



1989 Technical Review Summary
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Hotel Tichka

Marrakesh, Morocco



Architect

Charles Boccara
Marrakesh, Morocco

Client

Société Paradise
Casablanca, Morocco

Completed

December 1985

I. Introduction

The Hotel Tichka is an attempt to conciliate the atmosphere of a traditional 19th century Marrakesh palace with the demands of a modern luxury hotel in terms of service, comfort and building techniques.

Like the model chosen, the exterior is sober, even austere, emphasis being laid on volume proportions and interior decoration. This interior decoration, while inspired by tradition in its technique and certain motifs at times clearly goes beyond simple imitation, thereby opening new horizons for traditional Moroccan craftsmanship.

II. Context

a. *Historical Background*

Marrakesh was founded in 1062 by Yusif-Ben-Tashfin, the first ruler of the Almoravid dynasty. His son, Ali, built the Ben-Yussef Mosque and the city wall. The Almohads (1146-1268) made Marrakesh the capital of their empire and it was during this period that the Kutubia was built. The Merinids (1268-1520) neglected Marrakesh but they were succeeded by the Saadians (1520-1668) who endowed the city with the Badi' palace, the Ben-Yusif *madrassa* and the Saadians mausoleum.

From 1668 onwards, the Alawites, who only resided in Marrakesh occasionally, erected numerous buildings such as the palace of Bahia and Dar-Si-Saïd at the end of the 19th century. Later, the modern town was to develop, three kilometres from the *medina*, with its wide avenues bordered with palm-trees, orange-trees and jacarandas.

It is in this prestigious old town that the Hotel Tichka was built.

b. *Local Architectural Character*

There are three types of architecture in Marrakesh.

Traditional Architecture

The architecture of palaces, mosques and dwellings uses pisé, sun-baked earth bricks, burnt bricks or stone, such as the famous Gueliz quarry stone (hard limestone). The lines are generally simple and never result from elaborate arrangements or technical feats. There are practically no vaults in this architecture and domes, a current feature in other Muslim countries, are used very sparingly, often concealed by a pyramidal roof. Decoration, abstract in character, is lavish and executed in various materials: stone, burnt brick, glazed ceramic, stucco, wood.

Architecture of European Influence

During the Protectorate and after Independence, some buildings were erected in Marrakesh which hardly differ from constructions built in the same period in France and elsewhere in the world.

On the other hand, certain periods witnessed a real endeavour to integrate modern architecture with traditional architecture. In a famous speech he made in 1977, King Hassan II called upon architects, developers and local authorities to take steps in that direction. While results were in many cases very positive, this policy also gave rise to a profusion of arcades and Moorish adornments added as an afterthought to the most commonplace buildings.

c. Climatic Conditions

Situation

Latitude	31°41' North
Longitude	08°00' West
Altitude	460 m

Temperatures in °C

Month	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Maximum	18.0	20.0	23.0	26.0	29.0	33.0	38.0	38.0	33.0	28.0	23.0	18.0
Minimum	5.0	7.0	9.0	11.0	14.0	17.0	20.0	20.0	18.0	14.0	10.0	6.0
Average	11.5	13.5	16.0	18.5	21.5	25.0	29.0	29.0	25.5	21.0	16.5	12.0

Rainfall

About 280 mm per year with major variations from one year to another.

- Autumn rains with peak rainfall in November
- Spring rains with peak rainfall in March

Winds

The mild humid Trade Winds from the North-East oppose the continental parching and sand-laden winds from the East and South (Sirocco, Chergui).

d. Immediate Surroundings of the Site

The Hotel Tichka is located in the North-West of the town, near the Casablanca road, the Chariaa Mohammed Abdelkrim el Khattabi, in a district reserved exclusively for 4 and 5 star hotels. From the main highway, access is through a quiet street, which runs around the hotel. To the east of the hotel, and on the opposite side of the street, there is an unbuilt area where the SALAM chain, which already owns the Tichka and the Méridien Sémiramis, plans to build a new hotel.

e. Topography of the Project Site

The hotel is situated on flat land. On the other side of the Chariaa Mohammed Abdelkrim El Khattabi, there is an old quarry at the foot of a small rocky hill.

III. Description

a. *Conditions Giving Rise to the Programme*

- In 1978 Mr. Abdelwahad Doukali, the owner of the land, set up the Paradise Company in partnership with Mr. Mohamed Aïmarah.
- Foreign investors were called upon and foreign capital eventually amounted to 66%.
- In April 1980, Mr. Mohamed Aïmarah commissioned Mr. Charles Boccara to design the plans of the hotel.
- While construction work was in progress, Mr. Mohamed Aïmarah contacted Mr. Bill Willis for the decoration on the suggestion of Mr. Charles Boccara.
- In 1984, Mr. Jean-Paul Lance was recruited by the Paradise Company to follow the construction and subsequently take the position of hotel manager.

The initial programme underwent some changes during construction.

b. *General Objectives*

To build a luxury hotel with modern standards of comfort, that would re-create the atmosphere of a 19th century Marrakesh palace but without any trace of pastiche.

c. *Functional Requirements*

The Hotel Tichka offers the services of a 5-star hotel; however, due to the fact that 15% of the overall building costs were subsidised by the State, present legislation imposes that it is classified as a 4-star hotel. Regulations have nonetheless been by-passed as the prices of rooms are comparable to those of a 5-star hotel.

The Hotel Tichka comprises:

- 130 bedrooms
- 8 suites
- 1 entrance-reception hall
- 1 main lounge
- 1 piano/drawing-room
- 2 lounges on the first floor
- a bar
- 1 large restaurant
- 1 Moroccan restaurant
- 1 swimming-pool
- a terrace around the pool with a buffet serving luncheons
- a conference room
(capacity: 180 with a "classroom" arrangement or 250, with a "theatre" seating arrangement)
- the disco planned at the beginning was never opened; it will probably be converted into a piano-bar for 40 to 50 guests
- 1 hair-dressing salon (not completed)
- 1 hammam (not completed)
- kitchens - store-rooms - pantry - utilities
- 2 shops at the entrance of the hotel
- adjacent shops, partly under construction.

d. Building Data

The building comprises two wings laid at right angles. The bisectrix of this angle faces south and acts as the central axis of the swimming pool. The volume of the entrance lobby, situated at the intersection of the two wings, occupies the four levels of the building and is surmounted by a dome.

The western wing contains the restaurants and adjoining services on the ground floor, and three floors of bedrooms. The eastern wing has five levels of bedrooms including one at garden level, built slightly below the swimming-pool. The central axis linking the entrance lobby to the pool, runs through the main lounge.

- The overall site is 7'850 sq m.
- The ground surface is 2'850 sq m.
- Total floor area is 15'000 sq m.

e. Evolution of Design Concepts

The concepts governing the design of the building give absolute priority to the atmosphere created inside the hotel. Climatic considerations and functionality came in the second place. A number of changes had to be introduced both during and after construction in order to correct flaws in the design:

- removal of the balconies on the north-west façade as they were always in the shade;
- improvement of the protection against sun on the roof and upper floor verandas.

On the other hand, great care was given to the interior volumes and to the details of the interior decoration. The shapes, volumes, colours and materials have been thought out with great skill. No jarring element impairs the balance and harmony of the whole.

f. Structure, Materials, Technology

Foundations

Cyclopean concrete.

Structure

In-situ reinforced concrete.

Infill

Locally produced burnt bricks.

Finishing of External Walls

Locally produced cement-cum-lime.

Flooring

- glazed tiles,
- *zellig* (small pieces of ceramic tiles arranged in geometrical patterns),
- coloured and waxed cement tiles,
- *bejmat* (traditional burnt bricks),
- wall-to-wall coco-matting,
- marble.

Finishing of Interior Walls

- *tadelakt* (lime rendering, dyed to the core, rubbed with local soft soap and smoothed with a pebble),
- *bejmat* (traditional burnt bricks),
- *zouak* (painted wood cladding),
- carved plaster work,
- *zellig* (panels made up of small pieces of ceramic tiles arranged in geometrical patterns),
- glazed tiles.

Ceilings

- ceilings in *tataoui* (traditional technique using coloured strips of laurel wood forming geometrical motifs).
- ceilings and domes in *zouak* (painted wood).

Roofing

- glazed traditional tiles
- multi-layer damp-proofing for flat roof

Fireplaces

There are five different fireplaces in the hotel, decorated with *zellig* motifs and *tadelakt*.

Locks and Ironwork

Locally produced materials.

Plumbing

Initially locally manufactured, then entirely replaced by imported products.

Lifts, Goods-lifts, Air-conditioning/Heating. Swimming-pool Maintenance Equipment, Kitchen Equipment

Imported equipment.

g. Origin of Technology

The building technique used is of European origin. It is the most commonly used modern building technique throughout the world. All the techniques used for the decoration of the hotel are of local origin: *zellig*, *bejmat*, *tadelakt*, *zouak*, *tatoui*.

Materials

Traditional materials produced in Morocco:

- traditional bricks
- lime
- glazed tiles
- wood
- light fittings
- wood-work
- furniture.

Modern materials produced in Morocco:

- cement
- modern burnt bricks
- modern tiles
- plumbing (initially)
- ironwork
- furniture.

Imported modern materials:

- lifts
- goods-lifts
- air-conditioning/heating
- plumbing (recently fitted)
- kitchen equipment
- pool maintenance
- light fittings
- telephone
- television.

Labour Force

95% local.

Professionals

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| - Architect | Charles Boccara, a French architect of Tunisian origin who has lived in Morocco since 1970. |
| - Decorator | Bill Willis, an American architect-decorator, who has lived in Morocco since 1966. |
| - Consultants | Various French engineering firms and building inspection services. |
| - Master craftsmen | Moroccan. |

IV. Construction Schedule and Costs

a. History of the Project

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|------|---|
| 1979 | Mr. Abdelwahad Doukali, owner of the land, founded the Paradise company with Mr. Mohamed Aimarah. |
| 1980 | Foreign investments were called upon and include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Union Nationale (Lebanese insurance company),- Mr. Idrissi (Insurance broker in Athens) and eventually amount to 66% of the total capital. |

1980-1982 Elaboration of the programme with the help of a French consulting firm.
 1980 April Commencement of the design work by Charles Boccara.
 1982 Oct End of design work and engineering studies.
 1982 Nov Commencement of construction.
 1983 Beginning of work by Bill Willis.
 1984 Jan Arrival of Jean-Paul Lance to supervise the construction and take the position of hotel manager.
 1985 Dec End of construction work.
 1986 April Opening of the hotel.
 1988 Jan The foreign shareholders sell their shares to a national hotel chain: the SALAM chain which already owns thirteen hotels in Morocco, and whose President Director General is Mr. Mohamed Belghmi.

b. Total Cost and Main Source of Finance

- total cost	MDH 60'000'000 (US\$ 6'180'000)
- cost per sq m	MDH 4'000 (US\$ 400)
- financing	80% private capital: Société Paradise (with 66% foreign capital), 20% public capital: national.

c. Comparative Cost

This hotel's cost per square metre is quite similar to that of other buildings of the same kind, and the use of local material in the finishing work has compensated for certain extra costs.

d. Qualitative analysis of costs

The total cost of MDH 60'000'000 can be broken down as follows:

- land	MDH 785'000
- infrastructure	MDH 23'854'800
- material	MDH 29'654'100
- fees	MDH 5'721'000
Price per sq m	MDH 4'000
Price per room	MDH 410'000

e. Maintenance Costs (Heating, Cooling, etc.)

Operating costs vary from one year to the next. However, the following indicative figures can be quoted:

- For an annual turnover of MDH 25'000'000 inclusive of taxes (year 1988):	
- Staff	20% of turnover, i.e. MDH 5'000'000/year
- Fuel oil heating	MDH 25'000/month
- Water	MDH 7'000/month
- Taxes	10% of turnover, i.e. MDH 2'500'000/year
- Maintenance	2% of turnover, i.e. MDH 500'000/year
- Advertising	3% of turnover, i.e. MDH 750'000/year
	to 4% MDH 1'000'000/year

- Other costs:
 - the purchase of food amounts to 30 - 33% of food sales,
 - the purchase of drinks amounts to 25% of drinks sales.

V. Technical Assessment

a. *Functional Assessment*

As stated earlier, a rational approach to functional issues was not the prime concern of the architect. It would be possible to devise shorter and more direct service passage-ways. At first, hotel guests are somewhat lost, trying to find the lifts and staircase. On the other hand, they may discover a sitting-room or a patio they had not seen.

b. *Climatic Performance, Lighting, Ventilation, Acoustics*

Here again, it seems obvious that an attempt to adapt perfectly to climatic constraints was not the architect's prime concern. The orientation of the building takes little account of exposure to the sun and the façades on both sides of the building are almost treated in the same manner. However, it must be mentioned that the climate of Marrakesh is such that it is difficult to achieve a rational adaptation of buildings to climatic conditions. At certain times in the year the weather is cold and premises must be heated and guests seek as much sun as possible. At other times in the year, it is too hot, the hotel must be air-conditioned and it is necessary to protect oneself from the sun. As for lighting, ventilation and acoustics they deserve no particular comment, as these systems function satisfactorily.

c. *Choice of Materials; Level of Technology*

It is in this field that the architect and the decorator have fully expressed their talents. There is no lavish display of costly materials, such as marble, but a very judicious use of materials that are sometime remarkably cheap but extremely effective, such as *tadelakt*. Both the architect and decorator have a thorough knowledge of traditional techniques which has enabled them to draw on a wealth of techniques and materials, in the most appropriate way.

It must be emphasised again that they have not simply relied on the conventional use of these traditional materials and techniques, but have contributed to their development through a modern approach in their expression.

d. *Ageing and Maintenance Problem*

- A few maintenance problems should be mentioned:
 - the original plumbing, produced locally, had to be completely replaced;
 - a few floor tiles are loose in one particular area. From the evidence available it seems that one work team is responsible for the faulty laying of these tiles.

e. *Design Features: Massing and Volume, Articulation of Spaces, Integration into Site*

The overall exterior volumes are simple. The architect has not paid too much attention to the treatment of exterior volumes as they display no elaborate proportions. Neither the façade facing the street nor that giving onto the swimming-pool, display a particularly involved treatment.

The interest of the project lies in the arrangement of interior volumes. In the interior of the building everything betrays a subtle reflection: the inherent quality of the volumes, the transition from one space to the next, the perspectives, the transparencies, or on the contrary, the gradual unfolding of the various spaces. Others simply exist for the pleasure of contemplation, such as the immense volume of the entrance lobby or the small spaces that may be described as covered patios at the far end of the eastern wing. It is in the quality of these interior spaces, and the refinement of the decoration and materials, that the intrinsic architectural value of the project lies.

VI. Users

a. *Description of Those Who Use or Benefit from the Project*

In order to understand who are the users of the Hotel Tichka, it is necessary to outline the recent past, to compare prices, the quality of hotels and evaluate the part played by chance or advertising. Some ten years ago, the name of Marrakesh was closely associated to that of a prestigious hotel: the Mamounia, that in winter attracted fashionable European society. This hotel was the symbol of refined luxury and good taste.

Under the supervision of the French architect-decorator, Paccard, the Mamounia was completely renovated. The operation swallowed up astronomical sums, with controversial results. In fact, it would appear that its distinguished luxury has given way, at least in part, to a gaudy and extravagant display for "nouveaux riches". The fact that the nostalgic guests of the old Mamounia no longer recognised their favourite hotel, combined with a considerable increase in the hotel prices (single room MDH 1'000/2'000; double room MDH 1'250/2'000), has persuaded many of its customary guests to look for another hotel. Because of its discreet refinement and more reasonable prices (single room, MDH 540; double room MDH 650, the Hotel Tichka has succeeded in attracting a significant number of this clientèle.

Some architecture and interior decoration journals have published articles on Tichka such as:

- *Le Matin du Sahara*, Casablanca, Philippe Couderc.
- *Architectural Digest*, Los Angeles, Denis Landt.
- *Mimar*, Singapore, Brian Brace Taylor.
- *L'Oeil*, Lausanne, Mouelle Hayot.
- *Beaux-Arts*, Paris, Jean Dethier.

This also contributed to the reputation of the hotel, attracting people with good taste, who were deterred by the snobbery of the Mamounia. Aware of this trend, the management of the Hotel Tichka has done its best to encourage it:

- by attracting individual guests rather than the usually noisy boisterous groups,
- by doing nothing to encourage families with children (no reduction for children, no special menus, no playgrounds.).

The fact that internationally famous actors, singers and sportsmen stay at the Tichka proves that the charm of the hotel is appealing, and that the management policy is successful.

b. Response to Project

The hotel has a good occupancy ratio: yearly average 60%, with the following breakdown:

- September, October, December, March, April, May, June: between 60 and 80%
- November, January, February, July: between 40 and 50%
- August: between 30 and 35%

showing that it enjoys a good reputation. Some clients have been regular guests since the opening. Other guests are as keen to take souvenir photographs of the Tichka as of the Kutubia or the square of Djema El Fna.

VII. Persons Involved

Owners/Developers

- Abdelwahad Doukai, owner of the land, founder, with Mohamed Aïmarah, of the Paradise Company.
- Mohamed Aïmarah, Co-founder of the Paradise Company played a major role in the elaboration of the programme and the choice of the architect and decorator.
- Jean-Paul Lance, recruited by Paradise Company; he followed the end of the construction and was then a hotel manager from its opening until February 1989 (at which date he was appointed construction supervisor for the Salam chain).
- Mohamed Belghmi, Chairman and Managing Director of the Salam Company. Owner of the Hotel Tichka since 1988, he has integrally preserved its character.

Design

- Charles Boccara, architect, author of the project.
- Bill Willis, decorator who, in close co-operation with Charles Boccara, carried out the decoration of the hotel.

Contractors

- Polybeton Company: all building trades.
- SMEC: structure, foundations and finishings. Manager: Mr. Chirasi.
- SEMANMA: wood work. Manager: Mr. Maatallam.
- Principal craftsman: Mr. Omar Jouahri

Laszlo Mester de Parajd
Saint Cloud, 2 April 1989