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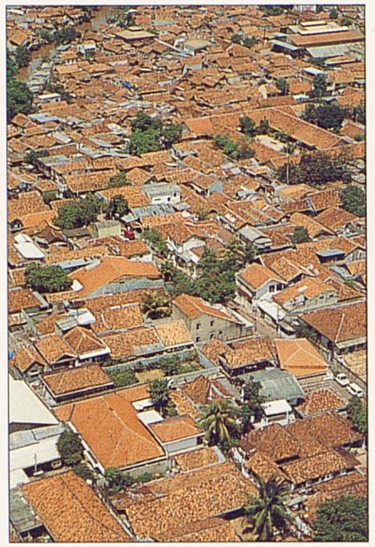
QUALITY IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND THE THIRD WORLD REALITY

It was the novel vision of His Highness the Aga Khan to contribute to the quality of the built environment by recognizing the achievements of the institutions and individuals whose efforts deserved to be encouraged and brought to the attention of a wider public as possible solutions to the continuing deterioration of the built environment. An important decision was to situate this endeavour within the realm of the architectural profession. Thus began a reciprocal and symbiotic relationship between the architectural profession in the Muslim World and the Award for Architecture, which has been continuously enriched since 1977.

When the Aga Khan Award for Architecture was announced, the architectural profession and all aspects of the built environment were highly complex and polarised. On one extreme, the newly emerging priorities of oil-rich countries sought to provide the very best infrastructure and architecture for their expanding cities; and on the other, at the fringes of hope, hundreds of millions in cities in Asia and Africa sought basic rights of shelter and mere survival. At both extremes, architecture was seen as an obvious solution but its definition and scope were different, and required re-formulation.

"A Search for Excellence" and "Quality of the Built Environment" were key expressions that guided the establishment of the Award. A meticulous, thoroughly conceived structure was devised at the Award's inception and was based on universal principles. The members of the first Steering Committee were the foremost practitioners and experts in the related fields of architecture, and highly committed. They envisaged the Award as a solid institution capable of enduring the changes of time, and tailored its procedures to include a process of evaluation that would be informed, credible, and - most importantly - independent. Therefore, the institution could incorporate the views, and sometimes the controversies, of changing, cyclical judgments and temporal statements to which the various juries,



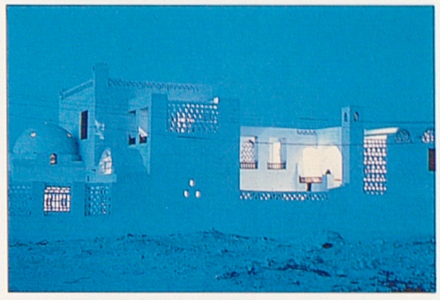
FROM ABOVE: The Kampung Improvement Programme, Jakarta; Sherefudin's White Mosque, Visoko, Bosnia, Architect: U. Zlatko

sovereign in their mandate, would contribute. The decisions of each jury are presented to the widest possible forum, in order to stimulate open, critical debate. Accordingly, jury members are selected with particular care in order to reflect the current thinking of architecture on a world-wide scale, as well as to ensure quality, concern, and effectiveness.

To facilitate and enhance this thinking and to reinforce the intellectual tenets of the Award, a series of seminars were organized to explore and voice opinions in an academic forum; collectively, these seminars were later described as the Award's "Space for Freedom". Seminars remained thematic, in order to enable pertinent issues to be addressed in a geographical and societal context.

In 1980, the first cycle Master Jury identified fifteen winning projects. Their decision was a breakthrough in the broadening of the boundaries of architecture which, at that time, was confined to a classical definition dating back to the Renaissance. Ideas and concerns such as the problems of poverty and the pressing reality of informal housing in big towns have always attracted the attention of architects, but never as part of professional discourse. These issues formed part of their humanitarian concerns as fragments of contemporary reality that disfigured the urban environment. Contextualism was a popular theme, but mostly as an elitist attitude seeking to re-instate the grandeur of the scarred urban fabric of European cities. Alternative technology was an emerging idea and concern, but was always kept aside as a marginal issue that did not enter into the mainstream of architectural discourse. The Kampung Improvement Programme in Jakarta, Indonesia, the Medical Centre in Mopti, Mali, and the Agricultural Training Centre in Dakar, Senegal, were three projects premiated - and proudly acclaimed as examples of excellence - that otherwise would have been overlooked.

In addition to these, the work of a master, Hassan Fathy, and of his pupil, the designer of Halawa House, Agamy, Egypt, showed the great potential of traditional architecture, design and building practices, and brought them to the fore of the international architectural discourse. Appreciation and acceptance of traditional building systems had previously been limited to the architectural research media, but had never been



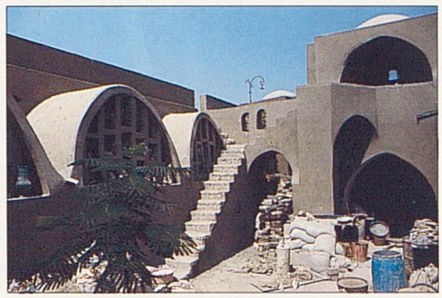
ABOVE: The Medical Centre, Mopti, Mali; Halawa House, Agamy, Egypt; Hajj Terminal, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Architect: Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill

so forcefully and so visibly recognized as they were by the Award in 1980. Appreciation of the contemporary idioms of architecture was also sentient but was eclipsed by a strong message that came to be identified as new priorities for the architecture of Muslim societies.

The second Master Jury, in 1983, referred substantially to the precedent established in 1980, and maintained a similar discipline of thought. In doing so, they did not hesitate to strive towards a more encouraging message for contemporary expressions wherever they felt that such efforts were appropriate to the indigenous realities of particular regions. The "hi-tech", state of the art Hajj Terminal in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and the unprecedented, free expressionism of Sherefudin's White Mosque in Visoko, Bosnia, securely placed the jury's debate on the cutting edge of contemporaneity. Within the same spectrum of decisions, the jury recognized the traditional idiom in its most pure sense and authentic form by premiating the Great Mosque of Niono in Mali. The same jury also made strong allusions to expressions of traditional form meeting the contemporary reality, as in the Ramses Wissa Wassef Arts Centre in Cairo, Egypt, and the Çakirhan House in Akyaka, Turkey.

The deliberate decisions of the third jury, in 1986, were very strong and indicated a new commitment as two members of the jury made dissenting statements. The jury decried the ills of the Modern Movement and celebrated the achievements of popular culture, traditional building and relevant contemporaneity in an urban context. The Bhong Mosque in Bhong, Pakistan, is an expression of popular building form, the Yaama Mosque in Tahoua, Niger, is a manifestation of uninhibited expression of sculptural form, and the Social Security Complex in Istanbul, Turkey, is a mature example of contextual architecture thoughtfully sited in the old city of Istanbul; all were highlights of the much-debated decisions of the 1986 Master Jury. The jury did not reach unanimous agreement, and the dissenting views voiced equally strong counter arguments.

The 1989 jury encompassed the widest range of architectural approaches. Their decisions raised considerable interest, from the point of view of the scope of the societal aspects of architecture, as well as the span of technology - from the most

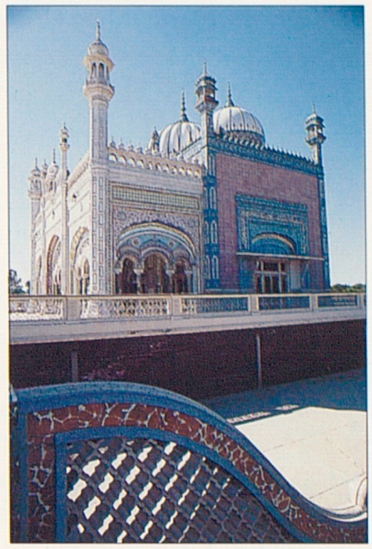


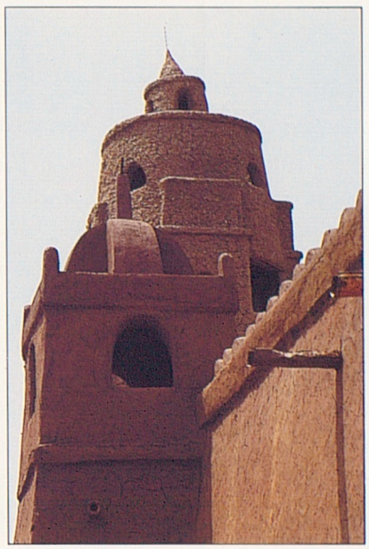
FROM ABOVE: Great Mosque of Niono, Mali, Architect: Lassiné Minta; Ramses Wissa Wassef Arts Centre, near Cairo, Egypt, Architect: Ramses Wissa Wassef; Nail Çakirhan House, Akyaka, Turkey, Architect: Nail Çakirhan

rudimentary to the most sophisticated. The Grameen Bank Housing in Bangladesh aimed to provide dependable shelter in cyclone-prone areas, and affordable housing through a credit mechanism that enabled access to the basics of intelligently designed house types. It was contrasted with a steel and glass cultural centre, the Arab World Institute in Paris, France, with fine finishes and totally mechanised building systems. By doing so, not only was good architectural quality redefined within particular contexts, but the reality of rural areas, where almost two-thirds of the Muslim World reside, was addressed, as was the present-day reality of Muslims living outside their home countries. The jury also pointed towards important new discoveries, such as the Hayy Assafarat Landscaping in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where the provision of greenery and vegetation in a desert climate was achieved with minimal or no irrigation.

All four juries in the past have recognized architectural quality and have presented a wide array of alternatives with which architects working in the Muslim world may enrich their thinking and design approaches. Most importantly, the collective juries have posed the critical re-questioning of design priorities in the light of a new architectural discourse which has been nurtured, developed and disseminated under the auspices of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. Many of these projects soon met with world-wide acceptance and were acknowledged as valid solutions to problems of a similar nature. The Residence Andalous in Sousse, Tunisia, and Mughal Hotel in Agra, India, the Tanjong Jara Hotel in Kuala Trengganu, Malaysia, and the Courtyard Houses in Agadir, Morocco, are among the projects which have had a wide impact upon many architects world-wide.

This year, 1992, marks the fifth cycle of the Award, with forty-eight different solutions and the life work of Hassan Fathy and Rifat Chadirji having been recognized by previous Awards as exemplary achievements in the field of architecture. As a part of this cycle, the Award held two intellectual activities. One of these was a meeting in Geneva, when the Steering Committee had the opportunity to discuss the Award's endeavours with three distinguished participants, an eminent architect, a renowned critic and an influential publisher. Frank Gehry, Alan Colquhoun and





FROM ABOVE: Bbong Mosque, Bbong, Pakistan, Architect: Rais Ghazi Mohammad ; Yaama Mosque, Taboua, Niger, Architect: Falké Barmou

Andreas Papadakis attended this meeting.

The second event was an international seminar entitled "Expressions of Islam in Buildings", which focused on places of piety and worship. The papers and discussions that resulted from this event were published early in 1991.

The present jury has made a particularly strong judgment which, we believe, will engage architectural thinking around the world.

First, they declare that historical edifices should not be regarded as isolated, individual elements. Instead, the jury insists that they should be placed in the context of historic and urban environments with contemporary functions that accommodate uses and perform services in order to enable their continued importance in the lives of the people and to sustain their existence. The Kairouan Conservation Programme in Kairouan, Tunisia and the Palace Parks Programme in Istanbul, Turkey are fine examples of this attitude.

Secondly, the 1992 jury brings the social concerns of previous juries to a new level, highly evident in the architectural and design input in the improvement of existing settlements. In doing so, the jury sends a strong signal that the Award premiates projects at a higher level than the basic provision of infrastructure. The East Wahdat Upgrading Programme in Amman, Jordan, and the Kampung Kali Cho-de in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, contain architectural components much stronger than any other similar projects premiated previously.

Thirdly, there is a strong expression of the importance of larger natural and urban environments. No single project premiated in this cycle is an isolated, individual achievement, pointing to a sense of urgency for architectural inventions that engage in a stronger dialogue with societal and natural contexts. The Cultural Park for Children in Cairo, Egypt, and the Demir Holiday Village in Bodrum, Turkey, respectively, are examples of contextual interaction with the urban and natural environments.

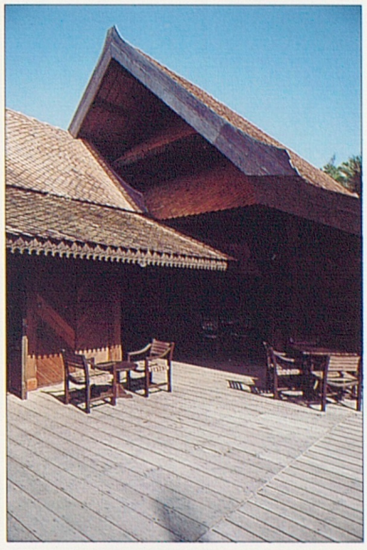
The use of appropriate technology has always been one of the major areas to be explored by the Award. The introduction of inappropriate, imported or imposed technology has been diagnosed as one of the major ills of contemporary developments in architecture which have contributed to the disfigurement of the built environment. Furthermore, the explicit economies of

ABOVE: Diplomatic Quarter Landscaping, Riyadh, Architects: Bodeker, Boyer, Wagenfeld; Residence Andalous, Sousse, Tunisia, Architect: Serge Santelli; Courtyard Houses, Agadir, Morocco, Architect: J.F. Zevaco

using local materials which are readily available and abundant has the tremendous potential of harmonising with the natural context. In this cycle, the Stone Building System in Dar´a Province, Syria, and the Panafrican Institute for Development in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, are two novel examples of the use of simple technological innovations to enable building with local resources. The Stone Building System in Syria not only allowed the construction of elementary schools at a very low cost, but also questioned the widely-employed, standard school projects which are more usual, regardless of the availability of materials, climate, and all other local conditions. The example of Burkina Faso is the result of the wish of a dedicated group to build a major campus with a single material and simple building technology. In a similar vein, the Entrepreneurship Development Institute in Ahmedabad, India, employs a simple brick load-bearing structural system with standard pre-cast elements to achieve indigenous expression with direct reference to context.

In addition to these strong, well-articulated messages, there is one underlying element which binds all the projects tightly together - the quality of architecture and design. Even in projects with primary social and economic concerns, the use of design skills and architectural know-how has been closely examined and scrutinised. The dominant message of the jury - with all its emphasis on the condition of mankind - by no means undermines the manifestation of architectural quality, which has always been the central theme of the Award: to recognize the quality of the built environment by the full and appropriate use of design and architectural skills.

The deliberations of the fifth Award Master Jury indicate exciting directions for the Award's pursuit of a balanced synthesis of the highly sophisticated and valid values of architectural experience and the realities of Muslim cultures in a process of social, economic and environmental change.



ABOVE: Mughal Hotel, Agra, India, Architect: Arcop; Tanjong Jara Beach Hotel, Architects: Wimberly, Whisenand, Allison, Tong and Goo