

From 2000 on, glimpses
of current trends
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Since 2000, the Egyptian economy has fluctuated dramatically. From 2000 to approximately 2005 the economy's performance was sluggish; from 2005 it improved, reaching its peak in 2008, until the global recession caused a local slowdown during the next few years. From 2011 until the present day, the political uprising has caused dramatic economic decline. The combination of the dramatic fluctuation coupled with the energy crisis has led to disillusionment amongst architects on the issue of local identity versus modernity. Architects increasingly look for real value behind design; as such they no longer add components on the facade or sculpt forms so as to give an "en vogue" impression, nor are they interested in superficial classical image making. Instead, architects seek green measures that offer pleasant living while saving on energy. The following projects show how this change of mood has started to materialize. They show new trends that will further strengthen in the coming few years.

The Four Seasons Resort (Sharm El-Sheikh, 2002) redefines local understanding on how to landscape a five-star resort yet maintain sustainable measures. Despite hilly terrain, Tarek Beshir planted 2,400 palms and 1,200 trees stretching over nine hectares in order to create an oasis-like environment that offers a comfortable microclimate for its visitors. Contrary to local norms, only 20 percent of the green area is covered by grass, the rest is groundcover, thus reducing significantly the use of irrigation water.

Sustainable identity rather than pastiche was a key issue in Al-Azhar Park, designed by Maher Stino (Cairo, 2004). Everywhere in the thirty-hectare garden, visitors appreciate the open modern courts as outdoor living rooms under tree canopies. The design of the garden and its proximity to historic Cairo, put visitors into direct contact with nature while nourishing simultaneously their strong sense of heritage and feeling of contemporaneity.

Reviving heritage took a new trend with Emad Farid and Ramez Azmi who built Albabenshal Hotel in the eight hundred-year old settlement of Shali (Siwa Oasis, 2005). They adapted five old houses to become a hotel of fourteen rooms around a courtyard. Everywhere in the hotel, visitors might notice the gradual fading of its walls in the midst of demolished Shali houses. Such blending encouraged local inhabitants to revive their lost traditions as they saw the economic rewards of the hotel's approach.

A new attitude towards mixing climatically valid traditions is evident in Mohamed Awad's work. He practiced the symbiosis of various Mediterranean traditions in the design of the Fahmy villa (Alexandria, 2007). On the right side, heavy piers stacked together with cascading rooftops recall the temple of Hatshepsut. On the left side, the vaulted roof recalls the Roman building tradition. In between is a modern Mediterranean courtyard mediating between the two traditions of sustainable Alexandrian architecture. Behind the courtyard is a reception that has a double skin roof to achieve better ventilation and soft illumination for indoor living.

A pioneering work by Abdel Halim Abdel Halim and Sasaki Associates focused on creating an environmental plan for a campus that reduces the energy load by 40 percent. They believed in modifying the microclimate in the new campus of the American University (Cairo, 2008) by connecting variable sized courtyards through corridors so as to induce favorable air currents inside spaces. This was practiced in Abdel Halim's design for the Humanities and Social Science Building where multiple interlinked court designs foster AUC's liberal art education. In this philosophy, free exchange of knowledge across various departments of the school suggests different modes of gathering. Interlinked courts with various patterns of light and shadow encourage students to step outside classrooms and interact, moving seamlessly from one department to another.

Legorreta's concern was to capture contemporary student lifestyle by using an historic model, as seen by his design for student housing in the American University (Cairo, 2008). He grouped apartments using the morphology of medieval cities where large public spaces mushroom into smaller ones. This gradual transition is agreeable with students living on campus since it encourages social clusters whilst retaining territorial privacy. Students living there prefer these smaller spaces filled with intimacy and friendship. Legorreta understood this tendency and added extra living rooms at the ground level overlooking these smaller spaces so as to foster a familial atmosphere.

Educating local communities to reconnect with their traditions without losing their modernist aspirations was a basic agenda for Ramses Nossbi who built a Visitors Center in Wadi El Gemal National Reserve (Marsa Alam, 2009). Local practice avoids using traditional construction materials in favor of foreign unsustainable ones, because of the modernity associated with the latter. With a nod to both the traditional and to the modern, Nossbi made the bulk of the building of bearing stone walls and columns, and the roof of

modular palm midrib panels, with a second roof on top composed of corrugated metal sheets. This mixture of modern and local materials inspired local people because they came to the realization that the modern component not only projects a desirable image but also improves the environmental quality due to the double roof system.

The design of the Pyramid Villa (Giza, under construction) by Shahira Fahmy rejects the stagnant modernism offered by the rigid villa formula. The site directly overlooks the Pyramids and this gave Fahmy ideas for an unconventional layout. The formal reception is on the upper floor rather than the ground in order to enjoy the spectacular view from above. The house splits into two volumes so that the left volume containing the formal reception room can slightly rotate so as to capture the exact view. Another unconventional solution is the ramp which leads up to the formal reception, thus celebrating the processional route leading to the view of the Pyramids.

Going for LEED certification is a concern in Egyptian architectural practice that materialized during the last 3 years. The Egyptian Consultant Group (ECG) together with Credit Agricole had the vision to design headquarters (Cairo, under construction) with a serious sustainable design. The bank is a strong advocate of "green banking" and supports renewable energy and energy saving projects. The Bank's Headquarters in Cairo has a double skin facade with a slim U-shaped layout insuring good daylight and view. There is 30 percent more fresh air intake than standard requirements. There are sensors that monitor indoor levels of CO2, and others that monitor the number of occupants to manage air volume and light. Cooling depends on absorption chillers that consume 30 instead of conventional 700 watt/hour. With these specifications, energy saving reached sixty percent reduction in load. It is therefore not surprising that the building is on its way to becoming the first platinum LEED certificate holder in Egypt.

Arata Isozaki's design of Egypt-Japan University for Science and Technology (Alexandria, under construction) handles the issues of environmental ethics and a strong visual presence aimed at educating the public. He covered the campus with a 550 x 500 meter roof using a technological membrane that is composed of photovoltaic cells, movable sunshades, and permeable filters. A bold educational philosophy lies under this bold roof redesign. The whole layout is a mixture of academic buildings with student dormitories. This brings more life and productivity to the campus as it depicts the vitality of Egyptian street culture rather than an idealized academic enclave.

Through these ten pioneering projects, Egyptian architectural practices are responding to the current hardships they face. A lack of basic economic needs, of reliable power supply, of foreign currency, combined with high inflation, all contributed to clients prioritizing value for money over ideals of image-making. In this case, landscape that provides visual comfort while saving on water consumption is preferred. Projects setting new standards are the ones that educate the locals on the value of their traditional architecture and show them how to make best use of it in a contemporary context. They are achieving high professional practices by searching for LEED certification and proudly showing how little energy is consumed. They revise standard modernist clichés in villa design in favor of designs which are more responsive to the surrounding environment. They capture modern social habits and fuse them with traditional ideas. These are the projects that will set the trend for Egyptian practice during the coming years.