

# THE SAMARKAND REVITALIZATION

Ismail Serageldin gives his views on the outcome of the international architecture competition on ideas for the Ulugh Beg Cultural Centre. In the following pages we show the winning entries and 'honourable mentions'.

The International Jury, which met in Samarkand from 7 to 12 August, announced the five winners from among 685 entries received from all over the world, and selected eight honourable mentions. Each of the five winners will receive US\$ 30,000 at a ceremony to be held in Samarkand.

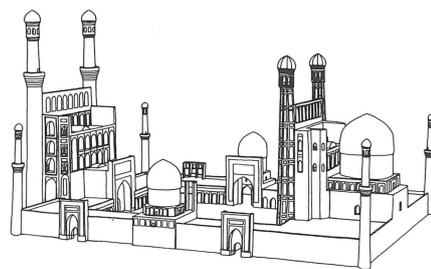
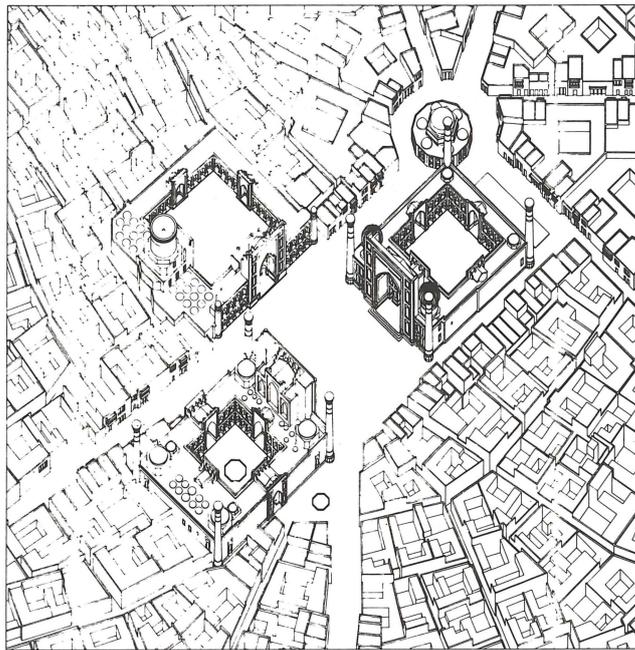
Participants in the competition presented their architectural proposals to develop a site of 25.5 hectares in the heart of the city. The site occupies the space between the spectacular Registan Complex and the old city of Samarkand on one side and the modern city with its motorways, boulevards and office buildings on the other. The bulk of the program revolves around a cultural complex to be located on the site. The competition, therefore, was also an excellent opportunity to articulate an approach to the whole problem of old cities, which Samarkand so beautifully illustrates.

The uniqueness of the site also introduced a specificity and a realism not usually encountered in an ideas competition. The need to promote dialogue and debate within the world-wide community of architects had to be balanced by providing guidance to the city of Samarkand.

## Framing the Problem

The essence of the *problématique* of this competition lay in the relationship between the old and the new, between the past and future. This relationship manifests itself at multiple levels:

*At the level of urban townscape.* The site is central to the master



Top: Axonometrics, hypothetical reconstruction of Registan Square by Klaus Herdeg. Above: Bibi Khanum Mosque – one of the largest mosques in the world, which is now only a ruin.

plan of the city. How does the proposed scheme relate to the old city and to the new? How does it blend with the surrounding traffic patterns and land uses?

*At the level of scale.* The treatment of the spaces and buildings on the site must relate to the Registan, to the pattern of the old city with its mosaic of *mohallas* and private courtyards, and to the larger modern geometry of the automobile and the high-rise.

*At the level of texture.* Urban

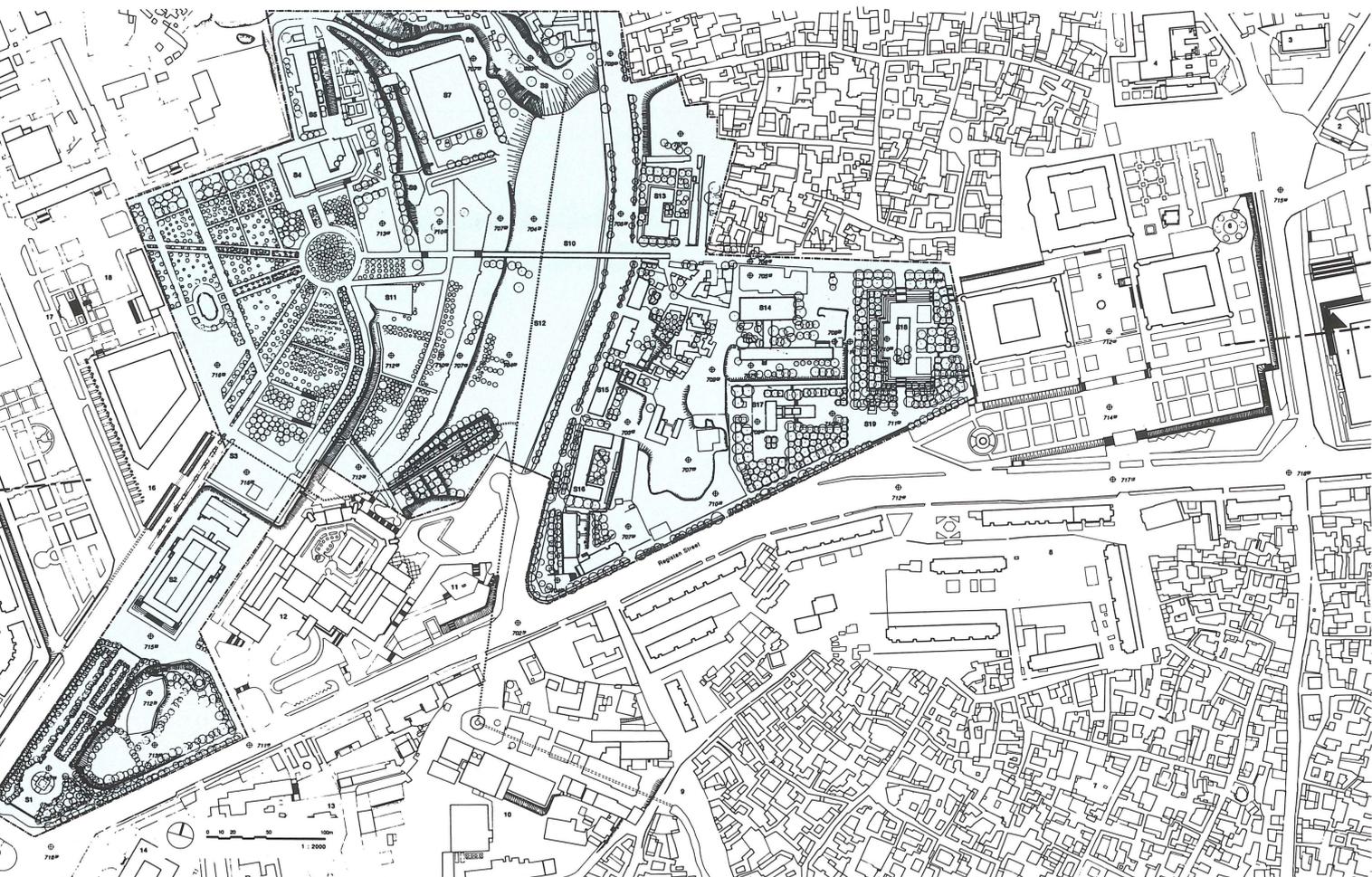
texture cannot be examined only in terms of scale and form. Forms reflect lifestyles of human beings and families. Their patterns of work and leisure, their social interactions and social rituals are all part of a living reality of which the built form is but one dimension. Until recently the *mohallas* were derided as archaic relics left behind by the modern city. Today an increasing number of families are reviving *mohallas* grouped around mosque, *chaikhana* and

school as a more desirable way of life.

*At the level of the architectural language.* The modern buildings abutting the site are totally different from the traditional Timurid architecture or even the modest *mohallas*. The architectural language, in both scale and vocabulary, cannot merely copy the old style. But does it adapt to it or ignore it? Is there creativity and imagination in the approach selected? Does the scheme respond to the uniqueness of its site (next to the Registan)? In other words, does its architectural language make a compelling statement? Since an important criterion of the competition was the manner in which the world-class heritage is treated, the Jury asked whether a scheme enhances Samarkand's unique heritage or demeans it. The Registan was built over two centuries. The Sher-Dor and Tila Kari Madrassas enhance the original Ulugh Beg Madrasa, creating a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. Can we build today next to the Registan in a manner that will enhance it?

*At the level of dialogue among past, present and future.* The Registan is, without doubt, one of the masterpieces of world architecture. It cannot be taken lightly in any composition. Yet, respect for the Registan, and for Samarkand's architectural heritage, should not engender pale copies of its splendour. Thus, can the design find the right balance to link these two worlds? To separate them? To bridge them?

From scale, to materials, to architectural language, to functional uses – in each



**Existing site plan 1:2000 :** 1. Museum; 2. Choi Khana; 3. Departmental store; 4. Restaurant; 5. Registan Square; 6. Chor-Su (Domed Market); 7. Mohalla (traditional high density courtyard housing); 8. Apartment blocks; 9. Water stream; 10. Factories & workshops; 11. Statue of Navoi & Djami (poets); 12. A 500-bed hotel for Intourist under construction; 13. "Rukhabad" Mausoleum of Burhan Al-Din Sagarji, 15th century; 14. Restaurant; 15. University hostel blocks; 16. Water channel; 17. Statue of Lenin; 18. Administrative complex.

**Site: - - - Site boundary:** S1. Statue of Yuldash Akhunbabayev (first president of Uzbekistan); S2. Opera theatre - capacity 1000 seats; S3. Underground water channel; S4. Restaurant & wedding reception hall; S5. Regional architects office; S6. Remains of Timurid citadel wall; S7. Garage; S8. Water Stream; S9. Remains of water channel and Hauz (14th-16th century); S10. Pedestrian overbridge; S11. Remains of bath house of Emir of Bokhara (18th-19th century); S12. Underground water channel; S13. Administration office; S14. School for 800 students; S15. 4 apartment blocks; S16. Hostel for 400 students; S17. Garden; S18. Garden; S19. Statue of singers & musicians.

### The Jury:

Ismail Serageldin  
Sabir Adilov  
Charles Correa  
Abdelwahed El-Wakil  
Yuri Gnedovsky  
Yuri Platonov  
Nematjan Sadikov

dimension, linking the past to the future is at the core of any solution.

A successful design must fuse all of these, including siting, form and scale, to create a sense of place. An effective architectural statement is seldom achieved by slavishly copying the past, nor by ignoring the regional heritage. It is at this juncture of innovation and authenticity that tradition and modernity meet and are resolved.

All five winners met these criteria and showed a spectrum of ideas ranging from a design that is almost totally landscape (entry 219), to putting delicate architectural elements in the landscape (entry 101), to one that clearly articulates the park and the city (entry 543), to a reaffirmation

of the urban texture and an architectural elaboration of the open spaces (entry 424), to a complete recreation of the old city pattern enveloping Registan Square (entry 104). Despite their range, these solutions all show sensitivity and seriousness in dealing with Samarkand's unique heritage and lay the basis for the revitalization of the city's centre.

The eight honourable mentions fall short of the high standards of the five winners but are sufficiently outstanding to have been singled out from the remaining 672 projects. The honourable mentions also highlight the diversity of approaches and ideas submitted for consideration.

When the envelopes were opened and the names became known, the Jury was delighted that many of the winners are relatively unknown architects. The competition served one of its functions by giving their talents international recognition.

The Jury was also delighted by the geographic breadth represented by the winners and honourable mentions.

They are a testimonial to the global appeal of Samarkand and to the world-wide availability of talent.

Two observations deserve to be noted. First, none of the winners was really working in the developing world generally, nor the Muslim world specifically. Second, a number of distinguished names were not among the selected projects. Both of these observations are mitigated by the closeness of the decision around the honourable mentions retained and by the preferences of the Jury to retain only the best representative of a particular solution. Each of the winners, therefore, represents a set of similar solutions, some of which were extremely close.

### Conclusions

Where does all this leave Samarkand and the practice of architecture in contemporary Muslim societies?

For Samarkand, the makings of a great and enriching debate have been provided. What ultimately gets built and when, clearly will depend on financial and economic deve-

*Above: Site information.*

lopments in the country and the region. But the Soviet and Uzbek Unions of Architects and The Aga Khan Trust for Culture must be congratulated for having made this tremendous contribution to empowering the people of Samarkand to re-engage forcefully in a dialogue with their history and their future.

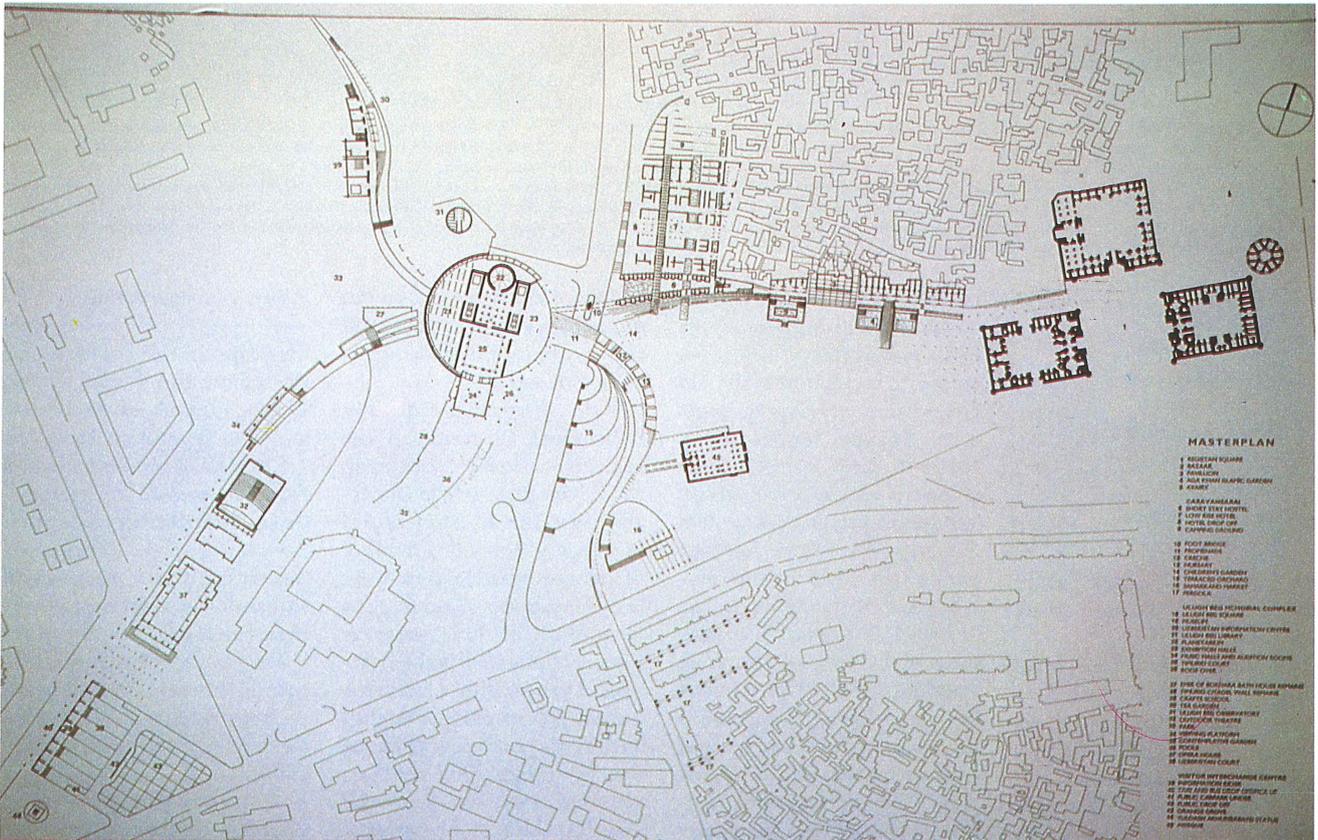
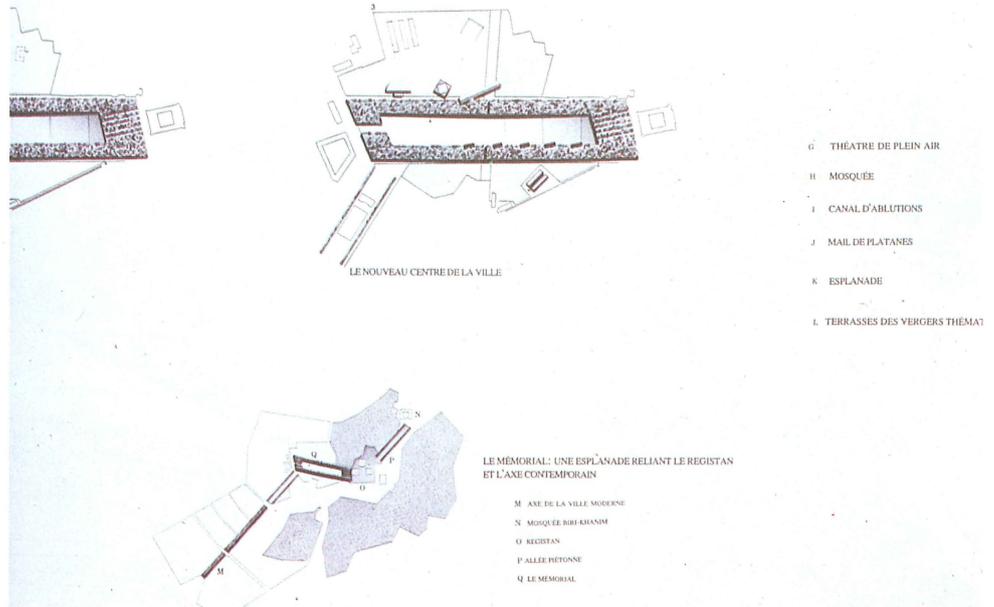
For the practice of architecture in Muslim societies, the message is mixed: the tremendous variety and vitality of the submissions, especially by a youthful upcoming generation of architects from all over the world, augur well for the future. But the continuing difficulty of developing an architectural language that can successfully speak to the present and the future without breaking its discourse with the heritage shows that the challenge is still there.

ISMAIL SERAGELDIN, ARCHITECT AND PLANNER, IS DIRECTOR, TECHNICAL DEPARTMENT, AFRICA REGION, THE WORLD BANK.

The Winners

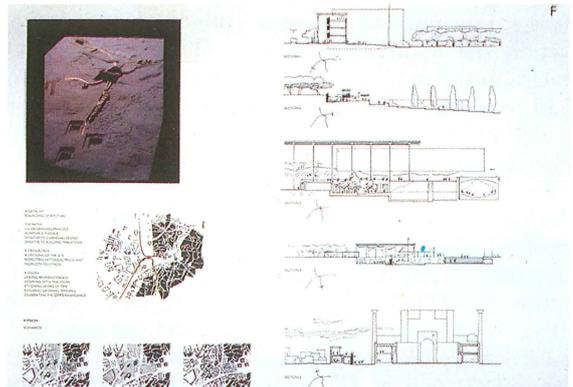
Patrick Berger, France

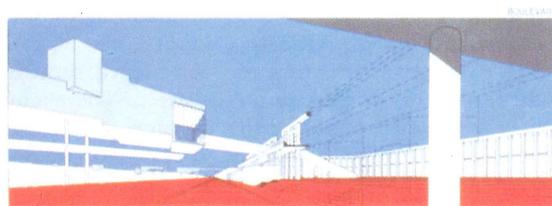
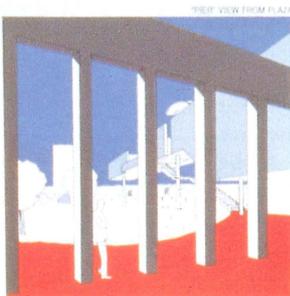
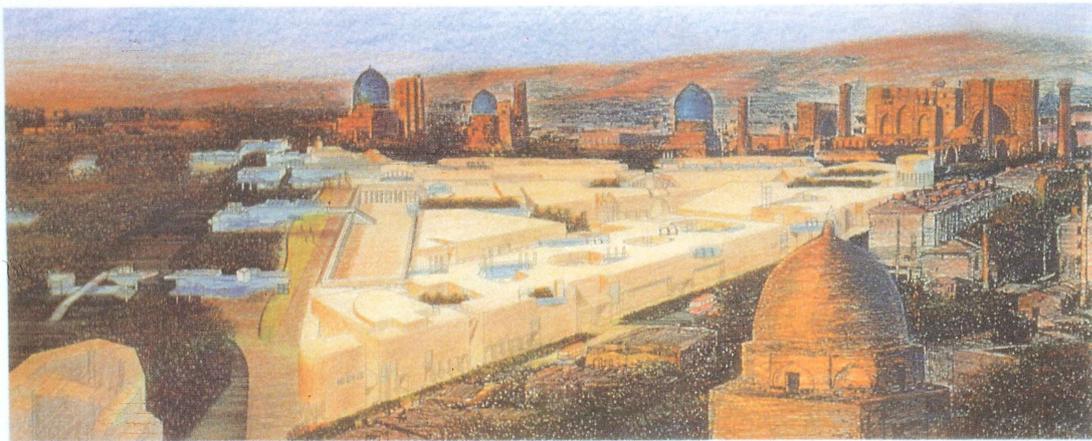
219 The link between the old and the new is created by a vast esplanade surrounded by trees. The modest buildings are sparse and scattered artistically throughout the landscaped park. The esplanade itself is the monument to Ulugh Beg and provides a space of transition, even purification, between the experiences of the old city and the new. On the scale of the city, the memorial relates the Registan to the axis of the modern city. Although the buildings are unstudied (the mosque orientation is off), the clarity, simplicity and beauty of the design and the modesty of using trees and landscaping to make such a statement made this entry a clear winner.



Studio 333  
(Stephen McDougall),  
United Kingdom

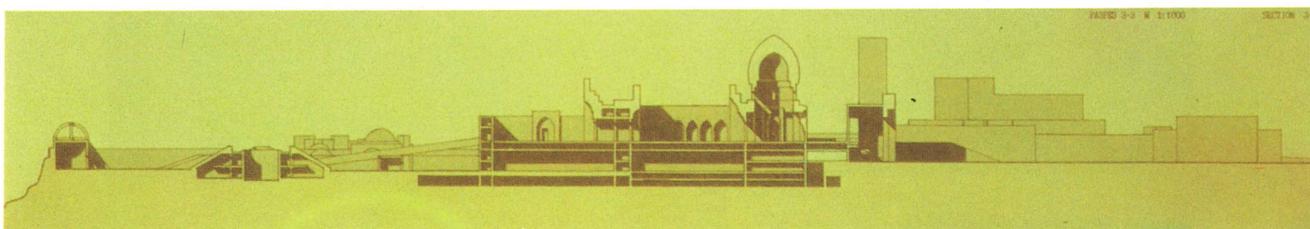
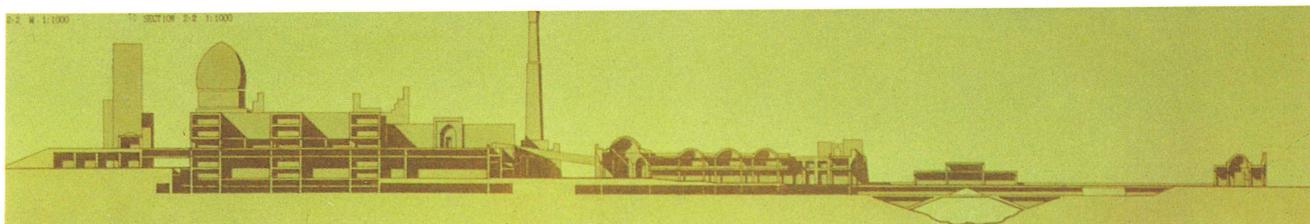
101 A simple central focal element with four gently curving links to a variety of small, elegant, unobtrusive and inviting structures is placed within a large archaeological park. The refined treatment of the axis linking the Registan to the central Ulugh Beg complex is particularly noteworthy.





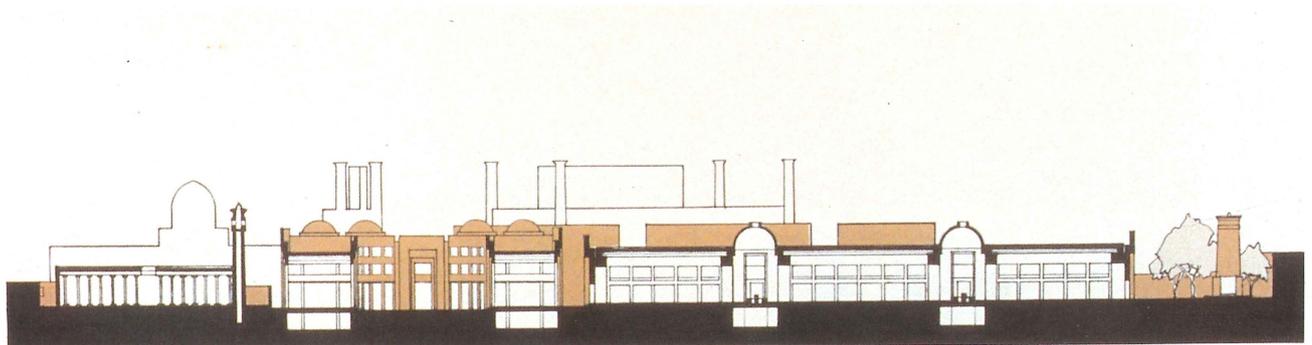
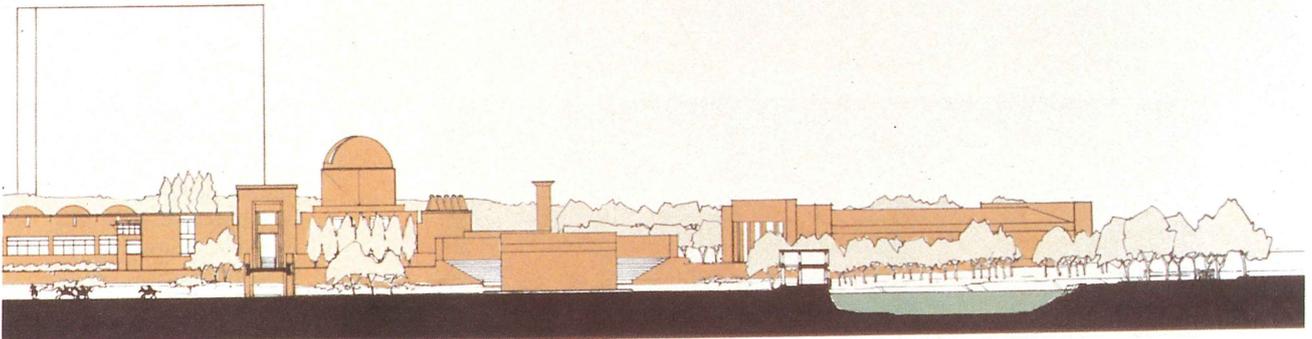
**Ohno Laboratory (Hidetoshi Ohno), Japan**  
 543 The winning idea creates a park on the west interspersed with a few buildings and a solid urban tissue on the east interspersed with a variety of spaces larger, more modern and different from the traditional tissue but in

harmony with the scale of and not offensive to the Registan. It is indeed a city in the park and a park in the city. The appealing idea marked it as a winner, even though the distribution of functions within the volumes must be rethought if it is to be developed beyond an idea.



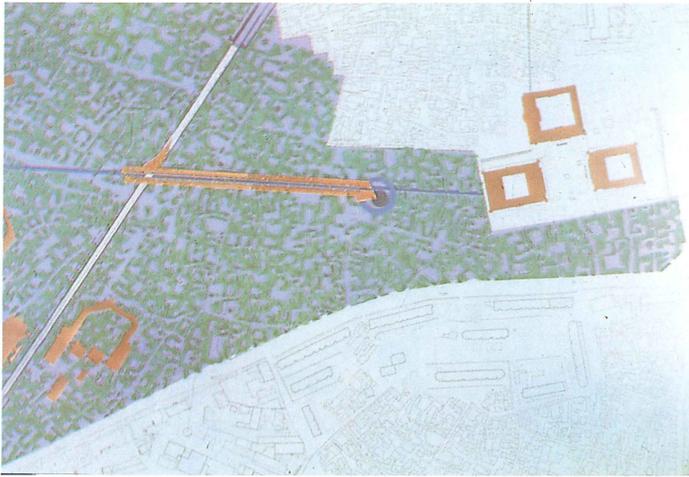
**ARCSIM**  
**(Alexander Larin), USSR**  
 424 A sensitive recreation of the texture of the old city on the eastern side is linked by an exquisite transitional bridge over Dagbit Street to an allegorical recreation of the citadel on the western side to create

an urban composition of great clarity. The link to the city may leave something to be desired. The exquisite architectural treatments, although confined to a traditional architectural vocabulary, speak of great mastery of architectural technique.



**Faruk Yorgancioglu and Kaya Arikoglu, USA**  
 104 This is a very strong statement about recreating the urban context of the old city affirming its strong edge along Dagbit Street, enveloping the Registan Square as it used to be, and recreating the sense of discovery of open spaces in the Old Islamic city. The treat-

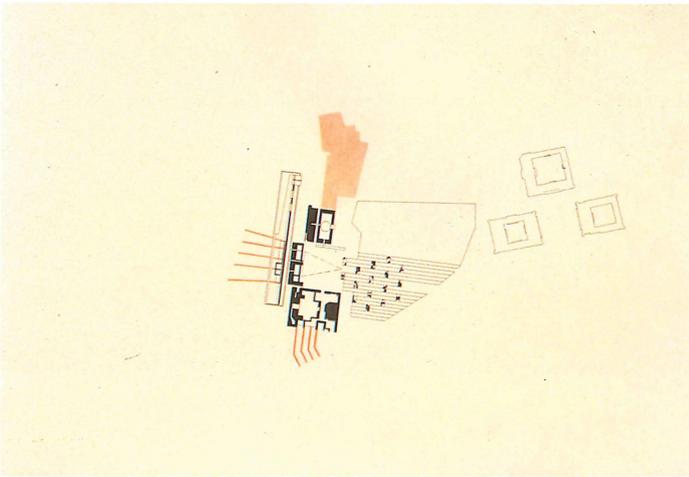
ment on the west shifts scale and uses landscaping to make the transition to the modern city. The bridge over the park stops abruptly on Dagbit Street rather than linking directly to the restructured old city. However, the clarity of the town planning statement is exceptionally powerful.



#### Honourable Mentions

##### **Olavi Koponen and Ilkka Tukiainen, Finland**

354 A single golden strip floating on a forest of trees points to the Registan Square. Simple, clear and removed from directly impinging on the majesty of the monuments, the boldness of the gesture imparts an almost surrealistic quality to the scheme.



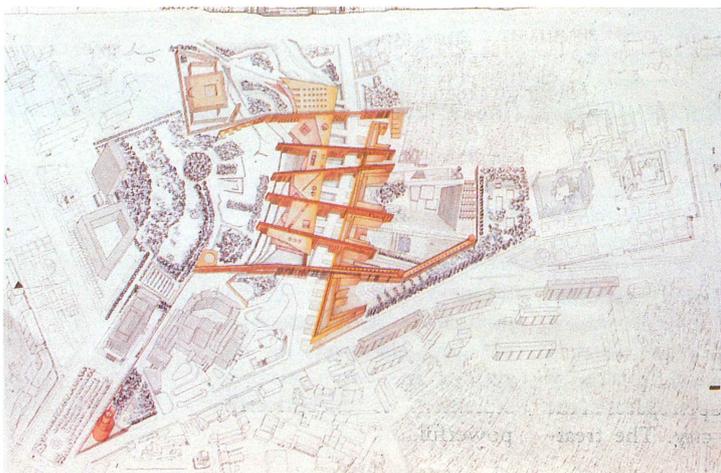
##### **Yves Weinand, Belgium**

131 An exceptionally sensitive infill with the modern buildings articulates a 'city-wall' function that encloses all activity on the eastern side of the site but would block the view of the Registan from the park on the west.



##### **Hans Cometti and Dieter Geissbühler, Switzerland**

415 The large modern structure of the Ulugh Beg Centre is suppressed to respect the Registan complex, and the topography plays a primordial role in the articulation of the scheme. The rigid large-scale geometry of the links is not sensitive enough to the human scale of the old city.

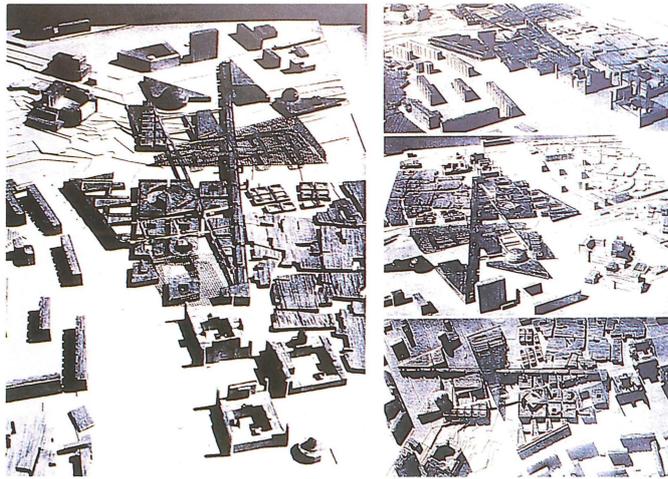


##### **Claudio Sgarbi, Italy**

766 This bold proposal would cross the ravine with a number of pedestrian bridges that intersect the buildings laid out in the ravine. Playful light patterns within the bridges and offset gardens between them and the Registan round out the keys to the composition. The hardness of the geometry and the narrowness of the pedestrian bridges keep it at the level of idea rather than architectural language.

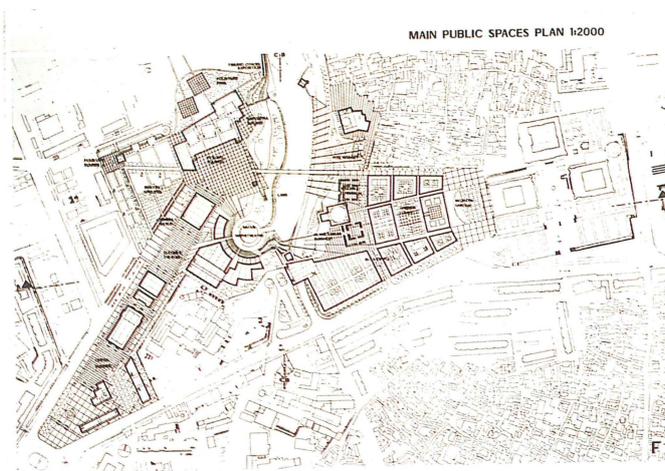
**Santa-Rita Arquitectos Lda,  
Portugal**

309 A wilful assertion of the major east-west axis uses a bold geometry to dispose the buildings and to articulate the linkage between the different scales and axes of the modern and the old points of interest. The architectural language in three dimensions does not come across as clearly as the bold geometry.



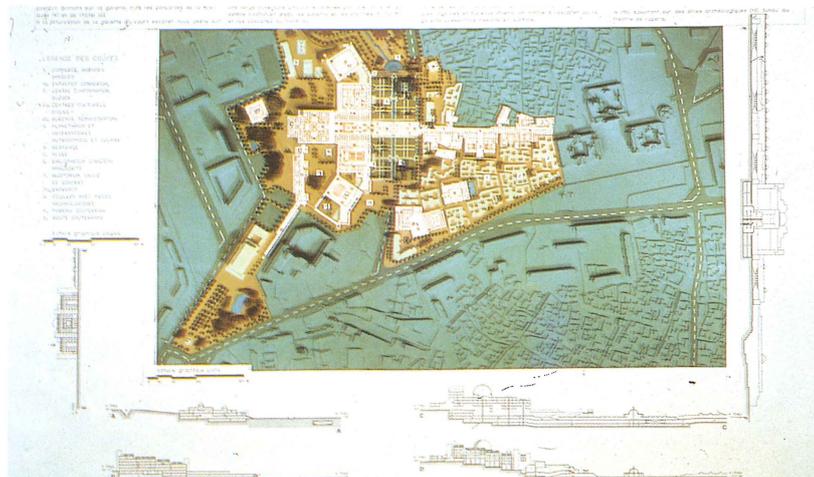
**Michal Tomanek, Poland**

642 In this clear two-axis composition, the hub is articulated by plazas. The modern buildings on the side of the old city are not as convincing as the designs of the plazas, but they are offset from Registan Square and are kept at a very modest scale.



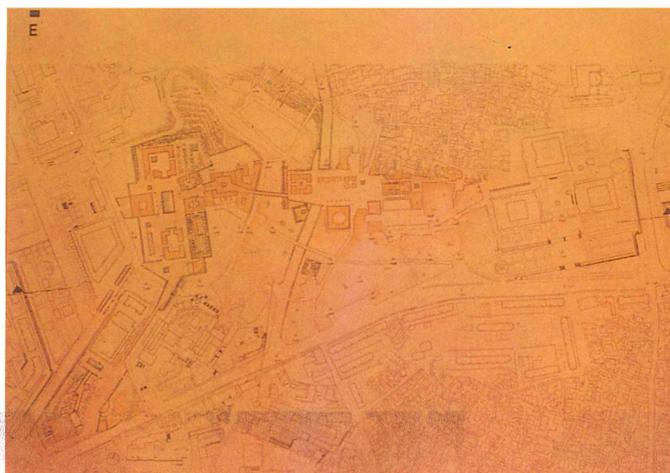
**Giuseppe Cappochin and  
Giovanni Comparini, Italy**

375 The sensitive treatment of the site with a thoroughly modern architectural vocabulary does not jar in scale or disposition with the monuments and the character of the old city. The geometry of the main axis is not as sensitive as the rest of the scheme would lead us to expect.



**Eric Torcq, France**

367 An exceptionally beautiful episodic treatment of spaces and pedestrian walkways links the Registan to the rest of the project and terminates at the southern tip of the site. The composition reflects traditional urban design patterns. The quality of the graphics and some of the architectural designs do not do full justice to the scheme.



The above captions were edited by  
Ismail Serageldin from the Jury  
report. 