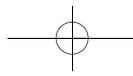
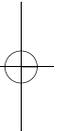
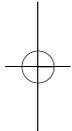
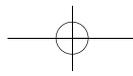
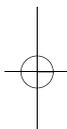
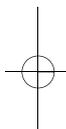
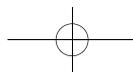


THE CHALLENGE OF PLURALISM: PROJECTS IN CANADA





The Challenge of Pluralism: Projects in Canada

There are approximately 75,000 Ismailis in Canada, of whom 15,000 reside in the Greater Vancouver area. The first of these citizens arrived in the mid 1960s, often as students from such countries as India, Pakistan or Bangladesh (West Pakistan until 1971). The flow of Ismailis toward Canada, a country long-known for its tolerance and acceptance of the ideas of pluralism, increased in the 1970s due to conflicts in Africa and in particular the expulsion of Asians from Uganda in 1972. Though some come from Zaire, South Africa, Rwanda, Iran and Syria, a majority of Canadian Ismailis originated in Kenya, Uganda, Zanzibar and Tanzania. It was no coincidence that the first Ismaili Centre and Jamatkhana to be built in North America was opened in Burnaby, Vancouver, in 1984, not long after the London Centre was inaugurated.

Today, the Aga Khan has undertaken to give his presence and that of his community in Canada an even more significant and symbolic turn. Two major projects in Ottawa and two in Toronto have clearly marked these initiatives. Given the importance that the Aga Khan has long placed on architecture, it should be noted that the responsibility for three of these projects has been given to two of the best-known contemporary architects in the world, Fumihiko Maki from Japan and Charles Correa from India. The fact that neither of these architects is a Muslim might be seen as a further pledge to the principles of pluralism that have come to underlie the Canadian initiatives of the Aga Khan. Maki has designed the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat in Ottawa as well as the new Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, while Correa is the architect selected to create a second Canadian Ismaili Centre, on the same Wynford Drive site in Toronto as the Museum. Both architects, as well as the landscape designer Vladimir Djurovic from Beirut, have been actively encouraged, not only by the programmatic requirements laid out for them, but in more personal terms by the Aga Khan himself, to seek to renew the principles of the architecture of Islam in a contemporary vocabulary and in full respect for the context they are working in. When he announced the Toronto buildings in 2002, the Aga Khan stated: "In situating these two institutions in Canada, we acknowledge both a tradition of tolerance and inclusiveness as well as an environment that has permitted diversity to flourish, enriching the civic life of each individual and community that has sought to make this country its home. It is to this commitment to pluralism that we will turn in seeking to make these institutions both a repository of heritage and a source of inspiration for societies the world over in the future."¹

The original announcement for the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto carried with it the prospect for a centre for the study of "human pluralism." As it happens, that project has also taken form, but in a different location, the former Canadian War Museum on Sussex Drive in Ottawa. In announcing this project, the Aga Khan stated: "I am grateful that the government of Canada has contributed so generously to its material and intellectual resources. Making available the Old War Museum is a particularly generous and symbolic gesture. Our own commitment is to invest in this building so that it becomes a worthy testament to Canada's global leadership in the cause of pluralism. Those who talk about an inevitable 'clash of civilizations' can point today to an accumulating array of symptoms which sometimes seems to reflect their diagnosis. I believe, however, that this diagnosis is wrong –

that its symptoms are more dramatic than they are representative – and that these symptoms are rooted in human ignorance rather than human character. The problem of ignorance is a problem that can be addressed. Perhaps it can even be ameliorated – but only if we go to work on our educational tasks with sustained energy, creativity and intelligence. That is why we felt the Global Centre for Pluralism was needed. That is why the Global Centre for Pluralism exists today. And that is why the Global Centre for Pluralism holds such enormous promise for all of our tomorrows.”²

Built beginning in 1904 to plans by the firm Band, Burritt, Meredith and Ewart, the 3800-square-metre structure selected for the Pluralism Centre has a clear importance for Canadians since it housed the Dominion Archives until 1967 and the War Museum, until a new structure was created on another site in 2005. Indeed, in contrasting the crystalline elegance of Maki’s new design for the Imamat Delegation building and this old stone structure that is soon to be refurbished (architect still to be selected), it may be possible to further sense the deeper meaning of the involvement of the Aga Khan in architecture. In a letter sent to Fumihiko Maki to detail the wishes of the Aga Khan for the building, in 2002, it was written: “The Imamat Delegation building, in a sense, should be somewhat mysterious and visually nearly esoteric. It should not be blatant, but ethereal: not obvious, but difficult to captivate; it should be harmonious, linear in many planes and shapes, at times symmetrical and sometimes asymmetrical, perhaps domed in some areas with spherical or flat planes...”³ The will thus expressed had to do not only with the functions of the new building, but also with the neighbouring buildings in Ottawa. Architecture is seen here not as a simple container, prestigious or attractive as it may be; rather, it is the real use of a building, how it fits into its context, what message it gives through the flow of light and the rising forms of a remarkable glazed atrium that interests the Aga Khan.

Housing the Dominion Archives for most of the twentieth century, the older building on Sussex Drive, later chronicling the history of Canada’s wars, could not be better and more symbolically suited to the Global Pluralism Centre imagined by the Aga Khan. The diversity inscribed in the country’s population, the ravages of war, both these powerful forces mark the Ottawa building and give it legitimacy to become a forum, in the very core of the nation, to reach out to those who would doubt the virtues of understanding and tolerance. The Islam defended by the Aga Khan speaks with the voices of pluralism, of the very diversity at the heart of a religion that spans the globe. The four new projects in Canada, one steeped in local history, the other three reaching pointedly to a future where modernity respects tradition and even improves upon it, are all a statement for the significance of architecture as a vehicle for ideas, as points of gathering where people may meet and learn to be tolerant of one another.

1 Speech by His Highness the Aga Khan, Toronto, Canada, 8 October 2002.

2 Remarks by His Highness the Aga Khan on the occasion of the signing of the funding agreement for the Global Centre for Pluralism, Ottawa, Canada, 25 October 2006.

3 Letter from Nizar Shariff to Fumihiko Maki, 10 October 2002.

Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat

OTTAWA, CANADA

Design Architect: Fumihiko Maki & Maki and Associates,
Tokyo, Japan

Architect of Record: Moriyama & Teshima Architects, Toronto,
Canada

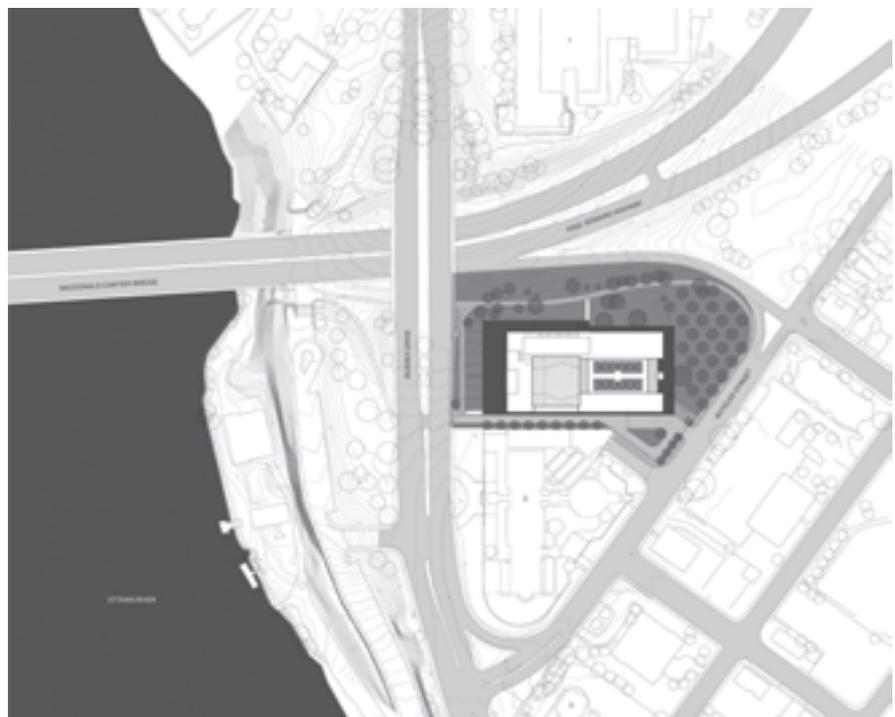
Date: 2004–08

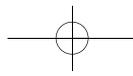
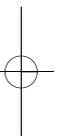
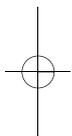
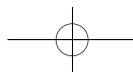
■ The Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat in Ottawa is located at 199 Sussex Drive on a site measuring approximately one hectare. The building borders on many of Canada's prominent diplomatic and political sites, such as Parliament Hill, the official residences of the Governor General and the Prime Minister, as well as numerous embassies and consulates. This stretch of Sussex Drive is also called Confederation Boulevard, a ceremonial thoroughfare in the nation's capital. The building will, for all intents and purposes, function much like an embassy. "It will be an enabling venue for fruitful public engagements, information services and educational programmes, all backed by high-quality research to sustain a vibrant intellectual centre and a key policy forming institution," according to the Aga Khan. "The aim," he continues, "will be to foster policy and legislation that enables pluralism to take root in all spheres of modern life: justice, the arts, media, financial services, health and education."

Designed by the noted Japanese architect Fumihiko Maki, the two-storey building, due to be completed in 2008, will have a gross area of 8916 square metres, of which 4720 above grade. The primary spaces of the Centre are a reception and exhibition gallery, library, conference and meeting rooms, institutional offices, a boardroom and executive office, as well as residential space. Born in Tokyo in 1928, Fumihiko Maki received his Bachelor of Architecture degree from the University of Tokyo in 1952, and Master of Architecture degrees from the Cranbrook Academy of Art (1953) and the Harvard Graduate School of Design (1954). He worked for Skidmore, Owings & Merrill in New York (1954–55) and Sert Jackson and Associates in Cambridge, Massachusetts (1955–58), before creating his own firm, Maki and Associates, in Tokyo in 1965. Fumihiko Maki was the winner of the 1993 Pritzker Prize, the Prince of Wales Prize (for Hillside Terrace) and the UIA Gold Medal the same year.

He received the Praemium Imperiale, given by the Japan Art Association, in 1998. He was also a member of the 1986 and 1992 Master Juries for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. Given his American educational background and cosmopolitan manner, Fumihiko Maki has received numerous commissions in North America, including the Centre for the Arts in the Yerba Buena Gardens (San Francisco, California, 1993) and the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts at Washington University in St Louis (2006). Aside from the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto and the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat published here, he is currently advancing on the University of Pennsylvania Annenberg Public Policy Centre (2008), the Media Arts and Sciences Building at MIT (2009), and a skyscraper in lower Manhattan (World

One of the most prominent features of the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat in Ottawa, Canada, is its glass-covered atrium. The asymmetrical form of this crystalline emergence was the result of a close dialogue between the architect and the Aga Khan.





Trade Centre Tower 4, 2012). Fumihiko Maki is also working on numerous projects in Japan.

The site of the building is irregular with elevation changes of as much as four metres. The western side of the property is on Sussex Drive, where architectural guidelines are set by Canada's National Capital Commission. A residential neighbourhood on the east and a roadway with the Ottawa River beyond on the west contrast with the south boundary formed by the fences of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Set on a granite podium that helps to deal with the changes in elevation on the site, the building offers numerous plazas and terraces. As Maki states: "Together with the space planning, the podium helps to achieve an intended ambiguous division between indoor and outdoors spaces – an inherent characteristic found in much of Islamic architecture."

Working in close collaboration with the Aga Khan, Professor Maki has developed an asymmetrical, crystalline form for the main atrium of the building. As the architect says: "Contained within a simple rectilinear footprint (43.5 metres wide and 87 metres long), the plan form is shaped in the configuration of an elongated 'ring' whereby the programmes surround two large symbolic

Given the constraints imposed by the harsh winter climate of Ottawa, Fumihiko Maki chose not to use running water in the garden courtyard of the Delegation building (lower right). Elsewhere, his light, subtle touch is evident in these perspective drawings.





spaces that are complimentary – an atrium and courtyard. The building as a whole will be an interplay of visual clarity and opacity, overlaid with various degrees of translucency. Like the natural beauty of a rock crystal that is a true wonder to the human eye, it is hoped that the Delegation building will be a source of optimism, fascination and enlightenment.” The idea of light and the play on contrasting opacity or transparency is a constant theme of this work. “The building is clad primarily in glass with varying degrees of transparency, translucency and opacity to achieve a dynamic visual effect. The primary facades on Sussex Drive and Boteler Street are affixed with crystallized glass panels – Neoparies. It is a unique building material developed and made by a highly sophisticated and specialized technique of crystallizing glass whereby the process produces needle-shaped crystals to give the glass a soft opaque colour resulting in a smooth marble-like texture. Neoparies is no doubt a product of our modern age; however, it evokes a sense of continuity and tradition with the masonry buildings nearby. The north and south elevations are arranged in alternating bands of transparent and translucent glass which is hoped will achieve different levels of visual penetration into the building as well as subtle reflections of the surrounding landscape.”

The atrium is set to the west and accessible from the ceremonial entrance on Sussex Drive, while an outdoor garden “recalling the traditional Persian-Islamic garden – the *chahar-bagh* (a garden contained within walls that is divided into four quarters by the intersection of four avenues)” is near the eastern Boteler Street entrance. The architect explains that these two spaces form the building’s hub linking the different parts of the programme and creating an “inner sanctuary somewhat separated from the outside world.” Fumihiko Maki states: “His Highness the Aga Khan is a strong advocate and supporter of pluralistic values. These are thought to be expanded through academic, governmental and cultural exchanges. In architecture, this concept can be expressed through themes such as modernity versus tradition, West versus East. The design of the Delegation building is a manifestation of this vision held by the Aga Khan carried out with the principles of modernism that also reflect an Islamic character in its spatial and detail design.”

Ismaili Centre and Jamatkhana

TORONTO, CANADA

Design Architect: Charles Correa Associates
Architect of Record: Moriyama & Teshima Architects
Date: 2006–

■ The new Ismaili Centre and Jamatkhana in Toronto, located on the same Wynford Drive site as the Aga Khan Museum, will contain a library and conference rooms for the community, administrative offices and chambers for the Ismaili Council for Canada, as well as the Social Hall for gatherings, lectures, seminars and other special occasions. Located at the highest point of the site, the entrance portico faces the driveway and on the garden side the building opens onto terraces overlooking the Don Valley. The total floor area of the Ismaili Centre and Jamatkhana is 7800 square metres, with construction due to begin in 2007. Together with the Aga Khan Museum, the new Ismaili Centre and their surrounding gardens offer an oasis of calm and serenity to an area that is presently in need of such an amenity.

In 2000, the architect Charles Correa won an international competition to design the Toronto Ismaili Centre and Jamatkhana. His built work includes the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial at the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, the Jawahar Kala Kendra in Jaipur and the State

Assembly for Madhya Pradesh. He has completed housing projects in Delhi, Bombay, Ahmedabad and Bangalore. He was Chief Architect for the “Navi Mumbai”, a new city for two million people located across the harbour from Bombay. He was appointed by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi as the first Chairman of the National Commission on Urbanization. He has been serving recently as the Farwell Bernis Professor in the School of Architecture and Planning at MIT. He was the 1994 recipient of the Praemium Imperiale in Japan, as well as winner of the RIBA Gold Medal in 1984 and the UIA Gold Medal in 1990. He has been one of the most consistent participants in the activities of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in various capacities from the time the Award was first created. He was a member of the 1980, 1983, 1986, 2001 and 2004 Award Steering Committees, and of the 1989 Award Master Jury. He received an Aga Khan Award in 1998 as the architect of Vidhan Bhavan (Bhopal, India), the State Assembly for the government of Madhya Pradesh, completed in 1996.



Left, gardens designed by Vladimir Djurovic will accompany the Centre as well as the Museum.

Above right, a large crystalline dome is a prominent feature of Charles Correa's design for the Toronto Ismaili Centre.

Below right, an overall site plan shows the Centre to the left and the future Aga Khan Museum by Fumihiko Maki to the right.



Below, drawings by the office of Charles Correa show the Prayer Hall and dome of the Toronto Ismaili Centre.

Right, the Centre as seen in a computer perspective by the landscape designer Vladimir Djurovic.

The generous double-height Social Hall of the Centre has its own entrance foyer, contiguous with that of the Prayer Hall, allowing for a good deal of flexibility in the use of the spaces. The Social Hall opens out toward the “Ismaili Garden” designed by Vladimir Djurovic (see page 212). The library is contained in the double-height atrium, a space that connects with the administrative offices and Council Chamber above.

The climax of the composition is the Prayer Hall. Approaching it from the entrance foyer, a glass column symbolizing the unity of Islam is visible. The actual Prayer Hall is circular in form, “like a gigantic tent, with light cascading down from the immense vault of the sky above.”¹ Although the round form might be considered quite unusual, Charles Correa thus sees it as a reference to the connection of religion to history and the majesty of creation. For the roof, the architect has used two layers of frosted glass that enclose a delicate steel fabric, modulating light in the space. While the exterior of the Prayer Hall roof is made up of varying flat surfaces, the architect compares the interior surfaces to the facets of a diamond or the forms generated by fractal geometry. The result is “a rational and contemporary reinvention of the age-old Islamic tradition of corbelling.” Clearly visible from the Don Valley Parkway, at night this roof will “glow from within like a jewel,”² becoming the most powerfully symbolic architectural gesture of the complex.

Charles Correa explains: “We knew this Jamaatkhana must be pluralistic – expressing on the one hand the age-old heritage of the Ismaili community, and on the other their newfound aspirations as proud citizens of Canada. So, throughout the building, the architectural language and the materials used are contemporary (exposed concrete, stainless steel and frosted glass), but there are also references to other values, derived from other times. Thus, for instance, though the orientation of the building has been determined by its immediate surroundings, as we move toward the Prayer Hall, the axis

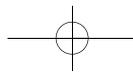
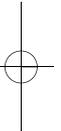
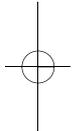
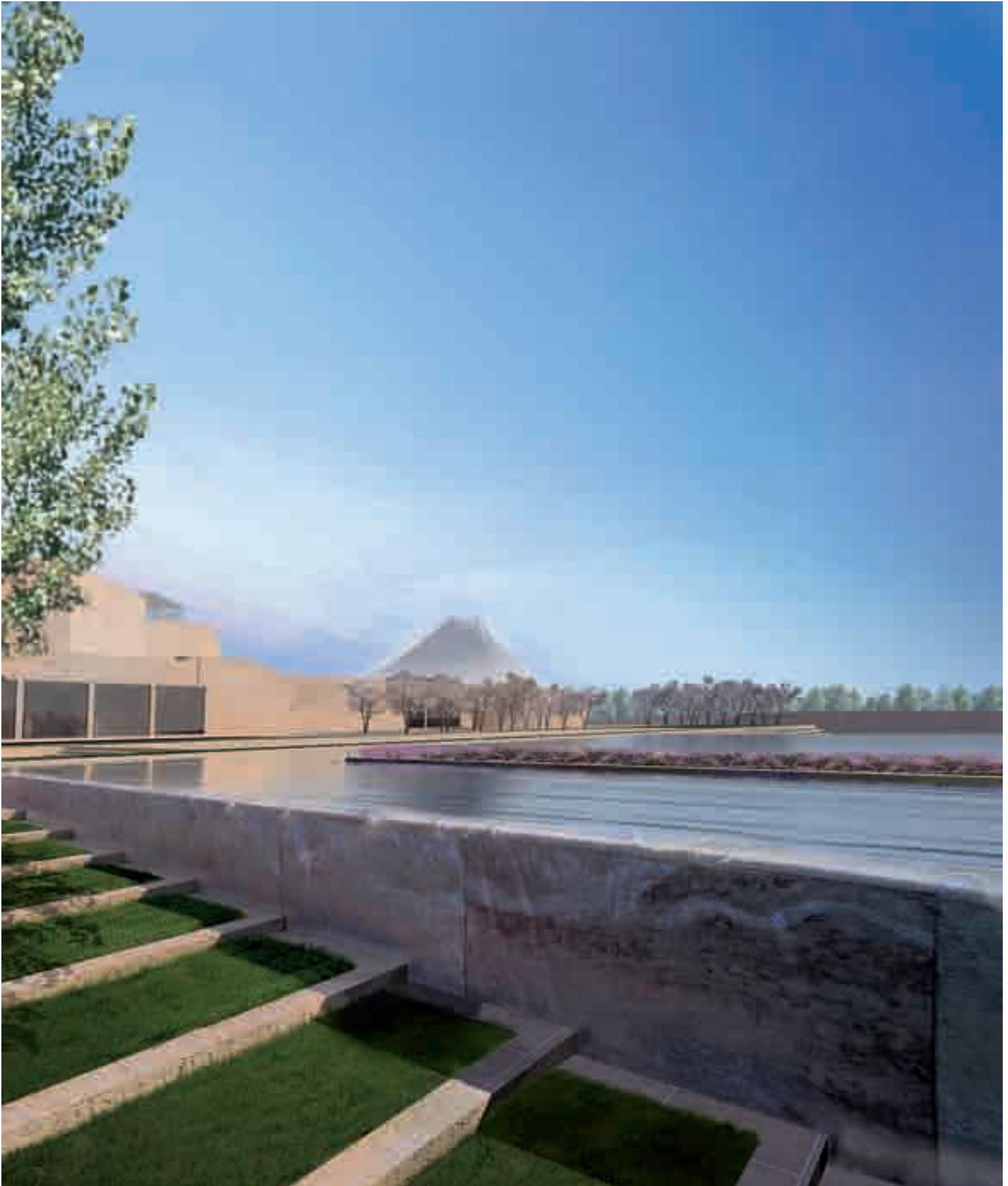
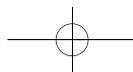
pivots in order to face Mecca. This subtle but dramatic shift (clearly articulated in the floor plans and sections) serves to remind us that underlying the pragmatic world of our everyday lives, there exists a more sacred – and profound – geometry.”³

1 E-mail from Charles Correa, 20 February 2007.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.





Aga Khan Museum

TORONTO, CANADA

Design Architect: Fumihiko Maki & Maki and Associates,
Tokyo, Japan

Architect of Record: Moriyama & Teshima Architects, Toronto,
Canada

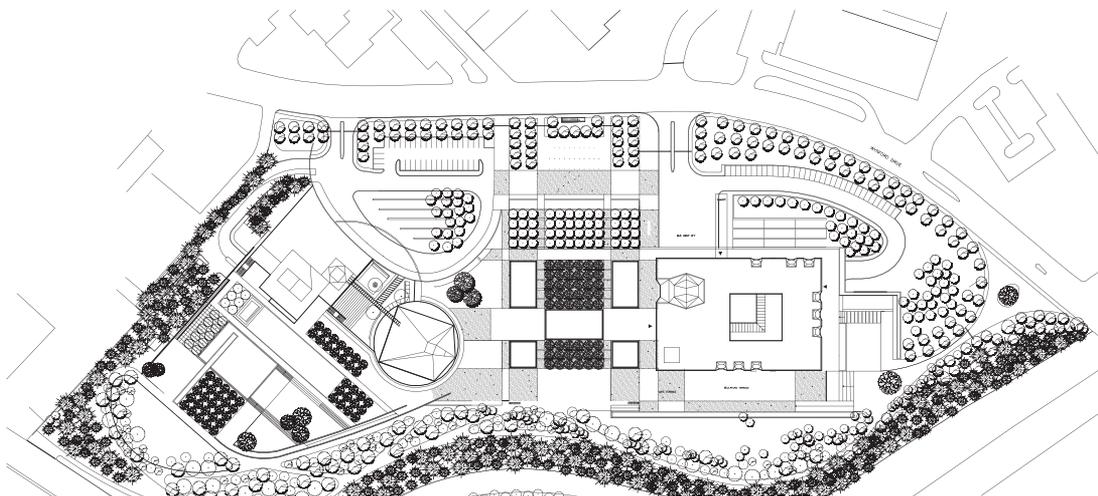
Date: 2006–

■ As described in a report from Toronto's Commissioner for Economic Development, Culture and Tourism: "On 8 October 2002, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) announced its intention to establish in Toronto a museum housing exceptional collections of Islamic art and heritage items, as well as a cultural and educational centre devoted to the study and practice of human pluralism. The location for this proposed development is a seven-hectare site located on Wynford Drive in the north-west quadrant of Don Valley Parkway and Eglinton Avenue. The site includes a 3.6-hectare parcel upon which the Aga Khan Development Network had previously proposed constructing a mosque, and an adjacent 3.35-hectare parcel that the Aga Khan Development Network has recently acquired from Bata Industries." In

its conclusion, the report states: "The Aga Khan Development Network proposal would appear to be a major acquisition for the City of Toronto and demonstrates that the world recognizes Toronto's long-standing tradition of tolerance. It further adds to Toronto's appeal as a vibrant international city capable of competing for prominent business, research and cultural attractions. This announcement made world coverage in many major newspapers increasing Toronto's worldwide profile."¹

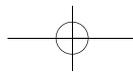
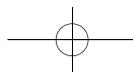
After the original site planning done by Don Olsen of Sasaki Associates, the architects Charles Correa (Ismaili Centre and Jamatkhana) and Fumihiko Maki (Aga Khan Museum) became involved in the project on adjacent parcels. The Aga Khan Museum is intended as a "multi-purpose cultural facility with the aim of exhibiting Islamic art and artefacts, providing a venue for musical performances, educating the general public on Islamic traditions, along with a full service restaurant. The programme consists of four primary functions (museum, auditorium, educational and multi-purpose) organized around a central courtyard."

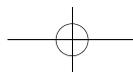
Early in the development of the Wynford Drive site, the Aga Khan wrote a letter to Fumihiko Maki outlining some of his ideas for the facility: "For the Aga Khan Mu-



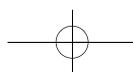
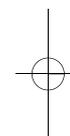
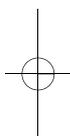
Left, on the site plan, the Aga Khan Museum is visible to the right, with its essentially rectilinear plan.

Right, models show the relation of the Museum to Correa's Ismaili Centre on their shared Wynford Drive site in Toronto, Canada.





Although these perspectives do not yet give the layman a clear understanding of the Museum's volumes, it is clear that, as imagined by the architect, the building will be flooded with light wherever the conservation of the displayed art works permits.



seum, I thought that 'Light' might be a concept around which you could design an outstanding museum; the notion of Light has traversed nearly all of human history and has been an inspiration for numerous faiths, going as far back of course as the Zoroastrians and their reverence for the Sun, to the Sura in the Holy Koran titled Nour. Decades of Western history are referred to as the 'Enlightenment' for good reason."² The letter of the Aga Khan clearly explains the relationship of the client to the architect in this instance, expressed in terms of the ephemeral but essential qualities of light. "I hope that the building and the spaces around it will be seen as a celebration of Light and the mysteries of Light, which nature and the human soul illustrate to us at every moment in our lives," states the Aga Khan. "I have explained at the beginning of this letter why I think Light would be an appropriate design direction for the new museum and this concept is of course particularly validated in Islamic texts and sciences: apart from the innumerable references in the Koran to Light in all its forms, in nature and in the human soul, the light of the skies, their sources and their meaning has for centuries been an area of intellectual inquiry and more specifically in the field of astronomy. Thus the architecture of the building would seek to express these multiple notions of Light, both natural and man-

made, through the most purposeful selection of internal and external construction materials, facets of elevations playing with each other through the reflectivity of natural or electric light, and to create light gain or light retention from external natural sources or man-made internal and external sources."³

The 11,000-square-metre building is to be laid out on three floors: two floors above grade and one below for parking or reserves. The two floors above grade are to contain 1800 square metres of gallery space, a multi-purpose auditorium, a restaurant, and educational spaces consisting of classrooms and a library. Fumihiko Maki states: "Contained within a simple rectilinear footprint, the four primary functions will revolve around a central courtyard, which will act as the heart of the building and will integrate the differing functions into a cohesive whole while allowing each space to maintain its independence, privacy and character."⁴ The architect has been careful to create ideal conditions for the viewing of art, providing very low luminosity where miniatures from the collections of the late Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan might be shown, for example. Skylight screens with geometric patterns "inspired by the windows in mosques" and translucent marble walls will be features of the exhibition spaces. The design is centred around a courtyard intended as "a



symbolic space, protected from the outside world,” with an “inherent link to traditional Islamic architecture.” The exterior of the Museum is “inspired by the forms and shapes of precious stones” and will have walls inclined at two distinct angles to accentuate the play of light on the surfaces. Translucent marble and opaque white marble are the main cladding materials. As for the relation with Correa’s Ismaili Centre, Fumihiko Maki states: “The metallic roof of the auditorium space will further accentuate the shape and materiality of a precious stone and is intended to establish a formal dialogue with the crystal roof of Correa’s Prayer Hall adjacent to the Aga Khan Museum. The primary entrance and axis of the Museum is aligned with the Prayer Hall, which will provide a subtle relationship between the two buildings, emphasizing the unity of the complex.”

Luis Monreal, the General Manager of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, underlines the significance of the Museum in the present world situation: “The evolution of the political situation in the last few years, its resulting crises and the additional factor of flows of emigration toward the West, have revealed – often dramatically – the considerable lack of knowledge of the Muslim world in Western societies. This ignorance spans all aspects of Islam: its pluralism, the diversity of the interpretations of the Koranic faith, the chronological and geographical extension of its history and culture, as well as the ethnic, linguistic and social diversity of its peoples. The supposed ‘shock of civilizations’ is in reality nothing more than the manifestation of the mutual ignorance that exists between two long-time neighbouring worlds. For this reason, the idea of creating a museum of Muslim culture, as an eminently educational institution with the aim of informing the North American public as to the diversity and importance of Muslim civilization, naturally imposed itself in the Aga Khan Trust for Culture’s programmes.”⁵

1 Staff Report from Joe Halstead, Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism to the Economic Development and Parks Committee of the City of Toronto, 20 November 2002.

2 Letter from His Highness the Aga Khan to Professor Fumihiko Maki, 3 January 2006.

3 Ibid.

4 Fumihiko Maki & Maki and Associates, internal report.

5 Luis Monreal, in: “Splendours at Court” – A Preview of the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto’, forthcoming.

Interior views from the office of Fumihiko Maki show the auditorium (below) and an exhibition space (right) of the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, Canada.





Gardens of the Toronto Ismaili Centre and the Aga Khan Museum

TORONTO, CANADA

Architect: Vladimir Djurovic Landscape Architecture,
Beirut, Lebanon

Date: 2006–

■ An international competition was held to select the landscape architect who would be given the task of uniting the Aga Khan Museum designed by Fumihiko Maki and the Toronto Ismaili Centre designed by Charles Correa on the seven-hectare site selected in Toronto for both institutions. The young Lebanese architect Vladimir Djurovic was selected from a group of accomplished landscape architects. Djurovic, a cosmopolitan figure who owes his name to his Yugoslav father, states the goals of his scheme in simple terms: “Our vision for the project is one that captures the essence of the Islamic garden and translates it into an expression that reflects its context and contemporary age. Embracing the five senses as the means to reach the soul, every space and every garden are imbued with the delicate sensations that we seem to have lost in this fast-paced era. The ephemeral and the eternal are both essential to our composition of spaces. Shadows, light, petals, leaves and water in motion are complemented by the solidity and purity of created forms. All is not at once apparent; the garden reveals itself slowly to the visitor, who experi-

ences hidden aspects with serendipity.” Being the intermediary figure between two such well-known architects as Maki and Correa cannot be simple, but Djurovic has succeeded in creating “one unique, harmonious and welcoming park with two landmark buildings in it. The park,” he says, “could be viewed as fluctuating between formal spaces around the buildings and informal spaces as one moves away.”

Educated in the United Kingdom (Reading University) and in the United States (University of Georgia), Vladimir Djurovic created his own firm in Beirut in 1995 and has practised an intriguing mixture of minimalist architecture and landscape design since then, in particular for numerous private clients. He admits to being attracted to the craftsmanship of the Swiss master Peter Zumthor or the ways in which the Portuguese architect Eduardo Souto de Moura integrates his work into its natural settings. “After I won the competition,” explains Vladimir Djurovic, “His Highness gave me a list of places to visit around the world. ‘Once you have visited these places, let us meet again,’ he said. I have never been to



Left, a garden view showing the Toronto Ismaili Centre at the rear of the perspective with the Aga Khan Museum on the left.

Right, images showing the proposals of the landscape architect for the gardens near the Centre.



India and I found the Gardens of Humayun's Tomb and Fatehpur Sikri remarkable."¹

Built in honour of Sufi Saint Salim Chishti in 1571 by the Mughal Emperor Akbar, Fatehpur Sikri might be considered a revealing choice in the context of the itinerary of Vladimir Djurovic. Unlike other Mughal cities it demonstrates a certain informality and improvisation and blends influences from Hindu and Jain sources as well as Islamic elements. Further, Fatehpur Sikri is known to have influenced such modern figures as Charles and Ray Eames and Balkrishna Doshi. After visiting India, Djurovic finished his whirlwind tour in Azhar Park in Cairo. "I realized after these visits," says the landscape architect, "that what the Aga Khan is doing is not for now, it is for generations to come. I understood that anything I do for him has to last as long as possible."

The designs of Vladimir Djurovic for the 75,000-square-metre Toronto gardens are an intentional attempt to render contemporary the very spirit of the Islamic garden. "I think that His Highness is happiest when he discusses the gardens. He really wants us to reinterpret the Islamic garden in a contemporary way. We did not copy any garden – it is more about what you feel and smell and hear in an Islamic garden. What it is that I love about Alhambra is the sound of water and the smell of jasmine. I wanted to use a very contemporary language. The architecture of the buildings is very contemporary. The garden must also reflect its context as well – a place covered with snow. I like this challenge – how to reinterpret the Islamic garden."²

Such features as the waterfall '*bustan*' (Arabic for "fruit garden"), a secluded yet welcoming space, is a niche in the botanical garden that serves as a gateway to the

Ismaili Centre. One area of particular attention and concern in the frigid winter climate of Toronto was the use of water in the gardens. "In one preliminary scheme we created translucent cast acrylic elements with water flowing over the edges. Covered with snow, they would appear like lit ice cubes. The edges would have been angled out so that freezing ice falls off the edge of the basins," explains the designer. This idea was abandoned in favour of solid granite basin walls because Djurovic could not vouch for the long-term reliability of acrylic slabs, which tend to turn yellow with time. Within the newly designed granite basins, their edges still angled out to allow expanding ice to fall over the edges, Djurovic places what he calls "steel lilies" that create turbulence in the water when it is liquid, and are heated in winter to produce steam and the continuing sound of water in movement. A rose garden elsewhere uses the scents and origins of the varieties selected to give a subtle lesson to visitors about the geographic dispersion across the world of the Ismaili community.

Through his seductive but quite realistic computer perspectives, Vladimir Djurovic has conquered the enthusiasm of those involved in the Toronto projects, giving a sense of unity to what could have become a disparate whole, especially given the decidedly urban context of the site, with major traffic arteries located just beyond this green vision of paradise. Through sight, but also sound and smell, this Lebanese designer with a Yugoslav name recreates an Islamic garden in a land of snow, a garden of pluralism.

¹ Interview with Vladimir Djurovic, Paris, France, 31 January 2007.

² Ibid.

The gardens of Vladimir Djurovic are designed to give colour to the site in all seasons, as these four views from the same perspective demonstrate.

