

Kazim Kenan in Ghazieh (1963–1966). The Beirut Airport, the Cité Sportive, the Casino du Liban, and the Presidential Palace, are among many government sponsored projects testifying to the authorities' ambition to lend the country a modern face. The Ministry of Defense by Wogenscky and Hindié (1962–1968), the Tripoli Fair started in 1962 by Oscar Niemeyer, and the Electricité du Liban headquarters by CETA group (1965–1972), are probably the best representatives of public architecture of the time.

When preoccupation with regional identity emerged in the mid-1960s, local materials such as sandstone were rediscovered and spaces like courtyards reappeared. Assem Salam's buildings of that period include the Serail in Sidon, and the Khashokji Mosque (1965) recognizable with its sandstone walls topped with a faceted roof in reinforced concrete—a modern interpretation of the dome.

1970's and 1980's

A few exceptions aside, such as the daring Interdesign showroom by Khalil Khoury, the architecture of the 1970's seems to have developed into a mainstream, literal application of building ordinance. Linear balconies wrapped around dull buildings were more a product of exploiting the total area permitted in building codes than from sound design thinking. The experimentation of the earlier period was abandoned for soulless architecture.

1990's, Reconstruction and beyond

Construction continued throughout the wars that ravaged Lebanon between 1975 and 1990, yet some degree of rupture with the past was inevitable. The intermittent periods of unrest that shook the country caused significant destruction. Because the core of Beirut was the scene of fierce battles, new neighborhoods developed overnight in the suburbs. Uncontrolled expansion reached zones hitherto relatively protected from urbanization. The result was the detrimental loss of balance between the urban and the rural as the fabric of rural zones was invaded by the urban building type often incongruously imposed on sloping sites.

After the war, reconstruction and urban redevelopment raised the complex issue of identity. What appeared to have been appropriately resolved in the cultural heyday of the 1950's and 1960's emerged once more, unresolved this time, intensified both by the delayed postmodern wave and nostalgia for a Lebanon that was felt to have disappeared. Two tendencies emerged: exacerbated high-tech as a vain attempt to catch up with the world, and the recourse to pastiche that merely testifies to the loss of tradition. Fortunately, other approaches have appeared, devoid of superficial statements, displaying a decisive character that could be called Situated Modernism. Such an example is the Banque Audi headquarters by Kevin Dash (2001). A more recent building, the CMA-CGM headquarters by Nabil Gholam architects (2005–2011) resorts to an enclosed mass of double-skin glass, treated differently on the various sides, and manages to negotiate its affiliation to the encountered models of the 1950s–60s with deep shaded façades.

Still recovering from the after-effects of the war, although the damage these days is less the physical than psychological, architecture in today's Lebanon has lost much of its former confidence and as a result, is too often tempted by the comfort and security of rehearsed tradition. Care for the urban and natural environments and relation to public space, are much more contextually needed than superficial stylistic references or outbids on the 'Lebanity' of the design.

Jordan

Jordan was founded as an independent country in 1924, after it was under Ottoman rule forming part of the province of Syria with Damascus as capital. Amman has been populated by waves of immigrants, growing very quickly with the arrival of Palestinians in 1948 and in 1967. The city benefited also from the oil booms of the 1970s in the Gulf and later from the Gulf war in 1990, and again from the 2nd oil boom in the mid-2000s.

Amman's architecture is mostly dictated by the use of local stone admirably served by skilled masons. In the early 1980s, Bilal Hammad proposed a housing scheme, al-Ribat in Amman that offers the local qualities of a neighborhood cluster inducing conviviality and keeping with human scale. It has the merit of ageless architecture, concerned with spatial relationships and performance more than style. In the SOS village in Aqaba on the Red Sea (1988–1991) Jafar Tukan also uses local skills of stone building and simple vernacular ventilation techniques. Precast concrete is introduced to replace wooden tension members.

In the early 2000s, Amman saw a project that can be coined as Ammani, namely the Wild Jordan Center by architect/artist Ammar Khammash. Perched on concrete stilts over the steep hill of Jabal Amman, the nature center displays a natural, unadorned, and low

tech elegance demonstrating that good architecture does not require much artifice. Resorting to many recycled materials, the building fits in its context while not making an expected literal reference to the locale.

The tradition of stone building found another contemporary application with the International Academy in Amman by Khalid Nahhas (2006). Here again, passive energy and the use of traditional materials and techniques are combined with contemporary amenities. Several finishes of local stone demonstrate that the tradition is still alive.

Palestine

The history of architecture in Palestine is yet to be written. Riwaq, a center for architectural preservation in Ramallah, did a colossal survey of historic buildings built prior to 1948 in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. The remarkable work covers whole villages and towns since 1700. Very little has been done, however, on the documentation of its architecture of the past century, mostly after Israeli occupation. Probably more acutely than anywhere else, Palestinian heritage, old and modern, is threatened. Occupation, systematic demolitions, but also unprecedented rates of construction in recent times had a tremendous impact on the quality of the built environment. A record of 20th century buildings in Palestine would certainly include the Baroque Jacir Palace in Bethlehem (1914), the Alami House in Jericho (1919), the Qutub House by Egyptian architect Sayed Karim in Shufat (1960), the work of Hani Arafat in Nablus in the 1960s such as the Municipality and the Salti House, the Hanania Commercial Building in central Ramallah by Arkbuild (1971), the Engineering Building at Birzeit University (1984).

Three buildings particularly stand out: the Azzahra-Ambassador Hotel (1953) in East Jerusalem, designed by a team composed of architects Georges Rais and Theo Canaan with engineer Bagdassar Erdekian, symbolically built around a large oak tree. More recently, two landmarks were built in Ramallah by architect Jafar Tukan. Both minimalist structures make the best of their sites and inspire serenity and meditation. Their ingredients are simple landscaping, and humble volumes with local materials. In the Yasser Arafat Mausoleum (2007), a modest but powerful place, the prayer pavilion and the burial chamber face each other on two sides of a path. The prayer hall is a meditative space made of Jerusalem stone only adorned with a frieze holding calligraphy of Quranic inscriptions, while the chamber is elegantly mirrored in a reflecting pool. The Memorial for renowned poet Mahmoud Darwish (2012) located on the hill of Al-Birweh Park, includes a mausoleum, a museum, an underground theater, and an open air theater.

Syria

The first two decades of the 20th century in Syria were marked by the works of Fernando di Aranda who designed the Hijaz railway station in Damascus (1908–1912) and Damascus University (1922–1923). Another distinguished architect is Abderrazak Malas, the author of the Fijeh Water Building.

Hotel Orient Palace by architect Antoine Tabet (1930–1933) is an early modernist building, in line with the French rationalist school of Auguste Perret. Michel Ecochard, the French architect and urban designer left two important buildings. While renovating the Azem Palace in 1936, he added a modernist house on pilotis for the director of the newly created French Institute. At the same time, Ecochard designed the National Museum in Damascus, completed in 1940, combining the sobriety of medieval Syrian architecture with the simplicity of modern architecture. Until the 1960s, the country had a flourishing building industry. From that period, some distinguished designs by Egyptian architects Mustafa Shawky and Salah Zeitoun are found, namely hospitals in Damascus Aleppo and Hama. Borhan Tayara and Naufal Kasrawi designed the Fine Arts Society Condominiums in Damascus (1968–73), probably the first duplex apartment building in the country.

When the Socialist political system nationalized the profession and gave mostly work to large companies owned by the military, it had a devastating effect on architecture quality in the country. Several established architects decided to relocate in Lebanon, Kuwait, or Saudi Arabia like Naufal Kasrawi, while some remained and were able to maneuver, like Youssef Abou Hadid with his remarkable works in Damascus, namely the Ministry of Higher Education and the Syrian Insurance Headquarters (1992), and Borhan Tayara who designed the Faculty of Architecture at Damascus University. The Shagrawieh Elementary School in As-Suwayda built with local basaltic stone in 1990 by the Mhanna brothers won the Aga Khan Award but did not succeed at reviving traditional ways of building.

Among the distinguished buildings built around the year 2000 in Damascus is the Madrasa and Mosque Shaykh Badr-al-Din al-Hasani by Wael Samhouri, a 9 story building, commissioned by the Awqaf Charity. The project is revealing of the conditions of practice in negotiating architectural style and types of window openings with the client.