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Throughout the Islamic world there is a thirst for the images of modernity, of material progress, the symbols of power. The colonial rulers are gone, the structures they left behind, the courts and residences and legislatures they built and from which the rulers governed, have long been occupied by our own leaders. Now the need is for new symbols and they are being imported complete and intact without adaptation, without filtering out the inappropriate, without perhaps even asking the question whether they could, or should, be different. There is little time.

The treasures of our past are being destroyed and an ever quickening construction boom is bringing us too many buildings that I think we will live to despise. Should we allow future generations of Muslims to live without the self-respect of our own cultural and spiritual symbols of power, to practise their faith without also being reminded of that sense of scale in relation to the universe around us which is so particularly ours?

The field trips I have mentioned are but one part of our quest. A world wide series of seminars on fundamental issues affecting modern Islamic architecture are assisting us to address the problems. Eminent scholars of Islamic culture and distinguished architects and designers have met in Paris, Istanbul and Jakarta to discuss the issue and to share their knowledge. The fourth seminar will take place next month in Fez.

In all these journeys and meetings, we have been searching for a definition of Islamic architecture. One of our first conclusions has been that no single definition exists. Islamic architecture has reflected different peoples, different climates, different times and materials, and thus today, in speaking about a revival, let me underline to you that I am far from referring to a new school! I do not believe it can exist, nor should it be encouraged, because this would stifle that strength which comes from the diversity of the Islamic world, and the creativity of those who will build around us in the years ahead.

We have, however, sought the essentials that go beyond regional factors of climate and materials and the limitations of period technology. What have we found?
One of our major conclusions centred on the serenity of form. In Islamic design the basic forms are balanced and ruled by geometry. There is a sense of stability, tranquillity and equilibrium. And with serenity goes modesty. There is a lack of domination and pride. The superiority of man-made structures over natural environment is a concept alien to Islamic belief.

A second conclusion growing out of the first was the congruence of our traditions with natural forces. There is much Islamic spirit in the current effort in the West to respect and preserve ecological balance. As an example of this, Islamic builders have employed cooling systems in their houses for the last thousand years using only sun and wind for power. Such houses circulated cool air and produced chilled water and even ice.

We found too that the overwhelming unity of Islamic life which sees no division between body and spirit, between this world and the next, was a powerful influence on Islamic architecture. The desire to bring to this world some of the beauty of the hereafter acted as a constant barrier to the discordant or the haphazard in Islamic styles. The calligraphy which adorns so much of what we have built was a constant reminder of spiritual content through its common design, the endless expression of the name of God.

Finally we found that we were able to specify applications of style which expressed our attitudes and beliefs. There is the framing of space for instance. We define each area. We construct a physical context for each activity in daily life. There is always a definite delineation between privacy and community, light areas and areas in shadow, small spaces and large spaces, interiors and exteriors, each is framed and set apart by itself usually with formality. There is further formality, it might even be called solemnity, in the passageways that connect all of these differing spaces.

And we were reminded that Islamic homes are sanctuaries, places of retreat and refreshment from the noise and movement of public life. Those aspects of our idiom that engender this sense of peace should come with us in our designs for the homes of the future. But here we come upon one of the many paradoxes that struck us in our research. How much of the privacy built into a Muslim house was necessitated by the sequestering of our women? When women step out of Purdah, no doubt the physical form of new households will reflect this change. On the other hand, perhaps the internal orientation of buildings can be most closely linked to

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70
» the privacy and attitude to the family, the very base
» of Islam.

71
72
There is also a strong kinaesthetic experience in
» Islamic building. There is a play upon the physical
» senses -- air currents touching the skin, the sound of
» moving water, the touch of varied surface textures,
» the richness of colour and the play of light and
» shade upon the vision, the scent of plants in the
courtyards, are touches of the paradise to come.

73
These then are our findings. What will we do with
them? We cannot offer any clear-cut solutions that
» correspond to the blueprint of the drawing board.
» Indeed, we do not seek them nor do we believe in
them. But we can identify the paths that must be
taken if such solutions are to be arrived at in the
future. The signposts to these paths are already
clearer.

74
We must begin with a new visual language for our
future environment, one generated from within
Islam, not devised abroad.

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76
We must foster the growth of a new generation of
architects knowledgeable about technology,
sensitive to the cultural diversities, regional
resources and separate national destinies of their
countries and imbued with a renewed sense of pride
in the value and dignity of Islamic culture.

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78
We must instill that sense of respect in those who
employ architects. The city planners, the Governme
nt officials, the private clients who commission
construction projects must be recognised as the
powerful agents of change that they are. They must
understand that to build is to exercise power and
that their decisions resonate upon Islam.

79
80
We must encourage sensitivity to local needs.
Labour-intensive construction and the teaching of
building skills must be stressed, especially in the
many regions where there is great unemployment.
We must look for the use of local artisans and crafts
people and of local materials.

81
82
This is what we have learned about the problems we
face and the ways in which they must be solved. Our
assessments, our reflection, our meditation
continue. Even so we are acting. Our first steps
along the path begin now. To encourage new
creative approaches we have instituted the Award
for achievements in Islamic architecture. The first of
these will be made at the end of 1980. The awarding
of prizes, the recognition of achievement is only a
part of our objective. We seek at the same time to
open communications between Islam and the West

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I am often asked how better understanding can be developed between East and West, whether bridges can be built and what they should look like. There are as many answers as the number of times the question is asked, but it is my deep conviction that a singular step should be taken, a magnificent relationship developed on which so much could be built if the West will cease to look at the Islamic architectural heritage simply as a matter of scholastic interest and admiration. On the contrary, give to it recognition of a different dimension, a dimension of the future. Enhance it, enrich it and enliven it, put at its disposal your talents, your knowledge and your creativity.

I do not wish to imply that the West is solely responsible for what is happening to Islamic environments. I am saying that you could do much more, as you are already doing for your own architectural heritage, to help revive the culture of Islam. Creativity knows no borders: it is not of the East nor the West, of the North nor the South, but it sometimes needs awakening, to be set alight, to be shown a purpose. I believe such a time is now.

The recognition that teaching and communications are of the essence and that, for years to come, the West's contribution is fundamental to an Islamic architectural revival, led me to create the first major teaching and information programme incorporating all the points I have mentioned.

We must also make every effort to see that those who make the journey to study far from home return to their native lands to use their knowledge, to plant the seeds of this revival in the soil of Islam. I might note here that having schools of architecture within the borders of Islamic countries does not guarantee an Islamic architecture. Many architectural schools in the Muslim world have orientated their teaching towards modern western idioms instead of seeking to revive their own culture. They are often not to blame as the source of their teaching is usually in the West. Yet few of the western schools are informed about the real needs of their counterparts in Muslim countries, fewer still have developed the resources and documentation necessary to meet the needs of Islamic architectural scholarship, whether in Muslim countries or in the West.

» and among builders in the Muslim nations. At present the exchange is very limited, indeed, almost non-existent. An architect in Lahore has little access to news of what is being built in Rabat and if he himself devises a good solution to a design problem, there are no channels through which he can share that solution.
| 91 | To fulfil the immediate need for an information base for all who require it, and to move into the action as effectively as possible, this first programme will build upon the existing resources of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University. I would like to share with you my expectation of the clarity that will follow this time of confusion, this time of turning back to rediscover some of the foundations on which to build the future. Before the end of this century, before the 1420th year of our faith, I hope to see an Islamic civilisation with a strong sense of purpose, that has become clear in its understanding of itself and of the world around it. And with those gifts of strength and understanding, our builders, our Governments and our private patrons should be able to create an environment that will personify the spirit of modern Islam. |
| 92 | I hope that in the years ahead we shall see Islamic cities representing to the world all that the city of God and man can be. Cities of which all Muslims can be proud, where our magnificent heritage and our firm place in this new age, are manifest. |
| 93 | As we work towards that vision of the future we will remember the Sura of Light from the Qur'an. It tells us that the oil of the blessed olive tree lights the lamp of understanding, a light that belongs neither to East nor West. We are to give this light to all. In that spirit, all that we learn will belong to the world -- and that too is part of the vision I share with you. |<|>
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