartments are cleaned daily with a more thorough cleaning twice a week. The one-room apartments contain a shower, the two-room apartments a bathroom, and the three-room apartments both. Central heating is provided in winter and, although originally only the public rooms had air-conditioning in summer, all the apartments are now being equipped with it. Restaurant and bar facilities are provided for residence guests, who can also enjoy the services provided by the Diar el-Andalous complex, which include swimming pools, tennis courts, and discothèques.

Services. The residence provides full services independently from the rest of the Diar el-Andalous complex. It has its own service quarters consisting of a courtyard onto which the various service rooms open. These are not visible from the areas or traffic routes used by residence guests. There are two such rooms per floor for each courtyard, which makes service both efficient and discrete.

Security is the responsibility of a team of eight watchmen equipped with radios. The outside doors of the patios, made of wrought iron, are locked at night, leaving only the main entrance by the front office open.

Material, Structure, and Technology. The building is a bearing structure with outer walls of poured-in-place concrete 18 centimeters thick. While the mode of construction proposed by the architect was traditional stone and concrete blocks, the construction firm that won the contract preferred cast-concrete technology in order to save both money and time. Unfortunately these advantages were not realized. The work force, which had no experience with this new technology, had a difficult time adjusting the metal forms properly, with the result that the openings for doors and windows ended up being crooked. A considerable amount of time had to be spent in

straightening these openings and smoothing the walls, canceling out any time gained by the use of metal forms.

An inner skin of hollow brick is separated from the outer walls by a 4-centimeter air space; the complete wall measures 35 centimeters in thickness. The interior partitions are also of hollow brick, coated on both sides with cement mortar to a finished thickness of 10 centimeters.

The floors of the apartments are covered with blue and white tiles, and those of the salons and public rooms with gray marble or Agglo-marble—a locally quarried stone. The floor finishes for the galleries and passageways are pink cement tiles, stone, or marble.

The ceilings of the reception rooms and bars imitate the painted wooden ceilings of Tunisian houses, whereas living-room and bedroom ceilings in the apartments are plastered. The outside walls are covered with a rustic-style sprayed surface in ocher, and the interior wall surfaces, though originally rendered smooth and white, are being changed so that they will have a sprayed texture similar to that of the outside walls.

The windows of the inside courtyards are surrounded by bands of traditional tiles from Nabeul, accented by black borders like the decoration in the courtyards of traditional Arab houses. Some courtyards have niches covered with faience of the traditional *maadenoussi* type, whose brilliant texture and strong color contrast with the flat white surface of the surrounding masonry. The courtyard where guests are received is completely covered with faience in framed panels highlighting the outlines of the openings.

The windows, all of which are small in size and flush with the outside wall, are made up of two frames with attached inside shutters. When open, they are contained within the

4: Smaller courts have galleries with wooden balustrades. Windows are contained within a decorative framework of tiles from Nabeul edged with black borders. 5: One-room apartments have deep sleeping niches with built-in beds. 6: The wall around the entry to the reception area is completely covered with tiles.



thickness of the wall. On the outside, *mashrabiya*-type screens protect the windows and allow light to filter in. All the doors are of wood painted light-green with dark-green frames. The wooden shutters of the French windows are also painted green.

While some outside galleries are protected by white-painted concrete rails, others have wooden balustrades painted green. At the ends of some galleries *mashrabiya*-type wooden panels help protect the courtyards from wind and sun, and add to the decorations. These are also painted green.

Conclusion. The typical Tunisian hotel tends to be a monolithic block turned toward the sea. The Andalous Residence has avoided this stereotype successfully and has attained the

objective of the architect to build an apartment hotel agreeable to stay in, pleasing to the eye, and at the same time related to Tunisian architectural traditions.

The figures provided by the residence manager reveal a reasonably satisfactory level of occupancy: 45 per cent in 1981, rising to 54.44 per cent in 1982 for the nine months the hotel is open. Most of the hotel guests are European, with Tunisians making up about 2 per cent.

The project has been of considerable benefit locally. Only local materials were used in its construction, which was carried out entirely by Tunisians. The hotel is run by a Tunisian-Kuwaiti company employing a Tunisian staff, with extra employees, also local, hired for the summer.

