

Of all the major architectural prizes, the Aga Khan Award for Architecture is perhaps the only one that, in addition to celebrating the finest fruit that embellishes the tree of Architecture, encourages the roots that nurture the plant. These dual concerns place the Award in a truly unique position; for in order to make its selections, the Award must of necessity be concerned not only with product but also with process and the issues that generate that process. Thus, since its inception almost twenty-five years ago, the Aga Khan Award has been an extraordinarily inventive and courageous enterprise, seeking always to understand the fundamental issues of the societies it addresses and to identify those subtle but pivotal watersheds that shift our perspective and open up a world of new possibilities.

In Islamic societies, these issues and possibilities are even more diverse than we might imagine. For most of us Islamic architecture conjures up the incredible beauty of the Alhambra and the Taj Mahal, of Isfahan and Fatehpur-Sikri, as well as unforgettable images of closely packed habitats, ranging from the kasbahs in Algiers and Fez to the hill towns of Yemen. In short, an urbane oasis architecture, with impervious walls to keep out the hot, dry desert winds, built of timeless materials – mud, brick and stone. And this set of conditions stays surprisingly constant in a long geographic belt that runs all the way from Casablanca in the west to Delhi in the east. But the truth is that the vast majority of Muslims lives even further away than Delhi – in fact, most of them live east of Calcutta. What they have to deal with is not the hot, dry climate of the desert, where the air can be trapped in courtyards and humidified, but the hot, humid conditions of South-East Asia, where the air must constantly be kept moving, and light porous walls and cross-ventilation are essential. Furthermore, most of them live not in urban centres but in rural areas, so they need an architecture that is concerned with rural typologies and not urban ones.

The present set of Awards for the 2001 cycle articulates all these issues very eloquently. Not only do the projects demonstrate a wide and pluralistic range, from low-income housing in India to an elegant new hotel in Malaysia, but, more than in any previous cycle, there is a real emphasis on rural habitat. The considerable efforts of the last twenty-five years are

beginning to show results. There is a growing awareness in the rest of the world that the Aga Khan Award for Architecture probably represents the most serious process of all the major architectural awards. And from that, the people of the Islamic world have garnered a new sense of confidence in their own judgment and architectural skills.

This cycle also includes a special event, one that has occurred only twice before in the history of the prize – the presentation of a Chairman's Award. In 1980 this was awarded to the great Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy, and in 1986 to Rifat Chadirji of Iraq. In this cycle the Chairman's Award is presented to the extraordinarily brilliant and original genius, Geoffrey Bawa of Sri Lanka. There could have been no better choice. For five long decades Bawa has always marched to the beat of his own drum, creating an incomparable body of work that we can all now enjoy. In presenting him with the Award, we honour not only the great sensitivity of his world, the power and inventiveness of the language he has created, and the exquisite beauty of the fruit he has harvested but also the vital importance of the roots he has nourished all these years.

## FOREWORD CHARLES CORREA