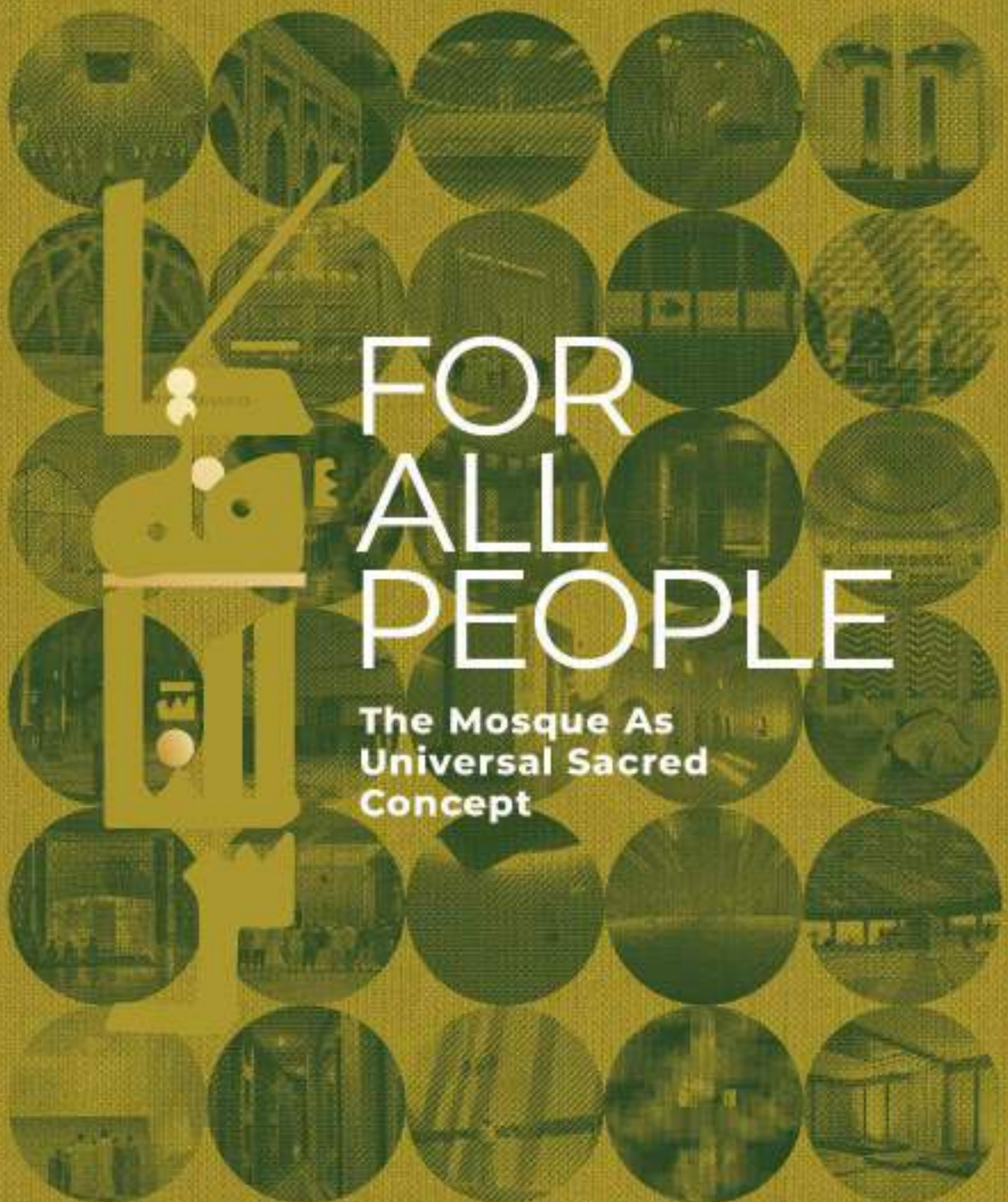
Abdullatif Al Fozan Award

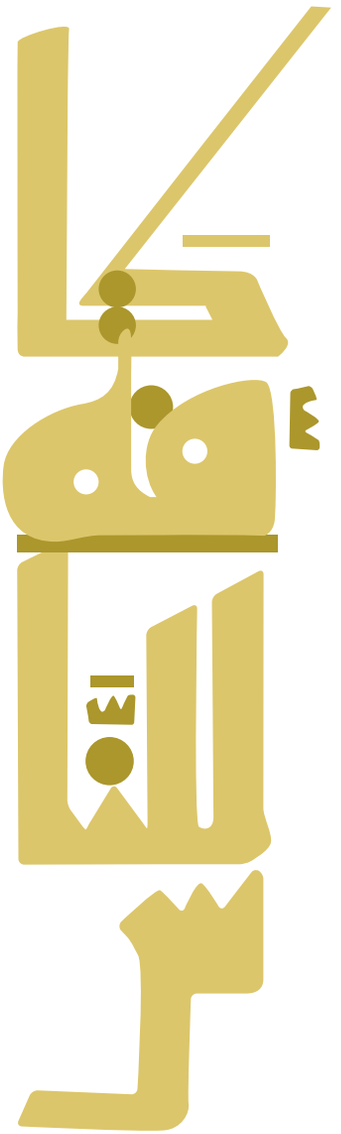
FIFTH CYCLE
2023-2026



FOR ALL PEOPLE

The Mosque As Universal Sacred Concept

Mashary Abdullah Alnaim
Wael Samhouri

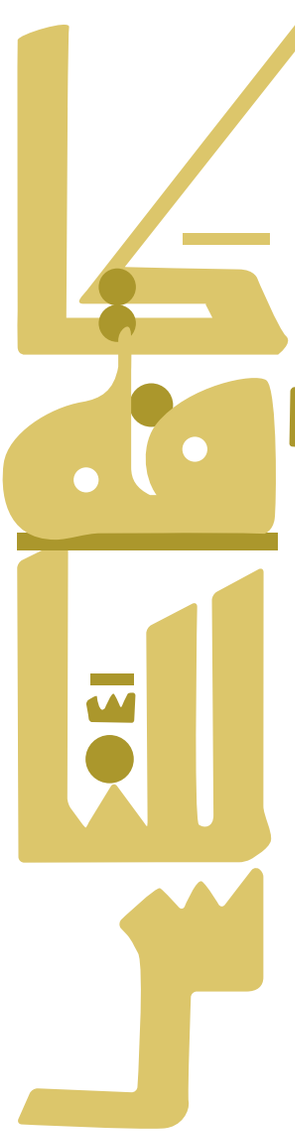


FOR ALL PEOPLE

The Mosque as Universal Sacred Concept

Abdullatif Al Fozan Award

FIFTH CYCLE
2023-2026



FOR ALL PEOPLE

The Mosque as Universal Sacred Concept

Mashary Abdullah Alnaim
Wael Samhouri

© Mashary Abdullah Mohammed Alnaim, 2026
King Fahd National Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Alnaim, Mashary Abdullah Mohammed

For All People: The Mosque As Universal Sacred concept /
Mashary Abdullah Mhammed Al Naim .- Dammam , 2026

548p; 30X22cm
ISBN: 978-603-06-3721-8
1- Mosque architecture I-Title

L.D. no. 1447/14532
ISBN: 978-603-06-3721-8

For All People: The Mosque As Universal Sacred Concept
© Copyright Abdullatif Al-Fozan Award For Mosque Architecture
All rights reserved. It is prohibited to transfer any part of this publication or store it in any of the devices for keeping, retrieving information and by any means without prior permission from the publisher.
For information, please contact: info@alfozanaward.org

All images and drawings in this book have been published with the prior knowledge and consent of all concerned parties, the book›s producer and its publishing house, and its publication, all of which bear no responsibility for any breach of copyright or other legal breaches that it may be exposed to. We have made no effort to ensure that the information and names provided are correct. In the event of any errors or errors. It is a pleasure to enter or correct information in any subsequent editions.

Authors
Mashary Al Naim
Wael Samhouri

Contributors
Hakan Elevli
Sara O Khasib
Amel Abdelli
Jerry Magutu
Jung Ik Hong
Alim Feyzulayev
Lamia Hadda
Mohammed Al Naim
Jemma Chidiac
Juan Carlos Calanchini González Cos
Aya Musmar
Wael Samhouri
Corinna Del Bianco
Rizal Muslimin
Ahmed Abdel Moneim

A special contribution from Abdulrahman Amer Lardhi

Follow up
Abdulrahman Amer Lardhi

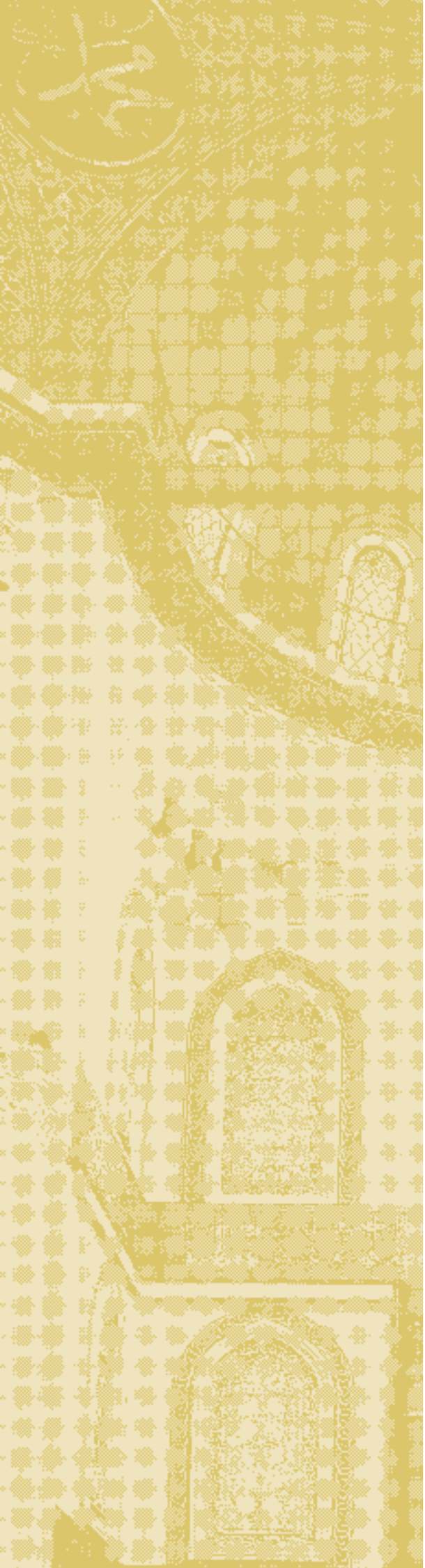
Publisher
Al-Fozan Award For Mosque Architecture

Book concept design
Mohamad Hussain Abdul-Majid Barada

Cover calligraphy
Mohamad Hussain Abdul-Majid Barada | Mamoun Ahmed

Typestting
Montserrat

First edition, 2026
Printed in Saudi Arabia
Sarawat Printers - Jeddah



This Book

For All People

The Mosque As Universal Sacred Concept

In an age marked by fragmentation and the loss of shared bearings, certain symbols still possess the quiet authority to unify what has come undone—and to sow serenity where noise has taken root.

Among the most enduring of these is the mosque.

For this book, we have chosen a singular Qur'anic expression of profound resonance: Kāffatan li'l-Nās — "inclusive for all people."

It occurs only once in the Qur'an, in the verse:

"We have not sent you [O Muhammad] but as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner to all mankind." (Saba', 28)

Within this verse, three pillars of the Prophetic mission intersect: the Divine Sender, the Messenger, and the Message. Yet, what stands out most is the manner in which the Message is described—its universality: "to all people."

It is a summons that transcends geography, lineage, and identity—gathering humanity around a shared orientation: the qiblah. And in the mosque, that orientation takes spatial form—a place open to all, where architecture becomes invitation.

It is from this interpretive horizon that our title emerges—not to conflate the mosque with the Message or the Messenger, but to suggest that mosque architecture, despite the breadth of its contemporary expressions, remains drawn to a constant center: qiblah, expansiveness, and the unifying act of gathering.

The subtitle, Unity in Contemporary Mosque Architecture, draws attention to the generative paradox at the heart of this book:

Unity is not the negation of diversity—it is its condition and fulfillment.

Just as peoples differ in tongue and custom, so too do their architectural languages diverge—particularly in today's contexts that welcome experimentation and reimagining. And yet, the mosque remains oriented—true to its essence, and faithful to its role.

Thirty mosques. Thirty architectural dialects. Thirty cultural milieux.

Each distinct. Yet all converging upon a singular truth:

The mosque as an open, sacred space for all people—

A house where the soul is reawakened,

and the glad tidings (Bisharat) are received.

Kāffatan li'l-Nās... a bearer of good news.

CONTENTS

Preface **5**

The Mosque.. A Point of Balance in a Changing World **8**

From a Local Vision to Kāffatan li-l-Nās **10**

Kāffatan li-l-Nās ‘for all people’, ‘to all humankind’: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Mosque’s Universality, Belonging, and Silent Daʿwah **12**

Shortlisted Mosques **92**

Centeral Mosques 94

96 ..... HIKMA - A Religious and Secular Complex
110 ..... Cambridge Central Mosque
124 ..... Islamisches Kulturzentrum Graz
138 ..... Bahria Grand mosque Lahore
152 ..... Al Jabbar Mosque
166 ..... Houghton Mosque
180 ..... Nurul Yaqin Mosque
194 ..... H.H Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque – Ras Al Khaima
208 ..... Hazrat Sultan Mosque
222 ..... H.H Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque – Al Ain
236 ..... Khaled bn Abdulaziz Al Saud Mosque

Jumu'a Mosques 250

252 ..... Agarpur Mosque
266 ..... Al Fadanga Mosque
280 ..... As-Salam Jame Mosque
294 ..... Marmara University Faculty Of Theology Mosque
308 ..... E Zubaida Mosque
322 ..... Nomba Mosque
336 ..... Kushtia Mosque
350 ..... Mamluki Lancet Mosque
364 ..... Ulul Albab Mosque
378 ..... Tabuk University Mosque
392 ..... Ghazi Al Gosaibi Mosque

Local Mosques 406

408 ..... Light of Allah Mosque
422 ..... Miazi Bari Mosque
436 ..... Zebun Nessa Mosque
450 ..... TRAD Japanese Mosque
464 ..... Alnajdi Mosque
476 ..... Bab Al Salam Mosque
490 ..... Isfahan Cemetery Prayer Room
504 ..... Al Sabbah Musalla

Epilogue: Towards an All-Inclusive Mosque in a Heterogeneous World 518

540 ..... Index
546 ..... Photo Credits
548 ..... Authors

THE MOSQUE

A Point of Balance in a Changing World

Across the centuries, the mosque has remained one of the most compelling places for gathering people around a meaning that outlasts the moment and is not confined to any single setting. It is more than a building, and more than a religious sign. It is where several layers of human life meet at once: the spiritual and the social, the cultural and the urban. In a time of unusually rapid change, when fragmentation deepens and questions of identity, meaning, and belonging press more urgently, the mosque continues to offer a point of balance. It does so quietly, through a presence that helps restore something of a person's inner composure and attentiveness. Its strength lies in a rare flexibility. It can take many forms and still remain recognizably itself. Wherever it stands, and however it is expressed, it remains a mosque. Shapes differ, materials change, contexts shift, yet the core is preserved: a place of sakīnah, a place of orientation, and a place made for the human being. That ability to hold permanence and renewal together, to remain rooted while staying open, is what makes the mosque a profoundly human phenomenon, imperfectly yet earnestly emulating the Creator, even before it becomes an architectural one.

Over many years working in heritage, the built environment, and cultural affairs, I have come to see that the mosque is not simply one element in the urban fabric. In many places, the mosque is society's heart. In and around mosques, relationships take shape, communities gather, and values are quietly formed. A mosque is not a building one merely visits. It is an experience that is lived. It is not a closed emblem, but an open space that welcomes people, however different their backgrounds and cultures may be. In that sense, the mosque raises questions that touch the human condition itself: how do we live, how do we search for meaning, and how can space help restore inner balance. These are not only religious questions. They are human questions. At its core, the mosque is not only a place where ritual is performed. It is a place for all of us, a place that restores our capacity to listen, to reflect, and to reorder our inner life in alignment with the Creator, before returning to the outer world.

The community that forms around the mosque is not simply a social byproduct. It is one of the main ways we come to understand the mosque's cultural and existential value. A mosque is not completed by architecture alone, but by the people who surround it, by the stories that gather around it, and by the bonds it creates across generations. It is the community that gives the mosque its life, and it is the mosque that helps the community keep its balance. This mutual relationship is what makes the mosque, in the fullest sense, a deeply human institution, one that cannot be reduced to a form or a function.

A mosque is not merely visits. It is that is lived.

In a world where cultures intersect and identities grow more intertwined, a natural question arises: how can the mosque become a means of connection with the other, both within Muslim societies and beyond them. The answer lies in the nature of the mosque itself. By its nature, it is an open space. It does not ask the entrant for an identity card, nor does it impose a single mode of belonging. It allows a person to enter as they are, to stand as they are, and to be silent as they are. This deep simplicity is what enables the mosque to become a bridge between cultures rather than a barrier. When the mosque is opened to the other, it can become a place of dialogue, mutual understanding, and shared recognition.

Perhaps this is what makes the Abdullatif Al Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture distinctive in its message and its impact. The Award does not celebrate mosques only as beautiful buildings, but as spaces that carry a double intelligence: the intelligence of architecture and the intelligence of society. It looks for mosques that succeed in holding together the aesthetics of design and the depth of purpose, architectural creativity and the ability to nurture a living community, cultural specificity and a universal human horizon.

Through the Award's work, I have seen that the mosque can become a laboratory for innovation, a platform for thoughtful experimentation, and a field for rethinking the relationship between the human being and space. The mosques highlighted by the Award are not merely architectural examples. They are human stories of success, showing how architecture can serve people, and how the mosque can speak within the visual language of our time without losing its universality or its essential identity.

a building alone an experience

This book, Kāffatan li-l-Nās, arrives at a moment when the world is in dire need of renewed reflection on the meaning of shared spaces and shared values, and on the role of architecture in shaping the individual and the community before it shapes buildings. The mosque, with its history and spirit, is capable of offering a model for such renewed thinking. It is a space that can receive all, restoring something of the reassurance many feel they have lost, and something of the meaning they continue to seek. I believe the future of the mosque will not be made only in design offices, nor in technical laboratories, but in the intention that moves it: the intention to open, to welcome, and to cultivate sakīnah. Technology may change materials, reshape light, and make spaces more responsive, even more sustainable, yet it cannot grant the mosque its essence. That essence comes from the human being, and from the enduring need for a place that restores one's Divine inner balance.

I pray to God that this work will contribute meaningfully to our understanding of the mosque, open new horizons for research and reflection, and strengthen the mosque's presence as a unifying space, a deeply human space, and one that looks toward the future, welcoming all of humanity, Kāffatan li-l-Nās.

Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud
Chairman, Board of Trustees of the Award
Riyadh
1 March 2026
12 Ramadan 1447 AH

From a Local Vision to

KĀFFATAN LI-L-NĀS

The thought of founding the Abdullatif Al Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture came with a clear aim. I hoped to renew our attention to the mosque, not as a building that simply sits within everyday routine, but as a living, organic environment that can express our shared Islamic values, support a robust, nurturing, and loving community life, and speak to the hope of a future we share with the Creator of the universe in Paradise. What began locally was anchored in a simple conviction: in our context, the mosque is not limited to worship alone. It is the center of a life fully lived, a platform for meaningful, even Divine, connection, and a place of shared memory. Yet the vision did not remain local for long. It expanded, evolved, and grew into a global outlook, one that is truly Kāffatan li-l-Nās.

Wherever it stands, the mosque has an unusual ability to adapt to its local environment and local community without losing its essence. You will see many examples of this in the pages that follow. A mosque's form may change, its materials may differ, and its surroundings may shift, yet it remains a mosque. It remains a place that can return a person to themselves and to their Creator, offering a moment of honesty and centering in a world that seems to grow more less honest and more scattered each day. This ability to hold together continuity and change is what makes the mosque a universal human phenomenon, not confined to one culture or one society. From here came our intention through the Award: to rediscover this space, to reconsider its role, and to open the door to new architectural lineages that respect inheritance while playing an important part in building humanity's shared, Creator-honoring future with confidence.

Through the Award, we have sought to reshape our understanding of what a mosque culture can be, and what it can produce as architecture across the world. A mosque is not simply a building that is erected. It is a culture that is formed. It is a relationship between human beings and space, between society and the city, between inner life and the built environment. When culture changes, architecture changes. When architecture changes, the way people live changes, the way they interact changes, and the way they perceive the world changes. For this reason, the Award is not merely an architectural competition. It is a cultural project, a project that rethinks the meaning of the mosque and its place in contemporary life.

In its essence, the only one of its kind of w place of life, whe learn, connect, a

One of the most important aims of the Award has been to build a global bond among thinkers and architects who share a common concern: how can mosque architecture evolve, renew itself, and express Divinely designed and bestowed human ingenuity in every place. This bond is not only professional, not only a bond of architectural practitioners, while that clearly is a critical part of the whole. It is a community of thought, a space for dialogue, a platform for exchanging experience, and a bridge between different cultures, united by respect for the mosque and an understanding of its value to Kāffatan li-l-Nās, all of humanity. Over the years, we have seen that this global community can challenge prevailing assumptions about mosque architecture, and can offer new models that inspire, educate, and open unexpected horizons.

What we are doing today through this book is one step within a longer sequence of past and, God-willing, future steps to rethink mosque architecture. It comes after years of work, research, and dialogue with architects, thinkers, and practitioners from across the world. It affirms that the mosque is not a completed project, but an ongoing one, evolving with human beings, changing with time, and responding to the needs of societies, however different their environments and cultures may be. Humanity's need for the mosque increases with time.

This book, Kāffatan li-l-Nās, reflects the core of what we believe in through the Award: that the mosque is a space wide enough for everyone: all members of ummah, the Islamic community, for sure, but also those whom the Prophet (PBUH) affectionately called, "the people of the book" (Jews and Christians), certainly every mosque is wide

enough for them, as well as every other member of our human family Kāffatan li-l-Nās indeed, all of humanity. A Mosque is not limited to one group, closed within one culture, or restricted to a single image. It can be local and global at once. It can express the identity of the community that embraces it, while remaining part of our shared human heritage. This is precisely what we see today in the mosques honored through the Award: mosques that bring together the intelligence of architecture and the intelligence of society, the beauty of form and the depth of purpose, simplicity, and innovation.

Rethinking mosque architecture is not merely an architectural task. It is also a cultural, human, and spiritual one. It invites us to reconsider our relationship with space, with the city we live in, with one another, both within ummah and currently outside it, and with our Creator. In its essence, the mosque is not only a place of worship. It is a place of life, where people meet, learn, connect, and find sakīnah. If we want the mosque to regain its true role, the role very ably served by the very first mosque, we must rethink the architecture of this space, the culture that produces it, and the society that builds it.

I believe the future holds significant possibilities for mosque architecture, and the Award will be part of that future. We will continue our work, continue our research, continue building bridges between cultures, and continue supporting architects and thinkers who see the mosque as more than a building. We continue because the mosque deserves to be rediscovered, because all people deserve a space that restores their balance, and because the world today, more than ever, needs places that renew people's capacity to listen: to oneself, to others, and to the silence that comes before meaning.

Abdullatif bin Ahmed Al Fozan
Founder of the Award
Al Khobar
1 March 2026
12 Ramadan 1447 AH

e mosque is not
orship. It is a
re people meet
nd find sakīnah.

Kāffatan li-l-Nās

‘FOR ALL PEOPLE’, ‘TO ALL HUMANKIND’

A Philosophical Inquiry into the Mosque’s Universality, Belonging, and Silent Daʿwah

1

On a close reading of the Qur'anic verse, "We have not sent you except to all humankind, as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner; yet most people do not know" (Qurʾān, Sabaʾ 34:28), a simple conclusion begins to take shape. If the Messenger (PBUH) was sent to all humankind, then the mosque, as one of the most tangible expressions of Islam's cultural and spatial presence, cannot be understood as a place for Muslims alone. The notion of silent daʿwah (al-daʿwah al-ṣāmitah) has always belonged to the mosque's wider vocation. Daʿwah is not meant here as 'invitation' in a casual sense, but as a calling: a way of conveying meaning through presence, conduct, and form, no less than through speech. In that light, a mosque may speak without words. It may allow the other to read something in its restraint and quietness, and to encounter a message that does not demand attention, yet still asks for reflection.

1. *From darkness into light, the mosque reveals itself through a spirituality that allows place to transcend materiality.*

In November 2022, we convened an important conference in partnership with Kuwait University under the title, “The Mosque: A Transcultural Building.” The conference posed a focused question: how can a building that continues to proliferate worldwide integrate into local cultures, and how can it remain elastic enough to express those cultures by drawing on forms that have evolved locally? The mosque, on this reading, does not seek to dominate its surroundings or force them to bend under an overwhelming presence. Yet it retains, with notable discipline, its purpose and what might be called its ‘universal governing premises’.

This led us to a deeper question: how has the mosque sustained such capacity across centuries, and why does it remain so legible today? We returned, again and again, to one insight. The mosque’s architecture is not detached from people; it is interwoven with them. It orders daily life through a rhythm that is neither marginal nor accidental. This is what embeds the mosque in a community’s lasting memory, and what can cultivate a shared sense of coherence among those who gather within it.

For that reason, choosing *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* (‘for all people’, ‘to all humankind’) as the title of this book also recalls our previous volume, *li-taʿārafū* (‘so that you may know one another’). There, the mosque was approached as a social product: a framework concerned, above all, with forming the nucleus of a connected community. Under this lens, the mosque is for all people across ages, genders, and social positions. Within it, the affluent encounters the poor, the old meets the young, and the scholar meets the ordinary passerby.

If Kāffatan li-l-Nās discloses one of the mosque’s philosophical horizons, it also points beyond the scale of any single local community toward the wider idea of the ummah (the worldwide Islamic community). The ummah cannot be reduced to a material or urban register. It is a concept with technical and normative weight, reaching beyond spatial adjacency toward a shared world of belief and cultivated ways of thought. Here the mosque, precisely as built form, can lend tangible presence to an otherwise abstract reality. It renders perceptible the broader meaning intimated by the Qur’anic address.

At this point, an existential link comes into view between the *ummah* and *li-taʿārafū*, Universal Acquaintance, since the *ummah* is not realized without mutual recognition and the work of coming to know one another. When *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* enters this constellation, the mosque begins to read less as a maker of boundaries than as an architecture of openness. The horizon of the *ummah*, on this reading, is not defined by exclusion. Silent *daʿwah* becomes a quiet call toward entry into the *ummah* in its widest human sense.

This perspective invites a reconsideration of why the mosque exists in the first place. “The whole earth has been made a masjid” is not an incidental idea. It is tied to the requirement that prayer be performed in its time, and to the Qur’anic address to all people. It also encourages a careful distinction between the mosque as a material building and the mosque as a figurative place. When the mosque takes architectural form, it establishes permanence and a visible sign, and with it a renewed spatial bond. When it appears as a passing, figurative

1

1. *When the direction is determined, the place transforms from a public place to a private and sacred place.*

place, the bond is temporary, called into being by the necessity of prayer at its appointed time. Yet both registers can carry silent daʿwah with remarkable force.

The figurative mosque also generates what we might call a durable memory of the mosque. This memory does not depend on a single image held in the mind, but on countless images that give form to the very idea of 'the mosque'. At its deepest level, the mosque is an idea, and an idea can admit inexhaustible embodiments.

This memory, in turn, draws us back to the mosque's generative social method. The mosque builds community from the ground up, beginning with local circles and extending toward a more universal social horizon that resonates with Kāffatan li-l-Nās. In that horizon, human bonds are formed through a shared gathering around the mosque as a figurative idea, one that need not be fixed in any single architectural image.

To witness worshippers perform the Eid or Friday prayer on a mountaintop in the Fīfā Mountains or in ʿAsīr, within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is to sense the mosque's presence even in the absence of walls and roof, of dome and minaret. When crowds of worshippers fill a public square in Moscow, or gather densely in Times Square, we witness the mosque's boundaries expand with

startling clarity, as though the surrounding buildings temporarily become its enclosure. When the mosque spills beyond its narrow architectural limits and worshippers occupy the sidewalks of Cairo, the mosque reveals itself as a phenomenon that exceeds any confined material site and opens onto a wider meaning of place.

These scenes point to a distinctive feature of the mosque: it is not bound, in any final way, to a single architectural enclosure. At times it appears as a building shaped by two conditions, place and time, and it responds to both with an elasticity that is rare among other houses of worship. This elasticity is not merely practical. It reflects Islam's understanding of worship itself, where communal rites coexist with an intimate relationship between the human being and the Creator. That dual register has required a place more than it has required architecture. In its most expansive sense, that place is the whole earth[1].

From here, the idea of the open mosque follows. The mosque is 'open' not only because it welcomes people, but because it can, when necessity requires, loosen worship from any single fixed form and allow it to occur wherever it must. In that sense, the figurative mosque gestures toward the reach of *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*. A mosque set within an unfixed terrain becomes a figure for an Islam addressed to all peoples, one that affirms human equality. Just as any place may become a masjid when need demands, so too are all people addressed by (and called to) Islam's message when God opens their hearts and guides them toward it.

In our view, the mosque is anchored in a constellation of philosophical concepts that complete one another and ultimately return to one premise: this building exists for people and because of people. It shapes a social method suited to human life across multiple scales, from the intimate neighborhood community to humanity as a whole. At each scale, a corresponding concept crystallizes, shaping a mode of thought in which the mosque becomes a primary center through which belonging is expressed.

1-2. *The mosque carries existential seeds that recreate it in any place and at any time.*

If we return to the operative logic of *li-taʿārafū* ("so that you may come to know one another") we find it directly tied to the making of place. *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*, however, moves the inquiry into a different register. It names a figurative horizon that cannot be secured to any single site, and it compels us to think in terms of an abstract, non-local place, one in which the mosque must remain present across moments and across terrains. For that reason, *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* resists attachment to a single geography. The difficulty then becomes architectural as much as philosophical. How can such a horizon speak through the mosque, a form whose spatial definition is typically rigorous, and whose image is anchored so firmly in the collective mind?

We do not suggest that this tension can be clarified without a conceptual shift in how the mosque is conceived. The mosque is not only a place. It is also an idea. It may appear as physical form, yet it also persists as a figurative register, one that binds people not only to those who share belief and cultivated ways of thought, but also to the Other, by opening a space for encounter across difference.

1 Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "The entire earth has been made a place of prayer (masjid), except for graveyards and washrooms [bathrooms]" (Sunan al-Tirmidhi, Sunan Ibn Majah), and "The earth has been made for me a place of prayer and a means of purification" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim).

Such questions open the conversation onto what might be called Beyond the Mosque. They press us to rethink what 'mosque architecture' means in the first place. *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* frames a general address to humanity, a register that recurs throughout the Qur'an. Its calls are directed to people at large, excluding none, even as believers experience that address with a more immediate and intensified claim. Under this light, what distinguishes one human being from another is not humanity itself, but the question of assent to a particular faith and creed. Islam may be read here as calling humanity back to its first disposition, when it was gathered around a single truth. The mosque then stands as a sign that can serve as a point of reference, at times as a concrete spatial marker, and at other times as a figurative one.

This critical introduction unfolds through a sequence of chapters, each engaging a different thread in the philosophical fabric that Kāffatan li-l-Nās brings into view. The aspiration toward human universality, the attempt to articulate a horizon in which shared meaning can exceed the limits of tribe, territory, or inherited difference, has preoccupied thinkers for centuries. Here, however, we begin from a Qur'anic address whose scope is unambiguous. It speaks to humanity at large, and in doing so it places before us not only a doctrine, but an architectural problem. If the mosque is the built manifestation of that address, it cannot be approached as a building

that speaks only to its immediate constituency. In principle, it bears the claim of openness directed toward all people. That is precisely what makes the task more exacting. We are compelled to ask which qualities, within the mosque as architecture and as lived institution, can sustain such a horizon without collapsing it into slogan or mere appearance.

The chapters are arranged to stage a gradual ascent through the concepts implicated in this argument. The inquiry is architectural in its privileged lens, yet it cannot avoid theology, since the mosque is intimately tied to the enactment of worship. It also remains spatial in the strict architectural sense, because it turns on how belief, orientation, and meaning become legible through built form and lived practice. For that reason, the mosque is not treated here as style, nor reduced to a recognizable formal type. It is approached first as concept and idea, and only then as function.

On the Universality of the Message and of Place

A Philosophical Point of Entry

The point of departure is a premise central to Islamic consciousness, one that can be read as foundational to later reflections on the mosque, architecture, belonging, and the human being. That premise is the universality of the message. The Qur'anic verse, "We have not sent you except to all people" (Qurʾān, Sabaʾ 34:28), is more than a theological assertion. It establishes an epistemic frame that clarifies the nature of the message, its reach, the audience it addresses, and the space within which it moves. This universality is not incidental. It signals a decisive shift in the history of prophetic messages. Many earlier messages were associated with particular peoples, specific geographies, or bounded cultural contexts. Here, by contrast, the Qur'anic address insists from the outset that the message is not the possession of a single community, not the monopoly of a culture, and not an extension of political, ethnic, or racial borders. It speaks beyond inherited affiliations, addressing the human being first as human, before any designation of language, lineage, or geography.

In this light, *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* is not merely a linguistic description. It functions as a philosophical concept that opens onto deeper questions, including how a religious address speaks to humanity as a whole, how such an address travels across times and cultures, and how text becomes space, space becomes experience, and experience becomes belonging. These concerns are not abstract. They bear directly on the subject of this inquiry. The mosque is not simply a building that accommodates ritual practice. In its deeper vocation, it becomes a carrier of the message, a mediator between text and human being, between heaven and earth, and between belief and place. To understand the universality of the message, therefore, is also to approach the universality of the mosque.

When the Qur'an declares the universality of the message, it does not merely announce an abstract address. It also lays the groundwork for a material order capable of giving that universality legible form. A message that claims such reach requires a place that can

1. *The crowds of worshippers and their alignment in successive and orderly rows represent an existential structure for the architecture of the mosque.*

carry it, embody its values, and render its principles intelligible beyond the boundaries of language and cultural inheritance, including to those who neither read the Qur'an nor belong to an Islamic milieu. Under this horizon, the mosque appears not only as a building, but also as a universal sign.

One may therefore argue that the mosque is among the earliest architectural spaces in history to be conceived around an explicitly universal horizon. It is not a national temple, nor a sectarian institution, nor a building tethered to race or language. It is an open space capable of dissemination, able to integrate into almost any environment without surrendering its essential identity.

When we speak of a universal message, we are also speaking of an epistemic structure that needs instruments able to carry it through time. Text alone is not enough. Speech alone is not enough. Instruction alone is not enough. A place is required, one that embodies the message and translates it into lived experience: sensory, visual, social, and inward. A place in which a human being can feel addressed even without hearing a single word. That place is the mosque.

The mosque, then, is not merely a building. It is an architectural manifestation of a universal idea. It renders the message visible, tangible, and inhabitable, allowing it to move across cultural contexts without forfeiting its core meaning.

If the message is addressed to Kāffatan li-l-Nās, the place that bears it must also remain open to Kāffatan li-l-Nās. Here lies one of the mosque's distinguishing features among houses of worship. In its essence, it is not a building closed upon a single group, nor a space sealed by rigid cultural limits. It is an adaptive framework, capable of integrating into diverse settings while remaining recognizably itself. In China, mosques can resonate with Chinese architectural language. In parts of Africa, they may draw on local building traditions and inherited craft. In Europe, they can engage European idioms without dissolving into them.

This integrative capacity is not simply architectural flexibility. It follows from the universality of the message itself. The mosque does not impose a predetermined image so much as it sustains a set of necessities: orientation, gathering, accessibility, dignity, and a legible space for worship. It does not enforce a fixed visual identity so much as it carries essential values. In that way, the mosque becomes a universal medium through which the message can travel across cultures.

A universal address is not only a quality of discourse. It also generates a spatial demand. If the Qur'anic address is universal, the place that embodies it cannot be narrowly bounded, socially closed, or culturally sealed. A message of such reach requires a space capable of receiving the human being, whatever their belonging, and of allowing entry into the experience of worship without making cultural or linguistic fluency a condition for recognition.

From this angle, the mosque may be understood as the message's identity in place. Not only because it hosts worship, but because it gives Qur'anic values architectural presence and makes them experientially readable. It becomes an early urban articulation of

a horizon that resists confinement within locality, within closed cultural enclosures, or within the claims of race and peoplehood. For that reason, from its earliest formations, the mosque tends toward an architecture of openness and restraint: economical in its means, adaptable in its presence, and able to settle into different environments while continuing to carry what is essential.

> *Ever since the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah (PBUH), it has been evident that the mosque was not established as a closed temple, but as an open social and spiritual space. There were no domes, no minarets, no ornament, and no rigid architectural boundaries. The mosque was a simple setting, defined by function rather than form, and governed by values rather than visual display. This simplicity is not accidental. It can be read as a philosophical choice aligned with the nature of the message itself: clear in address, direct in purpose, and not confined to a single shape or bounded by borders.*

Under this horizon, the mosque is not a building that forces itself upon place. It is a building that enters into place. It does not seek to rise above its surroundings, compete with them, or claim visual dominance. Instead, it adapts. It draws from local architectural language, takes up familiar elements, and reworks them in ways that serve its vocation as a space of worship and gathering.

> *One of the mosque's most distinctive qualities is precisely this ability to integrate into different cultures without losing its essential identity. In China, the mosque may resonate with Chinese architectural idioms. In parts of Africa, it may adopt earthen construction logic and locally rooted tectonics. In Turkey, it can assume a dense, layered architectural character that still reads as deeply local. In contemporary Europe, it may engage modern vocabularies of glass and steel, and a restrained geometric discipline. Yet despite this range, each remains recognizably a mosque.*

This capacity to hold continuity and variation together allows the mosque to stand as a living manifestation of *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*. It remains constant in function while diverse in form. It remains constant in values while varied in visual language. Its message remains one, even as its embodiments multiply across places and cultures.

> *If the message claims universality, it also requires a register through which it can be recognized with immediacy, regardless of language or cultural inheritance. The mosque performs this role without relying on spectacle or a fixed iconography. It remains intelligible as a mosque even when its forms vary, and it does so without requiring a dome, a minaret, or an embellished miḥrāb. It is enough that it be a space for prayer, oriented toward the qiblah, and able to receive the worshipper in the act of prostration (sajdah) before God. In that economy of means lies a central aspect of its universality: a sign that does not depend on translation, explanation, or cultural mediation.*

The Qur'anic text addresses humanity directly, yet such an address is most fully sustained when it finds a place in which it can be lived. In this account, the mosque may be read as that place. It mediates between text and reality, between revelation and experience, and between belief and everyday life. Within the mosque, the text is not only recited but enacted. Prayer becomes embodied practice, remembrance becomes voice, the qiblah

1. *Prayer is an action, direction, and time, regardless of location.*

1

becomes orientation, and worship enters the texture of daily time. The mosque, then, is not merely a building. It is the message embodied in place. If the message bears a universal horizon, the mosque must be capable of carrying that horizon as well.

A further question then becomes unavoidable: how is the message transposed from text into lived experience. Here we may name a concept essential for grasping the relationship between architecture and religion, between space and consciousness, and between form and meaning. This is what may be called silent da ʿwah (al-da ʿwah al-ṣāmitah).

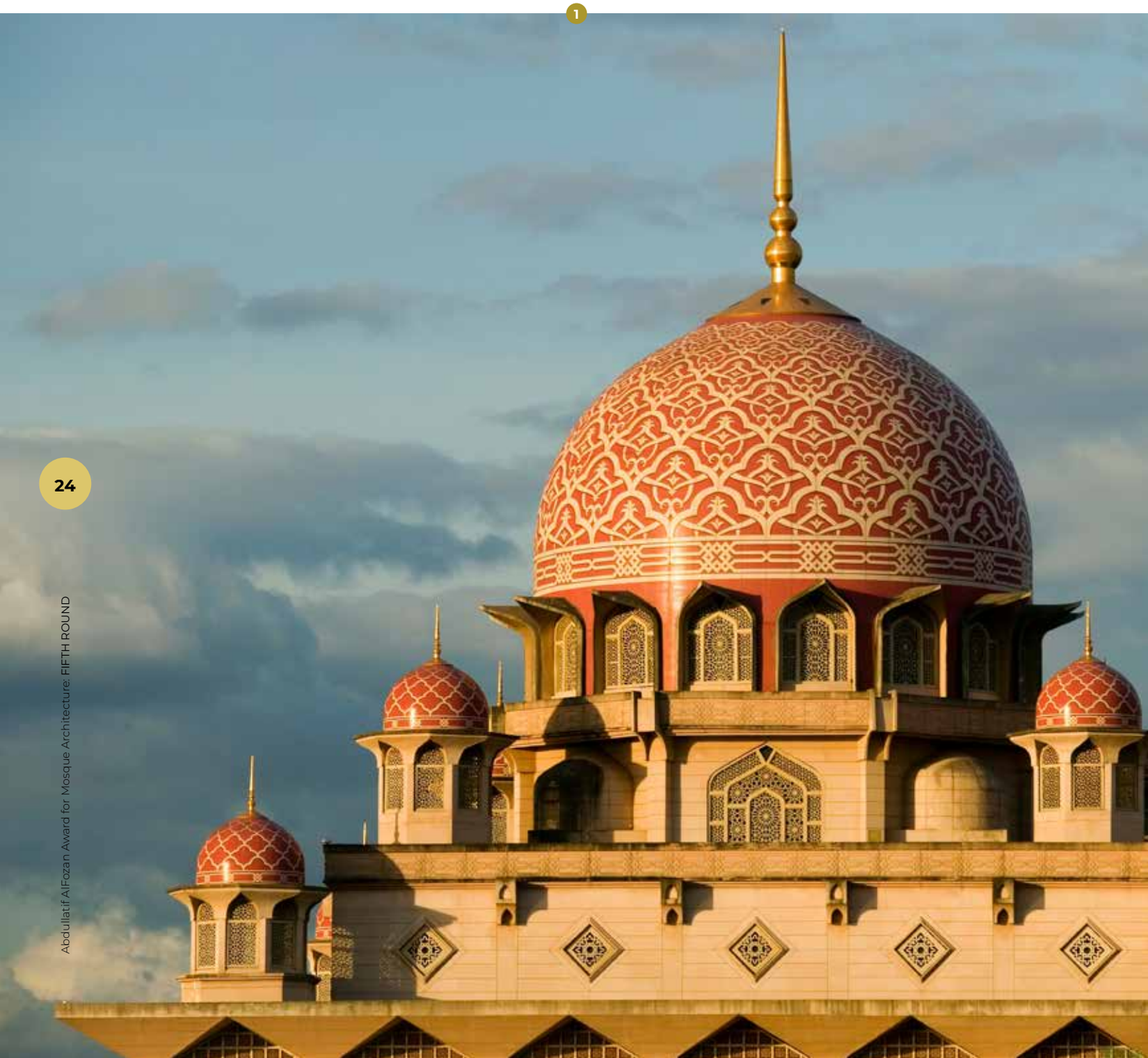
By silent *da ʿwah* we do not mean verbal preaching, direct instruction, or intellectual debate. We mean the communicative work of space itself. Place speaks through atmosphere, sequence, threshold, measure, light, and the ethics implied by use. It addresses perception before it addresses argument, and it leaves its trace not as a proposition, but as an experience. Under this horizon, the mosque can carry a call without speaking, reaching even those who never cross its threshold, who do not identify as Muslim, or whose lives have never led them into an encounter with the Qur'an.

Across history, architecture has often served as a vessel through which societies externalize their convictions: temples have given form to accounts of the Divine, palaces have staged

1. The mosque's traditions are not confined to specific boundaries, but rather integrate into the local geography and culture, transforming them into forms and images with their own unique characteristics.

authority, squares have held public gathering, and cities have condensed identity. The mosque differs from these examples in a decisive way. It is not only a building that gestures toward a transcendent meaning, but a space that can shape awareness from within. It does not merely express Islam. It participates in how Islam is inwardly formed and sustained, often by cultivating dispositions rather than delivering explicit instruction. Entering a mosque, one may register calm, breadth, simplicity, orientation, order, and openness. These are not only architectural effects. They are values translated into the language of place.

1



The efficacy of silent *daʿwah* is not secured by scale or opulence in any straightforward way. If anything, its force often gathers in the opposite register, through composure, restraint, and a quiet confidence. A modest mosque, simple and woven into its surroundings, can sometimes carry more than a monumental mosque that asserts itself over place. Such simplicity may be mistaken for minimalism or austerity. Yet it can also be understood as a philosophical stance, one that aligns presence with clarity rather than spectacle, and meaning with measure rather than display.

A mosque that accords with its environment, draws from its local language, and shares in its material conditions can become part of the social fabric rather than an intrusion upon it. Here, integration itself becomes one of the most powerful modes of silent daʿwah.

Silent *daʿwah* does not operate primarily by persuasion, but by a kind of recognition. In encountering a mosque, a person may sense something that echoes inwardly: humility suggested by simplicity, calm carried by quietness, openness implied by unguarded thresholds, orientation gathered in the qiblah, and order disclosed in the rows of prayer. The mosque does not impose its values from the outside. It allows values many already seek to become legible in space. That inward resonance, more than external argument, is often what gives silent *daʿwah* its reach.

Verbal discourse is bound to language, translation, and the codes of a shared cultural context. Spatial and visual meaning is less dependent on such mediation. The mosque, as a legible presence, can convey meanings that are apprehended without explanation: peace carried by breadth, humility in simplicity, openness in thresholds, unity in alignment, and orientation in the qiblah. Such meanings can reach beyond the community of worshippers, including those who never cross the mosque's threshold. In that way, the mosque's presence in the city becomes a form of address.

In many non-Muslim contexts, that address may first take the everyday form of curiosity. A mosque can awaken quiet attentiveness among local residents not because it presents itself as an exotic object, but because it is calm, distinct, and non-confrontational. Such attentiveness is itself one mode of silent *daʿwah*. Human beings are drawn to meaning, and when a building carries meaning without coercion, people often find themselves drawn to it.

This may also help explain why mosque-building is viewed with suspicion in certain settings. The unease is not always about speech or sermon, but about the quieter work of presence: how a mosque can reframe a streetscape, signal belonging, and invite recognition. What registers, over time, can recalibrate perception. When a shift occurs, it is not produced only by political rhetoric. Architectural presence can play its part as well.

If the message is addressed to *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*, silent *daʿwah* becomes one of the ways that universality becomes plausible in lived terms. It does not rely on prior familiarity, cultural codes, or linguistic access. It works through what human beings share at a fundamental level: perception, an intuition for beauty, a longing for calm, and the elemental registers of space, light, and orientation. In this way, the mosque becomes not only the place-identity of the message, but also a universal mediator capable of carrying that message across centuries and cultures.

Ummah (Community), Taʿāruf (Mutual Knowing), and Kāffatan li-l-Nās (To All People)

Toward a Philosophical Triad Through the Mosque

This section offers an attempt to reread three major Qur'anic concepts, ummah, taʿāruf, and Kāffatan li-l-Nās, not only as social and religious terms, but also as spatial ones. Each relates, in one way or another, to the mosque, whether as a material place in which collective life is enacted, or as a more abstract register that inhabits consciousness and shapes belonging. The mosque, under this horizon, appears not as a mere building, but as a philosophical structure in which these concepts intersect, and through which they can be rearticulated.

In Qur'anic terms, the *ummah* is not an ethnic or national collective, but a community of belief. It is a bond that exceeds blood, language, and geography, grounded in a shared horizon of meaning. Yet such a horizon cannot remain purely conceptual. It requires a place in which it can take form. Here the mosque comes into view as a kind of abstract homeland of the *ummah*. It is not tethered to a single ethnicity, culture, or territory. It is the place in which a Muslim can feel, in a profound sense, at home, even in a country whose language is unfamiliar.

1. The goal of the mosque user is to carve out a special space between himself and God... Creating that special space is what we can call spirituality.

Although the ummah is an abstract concept, it often needs material embodiment in order to become livable rather than merely held in the mind. A spatial question therefore arises: where, and through what practices, does such belonging become tangible? The mosque can be read as one answer, not as a single fixed model, but as a recurring spatial situation in which the ummah becomes perceptible.

When people stand in one row, oriented toward one qiblah, they do not simply affirm the *ummah* as an idea. They enact it as a spatial experience. They inhabit belonging before they articulate it. For that reason, the mosque becomes a point where two registers converge: the material register of gathering in one place, and the abstract register of belonging to a community larger than place itself. In this sense, the mosque functions as a formative instrument of the *ummah*, not merely a surface in which it is mirrored.

Taʿāruf (mutual knowing) or as we called it (Universal Acquaintance) also does not occur in a vacuum. It requires a setting that permits encounter, proximity, observation, and interaction. The mosque can become one of the clearest sites where such knowing is enacted: the affluent meets the poor, the scholar meets the ordinary passerby, the elder meets the young, the Arab meets the non-Arab, and the resident meets the traveller. These encounters are not only social. They can be existential, recalibrating how a person understands the self in relation to the other.

Within the mosque's lived reality, *taʿāruf* unfolds through multiple registers: through the body, in standing within a single row; through movement, in bowing and prostration; through sound, in shared recitation; through time, in the rhythm of the five daily prayers; and through orientation, in the single qiblah that gathers dispersed directions into one. These embodied elements

create a shared experience, and it is this sharedness that allows *taʿāruf* to become more than mere contact.

> *Yet taʿāruf is not confined to physical encounter. The mosque, even as an idea, can enable a more abstract mode of mutual recognition. A Muslim may feel a nearness to another Muslim they have never met. A non-Muslim may feel quiet curiosity toward the mosque's presence. Whole communities may come to know Islam through the mosque as a spatial sign within the city. The mosque thus mediates taʿāruf beyond its walls. The ummah, in turn, is not realized without taʿāruf, since it is taʿāruf that moves people from mere co-presence to genuine relationship.*

When *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* is brought into conversation with *ummah* and *li-taʿārafū*, a further philosophical horizon comes into view, one that moves beyond the local and the communal toward the universal. If *ummah* designates a community of belief, and *taʿāruf* an ethic of mutual knowing, then *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* opens

1

1. *Mosque architecture has the ability to transcend forms when it is materially embodied and simultaneously integrates with the local geography as if it were a part of it.*

the address onto humanity at large. The mosque's presence in global cities can be read as giving this horizon visible form, allowing the mosque to register as Islam's universal sign. Not because it is 'a religious building' in a narrow sense, but because it is an open form, able to enter different cultures without surrendering what is essential, and able to carry a message without insisting on a single shape. A mosque in New York, Tokyo, Dakar, or London is not merely another building. It becomes a quiet sign that suggests: this message is not local, but universal.

Under this light, the mosque is not an inward-facing institution meant only for Muslims. In its essence, it is an open place, one that can be seen, approached, and contemplated in its symbolic presence, even without entry. It becomes a bridge between Islam and humanity, between material place as building and abstract place as idea, and between ummah as community and Kāffatan li-l-Nās as the horizon of all people.

1

When a Muslim stands to pray in New York, Tokyo, Riyadh, or Dakar, a form of universal belonging is enacted. When a non-Muslim encounters a mosque within their own city, they come face to face with Islam's public sign. The mosque thus becomes a point of convergence between *ummah* as community, *taʿāruf* as relation, and *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* as universality.

From here it becomes clear that Kāffatan li-l-Nās functions as a foundational structure in Islam's view of humanity. The ways in which human society is imagined, ethically shaped, and sustained find both philosophical and spatial articulation through the mosque, which operates as a medium of connection and a device for building social life, extending its significance beyond the performance of rites alone.

One might also describe these three terms as a set of concentric rings. The innermost ring names the operative method of community-making, and it is articulated by *li-taʿārafū*. The middle ring is the *ummah*, moving beyond immediate social bonds toward a bond of belief that crosses geography, allowing nearness even between people who have never met so long as they are gathered by a shared horizon of conviction. The widest ring is *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*, an ethical horizon toward which Islam calls, where human beings, despite difference and multiplicity, remain bound to a single origin, and where diversity of race and lineage does not preclude the possibility of a wider human community shaped by the principles Islam advances. The mosque remains present across these rings because it provides a tangible setting in which these horizons can converge and be lived.

Toward a Deeper Philosophical View

It seems to us that a philosophy of Kāffatan li-l-Nās rests, at its core, on cultivating a condition of belonging to a central idea that gathers people within a shared horizon. In the Islamic frame, that central idea is faith in God and worship of Him. The mosque, as we have been suggesting, is among the most tangible media through which this idea can speak quietly through place. A further problem follows, however. What kind of belonging should we expect as an outcome of such a horizon, and under what conditions does it take hold?

To approach the matter with any seriousness may require a tentative measure, or at least an analytic frame, able to sort the human states through which belonging becomes perceptible. Even in theory, belonging resists clean definition. It can be described, provisionally, as attachment, yet attachment does not carry the same force in every context, nor does it settle in every person in the same way. Inner states do not sit on one level, and responses do not follow a uniform pattern. Any 'scale' of belonging is therefore difficult to formulate, especially under the horizon of *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*, which gestures toward the possibility that all people might be drawn, in one way or another, into the commitment Islam calls toward.

What follows is an attempt to sketch a working scale of belonging. We do not claim that it precisely captures how the mosque produces differing states of attachment, yet it can guide us toward a clearer way of thinking about the mosque's effects at both the universal scale and the local one.

A distinction is needed at the outset between belonging and what might be called a bond to place. Belonging does not arise

1

simply because a place exists. It is, in the first instance, an idea that matures within the mind and gathers force in degrees when something stirs it. A bond to place, by contrast, presupposes encounter. It requires a place that is actually there, and it does not depend on architecture in the strict sense. Even an unadorned site, without formal articulation, can still carry enough presence to awaken feeling and produce attachment.

Taking belonging seriously matters precisely because it is an affective condition that resists measurement and certainty. If the mosque, through both its physical presence and its conceptual reach, can help cultivate such a condition, how might we trace it. How might it relate, in lived terms, to the horizon of Kāffatan li-l-Nās, especially if we propose that this horizon can gather humanity as a whole.

From this point, a set of working distinctions begins to emerge. Belonging may fasten onto something tangible, or onto something cultural and therefore intangible: language, memory, narrative, a shared symbolic world. It also varies in duration. Some forms settle and endure, while others arise briefly and recede. When these two axes intersect, four broad modes of belonging come into view. Such a scheme cannot capture every nuance, yet it offers a useful frame within which many lived variations can be gathered.

With that framework in hand, a more specific question becomes possible. How might each mode of belonging relate to the mosque, both as an actual place and as an idea that travels. Along this line, we attempt to outline a map of the mosque's global identity as place, not as a fixed image, but as a field of attachments through which locality and universality can be held in productive tension.

'Temporary material belonging' may be the least durable of these modes in terms of long-range effect. It is tied to a passing psychological state, to the intensity with which a person is moved by what is encountered, and it often dissolves quickly. The encounter itself may be brief, and it does not reliably produce what the text elsewhere calls a bond to place. A mosque, like many buildings, can generate such a momentary attachment. Yet a particular mosque,

as a single building with a single image, may slip from memory. This differs from 'the mosque' as an idea, which tends to remain rooted through more enduring forms of cultural belonging.

> *None of this diminishes the mosque's settled vocation. It returns us, rather, to the question of essence, to the generative core that makes the mosque readable wherever it appears. That core seems capable of producing different degrees of resonance in memory and feeling. Under the horizon of Kāffatan li-l-Nās, a further issue presses itself forward. What degree of impact can the mosque register for those who do not share Islam's belief. This bears directly on the idea of silent da ʿwah. Can built presence carry something of the message on its own, or does transmission depend primarily on what is practiced within. How might the mosque's place in the city operate, quietly, as a form of witness and invitation.*

Some preliminary observations on how new mosques are received in certain non-Muslim contexts suggest that apprehension toward them is sometimes entangled with wider anxieties about Islam itself. Restrictions are occasionally defended on the grounds that mosques increase Islam's public visibility and, with it, its social traction, in ways some would rather resist. Even if such claims must be handled with care, their recurrence still signals an issue central to this inquiry: a mosque can exert effects that extend beyond its immediate community, both directly and indirectly. Read in this light, silent *da ʿwah* begins to name a mode of influence that can operate through architectural presence itself.

1. *The movements of the body in prayer enter into a spatial dialogue that animates the place, allowing it to transition into a state of meaning.*

When we move to what we call 'enduring material belonging', two distinct registers of place come into view, each shaping how the mosque can settle in memory and form an attachment.

> *The first is the abstract place. Here the mosque becomes a universal place anchored in consciousness: the whole earth may become a masjid. This is the furthest reach of the spectrum. Yet even when we return to the mosque as architecture, we find that latent place already present, not geographical but conceptual. It registers as a spatial and visual constellation that admits countless forms in people's minds, shifting with time, culture, and lived context.*

The second is geographical place, meaning the mosque's situated presence in a specific locale. In this register, the mosque takes architectural form as an existential presence, spatially and visually legible, carrying a clear identity. Yet important as this register is, it does not necessarily produce enduring belonging in any direct way. The mosque often exceeds its immediate built condition, migrating toward an abstract persistence across generations, where the idea remains even as specific architectures fade.

> *This distinction opens onto the question of the mosque's universality: why it can be transcultural, and how it can speak to the horizon of Kāffatan li-l-Nās. Whatever takes fixed form is, in principle, vulnerable to disappearance. Yet when embodiment is understood as episodic, and the deeper continuity lies in an abstract idea capable of reappearing anywhere and assuming innumerable images, disappearance becomes harder to claim.*

In this sense, 'enduring material belonging' becomes attachment to the mosque's presence as multiple forms rather than attachment to a single geography. The mosque begins to resemble what Arabic calls *al-sahl al-mumtani ʿ*: seemingly simple, yet

1. Ablution is not merely purification but a ritual threshold separating the worldly realm from the eternal domain.

resistant to reduction. It is present in people's minds without being geographically determinate, if we set aside the three sacred mosques, foremost among them *al-Masjid al-Ḥarām* in Mecca.

Both 'temporary tangible belonging' and 'enduring tangible belonging' presuppose architecture in one way or another. They require the mosque's presence either as a recognizable building in a known geographical setting, with identifiable images and local markers, or as an abstract place carried in the mind, sustained by a more general sense of what a mosque is and what it does.

Yet the two forms do not carry the same weight when read through the horizon of *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*. 'Temporary tangible belonging' often remains tethered to local geography. People tend to form their strongest attachments to the mosques nearest to them, within the social texture of everyday life. That attachment can deepen in proportion to one's bond with the community gathered around a particular mosque, and it may, over time, take on a more enduring character. By contrast, one's relationship to mosques elsewhere often remains intermittent, shaped by passing recognition, episodic visits, or a memory that does not settle into sustained attachment.

Here it helps to slow down and ask what we mean by 'belonging' at all. It is not a clean variable we can measure or predict with confidence. It is closer to an inward pull, an affective orientation that shifts from person to person and from moment to moment, sometimes faint, sometimes powerfully felt. That elusiveness is precisely why it matters. Even when it resists definition, belonging still shapes how a mosque is encountered, remembered, and quietly taken in, and how its meaning can travel through presence rather than explanation.

In 'enduring tangible belonging', the mosque's embodied image can become the reference that sustains attachment even in the absence of a direct bond to place. This is one of the mosque's quieter powers. The effect is not produced by built form alone, but by the way form can settle into inward life, carried as memory, expectation, and recognition. In this register, architecture works less as an object to be admired than as a presence that continues to call one back to the idea of the mosque and its wider horizon, rather than to any single template of what a mosque must look like.

A complication must be acknowledged, however. The mental image of the mosque, when treated as the 'universal idea' that underwrites enduring belonging, can harden into a visual impasse. It may settle into a static sense of identity, a fixed picture of what a mosque ought to be, and with it a reluctance to allow that picture to evolve.

The third condition is what we call 'temporary cultural belonging.' At first glance, the term seems to resist its own logic. We are speaking about a non-material register, for example, belonging to the *ummah* as an idea that exceeds geography and the limits of place. One might even expect such belonging, once grounded in faith and conviction, to be enduring rather than temporary. What, then, could 'temporary cultural belonging' mean?

The notion becomes clearer when read alongside the theory of 'parallel heritage', particularly its principle of provisional stability. In that light, 'temporary cultural belonging' can be approached as the dominant cultural orbit

1

1. Towards a science of mosque lineages... this is what the Abdul Latif Al Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture aspires to develop in the coming years..

of a given moment, the prevailing paradigm that shapes how belonging is understood and performed within a specific period. Such paradigms often shift over a short or medium span as the ideas that define them are revised, replaced, or reoriented. Cultural belonging also has direct consequences for architectural form. Many of the shifts we observe in mosque architecture can be traced to this time-bound cultural register, through which each era offers its own materials, techniques, and conceptual horizons, allowing the mosque to take on multiple expressions.

This reading is broadly persuasive. Still, belonging remains difficult to interpret, let alone measure. Any account of 'temporary cultural belonging' must therefore remain attentive to fast-moving cultural and technological change, and to the shifting ways people conceive, represent, and inhabit the world through form and image.

A further tension then comes into view. At first glance, Kāffatan li-l-Nās seems to pull toward an address to humanity at large, while 'temporary cultural belonging' is, by definition, time-bound. How can a universal address be borne through historically contingent forms. One way of clarifying the matter is to recognize that the temporary dimension is precisely what allows human diversity to appear without being suppressed. Each community inhabits its own cultural inflection, recalling the Qur'anic phrasing: "and We made you peoples and tribes" (Qurʾān 49:13). If the conditions of belonging did not permit particular expression, the horizon would lose its elasticity and, over time, risk becoming brittle. In this sense, Kāffatan li-l-Nās is grounded less in sameness than in plurality. Unity does not lie in identical forms, but in an enduring cultural belonging able to hold diversity within a larger unity.

We are now nearing the upper register of this scale, what we call 'enduring cultural belonging'. Some readers may associate it with faith itself: shared assent to certain principles, the willingness to live by them, and the steady formation of a life around them. It gestures toward human groupings held together by a common horizon, a shared aim, and a sense of destiny. Under this light, *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* can be reread as an aspiration toward such enduring belonging, even as it confronts profound obstacles, most notably the force of local and sectional affiliations that make the idea of a shared horizon for humanity feel difficult to realize.

This returns us to a more difficult question. Why would a universal address be proclaimed to humanity in all its plurality, despite how demanding such a horizon is. We do not claim a settled answer. Yet one can read Islam, within the Qur'anic frame, as placing before humanity a proposition whose difficulty does not nullify its truth: the address is to all people, not to one group alone. Out of this emerges a productive tension between Islam and humanity. The call to guidance is made, yet "most people do not believe" (Qur'ān, Hūd 11:17). At the same time, the Qur'an insists: "there shall be no compulsion in religion" (Qur'ān 2:256).

There is no necessary contradiction here. The invitation stands and the path is named, yet the choice remains personal. This also helps clarify the boundary between what can be examined and what resists examination. The outward productions of 'enduring

tangible belonging', the images, narratives, and architectural expressions it generates, can often be traced and discussed. 'Enduring cultural belonging', at its deepest level, resists measurement, since it remains bound to interior assent and a life of conviction that unfolds with the person and changes as the person changes.

> *It may be helpful, then, to read mosque architecture through these states of belonging. They offer a scale for tracing the transformations mosque architecture has undergone, and continues to undergo, in relation to Kāffatan li-l-Nās. They also open a line of inquiry into how built form might carry this Qur'anic horizon into a philosophical register whose dimensions can be examined, including its strengths and its points of strain.*

One way to visualize the four states is as an inverted pyramid. At the broad upper base sits 'enduring cultural belonging', followed by 'temporary cultural belonging', then 'enduring tangible belonging', and at the narrow inverted tip 'temporary tangible belonging'. The upper base corresponds most closely to *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*. It signals a conception of mosque architecture that is enduring and transgenerational, yet not bound to any single physical image. It is the idea of the mosque itself, travelling across time and cultures. The lower tip, by contrast, points to the mosque as a more sectional and image-bound phenomenon, where a locally recognizable, time-specific material expression can become associated with temporary, particular affiliations.

> *The impulse to propose a scale of belonging rests on a simple observation: belonging is not a permanently active state. It often needs to be awakened and renewed through prompts. Those prompts may be material and visual, but they need not be. What matters is that this framework offers a way to ask, in a given moment, and sometimes in a given place, what kind of belonging a mosque is likely to cultivate, and how that, in turn, shapes its capacity to carry the horizon of Kāffatan li-l-Nās.*

Having examined belonging as a layered affective condition, and having unpacked its four forms, we arrive at a question that is at once more delicate and more profound. How does the mosque become a generator of belonging, and why is it embraced by some yet feared by others?

> *This is not only a social question, nor only a political one. It is also an existential question, because the mosque, unlike many other buildings, rarely arrives as a neutral place. It comes already charged with meaning, capable of producing meaning, and capable of reshaping how a person relates to the self and to the world. The mosque is not simply a building to be seen. It is also a building to be read, visually, symbolically, affectively, and culturally. That reading varies from person to person, from society to society, and from one horizon of sensibility to another. For this reason, people's relationship to the mosque is never singular. It stretches across a wide spectrum, from full embrace to deep apprehension, passing through curiosity, respect, refusal, and, at times, genuine integration.*

What matters here is that the mosque does not impose belonging. It does not demand it or secure it through direct address. It offers, instead, a quiet presence that works slowly, yet works deeply. Belonging is often awakened through interwoven

1. The mosque creates social space on multiple levels, and it also creates a spatial bond that usually represents an emotional relationship active at the local level and becomes an idea when it expands to encompass the universe.

1

registers: sensory experience in light, sound, and stillness; collective experience in rows, movement, and recitation; symbolic experience in qiblah orientation, the miḥrāb, and prostration; temporal experience in the daily cadence of prayer; and existential experience in the moment of standing before God[2]. None of this relies on language, explanation, or commentary. It operates beneath the level of argument, in the register of sensation and disposition, quietly composing a relationship between the self and place, and fostering a deeper relationship between the self and the Creator.

> *Within the mosque, a person can be drawn into an encounter with the self. In prostration, vulnerability is disclosed. In congregation, one's relationship to others is recalibrated. In the qiblah, direction becomes palpable. In silence, an inner voice can come into focus. In light, clarity is intimated. In repetition, steadiness is practiced. Such an encounter is not always easy, but it can be deeply formative, and it helps clarify how the mosque may reshape a person from within.*

The mosque, moreover, does not work upon individuals alone. It can also work upon a community, cultivating dispositions that only become visible over time: a rehearsed equality, bodies gathered into a shared order, a rhythm sustained by return, and a memory deposited by repetition. In that sense, the mosque can become a social center, though not merely in the civic sense. It becomes a place where social life is re-formed around an ethic of order, proximity, and mutual recognition.

> *When apprehension toward mosques appears in some non-Muslim contexts, it is rarely fear of the building as such. It is more often anxiety about meaning3. Even a small, modest mosque can carry a large symbolic charge, and that charge can be read in conflicting ways. It can signify religion, community, history, culture, values, and belonging. In certain settings these signs are interpreted as a challenge to local identity, especially where that identity feels fragile or unsettled. In a rapidly changing world, stability itself can become unsettling. The mosque, through its symbolism, can appear to offer forms of stability: the stability of orientation, of rhythm, of community, and of meaning. Such stability may be misread as resistance to change, even when that is not its intent.*

The mosque's deeper horizon is to bind the person to a community that exceeds geography. Yet that translocal belonging can, in some places, be interpreted as a threat to national or cultural affiliation. For that reason, the mosque does not need rhetoric in order to exert influence. Presence can be enough. That

2 Islamic Sufi mystics describe experiencing God's presence after completely emptying themselves of their 'self'; Christians describe experiencing God's presence, a supernatural gift from God for those who love God by obeying His commands, as taught by Isa ibn Maryam (Jesus) in the Injil of Isa (Gospel of Jesus) as recorded by John (See John 14:15-24 https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2014&version=NIV).

3 This 'anxiety about meaning' is fueled by, at least, three factors: 1) the almost complete lack of understanding on the part of most non-Muslims of Muslim doctrine, 2) false narratives of Muslim doctrine communicated by those who try to demonize Islam for their own purposes, and 3) a complete lack of appreciation by most non-Muslims (and the failure of Muslims to educate non-Muslims) of the significant overlap of Islamic doctrine with the doctrine of the other two Abrahamic religions (Judaism and Christianity): all three religions consider the *Tawrat* (*Torah*, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) and the *Zabur of Dawud* (*Psalms of David*) sacred, and both Islam and Christianity consider sacred the *Injil of Isa ibn Maryam* (*Jesus, son of Mary's Good News* of God's forgiveness for our mistakes, enabling everlasting life with God).

1. Sidewalks when they become places of prayer.

quiet efficacy, precisely because it does not announce itself as power, may be perceived as a silent force, and therefore as a force that cannot easily be contained.

> *Just as some receive the mosque with apprehension, others are drawn to it with real intensity. This embrace is not always religious in the narrow sense. It can be existential: a turning toward a refuge where one finds sakīnah4, clarity, orientation, companionship, a different experience of time, and a renewed sense of meaning. In a world saturated with noise, the mosque can feel like shelter. Many people need a place in which the self comes into focus, and the mosque's quiet can sometimes work in that way, offering something closer to a mirror than an argument. It links the person to something larger than the self, and that linkage can yield reassurance, belonging, and purpose.*

Within the mosque, one also meets the other: the affluent beside the poor, the scholar beside the ordinary passerby, the Arab beside the non-Arab, the elder beside the young. Such proximity can generate a form of human belonging, not merely a communal belonging of religious identity. In the end, the mosque is not simply a building. It is a horizon of belonging, one capable of gathering the self, the ummah, the broader community, humanity, time, and meaning into a single lived frame.

> *All these ties appear in the mosque both as idea and as architecture. In its built reality, it can be read as space, light, sound, movement, and quiet. As an abstract place, it becomes orientation, symbol, memory, meaning, and identity. From that angle, the mosque becomes belonging that exceeds geography, meaning that exceeds culture, and presence that exceeds the building. In this sense, it is among the most powerful spatial frameworks through which belonging can be cultivated in human experience*.

Lineages of the Mosque and Human Cultures

A Reading in the Existential Genealogy of Architecture

Across architectural history, it is rare to name a single 'first moment' for any building type. Temples, palaces, houses, markets, and city walls tend to emerge gradually, over long stretches of time, without a clear point of origin. The mosque, however, offers a beginning that can be dated with unusual precision: the founding of *al-Masjid al-Nabawī* in al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah, in the first

4 In Islam, '**Sakinah'** (Arabic: 'stillness', 'dwelling') refers to a reassuring and faith strengthening sense of peace that the Creator gives as a blessing to believers when facing anxiety, fear, or uncertainty (Qur'an 48:4). Christians describe a similar experience, called 'filling of the Holy Spirit', 'blessed assurance', or experiencing 'God's presence', providing obedient Christians who have received this gift with assurance of salvation, comfort in difficult times, help in decision making, etc. The Hebrew Bible describes individuals, such as Dawud (David), receiving the Creator's special 'anointing' to strengthen them to do His will, as well as His presence accompanying the community in their Exodus from slavery in Egypt: a pillar of cloud by day, a pillar of fire at night (see Tawrat, Exodus 13: 21-22). Later, His presence settled into the Holy of Holies within the Tabernacle, a mobile sanctuary in the Sinai desert (see Tawrat, Exodus 40: 34-38), as well as the First Temple in Jerusalem, only for the Creator's presence to leave the first Temple due to the increasing level of idolatry of the Jewish people at that time (see Ezekiel 10-12). Notably, the Creator was the architect of both the Tabernacle and First Temple, providing detailed design instructions to Musa (Moses) and Dawud (David), respectively. They were intended to be models of the true sanctuary of the Creator in Paradise (Heaven).

1

year of the Hijrah. This is not only a historical beginning. It is, in a deeper sense, an existential one. The mosque did not arrive as a finished architectural object, but as a seed, and that seed carried an exceptional capacity for growth, extension, and transformation without surrendering its identity.

This capacity enabled the mosque, across fifteen centuries, to generate lineages rather than merely 'styles' or 'patterns'. To speak of an existential beginning is therefore to take a first step toward understanding those lineages, and toward grasping how the mosque could remain, at once, constant and changing, local and universal, singular and multiple. When we look back to the earliest Prophet's Mosque, we do not simply see a humble construction of mud brick and palm fronds. We see an architectural logic whose durability does not reside in material appearance, but in the idea.

Our turn toward origins and lineages is not driven by a belief that the mosque's roots have been lost. Those roots are well known. What concerns us is how a lucid beginning generated, across centuries, an almost inexhaustible branching of forms and architectural families. Here the mosque offers tangible evidence for a paradox that is difficult to explain through form alone: remarkable ease in entering diverse cultures, paired with a quiet resistance that preserves what is essential in its inner code.

The first mosque was not conceived as a sealed enclosure, but as a space open to the sky. That openness was more than a practical choice. It carried a metaphysical clarity, allowing light and air to belong to the experience of worship, and allowing the act of gathering to remain legible without architectural assertion. From the outset, the mosque was also a place where people came not only for prayer, but for consultation, learning, hospitality, and the ordering of communal affairs. This wider vocation became part of the mosque's generative structure, resurfacing in different guises across later lineages.

1

It was, moreover, a space of direction. The qiblah, as orientation, is among the most persistent of the mosque's 'genes'. In that sense, the first mosque was not merely a place one entered. It was an orientation one inhabited, binding the individual to the community, and the local act of worship to a wider horizon of meaning. The daily rhythm of prayer also tied the mosque to time, not only to location. That temporal anchoring would later become central to the mosque's enduring identity as a lived institution, repeated yet never exhausted.

> *This invites a different conceptual frame for the mosque, one that does not treat it as merely a religious building, nor even merely as a social institution. It asks us to see it as an existential place whose architectural life unfolds into discernible lineages that can be traced with unusual clarity, almost as though one were studying a family genealogy extending across fifteen centuries. Unlike most building types, the mosque possesses something resembling a lineage tree whose branches can be followed without reducing the whole tradition to a single template.*

The key distinction here is not between old and new, but between origin and prototype. The first mosque functions as an origin, not a prototype. A prototype asks to be reproduced. An origin asks to be reinterpreted. Precisely because the Prophet's Mosque served as an origin rather than a fixed model, multiple mosque lineages

1. *Each of the mosque's lineages demonstrates how the tree of architectural forms that originated from the first mosque in Medina was flexible and possessed a rare strength that enabled it to generate these endless lineages of forms.*

were able to emerge: Arabian, Levantine, Andalusian, Ottoman, African, Asian, and others. All remain answerable to the origin, yet none is obliged to resemble it in form. What the origin transmits is not a look, but an intelligible idea, qiblah, congregation, space, light, and rhythm.

Form, by contrast, is what occurs when that idea enters a culture and accepts its pressures and possibilities. The beginning was materially plain: earthen walls, ground underfoot, a roof of palm fronds. Yet this plainness should not be mistaken for formal poverty. It reads, rather, as conceptual lucidity. As the mosque moved into Iraq, al-Shām[5], and Egypt, it entered sustained dialogue with the architectures it encountered: Mesopotamian and Persian, Roman and Byzantine, Hellenistic. From that dialogue, new lineages cohered: the expansive courtyard, the arcade, the craft of shade, the disciplined intelligence of the column, and later the miḥrāb as an architectural concentration of orientation. In each case, what endured was not a single shape, but a continuity of meaning carried by spatial constants, and translated, again and again, into local embodiment.

In the western reaches of the Islamic world, the mosque entered a dialogue with a dense fabric of local intelligence, and a lineage of light began to sharpen through calibrated arches, layered screens, and a geometric discipline that never needed excess to become persuasive. In the Persianate and Central Asian worlds, it conversed with older architectural inheritances and yielded another lineage, one in which the dome and the īwān became not mere motifs, but instruments for structuring procession, shade, and interior focus. In parts of Africa, the mosque engaged earthen construction, timber craft, and desert logics, producing a lineage whose material frankness feels entirely its own, yet remains unmistakably a mosque.

The ability to locate the mosque's beginning with such precision grants a rare possibility in architectural history: tracing a genealogy across time. One can, in effect, sketch a family tree that begins in Madinah and branches into trajectories such as:
- *Kufa → Basra → Damascus → Cairo*
- *Kairouan → al-Andalus → Córdoba → Granada*
- *Persia → Samarkand → Bukhara → Isfahan*
- *Anatolia → Istanbul*
- *Timbuktu → Djenné*
- *India → China → Southeast Asia*

These lines are not merely geographic. They are existential trajectories: each one records how an origin remains answerable to itself while consenting to local embodiment, and how a single idea can generate many architectural families without collapsing into a single image. Even so, any family tree sketched in this way must remain provisional. It cannot, on its own, register the hybridizations and cross-pollinations that have continually shaped mosque lineages across more than fourteen centuries.

Each lineage carries essential 'genes', yet each inflects them through a distinct cultural sensibility. What persists across this diversity is not a stable visual identity, but a stable idea. The mosque is, in the deepest sense, an idea before it is a form, and that priority is exactly what makes 'lineage' a more accurate

5 **Al-Sham**, or Bilad al-Sham: the Arabic name for the historical region of Greater Syria, generally recognized as the land included in modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan.

term than 'style'. In architectural terms, the idea generates form through orientation and congregation, and through a small constellation of spatial forces: light, sakīnah, rhythm, a measured openness to sky and air, and a calibrated relation between interior and exterior. Forms shift; the idea endures. For that reason, a mosque may be square, rectangular, or circular, domed or without a dome, built in earth or timber, in stone or, at times, in glass, without forfeiting its identity.

1. *Mosque architecture produces a contemplative visual rhythm that prepares the subject for entry into a spiritual realm distinct from the profane world.*

This is not an argument for indifference. Variation is not a free-for-all. Some configurations remain more compelling than others, whether in functional terms, in climatic intelligence, or in relation to normative religious considerations. The point is stricter than it first appears: the mosque neither dissolves into a new culture nor imposes itself upon it. It enters into dialogue, and dialogue yields new form without surrendering constants. This capacity for negotiated continuity is what allows the mosque to remain, at once, universal and local, constant and transforming, singular and plural.

When we attend to mosque lineages with sufficient care, the mosque no longer reads as a fixed object. It reads as a living condition, authored repeatedly by the congregation across time. It grows by taking on the specificities of culture and geography, climate and material, through the long education of sensibility. It preserves its essential 'genes' even as its outward form shifts. What makes it plausible to speak of the mosque as one of the rare architectural types whose genealogy can be traced to a single origin is not stylistic continuity, but structural openness: it is neither a sealed temple nor a nationalist emblem, neither a rigid ritual apparatus nor the possession of any one culture. It does not insist on a predetermined image. It insists on meaning, and meaning generates form, not the other way around.

Studying mosque lineages, then, is not an antiquarian exercise, nor a simple return to the past. It is an inquiry into an existential place that holds together seemingly opposed terms: the constant and the changing, the local and the universal, the self and the other, the *ummah* and *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*. The mosque is not one lineage but many, yet these lineages remain answerable to a single origin, oriented toward a single qiblah, and carried by a shared meaning: a place where human life is gathered, oriented, and opened toward what exceeds it.

Before turning to these lineages in detail, one distinction clarifies the argument:

- *Style: a primarily formal and visual description.*
- *Lineage: a historical and cultural description of transformation, continuity, and identity across time.*

Style describes how a mosque looks. Lineage clarifies how a mosque became what it is, and how an idea maintains identity while taking on local consequence. For that reason, mosque lineages are not merely a chapter within architectural history. They are also a record of how societies imagine order, community, and belonging, and how the mosque can receive those imaginations without becoming a mere copy of them.

The earliest Arabian lineage might be described as a lineage of simplicity and

1

orientation. In that sense, it remains close to the origin, not because it is 'purer', but because it emerged within conditions resembling those of the first mosque. Its characteristic traits are modest enclosure, local materials, earth, stone, timber, an open courtyard, and light shaped by spare shade. The relationship between inside and outside remains direct, and heavy ornament is largely absent. What speaks here is conceptual lucidity: direction as the true constant, light as a structuring presence, and an unforced relationship between human beings and place. One could call it a lineage of essence, in which form does not eclipse idea.

The Syrian-Egyptian lineage, by contrast, may be read through the courtyard and the craft of shade. As the mosque moved into al-Shām and Egypt, its architecture acquired a more articulated spatial apparatus: expansive saḥns, multiple arcades, stone columns, deeper shadow, and more elaborated miḥrābs, with the minaret increasingly assuming a distinctive urban role. The core register is the interplay of light and shade, and the column as both structural intelligence and a kind of rhythmic presence. The mosque also emerges here with a pronounced civic capacity: a capacious social space that holds openness and containment in a calibrated balance. In this sense, it is a lineage of shade, where light becomes rarer, and therefore more precious.

The Andalusian lineage is often approached as a lineage of light and disciplined ornament. In al-Andalus, recognizable markers include red-and-white arches, intricate geometric patterning, modulated daylight, multiple courtyards, and water used as both a visual instrument and a contemplative register. What distinguishes this lineage is not ornament as display, but ornament as a rigorous language, one that carries meaning through proportion, repetition, and measured variation. The mosque becomes, here, an aesthetic and philosophical field in which geometry and inwardness are pressed toward a refined equilibrium. Beauty operates as one of the persuasive routes by which meaning is approached, without needing excess to secure its authority.

If we turn to the Persian and Central Asian lineage, the mosque is rearticulated through domes and īwāns with greater decisiveness. Lofty domes, monumental īwāns, blue tilework, intricate, fractal-like muqarnas, vegetal motifs, and deepened miḥrābs intensify spatial focus and heighten the sense of directed interiority. The spatial thrust is shaped by verticality and breadth, and by the way architecture stages an address to the sky through construction, proportion, and enclosure. The effect is not 'cosmic' in a literal sense, but in the way it stretches perception beyond the immediately local, allowing verticality to carry a spiritual idiom with unusual force. One might call it a lineage of sky.

The African lineage can be read as a lineage of earth and timber, grounded rather than elevated. Thick earthen walls, protruding wooden struts, irregular rooflines, and strong massing establish an organic continuity with climate and ground. Here the mosque does not pursue transcendence through height or surface refinement, but through a rooted intelligence that binds building to soil and worship to collective presence. It also intensifies the bond between congregation and construction as a shared, sustaining practice,

so that material itself, earth in particular, can carry spiritual charge. In this sense, it is a lineage of earth, where clay becomes an idiom of permanence, and timber a tactile reminder that meaning can be borne by substance as much as by symbol.

Modern lineages, finally, are less a single family than a set of contemporary attempts to recover meaning under new conditions. In the modern period, the mosque has entered into dialogue with concrete, glass, steel, and global architectural currents. Many projects adopt new geometric logics, sharper lines, dematerialized or porous boundaries, and a retreat from inherited ornamental systems. The ambition often lies in rethinking the relationship between light and matter, framing the mosque as a contemplative interior within accelerated urban life, and returning to 'essence' by other means. One might call this tendency a pursuit of transparency, not as style, but as a condition in which light becomes both atmosphere and material argument.

Tracing the lineages of mosque architecture across its long history could constitute a serious and achievable scholarly project. What is offered here is only a preliminary schematic tree, closer to an orienting map than a comprehensive account. Even so, it points toward a global documentation effort capable of reconstructing the mosque's architectural genealogy with far greater rigor and granularity.

The value of such a project lies partly in the historical substance it would lend to the claim of *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*. It would show, in concrete terms, how the mosque branched into many cultural worlds, in a way that resonates with the Qur'anic articulation of plurality and *taʿāruf*: "*O mankind, We created you from a male*

1

and a female and made you peoples and tribes so that you may know one another (li-taʿārafū)..." (al-Ḥujurāt 49:13). It is difficult to speak persuasively of a universal message addressed to all people while leaving unexamined the material and intellectual evidence of how the mosque embedded itself within diverse contexts, entered the grain of daily life, and, through function as much as through form, became a carrier of local culture even as it remained a marker of shared orientation.

This sketch is necessarily broad. It overlooks hundreds, perhaps thousands, of local lineages tied to particular communities that cannot be represented within the limits of this introduction. Yet that incompleteness sharpens the case for a new research direction, both documentary and conceptual, which we propose to call a 'Genealogy of Mosque Architecture'. The field would be deep, uneven, and complex. Still, it is difficult to grasp the three major ideas traced in this book, li-taʿārafū, ummah, and Kāffatan li-l-Nās, without confronting the question of how the mosque generated an architecture capable of expressing human diversity, and how, through that diversity, it produced lineages of its own.

This line of inquiry leads to a central question: how do the 'genes' remain stable even as lineages diverge? Across difference, essential constants persist through qiblah and miḥrāb, through the congregational condition of space, and, with a secondary yet meaningful influence, through light, rhythm, and the relationship between interior and exterior. These are the constants that allow the mosque to remain a mosque even as its forms change. In our view, *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* likewise requires intelligible constants, clear enough to permit diversity while still gathering people around shared creedal and ritual points of agreement.

Kāffatan li-l-Nās, then, is not an abstract slogan. It is a deep philosophy with practical instruments that take shape in consciousness and, just as powerfully, in the tacit realm of perception, whether one is Muslim or not. For the Muslim, it is held as a horizon of belonging in which the worldwide community is felt as an extended social body. For the non-Muslim, a stance toward Islam also forms, supportive or resistant, conscious or unspoken. Within an Islamic horizon of ethics, the non-Muslim remains a human interlocutor rather than a fixed opposite, and their relationship to Islam is not presumed closed.

1. *The external spatial domain of the mosque constitutes a social refuge that gathers the collective body.*

How, then, might the study of mosque lineages bring us closer to the meaning of *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*? When these lineages are contemplated across fifteen centuries, a striking pattern comes into view: the mosque changes, yet it does not cross the threshold into a different architectural species. It undergoes transformation without forfeiting identity. It adapts to cultures without dissolving into them. It can accommodate the different other without relinquishing its constants. This ability to hold flexibility and stability together is not merely architectural. It is, in a deeper sense, existential. The mosque is governed by more than form alone. It is an idea, and when an idea is sufficiently coherent, it can sustain wide formal articulation without losing its meaning. What follows will try to clarify this duality: how the mosque has managed to be, at once, among the most stable of Islamic building types and among the most capable of transformation.

To move this discussion forward, it may help to approach the mosque as we would a living organism: one that carries 'genes' that secure

1

identity, yet remains capable of adaptation to environment. These genes are not formal motifs, nor a catalogue of recognizable shapes. They are existential constants, the conditions that allow a mosque to remain a mosque even as its appearance shifts. And just as an organism grows by responding to its surroundings, the mosque grows through encounter: climate, material, culture, sensibility, city, and time. The core remains intact; its architectural articulation evolves.

The mosque therefore holds together two dimensions that can seem, at first, to pull in opposite directions: constants that remain stable, and variables that continually change. To be explicit, the constants are orientation toward the qiblah, the congregational condition, and the pursuit of *sakīnah*. They are the seeds of identity through which the mosque repeatedly recovers its structure, character, and role, even as its expressions multiply. The variables, by contrast, belong to embodiment: form and material, ornament and height, internal distribution, and the mosque's relationship to the city. Seen in this way, the mosque does not tamper with its constants. It works through its variables. It does not abandon the idea; it renews the language that carries it. For that reason, the mosque can inhabit radically different material worlds, earth in parts of Africa, timber in China, stone in al-Shām, ornamental intensity in al-Andalus, glass in contemporary Europe, without becoming unrecognizable to itself.

Precisely because the mosque works through variables rather than altering its constants, it does not meet a new culture with refusal. It meets it through dialogue. That dialogue aims neither at domination nor at dissolution, but at reciprocal shaping: the mosque remains itself while allowing a culture to articulate it anew.

1. *The mosque is ontologically constituted the moment the direction of the qibla is established.*

It does not impose a single image upon the places it enters. It does not legislate that the dome must look like this, or the minaret must stand like that. What it insists upon is not an image but a set of non-negotiables: orientation, congregational space, and the conditions of worship. Within those bounds, form remains free to be rearticulated. Culture may rework appearance, sometimes profoundly, but it cannot rewrite meaning. It cannot change the qiblah, undo sujūd, or abolish the congregational condition. These elements carry a force that exceeds form, and it is precisely that force that makes transformation possible without loss.

How, then, does the mosque maintain itself through transformation across fifteen centuries? The answer begins with a simple hierarchy: the mosque is an idea before it is a form. The idea holds steady; form remains variable. It is bound to direction more than to material. The qiblah is stronger than stone, orientation stronger than ornament. It is bound to gathering more than to geometry. The congregation is the mosque's heart; geometry is one possible body. It is bound to time more than to style. The daily rhythm of prayer anchors the mosque in lived time rather than fashion. And it is bound to *sakīnah* more than to ornament. *Sakīnah* is the horizon; ornament is only one possible language.

Having traced the first seed, followed later lineages, and clarified the interplay between elasticity and constancy, we can now move to a different register of analysis: not the graphic, but the imaginal. What follows offers no drawings, but conceptual maps that help the reader see the mosque as a living continuum: extending through time, transforming across cultures, and preserving its 'genes' even as forms diverge. These maps are not technical. They are philosophical. Not a description of appearance, but an account of the logic of transformation.

If we were to sketch a 'genetic map' of the mosque, we would arrive at a small set of constants that function as its architectural DNA. These are not ornaments, materials, or shapes, but meanings that take architectural form. The qiblah is not a wall but an orientation, one that turns space into meaning and binds human presence to what exceeds it. Every mosque, whatever its form, begins there. The miḥrāb, likewise, is not merely a niche but a focus of awareness, a point where gaze, voice, and intention converge. In a sense, it is the 'eye' that keeps direction legible. The mosque also stages the congregational condition. It acknowledges the presence of the other. It is not an individual retreat but a space constituted through gathering. Even the rows register less as geometry than as an ordering of bodies, intention, and togetherness.

Light then appears as a primary substance. It is not only a visual element, but a register through which space becomes intelligible to feeling. The mosque receives and modulates light much as it receives and modulates time: with quietness, depth, and rhythm. Rhythm, in turn, becomes the mosque's lived time, since prayer gives the space its temporal life. This rhythm allows the mosque to 'live' through the day, not by walls alone, but by recurrent acts and renewed intention. Nor is the mosque separable from the city. It is part of it, an extension of it, and at times a lens through which the city can be reread.

Finally, *sakīnah* names the core that should not be surrendered. It is not only a psychological state, but an architectural horizon: intangible by nature, and never fully guaranteed. Every mosque, whatever its form, can only seek to make it possible in its own way.

Have we managed to answer the central question, the one that concerns the mosque's capacity to give architectural expression to the idea of Kāffatan li-l-Nās?

Our early inquiry began with a demanding Qur'anic address to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): that the mission is universal, that it is directed to all people, not to a single community in an ethnic sense, nor to a bounded people, race, or locality. The question, then, is not rhetorical. What intellectual and material instruments were given to make such a mandate practicable?

In our view, the Qur'an, as revealed text in its inimitable register, articulates an intellectual horizon capable of speaking across ages. The mosque, meanwhile, is its material and spatial counterpart: a built medium that can also speak across time, not by repeating a fixed image, but through a distinctive combination of elasticity and non-negotiable 'genes'. It is through these constants, and through the lineages by which the mosque receives, carries, and rearticulates the inheritances of human cultures, that it remains faithful to its origin while responsive to the world it inhabits. The argument remains necessarily expansive and calls for further documentation. Still, it opens a productive way of thinking about the kind of universality that mosque architecture, at its best, can embody.

Attachment to Place

Reading Embodied Presence in Light of Kāffatan li-l-Nās

We cannot bypass the mosque as an embodied presence within the collective consciousness of local communities. Nor can we ignore that attachment to mosque architecture operates across multiple scales: from the intimacy of a small community to a universal horizon in which 'the mosque' becomes an abstract image capable, in principle, of referring to any mosque on earth. Across these scales, spatial bonds take shape. They begin with physical proximity and repeated return, then, in certain cases, loosen from geography until the bond endures even when the place is no longer physically present.

This tension, between attachment on the one hand and a certain liberation from any single place on the other, may open a deeper reading of Kāffatan li-l-Nās. Its universality seems to require both rootedness and the capacity to exceed geography.

Attachment to place is not merely an emotional relationship between person and site, nor an incidental psychological state produced by memory alone. It is an existential structure formed over time and nourished by lived experience, ritual, symbol, and identity. Once the mosque is placed at the center of this concept, the question sharpens: how has the mosque, across fifteen centuries, generated spatial bonds that exceed the individual, the community, and the culture, reaching toward the horizon of *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*? What follows offers a philosophical reading of place attachment as an entry into the mosque's material presence, and into the way that presence can become a shared

language: crossing boundaries, receiving cultures, and producing forms of belonging that may, at times, outgrow geography itself.

In environmental psychology, place attachment refers to the affective, symbolic, existential, and behavioral relationships that bind a person to a particular place. In a philosophical register, the concept can be pressed further. Place becomes a path by which the person relates to the self, since place enters memory and memory, in turn, becomes part of identity. In the mosque, memory accumulates through first prostrations and first gatherings, through the call to prayer, the light of dawn, the scent of carpets, and moments of sakīnah.

Over time, these impressions settle into an affective reservoir that binds the person to place. Sensory experience remains vivid: light, sound, movement, stillness. Body and space enter into a direct relationship. In the mosque, however, experience does not remain sensory. It may become spiritual. Place becomes symbol, symbol becomes meaning, and meaning begins to exceed private experience. At that point, one can begin to understand how a person might feel immediate affinity with a mosque anywhere in the world, even one never previously encountered.

A sharper question follows: why is the mosque able to generate a form of place attachment that can feel more persistent than that of other buildings? Cities contain beautiful buildings, historic buildings, and structures that leave deep emotional imprints. The bond a mosque cultivates often operates on a different register, one not exhausted by aesthetics or heritage

1

1. *The mosque dissolves the boundary between interior and exterior, rendering the exterior an extension of the prayer hall.*

1. *The mosque has long functioned as a generative laboratory for the visual arts and crafts, where artistic expression attains architectural embodiment.*

alone. A few intertwined anchors help clarify the difference: time, direction, congregation, sakīnah, and meaning.

First, the mosque is bound to time. The five daily prayers fold it into the cadence of ordinary life, not as mechanical timekeeping, but as a lived spiritual temporality that returns and renews itself. Second, it is bound to direction. The qiblah makes the mosque a fixed point within a changing world, and orientation becomes part of consciousness rather than a mere spatial instruction. Third, it is bound to congregation. The mosque is not primarily a private refuge, but a space constituted through gathering, which produces social attachment as much as personal attachment. Fourth, it is bound to *sakīnah*, understood here not only as an

1

inner state, but as a spatial horizon the mosque seeks to make possible, often through quiet intelligence: light, shade, rhythm, void. Finally, it is bound to meaning. The mosque is not simply functional. It is meaning-bearing, and meaning, more than form, sustains the bond.

The idea of Kāffatan li-l-Nās is not only a religious address. It also carries what might be called a spatial grammar. Through its embodied presence, the mosque produces a place that is, in principle, open to all, without rank, stratification, or conditions of entry. There are no privileged seats, except where care requires them for the elderly or those with limited mobility. No calibrated distance separates the wealthy from the poor. The rows, by their very order, suspend visible hierarchies. From its earliest formation, the mosque has been a place where the stranger, the traveller, the poor, and anyone in search of sakīnah might enter without needing to justify presence.

This openness becomes one of the clearest embodiments of (Kāffatan li-l-Nās). A mosque in China and a mosque in Africa may share little in form, craft, or material, yet they converge in one decisive constant: the qiblah, made visible in the alignment of bodies toward it. That constant allows the mosque to operate as a universal space, not by erasing difference, but by gathering difference within a shared orientation. From that angle, the mosque can be read as an architecture of cosmopolitan belonging. The attachment it generates is not only local; it can open onto a wider horizon, where affinity is felt even across continents.

While tracing how mosque lineages shape place attachment, a reciprocal insight emerged. Attachment is not only an outcome of lineages; it also helps produce them. The early Arabic lineage, for instance, can be read through a bond with its place, articulated through simplicity, sand, and light, elements that cultivate direct intimacy with earth. The Syro-Egyptian lineage reflects a bond with shade, expressed through courtyards, arcades, and columns, shaping spatial depth through shadow. The Andalusian lineage may be read as attachment to light-as-beauty, where ornament, arches, and water cultivate belonging through luminosity. The Persian and Central Asian lineage points to attachment through height and expanse, staged through domes and īwāns, where vertical reach and spatial breadth become part of how place is felt.

As we move deeper into these lineages, the drivers of place attachment come into sharper focus, along with the specific symbolism each local tradition develops. The relationship remains reciprocal. Traits that appear to produce attachment are also reinforced and thickened by the attachments they help to generate.

For that reason, place attachment should not be treated as a psychological notion alone. It can be approached as an existential structure that illuminates how the mosque, through embodied presence, becomes a space of Kāffatan li-l-Nās. It also helps clarify how belonging can extend beyond the individual and the local community, and how the mosque can remain, despite divergent lineages, a single place oriented to a single qiblah and carrying a legible horizon of meaning.

The question that follows becomes unavoidable: as mosque lineages unfolded across time and entered other cultures, how did they generate distinct forms of place attachment?

If place attachment names the existential relationship that arises between person and place, then mosque lineages across fifteen centuries have produced layered accumulations of that relationship. The mosque becomes more than a building. It becomes extended memory, continually renewed experience, and living symbol, taking distinct shape within each culture. Through its lineages, the mosque does not remain only a site for prayer. It becomes a site of belonging and gathering, of memory and beauty, of light and shade, of earth and sky. When these elements enter a new cultural world, they generate a new mode of attachment without severing roots. What follows reads how each lineage formed its own distinctive place bond, and how these bonds, over time, help disclose the meaning of Kāffatan li-l-Nās.

The early Arabic lineage, emerging in an environment not unlike that of the first mosque in Madinah, cultivated attachment rooted in landscape, clarity, and orientation. The early mosque stayed close to the ground: sand underfoot, walls of sun-dried brick, a roof of palm fronds. This plainness produced a direct bond between person and place, one that did not require visual intermediaries or ornamental persuasion. The qiblah remained the decisive constant. Orientation, rather than image, carried attachment. One belonged because one knew where to turn, not because the space displayed itself. The congregational condition, often staged through an open courtyard, made the community part of the place itself. Attachment here was not private; it was shared. In this lineage, the bond was founded on essence rather than form.

As the mosque entered al-Shām and Egypt, it began a sustained dialogue with the architectural worlds it encountered, including Roman inheritances and older Egyptian spatial orders. Out of that encounter, a lineage cohered around shade and public space. Shade became an instrument of attachment, staged through deep arcades, columns, and expansive courtyards, elements that cultivate a lived relationship between body, movement, and shadow. Here shade is not simply protection from sun. It becomes a spatial language.

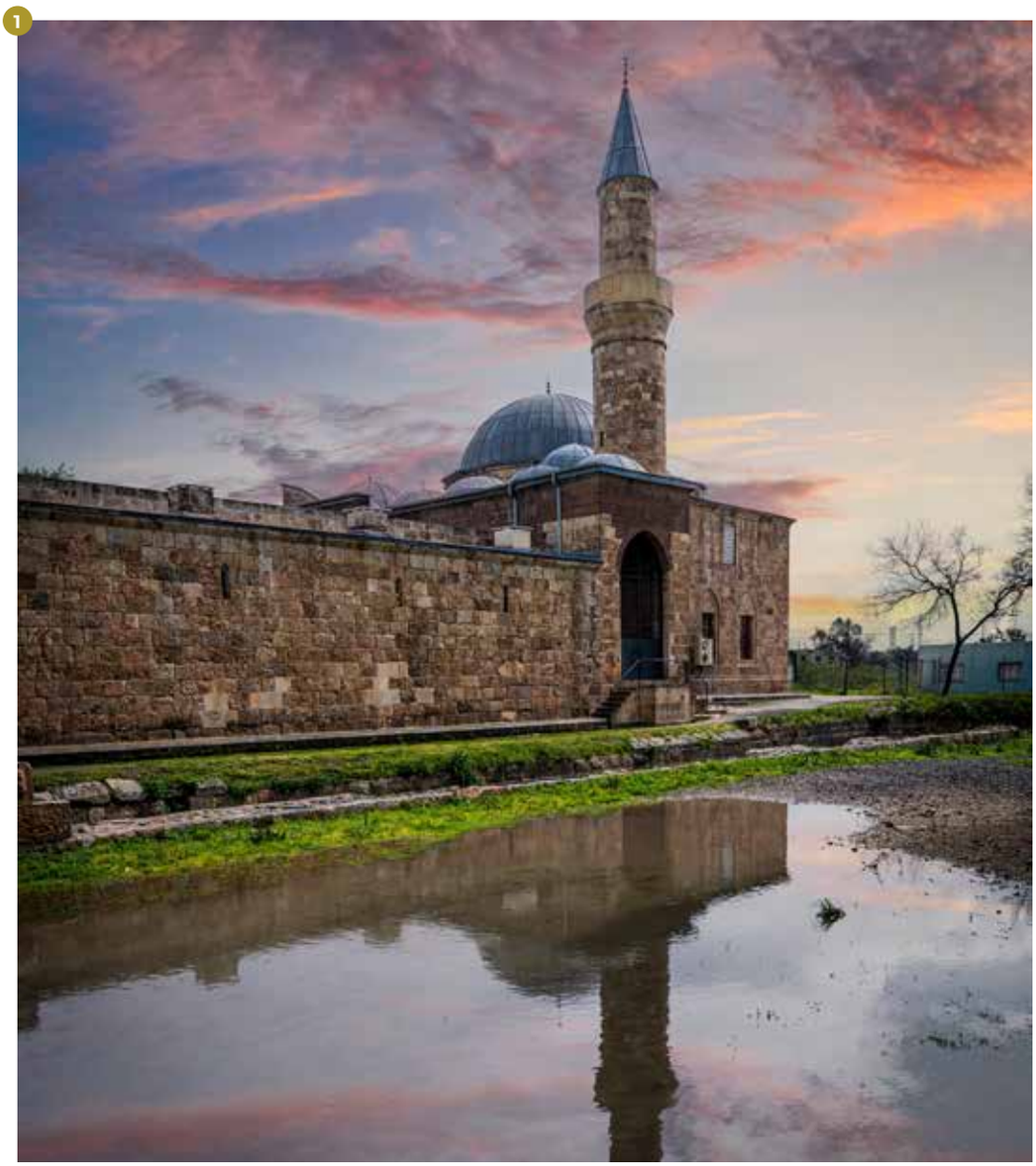
In al-Shām and Egypt, the mosque also assumes a distinctly urban role. It becomes a center of the city, with markets gathering around it and everyday life flowing to and from it. Place attachment here is not only spiritual; it is civic. Arcades draw people into shared pathways, synchronizing movement and producing collective rhythm. Attachment, in this lineage, becomes a bond of movement as much as a bond of stillness.

In al-Andalus, the mosque entered into dialogue with a culture that celebrated light, ornament, and water, and a markedly different mode of place attachment began to take shape. Light becomes memory. Red-and-white arches, small apertures, and the play of reflection on water draw luminosity into lived recall, so that light is not merely perceived, but retained. Ornament, in this lineage, is not an added layer. It operates as a spiritual language, and beauty becomes one possible path toward sakīnah. Water in the courtyard

is not only visual. It is also auditory. It adds sound to space, and the bond that forms here is, in a profound sense, multisensory. Yet even as lineages diverge, the roots of attachment remain legible: qiblah, sakīnah, congregation, light, and rhythm.

These roots allow each local bond, however culturally specific, to participate in a wider and more universal attachment. Mosque lineages did not produce forms alone. They produced modes of belonging-to-place. Each lineage forged a distinctive bond, yet all return to a shared set of constants. Over time, these layered attachments helped the mosque become a space of *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* and, simultaneously, a space through which the *ummah* acquires lived presence.

Kāffatan li-l-Nās is not only a religious address, nor merely an ethical injunction. It can be read as a spatial structure, made bodily in the mosque through openness, accessibility, and the refusal of rank. Across fifteen centuries, the mosque has rarely functioned as a sealed enclave or a building



1. *The mosque interacts with geography and transforms the place into a meaning where memory accumulates.*

reserved for one group against another. More often, it remained a place capable of receiving people across differences of background and culture. The question, then, is not whether the idea exists, but how it becomes spatially credible: through matter and void, through light and shade, through orientation and congregation, and through the kinds of attachment each lineage cultivates within its own cultural world.

From its first articulation in Madinah, the mosque presents itself as an open place: not defined by sealed thresholds, barriers, or ranks; not governed by reserved seating or conditions of entry. One can read this openness as an early spatial enactment of *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*. The mosque does not depend on proclamation. It lets the idea take form through use. Openness becomes architectural speech: a quiet insistence that this place is not possessed by anyone, and therefore cannot be withheld from others.

Within the mosque, bodies align in one row, the wealthy beside the poor, the learned beside the worker, the ruler beside the ruled. This is not social choreography in a conventional sense. It is an existential leveling, a bodily enactment of Kāffatan li-l-Nās. The early Arabic lineage gave this principle a particularly lucid architectural form. Material simplicity, the absence of theatrical complexity, and the continuity between the mosque's ground and the ground of the city make the space feel unthreatening and broadly hospitable. The boundary between 'outside' and 'inside' does not sharpen into a gatekeeping threshold. In that way, the

1

mosque remains woven into daily life. The courtyard, in particular, becomes a receiving space: open without precondition, Kāffatan li-l-Nās in one of its earliest spatial figures.

In al-Shām and Egypt, the same horizon acquires an explicitly civic expression. The courtyard grows into a center not only for the mosque, but for the city itself. Markets gather around it and life flows to and from it. The mosque here reads as public space as much as religious institution. Arcades offer shade to all without distinction. Shade becomes a language of equality, and the rhythm of columns reads less as boundary than as welcome, guiding the passerby rather than turning them away.

In al-Andalus, Kāffatan li-l-Nās receives one of its most sensuously legible readings. Moving light animates the space and keeps it responsive rather than fixed, lived rather than static. Light belongs to no one, and precisely for that reason it is given to all. Beauty, in this setting, is not indulgence. It becomes a shared language, a form of address that rarely needs translation. It welcomes before it asks anything of the visitor. Courtyard water resists possession in the same way: a figure of clarity held in common, encountered without claim.

Read through these lineages, *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* no longer appears as a slogan. It becomes experience. It takes architectural form through openness and breadth, through light and shade, through an economy of means that avoids intimidation, and through an atmosphere of shared presence. Across lineages, these elements produce an attachment in which people may feel received rather than assessed, included rather than ranked: a space not owned by one group against another. This is what prevents the idea from remaining abstract. It becomes embodied presence, carried by the mosque as it evolves. Each lineage offers a different reading of the same horizon, yet all preserve a common core: the mosque as open, accessible, and shared, able to welcome across difference and to form a bond that reaches beyond the individual and the local community toward a more human, inclusive horizon.

In its Qur'anic sense, the ummah is not an ethnic community, a national identity, or a political border. It is an existential bond shaped through belief, orientation, sakīnah, and the congregational condition. The mosque has been the space where this bond becomes tangible, not by discourse alone, but through matter and void, light and shade, movement and rhythm. This raises a further question: how does the ummah appear within each mosque lineage, and how does the mosque, across its historical development, become a living embodiment of the ummah, not as a closed collective, but as an open, gathering continuity across time?

Before the *ummah* becomes a social body, it is an orientation. The qiblah is one of its earliest spatial enactments, drawing millions toward a single point despite differences of language and culture. Orientation becomes the first form of *ummah*, not because everyone faces the same location, but because everyone shares the same meaning. Congregational prayer then gives that meaning a bodily syntax: one standing, one bowing, one prostration. Even *sakīnah*, in the mosque, is rarely only individual. It can take on a collective quality: an atmosphere held in common, one of the quieter roots of what the *ummah* becomes.

In the early Arabic lineage, the ummah becomes legible through simplicity, not as poverty, but as a shared language that

1. *Reverence gives a place dignity, silence enhances its meaning, and the Quran creates life within it.*

refuses to sort people into ranks. The qiblah remains the strongest constant. Orientation gathers people more than image does. The open courtyard makes the ummah a daily experience rather than a theoretical notion, renewed by return and repetition.

In al-Shām and Egypt, the *ummah* acquires a civic embodiment as the mosque becomes the heart of the city and a center of public life. The *ummah* here appears less as a closed circle than as a social fabric. Arcades draw people into a common shade, and shade becomes a language of unity. Columns, with their measured repetition, give the space a visual rhythm that coordinates movement and gathering without coercion.

In al-Andalus, the ummah is articulated through beauty. Beauty does not belong to a single culture. It can operate as a near-universal language, and moving light makes the experience shared rather than private. Light does not discriminate. Courtyard water offers a symbol of common clarity, a quiet image of purity held in common rather than possessed.

Across time, the mosque gives the *ummah* spatial presence through a constellation of constants: orientation, congregation, *sakīnah*, light, shared space, openness, and a capacity for renewed identity. Across lineages, these elements render the *ummah* as a lived, place-based experience, not confined to a single geography and not reducible to abstraction. The *ummah*, seen through mosque lineages, becomes not a border, but an orientation; not a fixed identity, but one continually renewed.

1. The spirit of the mosque manifests itself within the vast spatial expanse just as it reveals itself within the smallest spatial enclosures.

In that sense, the mosque, through embodied presence, remains one of the clearest spatial images of the ummah: formed through place, made legible through light, realized through gathering, and sustained across cultural difference as a continuity oriented toward a single qiblah.

What comes into focus, then, is that attachment operates in two intertwined registers, one literal and one figurative, and that both are constitutive of the mosque. If we begin with the mosque as an embodied architectural presence, it is difficult to deny that it generates a surrounding bond: an immediate orbit of affiliation through which *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* can begin to take effect locally. A universal horizon, on its own, cannot carry its own weight. A universal idea does not sustain itself only at the level of abstraction. It requires local engines that renew it, and these engines are cumulative: their force gathers and amplifies as the circle of attachment expands.

Yet attachment also operates figuratively. It works as an idea that searches for resemblance and shared ground, for historical memory and accumulated meaning. Out of these layers, it forms a metaphorical understanding of what 'a mosque' is, without fixing its outward features with precision. Instead, it holds to a small set of constants: the 'DNA' elements that carry the mosque's 'genes' through time, even as circumstances around it change. In this light, there is a place bond that ties people to what they see and touch in daily life, but there are also degrees of attachment that extend beyond the immediate environment toward a broader, more figurative horizon. Taken together, these degrees suggest a scale through which Kāffatan li-l-Nās becomes intelligible: a universal idea that becomes credible precisely because it can assume local, embodied form.

1

It would be unrealistic to claim that we are proposing a measurable index for *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* and its presence 'in' the mosque. What seems more urgent, however, is to understand the phenomenon with enough seriousness to ask how it might plausibly take shape in lived reality. The task is closer to forming a set of analytical approaches, deliberately deconstructive in spirit, for unpacking the conditions under which such universality could be realized, and for testing whether the mosque can be read as a material medium with a universal reach.

This work must remain methodical and grounded: attentive to the mosque's historical record, to its capacity to communicate across peoples and cultures, and to the striking fact that it has endured for centuries without altering its core, even as its outward language repeatedly re-forms and folds into new cultural worlds. How did the mosque preserve its essential constants while allowing its visible idiom to merge with local vocabularies? How did it retain identity while absorbing difference? Questions of this kind return the mosque to be viewed as a phenomenon with multiple philosophical layers, layers that still require patient, critical unveiling.

1. *The mosque does not remain confined to a fixed formal image; rather, it adopts all forms, just as it remains universally open to all people.*

Between Embodied Presence and Cultural Expression

Read through the Prophetic principle *juʿilat lī al-arḍ masjidan wa-ṭahūran* (“*the earth has been made for me a place of prayer and purification*”), the mosque comes into view not only as a building, but as a universal spatial possibility. Few architectural types carry this kind of planetary reach. In its earliest and most elemental sense, the mosque is not a bounded object with fixed edges, nor an institution secured by walls, nor an entity dependent on a particular material apparatus in order to count as ‘a mosque’. More fundamentally, it is a place, and that place can be disclosed anywhere on earth the moment a person turns toward the qiblah and stands for prayer.[6]

This meaning is anchored in Prophetic teaching, yet it should not be reduced to a juristic ruling alone. It can also be read as an existential principle that reconfigures the relationship between the human being and place, between worship and space, and between the sacred register and the earth itself. In that sense, the mosque appears as a universal spatial condition before it appears as a local cultural expression. Precisely here,

6 Mashary AlNaim. “Al-Ẓāhirah al-Māddiyyah wa al-Ẓāhirah al-Thaqāfiyyah.” Al-Riyadh, October 19, 2025.

1

mosque architecture reveals one of its most generative tensions: between 'universal place' and 'local place', between what can be anywhere and what must, inevitably, become somewhere.

When every place becomes available for prayer, the earth itself begins to read as sacred in potential. The mosque, in this sense, is not primarily a building to be produced, but a place to be disclosed. It is not something added to the world so much as an activation of a meaning already latent within it. This shift changes the grammar of sacred space. Sacredness is no longer confined to a single structure. Worship is no longer tethered to a prescribed architectural image. The human being is no longer dependent on a material intermediary in order to turn toward God. Holiness is no longer guaranteed by materials, ornament, or style. The earth becomes, in a fundamental way, the mosque's first substance.

For that reason, when we speak of the mosque's universality, the claim is not only about the universality of Islam, but also about the universality of the medium. Any ground can become a mosque. Any material can build it. Any light can be received as spiritual light, any shade can become a shade of sakīnah, and any direction becomes meaningful once it is bound to the qiblah. This is what makes the mosque, perhaps more than any other building type, unusually unburdened by image. It does not require a dome, a minaret, a carved miḥrāb, or ornament in order to declare itself. In the most elemental sense, human presence, earth, and orientation are sufficient.

The qiblah is what turns ordinary place into place-with-meaning. It is the element that allows any location to become a mosque, not as a wall, but as an act of transformation. The qiblah does not alter the place's appearance, yet it decisively alters its significance. It renders neutral space directional, ordinary ground capable of sacredness, open air into a spiritual register, and daily movement into movement-with-intent. In this sense, the qiblah becomes a universal marker: binding the human being to what exceeds the self, and binding the earth to meaning.

At its most elemental, the mosque has no necessary dependence on walls, roof, ornament, prescribed materials, or any settled style. This freedom from a fixed image is precisely what allows it to persist as a universal spatial condition. It is not a building that imposes conditions on the human being. It is a place that gathers around human presence. Its most primary architecture is woven from orientation, intention, movement, ground, and light, elements available in every place, across every time, within every culture.

When prayer meets the earth directly, the body touches the mosque's first substance. Prostration, *sujūd*, becomes a renewed contact between the human being and the ground. Light enters from every direction, not because it has been staged as spectacle, but because it remains unconfined. In that sense, the mosque can be named through a primary quartet: earth as first substance, light as first language, the body as first mediator, and orientation as first meaning. These elements are the mosque's stripped, legible core.

And yet a further question presses in: how does the universal take architectural form, how does the infinite become finite? If the mosque is universal in this elemental sense, why does it nevertheless insist on being built, and why does that building diverge so markedly from one

1. *The minaret is not merely a visual marker invoking identity, but a silent summons that gestures toward the presence of Islam.*

culture to another? The answer may begin with a simple recognition: human life is never lived in the universal alone. It is lived locally, within climate and material, memory and craft, time and place. The mosque, for all its universality, still asks to be embodied, and embodiment is always situated. It is here that the cultural register begins.

The universal does not cancel the local. It depends on it. The universal mosque is an idea; the local mosque is the idea made legible somewhere. Universality grants orientation, meaning, *sakīnah*, rhythm, and the congregational condition. Locality grants form and substance, light and shade, craft, and memory. The mosque, in other words, lives in a continual tension between two registers:

- A universal register: stable, meaning-bearing, and spiritually grounded.
- A local register: variable, cultural, and embodied.

The tension between the universal and the local is not a contradiction. It is a generative force. Reading the mosque as a universal spatial possibility becomes the ground for everything that follows: for understanding how culture shapes identity, how lineages form, how Kāffatan li-l-Nās takes on lived presence, how the ummah becomes spatially legible, and how designers negotiate the creative pressure between what remains constant and what must become situated. This is not a detour in the argument. It is the premise on which the rest of this introduction stands.

If the mosque begins as a universal spatial possibility, its appearance in the world never occurs in a void. The moment it shifts from a place that could be anywhere to a place anchored in a particular city, it enters into dialogue with culture. That dialogue is not secondary, cosmetic, or merely ornamental. It is a formative process through which the mosque becomes part of a community's shared memory, part of the city's living fabric, and part of how people recognize themselves in place. What follows, then, is an attempt to understand how the mosque's universal idea becomes locally embodied, and how culture, through material and climate, craft and sensibility, gives the mosque a distinctive identity wherever it takes root.

Culture, in this sense, is not an external force imposed upon the mosque. It is also the lens through which a community comes to recognize the mosque's meaning. The universal idea remains stable: qiblah, congregation, sakīnah, light, and ground. Yet even a stable idea needs a language in order to become legible, and culture supplies that language. For this reason, no mosque appears without cultural inscription, even in cases of restraint. A mosque that avoids ornament still carries a cultural imprint in how it admits and modulates light, how it negotiates the boundary between inside and outside, how it treats the courtyard, how it composes rhythm and shade, and how it positions itself within the city. Culture does not alter the mosque's essence. It reshapes the terms of its appearance.

Once the mosque is approached as a living record of place, it becomes clear that it is not a building erected and then left behind. It lives alongside people, grows with them, and changes with them. Over time, it becomes memory.

Climate, here, is not a neutral backdrop. It is an architectural teacher. In hot regions the mosque

1

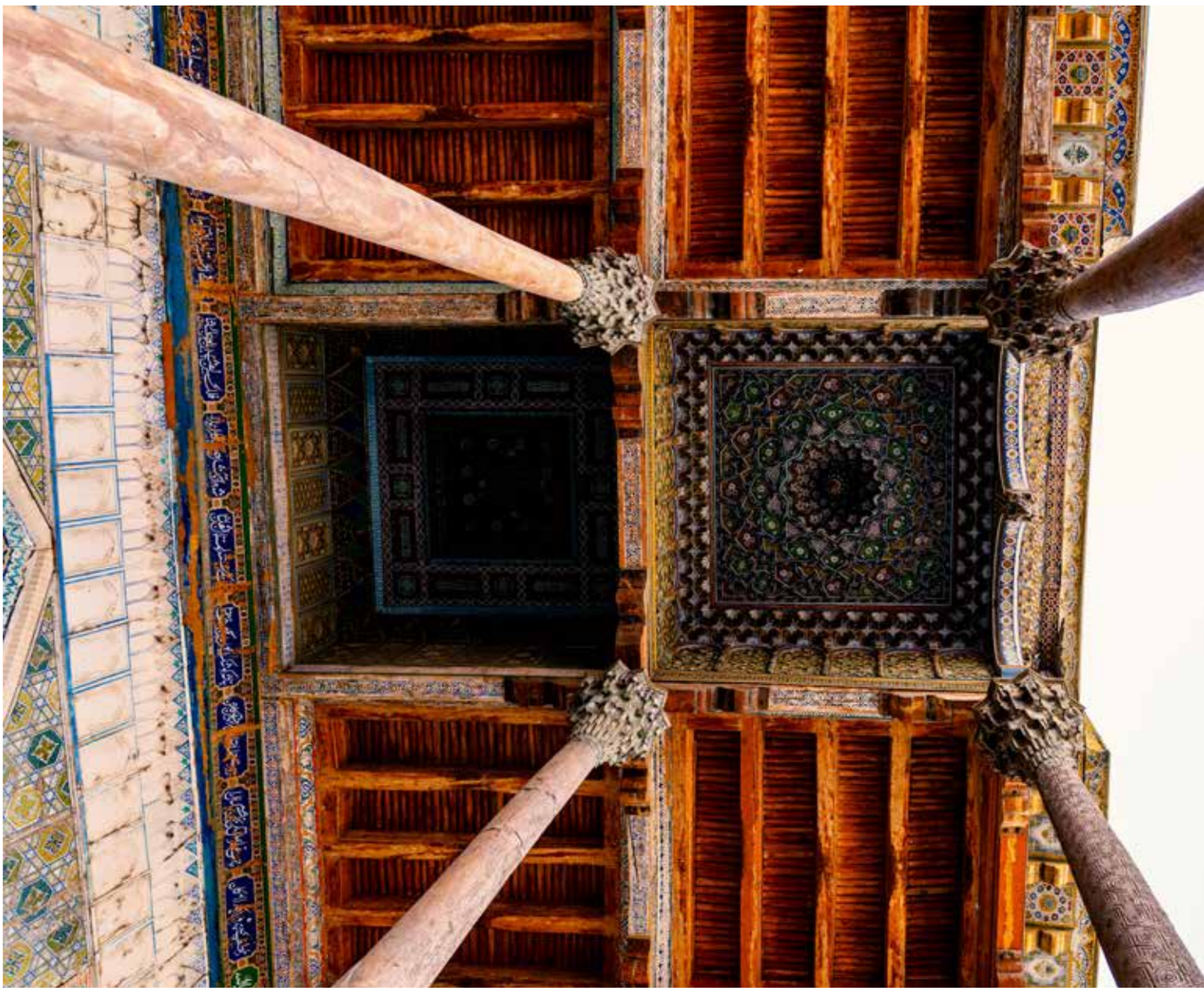
learns shade. In cold regions it learns mass. In humid regions it learns breath and ventilation. In mountainous terrain it learns shelter. Across time, these demands rarely remain merely technical. They condense into identity.

Materials, too, are never only technical. They carry cultural memory. Earth in parts of Africa is not simply a substance, but a lineage of making. Stone in al-Shām is not merely a choice, but a stratified history. Timber in China is not only an element, but a tradition of construction and joinery. And zellij[7] in Morocco is not ornament added to form, but a language through which form speaks.

If the mosque is also read as a mirror of society, it begins to reveal something more subtle than cultural 'expression'. It can disclose how a community imagines itself, what it chooses to honor, and what it considers worth making durable in space. This helps explain why mosques diverge so markedly across regions while still carrying a recognizable core. Simplicity, for instance, need not signal lack. It can be a deliberate stance. Early mosques in Arabia appear spare in part because their milieu favored clarity, open space, and a direct relationship between the human being and

7 **Zellij**: traditional Moroccan art consisting of detailed, hand-cut, mosaic tile-work which forms geometric patterns.

place. In al-Shām and Egypt, another emphasis becomes legible: shade, the column, the courtyard, and the public realm. The mosque often reads as a civic center, less a building set apart than a heart through which urban life circulates. In al-Andalus, a third register comes forward, shaped by attentiveness to light, geometry, water, and ornament, so that the mosque becomes an immersive sensibility, a bodily experience in which beauty participates in the work of sakīnah.



1. *Every art finds its point of origin in the mosque, and every craft reaches its maturation when it becomes integrated into its architectural being.*

If we shift focus from climate and material to the making of architectural language, culture comes into view as aesthetic intelligence. It shapes how light is received, how shade is paced, how ornament is deployed or withheld, how stillness is invited, how thresholds are calibrated, and how space is made to feel. This is why the mosque's idiom can differ so markedly from one culture to another even when its underlying 'grammar' remains shared.

From this angle, the mosque can become a kind of homecoming, not in the domestic sense, but as a place where presence settles

and belonging is quietly learned. It is not only a site of worship, but a lived register of attachment, formed through culture, through the tactile intelligence of making, and through daily familiarity with material. Earth can make the mosque feel as though it rises from its own ground. Stone can grant steadiness. Timber can lend warmth. Glass can lend permeability. And the cadence of the adhān folds the mosque into the rhythm of life itself.

Seen this way, the mosque is distinctive among building types for how consistently it must negotiate a double condition. It is grounded in a universal principle: the earth itself as masjid. Yet it becomes real only through local embodiment, through particular cultures, materials, forms, and sensibilities. This is not a contradiction to be resolved, but an existential condition to be sustained. The mosque cannot be purely universal, nor purely local. It takes shape in the contact zone where idea meets matter, meaning meets making, and orientation meets identity. Reading this tension closely is not an abstract exercise. It clarifies what Kāffatan li-l-Nās can mean architecturally. Across its long history, the mosque has repeatedly operated as a point of encounter between two registers of existence: a universal horizon that holds steady, and a local reality that continues to change.

1

The universal register of the mosque is not limited to Islam's worldwide address. It also resides in a universality of space, matter, and orientation. Material participates in the mosque's expression, yet it is the qiblah that anchors its degree of sacredness. In that sense, the mosque is not the possession of any one culture. It remains, in principle, addressable to human presence as such. This is why it can be Arabian, Persian, Chinese, or European without forfeiting identity.

Yet the mosque is never lived only in the abstract. The moment it takes built form, it enters into dialogue with climate and material, craft and sensibility, memory and city, time and place. Through that dialogue a local identity coheres. The local is not an afterthought. It is an existential necessity. Life is lived in the situated and the specific: a particular city, a particular climate, a particular store of memory, a particular moment in time. The mosque, too, asks for embodiment, and embodiment is always local. This is why the local mosque is not a copy of a 'universal mosque', but a situated articulation of a universal idea. Here we reach the center of the argument: the mosque lives in a continual tension between two registers:

- *Universal: stable, spiritual, oriented toward meaning.*
- *Local: variable, cultural, embodied.*

This relation allows the mosque to remain one while taking on a multiplicity of forms. Because the universal register holds steady while the local register continues to shift, the mosque can be one in essence and multiple in embodiment. It can be earthen in parts of Africa, stone-built in al-Shām, timber in China, ornamented in al-Andalus, or glass in our own time, and still remain recognizably itself.

How, then, does this relationship become architectural rather than merely conceptual? It becomes architectural the moment a few constants remain immovable while

1. If we seek the genealogies of the mosque, we discover that its architecture across fourteen centuries has carried these lineages through the geographies of peoples.

everything around them is permitted to vary. The qiblah is the clearest of these constants: stable in principle, yet endlessly re-read through different materials, different spatial instruments, and different ways of staging orientation as an experienced fact. Even light, universal in its given-ness, is never received universally. It is admitted, filtered, paced, and made intimate through local craft and local climate. Likewise, the openness often associated with mosque space may be a shared horizon, yet its figures are multiple: a courtyard that gathers air and sky, an īwān that frames approach, a central hall that concentrates the collective, a sequence that unfolds by degrees, or, at times, a deliberate transparency that rethinks enclosure itself.

The stakes of this double condition are not merely formal. It is what allows the mosque to be widely legible without becoming foreign, locally inflected without becoming insular, stable without hardening into rigidity, and capable of transformation without forfeiting itself. It also produces a layered belonging: to the *ummah* and to *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*, while remaining answerable to the specificity of place. In this sense, endurance is not incidental to the mosque's history. It is built into its logic.

Seen this way, the mosque can be approached as a bridge between registers of existence: between earth and sky, between the universal and the local, between the individual and the congregation, between past and future, between culture and the human. Yet the bridge is not carried by materials alone. It is carried, ultimately, by meaning.

Among the building types a designer may be asked to shape, few demand a responsibility as exacting as the mosque. It is not merely a functional enclosure, nor simply a symbolic statement. It operates in a contact zone between two registers:

- Universal: the earth itself as masjid, one qiblah, a shared *sakīnah*, a shared rhythm
- Local: culture, climate, materials, memory, sensibility, city

A designer who misses this tension risks falling into one of two distortions. The first is an overplayed universality that estranges the mosque from its place, as if it could be dropped anywhere without consequence. The second is an overplayed locality that turns the mosque into a folkloric replica, fluent in surface cues yet thin in inner life. The more serious task, and the more difficult one, lies in holding the two registers in balance.

What follows offers no recipe. It offers a way of seeing, a framework meant to help designers read this strained relation with greater clarity and approach it as a creative resource rather than a dilemma to be solved.

A first premise is simple: the mosque is an idea before it becomes a form. When the design process begins too early with image, the project can slip into an accumulation of motifs, persuasive on the surface yet uncertain in its inner bearings. Another premise follows from it. Begin from what tends to remain stable across contexts, qiblah, sakīnah, light, rhythm, congregation, and ground, and let form emerge as their local articulation. Starting there does not guarantee depth, but it makes depth more likely. Starting with form can still

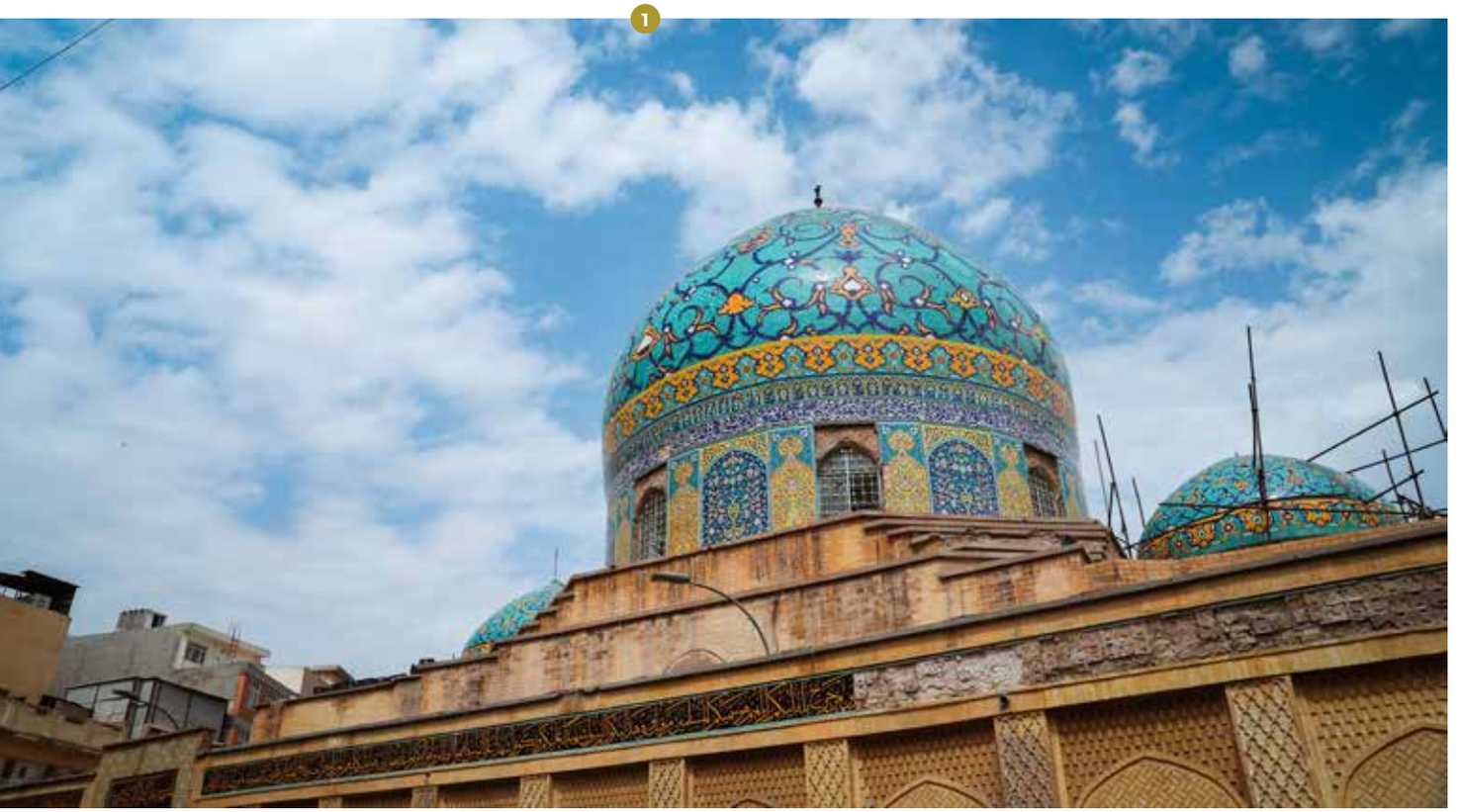
produce a strong mosque, yet it more easily risks a building that is visually fluent while less certain in what it enables from within.

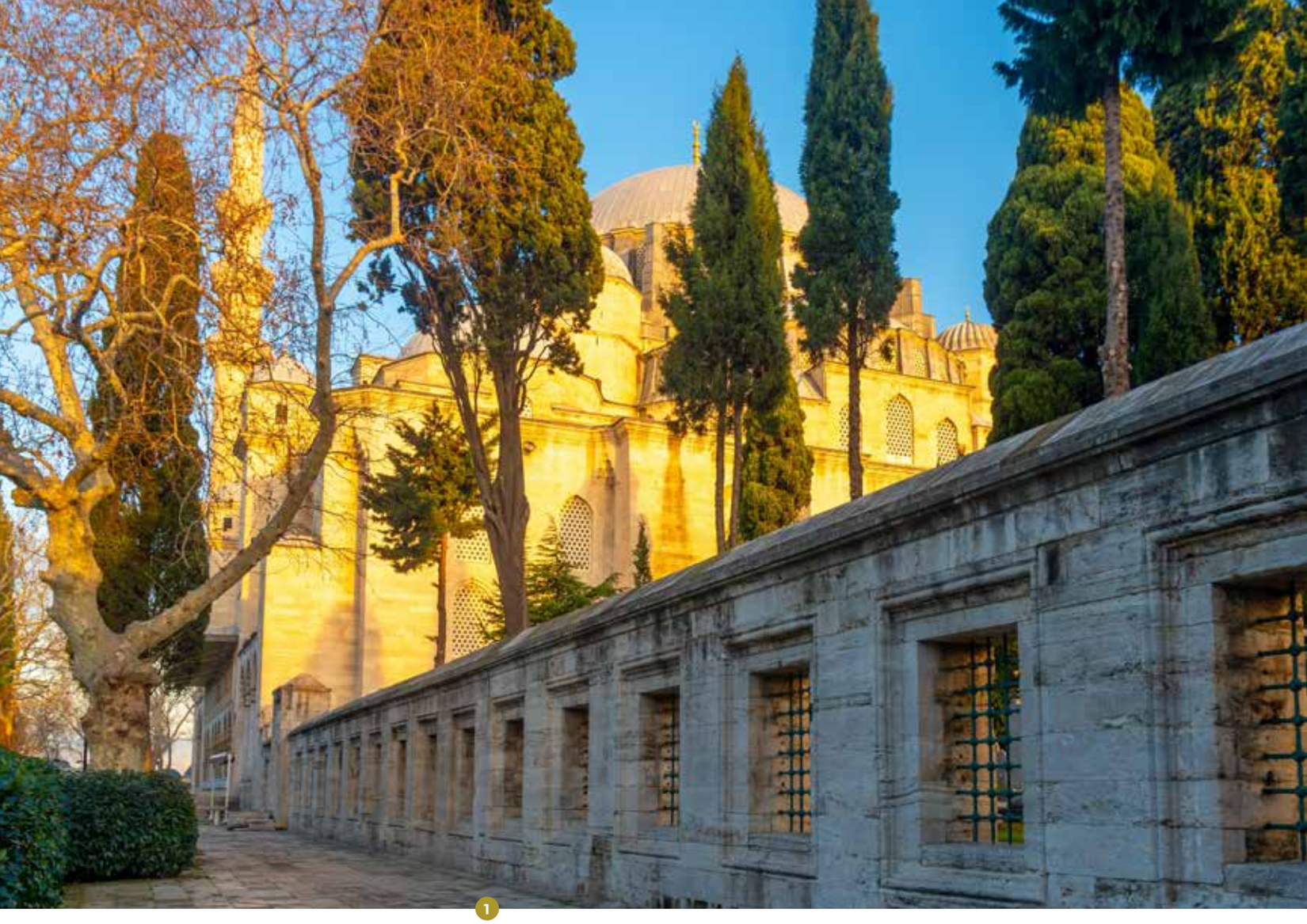
The qiblah, in this reading, is not a wall. It is a design intelligence: an orienting axis that can organize movement, modulate light, pace rhythm, and give space its intentionality. To grasp the qiblah as perceptual rather than merely directional is to let the mosque 'turn' before it 'stands'. *Sakīnah*, likewise, is not only a psychological state. It is a primary design aim, a spatial disposition the mosque tries to make possible. Where *sakīnah* fails to emerge, something essential in the mosque's vocation is diminished.

Culture, in turn, can be engaged with respect without reducing it to a catalogue of historic quotations. Culture is not an Andalusian arch, an Ottoman dome, a Persian miḥrāb, or a Moroccan pattern. These are idioms. Culture often becomes legible more clearly in relationships than in motifs: how light meets shade, how inside is negotiated against outside, how the body reads material, how the congregation is held by space, and how the city frames what it considers meaningful. These are the zones where deeper sensibility appears, and where productive tensions surface.

Climate, too, is more than backdrop. It acts as an architectural agent, quietly determining how a mosque gathers shade, admits air, holds warmth, or releases heat. This is one reason the mosque is never only an object for the eye. It is a spatial condition the body inhabits, where comfort, rhythm, and atmosphere matter as much as outline or profile.

1





1

1. *The local styles of the mosque are shaped to reflect the essence of the local culture.*

From here another calibration comes into view: openness and enclosure. The mosque's universal horizon leans toward openness, yet local life often calls for spaces that can hold and receive, not only disperse. Prayer remains central, of course, but the mosque also becomes a place for meeting, learning, rest, sakīnah, and belonging.

The thread running through all of this is one question: how does a designer keep the universal and the local in play at once, without letting one cancel the other? One way to think of the task is as a cycle rather than a recipe. Begin with the universals: qiblah, sakīnah, light, rhythm. Pass through the local: material, climate, culture, sensibility. Return to the universals in their spatial consequences: openness, belonging, and the congregational condition. When this movement is handled with care, the mosque can be contemporary without turning harsh, local without becoming enclosed, and traditional without slipping into folklore.

Designing a mosque, then, is rarely a technical problem alone. It carries an existential weight: shaping a place that lives on a charged threshold between earth and sky, between the universal and the local, between congregation and individual, between memory and future. A designer who recognizes this tension does not rush to 'solve' it. They learn to listen to it and translate its pressure into architectural language.

This section begins from a Prophetic formulation, "*juʿilat lī al-arḍ masjidan wa-ṭahūran*," often rendered as: "*the earth has been made for me a place of prostration and purification*." It is more than a juristic statement. It proposes a reorientation of the relationship between the human being and place, between worship and space, between the sacred register and the ground itself. From this angle, the mosque appears as a universal spatial possibility before it becomes an architectural artifact, and it enters the world precisely at the contact zone where the earth meets the cultures that give it form.

> *When every place is deemed apt for prayer, the implication is quietly radical: the earth itself becomes a sacred field in potency. In this sense, the mosque is not primarily a building to be produced, but a place to be disclosed. It is not an object added to the world, but the activation of a meaning already latent within it. That shift recalibrates the economy of sacred space. It loosens the sacred from enclosure, loosens worship from a prescribed architectural apparatus, and loosens the act of turning toward God from reliance on a material intermediary.*

The universality of the mosque, then, is not only spiritual or conceptual. It is also physical. Any ground can become a mosque. Any material can carry its making. Any light can be received as spiritual light, and any shade can become a shade of *sakīnah*. For all were created by the Creator. Read this way, the mosque may be the building type most liberated from a fixed image. It does not require a dome, a minaret, a carved miḥrāb, or ornament in order to remain what it is. At minimum, it requires a human presence, a place[8], and an orientation. This triad names the mosque's 'universal spatial phenomenon' in its most elemental form.

> *It helps to underscore that the qiblah here is not a mere wall. It is an act of transformation, the element by which any place can become a mosque. The qiblah does not so much alter form as reorder meaning: the ordinary becomes oriented, the place becomes consecrated, and open space becomes spiritually legible. In this sense, the qiblah functions as a universal sign, binding human presence to what exceeds it, and binding the earth itself to meaning.*

At its origin, the mosque has no intrinsic need for walls, a roof, ornament, or specified materials. This release from fixed image is what allows it to appear as a universal spatial phenomenon: a space composed of orientation, intention, movement, ground, and light. These elements are available everywhere, across every time, within every culture.

> *Yet universality alone does not suffice. The moment the mosque shifts from 'a place that could be anywhere' to 'a place located somewhere', anchored in a particular city, it enters into dialogue with culture. It is there that the cultural phenomenon begins.*

Seen from this angle, culture is not an external force imposed upon the mosque. It is the lens through which a community comes to recognize the mosque's meaning. The universal idea remains stable: qiblah, *sakīnah*, light, rhythm, congregation, ground. Yet even a stable idea requires a language through which it becomes legible in the world. For that reason, no built mosque

8 While most mosques are anchored in ground, a few mosques have been built over bodies of water, or give the appearance of being suspended over water, such as the Nurul Yaqin mosque in Indonesia, described later in this book.

stands outside culture. Even the most spare mosque bears a cultural imprint: in how light is received, in the relation between interior and exterior, in the figure and proportion of the courtyard, in material choices, in visual rhythm, in the calibration of shade, and in the mosque's relationship to the city.

One useful way to frame this is to say that culture inflects the mosque's identity through three interwoven strata: memory, material, and aesthetic sensibility. Climatic memory shapes how a mosque negotiates light and shade. Material memory lends it texture, acoustics, and even scent. Craft memory, where it persists, informs the mosque's ornamental speech when ornament is present. In this way, a mosque can read as a mirror of the culture that builds it: Arabian in the Peninsula, Shāmī in Damascus, Andalusian in Córdoba, Persian in Isfahan, West African in Timbuktu, Ottoman in Istanbul, and contemporary in parts of Europe.

In this sense, culture is not decoration so much as a web of relationships between the human being and place: between light and shade, inside and outside, congregation and space, city and the sacred register. It is within this relational field that the mosque's idiom can diverge profoundly across cultures, even as its underlying grammar remains recognizably one.

For this reason, the mosque can be approached as a form held in a productive tension between two registers of existence: a universal horizon that remains stable, and a local register that continues to change. This tension is not a contradiction to be solved. It is the condition through which the mosque stays intelligible across difference. The universal does not deliver a ready-made style. It offers a non-substitutable core. The local does not invent a different mosque. It gives that core its situated body through climate and material, craft and sensibility, city and memory. Because one register holds steady while the other remains open, the mosque can be one in essence and multiple in embodiment.

Architecturally, this relationship becomes legible through mediating elements rather than through fixed images. The qiblah is the first of these mediators: constant in meaning, yet continually re-articulated through different spatial devices, materials, and atmospheres. Light belongs to the shared grammar as well, yet its admission, pacing, and modulation are always local. Mosque space carries an impulse toward openness as a horizon, while its local figures may take the form of a courtyard, an īwān, a central hall, an organic sequence, or even a deliberate transparency. Even material, while never the measure of sacredness, becomes a cultural instrument: earth, stone, timber, or glass can each host the same orientation and congregational order without undoing the mosque's identity. Through this calibrated interplay, the mosque can remain global without becoming alien, and local without becoming enclosed.

Designing a mosque, then, cannot be reduced to technique. It asks for existential attentiveness, because it lives precisely where the universal and the local meet. When that tension is missing, the work tends toward two familiar failures. It may lean into an abstract universality that estranges the mosque from its place. Or it may over-identify with the local, mistaking inherited imagery for belonging, and produce a mosque that reads as culturally legible yet existentially uncharged.

1. *Forms associated with mosque architecture emerge in the same manner that local traditions are born.*

A more sustaining approach is cyclical rather than linear. It begins from the core: qiblah, *sakīnah*, light, rhythm, congregation. These are the mosque's universals, not as motifs, but as orienting realities. From there, the work passes into the local: material, climate, culture, sensibility, memory. It then returns to the universal, not by repeating forms, but by recovering the mosque's horizon of openness, its capacity for belonging, and its insistence on the shared condition of gathering.

Within this cycle, elements often treated as 'technical' reveal themselves as languages. Climate is not a backdrop but a formative pressure. Light is not a device but an idiom. Shade is not simply the absence of light, but one of the ways a place names itself. Materials are never only choices; they carry memory. A courtyard need not be read as a historical quotation, but as a local figure of a universal impulse: openness held within enclosure. An īwān is not ornament, but a threshold-space that stages passage and reception. A central hall is not an 'Ottoman form' by default, but one possible philosophical claim about unity.

In this reading, the mosque also gains depth when it's not treated as a detached object. It tends to become more truthful when it is woven into the city's life: as a public presence, a civic marker, a place able to receive, gather, and calm. A designer attentive to this strained relationship does not try to eliminate the tension. The task is not to resolve it, but to listen to what the tension demands and render it architecturally.

Seen this way, the mosque is neither a purely spatial phenomenon nor a purely cultural one. It is a meeting point: between the earth as such and local culture, between qiblah and sensibility, between ummah and place. The tension becomes a source of architectural vitality, and part of what gives the mosque its endurance, its intelligibility across difference, and its capacity to remain, in a deep sense, Kāffatan li-l-Nās.

Abdullatif Al Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture: FIFTH ROUND

Every dialectical relationship generates a critical tension that widens the field of attention. It allows a phenomenon to be read through its inner logic rather than its surface alone. The mosque's case is particularly revealing, because the relationship between its universal register and its local embodiment does not simply produce stylistic variety. It generates questions that press beyond form.

One question, perhaps the most decisive, concerns how the mosque takes shape mentally at the universal level, in collective perception, whether among Muslims or among those outside Islam. What is it, precisely, that makes 'the mosque' recognizable as an idea before it becomes a building? And how does that idea descend from its universal horizon to touch a specific geography, absorb its conditions, and begin to speak in its local tongue?

A further question follows almost inevitably: what kinds of local traditions are produced by this act of embodiment, particularly at the urban scale? Dialectical relationships tend to generate traditions around them, yet traditions that remain alive do not stay fixed. In the mosque's case, they are variable, changing with place and time, while continuing to orbit the deeper structure of the mosque's 'architectural DNA', nourished by enduring genes even as their expressions mutate.

This is what makes the design of a mosque a singular undertaking. It is, at once, a historical and cultural responsibility, and a contemporary and technical one. It requires reading tradition while working with present conditions, holding universality in view while allowing local life to give it form.

Beneath this entire dialectical account of *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* runs a practical uncertainty: can architecture meaningfully design for such a horizon, or does it emerge only through layered interactions, across scales, and over time?

Framed this way, the question opens onto a parallel debate about architecture's capacity to embody expansive philosophical ideas. Philosophy often generates, in the mind, forms and meanings that remain deliberately indeterminate. It is shaped by accumulated experience and by encounter with diverse cultures, and it rarely consents to being reduced to a single finished image. This tension between the philosophical and the embodied places architecture in a demanding position. It presses designers to search for modes of embodiment that do not pretend to 'capture' an idea once and for all, but keep it active, readable, and open-ended. It also helps explain why visual expressions can proliferate even when the philosophical source remains one.

Seen through this lens, *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* is not an idea to be cast into a stable form. It is a principle that resists closure, retaining a certain freedom from image even as it seeks architectural presence.

The Mosque and Time: Rhythm, Memory, and Daily Return

Among the many dimensions that shape the human bond with place, time remains the most elusive, the most formative, and the least foregrounded in architectural discourse. Place can be seen, touched, and measured. Time, by

1. Wherever the mosque comes into being, the place itself transitions into sacredness, becoming a threshold between the temporal world and the eternal beyond.

contrast, is lived. Yet the mosque, more than almost any other building, is shaped by time as much as by built presence. It is not apprehended only through the eye, but through the cadence of the day, the sediment of memory, and the repeated act of return. This section proposes to read the mosque as a temporal phenomenon, not merely a spatial one.

What kind of temporal attachment does the mosque generate? How do prayer times become a daily rhythm that quietly reshapes one's relationship to time itself? How does the mosque accumulate into lived memory, becoming a steady reference within a changing world? And how might the *ummah* be embodied through time, not only through place?

Time in the mosque is not experienced as an abstract continuum. It becomes rhythm. The five prayers segment the day into recognizable temporal figures, shifting time from an uninterrupted flow into intervals charged with meaning:

- *Fajr: the beginning of light*
- *Ẓuhr: the sun at its height*
- *ʿAṣr: the slanting of light*
- *Maghrib: at day's dight9*
- *ʿIshāʾ: the stillness of night*

These are not merely hours on a clock. They are temporal markers, and the mosque is where those markers acquire spatial weight and bodily consequence. One does not arrive at just any moment, but in response to moments that return, recur, and persist. In this sense, the mosque is less a static site than a place continually re-encountered, five times a day, as though time itself were calling at its threshold. Each arrival renews the threshold. Each prayer quietly re-tunes the inner tempo by which a person lives.

This rhythm is not only personal. The adhān[10], as a call, renders time collective. The city itself begins to move to a shared cadence, and even those who do not pray may register the day's shifts through the mosque's sound.

If rhythm is time in its short arc, memory is time in its long arc. The mosque is rarely a place visited once. It is a place returned to across a lifetime, and for that reason it becomes both personal memory and communal memory. Personal memory gathers around an individual's formational experiences: first prayer, first sujūd, first Ramaḍān, first Jumuʿah, first ʿĪd prayer, moments of fracture, moments of *sakīnah*, moments of *duʿāʾ* (supplication[11]). These are not passing recollections, but temporal layers that settle into consciousness. Communal memory, meanwhile, appears in the remembered voice of an older *adhān*, the remembered *imam*, the remembered seasons and occasions, the remembered shifts in social life, the succession of generations.

In this way, the mosque becomes a living register of the city, not through documents, but through time as it is lived. Its pace of change is usually slow. That steadiness can alter one's sense of duration inside it, as though time thickens, as though it slows. A person may feel older than their years within it, even when the building itself is new.

9 ***dight*** is derived from the Old English verb *dihtan*, which means 'to set in order, govern, or arrange'. This poetic use of the word signifies the day's end and aligns with the idea of getting organized at the end of the day: So, 'at day's dight' means the day is finally 'dight' (put in order/finished).

10 **adhan**: *a capella* call to prayer sung by a *muezzin*.

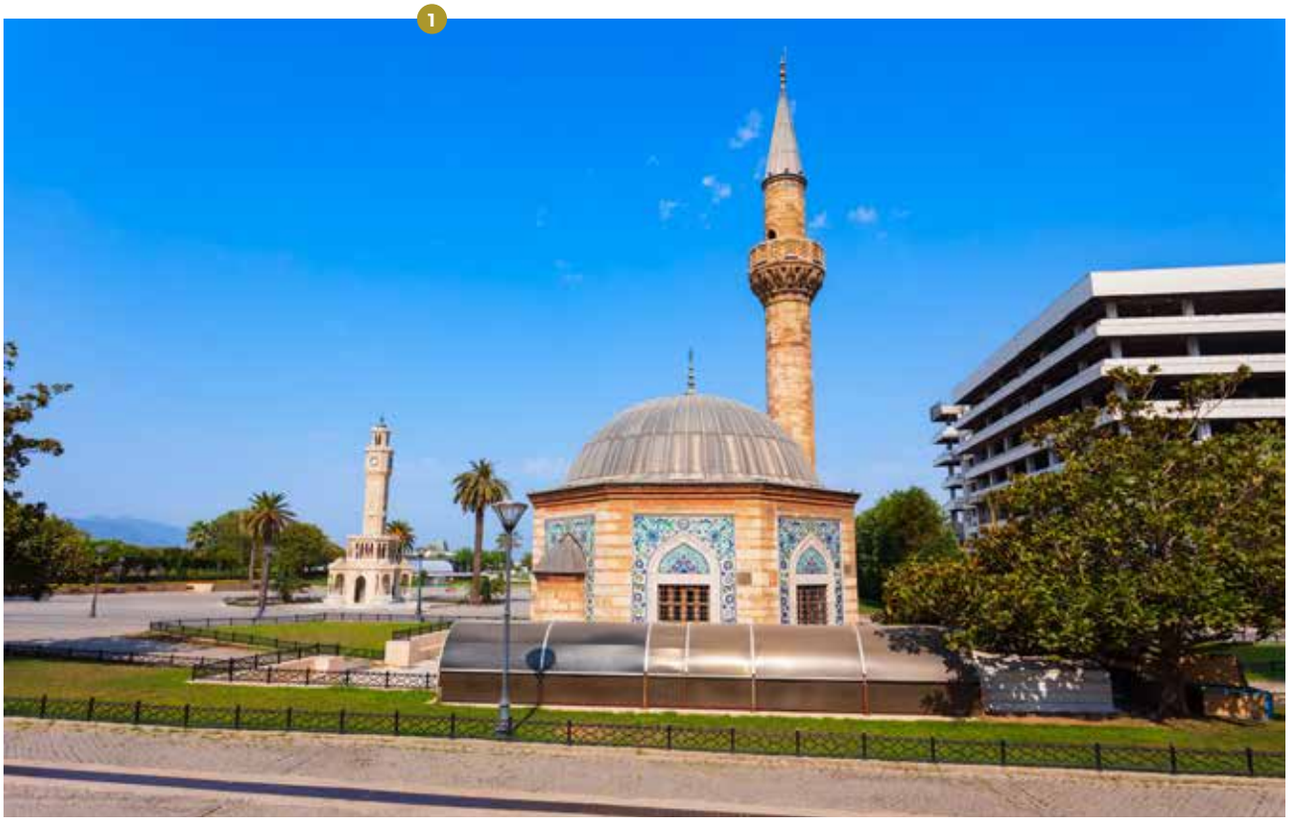
11 **supplication**: asking the Creator for guidance, forgiveness, or help, reflecting the believer's humility, submission, and total reliance on Him.

A person returns to the mosque again and again. The repetition is not mere habit, but a temporal structure. Five times a day, one comes back to the same place, though rarely in the same inner state. The mosque thus becomes a mirror of changing inward conditions: a point of re-calibration, a place where one returns to oneself.

Friday, in this sense, is not only a prayer. It is a temporal event: a weekly threshold that returns with steady insistence and quietly re-forms one's relationship to the rhythm of the week. Ramaḍān, the two ʿīds, and other seasons of intensified devotion are likewise not just occasions, but temporalities, making the mosque a center of the year as a whole. There is another kind of return that is not measured in days at all, but in a lifetime: the child who enters a mosque for the first time, the young person who finds a horizon of meaning within it, the elder who returns to it as a final house of sakīnah. In this way, the mosque does not merely accompany a person. It grows with them, and becomes part of their lived biography.

This invites another way of seeing the mosque. It does not merely sit within ordinary time. It can also generate a distinct temporality of its own. Entering the mosque is not only an entry into a place, but an entry into a different tempo: slower, quieter, deeper, more attentive. Silence, here, is not simply the absence of sound. It can read as the presence of time itself, gathered and held.

Across the world, Muslims pray to the same rhythm, though at different clock-times. Out of that shared pattern emerges something like a global time: dispersed, yet synchronized in structure. For fifteen centuries the cadence has scarcely broken: adhān, prayer, congregation.


1

Continuity of this kind allows the ummah to be felt not only as a community in space, but as a continuity in time.

The mosque, then, is not place alone. It is rhythm and return: a daily measure, a lifetime memory, a repeated arrival, a sacred register within ordinary time. It is one of the rare places where time becomes perceptible, almost tangible, and charged with meaning. In that sense, it becomes more than a space of *sakīnah*. It becomes a space of human time itself: time one inhabits, returns to, and, at moments, finds oneself within.

The time the mosque generates is one of its most consequential non-material dimensions, and it bears directly on the meaning of Kāffatan li-l-Nās. Time is enduring, yet it becomes lived only through rhythm and order. Ṣalāh (prayer) offers such a rhythm: a stable, recurring cadence performed by those who belong to Islam at designated hours. In this light, the mosque's universality is not only a matter of geographic spread. It is also a matter of temporal persistence: a structure of return that can be enacted wherever a person stands, and renewed without interruption.

This rhythm holds whether the mosque appears as a building that can be seen from afar, or as an open expanse set aside for prayer, a possibility already suggested by the Prophetic formulation that the earth was made a masjid and a means of purification. Here, *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* becomes more than an ethical aspiration. Because geographic time zones differ, the rhythm of prayer extends across the full day. At any hour, somewhere on earth, a call is being made, a row is being formed, a prostration is being performed. In that sense, the mosque can be reread as a temporal phenomenon: throughout the hours of the year, prayer continues, as though the bond between the mosque and people is not permitted to lapse.

Time, however, is not only recurrence. It is also forward movement, and forward movement leaves memory in its wake. The mosque is bound to time's unfolding toward what is to come, yet it also stands as memory and history. It accumulates into personal recollection and communal continuity. It becomes a reservoir into which acts and atmospheres settle: voices, seasons, thresholds, gestures, and the quiet endurance of return. No mosque is still, whether as an idea or as a lived practice. It lives through repetition, and repetition slowly deposits meaning.

1. *The genealogies of the mosque proliferate through their interaction with geography and local culture.*

For that reason, no single mosque can be treated as a rigid mental construct, or as a final image of 'the mosque'. Even when it takes architectural shape, it remains one articulation among many, not the totality of articulations. The mosque, at the universal scale, survives precisely through this breadth: a mental and perceptual field in which countless forms remain answerable to a shared rhythm, a shared orientation, and a shared act.

Such multiplicity is not incidental to the larger meaning of Kāffatan li-l-Nās. It is one of the ways that universality remains possible without sameness. The mosque persists, across time and across cultures, not as a single picture repeated, but as a continuity enacted: a rhythm that endures, an orientation that holds, and a place that can reappear anywhere, without surrendering what makes it itself.

1. *The mosque is the collective space that gathers all worshippers, yet each individual seeks within it a singular place of intimate communion with the Creator.*

Kāffatan li-l-Nās and Contemporary Challenges in Mosque Architecture

We arrive, then, at the question of the challenges facing mosque architecture today. Many of these challenges are structural in nature. They arise from an unprecedented openness between human cultures, and from the steady erosion of barriers that once kept worlds apart. They are not necessarily directed at the mosque as such. In many respects, they are pressures confronting humanity at large. Still, they can be reread as capable of serving the horizon of *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*, since the degree of human proximity we witness today has few parallels in history. Such proximity can be a genuine opportunity for the message to become legible through encounter.

It is important, first, to recognize that the mosque can enact what might be called a silent calling, al-daʿwah al-ṣāmitah. This capacity does not depend on argument or explanation. It arises from presence. A mosque meets the presence of the other in shared civic space, and it also carries an inner universality through the inheritable codes of Islam's message. What follows, then, is a brief account of key intellectual challenges that the idea of Kāffatan li-l-Nās, as represented through mosque architecture, is likely to face in coming years shaped by accelerated technological and cultural transformation.

At the outset, one difficulty with 'identity' as a concept must be named clearly: in common usage, identity remains persistently attached to what is seen. Identity tends to point first to appearance, to how a thing presents itself. For that reason, visible components and recognizable forms carry enormous weight in how individuals recognize people, communities, cities, and institutions. In recent decades, many thinkers have tried to widen the term, treating identity as a layered structure that includes both the apparent and the latent, both the visible form and the meaning stored within culture and practice. These efforts matter, because they open a necessary space of debate between the tangible and the intangible. Yet in lived perception, the dominance of the visual remains difficult to dislodge.

This creates a genuine challenge when we try to understand the universal-local tension that characterizes mosque architecture. The universal dimension often operates as a general mental image, while the local dimension emerges as a particular image shaped by geography and culture. The same tension spills into the debate on identity and widens its questions: does Kāffatan li-l-Nās imply a horizon of universal human address, or does it ask human beings to remain grounded in local identities while still meeting one another across difference. In architectural terms, the question becomes sharper: how can a mosque be legible beyond its locality without becoming a generic object, and locally rooted without collapsing into a closed cultural emblem.

The difficulty created by linking identity to visible forms arises, first, from the desire to transmit meaning quickly. Communities often rely on symbols already recognized within their cultural memory, because such symbols communicate at a glance. Yet quick recognizability does not guarantee truthfulness. Sometimes it points only to a historical association between certain shapes and the idea of 'the mosque', an association formed in a period that no

1

longer exists. In that case, 'identity' risks becoming a surface signal rather than a meaningful articulation of present realities.

> *A second difficulty is more subtle. Even deeper meanings still require perceptible cues to become readable. Identity is hard to grasp without some material sign that points toward it, even when what we seek is latent rather than merely apparent. This dependence leaves identity open to competing interpretations and weakens any claim to a single stable definition.*

At this point, it may be useful to speak of a life cycle' of the mosque's architectural identity, because much of what circulates under the label of identity revolves around form. When a society invokes its identity, historical images often rise immediately to the surface in clothing, in buildings, and in everyday artifacts. Rarely is a careful line drawn between past and present. Do we truly belong to those forms and practices, including ones whose making we no longer even understand. Or is the attachment itself a symptom of our difficulty in articulating what a contemporary identity could look like, and how it could be lived.

> *The problem becomes especially visible when the culture struggles to generate alternative forms capable of carrying identity without strain. The easiest path is then chosen: a retreat into inherited images, borrowing from them to produce a constructed identity, then justifying the result by claiming that identity can be carried on the shoulders of historical form. What is often missing is the more challenging work of bridging, testing, and re-authoring, so that continuity remains real rather than staged.*[12]

It is worth stating plainly that a purely visual notion of 'mosque identity' sits uneasily with the horizon of *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*. When attention narrows into an ideology of form, the shared generative codes of the mosque are pushed to the margins. The life cycle of forms is not the life cycle of identity. Forms repeat, dissolve,

12 Mashary AlNaim. "Al-Huwiyyah wa Dawrat al-Ḥayāh lil-Mukawwin al-Baṣarī." Al-Riyadh, January 2025 ,12.

1. Wherever the mosque comes into being, the place itself transitions into sacredness, becoming a threshold between the temporal world and the eternal beyond.

return, and mutate. Identity, in its deeper sense, is carried by more durable structures of meaning and practice.

> *By its very nature, the mosque was not meant to be imprisoned by form. Its constants are not a catalogue of motifs. They are orienting realities that can survive wide variation: qiblah, the congregational condition, and the pursuit of sakīnah as an existential horizon. This is why it is often misleading to confine mosque architecture within fixed visual templates, then declare that such templates define 'the mosque'.*

Contemporary architectural reality, in any case, reinforces this point. The stability of form and the comfort of repetition no longer carry the same authority in today's built world. A pronounced drift toward fluidity is underway, where images change quickly, profiles refuse permanence, and the built environment increasingly accepts multiplicity as normal. From our perspective, mosque architecture will not be able to avoid this shift in the near future. The more urgent task is to meet it without losing deeper bearings, and without mistaking recognizability for meaning.

> *What drew our attention is that material forms in the past often had a life cycle of their own. Certain historical forms proved capable of endurance. They resisted disappearance, remained alive, and even fused with contemporary expressions. This suggests that the issue is not a nervousness toward the old, nor a rejection of history, nor a call for rupture with heritage. It is, rather, a question of why some forms, whether historical or contemporary, persist. Their endurance seems tied to latent capacities within their composition, capacities*

1

by which an inner structure can renew itself rather than merely repeat itself.

The persistence of certain forms and components appears to rest on two conditions. The first is a kind of plastic flexibility, a formative openness that keeps them from presenting themselves as 'finished' objects. Their completeness is relational. It emerges through the subject who encounters them, and through the spatial, cultural, and climatic conditions in which they appear. This does not mean they are vague or characterless. On the contrary, such forms are often strong and legible. Their meaning intensifies through association with other components, and through their ability to accept new relationships without losing their intelligibility. The second condition is a broader public acceptance that survives across changing contexts, even as tastes evolve from one generation to another. These rare forms, often deceptively simple, seem to carry a robust internal structure refined through long experience. That maturation enables them to return each time with a renewed personality, without losing the radiance of their origin.

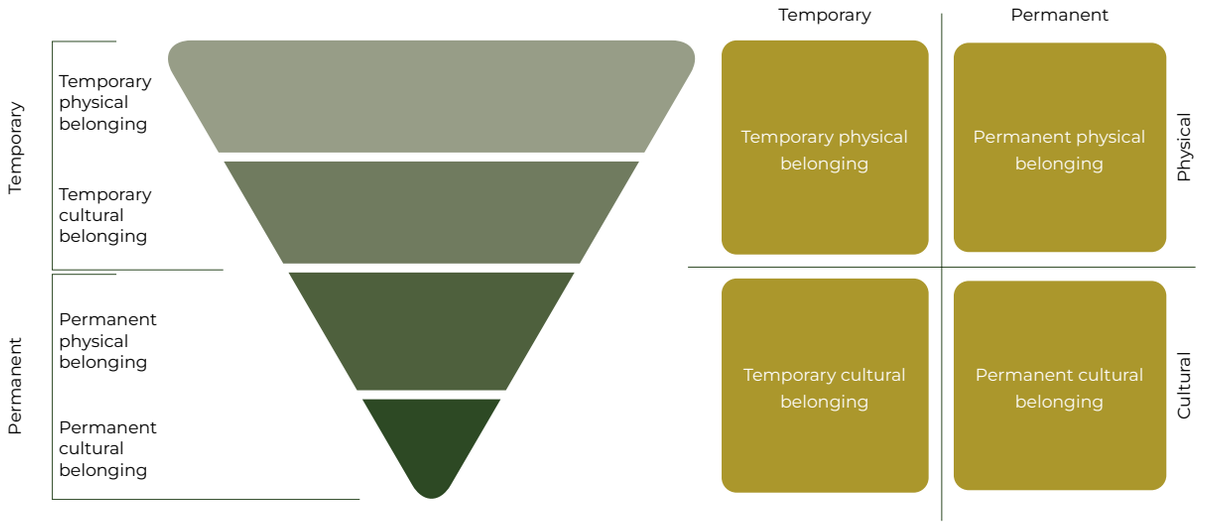
Seen in this light, the idea of a life cycle for forms and material components may lead us toward a clearer understanding of 'contemporary identity', especially an identity that repeatedly feels tempted to retreat into history. Yet this way of thinking should remain tied to the local, embodied dimension of the mosque. The universal dimension is resistant to being fixed within visual templates whose contours can be defined with precision. The mosque's universality does not deliver a singular image. It delivers a non-substitutable core.

It is precisely here that mosque architecture is repeatedly drawn into the predicament of 'authenticity'. Some argue that the mosque should be confined to a single visual template, assumed to be the authentic one. Such an assumption collides sharply with the horizon of *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*, which, in principle, releases the mosque from fixation on form and allows its architecture to become a fabric of many forms, so long as essence remains stable and beyond alteration.

The term 'authenticity' has occupied a prominent place in Arabic intellectual discourse over the past two centuries and continues to do so. In English, however, it tends to appear in at least two registers, and the distinction matters.

The first register treats authenticity as 'the authentic', meaning what is verified by the past. It looks backward, seeking authenticity of form, and sometimes even authenticity of material constitution, as it once appeared historically. This sense has largely governed how the term has been received in much Arab discourse. It also explains why 'contemporaneity' is so often positioned against 'authenticity', as though the two must stand as opposites rather than as concepts capable of a more nuanced relationship.

The second register treats authenticity as 'originality'. It also translates as 'authentic', yet it points toward an authenticity of invention: an originality that remains connected to origin without being imprisoned by inherited products. Here the authentic is not bound to the contexts that formed in the past, nor does it stop at their components and visible outcomes. It gestures toward innovation while keeping a live thread to the source. In this sense, authenticity implies, in one way or another, the ongoing creation of new origins. If origins were formed across history, what prevents us from forming new ones, and from proposing concepts different from those we inherited.



The first understanding tends to produce closed endings that repeat themselves, because it finds no new horizon toward which it can move. This helps explain why much discourse on authenticity has remained stalled. Within that dominant reception, authenticity becomes what was made in the past and preserved by history. It hardens into sacralized heritage that must not be touched, and must not be subjected to critique. The second understanding does not cancel history. It depends on the capacity to generate new origins and to invent ideas that accord with the spirit of an age. It is, therefore, marked by open endings whose outcomes cannot be fully predicted, unlike the first, whose results are often easy to foresee.[13]

The tendency to interpret authenticity as a closed-ended concept, tethered to what was produced in the past, has blurred the very meaning of contemporaneity in much Arab thought. The moment this mindset tries to think seriously about the present, the constraints of the past rise up and compel a hasty retreat into history and its imagined glories. Within this frame, contemporaneity becomes little more than the capacity to restore the past in one form or another. Even when the discussion turns to 'contemporary identity', the past remains central and difficult to escape.

From our perspective, contemporary local architecture is what we make today, not what our parents and grandparents made. Yet the conversation often slides toward the visual and the material. Among architects in particular, form, as the final product, can overwhelm the values, principles, and knowledge that gave rise to it. As a result, authenticity in architecture is frequently reduced to the recycling of historical forms, a tedious repetition of closed endings whose outcomes are decided in advance.

This becomes especially pressing in mosque architecture, which is often forced to inhabit the image of the historical mosque. Yet the mosque begins from an origin that is simple and unpretentious. In the Prophet's Mosque in

13 Mashary AlNaim. "Ibtikār al-Aṣālah" [Inventing Authenticity]. Al-Riyadh (newspaper), Sunday, 17 Rabīʿ al-Ākhir 1446 AH / October 2024 ,20.

1. *A "third time" emerges during prayer, interrupting the continuum of duration and dividing existence into a before and an after.*

Madinah, the root of all mosques, form did not carry primary importance. What mattered was orientation and alignment, the qiblah, and the act of praying together in rows. Everything else remained supplementary, capable of being shaped and reshaped over time.

Here lies the crux. Authenticity cannot be achieved by proxy. Our predecessors' ability to read their local environment, natural and social, and to work intelligently with the techniques available to them enabled them to produce an architecture that carried authenticity in their own time. That architecture belonged to the authenticity of its era. It cannot simply be imported into the present and expected to function as authenticity again.

If we speak of the mosque, each society has its own tools and cultural sensibilities that shape what it considers 'authentic', whether in the handling of space or in visual form. Yet the mosque exceeds these local particularities because it must continually recover its essential codes. Authenticity is made and remade as people respond to the time they live in. It expresses a momentary contemporaneity within a temporal context that continues to shift.

Two conclusions follow. First, there is no single authenticity and no single contemporaneity, because both change as time changes. Second, there is no real divide between authenticity and contemporaneity. Every contemporaneity generates its own invented origins. Any attempt to erect a hard boundary between the two terms risks falling into the snare of speaking as though we inhabit two separate worlds, a 'past' and a 'present', which is precisely the trap that has shaped much Arab thinking in recent decades.

The message of Kāffatan li-l-Nās is not bound to time, not merely because it is more than a rhythm, but because its meaning is not confined by any particular era or geography. It can crystallize in a specific moment and in a specific place without being produced by time or place, and without being limited to them.

A clarification matters here. *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* does not stand outside time and place as an abstraction. It becomes present only

1

through particular moments and particular settings. Yet time and place are not its authors. They are its medium. They influence the inflection of its appearance, not the ground of its existence.

For that reason, the message remains alive in every age and in every place. It takes on a distinct form each time, shaped by the circumstances of its moment and setting, yet it is never exhausted by any single expression. It cannot be enclosed within one geography, nor contained within one historical moment, because its horizon is enduring even as its embodiments continue to change.

From this angle, debates over authenticity, no less than debates over contemporaneity, do not act upon the phenomenon of *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* in any decisive way. It exceeds every fixed authenticity and every fixed contemporaneity, not by dismissing them, but by carrying within itself what might be called a lasting authenticity and a lasting contemporaneity.

These two notions can be difficult to translate into architectural terms, yet their meaning in the mosque is fairly precise. Lasting architectural authenticity lies in the mosque's continuous recovery of its origin. Without this repeated return to its essential codes, it cannot remain a mosque. Lasting architectural contemporaneity lies in the mosque's capacity to remain constant through changing eras. Its essence resists alteration, even as each generation gives it a form calibrated to its own moment.

Abdullatif AlFozan Award for Mosque Architecture: FIFTH ROUND

In this sense, the message of *Kāffatan li-l-Nās* becomes architectural. It takes shape through the mosque in a way that can speak across time and across place, without ever being confined to either one of them.

From the silent invitation, al-daʿwah al-ṣāmitah, the argument may lead to what could be called a 'silent culture'. By this we mean the spontaneous conduct through which people express an accumulated culture, along with meanings stored within it through lived experience. In that sense, 'silent identity' is the genuine, unforced identity. It is not the fabricated, normative identity that people celebrate rhetorically while it fails to describe their actual condition. It is, rather, a lasting identity whose core resists substitution.

Applied to mosque architecture, the point becomes readable. In almost any part of the world, the mosque signals the presence of Muslims even before it declares anything in words. The bond between *al-daʿwah al-ṣāmitah* and silent identity is therefore fundamental. Invitation cannot occur without a legible sign of the presence of the reality to which the invitation is directed.

A useful point of reference lies in classic discussions of culture and nonverbal meaning, particularly The Hidden Dimension and The Silent Language by Edward T. Hall, and The Meaning of the Built Environment by Amos Rapoport. The fact that these texts are now several decades old is itself instructive. It indicates how much of our current conversation still lags behind later approaches that attempt to dismantle culture analytically and reach toward its inner structure.

A frequent confusion arises here between 'silent' and 'nonverbal', and which of the two is more accurate. Our position is that silent identity is broader than nonverbal identity. The silent includes

1. *Within the prayer hall, time itself suspends, forming a spiritual interval.*

latent, unobserved meanings that may be present even when no visible cue is offered. The nonverbal, by contrast, typically presumes a perceptible carrier, a visible or tangible sign through which meaning is communicated without words.

> *In fact, the mosque has a universal, non-material dimension. It can exist as a firmly held idea in people's minds even when it is not embodied in a building, and its silent identity, in many cases, does not require a visible object in order to take form.*[14]

Whatever term we may eventually agree upon for 'silent identity', one point needs to be stated clearly: every identity involves a process of encoding. The extent to which an identity can reach those who belong to it, as well as those outside its circle, depends first and foremost on the ability to decode the codes through which its meanings travel.

> *In this sense, successful identities are those capable of forming their codes through dense and substantive cultural production, including artistic and visual production, and capable, in turn, of circulating that production in the public sphere, even, if the word is acceptable, 'marketing' it. Yet a persistent obstacle remains: the dominance of images and finished forms inherited from the past. It is difficult to shift what societies produce spontaneously today, and what that spontaneity normalizes, so that it genuinely expresses the silent identity, and even the verbal identity, of those societies. By contrast, the emotional images people carry of the past, and the repeated attempts to restore them, often amount to little more than an illusory identity, sometimes even a fabricated one.*

The idea of identity seems to face its hardest test when it moves from theoretical discussion into practical application. Because a contemporary 'silent identity' has not been clearly attempted, tested, and matured, the historical dimension continues to seep into most contemporary experiments. Forms produced in the past return almost by default, to the point where it becomes difficult to disentangle innovation from continuity. Identity is then treated as an extension of what has already been, rather than as an act of making oriented toward what is still to come. This sits uneasily with the claim that a mosque's silent identity can carry a universal dimension, since universality, in this argument, depends on a stable core that can be rearticulated without being reduced to inherited images.

> *Within the prevailing cultural climate, the difficulty appears to lie less in 'identity' itself than in the idea of the future. The future is often placed close to the register of al-ghayb (the unknown), and is therefore treated as something one should not think through. Yet the future carries the decisive challenge for any identity, especially one that claims an essential core that does not change. The question is not whether an identity has roots, but whether it can remain legible when the conditions of life, technology, and perception shift faster than inherited forms can follow.*

What is now often described as 'liquid culture' cannot ultimately hold its ground before the mosque's universality. We live in a

14 Mashary AlNaim. "Al-Thaqāfah al-Ṣāmitah wa Khiṭāb al-Huwiyyah" [Silent Culture and the Discourse of Identity]. Al-Riyadh (newspaper), Saturday, 22 Rabīʿ al-Awwal 1445 AH / October 2023 ,7.

1. *The minaret remains a sign that evokes a silent resistance.*

world of accelerated change in which stability is barely felt. This raises an unavoidable question: how can we even conceive of mosque identity within a hurried, restless condition that resists durable meaning and prefers rapid image-consumption to slow cultural sedimentation?

> *In our view, the mosque will function as a constant within a liquid world. Any fluid culture, and any fluid identity, eventually collides with the mosque's irreducible stability, not as an aesthetic refusal, but as an existential one. From the beginning, the mosque carried within itself the seeds of visual plurality. Over time, it also acquired a historical resilience that enables it to register its presence even as forms shift and cultures transform. Its identity does not depend on freezing an image. It depends on the persistence of its non-substitutable core, and on the capacity of each moment to re-encode that core into a language its own world can decode.*[15]

What Zygmunt Bauman described through the lens of 'liquid culture' may help us name the condition many people inhabit today, and may continue to inhabit in the near future. It is a condition that provokes an urgent search for remedy, one that can return human life to a measure of stability, or at least to a shared set of principles capable of producing workable coherence.

> *If we return to the message of Kāffatan li-l-Nās, we find that it aims, in a primary sense, to cultivate intellectual and faith-based steadiness, and to shape a human horizon that people can gather around without being asked to surrender their local cultures. What many face today is a struggle of liquid identity: a drift toward a mode of being shaped by the imperatives of global material and technological culture, a culture whose momentum often feels difficult to resist. In such a climate, rethinking Kāffatan li-l-Nās may be less a rhetorical gesture than a serious proposal for balance, a lifeline capable of steadying human life while allowing local cultures to remain fully themselves.*

From another angle, phenomena often appear to be structured through paired poles: night and day, stability and change. What gives a phenomenon its charge is not either pole in isolation, but the argument that holds between them. These become dialectical oppositions, and it is the grey interval, the *barzakh* (*al-barzakh*), between the two ends that generates existential questions. Human attention is typically drawn to what remains unresolved. The settled rarely provokes the same intensity of inquiry.

> *Architecture carries its own version of this. Ambiguity can be the height of architectural drama, a point Robert Venturi pressed forcefully in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture. If human ingenuity is inseparable from the ability to pose questions, it follows that the inner structure of things is often disclosed most sharply in that middle zone, where argument rises, where ideas gather density, and where theories evolve.*

Before moving to the concluding part of this introduction, one last proposition should be placed on the table. The mosque carries within it a chain of dialectical oppositions that keeps the mind in a

15 Mashary AlNaim. "Al-Huwiyyah al-Ṣulbah wa al-Huwiyyah al-Sā ʾilah" [Solid Identity and Liquid Identity]. Al-Riyadh (newspaper), Sunday, 15 Shawwāl 1446 AH / April 2025 ,13.

1

state of ongoing inquiry, because it is fundamentally structured by the tension between the universal and the local. In every condition the mosque passes through, whether it appears as a building or persists as an idea, it holds two formulations of itself that pull in different directions. It is the unresolved space between them that keeps its meanings generative rather than closed.[16]

> *The nature of things often seems to follow this pattern. Good stands against evil, and between them lies a wide field of contention. It is within that field that values are refined and norms are formed. Truth confronts falsehood, and much of human drama unfolds within that struggle, as though such oppositions were woven into the fabric of existence. Because these oppositions generate an ambiguous middle, traditions within human societies repeatedly emerge as attempts to respond to it. Each grey interval becomes available for argument, for consensus and dissent, and for the patient work of deciding what ought to hold.*

For that reason, human beings have long sought to produce their own orders. What once lived as agreed custom gradually became written law in the modern period, and in some contexts well before that. Even revealed law can be approached, in this frame, as arriving to address ambiguous zones that communities cannot resolve by instinct alone, zones that seem intrinsic to the conditions of existence. This recognition, in turn, leads naturally toward the inner structure of tradition and its dynamism.

> *When we return to what Karl Popper wrote about tradition, particularly his view of it as a means of organizing life and drawing*

16 Mashary AlNaim. “Al-Mutaqābilāt al-Mutajādirah” [Dialectic Oppositions]. Al-Riyadh (newspaper), 13 Rabīʿ al-Ākhir 1447 AH / October 2025 ,5.

boundaries between people, a useful emphasis comes into view. Societies are capable of inventing new traditions in each historical phase, traditions that provide a measure of social stability. Such inventions are not arbitrary. They tend to arise where uncertainty persists and where communities can respond only by developing conventions and shared systems, attempts to render what would otherwise remain obscure more navigable.

It is therefore unsurprising that the dialectical oppositions that mark mosque architecture, and keep it in tension between the universal and the local, between the stable and the changing, become essential contact lines for understanding the mosque and engaging it through its non-place-bound presence. The argument generated by this tension establishes an ongoing dialogue between the mosque and place. One side addresses a universal ground whose foundations do not shift, a ground that allows the mosque to remain a stable idea in the mind. The other side addresses locality, whose conditions continue to change.

This changing dialogue can be linked to place-making. Mosque architecture shapes what surrounds it, yet it is also shaped by its surroundings, even while its essence remains constant. The place the mosque makes is not only urban. It is, first and foremost, social. If we return to the operative logic of li-taʿārafū, "so that you may come to know one another," we find it tied directly to how places are formed and sustained. Many spaces and elements, within the mosque and around it, evolved over time precisely to make this social mechanism effective.

The urban phenomenon itself can be read as a chain of oppositions that, over time, shaped traditions and gave them deeper structure. Inside stands against outside, and between them multiply thresholds beyond counting. Around those thresholds gather values, customs, and systems that vary from one society to another. Below confronts above, while the closed sits beside the open. These material oppositions did not only generate visible forms. They also generated latent meanings that organize space and conduct. They clarified distinctions between public and private, drew lines between permitted and prohibited, and shaped patterns of reception and social interaction, often with an intensified emphasis on privacy.

For that reason, architectural oppositions are not merely compositional devices. They become sites of negotiated resolution through which societies develop particular traditions and deposit a hidden store of meanings. Those meanings are often crafted by specific communities as a way of confronting the obscure zones produced by opposing forces. In this frame, structural thinking attempted to understand the world by linking phenomena within hierarchies of contrasts, then urging attention toward the ambiguous interval between each pair, where interpretation and response become necessary.

One could even say that human civilization can be read as a persistent search for answers generated by opposing conditions. Darkness stands against light, and because human beings resist darkness, they sought light until they learned how to push it back.

Mosque architecture is especially dense with such oppositions, and they shape the mosque both as a place and as an image. The worldly exterior confronts a sacred interior.

1. *The mosque reclaims the local aesthetic spirit and confers upon it a distinct architectural dignity.*

1

The horizontal meets the vertical. Light meets shadow. Loosened orientation meets strict orientation toward the qiblah. Simplicity interweaves with visual richness. Clarity presses against ambiguity.

It is difficult to understand how the mosque makes place without returning to these oppositions, because they frame its architectural structure and its relationship to the surroundings in which it settles. Yet, as noted earlier, the mosque as a universal phenomenon also exceeds place. It can generate an abstract, universal place of its own, not defined by a particular geography and felt, in a certain sense, as though it were everywhere. In that way, it gives architectural form to *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*, a horizon wider than any limited human grouping.

What Comes Next

After everything we have said about the triad of li-taʿārafū, the ummah, and Kāffatan li-l-Nās, and about their deep philosophical impact on the mosque both as a mental construct and as a place, it becomes necessary to think in practical terms about how such a philosophy might be brought into lived reality. What follows is not a prescription for what must be done. It is, rather, a brief account of some attempts we pursued within the Abdullatif Al Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture to realize the principle of Kāffatan li-l-Nās, even if only partially.

Over the past few years, our central concern has been to rethink mosque architecture as a phenomenon that intersects with politics and society. It matters to the individual and to the collective. It intersects with place, with technology, and with craft. It takes form through these crossings, even as its essential codes remain stable, continually regenerating the mosque's identity. This singular phenomenon deserves to be studied with depth, precisely because it is not easily repeated.

What calls us to rethink mosque architecture in the present, and in what lies ahead? This was the driving question of the fourth International Conference on Mosque Architecture, held in Istanbul from November 4 to 6, 2025, organized by the Abdullatif Al Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture in collaboration with Istanbul Technical University. It belongs to a wider conference series convened by the Award across multiple cities, including earlier editions hosted in Dammam, Kuala Lumpur, and Kuwait City.

In Istanbul, the conference returned to a question that remains difficult to settle precisely because the mosque, in both its concrete presence and its symbolic reach, crosses local cultures while carrying individual and collective imaginaries at once. For that reason, a single consensus that gathers all these spectrums into one position is unlikely. What mattered, instead, was opening a space for serious dialogue, especially around cultural questions shaped by local specificity, and by the mosque's long historical entanglement with it. Here, too, it became important to voice what often remains unspoken: the mosque belongs to a particular community that frequents it daily, yet it also functions as a deep sign of the *ummah*, exceeding geographic borders and naming a bond defined by Islam more than by visible architectural objects alone.

The discussions therefore moved along two interlaced dimensions. One was material: its evidence, techniques, and instruments, all of which must be taken seriously. The other was

1

1. *Everything that points toward the mosque carries within it a latent message of silent resistance.*

symbolic: the deeper register through which the mosque binds its users and those who identify with it, regardless of local geographic particularities. The unresolved tension between these two dimensions is not a weakness. It is one of the mosque's defining conditions, and one reason the question of its architecture remains open, and worth reopening.[17]

The conference opened with a preparatory workshop on November 3, focused on mosques in Türkiye and beyond. Its central concern was the mental image the mosque produces within contemporary society: how people perceive the mosque, how that perception is communicated to others, and what the mosque signifies in daily life. The discussion repeatedly returned to a foundational question of scope. Is the mosque, for most people, primarily a place for *ṣalāh*, or does it carry a wider civic and social role? In addressing such questions, the workshop also pressed a practical concern that designers cannot avoid:

17 Al-Nuʿaym, Mishʿari. "Iʿādat al-Tafkīr fī al-Masjid" [Rethinking the Mosque]. Al-Riyadh (newspaper), Sunday, 18 Jumādā al-Ūlā 1447 AH / November 2025 ,9.

what, concretely, can architecture do, and where do the limits of architecture begin, because some issues clearly extend into governance, culture, and policy.

> *The workshop tried to hold a careful balance between two registers. On one side stood the professional discipline of architecture, with its tools, responsibilities, and constraints. On the other stood a more philosophical register that moved beyond what is merely seen toward what is latent and symbolic. Yet the workshop was deliberately structured to remain practical rather than abstract. A substantial portion of time was devoted to management and operations, along with the many obstacles that confront them, with the aim of approaching a contemporary understanding of mosque administration and long-term running.*

Within that practical horizon, two proposals stood out. The first asked whether the mosque guidelines developed in Saudi Arabia could be translated into a global code that remains adaptable at local levels, rather than being exported as a rigid template. The second explored how contemporary technologies might support operational continuity, including applications that connect imams and regular worshippers in a sustained channel of consultation, so that everyday needs, maintenance priorities, and service gaps can be identified and addressed through an ongoing, grounded conversation.

> *In his lecture, Muhammad Kılıç (head of IRCICA, affiliated with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation) proposed the phrase "form follows spirituality" (al-shakl yatbaʿ al-rūḥāniyyah), while also insisting that certain forms can, in turn, draw spirituality toward them. He was, in effect, describing a reciprocal relationship between form and inward disposition. The question, however, remains difficult, because spirituality in places of worship often appears as an elusive and partly hidden matter. Any serious engagement with it seems to require a balanced approach, one that does not dissolve into abstraction, yet does not reduce the subject to measurable technique.*

A further complication is that spirituality is first tied to the individual. How, then, can mosque architecture 'embody' it without turning it into a simplified claim? We have not foregrounded 'spirituality' in this introduction as much as many would expect when speaking about worship, particularly in the mosque. One reason is that spirituality is difficult to define with precision: it is an inward state that may not necessarily translate into a collective condition. This makes it resistant to measurement, and therefore resistant to being treated as a straightforward architectural target. Some will point to spatial simplicity saturated with natural light as a sign of spirituality. Yet such descriptions still circle the phenomenon without naming its essence.

> *For our part, we were led to think of spirituality as a lived relationship between a person and God, occurring within a particular zone of the mosque. In this sense, the individual does not merely receive spirituality from space. The individual, through presence, intention, and attentiveness, brings it into being within space. This view may need further development, and other positions certainly exist. Still, on the ground of practice, it remains difficult to define spirituality in a way that can be cleanly mapped onto architecture alone.*

A wide range of ideas was put on the table by the keynote speakers, and it is difficult to contain them within a single

Abdullatif Al-Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture, 2017 | ROUND

summary. Many of these contributions tried to hold a careful balance between design and practical experience, on the one hand, and the challenges that mosques face across different contexts worldwide, on the other. At the same time, they addressed the local philosophies that so often shape mosque architecture geographically. For the mosque is a universal building, yet it is also intensely local in its embodiment.

> *Among these voices, Rafiq Azam spoke about mosques in Bangladesh; Rasem Badran spoke about the "organic mosque"; Muthanna Al-Bayati addressed the mosque's philosophical dimension; Saleh Al-Hathloul engaged pressing issues confronting the mosque; Mohamed Gamal Abdelmonem discussed the mosque in non-Islamic societies; and Akel Kahera spoke about mosques in North America, alongside many others who approached the subject from additional angles. Taken together, these discussions reinforced a central point: mosque architecture, at its best, can make the horizon of Kāffatan li-l-Nās legible to the world through built form, practice, and presence.*

From another angle, we tried to reckon with the fact that the world is moving at great speed toward becoming, in effect, a single village, where people come to know one another with increasing immediacy and share many concepts and patterns of life. Isolation is no longer a realistic option, nor is turning away from what unfolds beyond one's immediate context. This point, in particular, drew the attention of several colleagues at the conference, where the establishment of the "International Association of Mosque Architecture (IAMA)" was announced. It also raised an unavoidable question: what role might such an organization play in the future, and why do we need it now?

> *At the outset, it should be said that the world's older boundaries, and the patterns of human distribution tied to them, are beginning to fade. Contemporary societies have become mixtures of peoples and lineages across almost every region. In that sense, the West is no longer simply 'the West', and the East is no longer simply 'the East'. This has produced a profound confusion within the geographic categories that once helped locate cultures and anticipate their forms. Those categories now face pressures that, in our view, they are unlikely to withstand.*

Within such a rapidly shifting world, the impulse to establish an organization concerned with mosques begins to look existential rather than administrative. The question is stark: do we take part in the new world as it is forming, or do we withdraw into a shrinking vocabulary of older maps? The mosque has long served as one of the most important channels, material and non-material, through which a dense intellectual and philosophical reservoir is carried. It expresses the idea of a single *ummah* that can exceed geographic borders, move through ethnic consolidations, and propose a different sense of belonging than the one dominant in contemporary consciousness.

> *A clear link can be traced between the idea of the ummah and the impulse to establish a global organization for mosque architecture. The mosque, despite its material, urban, and architectural character, also carries a relational abstraction shaped by the horizon of Kāffatan li-l-Nās. In that sense, the ummah, understood as an idea that exceeds geographic borders and privileges meaning over location, positions the mosque as more than a built entity. It becomes*

1. *The walls of the mosque present a narrative extended through time, recounting the succession of generations and the endurance of form.*

a philosophical condition of attachment and belonging, a bond that can be higher than affiliation to any single site. Yet it does not cancel place attachment. It can deepen it, and give it a wider register, so that a mosque becomes a place that stands in fraternity with mosques elsewhere, across the world.

It seems to us that the first real confrontation with 'globality' begins precisely here, in the encounter between two different senses of the term. One is the *ummah* as a human, conceptual gathering that seeks to embrace all people. The other is globality as it is commonly understood today, a geographic and infrastructural condition that crosses borders and circulates rapidly through places. The tension between these two meanings shaped the rationale for establishing such an organization, and it gives it two primary dimensions. One is scientific and professional: the mosque is a functional, material entity that requires research, studies, and sustained professional experimentation if it is to remain usable, comfortable, and well-run. The other is conceptual and philosophical: the bond linking mosques worldwide is not merely logistical. It is a trans-local relationship that does not take geography as its final reference. It is less concerned with matter as matter, and more concerned with what matter is made to mean, and with how built form can strengthen the philosophical and intellectual bond carried by the idea of the *ummah*.

The idea of establishing a global organization dedicated to mosque architecture began to take shape nearly eight years ago, when the Abdullatif Al Fozan Award started to face serious difficulties in documenting and studying mosques worldwide. Those difficulties exposed a genuine gap in the knowledge base surrounding the mosque: professionally, scientifically, and philosophically. They also clarified the scale of the challenge the mosque faces, even though it is among the most widespread religious building types in the world. It is often said that the number of mosques has exceeded four million. Yet, despite this vast presence, a real deficit persists in the structured knowledge and research that such a building demands.

The challenges confronted by the Award prompted an internal reorganization, so that it could temporarily assume responsibility for some of these scientific and professional tasks. Still, such an arrangement cannot substitute for an independent global institution capable of guiding the future of mosque architecture and articulating its philosophical horizon in relation to humanity. The mosque, after all, cultivates a logic of human alignment and integration without discrimination between lineages and ethnicities. This makes the practical possibility of a shared human horizon, one that strengthens *Kāffatan li-l-Nās*, more than an idealistic claim. It becomes attainable if an institution can be formed that gathers the world around the universal meanings the mosque can offer.

A further challenge immediately presented itself: who could credibly establish such an organization, and where should it be anchored. Practical steps followed. Colleagues in academia and professional practice were contacted across different regions, and the consensus gradually settled on an arrangement that is both grounded and open: the organization should be hosted by a globally recognized university while remaining a gathering platform for everyone concerned with mosque architecture worldwide.

1 Abdullatif Al-Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture, FIFTH ROUND

1. *The mosque cannot stop producing new breeds of minarets and shapes, for every era has its own forms and every geography imprints these forms with its character.*

2. *We must realize that the multiplicity of architectural styles of the mosque within a small geographical area is evidence that mosque architecture always tries to combine spirit, place, and human taste.*

2

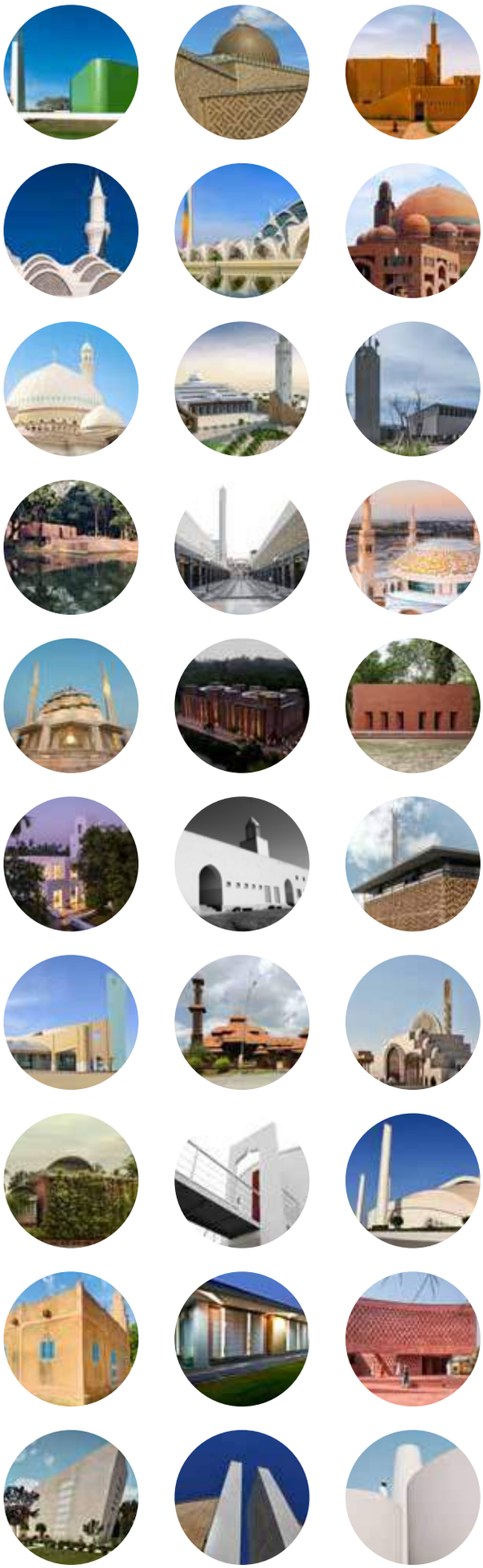
The idea took clearer institutional form in 2024, when Mohamed Gamal Abdelmonem, at University of York, convened a founding meeting at the request of the Award's secretariat, bringing together researchers from multiple continents. The decision that followed was to announce the organization at the fourth International Conference on Mosque Architecture in Istanbul, and to base it at the University of York with a remit focused on the scientific, philosophical, and professional dimensions of mosque architecture worldwide.

> *This step can be read as the opening of a new chapter. Mosque architecture has rarely received the sustained global attention commensurate with its reach and significance, yet it carries, within its ordinary persistence, seeds of existential orientation. It remains a durable reference point, one to which people return when direction becomes uncertain and the inner compass begins to falter.*[18]

This introduction has not answered every question it has raised. A long path still lies ahead if we are to understand the philosophical depth carried by mosque architecture, and the human messages this building can offer to humanity. Still, the work of bringing those meanings into view, and of sustaining an ongoing dialogue with what the mosque calls for, remains essential.

> *That call is toward a human society capable of harmony in thought, while remaining diverse in ways of living and in material expression. Pursuing it is part of the wider search for the truth of the mosque. For the mosque is not only a house of worship. It is also a place from which to contemplate the world, and to reflect on the human being who inhabits it and gives it meaning.*

18 Al-Nuʿaym, Mishʿari. "Limādhā Naḥtāj Ilā Munazzamah ʿIlmiyyah wa Mihaniyyah ʿĀlamiyyah li-ʿImārat al-Masājid" [Why Do We Need a Global Scientific and Professional Organization for Mosque Architecture]. Al-Riyadh (newspaper), 2 Jumādā al-Ākhirah 1447 AH / November 2025 ,23.



When Architecture Transcends Geography

United Kingdom
- Cambridge Central Mosque

Lebanon
- Anwar Al Sabbah Musalla

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- Tabuk University Mosque
- Ghazi Al Gosaibi Mosque

Niger
- HIKMA complex
- Alnajdi Mosque

Muscat
- Bab Al-Salam Mosque

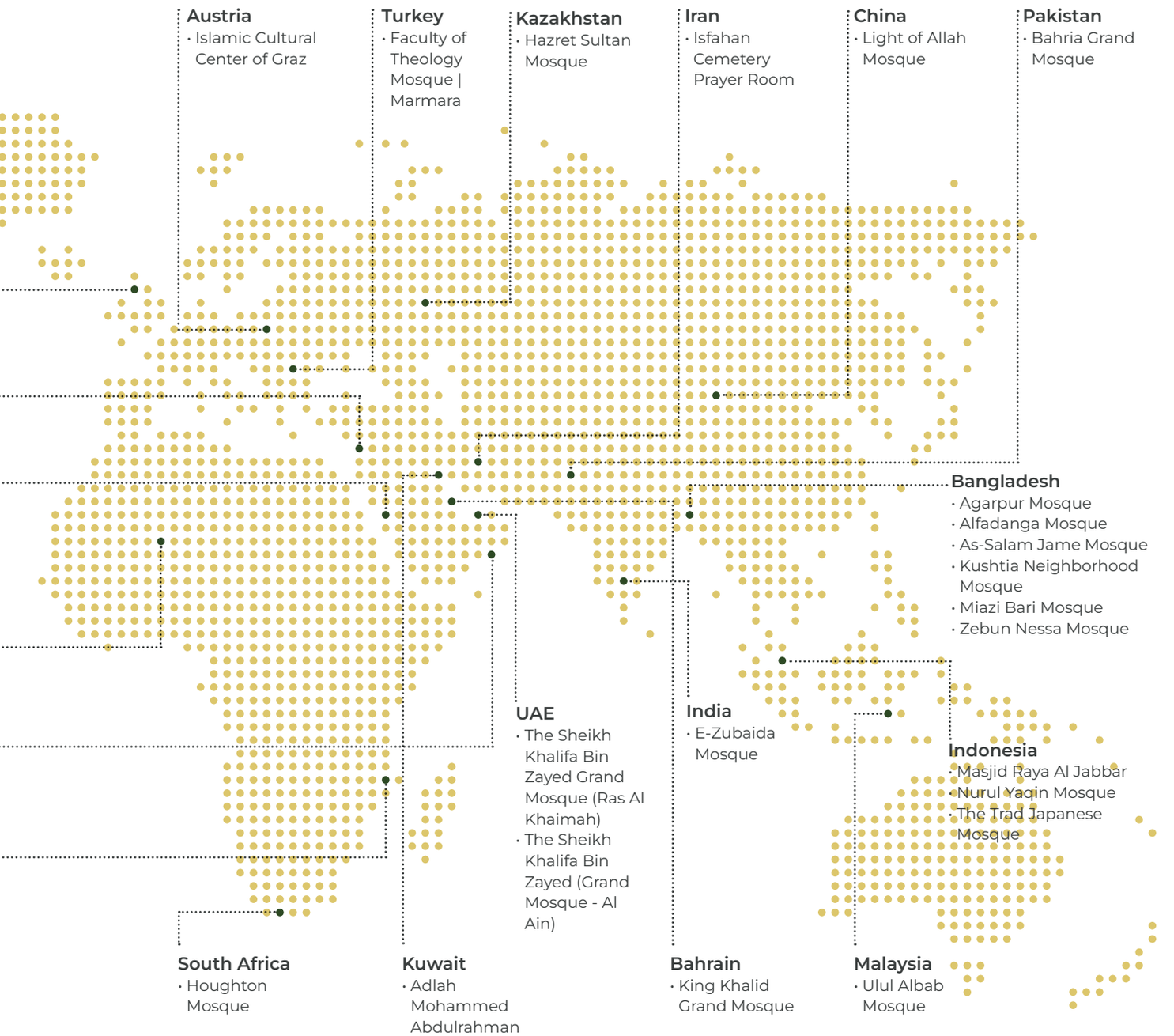
Mozambique
- Nomba Mosque and Teacher Training Facility

When we discuss the "mosque phenomenon," we are examining it from two perspectives simultaneously, each offering distinct views on place and geography. One view seems to cover the whole world, while the other is defined by the earth and its geographies, reflecting the nuances of various climates and the cultures of the people who inhabit them.

A mosque exists as a daily reality, almost as a static fact, yet it is always embodied in particular lives and locations. It is renewed daily, as if to assert that a faith revealed as the Seal of religions must also encompass, within its house of worship, an enduring relevance for the last horizon of time and for all.

This map illustrates the world that unites us, specifically highlighting the mosques shortlisted for the Abdullatif Al Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture in its fifth cycle. The list spans a geography that crosses continents. There lies a fundamental and irreplaceable constancy: a constancy that is repeatedly reclaimed because its existential roots are essential and enduring, even though this constancy is not overly concerned with form.

The dialogue between an unchanging existential function and an ever-evolving form in mosque architecture opens an architectural and philosophical discourse that never reaches a definitive conclusion. The function will remain constant, while the form will continue to evolve.



Al Jabbar Mosque 152

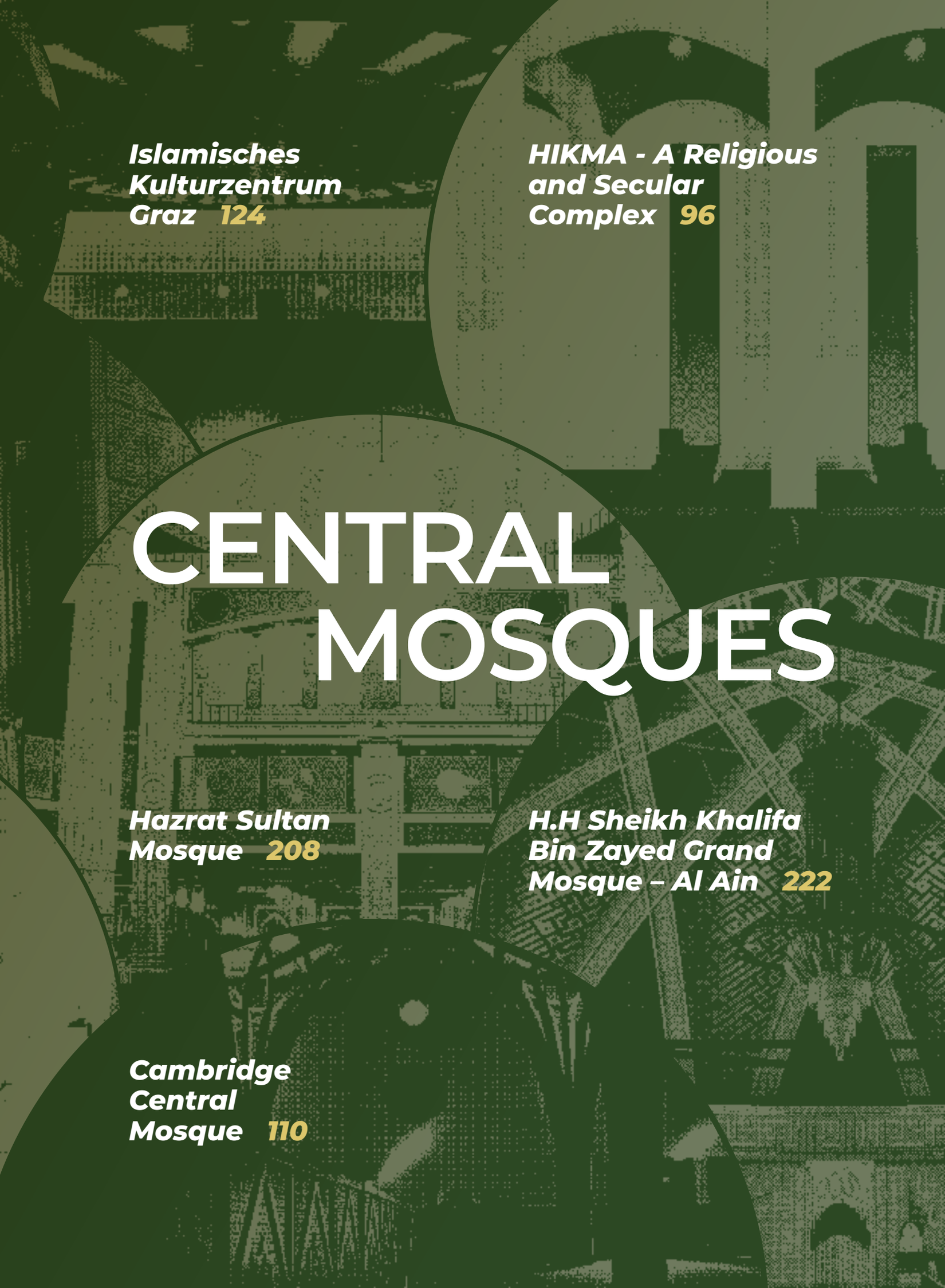
Bahria Grand mosque Lahore 138

Nurul Yaqin Mosque 180

H.H Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque – Ras Al Khaima 194

Houghton Mosque 166

Khaled bn Abdulaziz Al Saud Mosque 236



CENTRAL MOSQUES

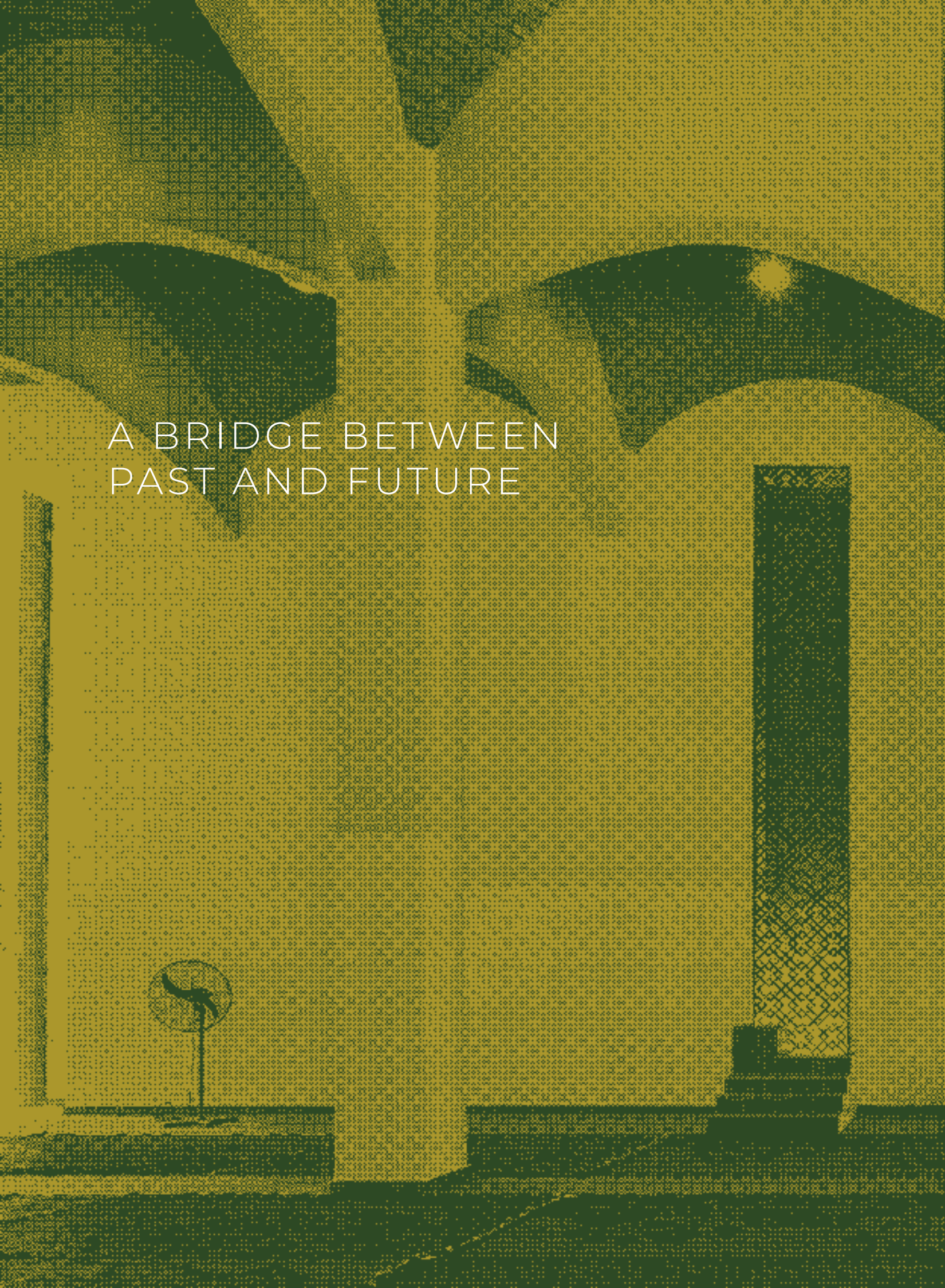
Islamisches Kulturzentrum Graz 124

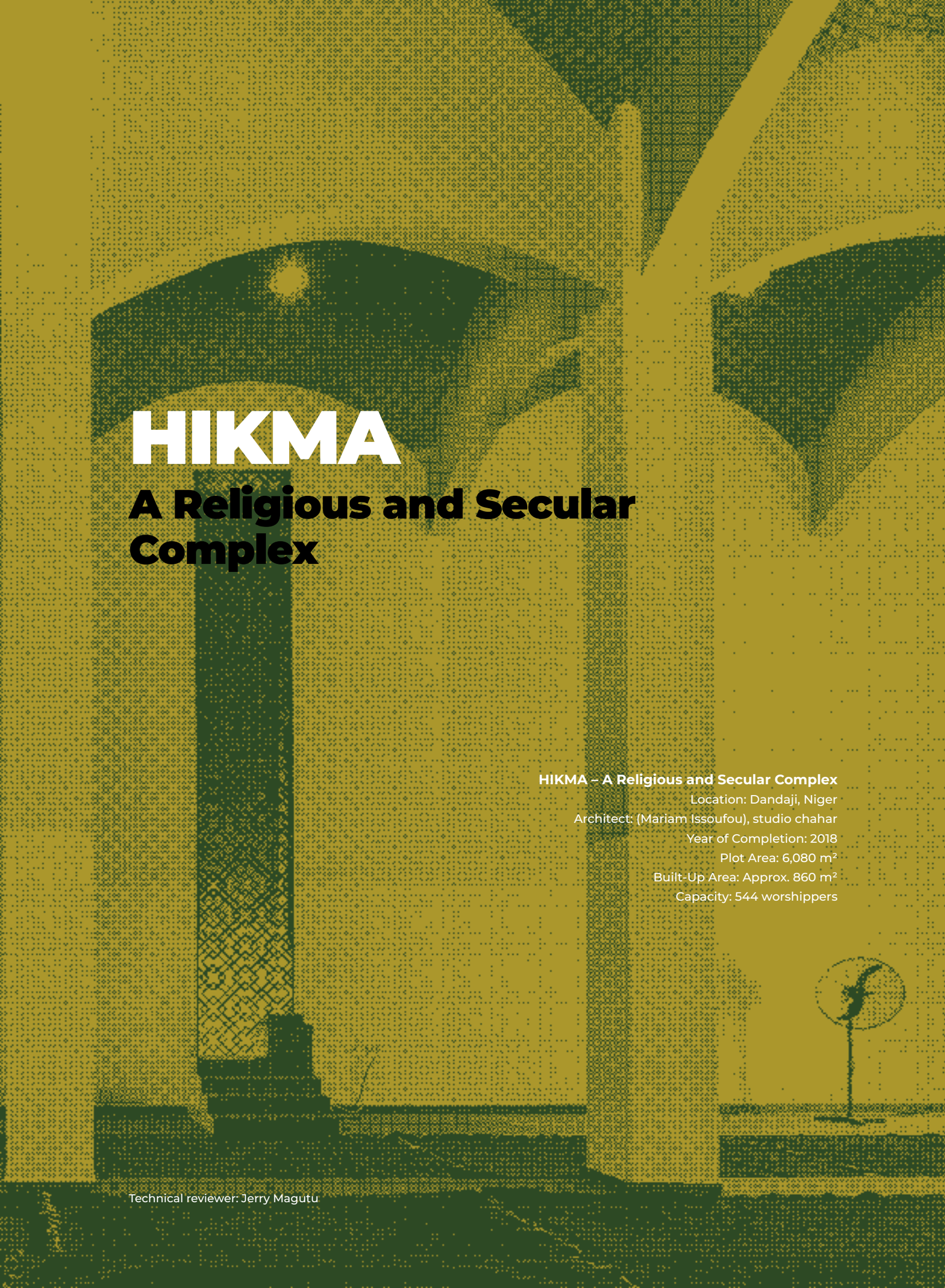
HIKMA - A Religious and Secular Complex 96

Hazrat Sultan Mosque 208

H.H Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque – Al Ain 222

Cambridge Central Mosque 110


A BRIDGE BETWEEN
PAST AND FUTURE



HIKMA

A Religious and Secular Complex

HIKMA – A Religious and Secular Complex
Location: Dandaji, Niger
Architect: (Mariam Issoufou), studio chahar
Year of Completion: 2018
Plot Area: 6,080 m^2
Built-Up Area: Approx. 860 m^2
Capacity: 544 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Jerry Magutu

1

The Hikma (Wisdom) Community Complex is a hybrid religious–civic ensemble located in the village of Dandaji, southwest Niger. Designed by atelier masōmī (now Mariam Issoufou Architects) in collaboration with studio chahar, the project reimagines the village mosque and its surrounding public functions as an integrated civic anchor. Completed in 2018, the complex includes a renovated traditional mud-brick Friday mosque, a new library, shaded courtyards, and landscaped gathering areas, forming a multifaceted community center rather than a singular religious building.

Commissioned by the local community with support from regional and international development partners, the project serves a wide spectrum of users: worshippers, students, women's literacy groups, elders, and youth. The program combines:

- *the restoration and expansion of the historic earthen mosque,*
- *a new library constructed from compressed earth bricks,*
- *outdoor reading and meeting courts,*
- *shaded pathways, seating areas, and communal thresholds.*

The intent was to create a place that supports religious practice while simultaneously revitalizing cultural and educational life in a rural context with limited public infrastructure.

The architectural vision builds on the legacy of vernacular earthen construction while introducing contemporary techniques that enhance durability and spatial performance. The historic mosque—previously in a state of deterioration—was carefully restored and subtly reorganized, preserving its sacred character while strengthening its structural logic.

The new library, with its rhythmic earthen façade and perforated brickwork, establishes a quiet counterpoint to the mosque: a civic volume dedicated to learning, reading, and informal community gathering.

Together, the two buildings operate as an intertwined religious and secular ecosystem, offering the village a renewed sense of identity and a platform for social, educational, and spiritual engagement. Their placement, shading structures, and courtyards create a thoughtful gradient from sacred to communal space, making the Hikma Complex an exemplary attempt at weaving tradition, contemporary craftsmanship, and community empowerment into one coherent architectural gesture.

2

URBAN INTEGRATION

The Hikma Community Complex sits at the heart of Dandaji, a rural village in southwest Niger where the settlement fabric is shaped by earthen compounds, narrow paths, and a dispersed but socially cohesive community structure. Rather than imposing a new architectural presence, the project works within this existing fabric, reinforcing the village's spatial logic and strengthening its civic core.

The historic mosque—long a reference point for the village—anchors the site. The new library and shaded courts are positioned adjacent to it, forming a gently articulated ensemble around an existing circulation spine. This arrangement transforms what was once an isolated religious structure into a connected network of public spaces that residents naturally move through during daily routines.

3

The use of local earth, both in the mosque restoration and in the contemporary compressed-earth library, ties the complex materially to its environment. The buildings' massing responds to the intense Sahel climate: thick earthen walls, recessed apertures, and deep shadows create a comfortable microclimate while aligning with the village's architectural vocabulary. The inserted steel shading canopy introduces a more contemporary element, yet its rhythm and porosity harmonize with the earthen context.

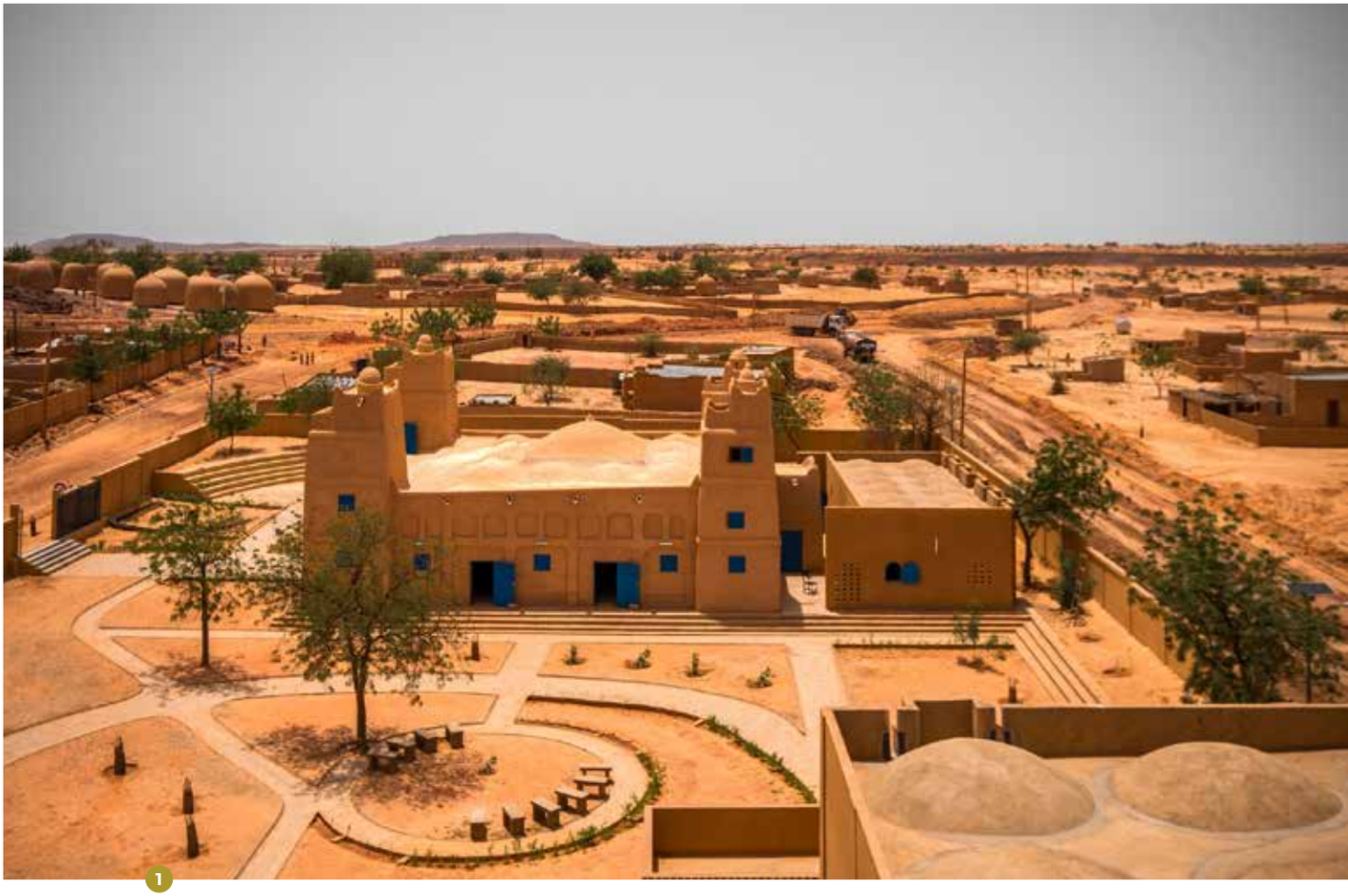
The complex's external courts and open reading areas operate as extensions of the communal life of Dandaji—hosting informal gatherings, educational programs, women's literacy sessions, and children's social activities. In a context where public infrastructure is scarce, these outdoor rooms become vital shared space.

Overall, the Hikma Community Complex does not seek to redefine the village; instead, it amplifies its spatial and social patterns. By weaving religious and civic functions together, it positions the mosque not as an isolated sacred object but as a central, integrated component of village life—rooted in its context yet aspirational in its civic ambition.

1. *The interior visual composition and its relationship with the exterior.*

2. *Exterior view of the site showing the new mosque and the old mosque that has become a cultural center.*

3. *The minaret and exterior walkways in the new mosque.*



1

2

1. *Exterior view of the site showing the new mosque and the old mosque that has become a cultural center.*

2. *Adaptive reuse of the old mosque to become a cultural center adjacent to the new mosque.*

3. *Worshippers gathered in the new mosque prayer hall, showing arch formations, concrete columns, and a brick domed roof.*

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The Hikma Community Complex adopts an exterior language firmly rooted in Dandaji's earthen traditions while introducing a contemporary spatial clarity. The ensemble is defined by two complementary forms: the restored historic mosque and the new compressed-earth library.

The mosque retains its traditional massing—thick walls, softened edges, and a sculpted earthen profile shaped by generations of local craft. Its restoration strengthens the structure, clarifies its entrances, and reasserts its role as a civic landmark without altering its understated presence.

The library, by contrast, employs modern earthen construction: compressed-earth bricks arranged in rhythmic, perforated facades that temper light and airflow. It offers a deliberate counterpart to the mosque—grounded, calm, and civic in character—without mimicking its form.

A steel shading canopy links the two buildings, creating a unified microclimate and framing a sequence of shaded courts. Its slender columns and porous surface soften the Sahel sun while sitting lightly within the earthen context.

These courts and pathways are integral to the complex's exterior identity. They mediate transitions between sacred and communal activities, offering informal gathering spaces that align with the rhythms of village life.

Together, the mosque, library, and canopy form a coherent ensemble that negotiates tradition and modernity with measured confidence—rooted in Dandaji's material culture while expressing a contemporary architectural sensibility.

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interiors of the Hikma Community Complex embody a quiet, earthy atmosphere shaped by material honesty and controlled light. Each component—mosque and library—offers a distinct spatial experience, yet both remain grounded in the tactile qualities of earthen architecture.

The interior of the restored mosque retains the essential spatial qualities of the original building. Its thick earthen walls and small, carefully placed openings admit a soft, filtered light that creates a calm, meditative atmosphere appropriate for prayer. The renovation focused on strengthening the existing structure and reorganizing it with a light touch, improving stability while preserving the mosque's familiar proportions and its established orientation toward the Kaaba.

The prayer hall retains its intimate scale, with surfaces left largely unadorned, allowing the texture and temperature of the rammed earth to define the atmosphere.

The new library interior presents a contrasting civic character. Its compressed-earth brick walls and perforated façade pattern generate a play of light and shadow that animates the reading rooms throughout the day. The interior is arranged around open reading areas, alcoves, and modest shelving, all oriented to encourage informal study and communal learning. The lightness produced by the perforations stands in deliberate counterpoint to the enclosed stillness of the mosque, reflecting the library's role as a public and educational space.

Circulation between the two buildings unfolds through shaded courts that act as transitional rooms—semi-interior spaces where the boundary between building and landscape becomes porous. These courts soften the shift from sacred to civic functions and help regulate the microclimate, reducing heat gain before one enters either structure.

Across both interiors, the Hikma Complex maintains a consistent architectural ethos: spaces shaped by earth, calibrated daylight, minimal finishes, and a clear hierarchy of program. The dialogue between the mosque's inward-facing calm and the library's outward civic openness forms the core of the project's spatial identity, demonstrating how earthen architecture can support both devotion and learning within a single, coherent complex.

3

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS & SUSTAINABILITY

The Hikma Community Complex relies on a robust environmental logic grounded in the long-standing building traditions of the Sahel. Both the restored mosque and the new library use earthen construction—adobe for the historic structure and compressed-earth bricks for the contemporary one—to provide thermal mass, regulate temperature, and ensure comfort in a region where daytime heat is extreme and mechanical systems are largely impractical.

Openings are kept small and strategically placed to reduce heat gain while admitting controlled daylight. In the library, the perforated brick façade enhances cross-ventilation and creates a dynamic play of shade that moderates interior temperatures throughout the day. The mosque, with its thicker walls and fewer apertures, maintains a more subdued, insulated environment suited to worship.

The steel canopy connecting the two buildings serves as a key environmental device. Its perforated metal surface casts broad shade over circulation paths and outdoor courts, reducing radiant heat and creating comfortable semi-outdoor spaces that expand the usable footprint of the complex. These shaded courts function as climate buffers, allowing gradual transitions between interior and exterior environments.

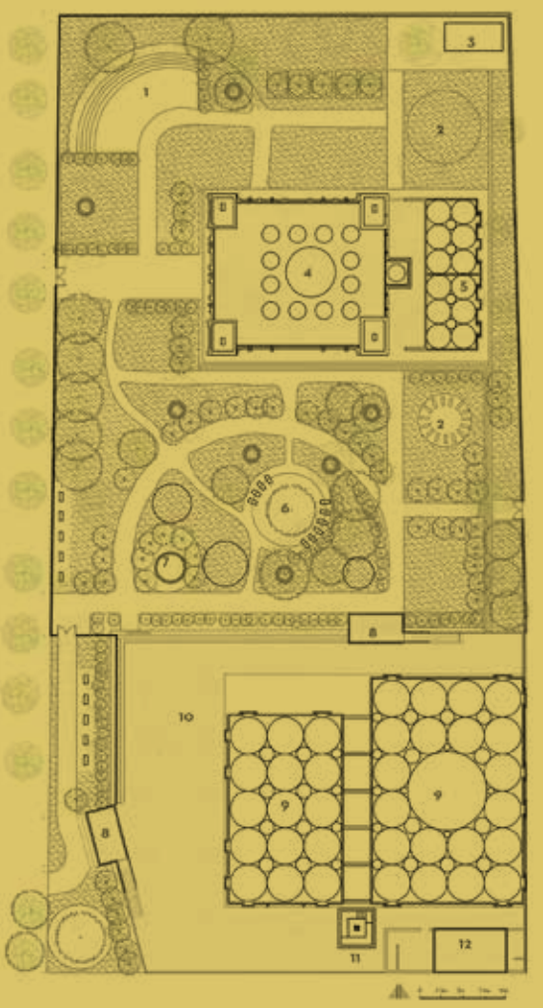
Water use is minimal and managed through simple, low-maintenance systems appropriate for the rural context. The reliance on local materials—earth, timber, metal—reduces embodied carbon, supports local craftspeople, and ensures that repairs or additions can be carried out by the community without specialized equipment.

Overall, the complex demonstrates how vernacular intelligence and contemporary refinement can work together to create a sustainable public environment. Without mechanical cooling or complex infrastructure, the Hikma Community Complex achieves environmental comfort, durability, and long-term resilience through straightforward, context-aware design strategies.

1. *Visual details of the new mosque.*

2. *Light celebrating the ablution area.*

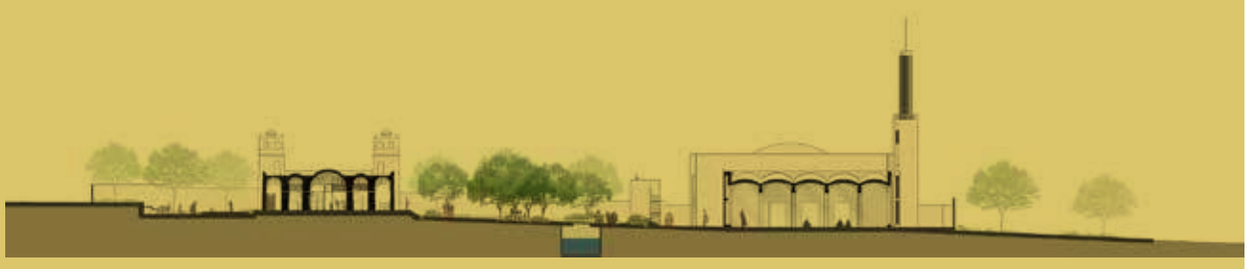
3. *Master plan.*



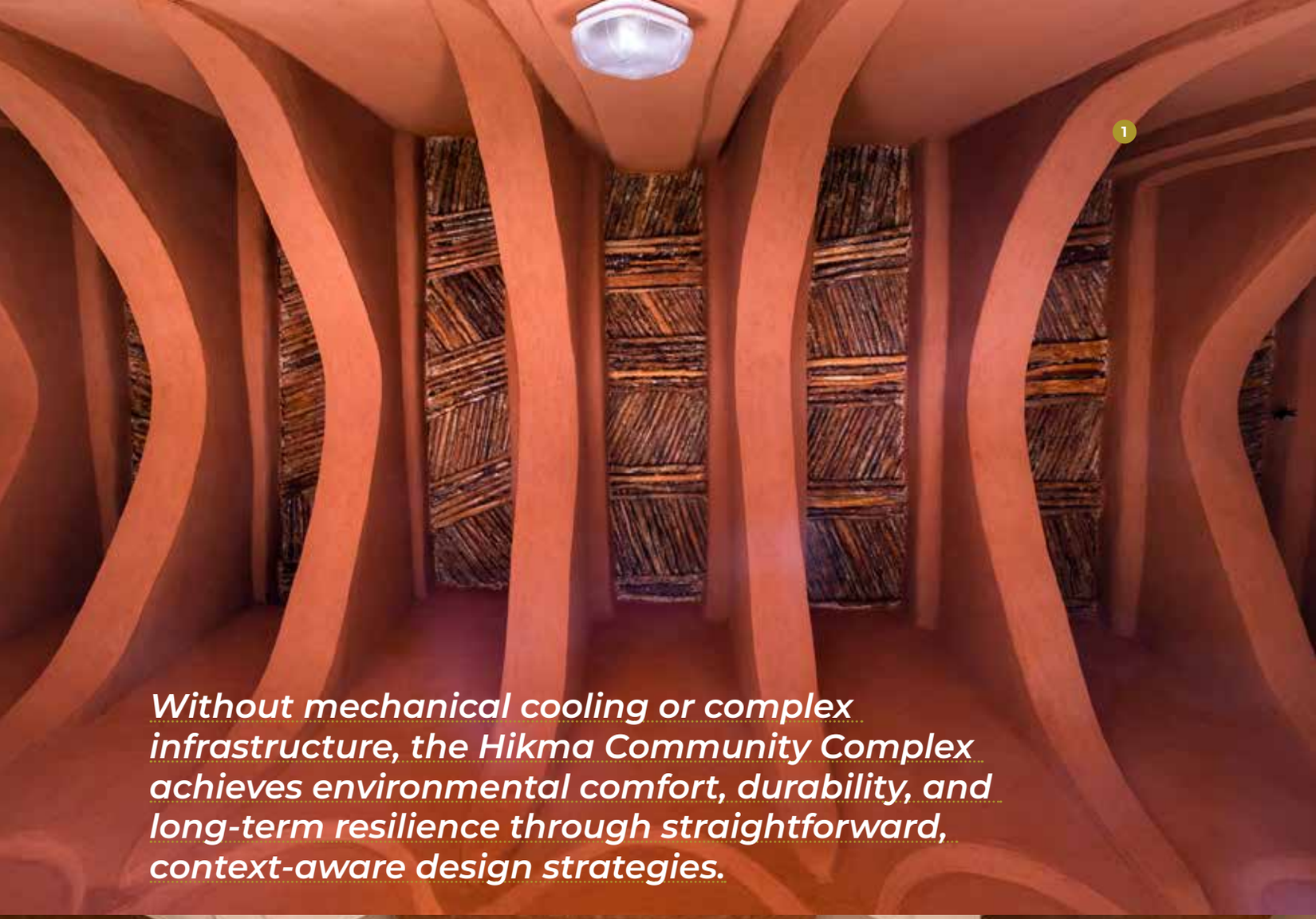
1. amphitheater/workshop area
2. children's play area
3. restrooms
4. library
5. new classrooms
6. Garden
7. underground water reservoir
8. ablution space
9 prayer room
10. outdoor prayer space
11. Minaret
12. Imam's quarter

3

Floor plan



General longitudinal section combining the old mosque and the new mosque.



1

Without mechanical cooling or complex infrastructure, the Hikma Community Complex achieves environmental comfort, durability, and long-term resilience through straightforward, context-aware design strategies.

2

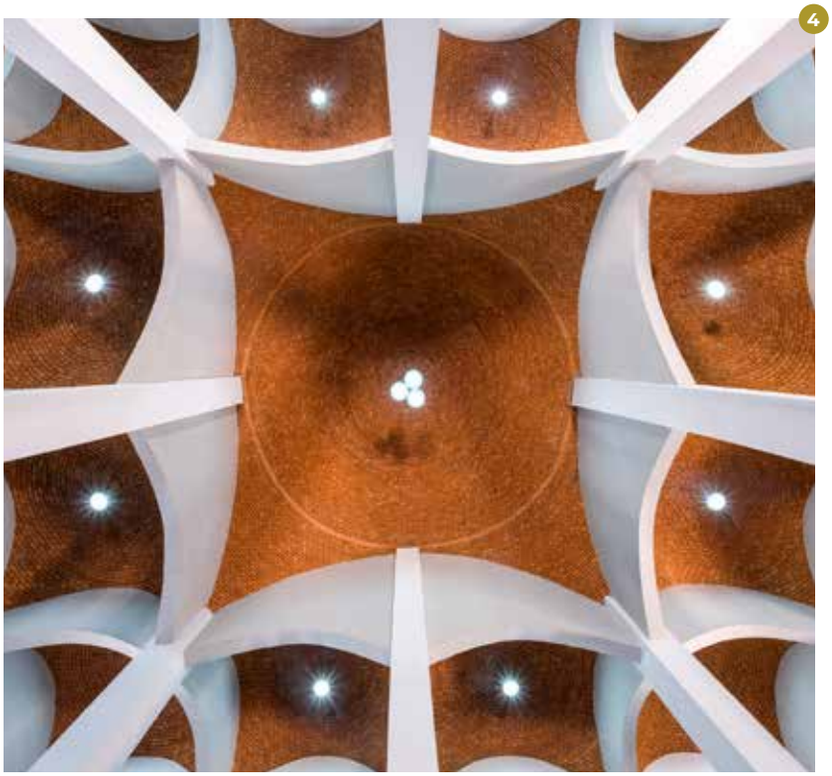
3

1. *Roof details in the old building.*

2. *The social role of the mosque.*

3. *Worshippers in the prayer hall of the new building.*

4. *The central dome in the new mosque.*



4

1

1. The library and cultural center that used to be a mosque when it was restored.

2. Daily life in the restored library.

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

The Hikma Community Complex has become a vital civic anchor for Dandaji, expanding the mosque's role from a purely religious space into a broader social and educational hub. In a village with limited public infrastructure, the combination of mosque, library, shaded courts, and gathering spaces provides an accessible communal realm that residents use throughout the day.

The restored mosque continues to support daily worship with improved durability and clarity of circulation. The new library, however, has significantly broadened the complex's impact: it now hosts women's literacy sessions, children's reading circles, and informal study groups, with its outdoor courts functioning as extensions of these activities.

The steel canopy and shaded courtyards create comfortable semi-outdoor rooms that naturally attract social interaction—places for resting, meeting, and conversation in a climate where much of community life occurs outdoors. These spaces strengthen the project's civic function as much as its built volumes.

Equally important is the renewed sense of ownership the project has generated. By combining traditional earthen techniques with contemporary forms, the complex reinforces local identity while introducing a forward-looking architectural presence.

The social success of the Hikma Complex lies in the interplay between its components—mosque, library, and public courts—together forming a cohesive environment that supports worship, learning, and everyday communal life.

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The Hikma Community Complex stands as a thoughtful reimagining of how a mosque-centered civic environment can serve a rural community. Its achievement lies not in monumentality but in its ability to gather—to bring worship, learning, and communal life into a shared architectural horizon. In this sense, the project resonates with the book's broader theme: that the mosque, in its deepest meaning, remains a place open to people kāffatan li'l-nās, even as its architectural expressions diverge across geographies.

The restored mosque anchors the spiritual life of Dandaji, while the new library extends that anchor toward education, literacy, and social exchange. The shaded canopies and open courts provide the connective tissue that allows these programs to coexist with ease, forming a modest but meaningful civic ecosystem. This interplay reflects a unified ethos: architecture rooted in earth, light, shade, and communal accessibility.

However, the project's duality also invites reflection. The two main components—the historic mosque and the contemporary library—are positioned as distinct and physically separated volumes. While the logic of differentiating sacred and civic functions is understandable, one might wonder whether bringing the two structures into a closer spatial dialogue—perhaps forming a tighter, village-like cluster—could have further strengthened the sense of communal coherence the project seeks to foster.

Likewise, the presence of a boundary wall, though perhaps driven by practical concerns, physically distances the complex from the broader village fabric. A more porous edge could have deepened the project's civic integration and reinforced the idea of the mosque as an open locus of gathering.

These considerations do not diminish the project's notable successes; rather, they highlight the delicate balance required when combining traditional religious structures with contemporary civic architecture. Hikma succeeds precisely because it neither romanticizes tradition nor pursues novelty for its own sake; instead, it negotiates a careful middle ground grounded in material continuity, climatic intelligence, and community agency.

Ultimately, the Hikma Complex demonstrates that mosque architecture today can expand its role without losing its center. Its power lies in its ability to gather and to open—to provide dignity in a region of limited resources, to cultivate learning where opportunities are scarce, and to offer a calm, inclusive environment where worship and community life reinforce one another. In this way, the complex embodies a form of unity that does not depend on uniformity of form, but on fidelity to purpose: orientation, openness, and the quiet ethics of communal togetherness.

1

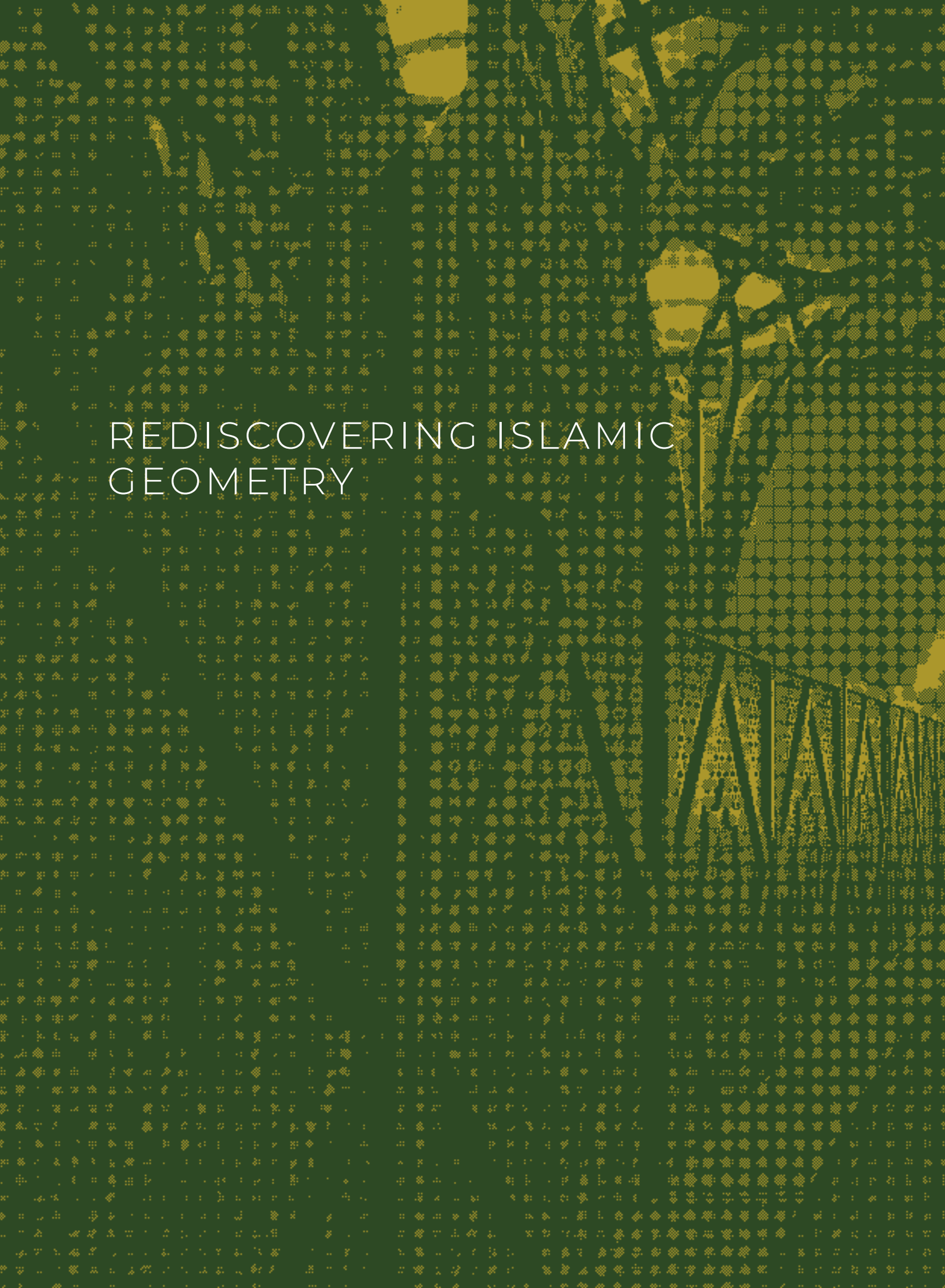
2

1. *Architectural details of the new building.*

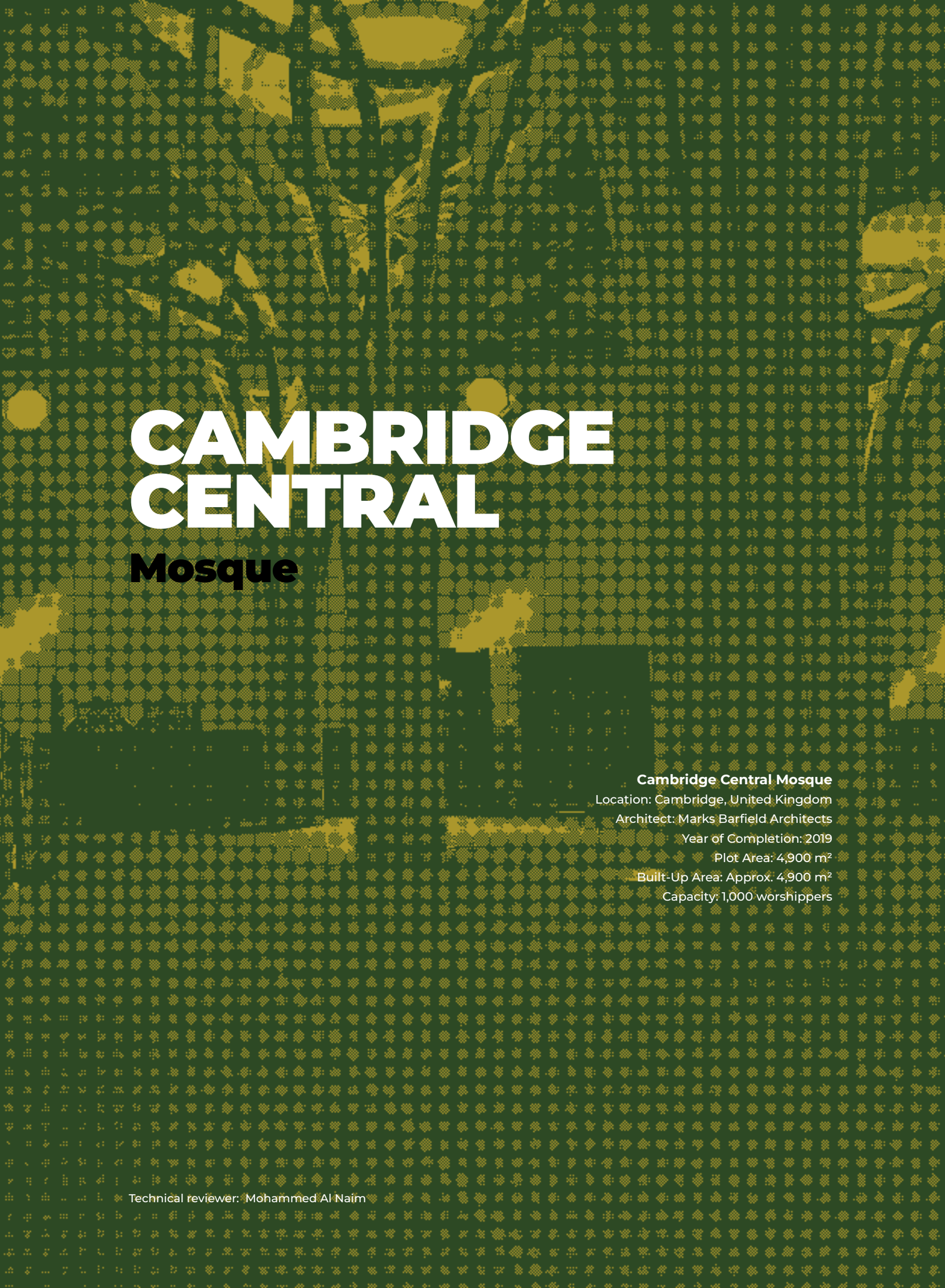
2. *This is how the historic mosque appears as it transforms into a library and cultural center when moving from the new mosque space.*

3. *Spatial and visual relationship between the new mosque and the old mosque.*

3



REDISCOVERING ISLAMIC GEOMETRY



CAMBRIDGE CENTRAL

Mosque

Cambridge Central Mosque
Location: Cambridge, United Kingdom
Architect: Marks Barfield Architects
Year of Completion: 2019
Plot Area: 4,900 m²
Built-Up Area: Approx. 4,900 m²
Capacity: 1,000 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Mohammed Al Naim

The Cambridge Central Mosque represents one of the most prominent contemporary attempts to formulate a new architectural language for mosques in a European context—where the mosque continues to oscillate between being a spiritual sanctuary and a civic or cultural landmark.

Commissioned by the Cambridge Mosque Trust and designed by Marks Barfield Architects, a firm best known for the London Eye, the project which involved a decade-long process of community dialogue, planning, and fundraising, in collaboration with local and international consultants. Chief among them was the late Keith Critchlow, one of the modern era's foremost thinkers on sacred geometry and Islamic pattern.

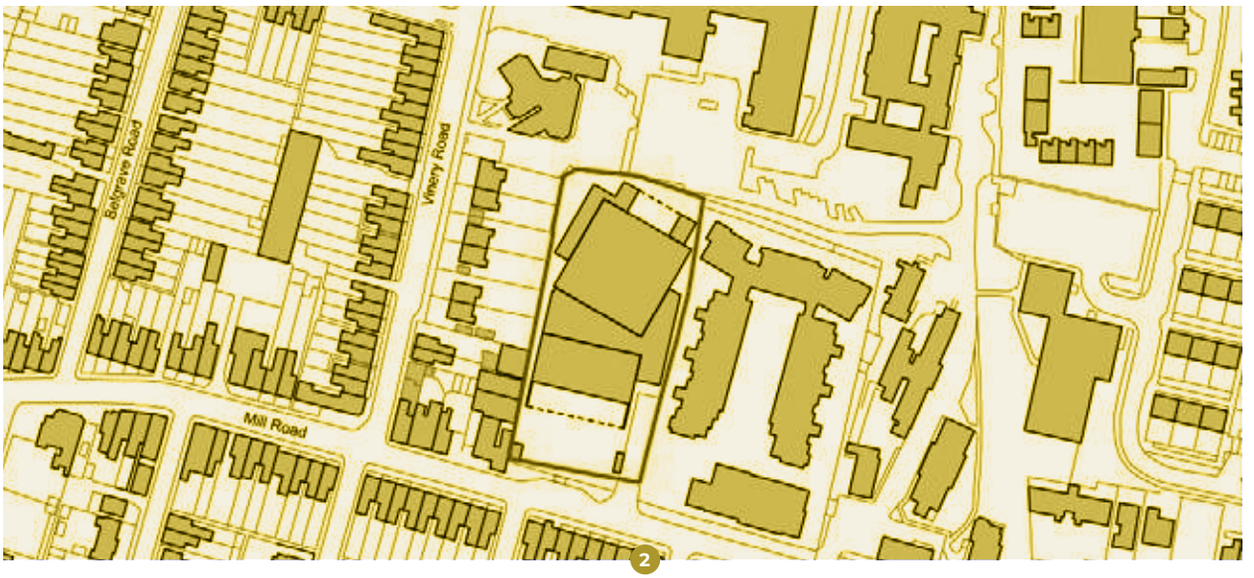
While it arose from the practical need to serve Cambridge's growing Muslim community, the mosque goes well beyond its functional role. It positions itself as a civic, environmental, and cultural anchor—aspiring to be a place of worship and reflection, but also a platform for education, interfaith dialogue, and urban integration.

Architecturally, the mosque follows the hypostyle typology of early Islamic mosques—such as the Prophet's Mosque in Medina or the Great Mosque of Córdoba—with a capacity of around 1,000 worshippers. The program includes a main prayer hall, a semi-private women's gallery, educational and exhibition spaces, ablution areas, a café, and a landscaped courtyard. At the heart of the architectural expression lies a forest of engineered timber columns branching into interlocking geometric vaults, evoking the organic logic of trees while embodying the cosmic order found in Islamic ornament.

This 'geometric grove' may be read as a three-dimensional extrusion of a two-dimensional Islamic pattern—reinterpreted and elevated into a symbolic and structural motif. It anchors not only the interior experience but also reinforces the mosque's environmental and philosophical ethos.

The project has been widely praised as a pioneering model of sustainable mosque design—one that draws on inherited aesthetics while responding to contemporary ecological concerns. Yet a question remains: does this design constitute a true paradigm shift in mosque architecture? Or does it stand, instead, as a remarkable yet context-bound experiment, meaningful but not transformative?

1



2

1. *A portion of the mosque's interior space.*

2. *Site plan.*

3. *The space surrounding the mosque.*

URBAN INTEGRATION

The Cambridge Central Mosque is located in the residential neighborhood of Romsey, just off Mill Road—a traditionally working-class area that has evolved into a diverse, multicultural quarter on the eastern edge of Cambridge's urban fabric. Formerly occupied by a school and industrial workshops, the site presented both a challenge and an opportunity: how to introduce a religious building into a cohesive local community without appearing intrusive or culturally out of place.

Rather than assert itself through monumentality or vertical dominance, the mosque adopts a strategy of quiet insertion. Its massing, building setbacks, and surrounding green buffer are carefully attuned to the domestic scale and rhythm of the adjacent Victorian terraced houses. The entrance, discreetly located on Mawson Road, leads into a landscaped forecourt that recalls the courtyard typology of traditional Islamic architecture. This spatial sequence—street → garden → portico → sanctuary—acts as a transitional choreography, gradually shifting the visitor from the civic to the spiritual realm.

Notably, the building avoids overt religious iconography or dominant vertical markers such as tall minarets. Instead, it embraces a warm architectural language—red brick façades, gentle timber detailing, and soft glazing—projecting openness, transparency, and restraint. This modest approach has been widely praised as a model of contextual sensitivity, though it also evokes a certain self-consciousness, an architectural 'taqiyyah' (precautionary concealment of one's faith or beliefs to protect oneself or a group from danger), so to speak, tiptoeing around cultural anxieties and the weight of stereotypical expectations.

In this sense, the mosque becomes more than a house of worship; it offers a test case for the potential of architecture to foster urban coexistence. It seeks acceptance not through symbolic distinctiveness, but through confident integration—without provocation. Whether this balance is fully achieved is open to interpretation, but the ambition itself marks a notable shift in how mosque architecture negotiates its civic presence within contemporary European cities.

3

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Cambridge Central Mosque does not assert its external presence through monumentality or spectacle, but through a finely tuned architectural language that seeks harmony with its residential surroundings. Located in the Mill Road neighborhood, the mosque deliberately avoids the familiar iconography of domes and towering minarets traditionally associated with Islamic architecture. Instead, it presents a low-slung, horizontally composed volume clad in red brick and timber—echoing the scale, rhythm, and materiality of the adjacent Victorian and Edwardian homes.

The most prominent external feature is the golden-hued timber portico that gently wraps around the building's perimeter. Composed of a rhythmic sequence of laminated timber columns—mirroring those within the prayer hall—this colonnade mediates the mosque's edge. It offers shelter, softens the threshold between public street and sacred interior, and sets up a processional experience defined more by movement, tactility, and atmosphere than by formal symbolism.

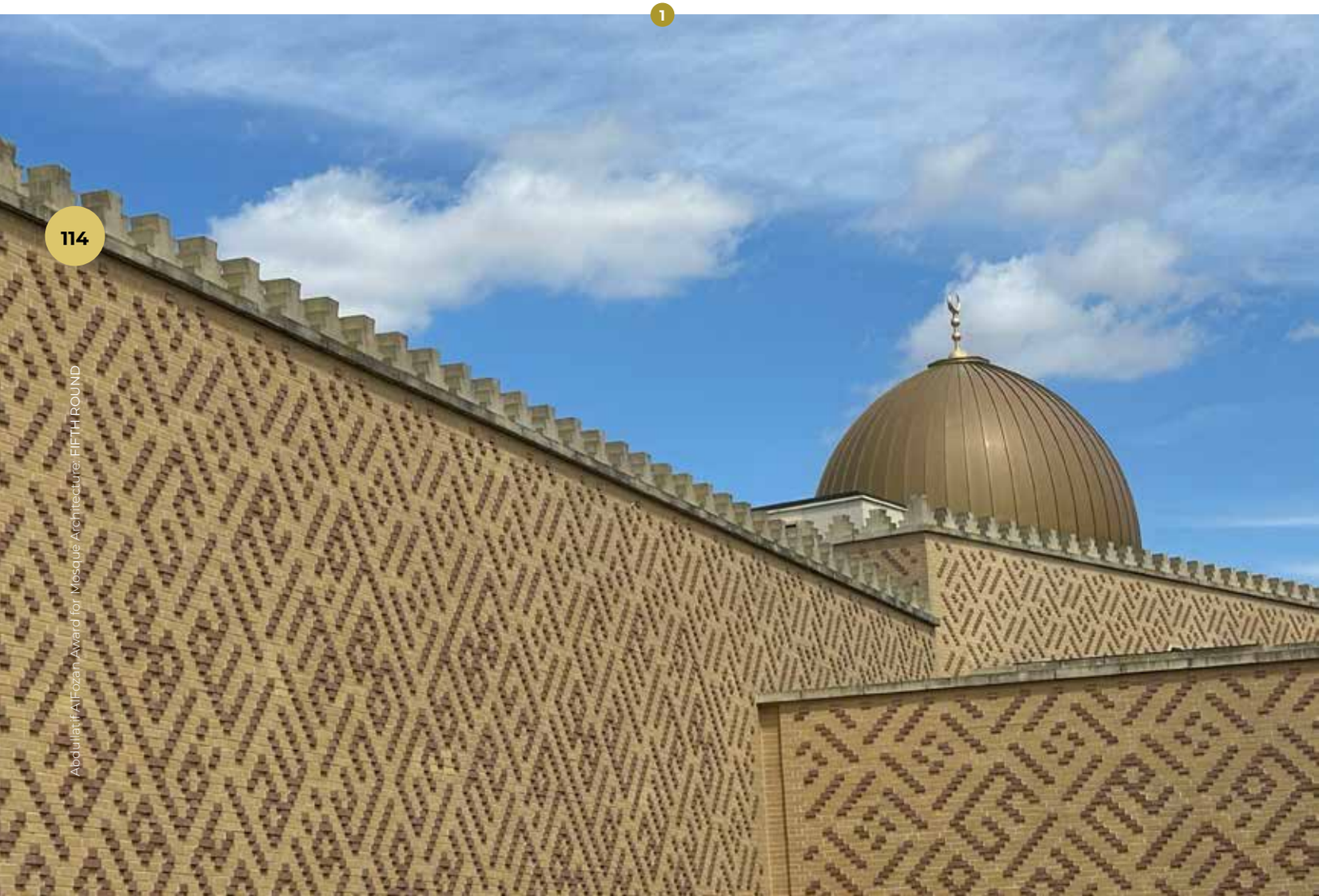
The main entrance, situated quietly beneath this portico, is devoid of overt iconography. Its appeal lies in the purity of materials, the modulation of light, and the spatial dignity it offers. The façade itself—a composition of brick, wood, and glass—is marked by restraint. Ornamentation is kept to a minimum in favor of material honesty and contextual resonance. The use of local red brick, in particular, serves as a deliberate gesture of integration, anchoring the mosque within its urban fabric rather than positioning it apart from it.

And yet, this architectural humility can also be interpreted as a strategic negotiation—a culturally sensitive calibration in a British context still navigating the visibility of Islamic identity in public space. The absence of a minaret, for instance—an element banned in some European countries like Switzerland—reflects both planning constraints and a cautious, if not diplomatic, architectural stance. While this contributes to the mosque's seamless integration, it also introduces a degree of perceptual ambiguity: is this a mosque, a public library, or a cultural center?

In the end, the mosque presents an exterior of quiet confidence—refined, deliberate, and materially thoughtful. It addresses the city in a muted civic voice, arguably by design. Yet this very restraint raises broader questions: when does architectural sensitivity tip into symbolic withdrawal? Does the quest for harmony risk eroding identity, or can this architectural taqiyyah help disarm cultural anxieties without compromising spiritual meaning?

1. *This is how the prayer hall appears when approaching it.*

2. *Ground floor plan.*



INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

From the first moment of entry, visitors encounter the mosque's most distinctive architectural gesture: a grove of engineered timber columns, mushroom-like in form, arranged in deliberate rhythm. These tree-like structures branch into interlocking vaults, forming a finely woven timber ceiling of remarkable precision and complexity. Simultaneously structural and symbolic, they evoke notions of growth, rootedness, and cosmic order. While visually inspired by traditional Islamic geometric patterns, their structural logic arises from contemporary digital fabrication—a synthesis that elevates ornamental patterns into expressive structure.

Natural light filters gently from above, descending through oculi and clerestory windows to animate the space with soft luminosity and shifting tones. The mihrab and minbar, though finely crafted in wood, appear as inserted elements rather than organic outgrowths of the architectural language. Their formal vocabulary does not fully engage the expressive logic of the timber canopy, and the same could be said of the surrounding walls, which remain largely indifferent to the ceiling's rhythm and geometry. This disconnect between enclosure and content—between the enveloping surfaces and the spatial essence—suggests a conceptual and expressive rift. It may partly reflect the architect's intent to align the external façades with the surrounding Victorian and Edwardian context, yet the result within is a sense of visual isolation between structure and surface.

Traditional decorative motifs are treated with notable restraint. Apart from a few well-placed calligraphic panels, the interior intentionally avoids the conventional overuse of ornament, vegetal motifs, or patterned inscriptions. Instead, the focus shifts toward structural rhythm and abstract clarity. For some, this design choice signals a refined contemporary spirituality—an architecture of dignity and discipline. For others, however, it may register as emotionally austere, where the sacred atmosphere leans more on formal expression than on cultural memory or devotional symbolism.

Support spaces—including ablution areas, educational rooms, and circulation corridors—are clearly organized and well-proportioned, enhancing comfort, accessibility, and intuitive movement. The overall plan favors spatial clarity and functional fluidity, but not at the expense of experiential depth. While ceremonial grandeur is not overtly emphasized, there remains a subtle architectural narrative that guides the worshipper's journey—a choreography of thresholds and transitions that enriches the interior encounter.

A particularly noteworthy aspect lies in the carefully sequenced spatial approach from the community garden (1), through the Islamic Garden (2), the front portico (3), the semi-enclosed courtyard (4), and into the café lobby (5). It is here, just before entering the main prayer hall (6), that a subtle yet meaningful shift occurs: the geometry of the route bends toward the qibla, signaling a spiritual inflection point. This oblique transition carries interpretive richness and echoes spatial patterns found in many historic mosques embedded within the fabric of traditional Islamic cities.

Regrettably, this thoughtful sequencing is absent when entering from the front entrance (7), where one transitions almost directly into the main hall, bypassing the preparatory spatial layers that deepen the spiritual experience. This missed opportunity slightly weakens the immersive journey that the rest of the plan so carefully composes. (see the plan below).

2

1

Abdullatif Al-Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture. FIFTH ROUND

2

1. *Mihrab.*

1. *Details of the tree-like columns derived from Islamic ornament.*

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

The Cambridge Central Mosque positions itself as a pioneering model of environmentally conscious religious architecture in Europe, integrating a well-orchestrated blend of passive and active strategies aimed at reducing energy use and environmental impact. Central to this ambition is a commitment to near-net-zero energy performance—a goal that is compelling in theory, but one that invites continued scrutiny through long-term POE (post-occupancy evaluation).

Geothermal wells, a green roof, and photovoltaic panels work in concert to regulate internal climate and minimize dependence on non-renewable energy sources. The building's form and envelope are carefully designed to optimize natural light and ventilation, thereby reducing the need for artificial lighting or mechanical cooling. Notably, these environmental strategies are embedded into the architectural DNA rather than applied retroactively—a key distinction when sustainability is treated as a generative design principle rather than an ornamental add-on.

Water-saving fixtures and rainwater harvesting systems further contribute to lowering the mosque's ecological footprint. The structural use of timber offers not only tactile warmth but also a lower-carbon alternative to steel or concrete, aligning with the mosque's ecological ethos. Yet timber's long-term performance—particularly in the damp British climate—depends on rigorous maintenance and careful weatherproofing.

Despite these commendable features, the mosque's sustainability narrative at times risks veering into self-congratulatory terrain. Public discourse often highlights ambitious environmental metrics, yet independently verified operational data remains limited. In this light, the project stands as a bold ecological statement, but one that would benefit from greater transparency and continued accountability over time.

Ultimately, the mosque exhibits a serious and technically sound commitment to environmental stewardship. And yet, a deeper architectural question remains: can the ecological virtues of a building stand in for the cultural, symbolic, and devotional layers traditionally embodied in mosque architecture? In this case, sustainability is not simply a performance target—it becomes a defining aspect of the mosque's identity. Whether that shift enriches or displaces the architectural meanings inherited from tradition remains an open and worthy question for reflection.

Geothermal wells, a green roof, and photovoltaic panels work in concert to regulate internal climate and minimize dependence on non-renewable energy sources.

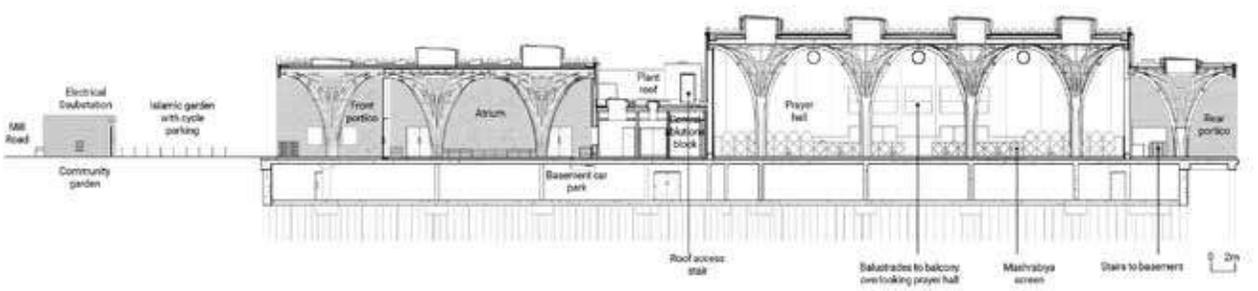
This is how the wooden roof appears with the tree-like columns.

1. *Longitudinal section.*

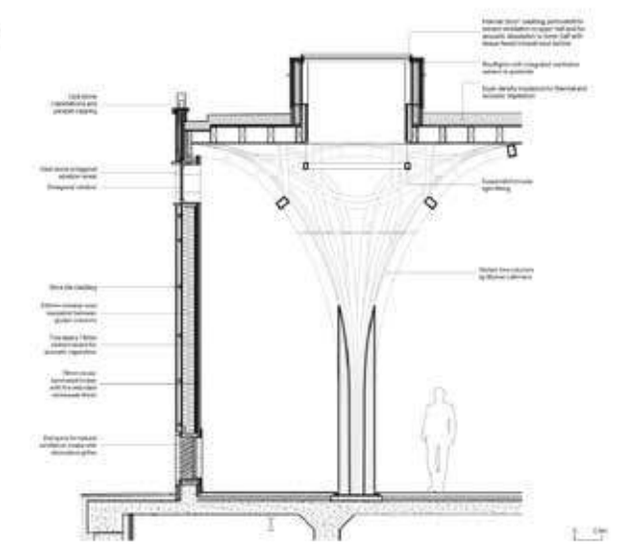
2. *Detailed section.*

3. *Longitudinal section showing the column–roof relationship.*

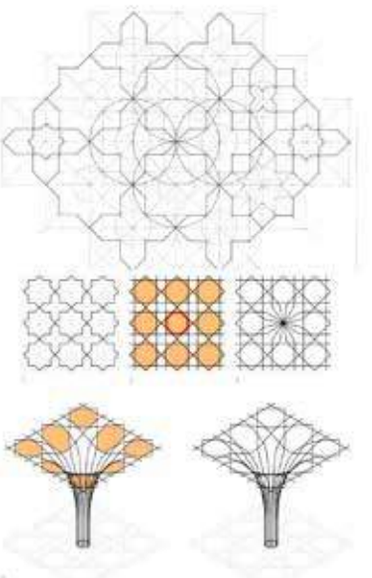
4. *Tree-like columns extend beyond the prayer hall.*

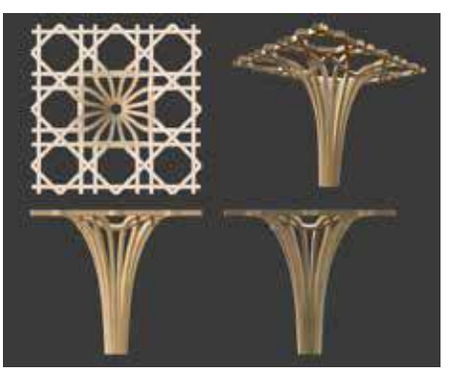


1



2





3

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

From its earliest conception, the Cambridge Central Mosque was envisioned not merely as a place of worship, but as a civic anchor for the local Muslim community and a bridge to wider society. In this regard, its social performance stands as one of its most unequivocal successes. The mosque functions daily as a space for prayer, education, culture, and interfaith exchange. It hosts guided tours, lectures, exhibitions, and public events with consistent frequency—reflecting a deep institutional commitment to openness and shared presence, in keeping with the inclusive spirit suggested by the phrase: "for all people."

The architectural layout actively supports this plurality of roles. Entrances are fully accessible and spatial flow is intuitive. Prayer areas for men and women are thoughtfully balanced in size and dignity, without imposing rigid separation. Communal gathering spaces—indoors and outdoors—along with amenities such as the café and garden courtyard, further blur the line between the religious and the civic. The mosque is not merely open to the public; it invites encounter, encourages lingering, and fosters a quiet sense of belonging.

Patterns of attendance indicate sustained engagement across age groups, backgrounds, and genders, with particular vibrancy observed during Friday prayers, Ramadan evenings, and public festivals. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the mosque swiftly adapted to serve as a center for logistical support, vaccination, and community coordination—further affirming its embeddedness in the city's social fabric.

At the same time, the successful model presented here—a mosque grounded in accessibility, education, and public participation—raises deeper questions. Does such an approach reflect a meaningful evolution in the mosque's role, attuned to the conditions of plural and open societies? Or does it risk softening the spiritual inwardness and contemplative gravity traditionally associated with Islamic sacred space? These are not contradictions to be resolved, but questions to be carried and contemplated.

The Cambridge Central Mosque does not seek to resolve these tensions conclusively. Instead, it inhabits them—with quiet confidence and graceful composure. In doing so, it offers a living example of a mosque that neither withdraws into insularity nor dissolves into abstraction, but remains responsive—faithful to its community, rooted in belief, and open, in space and spirit, to all. Kāffah li'l-nās.

4

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The Cambridge Central Mosque stands as one of the most visible and architecturally ambitious attempts to formulate a new mosque paradigm within the European context. It has earned widespread praise for its environmental performance, urban integration, and disciplined design language. With its expressive timber structure, generous daylighting, and ethical commitment to sustainability, the mosque offers a grounded and dignified architectural vision—a refined face of Islam in the West.

And yet, for all its coherence and grace, the project does not quite achieve the level of full architectural synthesis seen in more confident mosque designs—such as those emerging from Bangladesh. The timber canopy, by far the building's most compelling spatial and conceptual gesture, remains relatively isolated. Its expressive logic does not carry through to the mihrab, the minbar, or even the surrounding dome and walls. These elements, however finely crafted, feel appended rather than organically generated from the structural rhythm of the timber grove. Even the outer architectural shell, elegant as it may be, remains detached from the spatial intensity of the interior canopy. This disconnect creates a formal rift—between what envelops and what is enveloped, between structural essence and architectural skin. Part of this fragmentation may reflect a conscious attempt by the architects to visually harmonize with the brick vernacular of the surrounding urban fabric, as found across many English cities.

Such decisions raise deeper questions about how mosque architecture expresses spiritual identity in non-Muslim contexts: Can environmental ethics and formal discipline suffice in place of the devotional symbolism and emotional gravity that have traditionally characterized Islamic sacred space? Is this architectural restraint a deliberate gesture of cultural diplomacy—or a quiet retreat from symbolic clarity?

In this regard, comparative precedents become particularly instructive. Paolo Portoghesi's Mosque of Rome (1995), for instance, offers a direct metaphor of a 'forest of columns', integrating structure, liturgy, and tradition into a cohesive spiritual environment. Shigeru Ban's Pompidou-Metz (2010) uses a similarly intricate timber lattice—this time inspired by woven Asian hats—not to serve a religious function, but to unify a scattered cultural program under a singular poetic gesture. Both projects demonstrate how a timber canopy can transcend its structural function to embody deeper cultural or symbolic meaning.

Placed in dialogue with these examples, Cambridge's timber structure appears more contained. It succeeds as a visual and technical statement but stops short of permeating the rest of the building. The result is a powerful architectural idea presented almost as a stand-alone exhibit—striking, but not wholly integrated into the mosque's liturgical and spatial system.

Even so, one cannot help but appreciate the quiet confidence with which the project navigates a culturally charged terrain. It avoids the extremes of insular traditionalism and abstract universalism, instead seeking a carefully curated third position: a mosque that is open, integrated, and community-oriented—without entirely relinquishing its symbolic potential. Suspended between presence and modesty, between innovation and caution, the building invites contemplation more than it asserts conclusions.

It is also worth noting that much of what is offered here belongs to the domain of professional architectural critique—a conversation among peers, scholars, and designers invested in evolving the language of mosque architecture. For the wider public, and in terms of environmental and social performance, Cambridge Central Mosque stands as an unqualified success. Still, identifying its unresolved gestures and architectural gaps remains a necessary task—especially in a volume dedicated to enriching the critical discourse on the future of mosque design.

1

2

1. *Visual composition and spatial atmosphere that encourage tranquility.*

2. *A view of the interior space of the mosque.*

3. *Ablution area.*

4. *Wall details.*

5. *Interior–exterior relationship.*

A NEW LINEAGE OF MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE

ISLAMISCHES KULTURZENTRUM GRAZ

Islamic Cultural Center of Graz

Islamisches Kulturzentrum Graz
(Islamic Cultural Center of Graz)

Location: Graz, Austria

Architect: GSP Architektur (Gerhard Springer)

Year of Completion: 2020

Plot Area: 11500 m^2

Built-Up Area: 7375 m^2

Capacity: 450 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Jung Ik Hong

The Islamisches Kulturzentrum Graz (IKZ) is the first purpose-built mosque in the Austrian city of Graz, and one of the most thoughtfully integrated examples of contemporary mosque architecture in Europe. Designed by local architect Gerhard Springer of GSP Architektur, the project emerged from an international competition in 2011 and was praised for its restrained approach and sensitivity to local context.

While only the main prayer hall and a stylized minaret have been completed, the broader vision is that of a multifunctional cultural center—combining spaces for worship, education, community engagement, and daily life. Initiated by the Bosniak Muslim community and supported by city authorities, the IKZ reflects a clear social intention: to offer Muslims in Graz a dignified place of worship, while fostering dialogue and civic integration. Its realization aligns with the city's inclusive urban policies, notably its motto: "We are all Graz."

Architecturally, the IKZ avoids clichés and confrontations. Set in a regenerating district known for its immigrant communities, it blends quietly into its green surroundings. A floating prayer hall above water, a minaret that glows rather than calls, and a central courtyard still to come—these elements reinterpret Islamic typologies with humility and contemporary clarity. The mosque's form speaks softly but meaningfully, embedding itself into Graz's urban and social fabric.

Shortlisted for the Fifth Cycle of the Abdullatif Al Fozan Award, under the theme "The Living Mosque," the IKZ stands as a model of how mosque architecture can affirm identity, welcome the city, and engage the future—without spectacle, but with confidence.

The architectural vision of the Islamisches Kulturzentrum Graz is rooted in a profound yet restrained idea: to express unity through diversity. The guiding principle—"One Complex, One Place of Prayer, One God"—shaped a design that merges Islamic tradition with contemporary European sensibilities. At the heart of this vision lies a symbolic reconciliation of orientations: while the prayer hall aligns with the Qibla, the overall form gestures toward the East, subtly acknowledging Christian liturgical tradition. This dual orientation becomes an architectural metaphor for interfaith harmony—bringing distinct worldviews under a shared roof.

Rather than relying on historic forms or superficial symbolism, the architect Gerhard Springer proposes a new reading of mosque architecture—one that respects identity while engaging with its time and place. The minaret, for instance, is reimagined as a slender, glowing column that marks presence without sound or height. The prayer hall, square in plan and elevated above a reflecting pool, appears to float—suggesting purity, humility, and transcendence. Light and water are treated not as decorative elements, but as active agents of spatial and spiritual experience.

Equally important is the concept of ascension: a deliberate spatial journey begins at the street and moves gradually upwards through ramps, terraces, and gardens—culminating in the mosque. This slow climb turns the approach to prayer into a choreographed act of reflection, where each step is part of a transformation from the profane to the sacred.

The architecture consciously avoids monumental gestures or ornamental excess. Instead, abstraction, geometric clarity, and a restrained material palette guide the design. A triangulated façade filters light into the interiors and evokes Islamic pattern without literal repetition. Interior elements like the mihrab and minbar are integrated seamlessly, allowing the spatial form and light to carry the religious atmosphere.

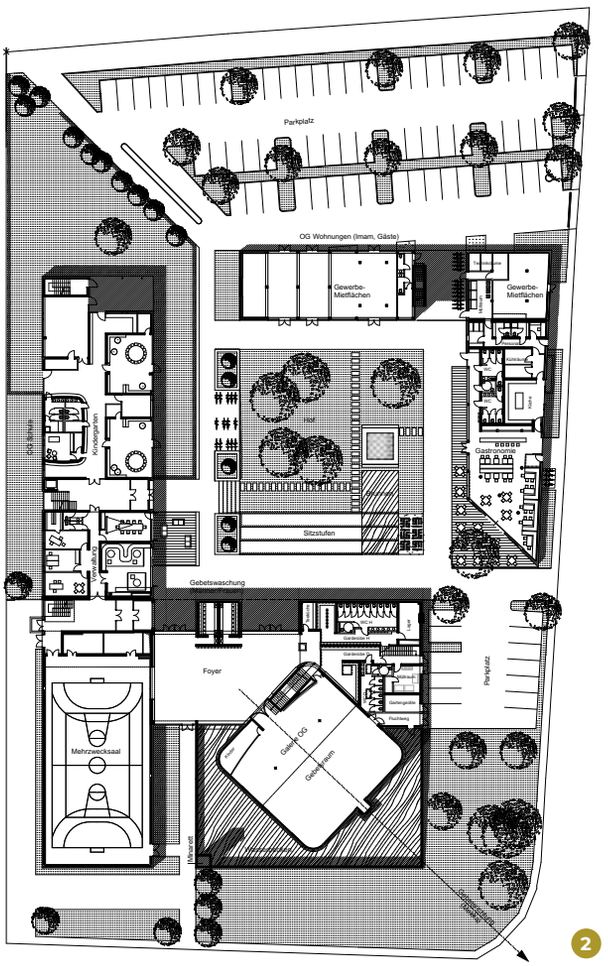
In sum, the IKZ's concept is one of quiet boldness. It reimagines the mosque as a civic and spiritual hub—not through mimicry of the past or erasure of identity, but through a contemporary language of openness, elevation, and shared meaning. The architecture becomes a vessel for integration—between functions, faiths, and the city itself.

1

1. A close-up view of the minaret.

2. Master plan.

3. Model showing a general view of the building massing.



2

3

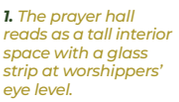
URBAN INTEGRATION

Set in the Gries district of Graz—a mixed-use area shaped by industrial history and immigrant communities—the Islamisches Kulturzentrum Graz integrates modestly yet confidently into its surroundings. The open site, bordered by green space and low-rise buildings, allowed for a horizontal composition that respects the local scale while introducing a new civic presence.

Rather than enclosing itself, the complex remains open and porous. Its edges are defined by gardens, water, and low architectural elements instead of fences, reinforcing its role as a shared urban space. The future central courtyard is designed as both a social gathering area and a transitional threshold to prayer, extending the mosque's reach into the public realm.

The minaret, a slender illuminated column at the site's corner, acts as a symbolic marker rather than a dominant feature. The absence of a dome or traditional ornamentation reflects a deliberate restraint—avoiding confrontation while affirming identity through abstraction and clarity.

More than its form, the mosque integrates through use. Public programs, interfaith events, and planned educational facilities invite daily interaction across communities. Even in its current partial state, the IKZ positions itself not as a secluded sanctuary but as an inclusive civic space—embedded in the life and future of the city.



1. The prayer hall reads as a tall interior space with a glass strip at worshippers' eye level.

2. The green prayer mass... a silent communicative language.

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The IKZ presents a contemporary, restrained exterior that balances symbolic presence with contextual sensitivity. Its overall form is composed of low-rise geometric volumes arranged around a future central courtyard, maintaining visual harmony with surrounding buildings. The absence of a dome and the use of 'clean' lines help the mosque blend into Graz's urban fabric while asserting its identity through abstraction and color.

The prayer hall stands out as a square, elevated volume that appears to float above a shallow water basin. This subtle gesture conveys spiritual elevation and reduces visual mass, while the water reflects sky and structure, softening the building's presence. Around it, green roofs and sloped terraces create a gentle ascent—both physical and symbolic—leading toward the haram. These landscaped ramps also integrate the building into its park-like setting, visible from neighboring streets and upper floors.

The minaret, placed at a site corner, is slim, translucent, and capped with a glowing lantern. It doesn't broadcast the call to prayer, but marks the complex with a quiet vertical gesture—aligned with local sensitivities and the city's architectural rhythm. Its illumination on special occasions adds subtle ceremonial presence without disrupting the skyline.

Materially, the mosque employs a neutral palette—glass, concrete, and greenery—enhanced by a triangulated façade that filters light into the interiors and evokes Islamic geometric pattern in a modern idiom. The façades shift with daylight and seasons, reflecting the surrounding landscape and reinforcing the mosque's openness.

Overall, the exterior conveys dignity without monumentality. Its formal language avoids visual clichés, instead offering a contemporary expression of sacred architecture—one that speaks to both its faith and its city with restraint and confidence.

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of the Islamisches Kulturzentrum Graz reflects the same quiet clarity that defines its exterior—an architecture of restraint, light, and spiritual coherence. At its center lies the main prayer hall: a square, column-free space topped by a folded-plate ceiling that recalls the effect of a dome without mimicking it. The openness ensures full visibility of the qibla wall and enhances the collective atmosphere of worship.

The hall is elevated above a shallow reflecting pool, with its perimeter walls lifted approximately 80 centimeters from the ground. This creates a striking 'floating' effect, allowing daylight and reflections to enter low into the space, reinforcing the sense of serenity and transcendence. Light filters in from clerestory windows, triangular patterned façade panels, and possibly skylights—producing a softly luminous, ever-changing interior.

A defining feature of the space is the qibla wall, which bears the 99 beautiful names of Allah in graceful calligraphy, each preceded by a respectful invocation. This artistic gesture—supported by thoughtful lighting—serves as a contemplative backdrop for prayer, rooting the space in Divine remembrance. Above the mihrab, the name of (ALLAH) is inscribed in beautiful calligraphy, planned to articulate the essence of faith and the call to establish prayer. Both the mihrab and the minbar are seamlessly integrated into the architecture: minimal in form, unembellished, yet dignified—supporting function and meaning without ornamental distraction.

At the rear of the hall, a glazed and screened space serves as a women's prayer area and overflow zone. While not a traditional upper gallery, this space fulfills a comparable role: offering privacy and autonomy while preserving full visual and acoustic connection to the imam and the congregation. Designed with flexibility in mind, it enables shared participation in a spatially inclusive way. Entrances for men and women are separate and dignified, each leading through dedicated ablution facilities and locker areas that support comfort, privacy, and ease of movement.

The interior material palette is deliberately calm: pale surfaces, soft carpeting with subtle row markings, and custom lighting fixtures that echo the building's triangulated geometry. Ventilation is managed naturally, with air entering from the rear zone and exiting high along the qibla wall, while underfloor heating ensures quiet thermal comfort. Acoustic surfaces keep sound levels gentle and focused—even during peak gatherings.

In sum, the mosque's interior avoids visual or symbolic excess, allowing space, light, and language—through geometry, water, and Divine Names—to create a sanctuary that is at once modern, sacred, and deeply human.

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

The Islamisches Kulturzentrum Graz adopts a pragmatic yet forward-thinking approach to technical systems and sustainability. While much of the complex remains under construction, the completed mosque building already demonstrates thoughtful integration of environmental strategies and efficient building services.

The design minimizes energy consumption through passive measures: the prayer hall's elevated form, green roofs, and earth-toned materials provide natural insulation and reduce thermal gain. The folded-plate roof is topped with planted surfaces that contribute to stormwater retention, improved thermal performance, and alignment with Graz's sustainable urban development guidelines, which encourage greening of new rooftops.

Daylighting is a primary strategy. The triangulated façade incorporates both transparent and opaque panels, optimizing natural light while reducing glare and artificial lighting demand. Inside the prayer hall, the use of light-colored surfaces and indirect reflections from the surrounding water pool enhances ambient illumination throughout the day.

Ventilation is primarily natural. Air enters from the rear congregation area and exits at high points along the qibla wall, creating a passive airflow system that maintains indoor air quality without mechanical noise. In winter, radiant floor heating—likely integrated beneath the carpet—provides efficient, silent thermal comfort, particularly suited to a space where users are seated on the floor.

1. *This is how the center appears from outside... a calm band topped by a striking green mass and a minaret crowned by an illuminated flame of Arabic calligraphy linking to culture.*

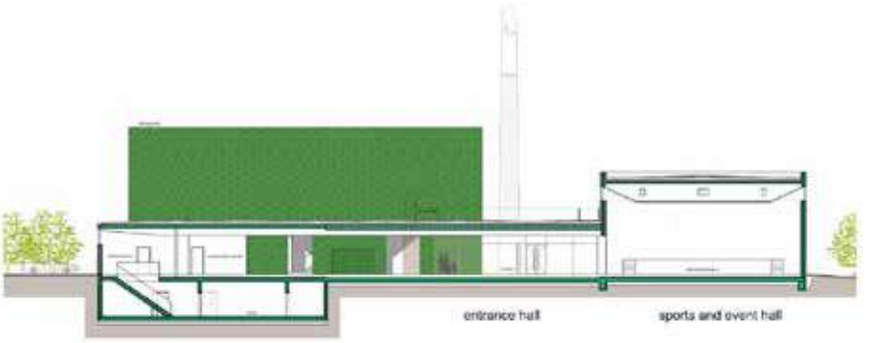
Water management is another key component. The complex employs a rainwater harvesting system, with collected water used for irrigation of roof gardens and potentially for ablution areas. The water basin surrounding the prayer hall is not purely symbolic—it also contributes to microclimatic cooling, reducing heat buildup around the main entry during summer months.

Though the full extent of building automation systems is not detailed, the planning indicates attention to long-term durability, ease of maintenance, and operational sustainability. The material choices—such as durable cladding, non-toxic finishes, and moisture-resistant detailing—reflect a commitment to lifecycle performance over superficial finishes.

In its current form, the mosque balances technical simplicity with environmental responsibility. As future phases are realized, the broader complex has the potential to further reinforce this foundation—making the IKZ not only a spiritual and social anchor, but a model of sustainable, context-sensitive mosque design.

1

Elevation



Section

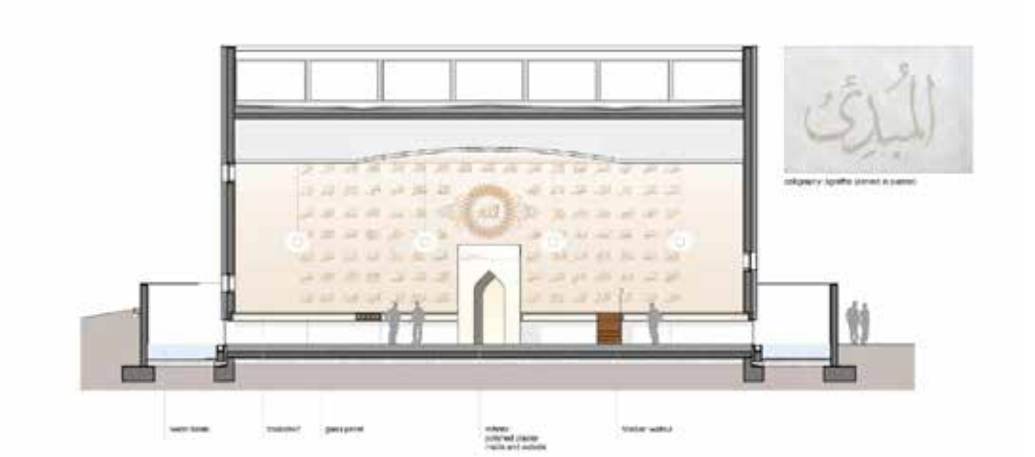
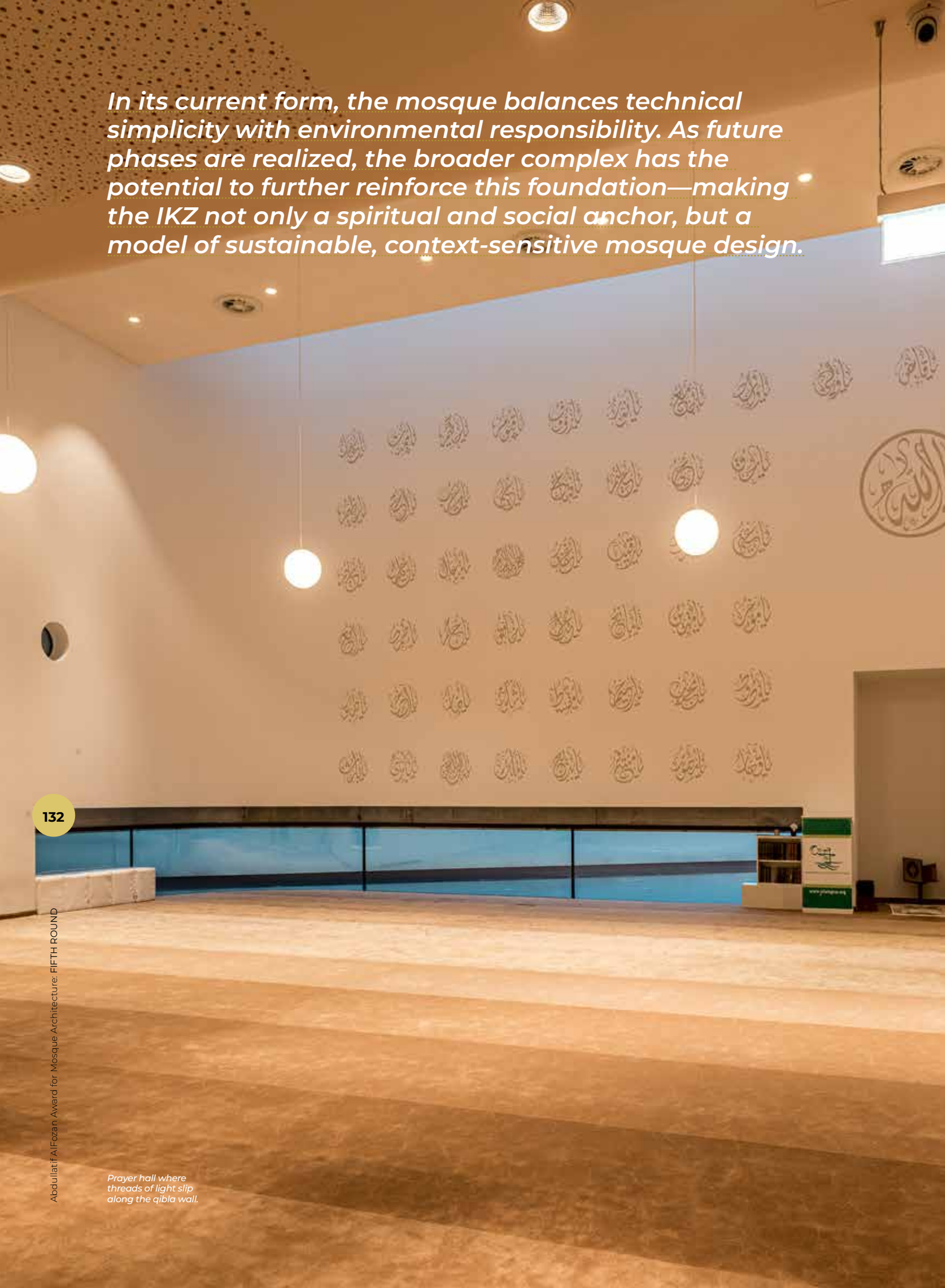


Diagram illustrating the qibla wall

In its current form, the mosque balances technical simplicity with environmental responsibility. As future phases are realized, the broader complex has the potential to further reinforce this foundation—making the IKZ not only a spiritual and social anchor, but a model of sustainable, context-sensitive mosque design.



Prayer hall where threads of light slip along the qibla wall.

1

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

From its inception, the Islamisches Kulturzentrum Graz was conceived not merely as a place of worship, but as a civic platform—one that fosters inclusion, dialogue, and social cohesion within a diverse urban fabric. Even in its partially completed state, the mosque is already fulfilling many of these ambitions, both in its spatial openness and its community programming.

The IKZ serves a population of approximately 18,000 Muslims in the region, offering them a dignified and permanent place of prayer after decades of improvised spaces. Yet its reach extends far beyond the religious community. Through interfaith events, public tours, open houses, and cultural programs, the mosque has become a setting for encounter and exchange. These events are held not only during Ramadan or holidays, but throughout the year—welcoming schools, local organizations, and residents into the space and helping demystify Islamic practice.

1. *This is how the glass wall appears from the exterior.*

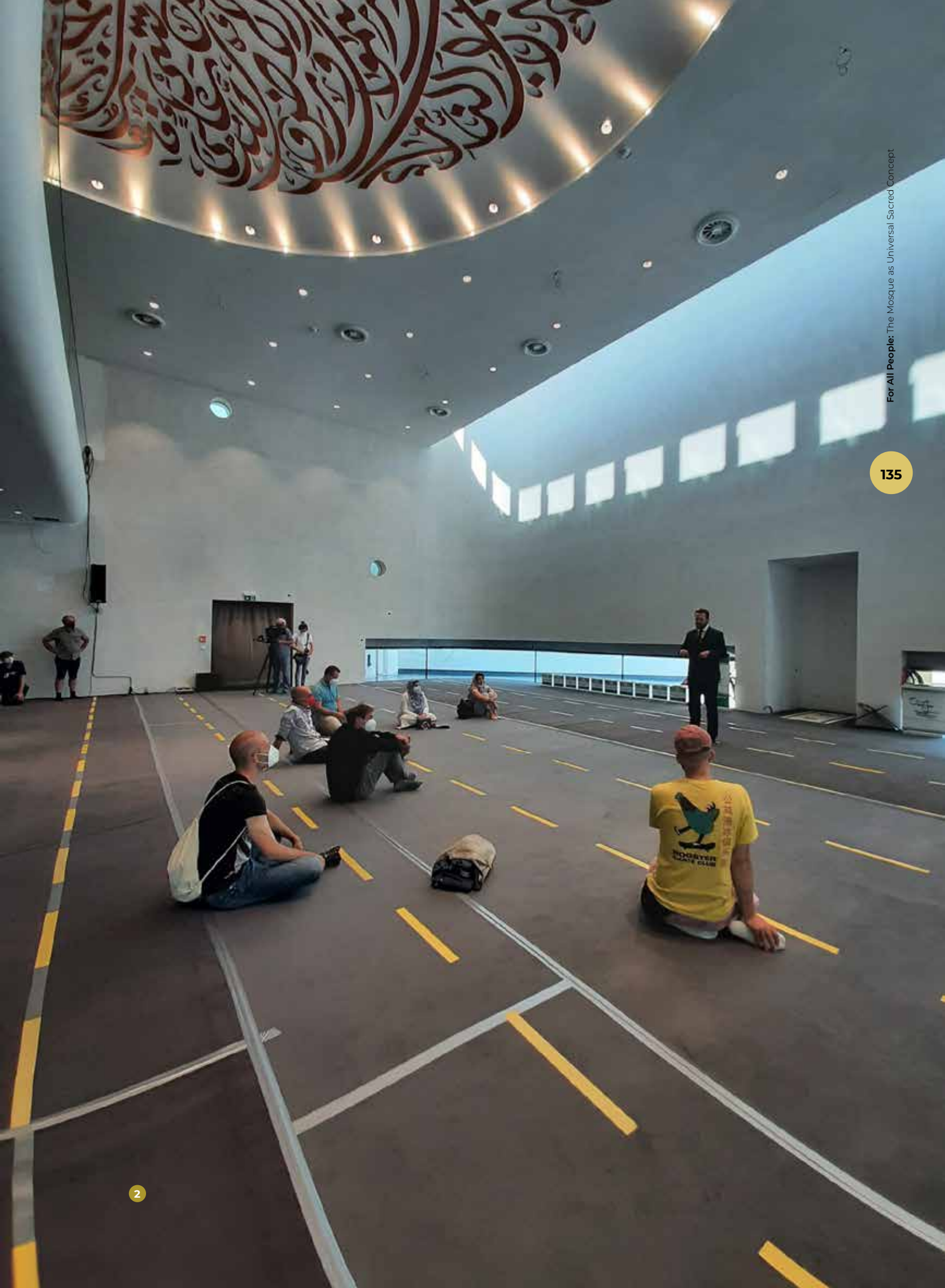
2. *The prayer hall transforms into a multipurpose hall.*

Importantly, the architecture itself supports this openness. The absence of perimeter fences, the centrality of the (future) courtyard, and the placement of public functions—such as the café, classrooms, and multipurpose halls—along street-facing edges all help embed the mosque into the daily rhythms of the neighborhood. Even passersby can rest near the mosque's gardens or enjoy glimpses into the courtyard, which is envisioned as a semi-public space.

The center also engages with education and youth through its on-site kindergarten, planned school facilities, and community rooms. These spaces are designed for use by all residents, not just Muslims, encouraging interaction across cultural and generational lines. Children of different backgrounds attend, parents meet, and the mosque grounds become part of the city's educational landscape.

Gender inclusion has been handled with sensitivity. Women have dedicated entrances and preparation spaces, as well as a prayer area that ensures visibility, sound access, and spatial dignity—avoiding marginalization or segregation. The same spirit of respect informs the mosque's attention to universal accessibility, making the site navigable for the elderly and people with disabilities through ramps, wide paths, and barrier-free ablution facilities.

The IKZ's success is also measured in its ability to normalize the mosque as a civic presence in Graz. It neither isolates itself nor asserts itself aggressively. Rather, it invites participation through everyday use, through architecture that is welcoming, and through a public posture grounded in coexistence. In doing so, it reflects Graz's broader commitment to inclusion, and offers a model for what a 21st-century European mosque can be: not apart from the city, but fully part of it.



2

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The Islamisches Kulturzentrum Graz emerges as a thoughtful architectural attempt to address the layered question: what does it mean—and how is it possible—to build a contemporary mosque in twenty-first-century Europe? In doing so, the architect chose to steer clear of spectacle, recycled clichés, and stylistic borrowings from times and places alien to Graz, offering instead an architecture that balances the boldness of its symbols with the quiet composure of its form, blending presence with openness to the city around it.

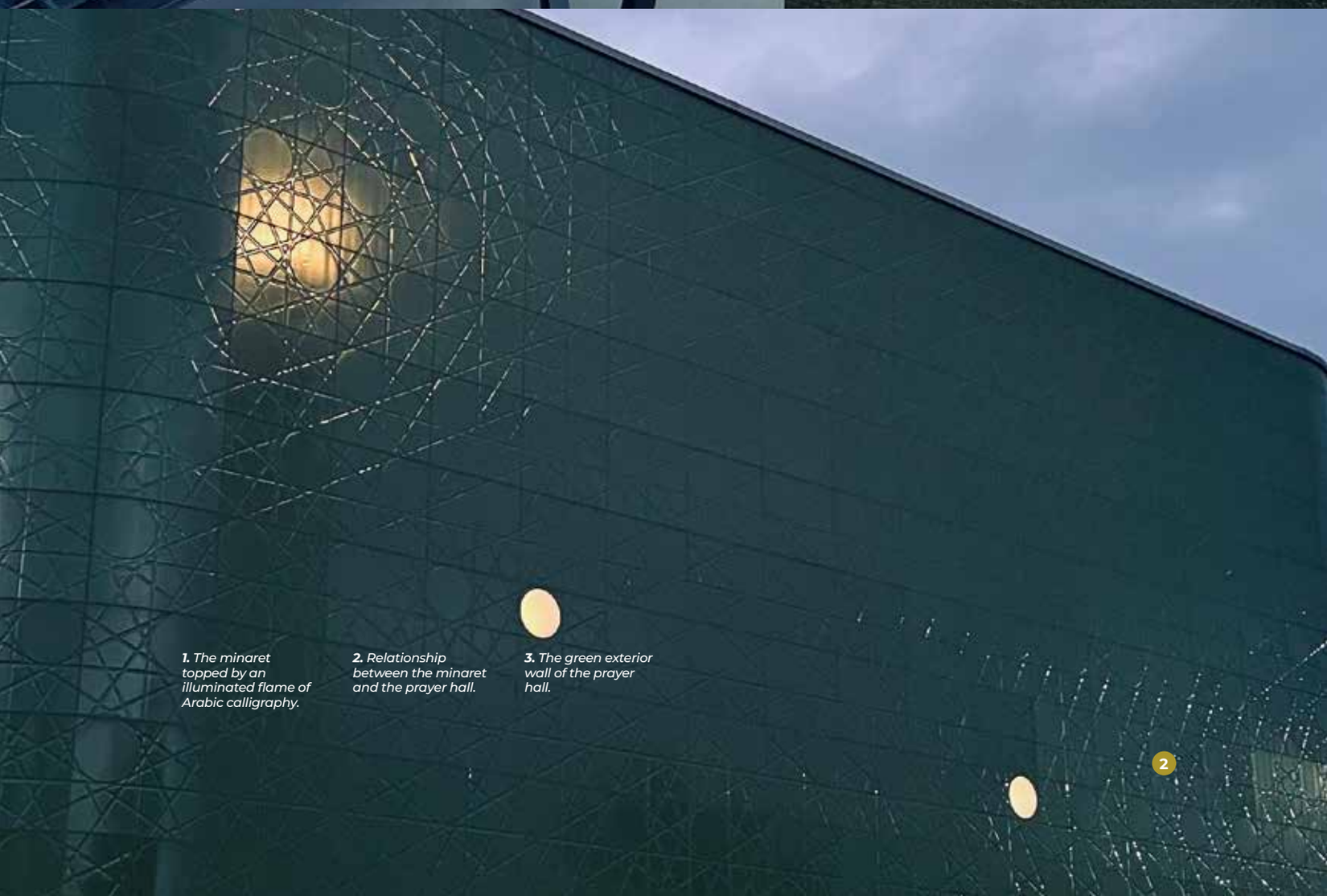
In the floating green mass of the prayer hall poised above water, in the interior illuminated by light that glows across the inscribed '99 Names of God' , and in the minaret that transforms into a beacon, an Islamic identity takes shape—articulating an architectural language that reconnects with mosque traditions while unfolding them into a contemporary reading. Here, the absence of a dome or of the public call to prayer is not a retreat from heritage, but a conscious re-imagining of form and meaning: a living dialogue with the sensitivities of the European host context, grounded in hospitality yet gesturing toward the horizon of future partnership.

Though the complex is not yet complete, the mosque has already begun to fulfill its mission: offering a dignified space for prayer after years of improvised settings, becoming a venue for interfaith and intercultural encounter, and marking itself as a civic landmark that adds tangible value to the city's fabric. With the realization of future phases, the site is envisioned to evolve into a fully integrated urban campus that unites worship, education, and social life.

The project's strength lies in its poised architectural boldness and its openness to community. It demonstrates that a mosque need not rise above its surroundings to affirm its meaning, nor withdraw from them to safeguard its sanctity. Instead, by relying on symbols that suggest rather than proclaim, it shapes a space that resonates with the spirit of restraint and abstraction in the Islamic tradition, while also speaking clearly to the Zeitgeist—the spirit of the age.

In this sense, the Graz Islamic Center offers a valuable model for the idea of the living mosque: not merely a place of prayer, but a shared civic ground where spiritual, communal, and everyday lives converge. It is an authentic contribution, one whose resonance extends beyond the boundaries of Graz—recasting the place of the mosque in Europe today, and opening horizons for what mosque architecture might become tomorrow...

1



1. *The minaret topped by an illuminated flame of Arabic calligraphy.*

2. *Relationship between the minaret and the prayer hall.*

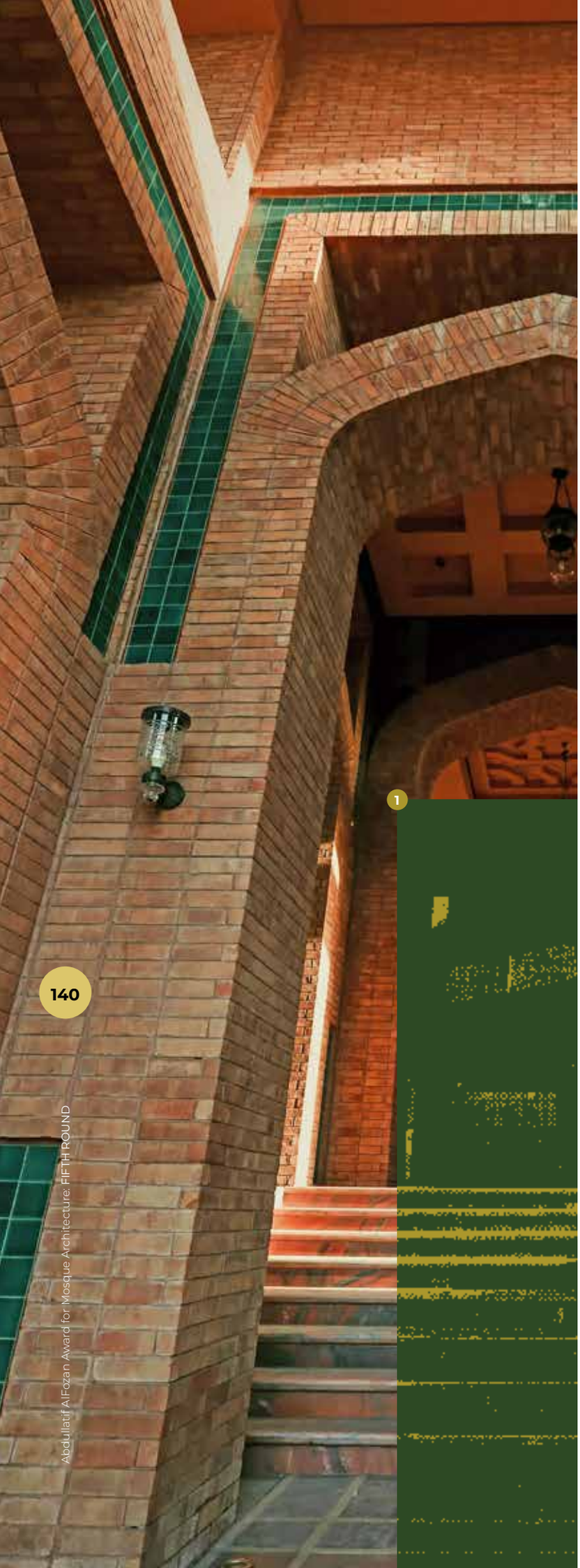
3. *The green exterior wall of the prayer hall.*

THE PRESENCE OF
HISTORICAL PRESTIGE

BAHRIA
Grand Mosque

Bahria Grand Mosque
Location: Lahore, Pakistan
Architect: Nayyar Ali Dada & Associates
Year of Completion: 2014
Plot Area: 49,987 m²
Capacity: 70,000 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Lamia Hadda



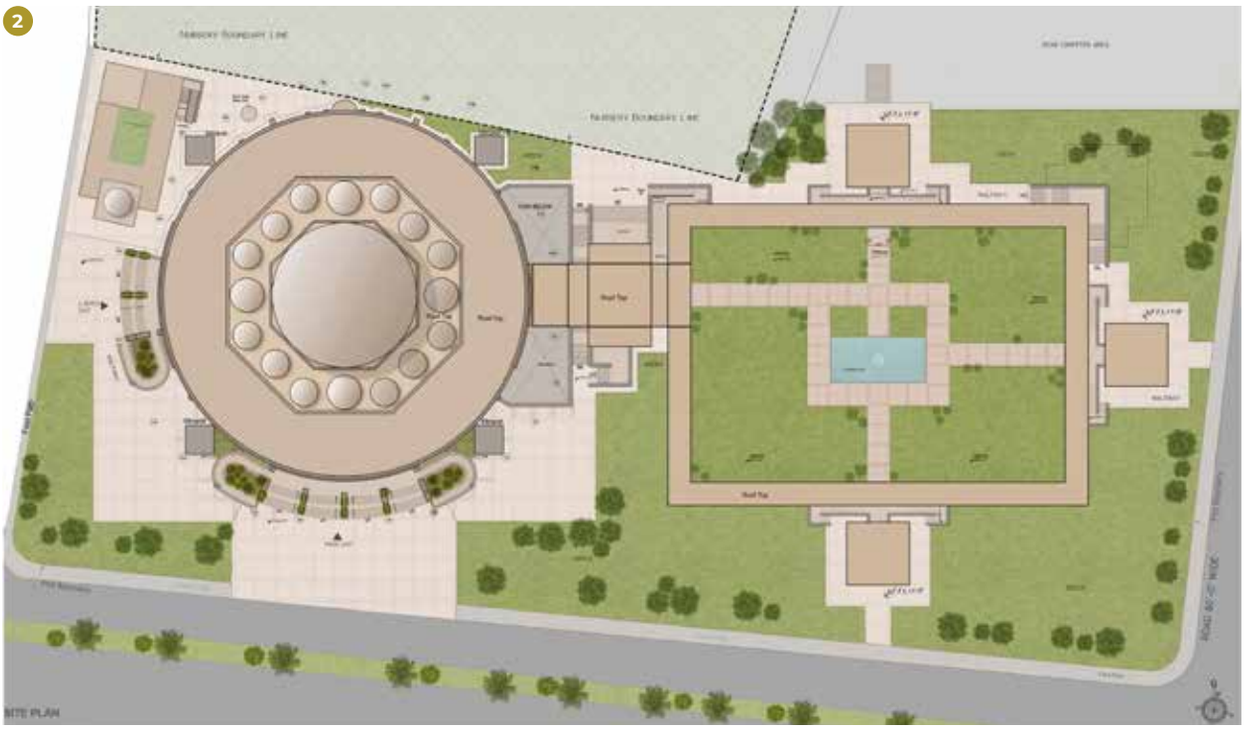
Bahria Grand Mosque (Grand Jamia Mosque), Lahore, Pakistan, rises as the defining civic-religious landmark of Bahria Town on Lahore's expanding periphery. Designed by Nayyar Ali Dada & Associates, the project adapts and completes a pre-existing structure into a large, multi-program complex that combines a principal prayer hall with women's prayer areas, an educational component (Islamic academy), and a curated gallery and library dimension.

Completed and inaugurated on Eid al-Adha (6 October 2014), the mosque is frequently cited in contemporary reporting as one of Pakistan's largest in covered prayer capacity, accommodating approximately 25,000 worshippers indoors, with an overall capacity of around 70,000 when the courtyard and surrounding circulation areas are included.

Architecturally, the mosque is anchored by a vast central dome and four corner minarets, organizing the worshipper's arrival through a large courtyard framed by arcaded porticoes—an arrangement that consciously reproduces established Mughal-Persian mosque archetypes. The project affirms a familiar monumental image of the mosque, relying on the authority of inherited forms rather than attempting to reinterpret the typology or recalibrate its spatial or symbolic grammar. While contemporary construction systems and building services enable the mosque to function efficiently at a very large scale, these technical means operate in support of a firmly revivalist architectural language that prioritizes recognizability and visual continuity over exploratory or forward-looking spatial propositions.

1

2



URBAN INTEGRATION

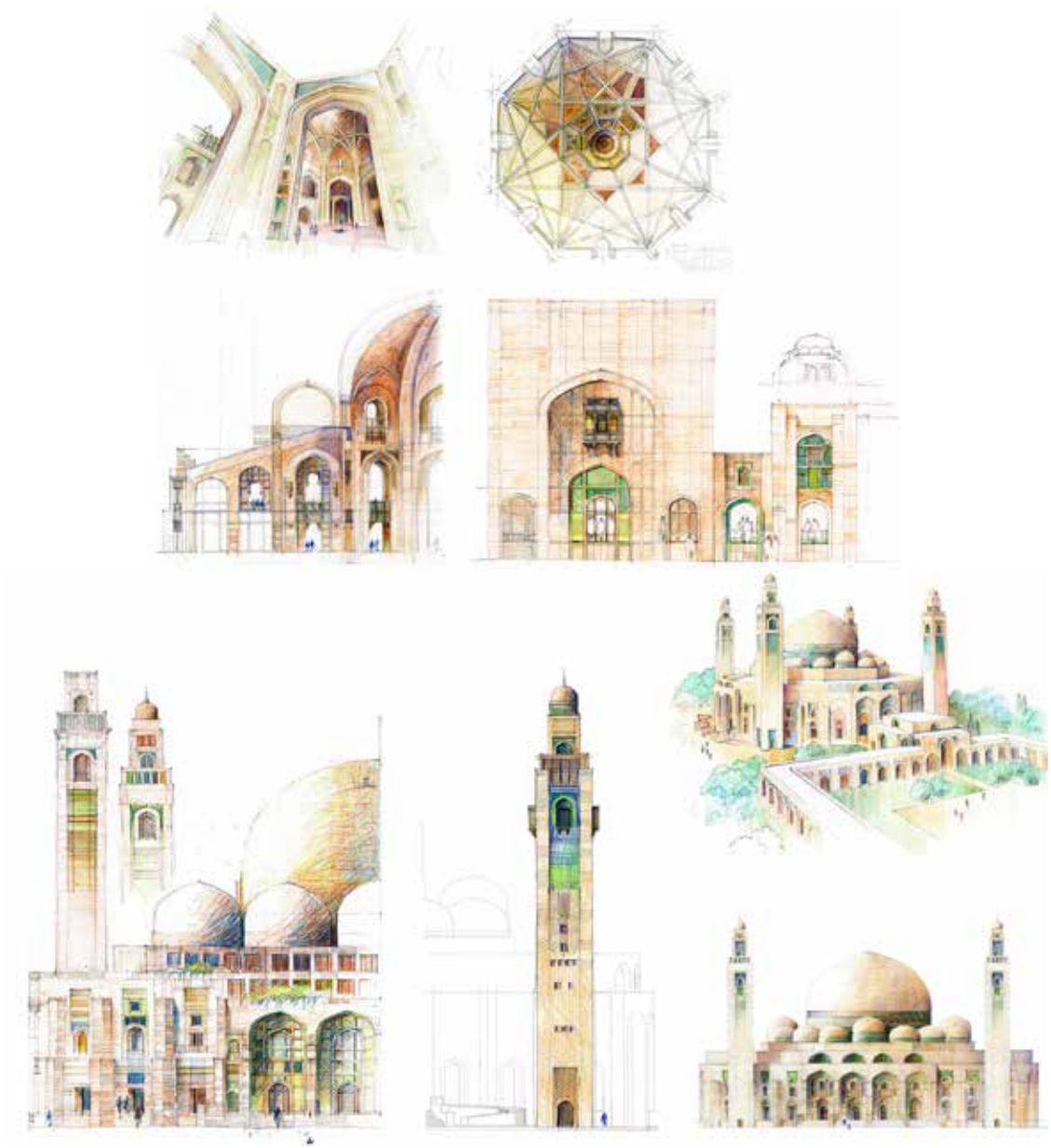
Bahria Grand Mosque occupies a prominent and carefully staged position within Bahria Town, Lahore, a large, privately planned urban enclave structured around clear hierarchies of landmarks and symbolic centers. Within this setting, the mosque is conceived as a primary visual anchor, rising above its surroundings and asserting itself as the dominant architectural presence of the development.

Its siting favors axial clarity and spatial separation over urban continuity. Approached mainly through wide vehicular routes and expansive forecourts, the mosque is experienced first as a distant object before becoming a place of entry. This reinforces its monumental character and aligns it with the logic of representational landmarks rather than that of a neighborhood-integrated mosque embedded in daily life.

Within the broader vision of Bahria Town, the mosque functions as a civic emblem, conferring cultural authority and symbolic gravitas on the development as a whole. While this positioning ensures visibility and accommodates large congregations, it also establishes a clear distance from the finer grain of lived urban experience, privileging ceremonial arrival over incidental encounter—a condition that bears directly on how accessibility and intimacy are negotiated within the project.

1. *Visual details of an entrance, showing traditional brick as a structural and visual component.*

2. *Site plan.*



1

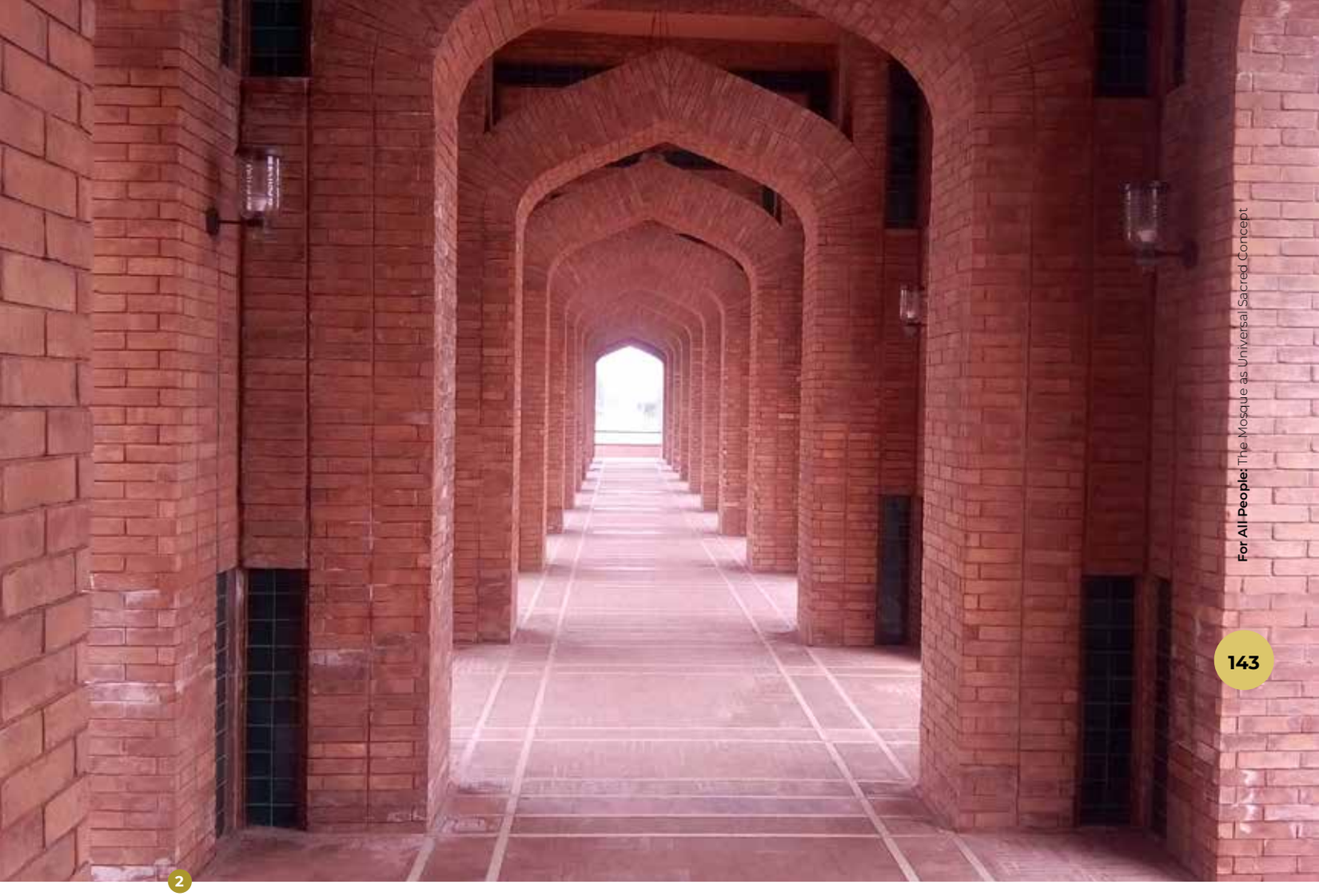
EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The architectural expression of Bahria Grand Mosque is defined by a deliberate return to a classical, revivalist vocabulary rooted in Mughal–Persian precedents. The composition is organized around a dominant central dome, flanked by four symmetrically placed minarets, and reinforced by a rigorously axial layout. Symmetry, hierarchy, and visual completeness govern the overall form, leaving little ambiguity in how the building is read or approached.

This reliance on established typologies lends the mosque an immediate sense of familiarity and recognizability. The architectural language communicates authority through scale, massing, and repetition, favoring monumentality over spatial experimentation. Rather than questioning or reinterpreting inherited forms, the project consolidates them, producing an image of the mosque that is visually assured and historically legible, yet largely closed to formal innovation.

The articulation of façades, domes, and vertical elements follows a logic of architectural assertion. Ornament, proportion, and silhouette work together to reinforce a sense of grandeur, while the overall composition privileges frontal perception and distant visibility. The mosque is thus conceived less as a mutable spatial field and more as a completed architectural object—one that presents itself with clarity and confidence, but resists ambiguity or reinterpretation.

In this sense, the building's formal language operates primarily within the realm of representation. It draws its strength from continuity with well-established mosque imagery, reaffirming a familiar architectural canon rather than advancing a new spatial or symbolic reading of the mosque in a contemporary context.



2

1. *Detailed illustrative drawings of the mosque.*

2. *A sequence of broad arches (Persian / Iraqi) in a passageway, creating a sense of depth.*

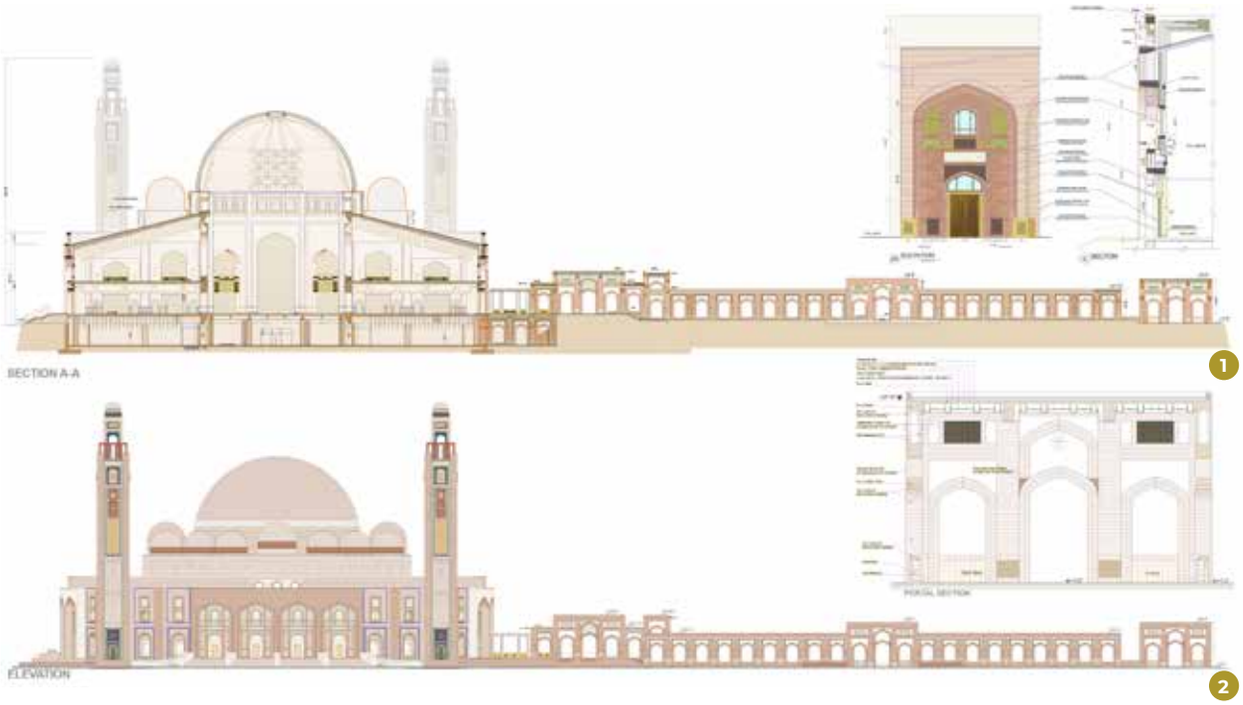
INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of Bahria Grand Mosque is conceived as an extension of its exterior monumentality, carrying the same emphasis on scale, symmetry, and visual order into the prayer halls. The central dome dominates the interior space, establishing a strong vertical focus and reinforcing a hierarchical spatial reading in which the collective experience is framed beneath a single, overarching architectural gesture.

Spatial organization within the main prayer hall prioritizes clarity and legibility. The arrangement of structural elements, lighting fixtures, and ornamental surfaces is carefully controlled, producing a space that is visually coherent and ceremonially composed. This clarity supports large congregational use, yet it also reinforces a sense of distance between the worshipper and the architectural envelope, as the interior is experienced primarily as a unified volume rather than a sequence of intimate or graduated spaces.

Ornamentation plays a significant role in shaping the interior atmosphere. Decorative treatments, surface articulation, and calligraphic elements are employed to enrich the visual field and affirm the mosque's traditional lineage. However, these elements function largely at the level of surface expression, reinforcing inherited symbolic codes rather than generating meaning through spatial modulation or experiential depth.

Overall, the interior achieves a controlled and dignified environment suitable for large-scale worship, but it remains firmly aligned with a representational understanding of sacred space. The emphasis on visual grandeur and compositional completeness leaves limited room for spatial ambiguity, intimacy, or personal engagement, positioning the interior as a setting to be admired as much as it is to be inhabited.



1

2

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Bahria Grand Mosque relies on conventional construction systems and material choices to support its substantial scale and formal ambition. The primary structural and envelope systems are designed to accommodate large spans and heavy loads, enabling the expansive prayer halls, domes, and elevated elements that define the building's monumental character.

Material selection reinforces the mosque's traditional architectural language. Stone cladding, decorative finishes, and carefully detailed surfaces contribute to an image of permanence and solidity, aligning the building visually with historical precedents. These materials are deployed with consistency and technical competence, supporting durability and long-term maintenance within the managed environment of Bahria Town.

Environmental performance is addressed primarily through mechanical means rather than passive spatial strategies. Large interior volumes are conditioned using contemporary building services, ensuring thermal comfort for sizable congregations regardless of seasonal conditions. While this approach guarantees operational reliability, it limits opportunities for environmental expression to become an integral driver of architectural form or spatial experience.

Overall, construction and servicing systems function efficiently in support of the mosque's scale and representational goals. However, sustainability considerations and climatic responsiveness remain secondary to formal and symbolic priorities, reinforcing the project's reliance on established construction practices rather than advancing new environmental or material interpretations of mosque architecture.

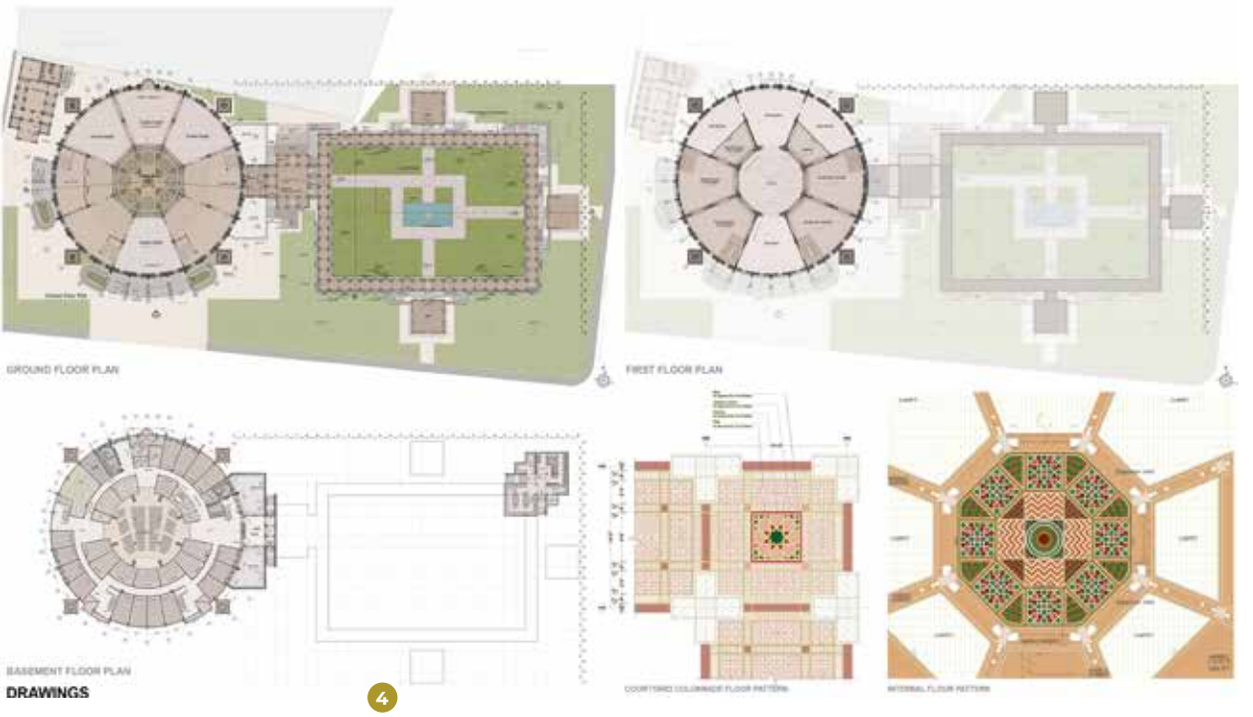
1. *Longitudinal section.*

2. *Elevation.*

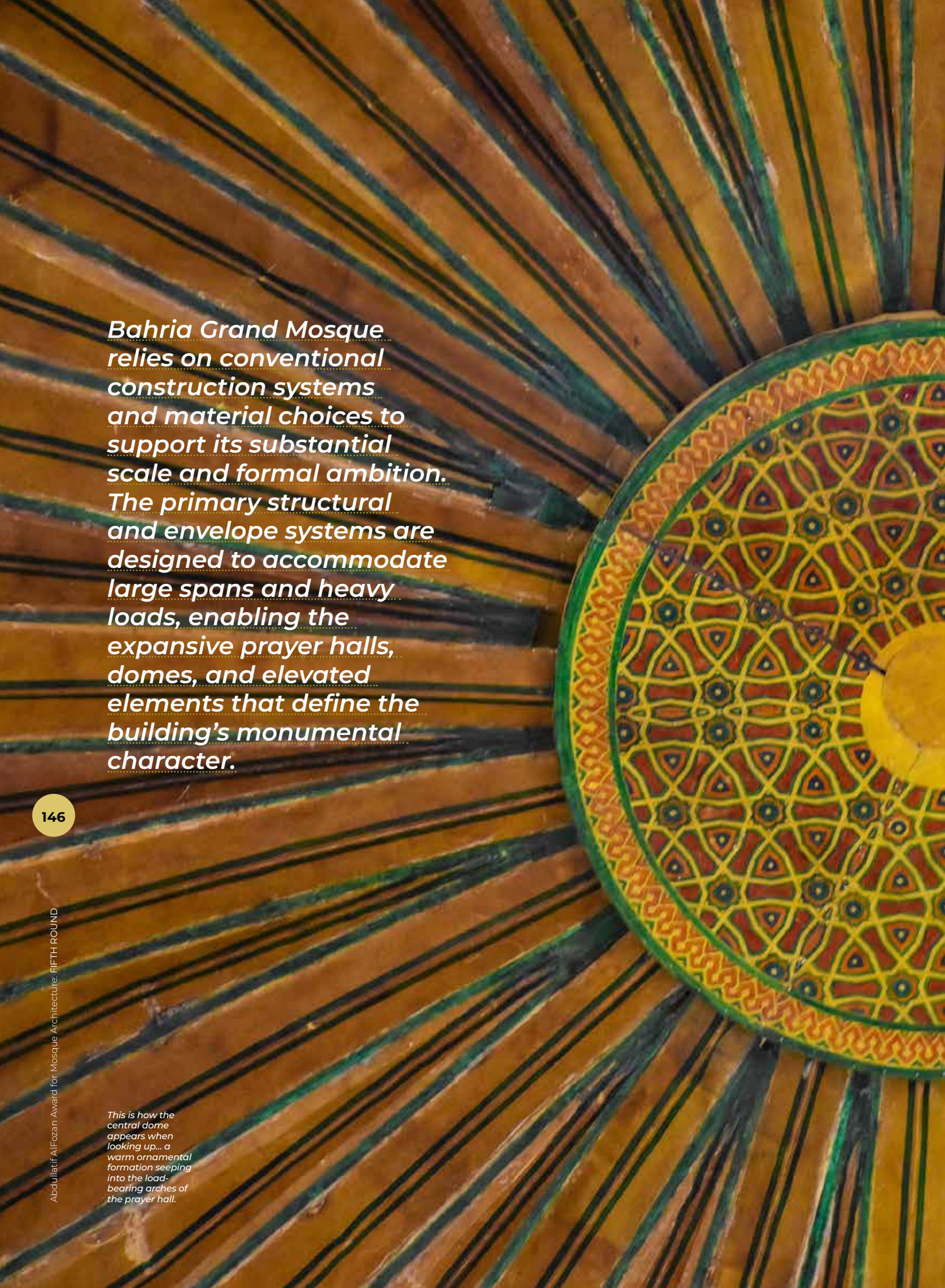
3. *Image of the mosque courtyard showing the arcade surrounding the sahn.*

4. *Floor plans and patterns.*

3



DRAWINGS 4



Bahria Grand Mosque relies on conventional construction systems and material choices to support its substantial scale and formal ambition. The primary structural and envelope systems are designed to accommodate large spans and heavy loads, enabling the expansive prayer halls, domes, and elevated elements that define the building's monumental character.

This is how the central dome appears when looking up... a warm ornamental formation seeping into the load-bearing arches of the prayer hall.

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

Bahria Grand Mosque functions as a major congregational venue capable of accommodating very large numbers of worshippers, particularly during Friday prayers, religious festivals, and special occasions. Its scale, visibility, and infrastructural capacity allow it to operate efficiently as a centralized place of worship within Bahria Town, reinforcing its role as a primary religious destination rather than a neighborhood mosque embedded in everyday routines.

Access to the mosque is largely structured around formal arrival and managed circulation. Wide forecourts, controlled entry points, and clear internal zoning facilitate crowd movement and operational order, especially during peak times. While this ensures safety and logistical clarity, it also reinforces a ceremonial mode of use in which the worshipper approaches the mosque as an event-based destination rather than through casual or incidental engagement.

1. Linking the outer court to the solid cylindrical wall of the prayer hall through soft green landscape elements.

2. Cylindrical prayer hall seen from above, showing the central dome and the smaller domes around it.

The mosque provides designated areas for women and families, reflecting an effort toward inclusivity within a conventional spatial framework. However, the separation and hierarchy of spaces remain clearly defined, with limited spatial overlap or informal zones that might encourage extended social interaction beyond the act of prayer itself. Community life, in this sense, is accommodated but not actively cultivated through spatial design.

As a social institution, the mosque plays an important symbolic role within Bahria Town, contributing to a shared sense of identity and collective presence. Yet its relationship to community remains largely representational: the mosque stands as an emblem of religious and cultural continuity more than as a flexible civic space capable of absorbing diverse, everyday social practices. This distinction becomes significant when assessing the project's broader contribution to contemporary understandings of the mosque as a lived and socially adaptive environment.

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

Bahria Grand Mosque stands as a confident and carefully executed example of large-scale, revivalist mosque architecture—one that achieves authority through monumentality, visual coherence, and the disciplined reproduction of inherited forms. Its architectural clarity, technical competence, and symbolic visibility make it an effective landmark within the planned environment of Bahria Town, fulfilling its role as a central congregational and representational institution.

Yet it is precisely this emphasis on certainty and recognizability that defines the project's critical limits. The mosque does not seek to reinterpret the spatial, symbolic, or social grammar of the mosque for a contemporary condition; rather, it consolidates a familiar image grounded in imperial precedent. Monumentality here operates less as a spatial invitation and more as an assertion, positioning the mosque closer to an architecture of authority than to one of negotiated intimacy. In this sense, the building subtly aligns with what might be understood as a mosque conceived in the image of a palace—ceremonial, complete, and distanced—rather than as a porous, evolving field of worship shaped by everyday encounter.

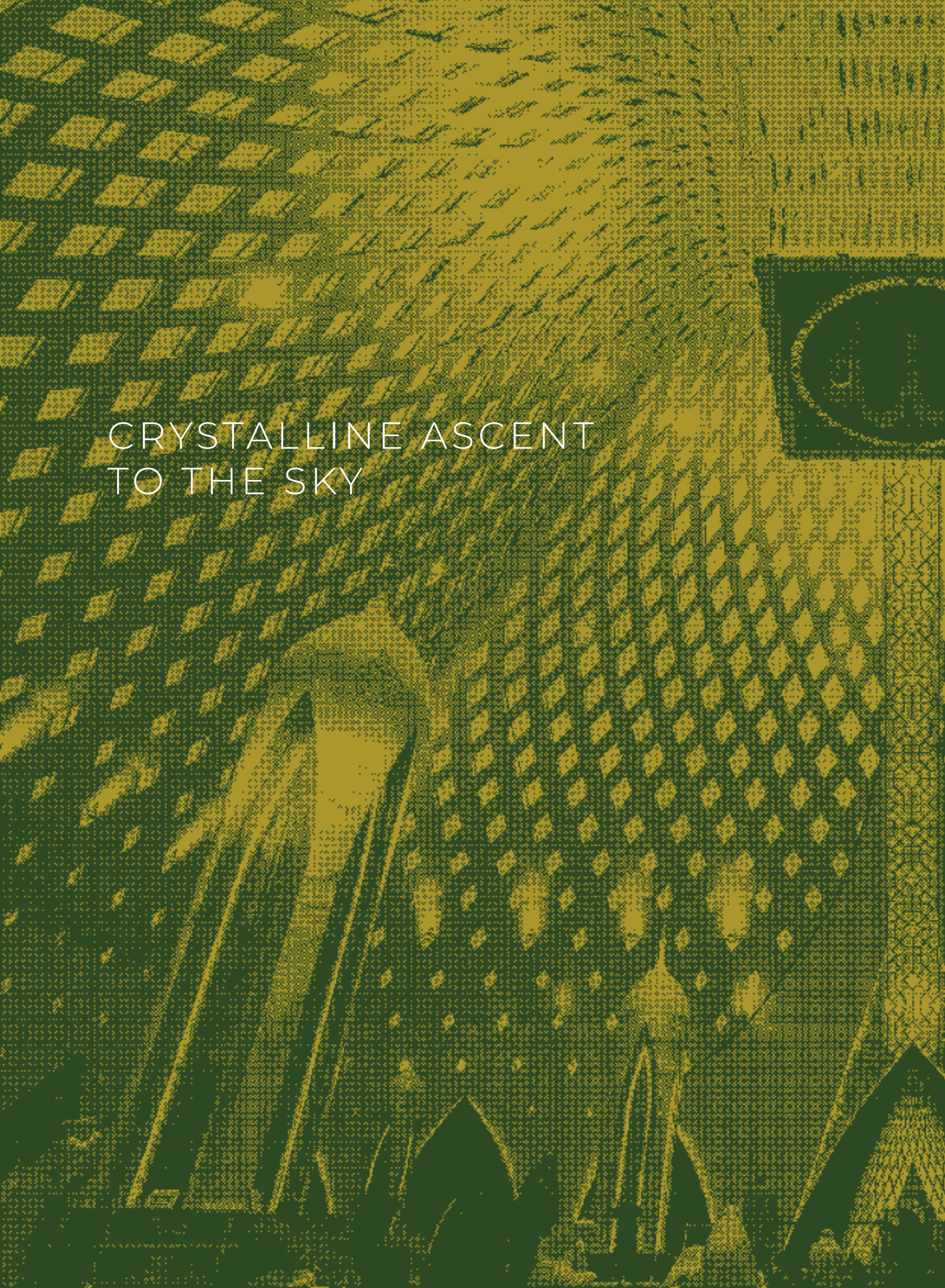
This stance is particularly striking within the Pakistani context. As early as the late twentieth century, the Faisal Mosque in Islamabad—whose construction was completed in the mid-1980s—had already proposed a decisive break from historical mosque imagery, offering a modern interpretation that rethought form, symbolism, and spatial presence without reliance on inherited typologies. Against this backdrop, the revivalist direction adopted at Bahria Grand Mosque appears less as continuity and more as a retreat into architectural reassurance, favoring visual authority over conceptual exploration.

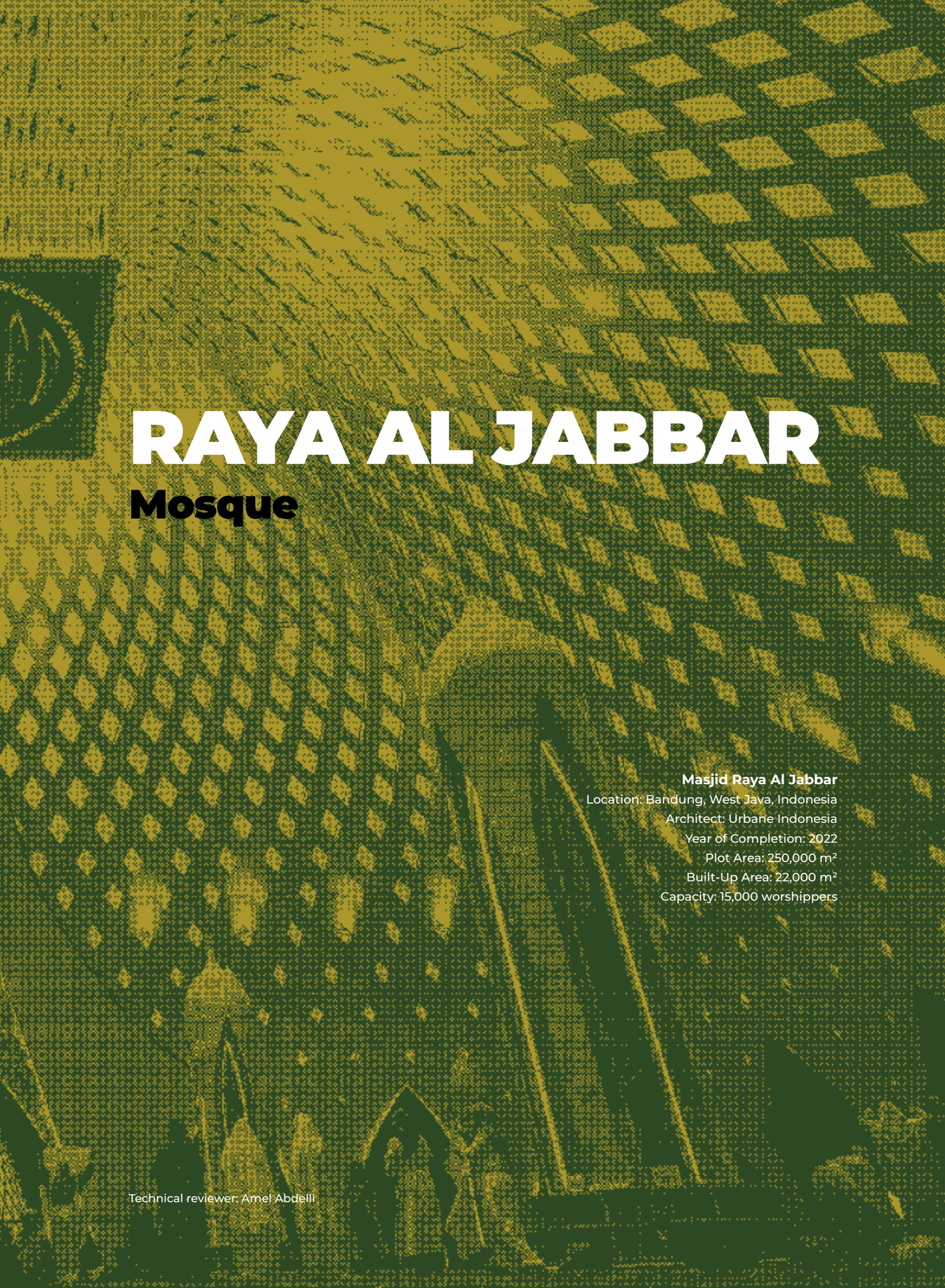
In the broader horizon of contemporary mosque architecture, the project thus occupies a position of consolidation rather than advancement. It confirms the endurance and appeal of traditional monumental language, but it does not extend the conversation toward new spatial, environmental, or social possibilities. As such, Bahria Grand Mosque serves as a telling reference point—not for where mosque architecture might go next, but for the comfort and limits of where it has chosen to remain.

1. *A solid brick wall derived from Persian and Timurid architecture, inlaid with colored tilework.*

2. *Details of a muqarnas element.*

3. *A solid brick wall derived from Persian and Timurid architecture, inlaid with colored tilework.*


CRYSTALLINE ASCENT
TO THE SKY



RAYA AL JABBAR

Mosque

Masjid Raya Al Jabbar
Location: Bandung, West Java, Indonesia
Architect: Urbane Indonesia
Year of Completion: 2022
Plot Area: 250,000 m²
Built-Up Area: 22,000 m²
Capacity: 15,000 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Amel Abdelli

1

Abdullatif AlFozan Award for Mosque Architecture, FIFTH ROUND

Masjid Raya Al Jabbar, set within the emerging Gedebage district of Bandung, is one of Indonesia's most ambitious recent mosques. Designed by Ridwan Kamil and completed in 2022, it occupies a vast site shaped around a man-made lake that serves both as flood-control infrastructure and as the mosque's defining landscape. Rising from this expanse of water, the building assumes a luminous, island-like presence that anchors the new metropolitan corridor.

Its identity is forged through a dramatic diagrid shell composed of thousands of triangular glass modules. This crystalline envelope merges Islamic geometric logic with patterns drawn from Sundanese craft traditions, giving the mosque a form that is at once contemporary and deeply rooted. The angled planes catch shifting light, turning the building into a prismatic landmark throughout the day.

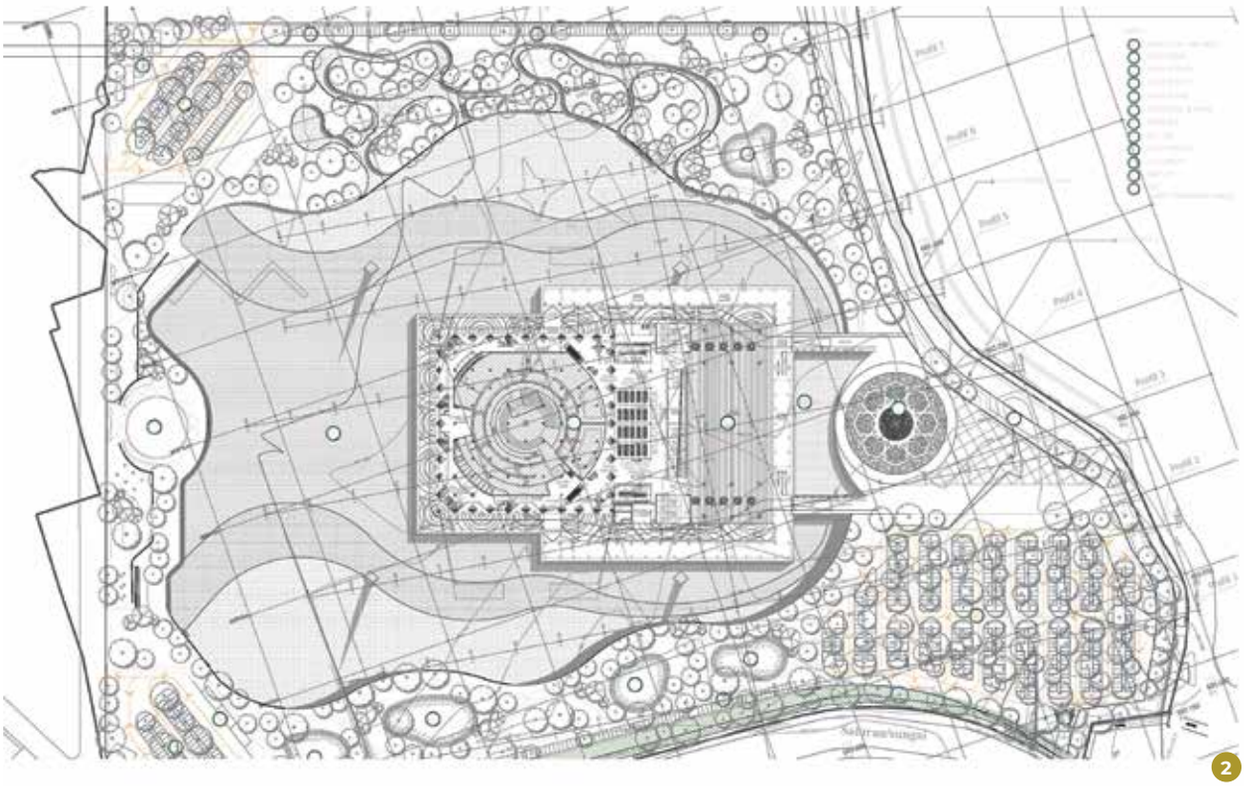
Urbanistically, the mosque functions as the central node of the Exhibition Park masterplan, a civic landscape still taking shape. Bridges, promenades, and lakeside terraces integrate the architecture with public life, making the mosque not only a place of worship but a destination for gathering, learning, and strolling. The lake, vegetation, and open spaces shape a microclimate that reinforces this integration between spirituality and everyday urban activity.

Its name, 'Al Jabbar', carries layered meaning—a Divine Name (Allah 'the Compeller', 'the Irresistible', and 'the Mender/Restorer'), a nod to algebra, and shorthand for West Java. The mosque translates these resonances into spatial and programmatic terms: a 99×99-meter plan, a faceted envelope expressing order and multiplicity, and a programme that includes prayer halls, an Islamic museum, educational facilities, and gardens.

The architecture departs from traditional domes and minarets. Instead, a soaring prismatic hall defines the interior, while four monumental berms at the site's corners act as landscape-minarets, binding the building to its terrain. Structure, shading, ornament, and identity merge under one cohesive geometric system.

Sustainability is integral to the project. The lake moderates climate and manages floods; multi-layered glazing reduces heat gain; daylighting minimizes energy use; and native planting supports ecological regeneration. Here, environmental intelligence is embedded within the architectural idea itself.

Today, Masjid Raya Al Jabbar stands as a regional symbol and a national reference point—an exploration of how a contemporary mosque can unify geometry, landscape, and civic life. Its selection for the Abdullatif Al-Fozan Award underscores its significance as a thoughtful, forward-looking contribution to the evolving language of mosque architecture.



1. *An external view of the mosque.*

2. *Site plan.*

URBAN INTEGRATION

Masjid Raya Al Jabbar occupies a pivotal position within the rapidly transforming Gedebage district. Built at the center of a large, engineered retention lake, the mosque turns a flood-prone site into a compelling civic and spiritual landscape. The water functions as both infrastructure and setting, shaping the mosque's presence as an island-like landmark whose faceted surfaces reflect into the lake and animate the surroundings throughout the day.

Arrival unfolds across a series of bridges and promenades that frame the mosque from shifting angles, making approach an experiential sequence rather than a simple transition from city to sanctuary. The surrounding Exhibition Park—terraces, shaded paths, planted slopes, and generous promenades—extends the mosque's influence into the public realm, supporting daily use beyond prayer, drawing families, students, and visitors into the site.

Four monumental earthen berms anchor the corners of the lake. Acting as topographic minarets, they stabilize the ground, frame major views, and balance the crystalline geometry of the mosque with a grounded, earthy presence. This interplay between faceted glass and sculpted terrain binds the architecture to its landscape and softens the visual intensity of the shell.

In a district still coalescing and without a clear civic anchor, the mosque offers both orientation and identity. It doesn't just sit on its site — it structures it, aligning the water, the parkland, and the new urban fabric around a focal point where faith, landscape, and public life converge.

1

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The exterior of Masjid Raya Al Jabbar is defined by its crystalline diagrid shell — a sweeping surface of triangular glass facets that replaces the traditional dome-and-minaret vocabulary with a single unifying geometry. Seen from across the lake, the building appears as a prismatic mass hovering above water, its planes shifting chromatically with light, weather, and movement.

Form and Symbolism

The faceted envelope translates Islamic geometric logic into spatial form while subtly referencing Sundanese craft patterns. Rather than rising into a singular dome, the roof folds and tilts to create a dynamic, hovering silhouette. This interplay between crystalline lightness and the reflective water below gives the mosque a presence that feels both grounded and weightless.

Materiality and Surface

The multi-layered glass panels vary in translucency, scattering light by day and glowing softly at night. Under overcast Bandung skies, the surface turns pearlescent; under sun, it becomes a shifting mosaic of reflections. The steel diagrid behind the envelope provides a disciplined structural order that maintains clarity despite the complexity of the form.

Light, Reflection, and Atmosphere

The mosque's strongest atmospheric effect comes from its dialogue with the lake. The water doubles the geometric shell, creating a living mirror that shifts with time and season. At dusk, the building transforms into a luminous lantern resting on water, its reflection extending the architecture into the landscape.

Scale and Grounding

Four monumental earthen berms anchor the corners of the site, functioning as 'topographic minarets'. Their mass provides a counterweight to the shimmering glass roof, rooting the structure within its terrain while balancing its visual lightness.

A Subtle Lineage: Ottoman Quadripartite Layout and the Faisal Mosque

Though resolutely contemporary, the mosque's composition resonates with earlier monumental precedents. The four berms faintly recall the quadripartite minaret arrangement of major Ottoman imperial mosques, where four markers frame the sacred volume and establish presence without overpowering it. More directly, the project's crystalline roof and perimeter anchors evoke the Faisal Mosque in Islamabad, which also replaces the dome with a folded, prismatic geometry stabilized by four vertical markers. In Bandung, these markers become sculpted earth rather than rising minarets, grounding the floating glass shell through landscape rather than height. Such parallels suggest that even the most experimental mosque forms remain connected to a shared architectural lineage—not through imitation, but through inherited proportions, balance, and civic presence.

Architectural Character

The exterior achieves a synthesis rare in contemporary mosque design: geometric clarity, cultural resonance, and landscape responsiveness. It is iconic without isolation — a crystalline figure shaped by water, earth, and light — marking a thoughtful new direction for large-scale Indonesian mosques.

1. This is how the mosque hall appears externally: a crystalline mass rising toward the sky, surrounded by four minarets and preceded by a plaza connected by two bridges... the entire hall floats above water.

2. The interior composition... a richness of diverse ornamentation.

2

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Inside Masjid Raya Al Jabbar, the crystalline geometry of the exterior unfolds into a vast, faceted canopy that defines the entire spatial experience. The shell's folded planes rise and dip above the prayer hall, creating a monumental volume whose presence is softened by filtered daylight from thousands of triangular glass modules.

Spatial Composition

The main hall is a broad, column-free space shaped by the prismatic ceiling. The diagrid's triangular logic organizes the room, guiding movement and sightlines naturally toward the qibla wall, where the geometry lowers into a quiet focal point. A mezzanine — used primarily by women — mirrors the calm spatial character of the hall below, connected through clear circulation paths and shared light.

Light as Atmosphere

Light is the dominant 'material'. Variations in the translucency of the glass panels produce a soft, even glow throughout the day, giving the interior a contemplative clarity. At night, concealed lighting traces the folded planes, creating a warm, hovering canopy that preserves the calmness of the hall without spectacle.

Material Palette & Sensory Qualities

Interiors remain restrained: white surfaces, steel lines, and a muted carpet that absorbs sound. Ornament is deliberately minimized. Geometry and light carry the expressive weight of the space, allowing worship to unfold within an atmosphere of composure rather than visual distraction.

Mihrab and Liturgical Elements

The mihrab is formed by the natural deepening of the shell's planes, rather than by applied decoration. The minbar, likewise, is a clean sculptural insertion. Both elements align with the mosque's broader ethos of reducing symbols to their essential spatial presence.

Acoustics and Comfort

The combination of angled planes and absorptive flooring produces balanced acoustics suitable for recitation. Sound diffuses evenly without excessive echo, despite the large volume and hard materials of the envelope.

Women's Hall and Inclusivity

The mezzanine prayer area benefits from the same geometry, light, and atmosphere as the main hall. While offering privacy, it remains visually and spatially connected, supporting an inclusive ethos without erasing functional distinctions.

Interior Character

Overall, the interior achieves a disciplined geometric minimalism. Its calm light, clear lines, and absence of decorative clutter create a setting where devotion unfolds through clarity and composure — a quiet counterpoint to the design's underlying geometric complexity.

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Masjid Raya Al Jabbar's intricate geometry is supported by an equally coordinated technical system in which structure, landscape, and environmental performance operate as one.

Structure and Envelope

A steel diagrid forms both the mosque's structural frame and its architectural identity. Prefabricated components and digital modeling enabled its precise construction and allowed the prayer hall to remain entirely column-free. The glass skin—composed of thousands of triangular panels with varying translucencies—controls daylight, reduces glare, and shapes the mosque's prismatic appearance.

Environmental Systems & Climate Strategy

The surrounding lake is the project's most effective environmental tool. Designed as a water-retention basin for the flood-prone site, it also cools the microclimate through evaporation and airflow across its surface. Mechanical systems are integrated discreetly within floors and perimeter zones, while the glazing system maximizes daylight, lowering daytime energy demand.

Lighting & Night Presence

Energy-efficient LEDs embedded within the diagrid provide soft, indirect illumination without visible fixtures. Externally, calibrated lighting reflects across the lake and maintains the mosque's atmospheric nocturnal presence while minimizing light pollution.

Water, Landscape & Ecology

The lake captures seasonal runoff and supports irrigation, reducing dependence on external water sources. Native planting stabilizes the shoreline, while pedestrian bridges and shaded paths connect the mosque to the parkland as part of an integrated ecological system.

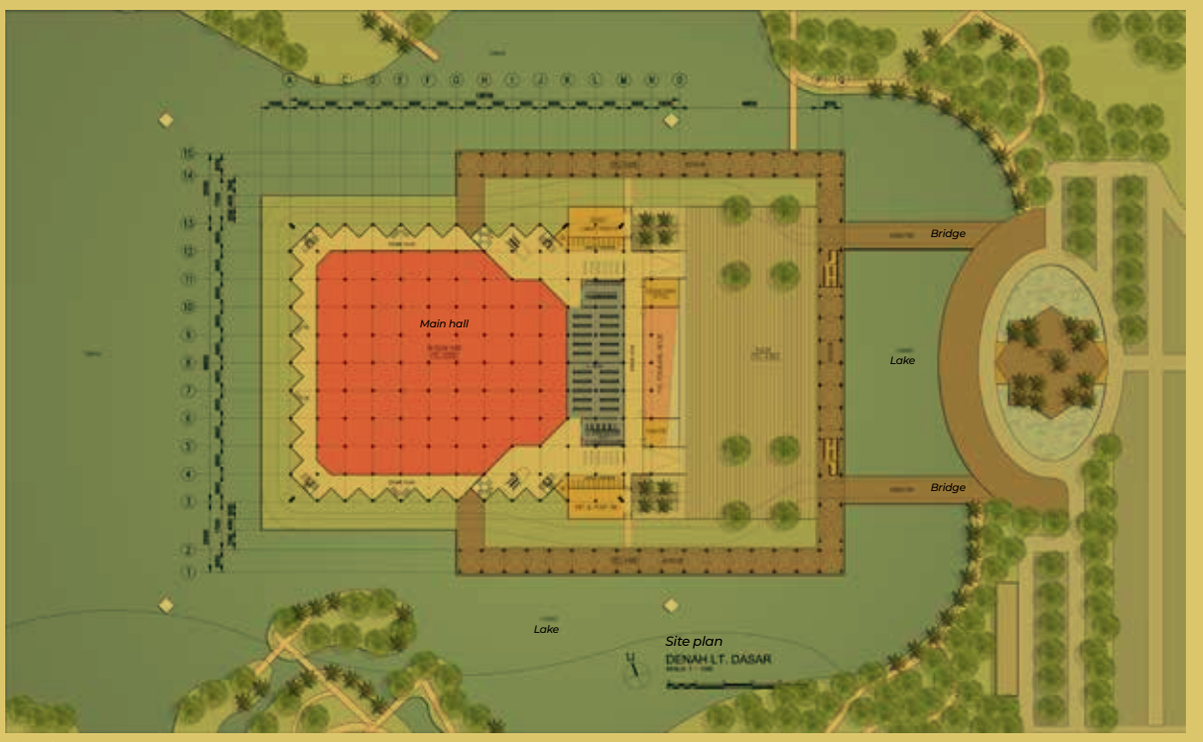
Durability & Maintenance

The modular nature of the diagrid and its glass panels allows individual components to be replaced without extensive intervention. Service routes and drainage systems are embedded within berms and lower levels to ensure long-term maintainability.

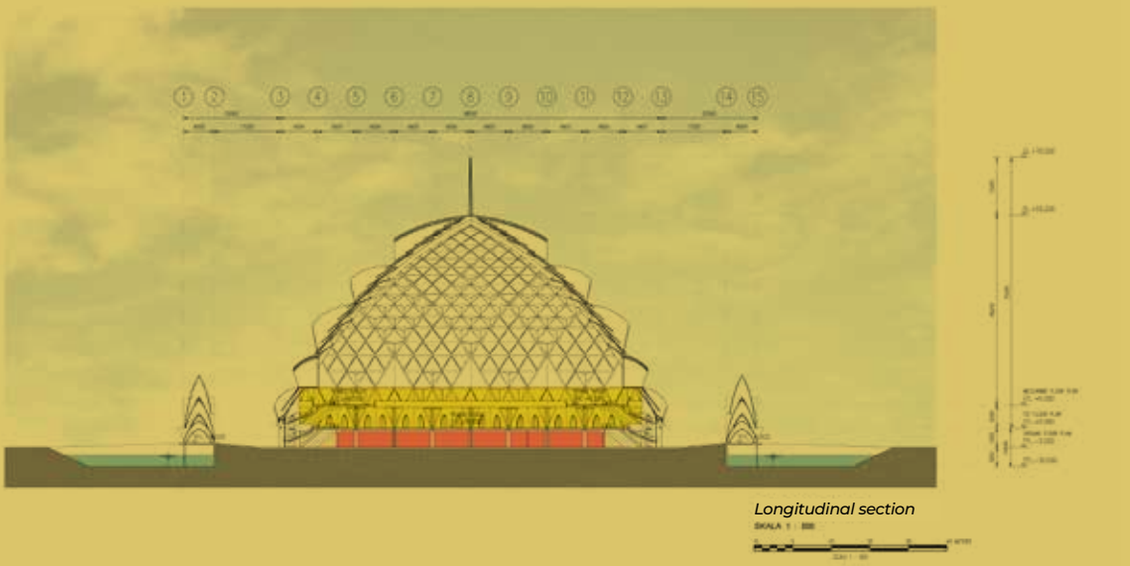
Sustainability Ethos

Sustainability emerges not from high-tech display but from coherent integration: landscape as infrastructure, envelope as environmental filter, and structure as long-term resilience. The result is a mosque where environmental intelligence and architectural clarity reinforce one another.

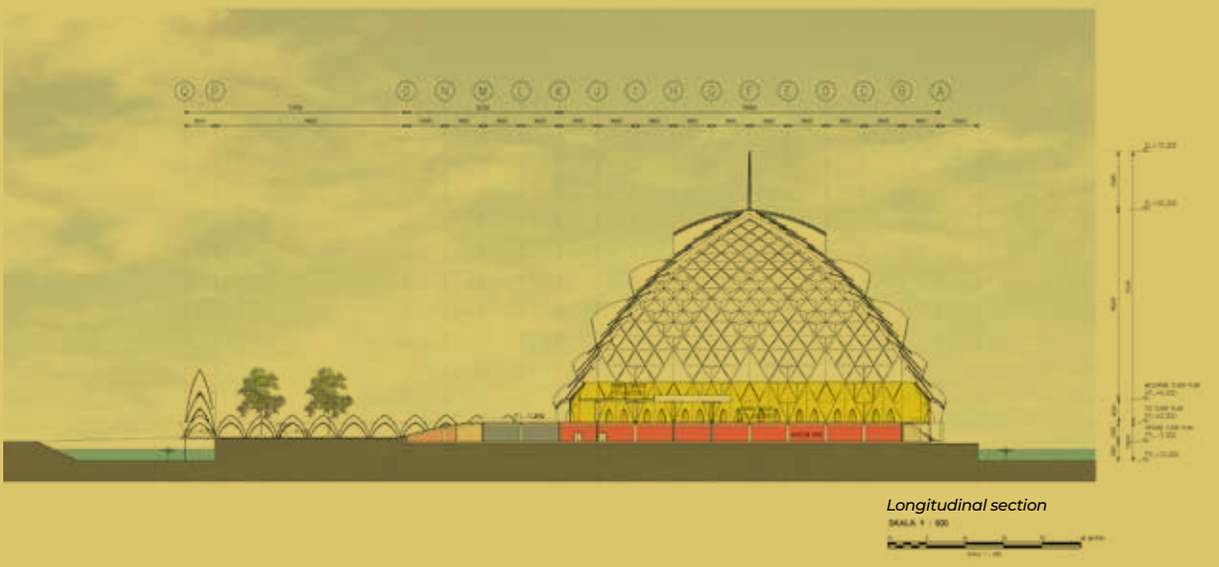
1. *Prayer hall from the opposite side of the lake.*



Site plan

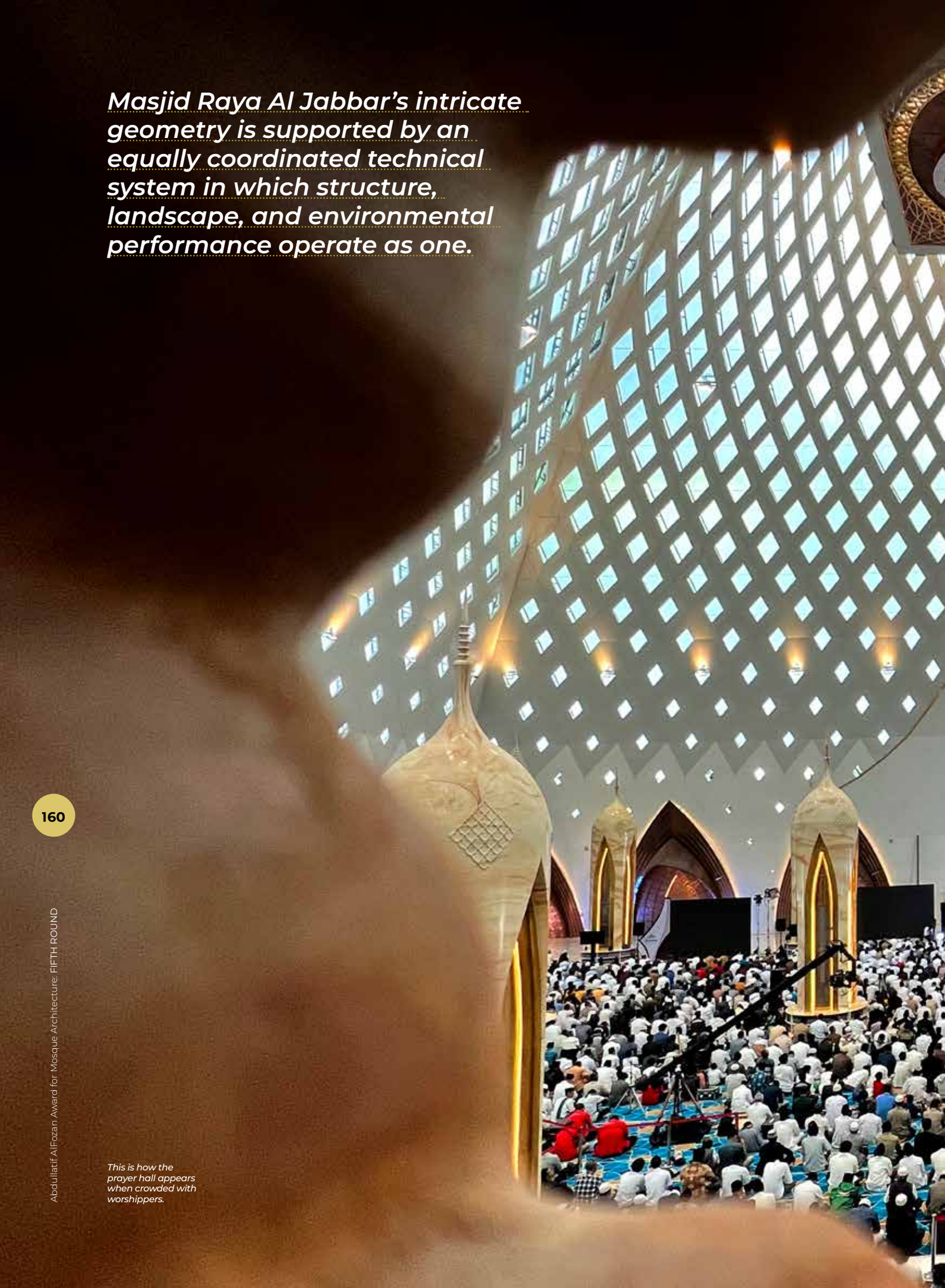


Longitudinal section



Longitudinal section

Masjid Raya Al Jabbar's intricate geometry is supported by an equally coordinated technical system in which structure, landscape, and environmental performance operate as one.



This is how the prayer hall appears when crowded with worshippers.

1

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

Masjid Raya Al Jabbar has rapidly become more than a religious building: it acts as a civic catalyst for a district still forming its identity. Its elevated presence above the lake, pedestrian walkways, and landscaped berms turn the surrounding grounds into a public park used daily for walking, gathering, and photography, expanding the mosque's reach beyond prayer hours.

Civic and Urban Role

By anchoring the new provincial complex and drawing visitors from Bandung and West Java, the mosque functions as a landmark of regional pride. The lake, bridges, and terraced landscape create a slow, ceremonial approach that encourages reflection and heightens the sense of arrival. Even outside prayer times, families and students occupy the grounds, turning the site into a shared civic realm.

Inclusivity, Access & Community Use

Ramps, wide terraces, and multiple access points help accommodate the large crowds the mosque attracts, despite the challenging topography. The women's prayer area—though positioned on the upper level—is spatially dignified and visually connected to the main volume through consistent light and materiality. The plaza and shaded platforms support informal teaching circles, Qur'an study groups, and school visits.

Cultural Programming & Identity

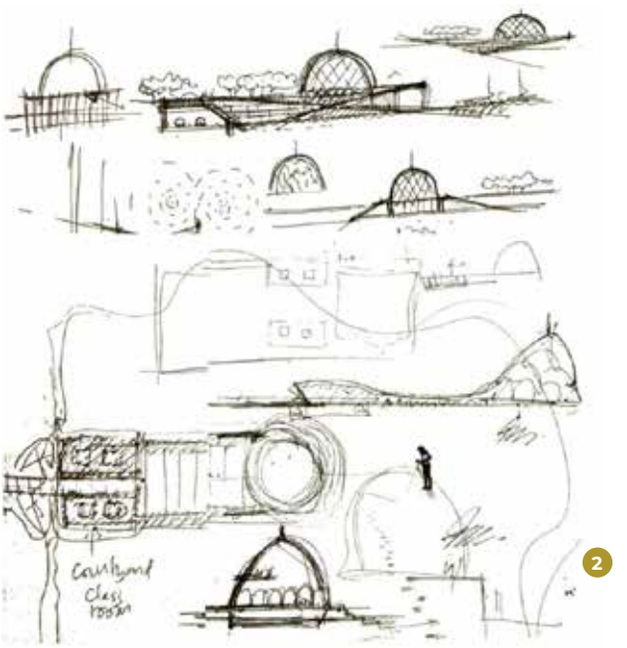
The mosque frequently hosts religious lectures, Ramadan events, and community gatherings, reinforcing its role as a cultural nucleus. Its bold geometry and photographic appeal have made it a symbol of contemporary Islamic identity in West Java—particularly among youth—turning it into a point of recognition and social connection.

Charity and Everyday Life

Facilities for ablution, rest areas, and shaded outdoor platforms help accommodate large crowds during Friday prayers and peak religious seasons. The mosque's committees organize food distribution and charitable activities, extending its role as a support structure for vulnerable groups in the province.

Social Meaning

The mosque succeeds by offering both spectacle and accessibility. It is monumental yet approachable, futuristic in form yet rooted in collective use. Its social value lies not only in the building itself but in the way it redefines its landscape into a democratic, open public domain—where religious practice, leisure, and civic life intersect naturally.



2

3

1. *The external passage enhances the monumental character of the mosque.*

2. *Preliminary drawings showing the evolution of the building concept.*

3. *The mosque's area represents an active social space.*

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

Masjid Raya Al Jabbar is an unmistakably ambitious undertaking—monumental in scale, visually assertive, and conceived as a new spiritual landmark for West Java. Its faceted dome and four soaring minarets establish an identity that resonates beyond Bandung, positioning the mosque within a global lineage of monumental contemporary mosques that includes the Faisal Mosque in Islamabad and other late-modern national mosques whose scale becomes part of their cultural messaging.

Yet this ambition comes with a set of architectural tensions that sharpen the project's significance.

The crystalline shell—composed of hundreds of triangulated panels—relies on a level of structural and computational complexity rarely found in mosque architecture. Its construction depends on advanced digital modeling, parametric coordination, and BIM-driven assembly to reconcile geometry, glazing, waterproofing, and structural load paths. This technological dependence makes the project distinctly contemporary, but also raises questions about long-term maintenance and the accessibility of such methods within broader Indonesian mosque-building traditions.

The interior inherits both the strengths and constraints of this complexity. While the vast prayer hall achieves an impressive sense of openness and scale, the geometric ambition introduces a certain rigidity to spatial sequencing and circulation. Movement is concentrated along elevated bridges and controlled paths, creating a ceremonial procession but limiting the ease and informality often associated with everyday mosque use. Similarly, the positioning of the women's prayer hall—though dignified and visually connected—still reads as spatially subordinate when the plan is read critically.

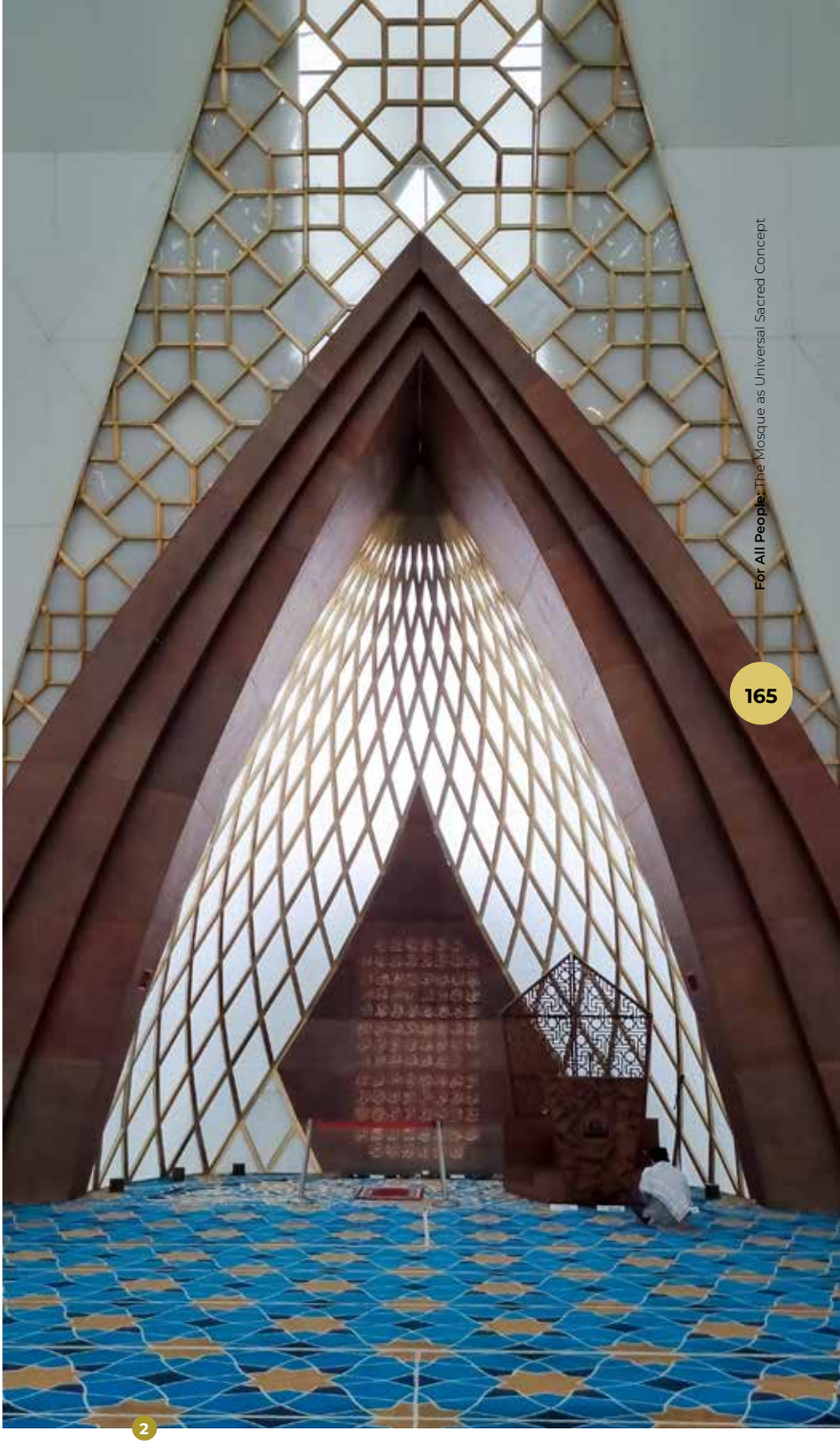
In its urban and civic performance, however, the mosque succeeds more clearly. By transforming a reclaimed site into a lake-park, the project offers Bandung a new public landscape that merges worship with recreation, and sacred presence with civic generosity. This move aligns the mosque with Indonesia's evolving model of the masjid as an open, social anchor rather than a closed devotional object.

Read as a whole, the mosque stands as a bold national statement—technically daring, formally expressive, and culturally aspirational. Its achievements are substantial, yet its contradictions are equally instructive. The project demonstrates that when computational ambition, symbolic form, and civic intent converge, contemporary mosque architecture can advance—though not without grappling with structural complexity, spatial hierarchy, and questions of long-term stewardship.

And while its impact is rooted in Indonesia, its relevance extends well beyond it. Masjid Raya Al Jabbar contributes meaningfully to the broader international discourse on the future of mosque architecture—especially the one articulated and debated through the Al Fozan Award, where design aspects of identity, innovation, inclusivity, and environmental responsibility continue to shape global expectations. In this balance between ambition and challenge, the mosque becomes not only a milestone in Indonesia's architectural trajectory, but also a noteworthy reference point in the evolving vocabulary of contemporary mosque design worldwide.

1

1

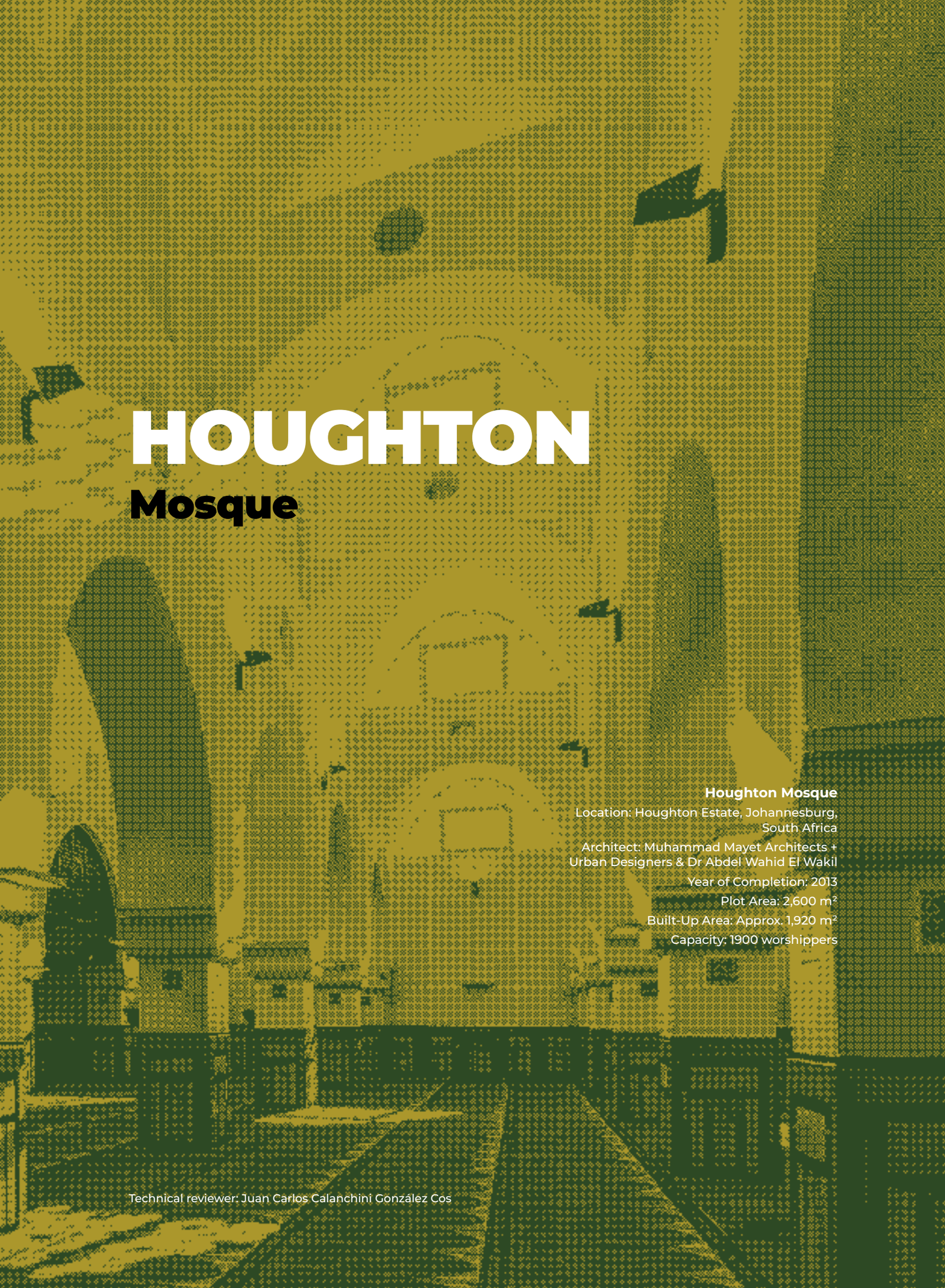


2

1. *Details of the prayer hall massing from the exterior.*

2. *The mihrab consists of successive arches terminating in a glazed surface.*

FORM THAT LEADS
TO MEANING



HOUGHTON
Mosque

Houghton Mosque

Location: Houghton Estate, Johannesburg, South Africa

Architect: Muhammad Mayet Architects + Urban Designers & Dr Abdel Wahid El Wakil

Year of Completion: 2013

Plot Area: 2,600 m^2

Built-Up Area: Approx. 1,920 m^2

Capacity: 1900 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Juan Carlos Calanchini González Cos

The Houghton Mosque, completed in 2013 and located on West Street in Johannesburg's Houghton Estate, occupies a distinctive position within one of the city's most historically layered suburbs. Commissioned by the Houghton Muslim Trust and designed by Muhammad Mayet Architects + Urban Designers, the mosque introduces a calm white landmark into a neighborhood long associated with Johannesburg's cultural elites and now marked by increasing demographic diversity.

Set on a 2,600 m² plot, the mosque accommodates nearly 2,000 worshippers and is organized around a hypostyle prayer hall, a glazed courtyard, a mezzanine women's area, and two slender minarets that frame its profile. While rooted in Islamic architectural principles—vaults in load-bearing brick, a dome above the mihrab, and a sequence of layered thresholds—the design interprets these forms with contemporary clarity, material restraint, and a sensitivity to Johannesburg's climate.

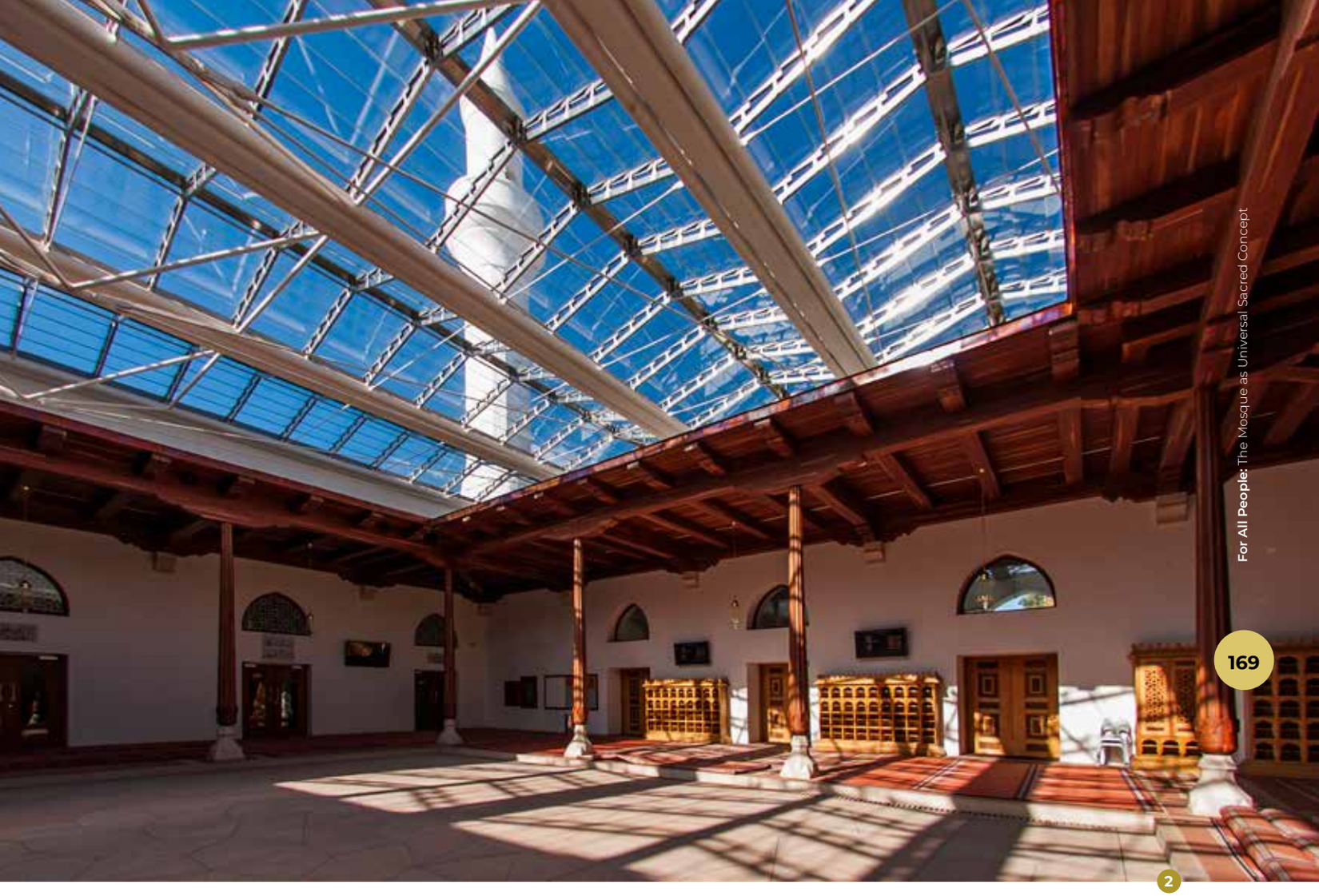
In its early design stages, the project benefited from the involvement of Dr Abdel Wahid El Wakil, whose longstanding contribution to the revival of Islamic architectural principles provided an intellectual and conceptual foundation for the work. His collaboration with Muhammad Mayet Architects + Urban Designers rooted the project within a lineage of traditional craftsmanship, proportion, and masonry-based construction that continues to define Dr. El Wakil's oeuvre.

Its presence in Houghton Estate is socially resonant. Once an exclusively white and predominantly Jewish suburb under apartheid, the area has undergone significant transformation. Within this shifting context, the mosque serves as both a spiritual centre and a civic gesture, asserting the visibility of a growing Muslim community and participating in the broader narrative of post-apartheid urban change.

Architecturally, the project stands out for its structural intelligence and material authenticity. The catenary brick vaults of the prayer hall, the tempered light of the glazed courtyard, and the measured verticality of the dome and minarets establish a coherent and dignified spatial language. Beyond daily prayer, the mosque hosts educational and communal activities, reinforcing its role as a neighbourhood anchor.

In this way, the Houghton Mosque offers a compelling example of contemporary Islamic architecture in South Africa: restrained, contextually grounded, and socially engaged — a project where structure, climate responsiveness, and community presence are brought into a unified architectural narrative.

1



2

ARCHITECTURAL CONCEPT AND DESIGN INTENT

The architectural concept of the Houghton Mosque rests on a synthesis of classical Islamic spatial principles and Johannesburg's contemporary climatic and urban conditions. In developing the project, Muhammad Mayet Architects + Urban Designers worked within a design language refined over decades by Dr El Wakil. His long-cultivated approach to proportion, load-bearing masonry and spatial progression forms the intellectual backbone of the mosque, grounding it in an established architectural lineage while Mayet's contextual sensitivity helps situate the mosque within Johannesburg's setting.

At the heart of the building lies a sequence of catenary brick vaults built entirely in compression. Arranged in rhythmic bays aligned with the qibla, they define the prayer hall's atmosphere—modulating light, softening acoustics and guiding attention toward the dome above the mihrab, which forms the spatial and symbolic culmination of the interior.

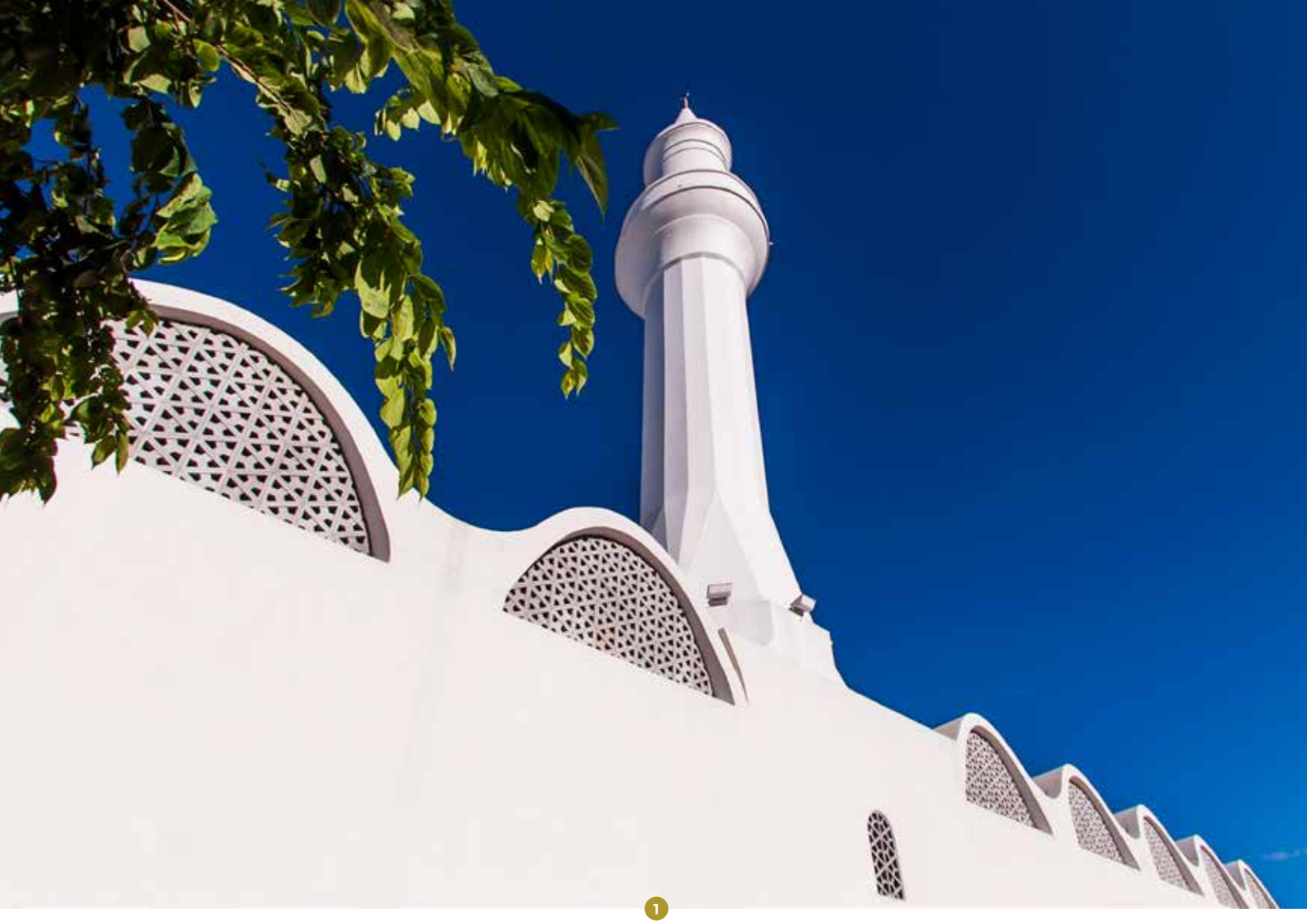
The glazed courtyard functions as the mosque's climatic and symbolic "lung." Framed by hardwood columns and carved timber details, it mediates Johannesburg's highveld sunlight and draws air through the building, forming a transition from the city's intensity into the stillness of the prayer hall.

Externally, the mosque's white, undulating silhouette and slender minarets establish a dignified presence without overwhelming the neighbourhood. Ornamentation is minimal. Instead, the project relies on proportion, repetition and material sincerity—sandstone, brick and timber used with restraint—to create an architecture where, in Mayet's words, "form follows ritual, and light reveals meaning."

Ultimately, the mosque's concept engages craft and climate within a familiar and well-established architectural language. It is a building that 'breathes', both through its passive ventilation system and through a spatial clarity that supports collective presence and contemplative movement.

1. *Mihrab.*

1. *The glazed inner courtyard, considered an extension of the prayer hall.*



1

URBAN INTEGRATION

The Houghton Mosque occupies a layered urban setting at the edge of Johannesburg's Houghton Estate, between the M1 motorway and a network of jacaranda-lined residential streets. This position places the building between infrastructural intensity and suburban calm, a duality that shapes its presence in the neighborhood.

From West Street and the Munro Drive viewpoint, the mosque appears as a quiet white silhouette embedded in greenery. Its scale and restraint allow it to register as a landmark without overwhelming its surroundings—an architectural posture consistent with the inherited language of Dr El Wakil, which emphasizes dignity and coherence over overt contextual engagement.

Lower Houghton's social history adds significance to the project. Once an exclusively white and predominantly Jewish suburb under apartheid, it has gradually become more diverse. The mosque's presence reflects this shift, marking a growing Muslim community within the northern suburbs and extending the area's tradition of religious institutions into a new demographic chapter.

Constraints of site size, parking, and motorway proximity limit formal landscape strategies, yet the mosque establishes a measured threshold of calm. Stone elevations, verandahs, and layered transitions soften the move from street to interior, allowing the architecture itself to mediate noise and movement.

Within Johannesburg's wider religious landscape, the Houghton Mosque reads as both landmark and enclave. It contributes a distinctive profile to its context while remaining architecturally rooted in a design tradition developed elsewhere—a characteristic that will invite further reflection in the concluding critique.

2

1. *Relationship between the minaret and the courtyards covered by perforated gypsum screens.*

2. *Mosque courtyard from the exterior.*

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

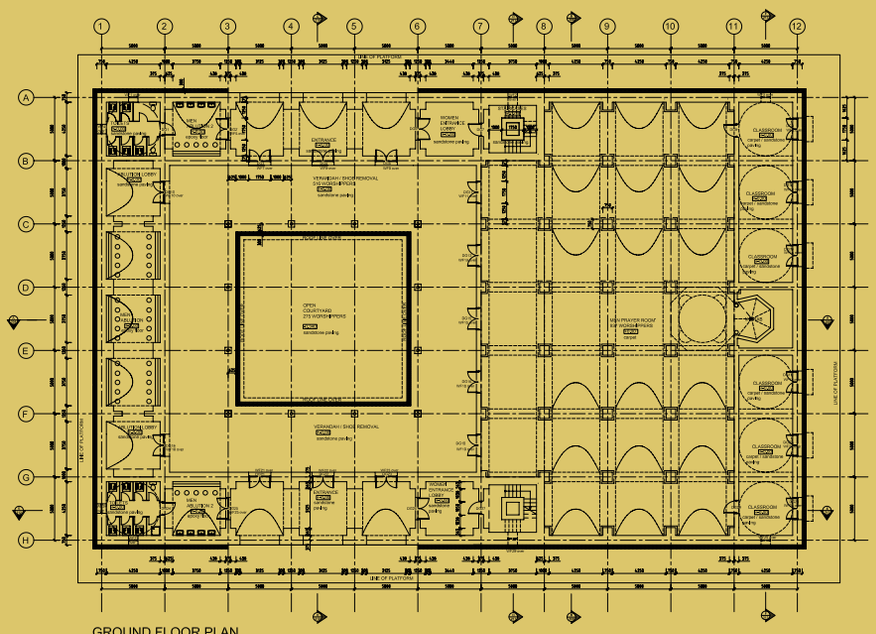
The exterior of the Houghton Mosque is defined by a disciplined architectural language: white, undulating vaults; a restrained dome; and two slender minarets that flank the composition without overpowering it. The building presents itself as a calm, continuous massing, where proportion and structural clarity take precedence over expressive ornament. This echoes the formal vocabulary refined by Dr El Wakil and adopted here with consistency by the local architect.

The vaults form the visual backbone of the exterior. Their stepped rhythm gives the mosque a distinct silhouette that is visible from the M1 motorway and nearby viewpoints, yet their scale remains measured, allowing the building to sit comfortably within the suburban fabric. The restrained dome, positioned above the mihrab bay, avoids unnecessary grandeur and aligns with the overall architectural tone: composed, symmetrical and rooted in masonry logic.

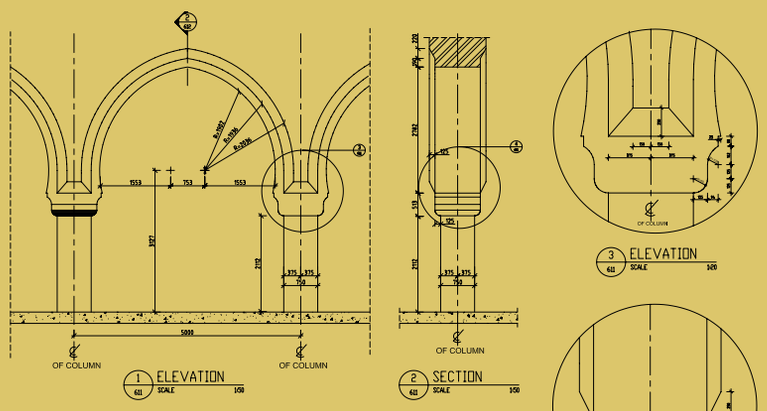
Materially, the exterior relies on white plastered surfaces and sandstone elements, giving the mosque a tactile and luminous presence. The decision to minimize applied ornament further reinforces the project's structural legibility, allowing light, shadow, and massing to articulate the building rather than decorative motifs.

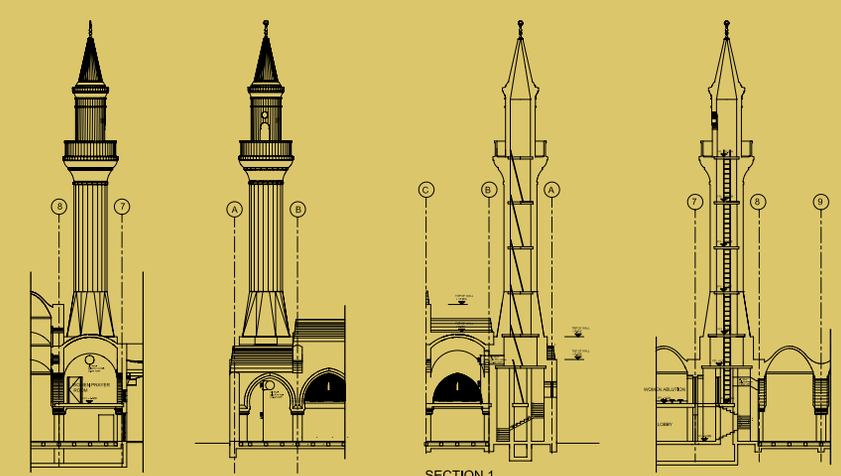
The two minarets, while traditional in their vertical form, maintain proportional discipline. Their placement at the corners of the composition emphasizes balance rather than monumentality. In their height and slenderness, they contribute to the mosque's visibility without disrupting the quiet horizon of Houghton Estate.

Overall, the exterior reflects a cohesive inherited tradition—clear, dignified, and technically sound. It establishes presence without assertiveness, offering a measured architectural expression that prepares the ground for the more intricate interior spatial experience.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



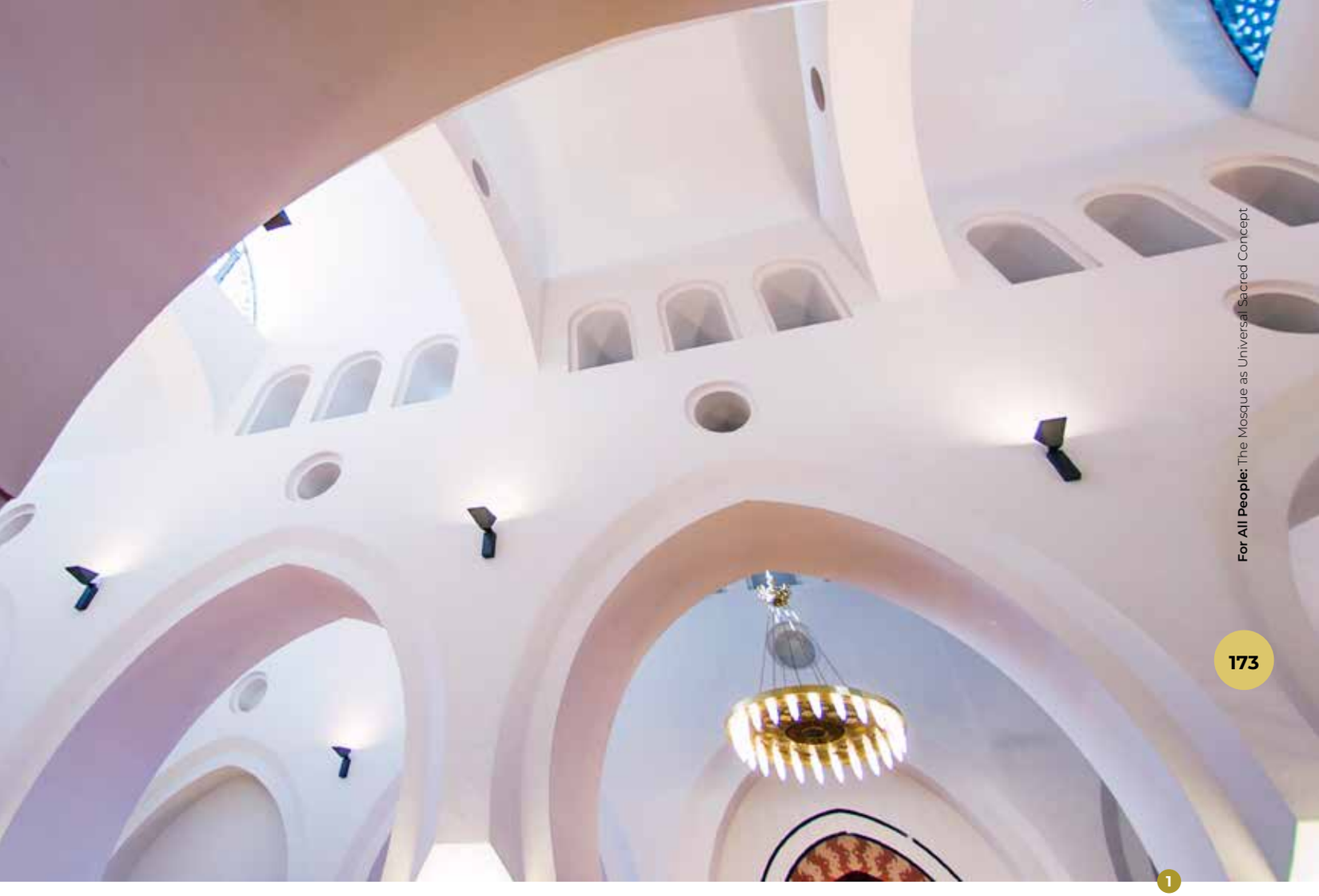


SECTION 4

SECTION 2

SECTION 1

SECTION 3



INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of the Houghton Mosque is defined by a disciplined spatial rhythm shaped by its catenary brick vaults. Built entirely in compression, these vaults create a calm, continuous field of structure and light, guiding the eye and the body toward the dome above the mihrab. The measured rise of the vaults, their soft acoustics, and the indirect light they gather, together shape the hall's distinctive atmosphere.

Material choices reinforce this sense of restraint. Below eye level, sandstone and wool carpeting provide warmth and tactility; above, the white plastered vaults introduce clarity and quietness. The absence of applied ornament keeps the focus on proportion, geometry, and the inherent expressiveness of masonry — a hallmark of the architectural lineage informing this project.

The dome above the mihrab acts as the spatial crescendo of the interior, not through spectacle, but through a calibrated increase in height and light. Its relationship to the vaults maintains continuity rather than contrast, preserving the building's internal coherence.

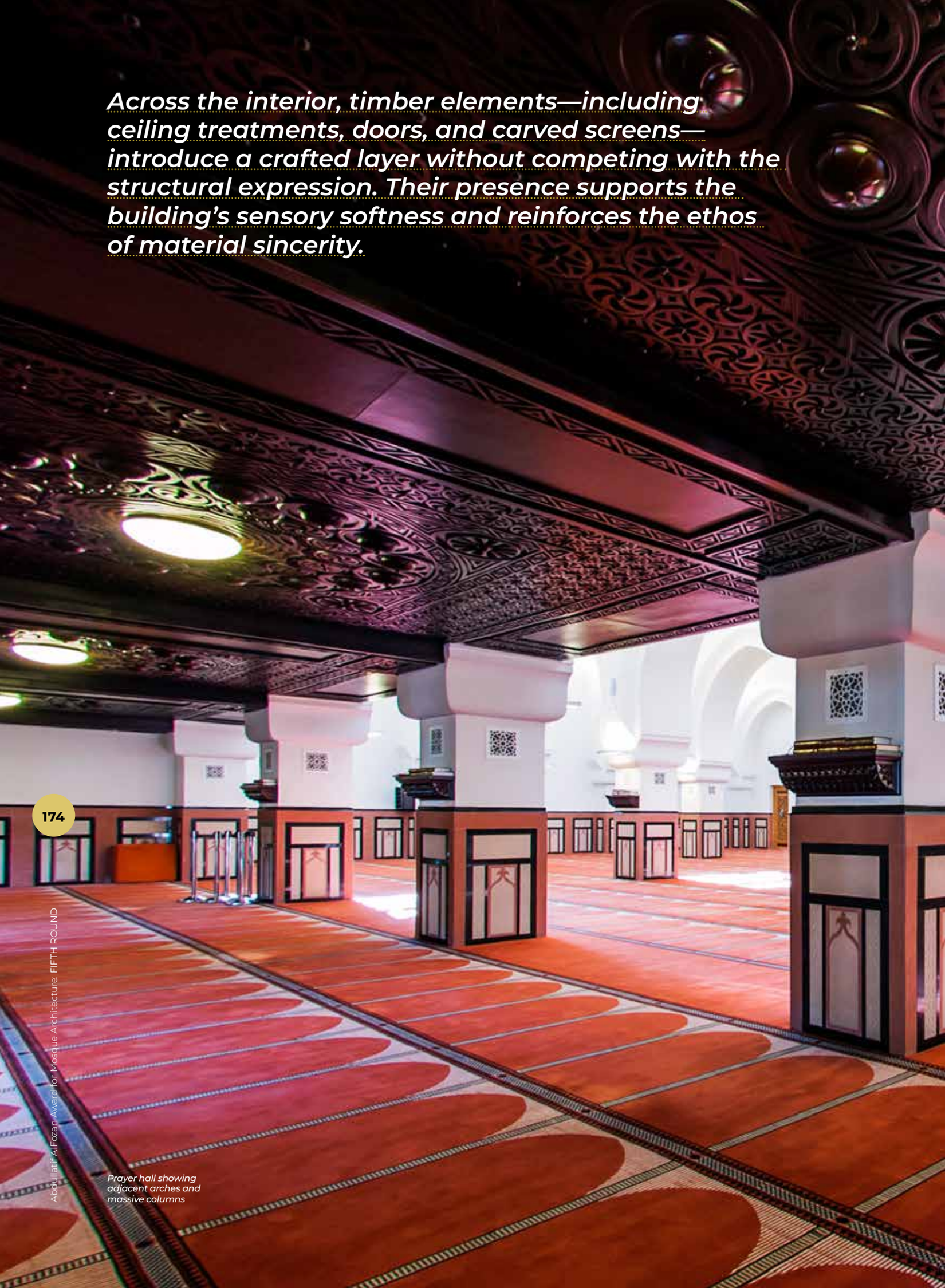
The women's prayer area, set on a mezzanine overlooking the main hall, adopts the same structural language and benefits from mashrabiyya screens that balance privacy with visual and acoustic connection. Though more modest in its detailing, the space maintains the overall architectural tone of filtered light and measured enclosure.

Across the interior, timber elements—including ceiling treatments, doors, and carved screens—introduce a crafted layer without competing with the structural expression. Their presence supports the building's sensory softness and reinforces the ethos of material sincerity.

Taken together, the interior presents a unified environment shaped by structural logic, acoustic calm, and spatial progression. It is a space of coherence and composure, defined less by ornament and more by the disciplined application of an inherited architectural vocabulary and syntax.

1. *This is how the prayer hall details appear when looking upward.*

Across the interior, timber elements—including ceiling treatments, doors, and carved screens—introduce a crafted layer without competing with the structural expression. Their presence supports the building's sensory softness and reinforces the ethos of material sincerity.



Prayer hall showing adjacent arches and massive columns

1

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

The Houghton Mosque serves not only as a place of prayer but also as a modest, yet active, community anchor within its neighborhood. Its internal clarity and measured spatial organization support daily worship, Jumuʿah gatherings, and small educational programs held in the classroom adjacent to the men's prayer hall. Although limited in scale, these functions strengthen intergenerational continuity and embed the mosque in the everyday life of its congregation.

The building's flexibility became most evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when it was temporarily adapted into a vaccination centre. This transformation—welcoming Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Hindus alike—illustrated the mosque's capacity to serve broader civic needs and demonstrated a spirit of openness that exceeds the building's formal program.

Within the social fabric of Lower Houghton, the mosque reflects and reinforces an evolving demographic landscape. Its presence signals the growing visibility of Muslim communities in Johannesburg's northern suburbs, while its architectural restraint allows it to coexist comfortably with the area's residential character and longstanding religious institutions.

At the same time, certain inequalities persist within the mosque's internal distribution of space. While the women's prayer hall offers dignity and visual connection through its mashrabiyya screens, its ablution facilities and general detailing remain more modest than the men's areas—a discrepancy acknowledged by the architect and indicative of broader patterns in mosque design across the region.

Despite these limitations, the Houghton Mosque succeeds in cultivating an atmosphere of welcome, composure, and collective calm. Its social contribution lies not in programmatic expansiveness but in the steady, quiet role it plays as a spiritual refuge and a point of cohesion for a diverse and transitioning urban community.

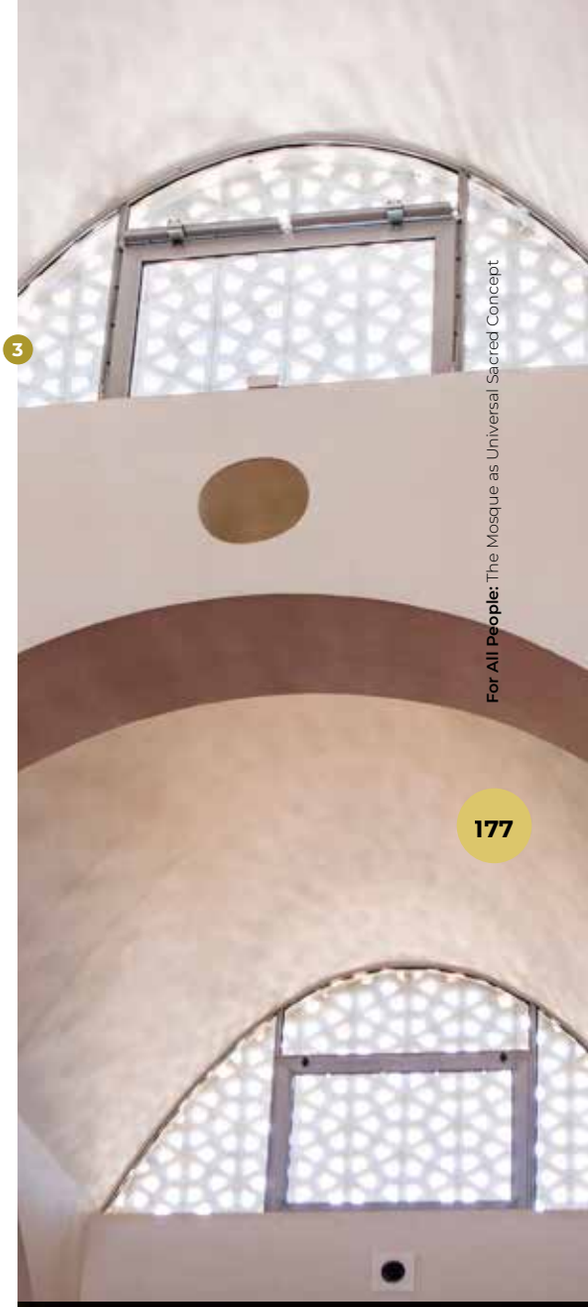
2

1. *The glazed roof of the mosque courtyard connects interior and exterior in a surreal manner... the minaret silhouette appears through the roof glazing.*

2. *Formation of the dome and successive courtyards covered by perforated gypsum screens.*

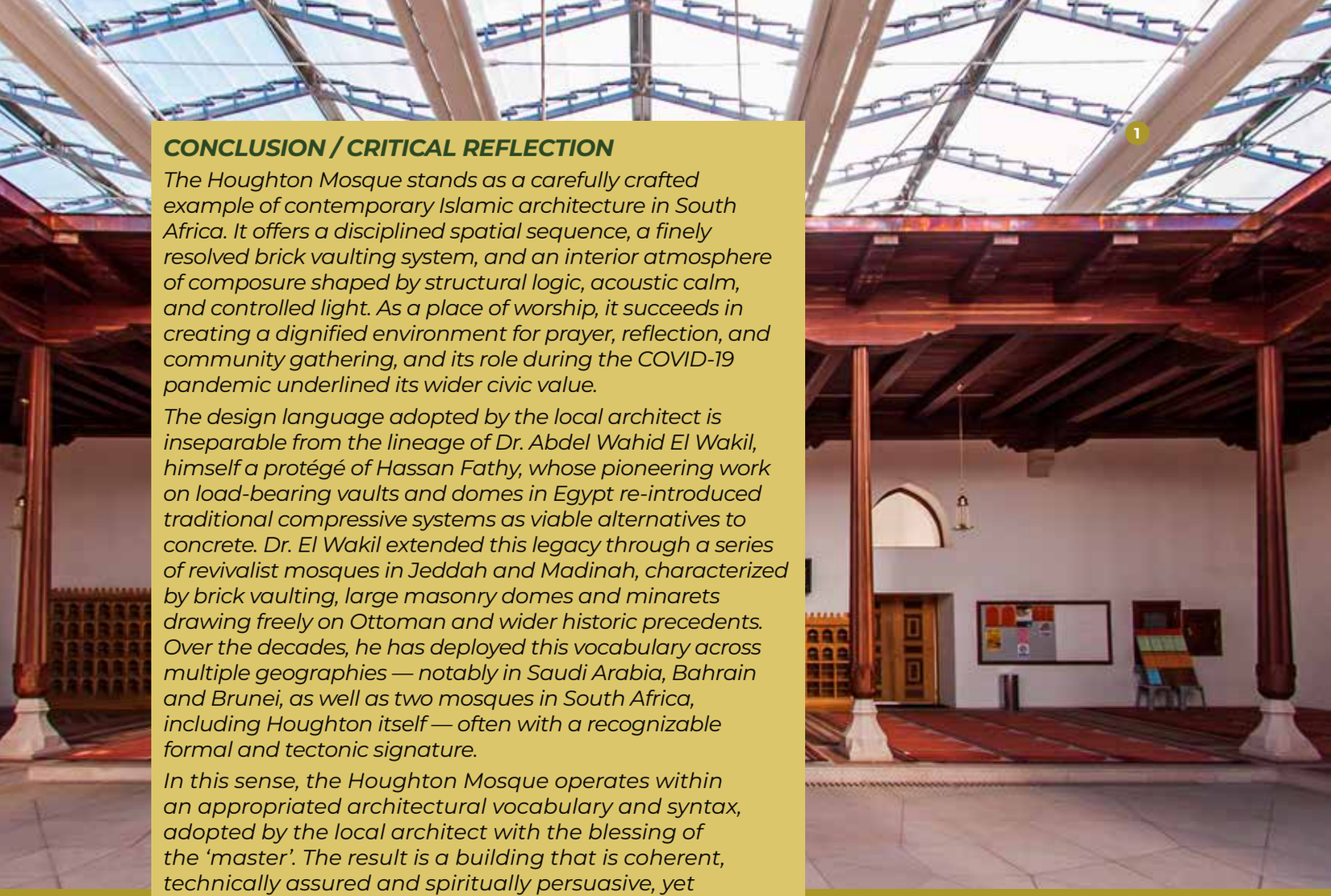
3. *Roof details.*

4. *Mihrab.*



3

4



1

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The Houghton Mosque stands as a carefully crafted example of contemporary Islamic architecture in South Africa. It offers a disciplined spatial sequence, a finely resolved brick vaulting system, and an interior atmosphere of composure shaped by structural logic, acoustic calm, and controlled light. As a place of worship, it succeeds in creating a dignified environment for prayer, reflection, and community gathering, and its role during the COVID-19 pandemic underlined its wider civic value.

The design language adopted by the local architect is inseparable from the lineage of Dr. Abdel Wahid El Wakil, himself a protégé of Hassan Fathy, whose pioneering work on load-bearing vaults and domes in Egypt re-introduced traditional compressive systems as viable alternatives to concrete. Dr. El Wakil extended this legacy through a series of revivalist mosques in Jeddah and Madinah, characterized by brick vaulting, large masonry domes and minarets drawing freely on Ottoman and wider historic precedents. Over the decades, he has deployed this vocabulary across multiple geographies — notably in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Brunei, as well as two mosques in South Africa, including Houghton itself — often with a recognizable formal and tectonic signature.

In this sense, the Houghton Mosque operates within an appropriated architectural vocabulary and syntax, adopted by the local architect with the blessing of the 'master'. The result is a building that is coherent, technically assured and spiritually persuasive, yet architecturally anchored in a tradition formulated elsewhere. While the project engages Johannesburg's climate through its passive ventilation and courtyard strategies, its deeper formal and symbolic language largely bypasses the specific cultural and historical layers of South Africa's own architectural narratives.

One might have hoped for more experimental inflections in the design — subtle shifts in form, detail or spatial emphasis that would speak more directly to the place, its post-apartheid history, and the lived experience of a South African Muslim community. Such gestures could have begun to weave the inherited canon into a more locally-grounded architectural voice, rather than allowing the 'imported' language to settle almost intact at the southern edge of the continent.

Even so, the Houghton Mosque remains a beautiful and thoughtful work. Its quiet vaults, measured dome, and crafted interiors offer a setting of real serenity and presence. As it stands, the project is both an accomplished continuation of Dr. El Wakil's architectural lineage and a reminder of the unfinished task: to translate that powerful tradition into forms that are not only Islamic and timeless, but also unmistakably of Johannesburg, of South Africa, and of this particular historical moment.

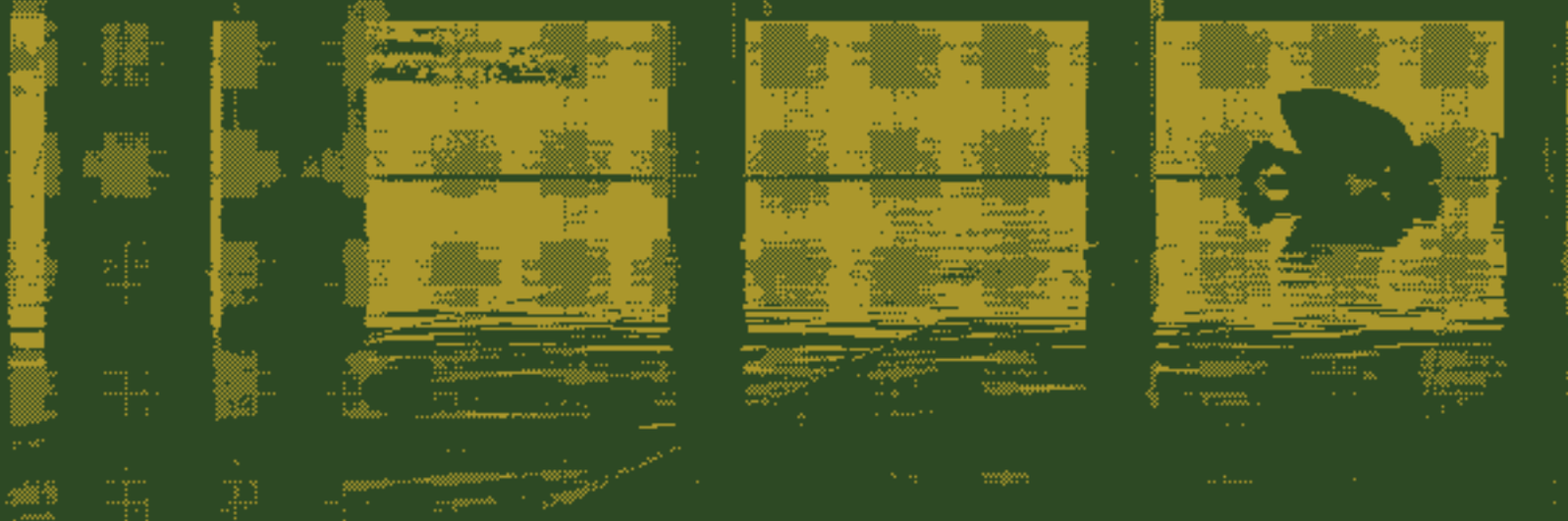
2

1. *Mosque courtyard (sahn)..*

2. *A portion of the prayer hall interior.*

3. *Relationship between the minaret and the undulating courtyards forming the key element of the mosque façade.*

VISUAL ELEGANCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL HARMONY



NURUL YAQIN
Mosque

Nurul Yaqin Mosque
Location: Palu City, Indonesia
Architect: Dave Orlando, Fandy Gunawan
Year of Completion: 2022
Plot Area: 2220 m^2
Built-Up Area: Approx. 290 m^2
Capacity: 232 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Aya Musmar

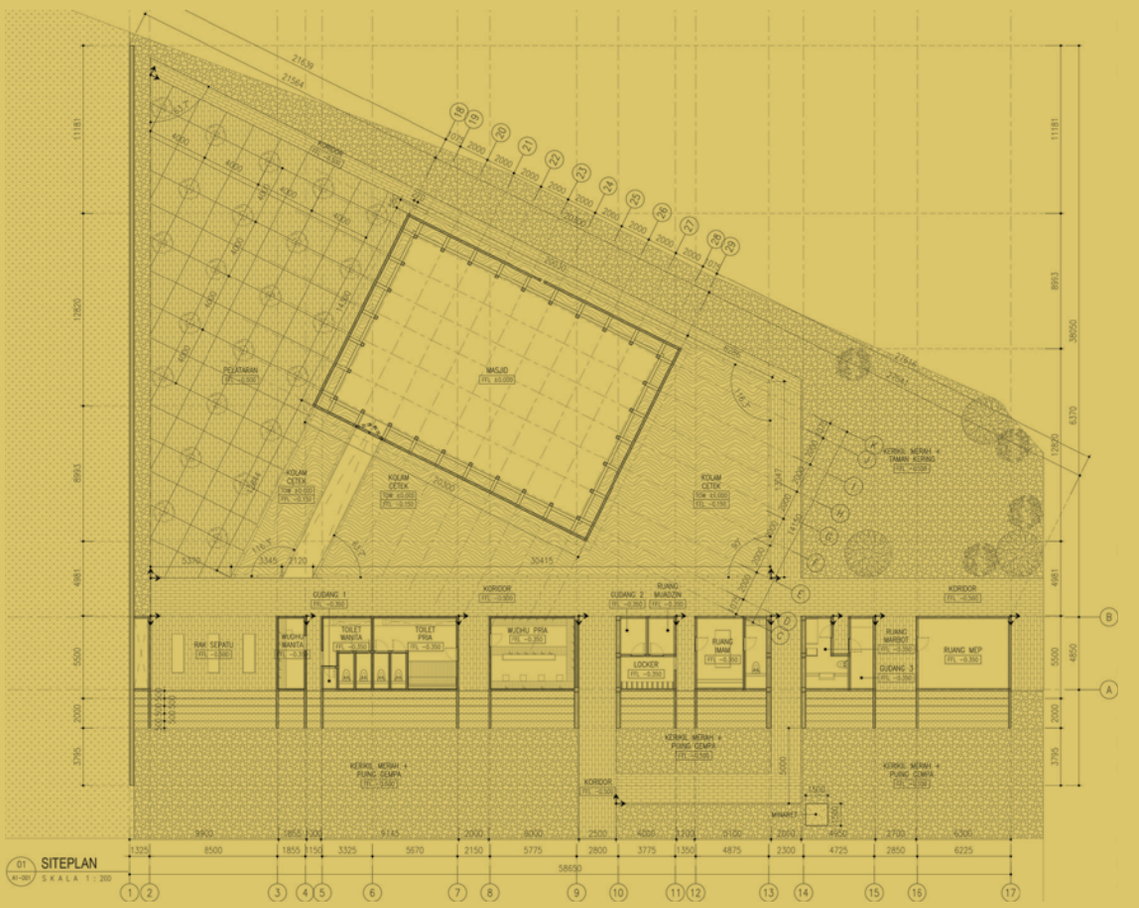
Nurul Yaqin Mosque is located in Palu City, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, on the coastal edge of Kelurahan Mamboro in the Palu Utara District. The mosque occupies a liminal site between land and sea, directly overlooking Palu Bay while addressing a rapidly transforming urban corridor defined by residential neighborhoods, infrastructure, and regional transport routes. This dual orientation—toward the ocean and toward the city—positions the mosque simultaneously as a coastal marker and a civic anchor.

The project was designed by Dave Orlando and Fandy Gunawan, Jakarta-based architects whose approach draws on contemporary minimalist architectural thinking. The mosque was completed in the aftermath of the 2018 Palu earthquake and tsunami, an event that profoundly reshaped both the physical and psychological landscape of the city. Within this context, Nurul Yaqin Mosque was conceived as a continuation—and replacement—of an earlier mosque bearing the same name located across the street, which had been severely damaged and rendered unusable by the disaster.

Beyond its functional role, the mosque emerged within a broader atmosphere of post-disaster recovery, where religious architecture assumed an amplified symbolic and social role. For a predominantly Muslim population, the reconstruction of a mosque was not merely a matter of replacing a building, but of re-establishing continuity, collective presence, and spatial confidence in a city marked by loss and rupture.

At the same time, the project reflects an intentional departure from conventional mosque imagery. Rather than relying on overt historical references or monumental symbolism, the architects pursued an architectural language of restraint-favoring clarity of form, openness to landscape, and material sobriety. This stance situates Nurul Yaqin Mosque within contemporary debates on mosque architecture in Indonesia, where questions of identity, memory, modernity, and resilience intersect.

1



2

URBAN INTEGRATION

Nurul Yaqin Mosque is located along the coastal edge of Palu City, overlooking Palu Bay while addressing a developing urban corridor that includes residential areas and regional transport infrastructure. This position places the mosque at a clear threshold between land and sea, giving it both civic visibility and environmental exposure.

The surrounding urban fabric remains fragmented, reflecting Palu's post-disaster condition and incremental growth. Rather than imposing order on this context, the mosque establishes itself as a stable point of orientation, legible from both the city and the water, yet restrained in scale and presence.

Its proximity to the coastline carries ecological and symbolic significance. Palu Bay's fragile marine environment heightens the sensitivity of the site, while the open relationship with water, horizon, and sky allows the landscape to remain an active component of the mosque's spatial experience.

1. *A portion of the prayer hall interior space.*

2. *Site plan.*

The siting also responds implicitly to the memory of the 2018 tsunami. Without resorting to explicit memorial gestures, the elevated prayer hall, surrounding water surfaces, and open visual connections suggest a cautious negotiation with ground and sea, balancing presence with awareness of risk.

Replacing the prayer function of an older mosque across the street that was damaged by the disaster, the new mosque subtly shifts the center of religious life toward a more exposed yet symbolically charged position. In doing so, it redefines its role within the neighborhood, functioning not only as a place of worship but also as a shared landmark between community, infrastructure, and landscape.

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The exterior of Nurul Yaqin Mosque is defined by a language of deliberate restraint. The building adopts a clear geometric form with a low and controlled profile, avoiding monumentality while maintaining a distinct civic presence. Its rectilinear plan and flat roof establish a calm and grounded silhouette that contrasts with the fluid natural landscape of sea and horizon without asserting dominance over it.

Vertical façade panels wrap the building on all sides, acting as an environmental filter and an architectural screen. These elements moderate light, ventilation, and views, while maintaining visual coherence and privacy. The panels are intentionally lifted above ground level, creating a continuous horizontal gap that lightens the mass and reinforces the mosque's openness to its surroundings.

Material choices emphasize durability and simplicity. Exposed concrete, brick, and muted finishes respond to the coastal climate and post-disaster context, while blue-toned surfaces and surrounding water subtly extend the presence of the sea into the architectural composition. This continuity is achieved without literal representation, relying instead on spatial and material resonance.

Traditional mosque elements are present but deliberately reinterpreted. The absence of a dome shifts emphasis toward horizontality and spatial openness, while the minaret appears as a modest, freestanding marker crowned with the word "Allah." Calligraphy is integrated with restraint, appearing primarily within stainless-steel ventilation elements that combine environmental performance with a subdued sacred expression.

The exterior architectural language deliberately avoids reliance on historicized forms or imported stylistic references common in many contemporary mosques in Indonesia. Instead, it presents an abstract, materially grounded expression that privileges climate, site, and collective experience over symbolic display.

Overall, the mosque's exterior balances clarity, humility, and presence. It resists spectacle in favor of an architecture that is legible, composed, and quietly confident, allowing meaning to emerge through proportion, material, and setting rather than overt formal symbolism.

1. *The concrete building mass raised above ground—typical of the region—to allow floodwater to pass unobstructed.*

2. *Prayer hall roof details showing natural light inlets from the edges.*

2

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of Nurul Yaqin Mosque is characterized by clarity, restraint, and a strong relationship with structure. The prayer hall is conceived as a single, legible space where architectural expression emerges from construction logic rather than applied decoration. The absence of visual clutter allows the spatial qualities of light, proportion, and rhythm to take precedence.

A defining feature of the interior is the ribbed concrete roof system, which spans the prayer hall and introduces a gentle spatial cadence. This structural articulation enhances both the acoustic and visual experience of the space, creating a sense of elevation without reliance on a dome. The repetition of vaults establishes order and calm, reinforcing collective focus during prayer.

Beyond its structural role, the parallel ribs of the concrete roof generate a strong directional effect within the prayer hall. Their linear repetition subtly amplifies perspective, drawing the eye and body toward the Qibla. In this reading, the implied vanishing point lies beyond the physical boundaries of the mosque itself, extending the spatial orientation outward, toward distance rather than enclosure.

The relationship between interior and exterior is carefully moderated. The gap between the vertical façade panels and the floor allows filtered light, air, and partial views to enter the prayer hall, maintaining a continuous dialogue with the surrounding landscape while preserving enclosure and concentration. This controlled permeability contributes to a tranquil atmosphere, particularly through visual connections toward the sea.

Interior finishes remain intentionally modest. Blue-toned flooring provides a subtle chromatic anchor, while the mihrab is defined through light and spatial emphasis rather than formal elaboration. The minbar follows the same ethos of restraint, avoiding visual prominence and reinforcing the overall architectural consistency.

Overall, the interior offers a calm and disciplined spatial environment. Through structure, proportion, and controlled permeability, the architecture supports worship not by symbolic excess, but by orienting movement, attention, and perception toward a shared direction and focus.

MASJID NURUL YAQIN

1. The prayer hall is open at the bottom to the exterior.

2. General view of the mosque.

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

The technical and structural systems of Nurul Yaqin Mosque are closely aligned with its architectural intent of clarity, durability, and low maintenance. The building relies on a reinforced concrete structural system, most notably expressed through the ribbed roof composed of parallel folded plates. This system enables a wide-span prayer hall with minimal internal obstruction, while contributing to both acoustic performance and spatial rhythm.

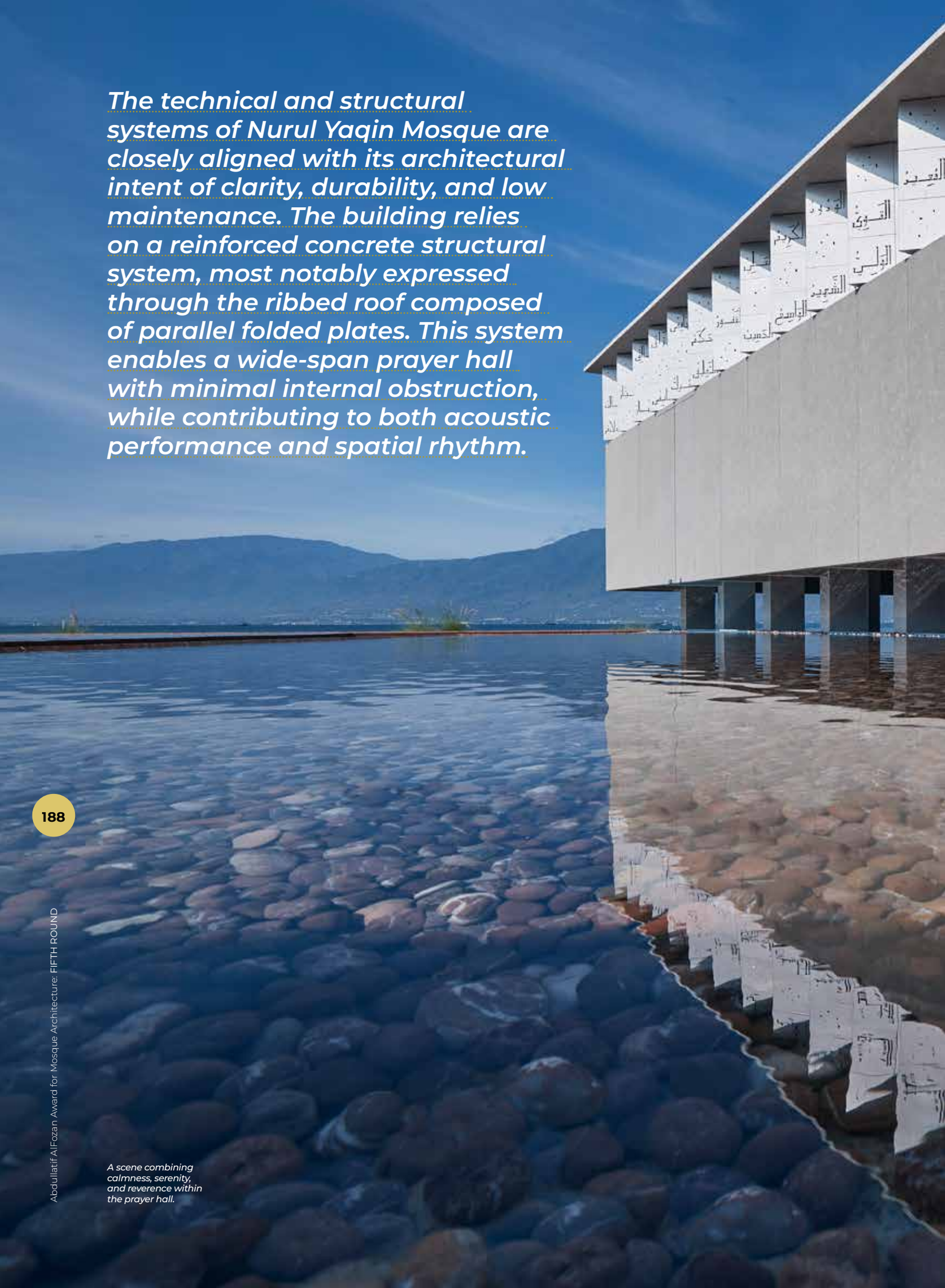
Environmental performance is largely achieved through passive strategies. The mosque benefits from natural ventilation, facilitated by the permeable façade panels and the continuous gap between the panels and the floor, which allows air to circulate freely through the prayer hall. This reduces dependence on mechanical cooling systems and supports comfort in the coastal climate.

Daylighting plays a central role in minimizing energy consumption. Natural light enters through the façade openings and the gaps formed by the structural roof system, creating a soft and evenly distributed interior illumination. Artificial lighting is used sparingly and primarily during evening prayers, complementing rather than replacing daylight.

Water is both a functional and environmental component of the project. Ablution facilities are efficiently organized, and water reservoirs at the rear of the site support daily use, contributing to a degree of operational independence. Surrounding water surfaces also assist in microclimatic cooling while reinforcing the mosque's connection to its coastal setting.

Material choices prioritize robustness and ease of maintenance. Exposed concrete, industrially produced components, and restrained finishes are well suited to the site's environmental conditions and to the realities of long-term upkeep. Sustainability here is approached pragmatically, grounded in durability, passive performance, and community stewardship rather than technological display.

The technical and structural systems of Nurul Yaqin Mosque are closely aligned with its architectural intent of clarity, durability, and low maintenance. The building relies on a reinforced concrete structural system, most notably expressed through the ribbed roof composed of parallel folded plates. This system enables a wide-span prayer hall with minimal internal obstruction, while contributing to both acoustic performance and spatial rhythm.



A scene combining calmness, serenity, and reverence within the prayer hall.

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

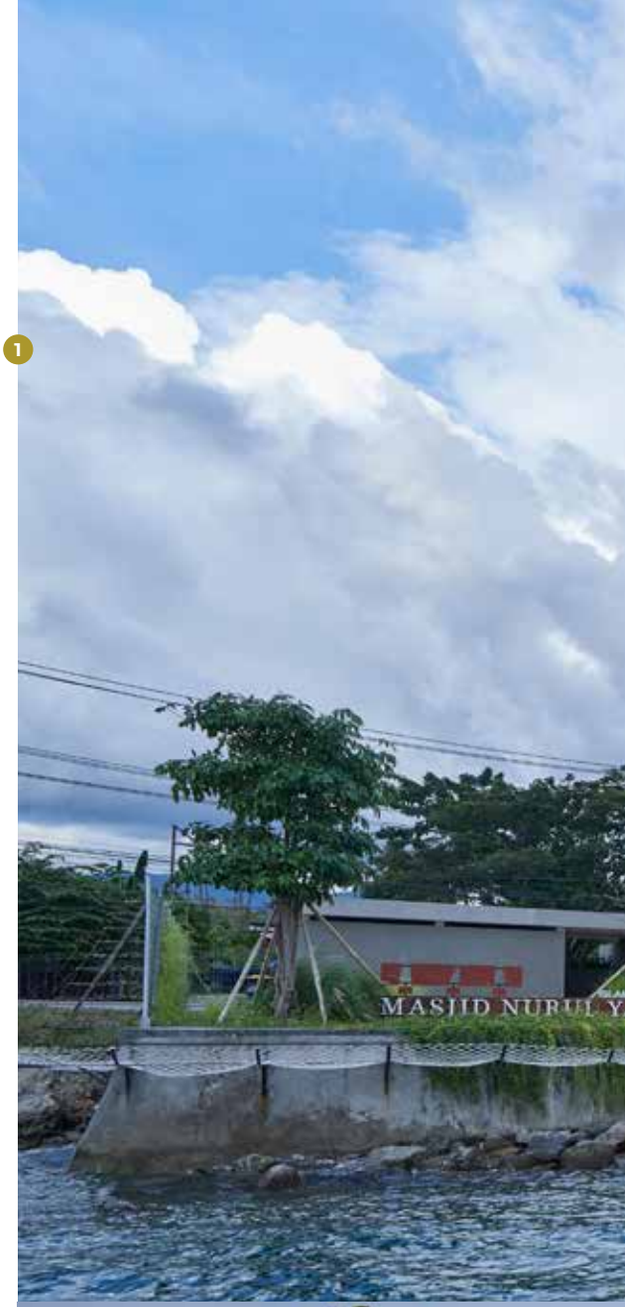
Nurul Yaqin Mosque performs an expanded social role that extends beyond its primary function as a place of worship. Since its completion, it has become a recognizable gathering point for the local community, particularly during religious occasions such as Ramadan and Eid, when the interior and surrounding open spaces accommodate collective prayer, social gatherings, and communal meals.

Accessibility is generally handled with care. The mosque is organized on a single level, allowing ease of movement for the elderly and for worshippers with limited mobility. A ramp provides access to the prayer hall, and circulation paths are clear and legible. Separate entrances and ablution facilities are provided for men and women, reflecting prevailing social norms while maintaining functional clarity.

The women's prayer area is accommodated within the main hall but is defined through temporary partitions. While this approach ensures privacy, it also limits women's access to the broader spatial and visual qualities of the prayer space, particularly views toward the surrounding landscape. This remains one of the areas where social inclusivity could be further developed.

The mosque's open plazas and shaded exterior areas play a significant role in its social life. These spaces allow the building to function as a civic environment, supporting informal gathering, rest, and interaction beyond prescribed prayer times. Community stewardship is evident in the way the mosque is maintained and supervised, reinforcing a strong sense of collective ownership.

Overall, the mosque succeeds in positioning itself as both a religious and social anchor within its neighborhood. Its accessibility, openness, and adaptability allow it to respond to everyday use as well as to moments of collective intensity, strengthening its role within the social fabric of post-disaster Palu.



1. General view combining the mosque mass with the adjacent water surface.

2. This is how the building appears in the evening—its relationship with the water surface is revealed through full reflection, as if in multiple layers.

3. Upper openings in the prayer hall mass appear as natural light collectors.

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

Nurul Yaqin Mosque presents a composed and thoughtful response to its context, one shaped as much by place and circumstance as by architectural intent. Its strength lies not in visual assertion or formal symbolism, but in a careful orchestration of structure, material, and spatial openness that supports worship while remaining grounded in everyday use.

Architecturally, the mosque demonstrates how restraint can operate as a form of clarity. The absence of inherited monumental elements, such as domes or historicized ornament, shifts attention toward proportion, orientation, and environmental responsiveness. In the Indonesian context, where many contemporary mosques draw heavily on architectural vocabularies imported from the wider Islamic world and adapted locally, Nurul Yaqin follows a different trajectory. It does not reject tradition, but it reframes it through abstraction, climate, and site-specific logic rather than through formal quotation.

Several architectural gestures contribute quietly to this stance. Most notably, the lifted façade panels introduce a continuous horizontal gap that mediates between enclosure and openness. This detail allows air, light, and visual continuity to pass through the building, resisting the image of the mosque as a sealed object. In a coastal, post-disaster setting, this permeability reads as both a pragmatic and ethical position, acknowledging vulnerability while maintaining presence.

Internally, the ribbed concrete roof system reinforces orientation and collective focus. The parallel geometry subtly amplifies perspective toward the Qibla, extending spatial direction beyond the confines of the prayer hall. Meaning here is not imposed symbolically, but emerges through geometry, movement, and shared alignment.

From the perspective of the Al-Fozan Award, the mosque's value lies in this balance between architectural discipline and social responsibility. It is not an iconic statement, nor does it seek recognition through scale or visual excess. Instead, it offers a credible example of how contemporary mosque architecture can remain rooted in community, responsive to environment, and open to reinterpretation without abandoning religious coherence.

Within the broader narrative of this book, Nurul Yaqin Mosque stands as a reminder that contemporary excellence in mosque architecture does not depend on a single model or aesthetic lineage. Its contribution is modest but meaningful, grounded in lived experience and architectural care. In this sense, it aligns closely with the spirit of the Award and with the book's wider inquiry into how mosques today can negotiate continuity, difference, and responsibility with quiet confidence.

1

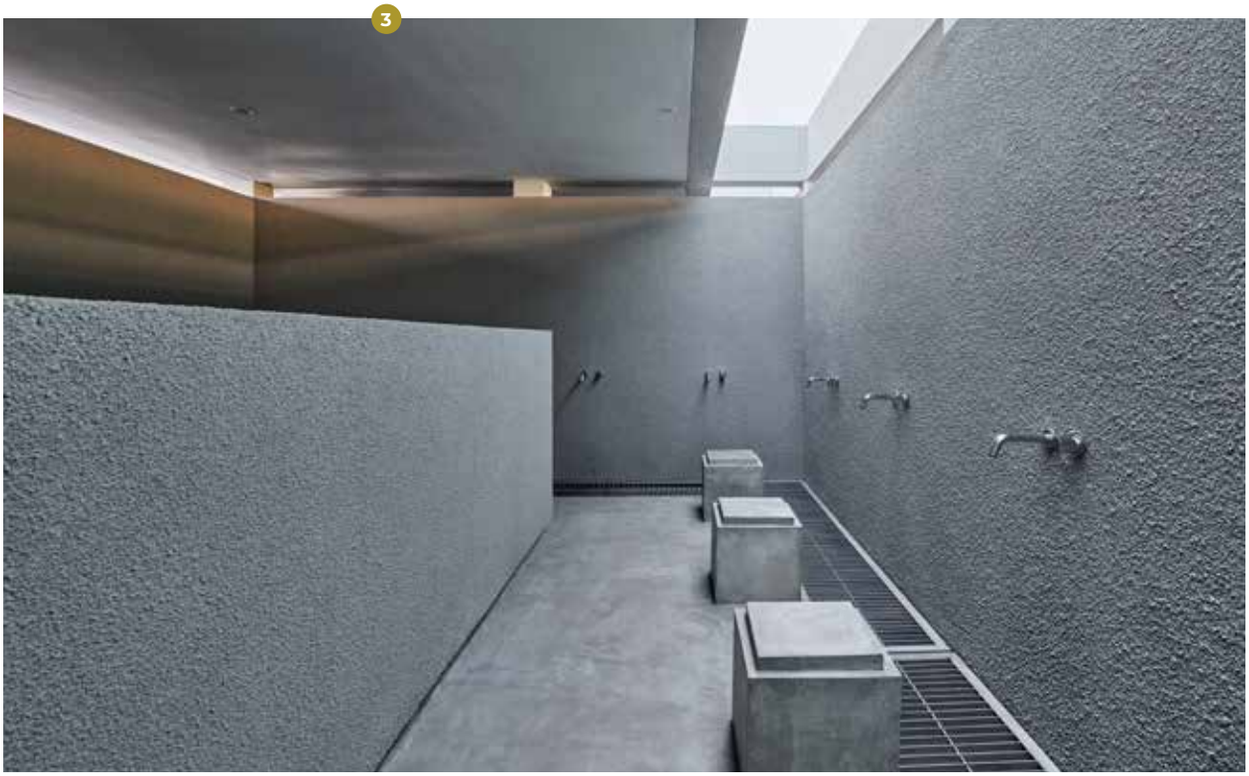
2

1. *Relationship between the minaret, the mosque mass, and the exterior spaces.*

2. *Shoe-removal area.*

3. *Ablution area.*

3



THE INTERIOR ASCENDING
TOWARD THE SKY AND
THE EXTERIOR OPENING
TO THE CITY

THE SHEIKH KHALIFA BIN ZAYED

Grand Mosque

(Ras Al Khaimah)

The Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque

Location: Ras Al Khaimah, UAE

Architect: Bayaty Architects

Year of Completion: 2021

Plot Area: 85,000 m^2

Built-Up Area: 2,800 m^2

Capacity: 4,200 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Wael Samhouri

Commissioned by the government of the United Arab Emirates to commemorate the legacy of H.H. Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque in Ras Al Khaimah stands as a monumental civic gesture. While not conceived directly by its namesake, the mosque honors his memory through scale, symbolism, and the provision of a prominent religious institution for the city.

Its architectural intent is to balance formal grandeur with spiritual clarity. The design emphasizes axial symmetry, centralized planning, and a hierarchical spatial sequence that culminates in the domed prayer hall. This formal language draws from classical Islamic precedents, yet it is interpreted through a contemporary lens, reflecting the broader aspirations of the UAE to foster a modern yet rooted architectural identity.

As one of the largest mosques in the northern emirates, the project responds not only to the religious needs of a growing population but also to the desire for an architectural expression that fuses civic prominence with devotional solemnity. Beyond its functional role, it serves as a marker of national identity, religious continuity, and urban ambition—asserting a lasting presence in the city's spiritual and civic imagination.

In this regard, the Ras Al Khaimah mosque offers an illuminating counterpoint to its counterpart in Al Ain—also commissioned under the name of Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed. While both projects share monumental ambition and civic generosity, their differing spatial strategies, material palettes, and levels of integration into their respective urban contexts underscore the diversity of contemporary mosque architecture in the Gulf. This comparison, though indirect, enriches the broader discourse on how mosque architecture can simultaneously embody unity of vision and plurality of form.

1

2

1. *The minaret appears in a hybrid composition combining multiple historic styles.*

2. *Prayer hall mass from the exterior.*

URBAN INTEGRATION

Situated at the southern gateway of Ras Al Khaimah, the Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque asserts itself as a landmark anchor at the urban threshold between city and desert. Its prominent location along Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Road—an artery that connects the emirate to the broader UAE—grants it high visibility and symbolic weight as a civic and spiritual gateway.

The mosque occupies an expansive site, surrounded by a generous buffer of landscape, roads, and visual corridors, allowing its monumental form to be experienced in isolation from immediate urban clutter. While the setting offers a sense of dignity and clarity, it also raises questions about urban connectivity. Pedestrian access is limited, and the mosque's relationship to adjacent neighborhoods remains loosely defined.

Unlike older mosques embedded within the historical fabric of Emirati cities, this project follows a model of territorial monumentality, where the mosque stands apart from its context rather than within it. In that sense, it echoes the spatial logic seen in the Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque in Al Ain—a sister project commissioned in his memory—where large scale, open siting, and a processional approach aim to elevate the mosque's civic presence.

Thus, site integration in this case is less about merging with the urban grain and more about staking a presence: establishing a new focal point that might, over time, shape the civic geography around it. While not yet organically absorbed into the city's daily rhythms, the mosque asserts a vision of future belonging—an intervention that anticipates the urban fabric rather than merely responding to it.

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque in Ras Al Khaimah adopts a formal strategy grounded in the reinterpretation of two traditional architectural components: the ḥaram (prayer hall) and the external enclosing wall, conceptualized here as a permeable 'skin'. Rather than fusing these into a single volumetric entity, the architect separates and recomposes them into a layered configuration that seeks to reflect a contemporary reading of inherited spatial values.

The mosque's design responds thoughtfully to functional and ritual concerns, particularly regarding alignment and movement. The ḥaram is oriented along the Qibla axis, while the circulation is redirected to the sides in deference to the etiquette of prayer—namely, avoiding interruption by crossing in front of worshippers. This is achieved by setting back the side walls, which accommodate lateral movement and provide discrete entry points through side portals.

The traditional sahn (courtyard) is retained but reinterpreted through the offset of these side walls, which frame movement toward the entrances. This spatial threshold is followed by a shaded riwaq (arcade) and finally the enclosed ḥaram, generating a gradual progression from openness to enclosure. The sequence defines a spatial and symbolic transition from the civic realm of the city to the sanctity of the prayer space.

Structurally, the mosque is organized through the intersection of two governing grids: one aligned with the urban fabric of Ras Al Khaimah, and the other with the Qibla direction. Their intersection point defines the main entrance plaza—a key transitional space in the overall composition. The single minaret, placed at this pivot, underscores the change in orientation and serves as a vertical marker within the otherwise low-slung profile of the building.

The roofscape of the ḥaram adopts a stepped form that rises gently toward the Qibla wall, allowing natural light to enter from above and visually reinforcing the orientation of prayer. Two domes punctuate the Qibla axis, with their differing sizes subtly accentuating directionality and hierarchy within the prayer space.

Secondary functions—including the women's prayer hall and men's daily prayer room—are integrated into the building's massing. These areas maintain spatial connection with the main ḥaram while remaining functionally autonomous, enabling flexible usage patterns throughout the day. Circulation is clearly articulated to accommodate different user groups without compromising the unity of the whole.

In sum, the project draws from a familiar mosque vocabulary—ḥaram, miḥrāb, Qibla wall, dome, riwaq, sahn, and minaret—yet deploys these elements within a reconfigured spatial grammar. The goal, as expressed by the architect, is to preserve the recognizability of the mosque typology while reimagining its formal organization to better suit contemporary patterns of worship and urban life.

1

2

3

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of the Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque in Ras Al Khaimah conveys a restrained and composed sensibility, extending the architectural discipline of the exterior into the spatial experience within. The material palette—soft-toned stone flooring, off-white surfaces, and light wood finishes—fosters an atmosphere of calm and openness. The scale of the ḥaram is generous, even bordering on exaggerated, amplifying the sense of spatial release upon entry.

Artificial lighting is discreetly embedded into the architecture, particularly within double-wall and ceiling recesses. This ensures a soft, ambient glow throughout the prayer halls, without the visual intrusion of fixtures. Accent lighting is applied selectively—at the base of domes or along ceiling transitions—drawing attention to formal elements while preserving the quietude of the space. The absence of chandeliers or grand suspended fixtures—commonly found in state mosques—supports the mosque's minimalist posture. While this restraint may forgo symbolic elaboration, it reflects a conscious commitment to visual calm and architectural coherence.

Acoustic performance appears to have been considered in the overall material selection and detailing, though no specialized treatment is immediately visible. The circulation within the interior is intuitive and unobstructed, with clear sightlines and spatial zoning that distinguish areas for men, women, and auxiliary prayer without fragmenting the overall experience. The two domes along the Qibla axis offer moments of vertical emphasis and natural light, reinforcing the directional logic of the design. Together, these elements suggest an interior that prioritizes legibility, stillness, and spiritual concentration over ornamental excess.

Treatment of Ceilings, Mihrab, Minbar, and Prayer Halls

The ceilings are tonally neutral and architecturally restrained, allowing the stepped geometry and domes to command attention. Natural light enters the prayer space through concealed clerestory openings, casting a soft and diffused illumination that reinforces spatial hierarchy without theatricality.

The mihrab represents a significant departure from traditional forms. Instead of a modest niche, the design introduces a full-height recessed wall, set slightly inward from the Qibla line and aligned with the central dome. This reinterpretation elevates the mihrab into a powerful spatial gesture—less tactile, perhaps, but more aligned with the monumental scale of the space. It offers compositional coherence rather than intimacy, and deserves recognition for its bold formal clarity.

By contrast, the minbar is notably understated. Modestly projecting from the Qibla wall, its design evokes a modern balcony—functional and discreet. While this restraint aligns with the mosque's overall architectural tone, it may be viewed as a missed opportunity to reimagine the minbar more fully within the project's broader design language.

1. *General view of the mosque.*

2. *Three dimensional representation of the mosque.*

3. *Prayer hall interior.*

4. *Shaded exterior arcade.*

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

From a sustainability standpoint, the mosque's approach appears thoughtful in certain aspects but conventional in others. Lighting is discreetly embedded within architectural elements—especially recessed ceilings and double walls—creating ambient illumination without visible fixtures. However, operational discipline is less evident. Site observations showed consistent lighting across all areas, including exterior zones, and full-volume air conditioning in under-occupied halls—practices that raise concerns about energy efficiency. No public data was found on the use of LED systems, smart controls, or motion-activated regulation.

Material selection supports long-term durability. The mosque employs robust cladding and marble finishes suitable for high-traffic and harsh climate conditions, while interior surfaces rely on smooth, modular treatments for ease of maintenance. Decorative elements such as calligraphy bands and geometric panels are executed in prefabricated GRC and gypsum—materials that ensure precision and replicability, but lack the tactile richness of traditional craftsmanship. This shift from artisanal to industrial techniques signals a broader move toward technical reproducibility rather than cultural continuity.

1

2

Structurally, the mosque demonstrates competence through the execution of a large column-free ḥaram. Long-span steel girders integrate lighting, HVAC, and maintenance access within their depth—offering clarity in both form and function. While not radical in innovation, this integration reflects architectural discipline and efficient spatial organization. By subtly expressing the structure in the interior, the design reinforces the spatial ascent toward the Qibla without theatrical excess.

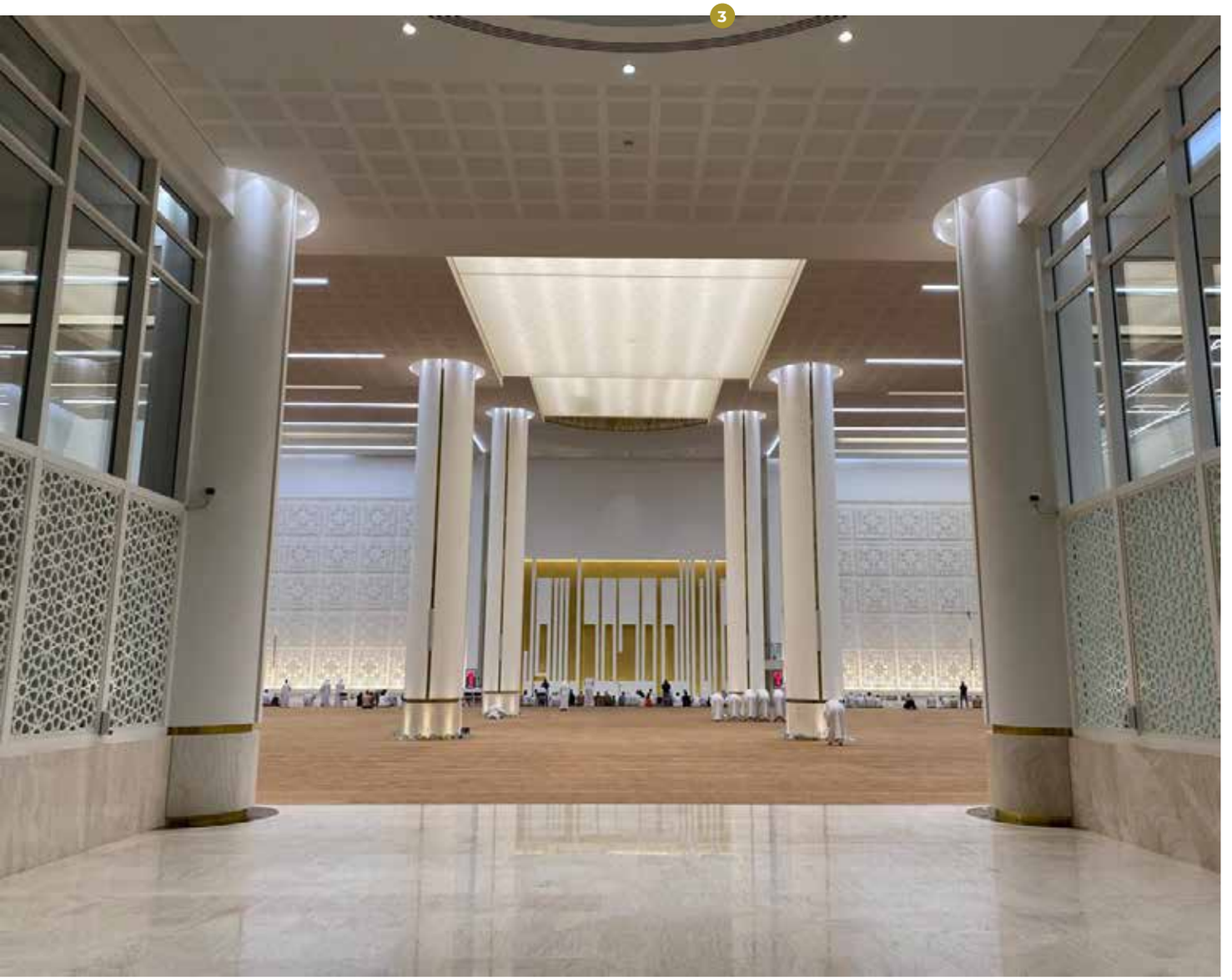
Maintenance needs are high due to the mosque's scale and elevated ceilings. Features like concealed lighting and HVAC systems require specialized access, demanding continuous institutional oversight. Though sustainability credentials are moderate, the design prioritizes longevity and resilience—an approach typical of major civic buildings in the UAE.

In sum, the mosque reflects a careful balance between material robustness, operational simplicity, and symbolic dignity. Yet, like many state-sponsored religious structures, it remains formally conservative—technically sound, but shy of experimental potential. The environmental impact hinges not only on design decisions but also on evolving cultural attitudes toward stewardship and conservation.

1. *View of the prayer hall façade from the mosque courtyard.*

2. *The exterior arcade adjacent to the prayer hall functions as a transitional space linking the mosque to the city.*

3. *This is how the mihrab appears upon entering the prayer hall.*



Site plan of the mosque.

From a sustainability standpoint, the mosque's approach appears thoughtful in certain aspects but conventional in others. Lighting is discreetly embedded within architectural elements—especially recessed ceilings and double walls—creating ambient illumination without visible fixtures.

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

The Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque in Ras Al Khaimah demonstrates a strong civic presence through its scale, accessibility, and inclusive design. Strategically situated on an open site with direct road access and ample parking, the mosque serves not only as a prominent architectural landmark but also as a practical destination for daily worship and large-scale religious gatherings.

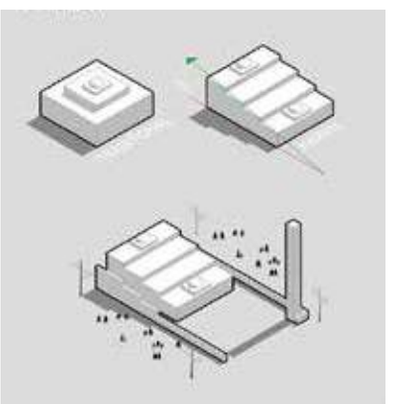
A notable strength of the mosque lies in its social accessibility. Entry points are clearly demarcated and spatially generous, while internal circulation flows smoothly—even during peak hours—thanks to the lateral movement strategy and clearly zoned interior layout. This contributes to an experience of order and dignity, especially during Friday prayers and Ramadan nights, when the mosque receives its highest number of congregants.

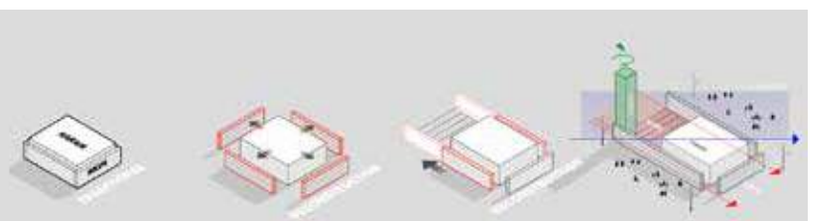
In terms of gender inclusion, the mosque achieves a rare parity. The women's prayer spaces are not only well-integrated but also receive the same level of material finish, lighting, and spatial attention as their male counterparts. During major religious events, signage, staff coordination, and movement flows are organized in a manner that supports both respect and ease of access for all attendees.

The mosque also shows commendable consideration for persons with disabilities. Sloped ramps, tactile flooring indicators, and clearly marked accessible toilets are all provided in accordance with UAE high standards. These features—often overlooked in architectural commentary—are essential in framing the mosque as a socially legitimate civic institution.

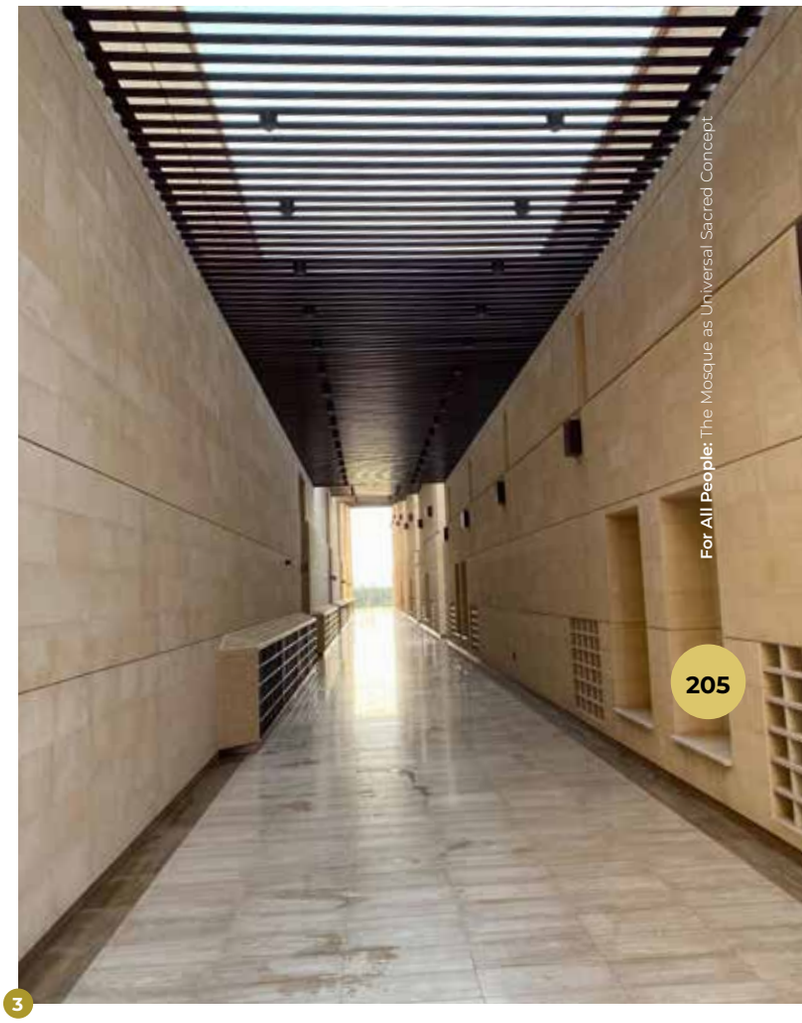
More informally, the landscape design around the mosque encourages incidental use beyond prayer hours. The open spaces and shaded walkways create opportunities for social gathering, reflection, and community engagement, subtly expanding the mosque's role into a more layered public function. Though not fully programmed as a cultural or educational venue, the mosque's openness hints at a broader civic generosity that exceeds its strictly religious mandate.

Ultimately, the mosque's social success is less about architectural bravado and more about how effectively it absorbs, accommodates, and uplifts its users—qualities that anchor it in the civic and emotional memory of its community.





Design development phases.



1. *Details of one of the domes.*

2. *Exterior wall details.*

3. *One of the passageways.*

Three dimensional representation of the mosque.

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque in Ras Al Khaimah asserts itself as a thoughtful civic and religious presence—firmly grounded in spatial clarity, operational logic, and material restraint. It neither indulges in spectacle nor recedes into anonymity. Instead, it offers a composed and measured reinterpretation of the mosque's architectural vocabulary—ḥaram, sahn, riwaq, dome, minaret—reassembled in a spatial rhythm that privileges coherence over novelty, and functionality over flourish.

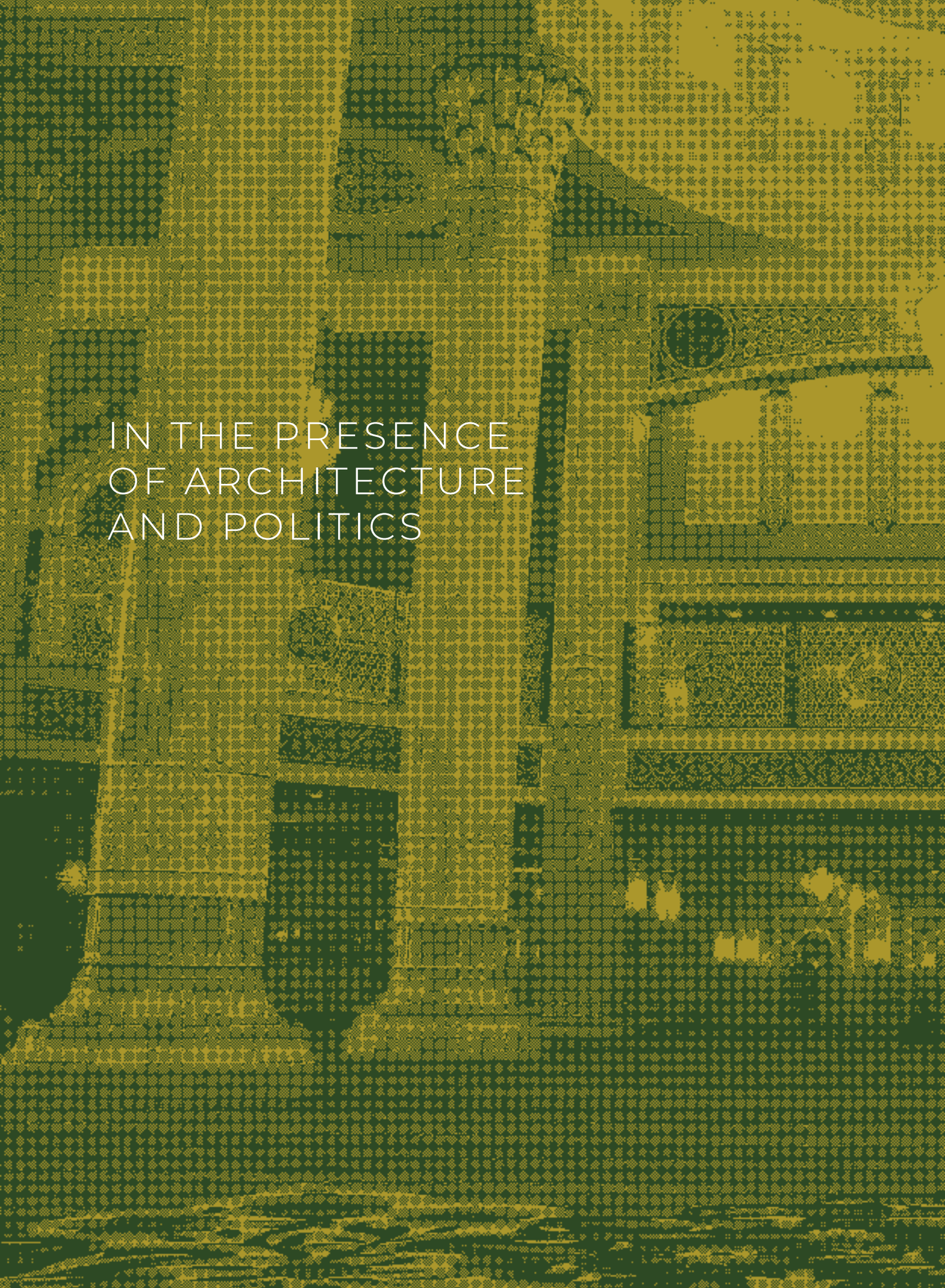
In doing so, it avoids the pitfalls of excessive formalism often seen in state-sponsored mosque architecture. Its gestures remain modest, but deliberate. The absence of chandeliers, the quiet lighting strategy, and the understated reinterpretation of elements such as the mihrab and minbar—all contribute to a space of dignified calm rather than theatrical awe. Yet this same restraint may leave the spiritually expectant visitor searching for deeper resonance.

Where the mosque finds its strength is in its commitment to accessibility and civic integration. The clarity of circulation, the accommodation of diverse prayer groups, and the subtle gradation of spaces from public to sacred reveal a latent inclusivity—an architecture that aims to serve rather than impress. In this sense, the mosque does more than organize space: it organizes behavior, anchoring worship within a civic ethic of generosity and openness.

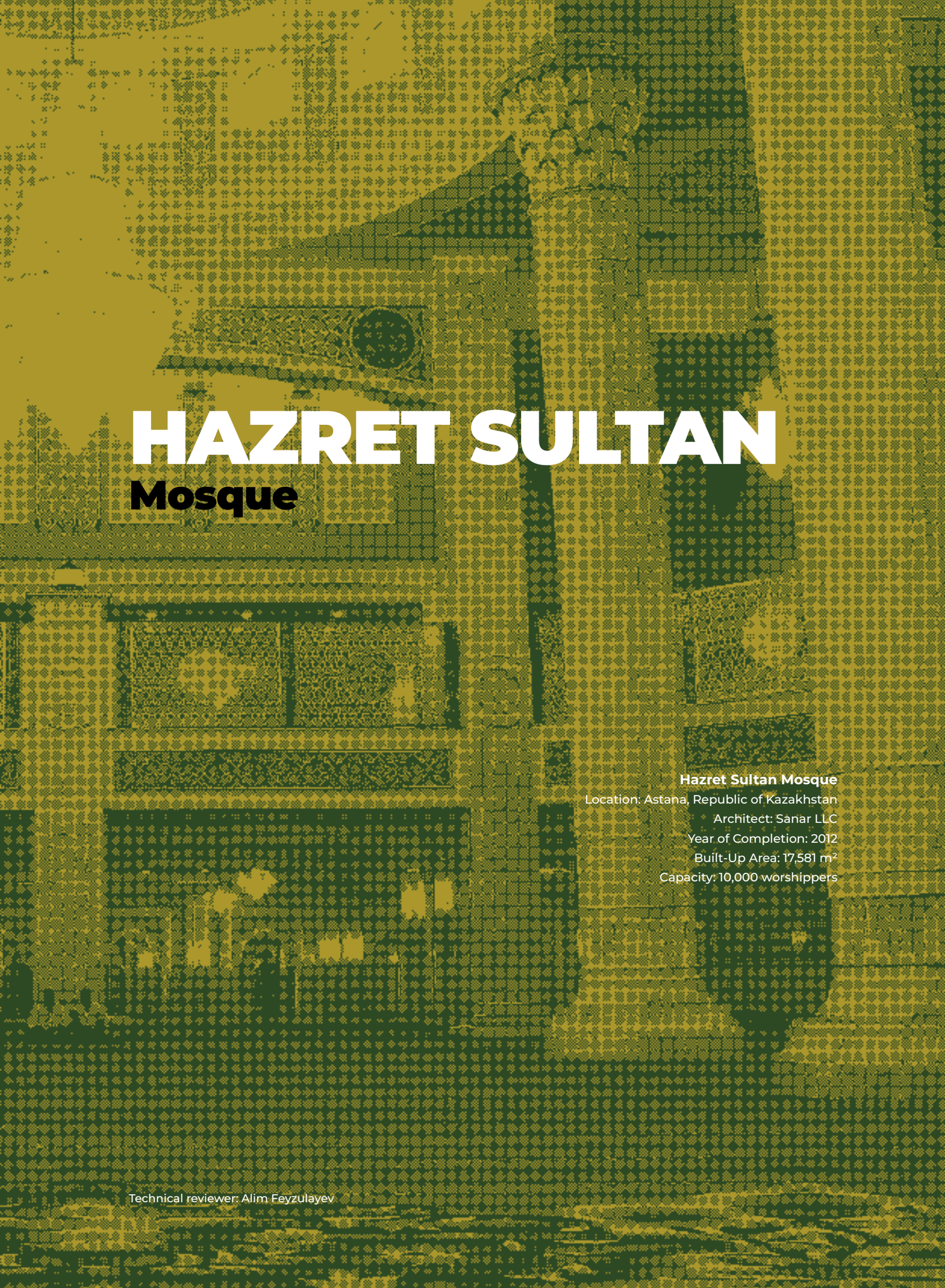
While its architectural expression remains cautious, even conservative at times, the project succeeds in framing the mosque as a place not only of ritual, but of public presence and communal belonging. It may not yet embody the full ambition of a kāffatan li'l-nās mosque—one fully unified and universally welcoming—but it gestures toward that aspiration in quiet, careful steps.

And perhaps that is its most instructive contribution: a reminder that the path to a truly inclusive mosque architecture is not charted by form alone, but by how form enables participation, comfort, and continuity of use. In this light, the Ras Al Khaimah mosque offers not a final answer, but a composed proposition—inviting future projects to build upon its calm foundations with bolder trust in both heritage and humanity.

It reminds us that architecture can still be a form of social prayer — "for all people"!



IN THE PRESENCE OF ARCHITECTURE AND POLITICS



HAZRET SULTAN
Mosque

Hazret Sultan Mosque
Location: Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan
Architect: Sanar LLC
Year of Completion: 2012
Built-Up Area: 17,581 m²
Capacity: 10,000 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Alim Feyzulayev

Completed in 2012 after an open architectural competition, the Hazret Sultan Mosque stands as one of Astana's principal national landmarks. Designed by Sanar LLC, the project adopts a revivalist architectural language that incorporates selected Kazakh ornamental motifs and references drawn from regional historic precedents.

The complex occupies an 11-hectare site within the capital's ceremonial district. Its built area is approximately 17,700 m², organized around a dominant central dome reaching about 51 meters, eight smaller domes, and four minarets rising to roughly 77 meters. Together, these elements give the mosque a strong vertical and civic presence.

The main prayer hall, around 3,900 m², is supported by a covered courtyard and an exterior terrace, bringing total capacity to nearly 10,000 worshippers on major occasions. Ancillary programs—including ablution facilities, administrative and educational spaces, hospitality areas, and visitor accommodation—are distributed across multiple levels.

The mosque has been officially recognized as a protected national monument, underscoring its role as a key architectural and cultural symbol in post-independence Kazakhstan.

1

URBAN INTEGRATION

Set within Astana's governmental and ceremonial district, the Hazret Sultan Mosque forms part of a broad ensemble of national institutions. The surrounding urban fabric is characterized by wide boulevards, open plazas, and monumental public buildings, giving the mosque a clearly representative role in the city's hierarchy of civic landmarks.

The mosque's Qiblah alignment introduces a gentle diagonal within the otherwise orthogonal grid, creating shifting oblique views of the dome and minarets and softening the rigidity of the surrounding layout. Landscaped edges, paved forecourts, and extensive parking areas frame the building and support its capacity for large gatherings, but also reinforce its identity as a freestanding civic monument rather than a neighbourhood-oriented place of worship.

1. *Striking interior visual details.*

2. *Mosque massing from the exterior.*

1. Relationship between the mosque and the open urban context.

2-3. Portions of the prayer hall interior.

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The Hazret Sultan Mosque presents a large, revivalist composition organized around a dominant central dome, eight secondary domes, and four tall corner minarets. Its silhouette relies on a familiar historicist grammar—recognizable, symmetrical, and intentionally monumental. Rather than seeking new spatial or structural possibilities, the exterior consolidates a set of established Islamic forms into a visually commanding civic image.

The façades are finished in light tones and articulated with porticoes, arches, and ornamental panels recalling regional motifs. These decorative elements introduce a degree of local character, yet the overall architectural language remains firmly within a generalized revivalist tradition, depending more on scale, mass, and repetition than on interpretive or innovative readings of Kazakh heritage.

The mosque sits on a substantial raised podium that amplifies its ceremonial presence and establishes a clear hierarchy between the building and its surroundings. This elevation, together with the wide stairways, deep portals, and formal arcades, creates a processional experience more commonly associated with state architecture. The composition projects an image of civic grandeur and public authority, situating the building within what may be described as a palace-mosque paradigm—a typology in which the mosque is framed primarily as a monumental emblem rather than a site of intimate communal encounter.

In this mode, the exterior is highly effective as a landmark: it is visible from afar, assertive within the skyline, and aligned with Astana's broader ensemble of representational buildings. Its limitations lie in the narrow expressive range afforded by its revivalist vocabulary, which prioritizes symbolic clarity and ceremonial impact over architectural exploration.

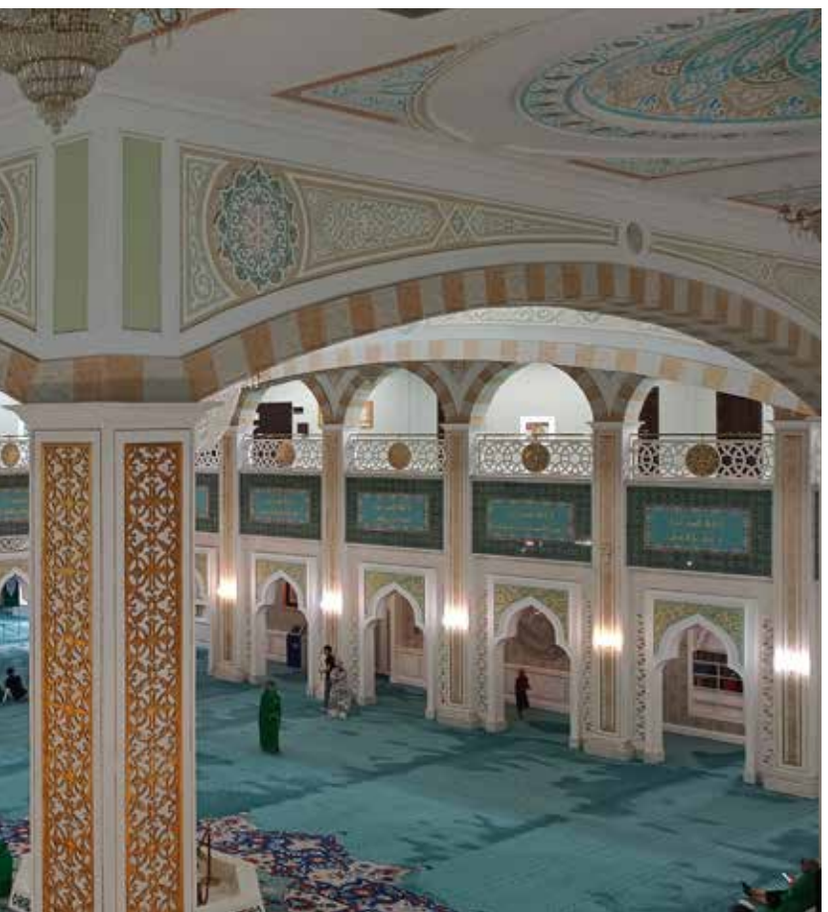
INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of the Hazret Sultan Mosque unfolds through a series of controlled thresholds that gradually transition from the exterior plaza to the main prayer hall. A raised entrance level, supported by a wide stair and a deep vestibule, provides an essential climatic buffer and establishes a ceremonial approach consistent with the building's monumental exterior stance.

Inside, the spatial organization is clear and hierarchical. The covered courtyard acts as an intermediate volume between the entrance and the main prayer hall, easing the movement of large congregations and supporting seasonal overflow. This courtyard leads directly to the principal hall, a vast space defined by rows of columns, high galleries, and a large central dome that concentrates visual and acoustic focus. The effect is one of scale and grandeur, with vertical height and generous light contributing to a sense of openness rather than intimacy.

Ablution areas, classrooms, administrative offices, hospitality facilities, and visitor accommodation are distributed across the lower and upper levels, creating a self-contained complex capable of hosting a wide range of religious and community functions. The women's prayer area, set on the upper level behind an ornamental screen, maintains visual continuity with the main hall while preserving privacy.

While the interior is efficient and well-structured, its architectural expression follows the same revivalist logic that shapes the exterior. The tall columns, ornamental detailing, and extensive decorative surfaces reinforce the ceremonial character of the mosque, at times approaching the representational register of a state complex. This gives the interior an assured, formal presence, though it also reflects the broader 'mosque-as-palace' paradigm in which scale and display take precedence over intimate spatial depth.



3

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

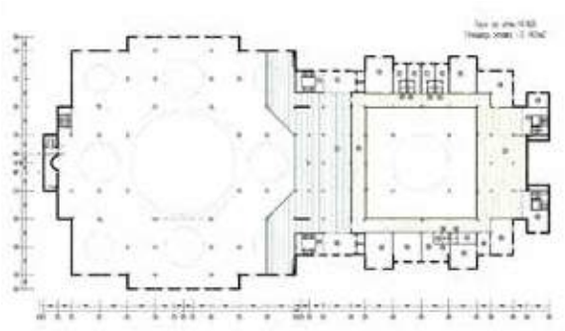
The Hazret Sultan Mosque is built on a reinforced-concrete structural system that supports its large dome, multiple secondary domes, and expansive interior spans. The combination of concrete framing with lighter dome materials allows the building to achieve its monumental profile while managing structural loads across wide interiors. Foundations and supporting elements are engineered to accommodate the soil conditions and the large footprint of the complex.

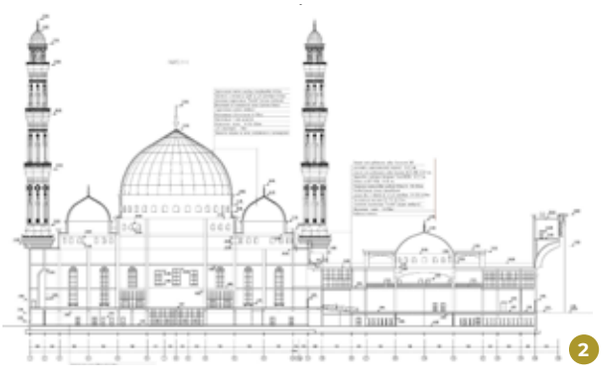
Given Astana's severe continental climate, the building relies heavily on mechanical systems to provide thermal comfort. Heating batteries, underfloor systems, and extensive mechanical ventilation support year-round operation, while high-level glazing around the dome and upper galleries introduces natural light into the main spaces. Artificial lighting becomes essential during evening hours, especially across the large halls and circulation zones.

Interior finishes combine modern construction materials with decorative elements intended to evoke historic craftsmanship: ceramic tiles, stucco work, carved wood, and metal details. While these materials contribute to durability and identity, they do not form part of an articulated environmental or material strategy.

Landscape areas are planted with hardy species adapted to extreme winters; however, the grounds primarily serve ceremonial and crowd-management purposes rather than ecological performance.

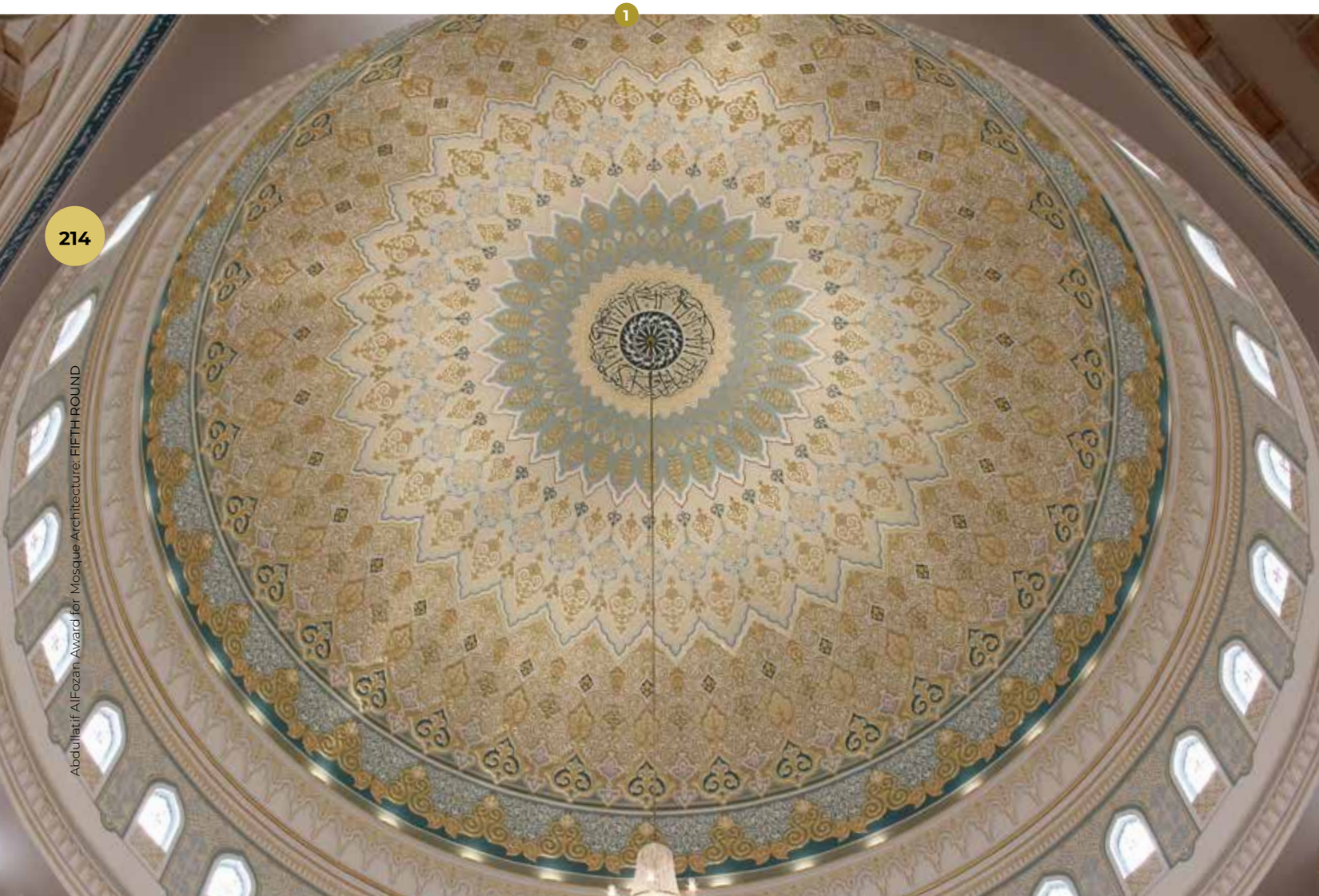
Overall, the technical systems meet the functional requirements of a large, state-sponsored complex, but the project does not advance a distinct sustainability agenda. The mosque depends on conventional mechanical solutions to operate comfortably at its scale, reflecting a broader emphasis on representational presence rather than environmental innovation.





2

1

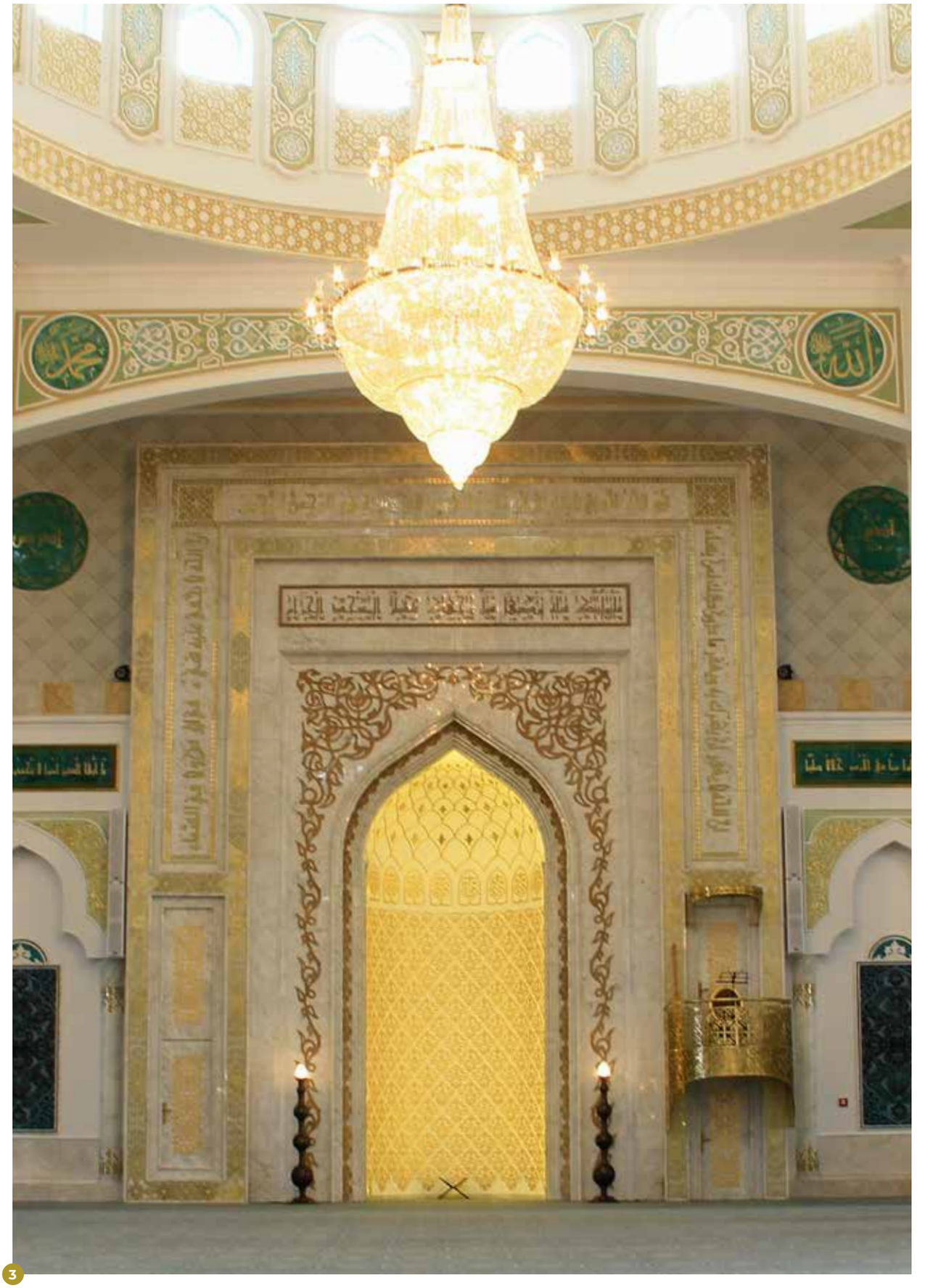


Abdullatif Al Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture: FIFTH ROUND

1. *Interior dome details.*

2. *Floor plan and longitudinal section.*

3. *Mosque mihrab.*



3

Interior finishes combine modern construction materials with decorative elements intended to evoke historic craftsmanship: ceramic tiles, stucco work, carved wood, and metal details. While these materials contribute to durability and identity, they do not form part of an articulated environmental or material strategy.

Prayer hall interior... ornamental details in every corner of the mosque.

SOCIAL PERFORMANCE AND SUCCESS

The Hazret Sultan Mosque accommodates a wide range of religious and communal functions that extend beyond daily prayer. Educational rooms, administrative offices, hospitality areas, and dedicated spaces for gatherings and celebrations allow the complex to operate as a multifunctional civic facility. The building remains open throughout the day, welcoming worshippers, families, and organized visitors, and its generous forecourts often serve as informal public spaces during evenings and weekends.

Accessibility is addressed through multiple ramps, lifts, and clearly separated circulation routes, allowing elderly visitors and people with limited mobility to reach the main levels with ease. Men and women have dedicated entrances, ablution areas, and prayer spaces, reflecting local expectations while maintaining visual continuity between levels.

While the mosque successfully supports large congregations and ceremonial events, its social presence remains shaped by its scale and setting. The expansive plazas, landscaped belts, and parking fields help manage crowds but also reinforce the sense of a monumental complex somewhat removed from the finer-grained daily life of surrounding neighborhoods. As a result, the mosque functions effectively as a national gathering place yet feels less embedded in the rhythms of local community use.

1

2

1. *Ornamental details.*

2. *Ablution area.*

3. *One of the prayer hall walls.*

3

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The Hazret Sultan Mosque stands as a major national landmark, confidently positioned within Astana's ceremonial district and calibrated to the visual scale of the city's representational architecture. Its exterior and interior are composed with clarity and technical competence, and its organization allows the building to accommodate large congregations, educational activities, and civic events with ease. In this sense, the mosque fulfils its intended role as a prominent public institution and a symbolic anchor within the capital.

At the same time, the project's architectural language remains firmly revivalist. Its domes, arches, and 'massive' walls reproduce historic forms that originally emerged from the structural logic of stone and brick construction, while the building itself is carried by a modern reinforced-concrete frame. This disconnect between appearance and construction lends the mosque a scenographic quality: a reproduction of historic solidity rather than a tectonic expression of how the building truly stands. The result is an architecture of image—assured in silhouette, yet distant from the material and structural truths that once shaped the forms it imitates.

This tendency is reinforced by the mosque's overall stance within the city. The elevated podium, deep processional portals, and expansive ceremonial grounds give the complex a distinctly palatial presence. In this sense, Hazret Sultan operates within a mosque-as-palace paradigm, in which the building's primary task is to project grandeur, stability, and national identity. The message is clear and effective at the level of representation, but it leaves limited room for spatial, environmental, or typological exploration.

Seen against the broader architectural landscape of Astana—a young capital that has not hesitated to commission bold, experimental buildings for its civic and cultural programs—this choice is particularly telling. Given the scale of the budget, the prominence of the site, and the symbolic importance as the main congregational mosque of the capital, this project could have been a rare opportunity to test ideas for a truly twenty-first-century mosque: one that engages more deeply with climate, structure, and contemporary modes of worship and community life. Instead, the design retreats into a carefully composed historicist image.

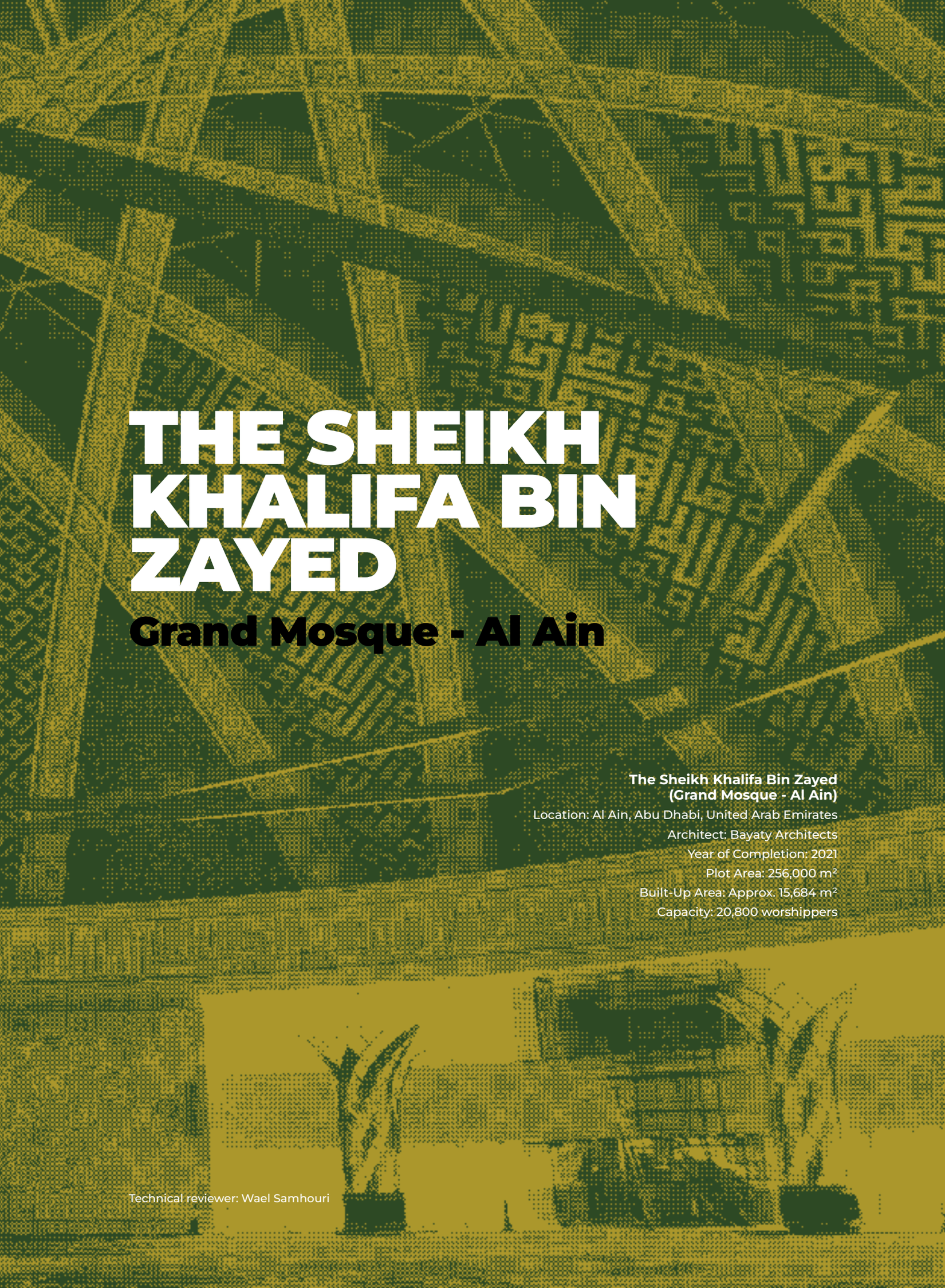
In the wider discourse on mosque architecture, the Hazret Sultan Mosque thus illustrates both the strength and the limits of this representational model. It offers a clear and coherent monumental form and a reassuringly familiar skyline presence, yet it also embodies a missed opportunity—an instance where the ambition of the commission and the experimental character of the surrounding city could have supported a more searching, future-oriented exploration of what a capital-city mosque might be today.

Visual details within the prayer hall

2

3

BOUNDARIES BEYOND THE EYE'S PUPIL



THE SHEIKH KHALIFA BIN ZAYED

Grand Mosque - Al Ain

The Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed (Grand Mosque - Al Ain)

Location: Al Ain, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Architect: Bayaty Architects

Year of Completion: 2021

Plot Area: 256,000 m^2

Built-Up Area: Approx. 15,684 m^2

Capacity: 20,800 worshippers

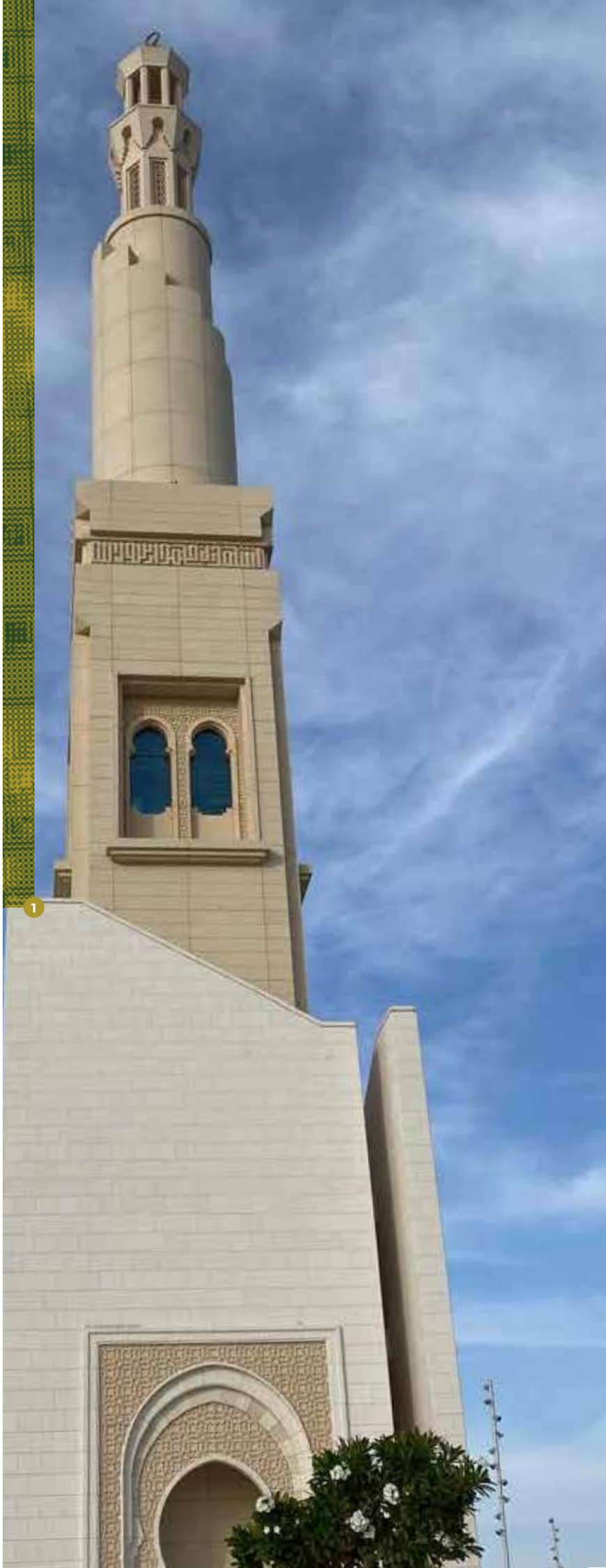
Technical reviewer: Wael Samhouri

Located in the heart of Al Ain—one of the UAE's most historically and culturally grounded cities—the Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque occupies a pivotal urban and symbolic position. Unlike the vertical skylines of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, Al Ain—known as the 'Garden City'—is defined by its horizontal sprawl, oases, and heritage-rich landscape. It is within this distinctive setting that the mosque asserts its monumental presence—positioned strategically between Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Road and Shakhboot Bin Sultan Road, with a clear axial alignment from Ali Bin Taleb Road leading toward the Qibla.

The mosque's monumental dome and four commanding minarets establish it not only as a dominant architectural landmark but also as a religious and civic anchor in the urban fabric. This placement is both deliberate and symbolic, reflecting its dual role as a sacred precinct and a representative public institution.

As articulated by the architect, the design seeks to reinterpret the symbolic essence of Islamic architecture, particularly the dome, through a contemporary lens. Rather than merely crowning the structure, the dome is conceived as the spatial and conceptual heart of the mosque—it is not atop the mosque; it is the mosque. The design references the poetic qualities of Al Ain's environment: filtered desert light, rustling palm fronds, and cooling breezes, particularly embodied in the early vision for the dome as a structural calligraphic shell. This was originally imagined as a luminous form, admitting daylight like sunlight through the leaves of a palm tree—a motif native to Al Ain's cultural memory.

Commissioned by the state, the mosque stands as one of the largest in the country, second only to the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in the city of Abu Dhabi . It thus bears both monumental ambition and the weight of cultural representation—tasked with embodying the spiritual dignity, architectural identity, and civic aspirations of the UAE.



1

2

1. *The minaret and its visual connection to the mosque mass.*

2. *The mosque's exterior formation.*

URBAN INTEGRATION

The Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque occupies a strategically prominent site within Al Ain, a city defined by its horizontal sprawl, historic oases, deep-rooted urban modesty and suppressed skyline. Situated between two major roads—Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed and Shakhboot bin Sultan—the mosque marks a significant urban junction, commanding attention through scale and axial orientation.

Its positioning takes advantage of long sightlines, particularly along Ali bin Taleb Road, which reinforces the Qibla direction and introduces a ceremonial visual axis toward the mosque. Rather than merging with the city's subdued scale, the mosque's massing asserts a contrasting presence, establishing a new node within the urban fabric.

Thus, in our case, site integration is less an act of camouflage than one of anchoring—a conscious urban intervention that establishes a spiritual and civic focal point. While not organically woven into its surroundings, the mosque initiates a new spatial order, one that may, over time, shape the city's evolving civic geography.

1

1. Exterior arcades of the mosque.

2. Part of the dome details and the qibla wall.

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The mosque's exterior architecture declares itself with confidence and intent. At its core is the monumental dome, not perched above the prayer hall but embodying it entirely—transforming what is typically a symbolic capstone into the spatial and structural heart of the complex. This inversion creates a singular massing gesture that distinguishes the mosque from most contemporary peers.

Flanking the dome, the four minarets occupy each corner of the site in near-symmetrical fashion, recalling Fatimid-era precedents while adopting a stripped-down formal language. These vertical elements counterbalance the mosque's bold horizontality, forming a tectonic dialogue of ascent and grounding. Each minaret also carries programmatic functions—two housing ablution areas, the others seating and reception spaces—blending traditional symbolism with contemporary civic function.

2

The façade compositions are layered but uneven. Cladding materials, a mix of stone and glass, attempt to merge the traditional with the modern. While the scale is coherent, the articulation of some transitions—especially between ornament and structure—reads as decorative rather than seamlessly integrated. This is perhaps where the mosque's monumental ambition falters slightly, revealing traces of compromise between conceptual purity and practical execution.

The surrounding arcades (riwāq) and colonnades frame the sahn (courtyard), softening the building's mass while offering shaded circulation. However, additional pergolas near parking zones—fabricated from metal and finished to mimic wood—introduce a dissonance that interrupts the unity of material expression.

Overall, the exterior reads as a composition of clarity and contradiction: a bold reinterpretation of religious architectural archetypes, filtered through the lens of state-sponsored monumentalism and site pragmatics.

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of the Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque attempts to cultivate a sense of minimal refinement framed by classical Islamic references. The overall spatial sequence—comprising entrance foyer, transitional spaces, and the central prayer hall—is well ordered, progressing toward the grand dome in a carefully modulated crescendo. This spatial orchestration reflects a disciplined design intent, even if not always matched by material or detail.

A prominent feature of the interior is the calligraphic band in monochrome Kufic script that encircles the prayer hall. While the choice of script and restraint in ornamentation convey a certain dignity, the translation of the originally envisioned structural calligraphy into mere surface decoration diminishes the spatial ambition and reduces its legibility to an abstract gesture. The carpet design is functional rather than expressive—eschewing decorative pattern in favor of simple geometric lines that guide worshipper alignment. Notably, the original carpet proposal by the architect respected this directional clarity, but the decision to commission the interior design, including the carpet, to a separate team resulted in compromises to this intent.

This disjunction is further amplified by the mosque's circular floor plan. While formally striking, such radial configurations impose geometric challenges on the linear logic of congregational prayer. The polar system requires spatial negotiation—lines must either bend or be artificially straightened—introducing a layer of distortion to the act of alignment itself. This recurring issue across several contemporary mosques reflects a tendency by designers to impose form-driven solutions that generate problems they later struggle to resolve.

The mihrab is treated not as a discrete niche but as an entire recessed wall plane, subtly marked within the spatial field. In contrast, the minbar appears more as a freestanding object—perched like a balcony—than as a fully integrated architectural element. This inconsistency in approach reveals a lack of coherence in the detailing of sacred focal points, possibly due to the division between architectural and interior teams.

Material finishes are largely conventional: plastered surfaces, painted ornamentation, and large chandeliers that attempt to balance ceremonial grandeur with ambient intimacy. However, the articulation of these elements lacks the craftsmanship found in more finely detailed mosques. Acoustic and lighting strategies are competently executed, although natural light—admitted through stepped clerestories—is more symbolic than functional in impact.

While thematically consistent with the exterior, the interior ultimately offers more symbolic allusion than spatial transcendence. It is dignified, operational, and legible—but it stops short of evoking the kind of contemplative interiority that mosque architecture can aspire to.

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

The Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque employs conventional modern construction systems and finishes, relying on steel, concrete, GRC , and natural stone to achieve a contemporary interpretation of traditional Islamic forms. While detailing is careful and materials are generally robust and suitable for long-term institutional use, the construction lacks the artisanal precision typically associated with traditional craftsmanship. This aligns with a wider pattern of large-scale state mosques that favor monumental presence over intimacy of detail.

The mosque's mechanical systems are extensive—especially air-conditioning—reflecting the climatic demands of Al Ain. However, the scale of cooling provision for a frequently underused prayer hall raises questions about energy intensity and resource prioritization. While the project incorporates basic sustainability features such as LED lighting, efficient plumbing fixtures, thermal insulation, and shaded courtyards, it stops short of embracing deeper passive environmental strategies or innovative climate-responsive solutions.

1. *The dome dominates the prayer hall space and is surrounded by four minarets.*

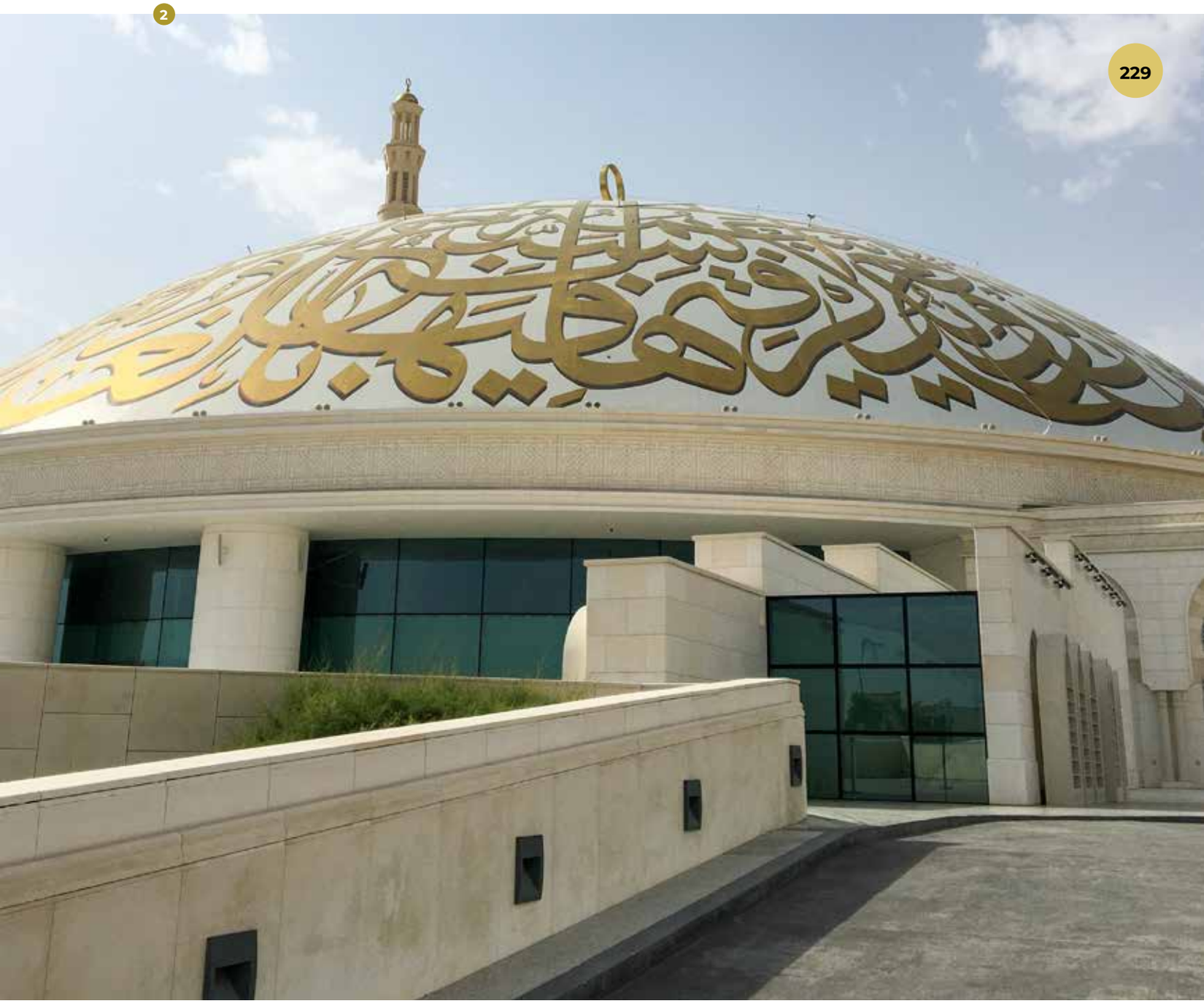
1. *A striking Arabic calligraphy formation crowns the dome... while the rest of the mosque components appear less impactful than the dome.*

The surrounding landscape, however, deserves more attention than it typically receives in such evaluations. Lush and carefully maintained, it integrates softscape and hardscape features while incorporating signage on native plants and archaeological remains of an older musallah (prayer space). This transforms the site into a kind of open-air cultural park, offering a valuable ecological and educational dimension that extends the mosque's public role beyond worship. Such gestures suggest that future sustainability narratives could expand beyond energy metrics to include broader cultural and landscape ecology.

Economically, the mosque was designed with long-term durability in mind, but its operational costs—especially those tied to energy consumption—may challenge this assumption over time. Socially, however, it demonstrates strong performance, particularly through its Ramadan hospitality programs, inclusive design approach, and high standards of accessibility.

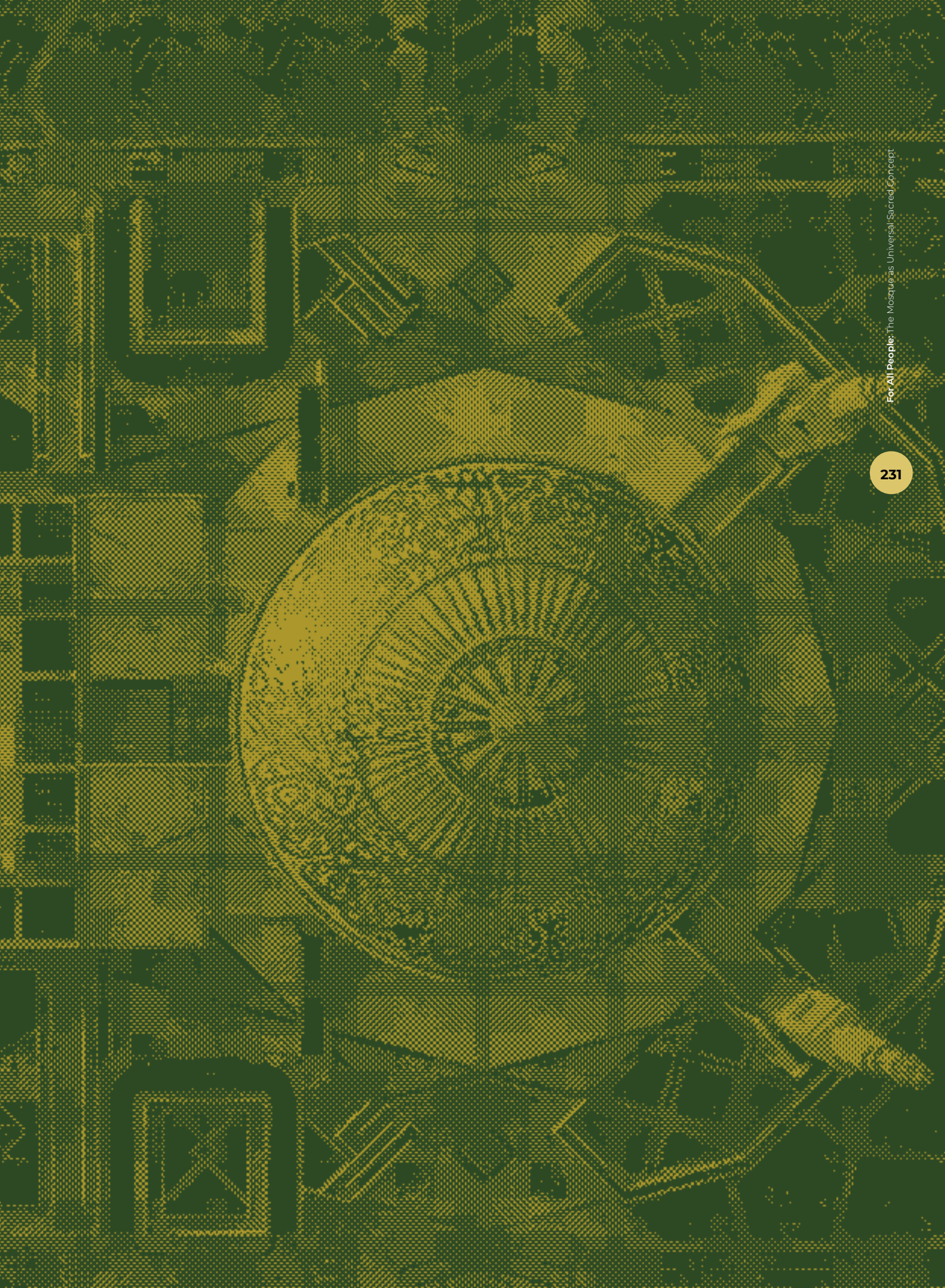
In summary, the mosque's environmental sustainability remains conventional and could be advanced in future iterations, while its social and spatial generosity offer more convincing models of sustainable practice in a civic-religious context.

2



The mosque's environmental sustainability remains conventional and could be advanced in future iterations, while its social and spatial generosity offer more convincing models of sustainable practice in a civic-religious context.

Site plan of the mosque.



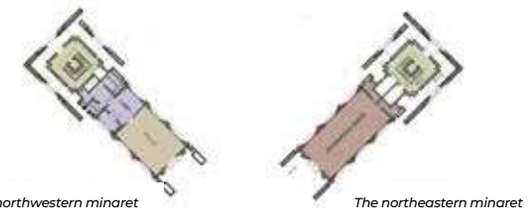
SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

Among the strongest dimensions of the Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque is its evolving social performance, which reflects the broader aspirations of unity in contemporary mosque architecture. Though conceived with monumental ambition, the mosque has gradually embedded itself within the civic and spiritual rhythms of Al Ain—becoming, in practice, a space that is kāffatan li'l-nās (inclusive for all people). This is especially evident during the month of Ramadan, when the mosque transforms into a dynamic hub of public social gathering, collective worship, and communal hospitality. Thousands of worshippers are welcomed nightly for iftar, supported by a well-coordinated network of staff and volunteers. The scale and generosity of these operations—reminiscent of larger religious precincts in Mecca and Madinah—demonstrate not only institutional efficiency but a deep commitment to the mosque's public mission.

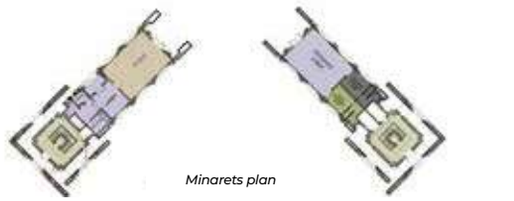
This success, however, stems not only from architectural intention but from operational stewardship. The mosque's staff have managed to soften the spatial monumentality through humane logistics, generous hospitality, and respectful crowd management. This suggests that architecture alone cannot guarantee civic integration; rather, it must be supported by a capable and visionary operational culture.

Gender inclusivity is handled with care. Facilities for men and women are equal in size and quality, and during peak events, signage and staff guidance ensure dignity and comfort for all worshippers. Similarly, the mosque demonstrates a high standard of accessibility for people of determination, in line with UAE regulations. These aspects—often overlooked in architectural critique—are crucial to the mosque's social legitimacy.

1. *Floor plan.* ***4,8.*** *Interior details.* ***2,3,6,7.*** *Exterior details of the mosque.*



The northwestern minaret *The northeastern minaret*



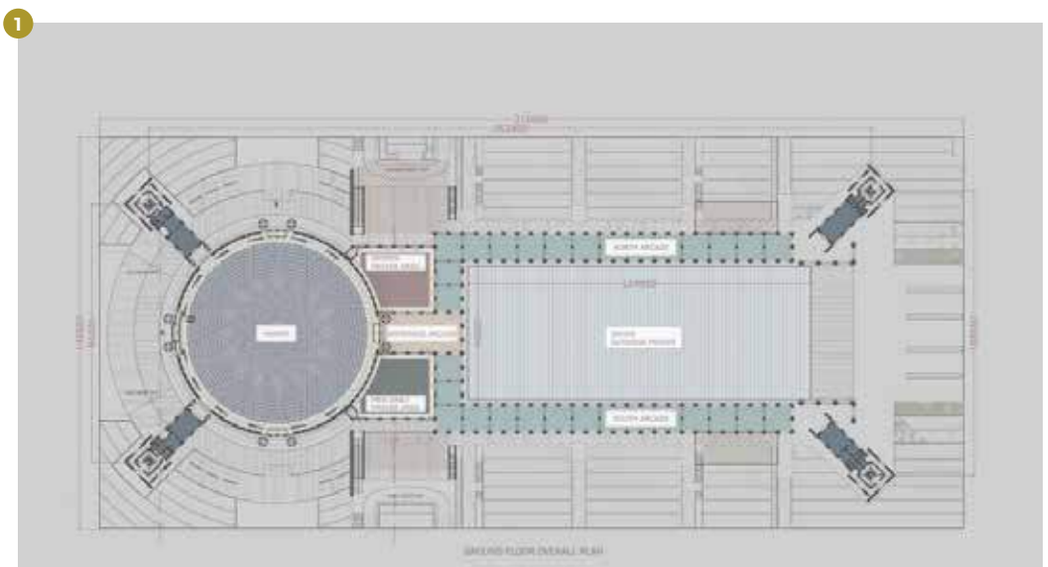
Minarets plan

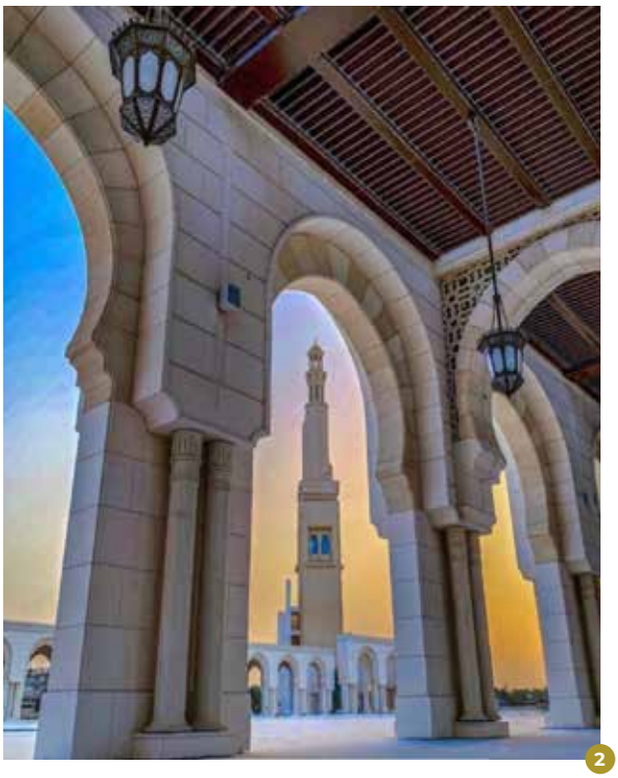
In addition, the mosque's landscape and surrounding open spaces act as informal extensions of its civic function. By preserving elements of the site's historical memory—such as the remains of an older musallah—and incorporating educational features related to native flora, the mosque assumes a role beyond that of a worship space. It becomes, in effect, a layered public institution: religious, educational, and ecological at once.

Still, one might ask whether the architecture itself encourages this openness, or whether these social roles have been added onto a form that was not inherently designed to support them. While the dome-centered plan evokes symbolic unity, its radial organization presents practical limitations for large congregational alignment and future programmatic flexibility. This tension between symbolic form and functional accommodation is likely to recur across several shortlisted projects and warrants sustained critical attention.

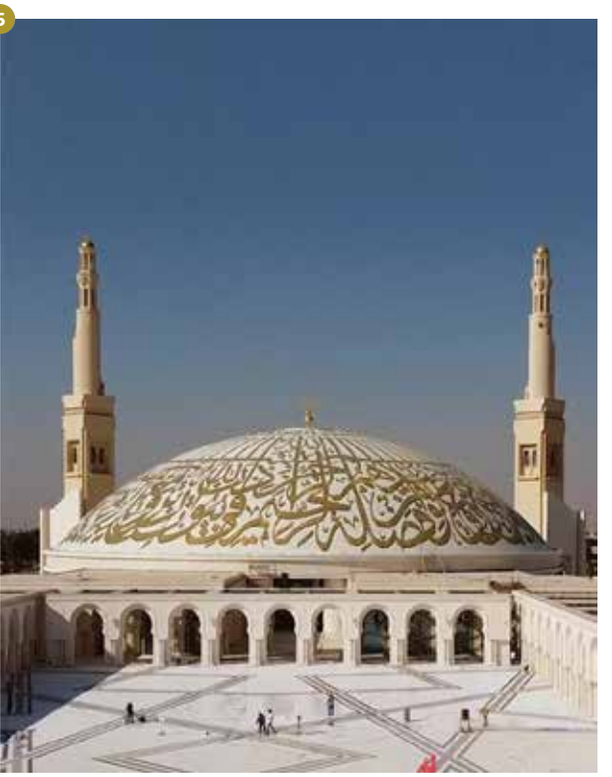
Ultimately, the mosque's social success lies not only in its capacity to host, but in its capacity to be inhabited—to become part of the everyday life of the city, even in ways that the architectural language may not have fully anticipated.

1

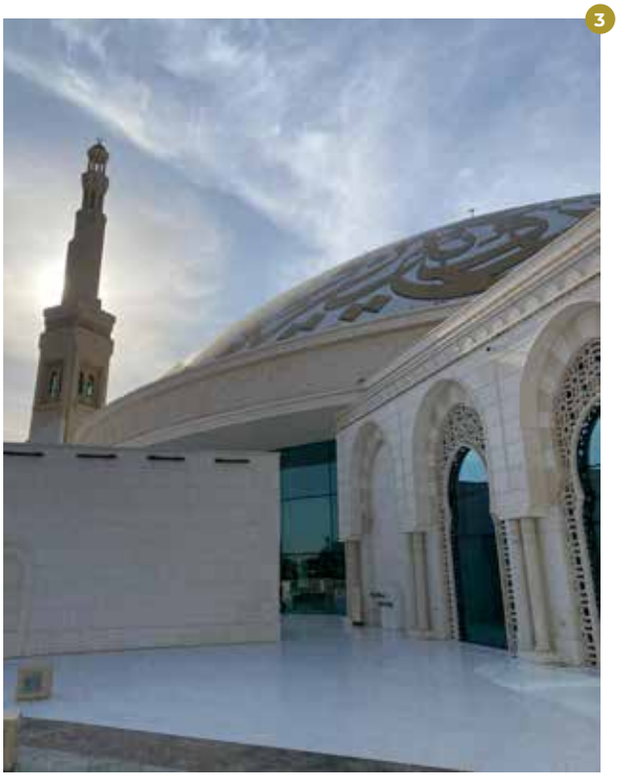




2



5



3

6

7

4

8

1. A striking and harmonious composition of the dome, the minaret, and even the mosque name plaque.

1

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque in Al Ain is a project of undeniable civic prominence and operational success. Its monumental presence and formal ambition position it squarely within the ongoing discourse on mosque architecture in the Gulf region. Yet when viewed through the lens of the present book—Kāffatan li'l-Nās: Unity in Contemporary Mosque Architecture—the project presents a more complex narrative.

At the heart of the design lies a bold conceptual move: the inversion of the dome from crown to core, transforming it from a symbolic topping into the central body of the mosque. While this shift aspires to refresh mosque typology, its execution was ultimately compromised. The envisioned structural calligraphy became surface embellishment, and the original spatial intent was diluted through programmatic fragmentation and multiple authorships. This signals a broader structural challenge in large-scale, state-led mosque commissions, where design integrity often yields to institutional or aesthetic conservatism.

The architectural vocabulary remains grounded in mimicry: a historicist grammar of domes, arcades, and minarets reinterpreted through contemporary materials. While this may speak to collective memory and resonate with public expectations, it also reveals the enduring difficulty faced by architects in transcending the reproduction of heritage forms without alienating the cultural subconscious of their audience. This paradigm—so prevalent since the mid-20th century—remains a point of tension for Muslim architects seeking to shape a future-facing sacred architecture.

And yet, what the architecture hesitates to achieve, the life of the mosque fulfills. The project's most compelling success lies in its social performance and operational vitality. The mosque's ability to absorb, host, and dignify thousands—particularly during Ramadan—positions it as a living institution that has surpassed its blueprint. The physical space has been softened and humanized by those who steward it, suggesting that architecture becomes complete only when inhabited, used, and cared for. This, perhaps, is the mosque's most significant contribution to the ongoing project of designing for unity.

In that light, the Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque reminds us that the contemporary mosque is not merely a matter of formal language, but of operational culture, civic generosity, and inclusive inhabitation. The path toward a unified, kāffatan li'l-nās mosque architecture will not be charted by design gestures alone, but by how those gestures are lived.

FROM A SPACE OF
CLAMOR TO A SPACE OF
TRANQUILITY

KING KHALID
Grand Mosque

King Khalid Grand Mosque
Location: Manama, Bahrain
Architect: Ahmad Alrashed Alhumaid ARH Consulting Engineers
Year of Completion: 2015
Plot Area: 8,100 m^2
Built-Up Area: 4,640 m^2
Capacity: 1,460 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Corinna Del Bianco

Located in the city of Isa Town, Bahrain, the King Khalid Grand Mosque (or King Khalid Mosque) presents a significant example of mid-scale contemporary mosque architecture in the Gulf. Originally established in the early 1980s as a small mosque personally financed by Prince Khalid—prior to his accession to the throne—the site served as a prayer space during his visits to Bahrain. Over time, the mosque gained symbolic recognition and became known as the King Khalid Mosque. Adjacent to the original structure was a vacant plot, later donated by His Majesty the King of Bahrain, enabling the development of a new, larger mosque complex. The entire project was subsequently funded by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, symbolizing a cross-national collaboration. The design ambition was to establish a meaningful architectural dialogue between traditional and contemporary Islamic idioms.

Today, the mosque occupies a prominent urban corner plot, directly addressing a main road and offering a landmark presence within a predominantly residential context. With a footprint of approximately 2,000 square meters, it accommodates daily worshippers as well as larger Friday and Eid gatherings, serving as both a spiritual and civic anchor for the local community.

The architectural form is characterized by a compact rectilinear prayer hall, crowned with a singular dome and flanked by two minarets. While modest in scale compared to grand Gulf-region mosques, the building asserts itself through strong volumetric clarity and strategic positioning. The main entrance faces a wide street, framed by symmetrical arcades that create a transitional threshold between the public realm and the interior sanctuary.

The King Khalid Mosque has undergone several renovations, the most recent of which introduced air conditioning, expanded ablution facilities, and improved accessibility—upgrades that reflect a pragmatic approach to modernization while retaining the mosque's original footprint and stylistic vocabulary. The structure balances traditional cues, such as arches and a prominent dome, with restrained modern detailing, creating a space that feels both familiar and functionally updated.

Its social importance is amplified by its role as a neighborhood mosque serving a diverse residential population. Despite its relative architectural simplicity, the mosque commands loyalty and daily use from its congregants. This reflects an essential truth about mosque architecture: that spiritual centrality is not always dependent on visual grandeur. In this regard, King Khalid Mosque is less about architectural spectacle and more about spatial continuity and religious presence in everyday life.

1

URBAN INTEGRATION

Located within a dense residential and institutional quarter of Muharraq—one of Bahrain's historically rich urban centers—the King Khalid Mosque occupies a corner plot with frontage on two intersecting streets. This positioning affords the mosque a degree of civic visibility, despite its modest architectural stature and limited spatial ambition.

The mosque's overall massing and orientation clearly signal its religious function. Yet its relationship to the surrounding urban fabric is pragmatic rather than transformative. Flanked by housing and community buildings, the mosque seems designed to serve a local congregation, but without seeking to shape or enhance the broader public realm in any meaningful way.

Pedestrian access is available from multiple directions, but the absence of threshold spaces—such as shaded arcades, porticos, or landscaped forecourts—dampens the mosque's potential to operate as a social or spatial gathering point. Likewise, the surrounding paving and external treatments make little attempt to engage the public realm in a generous or civic-minded manner. The mosque presents a clear boundary to the street, but does not extend an invitation to linger, gather, or interact.

From an urban design perspective, the mosque fulfills its basic functional role without overreaching. It integrates into its setting politely, yet without assertion. This understated insertion may reflect practical constraints—budgetary, spatial, or programmatic—or it may signal a conscious choice to remain architecturally modest. Regardless, the result is a building that blends in, rather than stands out, and one that fulfills its immediate role without aspiring to a deeper urban or symbolic presence.

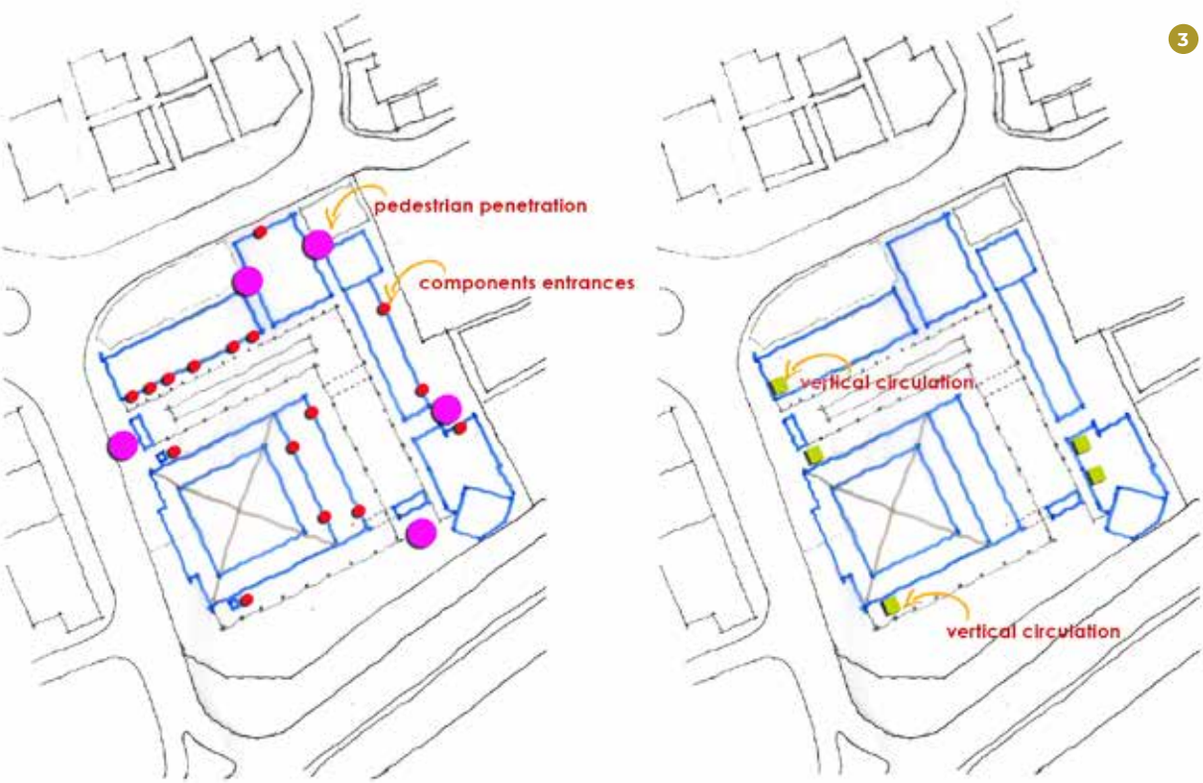
In this respect, the mosque's integration into the city is adequate but ultimately unambitious. Its presence is more defined by what it avoids—formal disruption, stylistic excess, or public boldness—than by any active contribution to the civic life of its surroundings. Alas, a missed opportunity lingers beneath the surface: the chance to articulate a richer spatial dialogue between faith, place, and community.

2

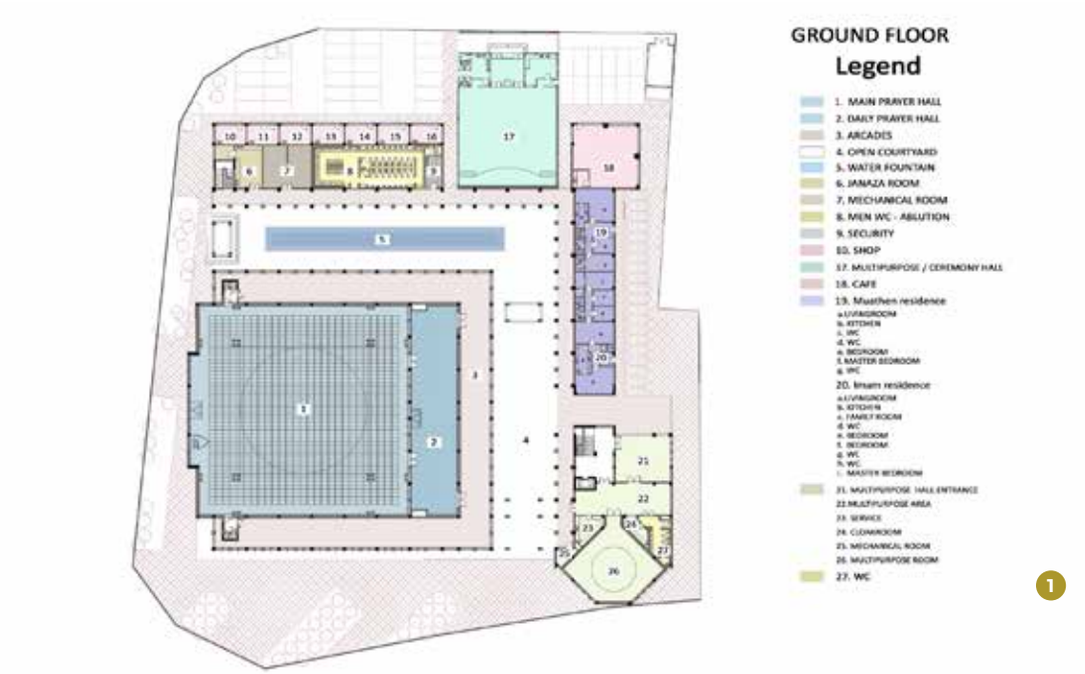
1. An external view of the payer hall of the mosque.

2. The mosque is located in a dense urban area.

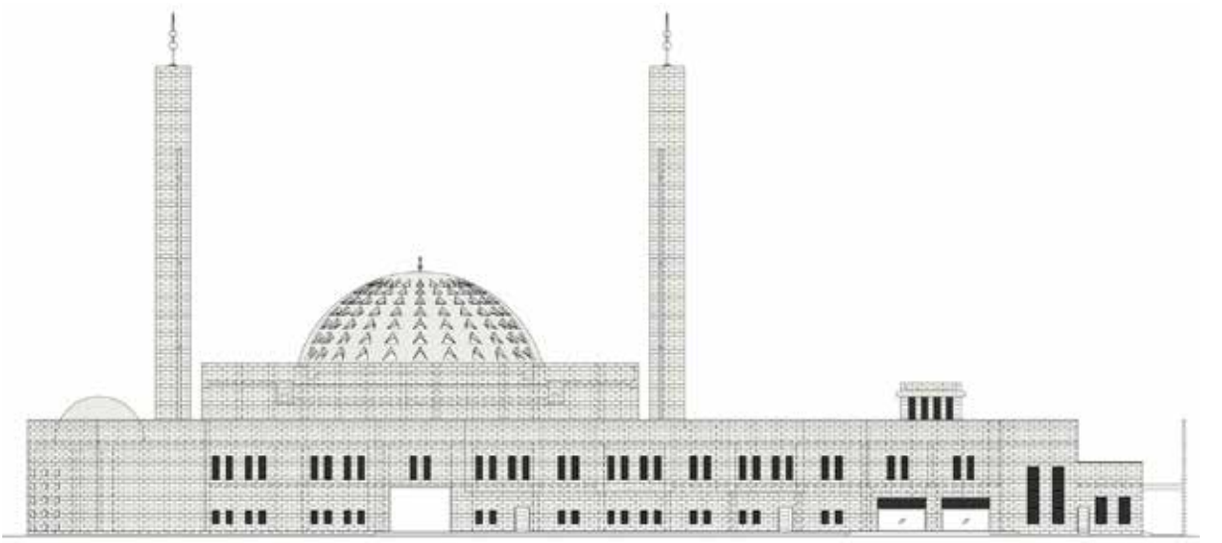
3. Site plan.



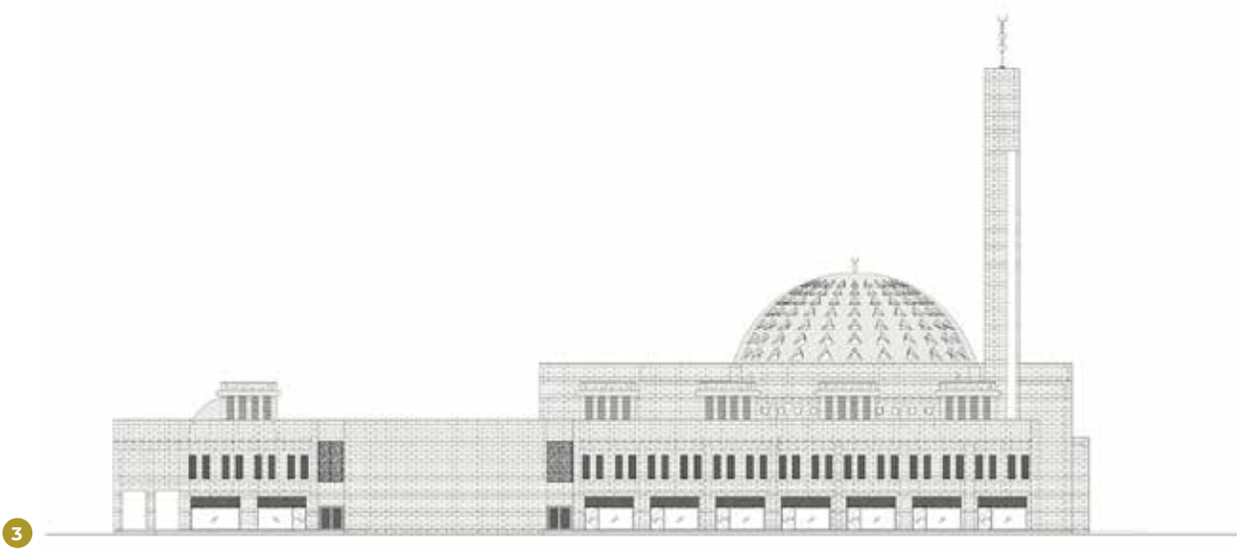
3


GROUND FLOOR
Legend
1. MAIN PRAYER HALL
2. DAILY PRAYER HALL
3. ARCADES
4. OPEN COURTYARD
5. WATER FOUNTAIN
6. JANAZA ROOM
7. MECHANICAL ROOM
8. MEN WC - ABLUTION
9. SECURITY
10. SHOP
17. MULTIPURPOSE / CEREMONY HALL
18. CAFE
19. Muathen residence
20. Imam residence
27. WC

1



2



3

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The mosque's exterior design follows a conservative interpretation of Islamic architectural tropes, characterized by compositional symmetry, minimal articulation, and restrained surface treatment. Its most defining elements are the two slender minarets and the main central dome, flanked by a smaller secondary dome—features that anchor the building within a recognizable, if conventional, religious typology.

The building is constructed in reinforced concrete and clad in light-colored stone, with overall volumes kept simple and compact. The façade treatment lacks ornamentation beyond what is structurally necessary or functionally explicit. Window openings are few and relatively small, contributing to a closed exterior envelope with minimal porosity or decorative relief. The outer walls—plain and largely unarticulated—reinforce the building's massive presence, but do little to elevate the architecture beyond basic functionality.

Entrances are clearly marked and accessible, yet they do not receive any architectural emphasis in the form of transitional canopies, recessed porticos, or crafted thresholds. As a result, the spatial transition between outside and inside lacks ceremony or symbolic charge. The mosque's skyline silhouette—comprising the dome pair and minarets—is legible and identifiable, but it does not distinguish itself through formal innovation or structural ingenuity.

Overall, the exterior composition is adequate in fulfilling the visual expectations of a mosque, particularly in a Gulf context where domes and minarets remain persistent markers of religious identity. However, the design appears more concerned with legibility and convention than with architectural exploration or expressive depth.

1. *Ground floor plan.* ***2.*** *Side elevation.* ***3.*** *Side elevation.*

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of the mosque continues the restrained approach observed on the exterior. The main prayer hall is a single open space organized beneath the central dome, with its spatial clarity supported by a straightforward structural grid and flat wall surfaces. The layout is clear and functional, although it offers limited architectural depth beyond its basic liturgical requirements.

Natural light enters primarily through a ring of openings at the dome's base, supplemented by modest apertures along the perimeter walls. The resulting illumination is diffuse and evenly distributed, yet it lacks the dynamic or contemplative modulation often found in mosques that deploy light more deliberately as a spiritual medium. There is no strong evidence of an orchestrated dialogue between light and material to deepen the sense of sacred enclosure.

The dome's interior is largely plain, with no muqarnas, ornamental structure, or decorative layering that might have transformed it into a celestial canopy. However, the small triangular perforations punctuating its surface do offer a modest architectural gesture—perhaps the most inventive in the entire composition. These subtle apertures may be read, if generously interpreted, as evoking the image of distant stars or constellations, lending the dome a quiet poetic resonance. A discreet band of calligraphy encircles the dome's base, reinforcing this symbolic suggestion, albeit with lesser visual prominence.

The mihrab and minbar are kept simple and unadorned, functioning as liturgical components rather than being spatially integrated or architecturally emphasized. Similarly, the floor materials are durable and well maintained, but offer no crafted detailing or symbolic motifs that might elevate the tactile experience of the space.

Absent are any interior courtyards, transitional iwan-like volumes, or layered spatial thresholds that could have introduced a sense of procession or sacred transition. As a result, the spatial sequence remains abrupt rather than unfolding, functional rather than contemplative.

In summary, the interior delivers a respectful and suitably dignified environment for prayer. Yet aside from the dome's quiet gesture toward the heavens, the design largely avoids architectural exploration or symbolic depth, maintaining a cautious minimalism that fulfills its purpose without aspiring to reinterpret the interior traditions of mosque architecture.

2

1. *The noisy space outside the mosque.*

2. *Relationship between the minaret, the prayer hall mass, and the central dome.*

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

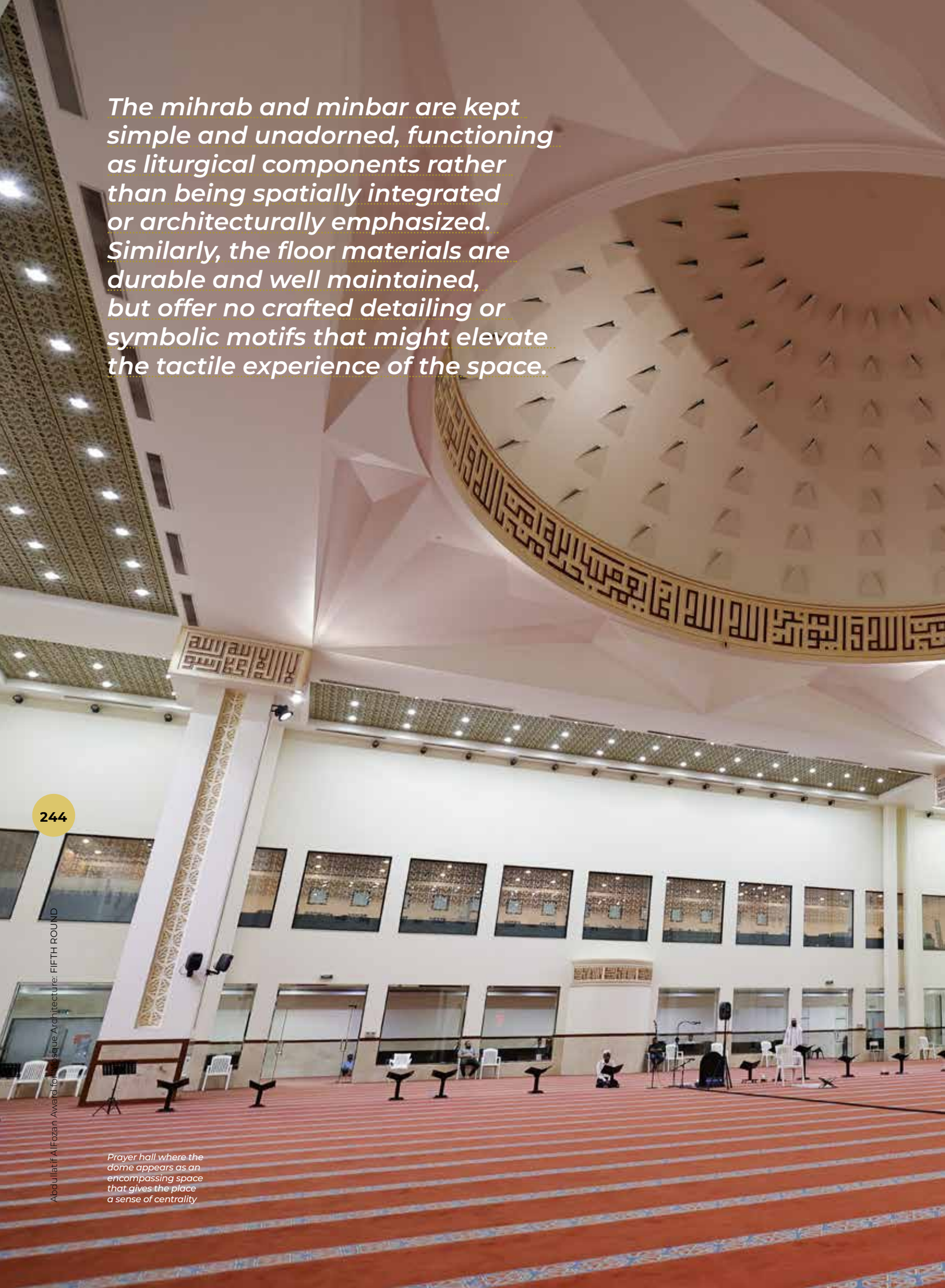
The available documentation provides limited insight into the technical and environmental systems employed in the mosque. Based on the on-site observations and general typology, it appears that the building relies primarily on conventional mechanical systems for lighting, ventilation, and thermal comfort. There is no indication of integrated passive cooling strategies, solar orientation optimization, or the use of renewable energy technologies.

Likewise, no mention is made of water-saving devices in ablution areas, energy-efficient lighting, or building automation systems. The building envelope—comprising plastered masonry walls and modest fenestration—appears to prioritize durability and simplicity over advanced thermal performance. There is no evident effort to express environmental ethics or sustainability aspirations through architectural form or material innovation.

In terms of long-term performance, the mosque seems robust and easy to maintain, which may reflect a practical concern for durability over ecological experimentation. This pragmatic approach ensures continued usability but does not engage contemporary architectural discourse around sustainability—an increasingly critical dimension of mosque design worldwide.

Insum, while the mosque appears functionally competent, its design and systems remain within the bounds of conventional practice. It does not project a strong stance on environmental responsibility, nor does it offer a model for technologically innovative or ecologically sensitive religious architecture.

The mihrab and minbar are kept simple and unadorned, functioning as liturgical components rather than being spatially integrated or architecturally emphasized. Similarly, the floor materials are durable and well maintained, but offer no crafted detailing or symbolic motifs that might elevate the tactile experience of the space.



Prayer hall where the dome appears as an encompassing space that gives the place a sense of centrality

1

Abdullatif AlFozan Award for Mosque Architecture: FIFTH ROUND

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

The King Khalid Mosque serves its immediate surroundings as a functional place of worship, offering the standard facilities required for daily prayers and community gatherings. While no specific programs or outreach initiatives are documented in the available review, the mosque appears to operate as a local religious anchor within its neighborhood. Its accessible location and accommodating capacity suggest a design that prioritizes basic community service and ritual continuity.

No evidence is provided of broader civic engagement, educational programming, or interfaith dialogue, nor are there architectural gestures that signal openness to diverse users or non-religious visitors. The spatial layout, while practical, is inward-looking, and the overall presence of the mosque in the urban fabric remains modest in both scale and social ambition.

During major religious events such as Friday prayers and Ramadan, the mosque presumably supports increased attendance, although the absence of detailed information on crowd management or auxiliary facilities makes it difficult to assess how effectively it adapts to peak usage.

In contrast to more socially integrated mosque designs in this cycle—such as those incorporating gardens, libraries, or cafés—the King Khalid Mosque presents a limited civic footprint. It fulfills its core function reliably but does not seem to aspire toward a broader role as a hub of community life or cultural exchange.

1. *A surreal image during prayer.*

2. *The arcade and upper passage form the mosque's entry space*

2

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The King Khalid Grand Mosque in Bahrain represents a modest attempt to preserve recognizable features of traditional Islamic architecture within a contemporary urban context. With its symmetrical plan, central dome, and twin minarets, the mosque adheres to established typologies that signal religious presence without challenging aesthetic or spatial conventions. It delivers functional clarity and basic congregational capacity but does not seek architectural distinction or expressive innovation.

In its material treatment, spatial organization, and general composition, the mosque appears content to fulfill expectations rather than reimagine them. There is no evident engagement with environmental design strategies, symbolic layering, or deeper reinterpretations of sacred form. Nor does the mosque articulate a clear response to its surrounding context beyond basic alignment and proportionality.

While such restraint may reflect practical constraints or cultural expectations, it also results in a certain architectural inertia. Compared with more experimental or socially embedded mosque designs elsewhere in this cycle, the King Khalid Mosque remains architecturally conservative and programmatically limited. Its role is clear and reliable—but also circumscribed.

This, in itself, is a noteworthy reflection on the diversity of contemporary mosque architecture. Not every mosque need be iconic or innovative. Some serve by holding ground—preserving continuity, anchoring ritual, and meeting the everyday needs of their communities with dignity and reserve. The King Khalid Mosque belongs to this category: a quiet presence that fulfills its task, even if it refrains from expanding the language or ambition of mosque design today.

1

1. *The minaret, with its distinctive form that harmonizes with the mosque mass.*

2. *One of the mosque facilities.*

3. *The mosque courtyard defined by the arcade and the striking upper mass.*

2

3

Marmara University Faculty Of Theology Mosque 294

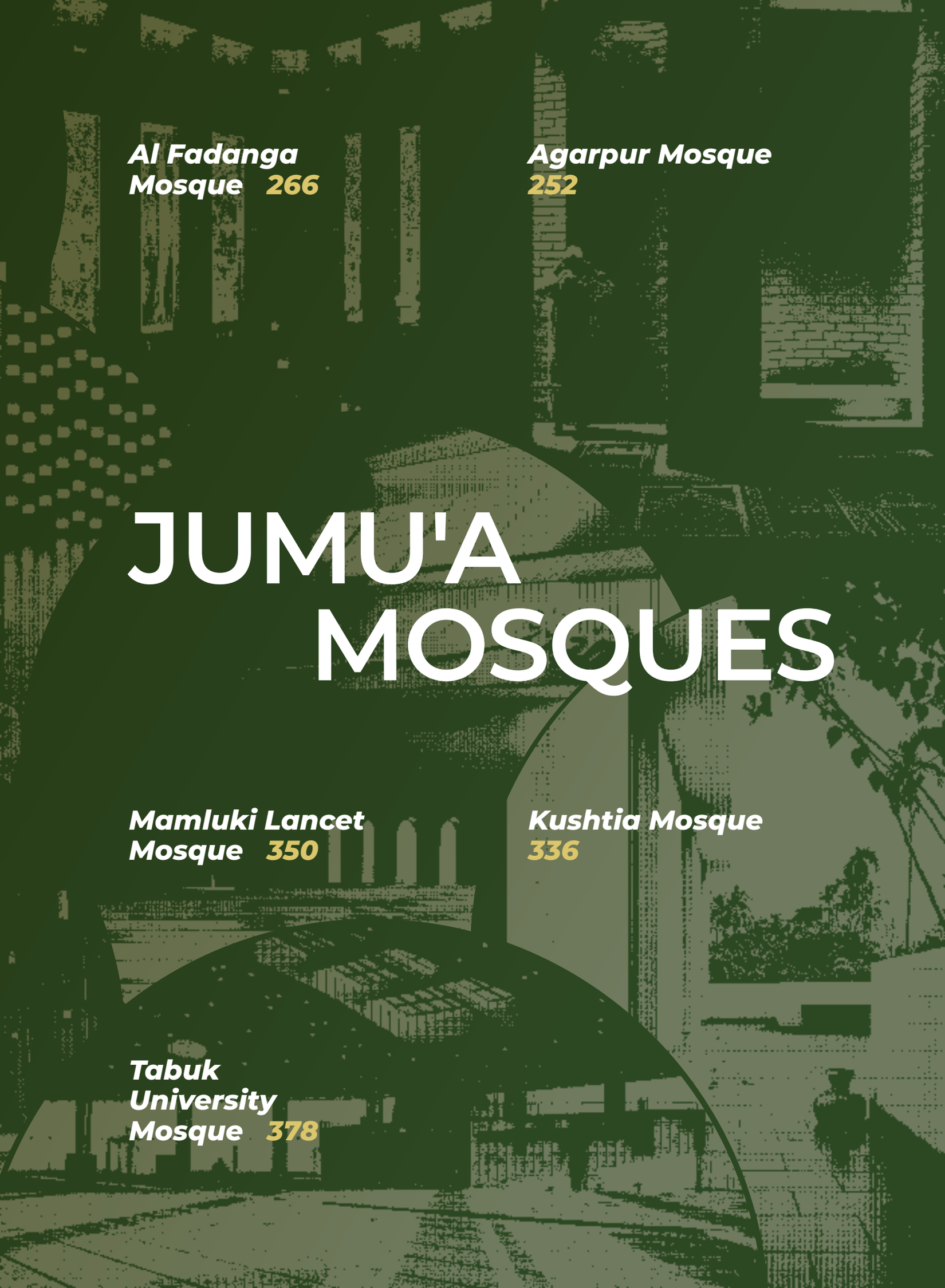
As-Salam Jame Mosque 280

Nomba Mosque 322

E Zubaida Mosque 308

Ulul Albab Mosque 364

Ghazi Al Gosaibi Mosque 392



JUMU'A MOSQUES

Al Fadanga Mosque *266*

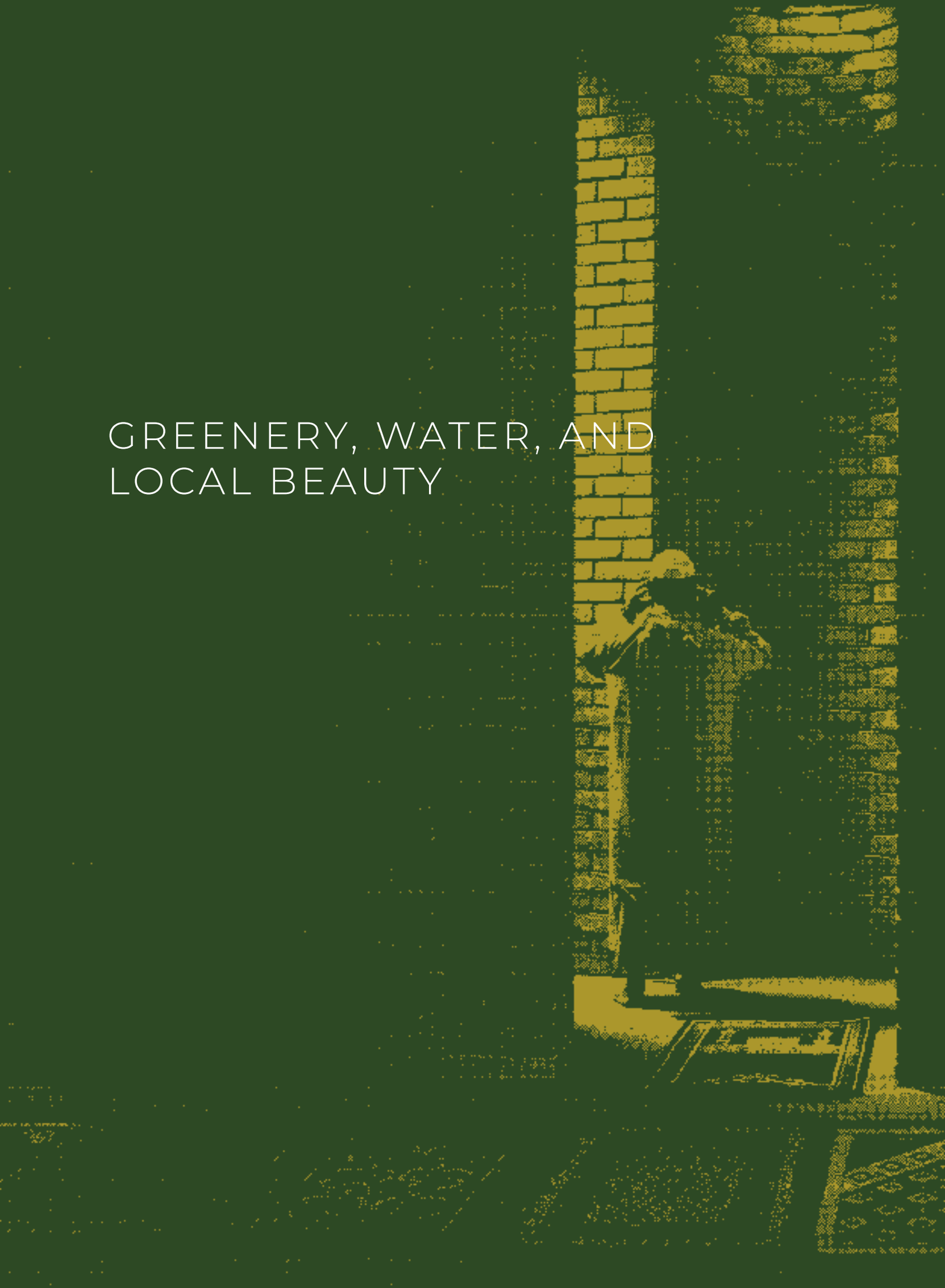
Agarpur Mosque *252*

Mamluki Lancet Mosque *350*

Kushtia Mosque *336*

Tabuk University Mosque *378*

GREENERY, WATER, AND LOCAL BEAUTY



AGARPUR
Mosque

Agarpur Mosque
Location: Barisal District, Bangladesh
Architect: Kashef Mahboob Chowdhury, Urbana
Year of Completion: 2019
Plot Area: 400 m^2
Built-Up Area: 165 m^2
Capacity: 100 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Rizal Muslimin

The Agarpur Mosque lies within the quiet rural landscape of Agarpur village in Bangladesh's Barisal district, on a family-owned plot that carries traces of several generations: an old mosque, modest family houses, and two ponds that once structured daily life. By the time the new mosque was commissioned, these structures had long fallen into disuse, reduced to softened brick silhouettes that nonetheless retained a certain dignity.

The client, Salahuddin Ahmed, sought not merely to rebuild a place for prayer, but to restore vitality to the land itself. He turned to Kashef Mahboob Chowdhury, a leading figure in contemporary Bangladeshi architecture , whose work stands at a considered intersection: deeply rooted in the regional culture of brick while remaining quietly conversant with modern architectural discourse.

Although the Agarpur Mosque is modest in size, accommodating around one hundred worshippers, its architectural stance is notably assured. Chowdhury's approach reflects a designer attentive to material, climate, and social context, yet engaged with a broader architectural lineage. One senses, without strain or imitation, an affinity with the spatial clarity and disciplined material use associated with Louis Kahn, whose presence in Bangladesh left a lasting intellectual imprint. The careful ordering of space, the controlled handling of brick, and the measured interplay of circles and squares resonate gently with that tradition.

There are also faint correspondences with the work of 'Team 10' , particularly the human-centered compositions of Aldo van Eyck, where circular insertions softened rigid forms and enriched spatial transitions. These influences are not quoted or reproduced; rather, they appear absorbed and rearticulated through the architect's own language, emerging as quiet affinities rather than explicit references.

The decision to retain the mosque's original location, with a slight shift that reveals nearby heritage structures, and the use of the eastern pond as a natural ablution setting, anchor the new building firmly within its landscape. Opened in 2019, the mosque became the first step in a broader, family-led effort to reactivate the site through the addition of educational and communal facilities.

In this way, the Agarpur Mosque is not presented as a singular architectural object, but as part of a living ground: one that preserves memory, serves the present, and gestures calmly toward a future shaped by learning, gathering, and prayer.

1

2

URBAN INTEGRATION

Agarpur is not a dense urban environment, but a village landscape shaped by water, trees, and the slow rhythms of rural life. The mosque site sits at the convergence of these elements: an inherited family compound framed by two ponds, remnants of old brick structures, and a gentle rise of ground facing the local road. The new mosque occupies almost exactly the footprint of its predecessor, though shifted slightly southward, a subtle adjustment that opens the site and allows the older family buildings to stand in quiet dialogue with the new prayer hall.

The landscape becomes an active partner in the design. The eastern pond, once simply part of the family land, is embraced as a natural ablution space, accessed via descending brick steps that also serve as seating. The alignment between pond, outdoor terrace, and prayer hall creates a sequence in which water, ground, and built form reinforce one another. For villagers approaching from different directions, the mosque appears not as an object placed upon the land, but as something that has emerged from it.

The wider rural context of Barisal also informed the mosque's scale and presence. Buildings remain low, trees rise above them, and brick walls tell a long regional story. The mosque responds with a restrained height, not exceeding five meters, allowing older structures and surrounding greenery to retain their place within the visual hierarchy. New and old thus coexist in a carefully weighted balance.

The act of siting also reveals an architectural sensibility attentive to both local conditions and broader architectural thought. The inner square, rotated toward the qibla, is nested within an outer square that respects the orientation of the historic family buildings. This calibration between prayer direction and inherited geometry reflects a deep respect for the site's history while affirming the mosque's spiritual axis. Such decisions, simple in appearance, belong to a tradition in which geometry mediates between the practical and the poetic.

Here, the mosque does not seek to dominate its surroundings. Instead, it frames them: the pond with its shifting water line, the brick remnants marked by time, and the open ground shaped by daily movement. Through this precise positioning, the Agarpur Mosque anchors the site in the present while keeping its memories legible and alive.

1. *The mosque within its surrounding.*

2. *Site plan.*

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

From the outside, the Agarpur Mosque presents itself as a compact brick volume shaped by the interlocking of two squares: one aligned with the inherited geometry of the family's historic buildings, the other subtly rotated toward the qibla. This restrained geometric move gives the mosque both its composure and its identity. The outer square situates the building within its context, while the inner square aligns it spiritually.

The space between these two geometries becomes a zone of unexpected richness. Parts of it remain solid, while others are carved into cylindrical voids that form micro-courtyards along the perimeter. These circular pockets soften the mass, loosen its edges, and generate a shifting play of light and shadow throughout the day. They also reveal the depth of the brick walls, contributing simultaneously to environmental performance and architectural expression.

Seen from the village road, the most distinctive gesture is the gently inclined roof plane, rising toward the qibla. One corner of the building lifts almost imperceptibly, creating a forward-leaning inclination that is both functional and symbolic. It aids rainwater drainage during the monsoon season while offering a subtle bodily cue, suggestive of orientation and reverence.

The brickwork, laid with consistent care, visually binds the mosque to the older structures on the site. It is not nostalgic imitation, but a continuation of a regional material language articulated in a contemporary manner. The walls read as monolithic, yet narrow openings and circular cuts introduce a controlled porosity, lending the exterior depth and nuance.

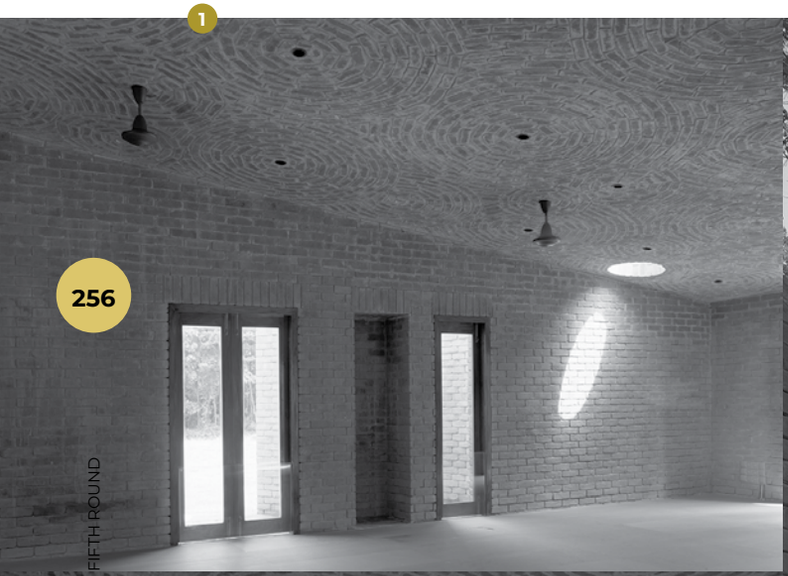
On the pond side, the mosque appears particularly grounded. Amphitheater-like steps descend toward the water, extending the building outward and forming a shared threshold between landscape and architecture. Reflected on the pond's surface, the brick mass softens and lightens, reinforcing the mosque's relationship with its surroundings.

The exterior composition is defined by order without rigidity. Geometry is disciplined but never doctrinaire; massing is simple without becoming reductive. Geometry, material, and light operate as primary architectural instruments, in continuity with Bangladesh's brick-building tradition and a modern architectural lineage that values clarity and proportion. Yet nothing feels borrowed. The mosque reads as a sincere response to place, climate, and community.

1. *Prayer hall and mihrab... a calm, balanced space.*

2. *The brick technique appears even in the prayer hall roof.*

3. *Brick walls create a calm sculptural visual formation.*



INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Crossing the threshold into the prayer hall, the first impression is one of measured calm. The interior is shaped by the same brick language as the exterior, yet the atmosphere shifts noticeably: the exterior is marked by interplay and porosity, while the interior settles into a quieter, more contemplative register. Surfaces are warm but restrained, and details are limited to what serves orientation, light, and prayer.

The interior is organized around the rotated inner square, the geometric decision that quietly governs the entire plan. Here, the turn toward the qibla becomes spatially legible. Walls gently realign, guiding body and gaze without explicit markers. This shift also generates interstitial pockets that absorb functional needs, allowing storage, circulation, and services to recede into the spaces between the two squares.

In this arrangement, one senses an unspoken affinity with Louis Kahn's distinction between served and serving spaces: the uninterrupted prayer hall at the core, encircled by a layer of quietly supportive functions that do not assert themselves.

Light enters in two complementary ways: laterally through the micro-courtyards and from above through a constellation of circular skylights. By day, these skylights cast diffused light across the ceiling, revealing a brick surface articulated with circular patterns that suggest gentle movement within an otherwise restrained space. The ceiling becomes the most expressive interior element, animating the hall without excess. At night, artificial lighting follows the same geometry, preserving continuity between day and evening conditions.

Along the qibla wall, light is treated with particular restraint. Here, the micro-courtyards are opaque, allowing illumination to soften and deepen rather than penetrate. The mihrab is articulated with quiet clarity: a tall wall containing two alcoves, one aligned with a skylight marking the imam's position, the other stepped to accommodate the khatib . The gestures are measured and dignified, avoiding any sense of emphasis for their own sake.

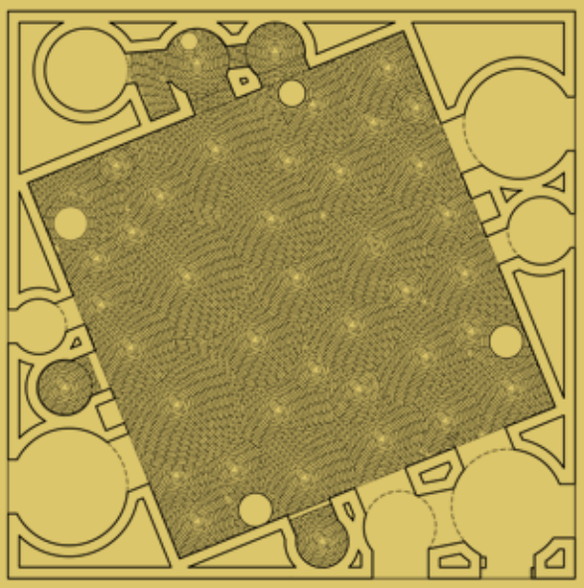
The floor continues this subtle geometry. Red-toned concrete panels, proportioned close to the dimensions of individual prayer mats, offer worshippers a natural sense of spacing without the need for markings. The interior is marked above all by a sense of collectedness. Ornament and spectacle are absent; instead, geometry, material, and light quietly prepare the body and mind for prayer. The space feels contemporary yet familiar, revealing its depth gradually through repeated visits and shifting light conditions.

4

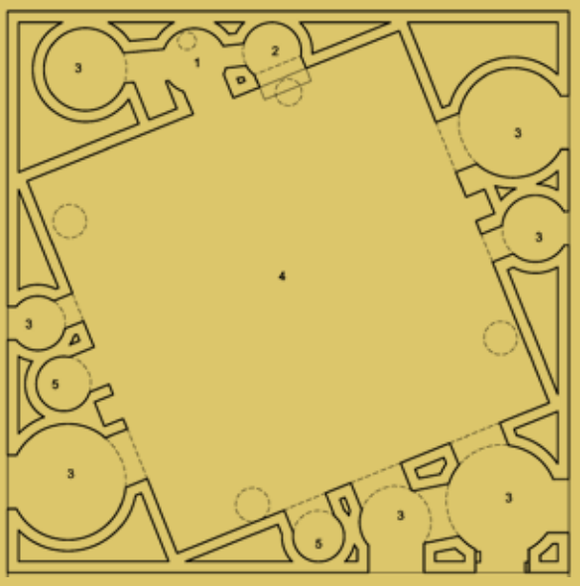
5

4. *A close relationship between water and the mosque within Bengali social culture.*

5. *Local brick technique forms the mosque walls.*

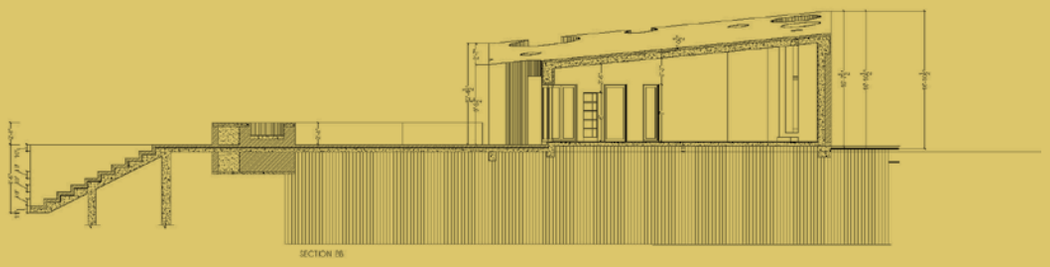


REFLECTED ROOF PLAN

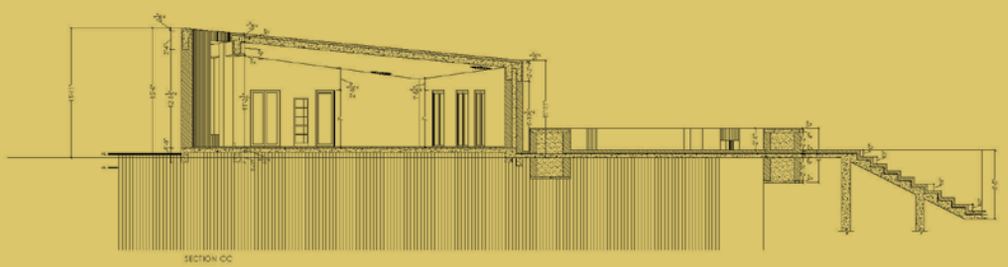


Floor plan.

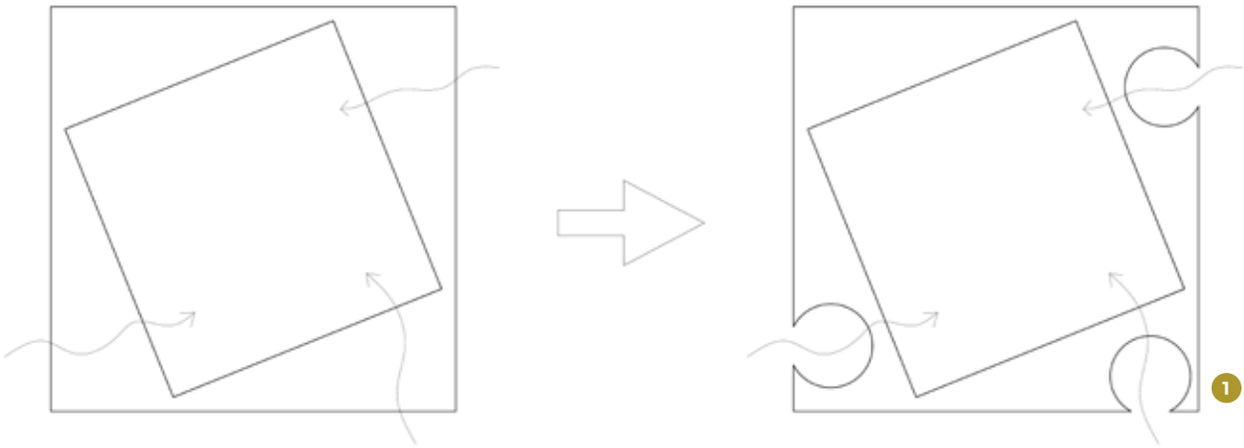
SECTION AA



SECTION BB



SECTION CC



TECHNICAL SYSTEMS & SUSTAINABILITY

The mosque relies on a set of quiet, largely invisible technical strategies well suited to its rural setting and restrained architectural language. Thick brick walls, combined with deep recesses and triangular micro-courtyards generated by the rotation of the two squares, help moderate temperature naturally, retaining coolness during the day and warmth during cooler seasons. Cross-ventilation is encouraged through lateral openings, while a discreet chimney effect behind the mihrab allows warm air to rise and dissipate.

Daylight serves as the primary source of illumination. Circular skylights and side openings provide ample light throughout the day, reducing reliance on artificial lighting except at night. When used, artificial lighting follows the same geometric logic, maintaining the calm visual order of the interior.

Rainwater management is handled through simple, robust means. The inclined roof directs water toward the lower edge, where it runs along the brick walls. Though this leaves visible traces of weathering, the brick ages gracefully without compromising structural performance.

Construction employs techniques familiar to local craftsmen: load-bearing brick walls, reinforced concrete columns, and a concrete roof slab, ensuring durability and ease of maintenance. Ablution facilities are divided between the pond-side steps, honoring local custom, and covered tap-water facilities within the adjacent preschool, providing a practical alternative during heavy rains.

Overall, the mosque's technical systems reflect the same philosophy that governs its architecture: modest in appearance, precise in performance, and grounded in local knowledge, relying on the logic of mass and form rather than mechanical intervention.

1. *General studies.*

2. *Exterior simplicity despite the richness of details.*

3. *Brick formations.*

Construction employs techniques familiar to local craftsmen: load-bearing brick walls, reinforced concrete columns, and a concrete roof slab, ensuring durability and ease of maintenance. Ablution facilities are divided between the pond-side steps, honoring local custom, and covered tap-water facilities within the adjacent preschool, providing a practical alternative during heavy rains.

Mihrab... a relationship between sculpture and light

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

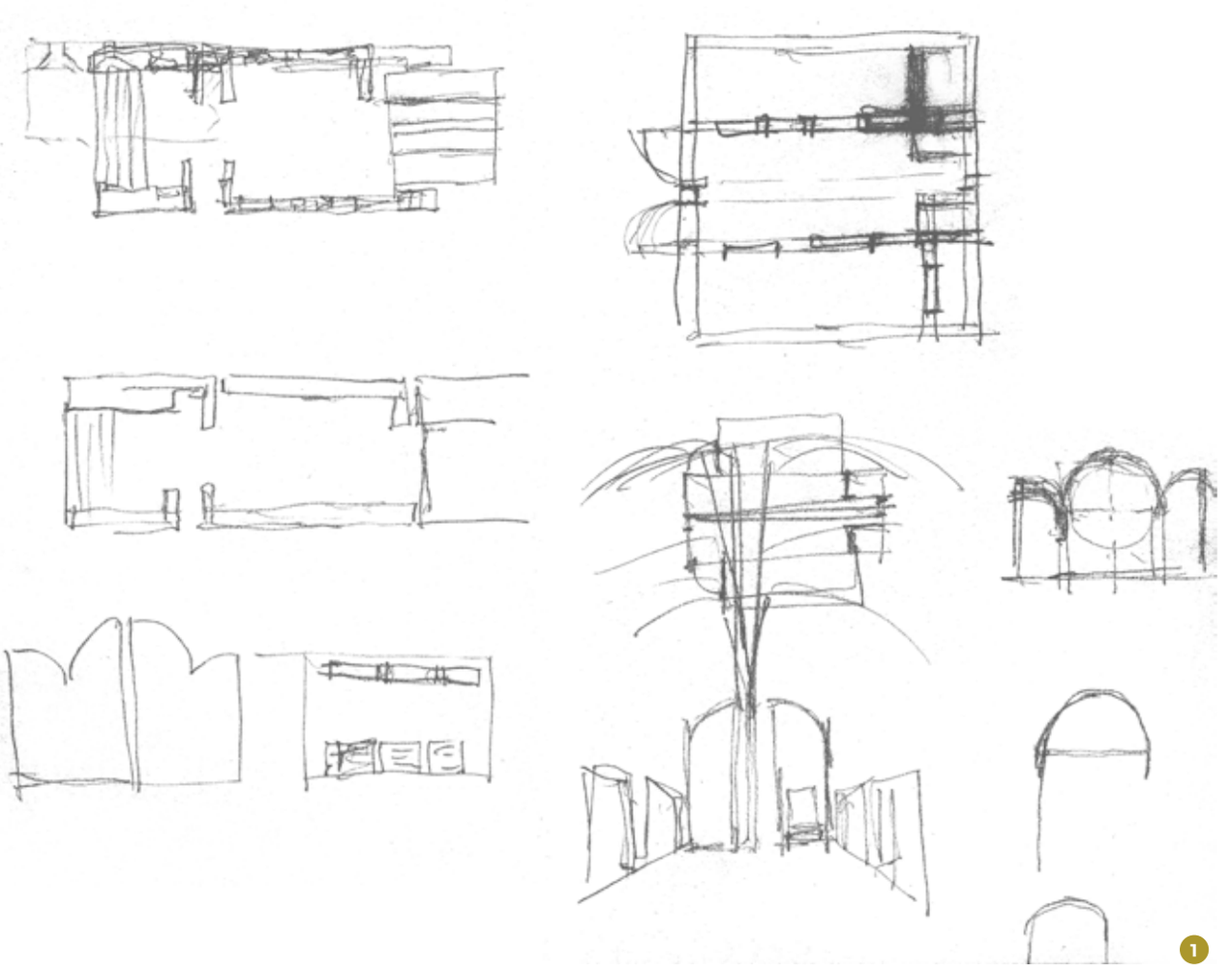
Despite its modest scale, the Agarpur Mosque has assumed a social role that exceeds its size. Surrounding spaces, including open terraces, pond-facing steps, and shaded seating areas, have become natural extensions of village life. The mosque is not approached solely at prayer times, but visited before and after, serving as a familiar place for pause, conversation, and informal gathering.

Children gather by the water's edge, elders rest on brick benches, and the amphitheater steps function as an unplanned social platform. This role was further strengthened by the construction of a nearby preschool following the mosque's completion, offering Qur'anic instruction for local children. The proximity of prayer and learning has given the site the character of a small communal nucleus, rooted in family land yet open to the village as a whole.

The mosque's unpretentious form and clear thresholds make it accessible and welcoming. While certain facilities, such as women's prayer areas, follow local custom rather than formalized provision, the mosque's overall presence remains inclusive. Most importantly, the project has revived land once occupied by abandoned structures, transforming it into a place that supports daily rhythms, shared encounters, and a renewed sense of belonging.

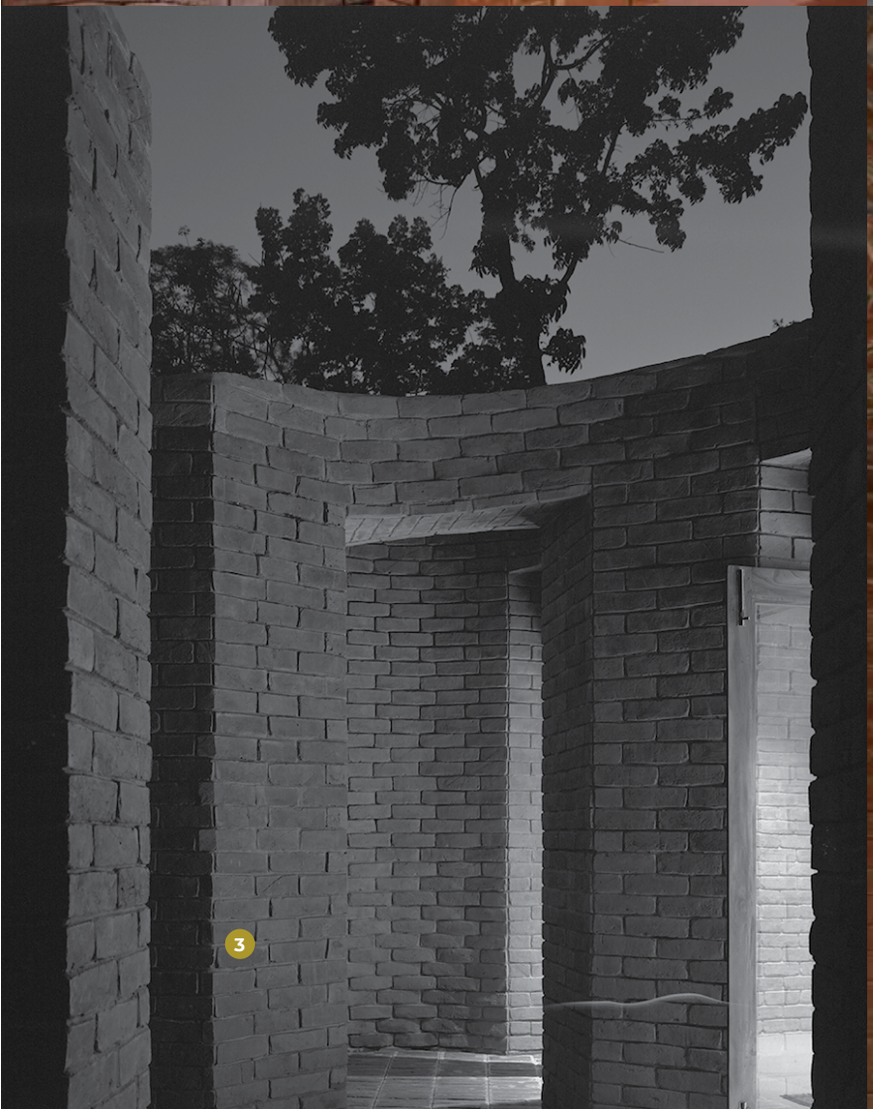
1. *Preliminary studies.*

2-5. *Wall and ceiling details where brick appears in all its local techniques, showcasing the craftsmen's inherited skills.*



2

4



3

5

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

Seen within the wider landscape of contemporary mosque architecture, and among the projects presented in this cycle, the Agarpur Mosque stands out as a work distinguished by its quiet clarity and composure. Its strength does not derive from scale, spectacle, or technological display, but from a deep architectural intelligence expressed with measured restraint.

Every decision in the project feels necessary. The interlocking squares, the triangular micro-courtyards generated by their rotation, the gently inclined roof, and the plan's careful accommodation of supporting functions without disturbing the sanctity of the prayer hall all point to a design approach grounded in order and discipline. Architecture here emerges from a coherent principle rather than from accumulation or formal improvisation. In this sense, the mosque aligns with a modern architectural lineage while remaining firmly rooted in its rural context.

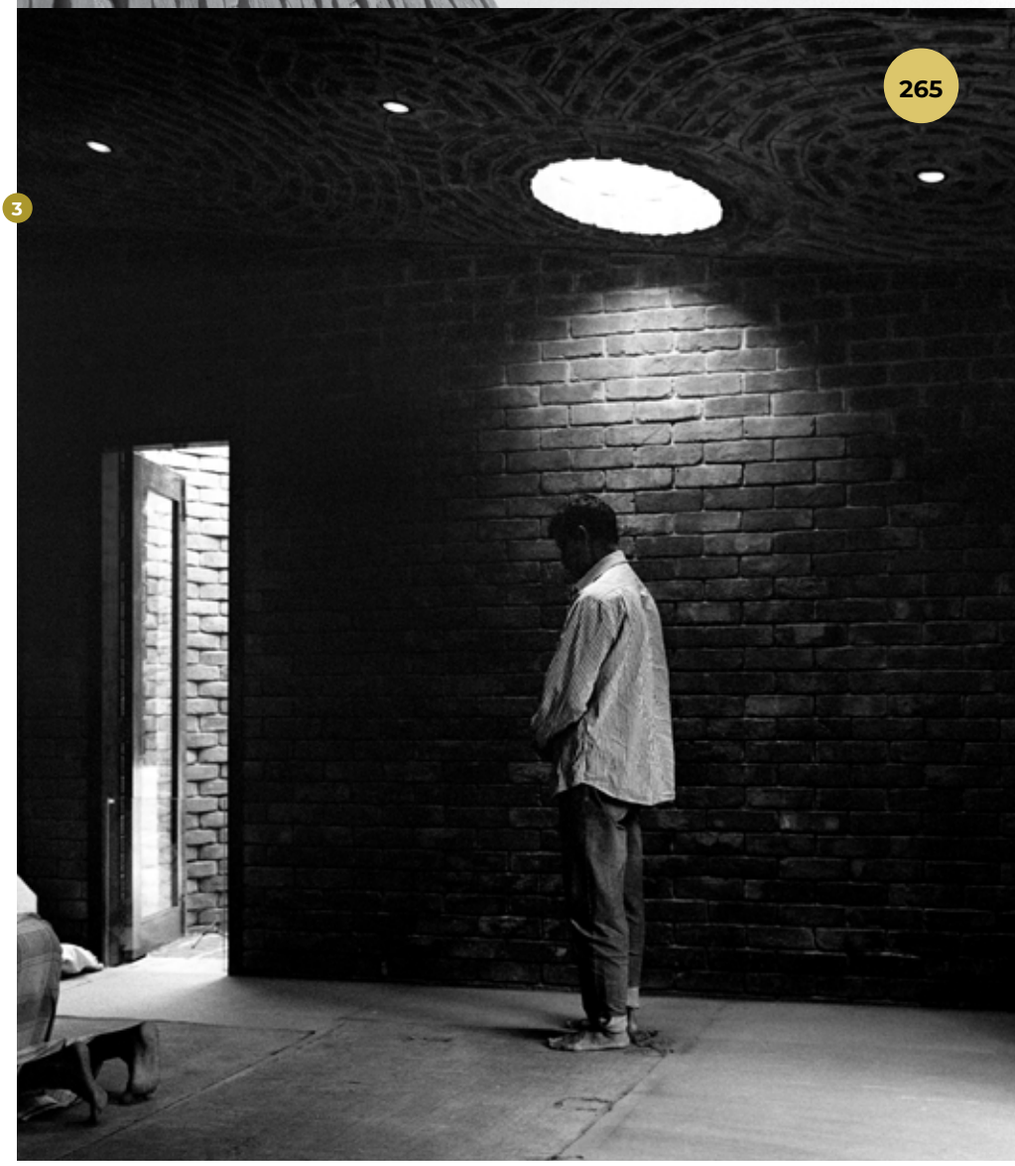
What gives the Agarpur Mosque its particular value is its respect for place. Brick speaks the language of the region, the pond becomes part of daily ritual life, and existing family buildings are not erased but allowed to coexist with the new. These elements are not treated as nostalgic references, but as living components of a shared environment. The mosque thus becomes an extension of the ground on which it stands, rather than an object imposed upon it.

Within the context of the Abdullatif Al Fozan Award, which seeks ideas capable of advancing contemporary mosque architecture and opening new horizons for the mosque of the future, the Agarpur Mosque presents a compelling architectural position. It demonstrates that a mosque can be modest in scale without limiting ambition, contemporary in expression without severing ties to context, and innovative without excess.

When set alongside projects in this cycle that range from dense urban complexes to expansive civic institutions, Agarpur reminds us that the future of mosque architecture need not be forged only through large-scale or metropolitan interventions. It may also emerge from places that appear peripheral, when material, landscape, and space are brought into thoughtful alignment with everyday life.

It is, in every sense, a small building with a long reach.

1



1. *Courtyards are an extension of the prayer hall mass not only spatially, but also in materials and construction technique.*

2. *Brick formations representing a bridge between past and present.*

3. *Darkness and light in the prayer hall.*

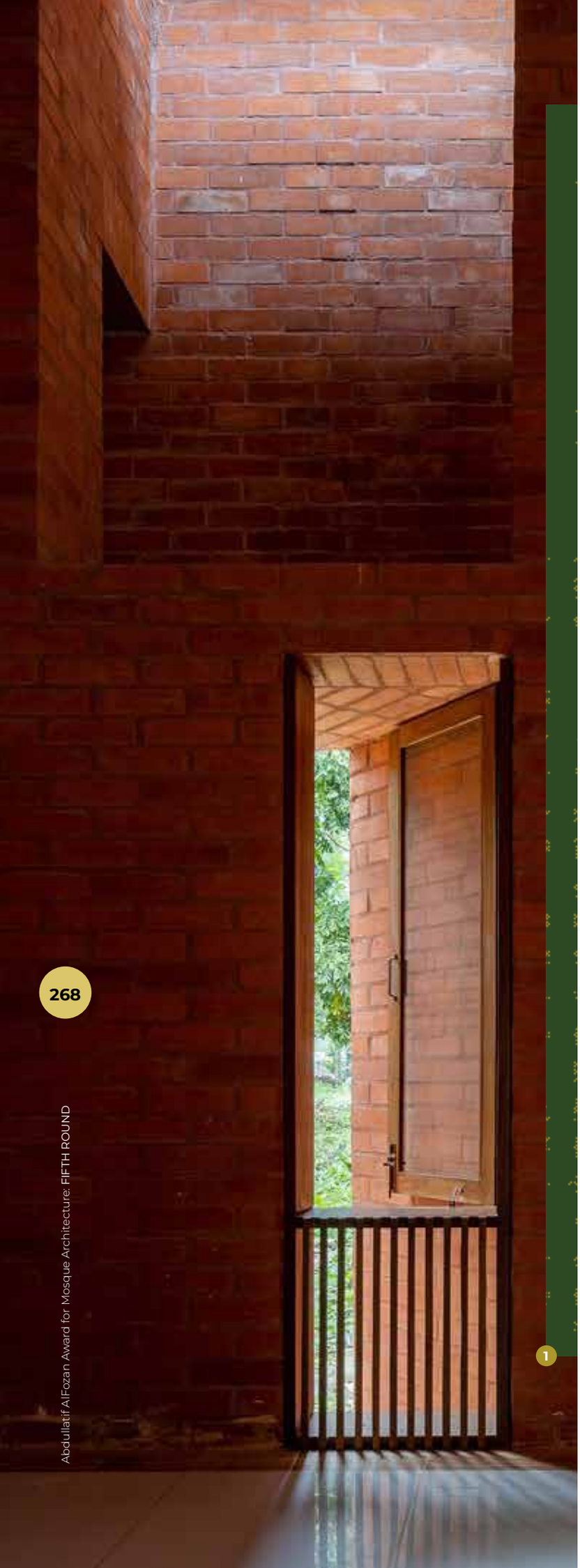
DETAILS THAT TRANSCEND THE LIMITS OF FORM

ALFADANGA

Mosque

Alfadanga Mosque
Location: Faridpur, Bangladesh
Architect: Marina Tabassum Architects
Year of Completion: 2022
Plot Area: 690 m^2
Built-Up Area: 320 m^2
Capacity: 148 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Rizal Muslimin



The Alfadanga Mosque, designed by Marina Tabassum Architects and completed in 2022, is a compact and contemplative prayer space located in the rural district of Faridpur, Bangladesh. Occupying a modest footprint of approximately 320 square meters, the mosque was commissioned by the Buraich Moulvi Bari family as part of a broader restoration of their ancestral estate—a 250-year-old Mughal-style residence. The new mosque replaces a deteriorated structure on the same site and serves the surrounding low-density village population with a capacity for 148 worshippers.

Designed with architectural restraint and intellectual clarity, the mosque draws inspiration from Bengal Sultanate pavilions and Mughal-era spatial typologies, distilled into a modern cubical form. The project seamlessly blends historical references with contemporary sensibilities, avoiding superficial ornamentation or symbolic gestures. Instead, it emphasizes proportion, light, material authenticity, and environmental responsiveness. With no dome, minaret, or calligraphy to herald to the world its raison d'être, the mosque manages to confidently and eloquently communicate spiritual meaning through spatial modulation and tectonic precision.

This project reflects Marina Tabassum's continued exploration of architecture that emerges from context—culturally, climatically, and communally. It stands as a contemporary reinterpretation of Bangladesh's rich religious and architectural heritage, realized through an economy of means and a deep respect for place.

This is precisely Marina Tabassum's intent: an architecture of quiet resolve—resonant with the ethos of Louis Kahn and his theory of 'Silence and Light'. Yet it does not imitate. It rises from its own soil, speaks in its own vernacular, and engages Kahn's legacy not through replication, but through dialogue, grounded reinterpretation, and mature evolution.

1

1. The wall and roof-light collectors.

2. General exterior view.

2. The mosque mass is adjacent to water and immersed in greenery.

URBAN INTEGRATION

Set within the lush, rural landscape of Faridpur, the Alfadanga Mosque inhabits a layered site rich in memory and meaning. Surrounded by tropical vegetation, a pond, ancestral Mughal ruins, and modest village structures, the mosque anchors a domestic-religious ensemble that has evolved across centuries. Its location along the axis connecting the restored ancestral house, the pond, and the outhouse gate reflects both continuity and quiet intervention. The alignment—slightly shifted from the original mosque footprint—was recalibrated to improve access and spatial clarity, framing a brick-paved plaza that now functions as both forecourt and communal threshold.

Rather than announce itself with vertical markers, the mosque recedes into its context. It is approached through a narrow brick lane, shaded by mango and Ceylon olive trees, and partially concealed until the final turn reveals its monolithic brick volume. From the east, it sits openly between the water and the house, tied into the topography through restrained architectural gestures—matching rooflines, shared terracotta plaster finishes, and a careful modulation of scale.

The absence of minaret, dome, or ornate signage is not a deficiency but a deliberate affirmation of context. This mosque was not designed for outsiders but for a community that needs no visual prompts to identify a place of worship. The familiarity of form, the tactility of materials, and the memory of the ancestral house form a landscape of recognition—one in which mosque and home, sacred and ordinary, coexist.

At the territorial scale, the project avoids disruption. It respects the wetland ecology by limiting paving and allowing grass, soil, and water to interact naturally. Circulation paths remain informal and adaptive, preserving the rural character. By forgoing grand gestures, the mosque achieves a more profound integration with its environment—becoming not a landmark, but a locus.

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The Alfadanga Mosque presents a restrained yet compelling architectural presence—an austere cubic form of red brick softened by chamfered corners and tactile detailing. Rising to a height of approximately nine meters, the building maintains a visual parity with the adjacent ancestral house, while asserting its identity through abstraction rather than ornamentation.

From a distance, the mosque reads as monolithic and grounded, but closer inspection reveals a nuanced spatial play between mass and void. Tilted openings, rotated at 45 degrees, punctuate the lower walls like shutters—inviting glimpses inward while preserving privacy. This oblique geometry is both spatial and symbolic, reframing conventional mosque façades and suggesting a shift from declarative monumentality to introverted reflection.

The absence of expected mosque markers—domes, arches, minarets—challenges normative expectations without alienating the local community. On the contrary, the architectural language draws directly from regional precedents such as the Bagha Mosque in Rajshahi and the Mughal-era buildings of Bengal, distilling their compositional logic into a minimalist grammar of proportion and rhythm. The result is a mosque that feels familiar yet renewed.

Materially, the use of load-bearing brick walls is both a structural decision and a cultural gesture. The bricks are laid in thick walls that express depth and continuity, extending traditions of the Bengal Sultanate and the family's ancestral house. Their texture is left unpainted, their geometry unembellished—evoking a raw honesty that resists superficial beautification.

Light becomes the mosque's primary ornament. The interplay of solid and void, depth and reveal, animates the façades as the day progresses. While the building seems hermetic at first, it gradually discloses its porosity. Vertical slits, hidden skylights, and perforated thresholds suggest that the mosque is less a container of space than a calibrated envelope for air, light, and silence.

1. *Site plan.* ***2.*** *Ground floor plan.*

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

If the exterior of the Alfadanga Mosque evokes quietude and solidity, the interior reveals a more dynamic spatial experience—an architecture of atmosphere shaped by light, material restraint, and spatial clarity. The prayer hall is a high, column-free chamber with a double-height ceiling reaching 6.5 meters. Its span, achieved without interior support, opens a unified space for worship, uninterrupted in both plan and gaze.

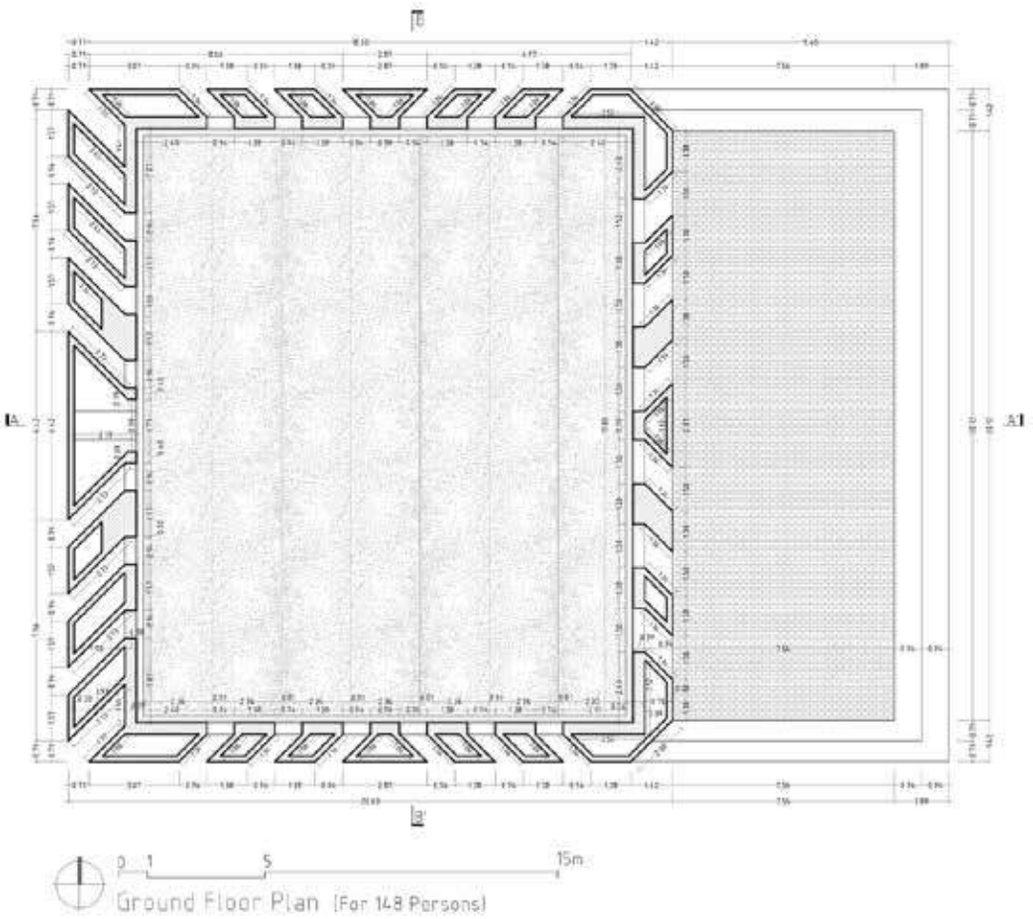
Daylight is the principal medium through which spiritual ambiance is achieved. A constellation of 36 openings—both horizontal and vertical—manages the transition between interior and exterior. Lower walls, angled at 45 degrees, direct light and breeze diagonally into the prayer space while shielding views inward. Above, recessed brick panels and carefully designed skylights diffuse overhead light, creating a serene and shifting illumination that transforms the space over time—from stark white at noon to warm amber at sunset. This orchestrated gradient animates the otherwise minimal surfaces and amplifies the contemplative atmosphere.

Materially, the mosque is reduced to three exposed elements: red brick, grey concrete, and white ceramic tile. These are not aesthetic choices alone, but climatic and spiritual ones. The ceramic floor reflects light and cools the space, the concrete slab appears to float above the brick walls, and the red brick regulates temperature and defines tectonic rhythm. No paint, no decoration—only spinning white ceiling fans mark movement in an otherwise hushed enclosure.

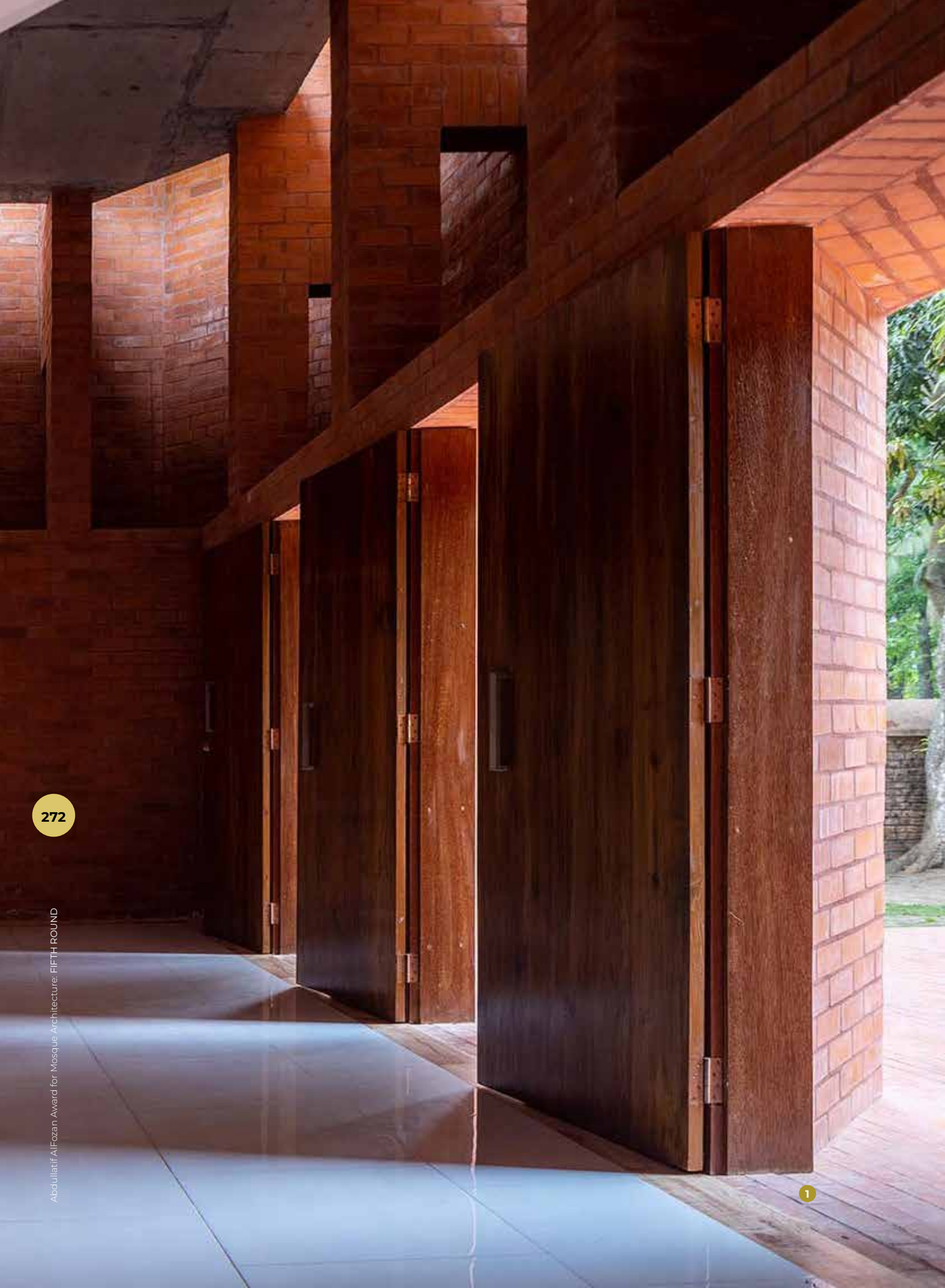
The mihrab wall, double-thick and inwardly recessed, anchors the prayer direction both spatially and symbolically. A subtle vertical niche carves out the minbar, while small, concealed alcoves house sound equipment without visual disruption. The walls are not flat but articulated—sliced, rotated, and recessed—so that depth, shadow, and airflow work in concert.

Thresholds are designed as transitional compressions: short brick tunnels with sloped sides that obscure the interior from direct view while filtering light and air. These moments of passage prepare the body and mind for worship, framing the act of entry as an architectural ritual.

Despite its simplicity, the space is rich in nuance—void of decoration but filled with intentionality. Its sparseness does not reflect poverty, but discipline; its restraint is not minimalism for its own sake, but a focused prioritization of spiritual clarity through spatial intelligence.



Ground Floor Plan (For 148 Persons)



2

1. *Details of deep brick walls functioning as a triple-purpose system balancing structural stability, ventilation, and natural light.*

2. *The mosque courtyard, like the prayer hall, represents a permanent social realm for residents.*

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

The Alfadanga Mosque is a study in low-tech intelligence—eschewing complex systems in favor of robust passive strategies, vernacular construction methods, and minimal resource consumption. At its core, the mosque demonstrates how traditional materials and spatial configurations can meet contemporary performance needs while remaining accessible to local craftsmanship and climate realities.

The building's thermal comfort relies almost entirely on passive means. Cross-ventilation is achieved through a system of rotated wall openings and staggered skylights, allowing air to move horizontally across the prayer hall and rise naturally upward, drawing out heat. The tall ceiling, combined with ceramic tile flooring and shaded massing, helps moderate interior temperature even in the humid months, with ceiling fans supplementing airflow when needed. No artificial cooling system is employed.

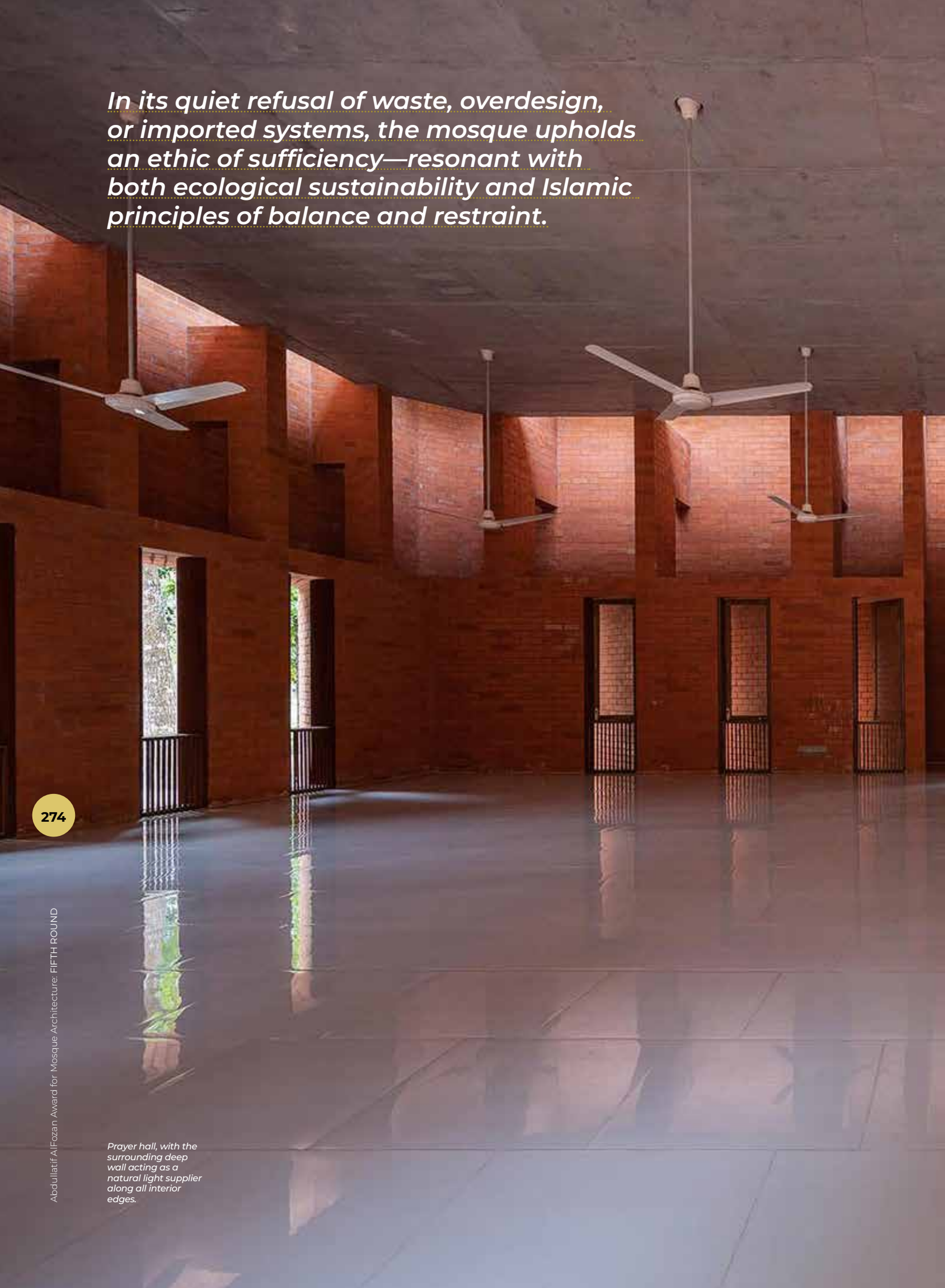
Lighting follows the same ethos. The carefully calibrated apertures—horizontal louvers and vertical skylights—ensure that natural light suffices for most of the day. Artificial lighting, intended to be integrated discreetly into the upper walls, remains minimally used. The potential for rooftop solar panels has been identified as a future enhancement, offering a sustainable energy source for lighting, fans, and water systems without altering the building's visual profile.

Material choices reflect a pragmatic environmental ethic. The structure is built almost entirely from load-bearing brick walls, a revival of pre-concrete construction traditions in Bengal. These thick walls not only carry structural loads but also regulate temperature, absorb sound, and age gracefully. Concrete is used sparingly—for roof slabs and lintels—ensuring long-term durability without unnecessary carbon cost. The entire construction system is optimized for local labor, requiring no heavy machinery or imported technologies.

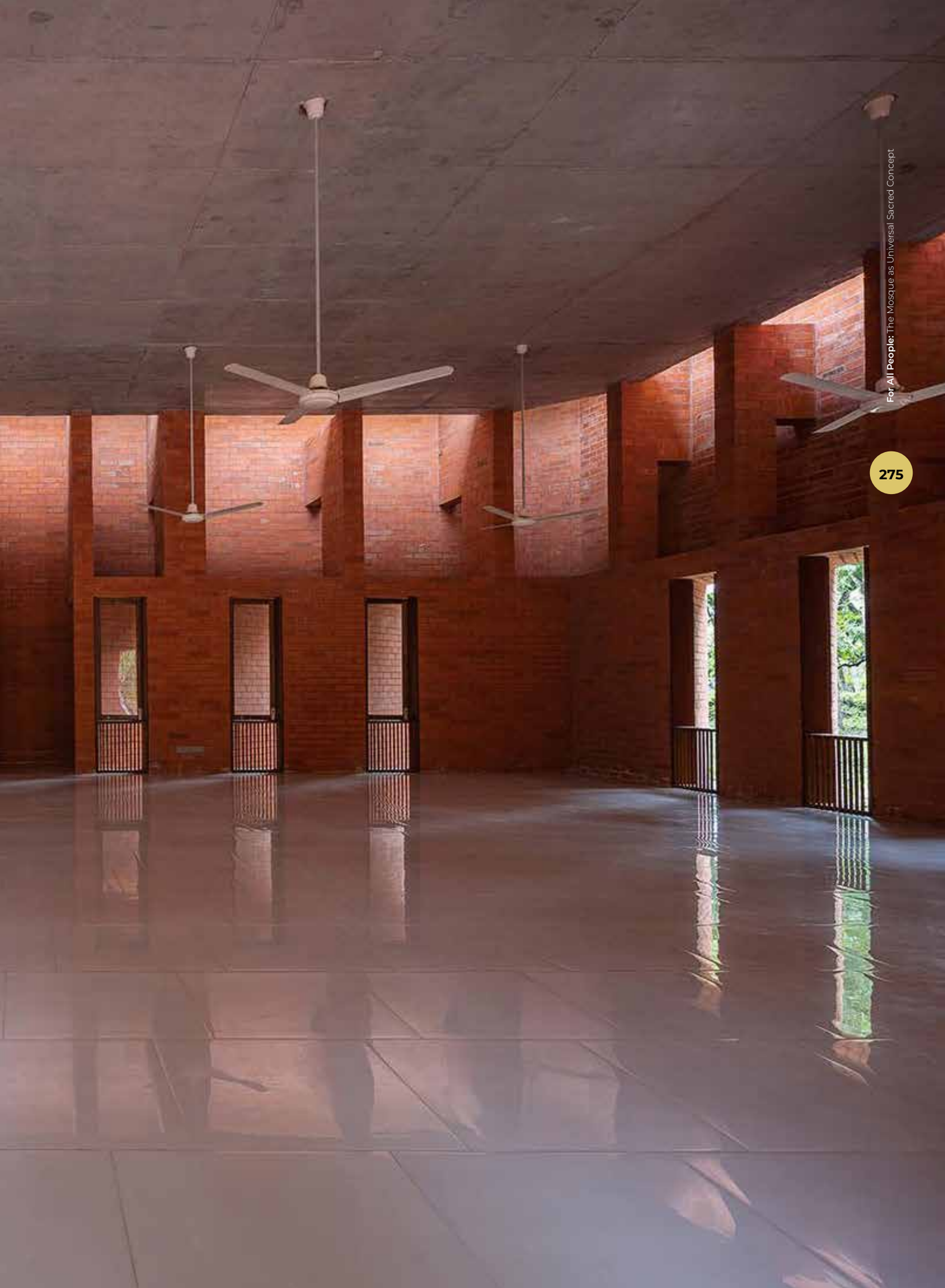
Water use is modest and decentralized. A pond adjacent to the mosque serves as a natural ablution area, especially favored by elders, while a tap-water station behind the mosque accommodates additional users. This separation of program reduces pressure on built infrastructure and embraces the site's natural assets. The surrounding landscape, left largely unpaved, serves as a water catchment zone during monsoon season, minimizing runoff and aiding the regional ecosystem.

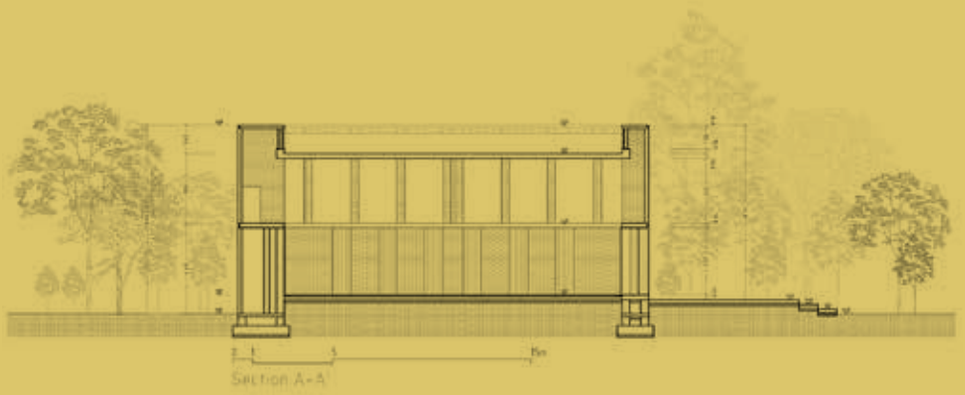
In its quiet refusal of waste, overdesign, or imported systems, the mosque upholds an ethic of sufficiency—resonant with both ecological sustainability and Islamic principles of balance and restraint.

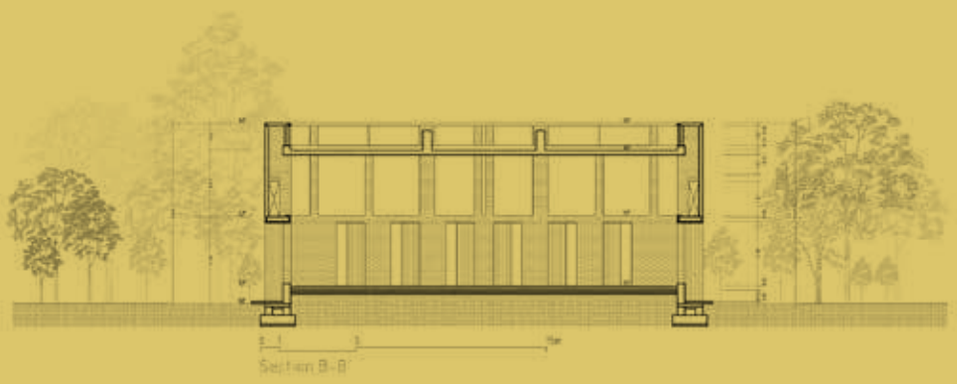
In its quiet refusal of waste, overdesign, or imported systems, the mosque upholds an ethic of sufficiency—resonant with both ecological sustainability and Islamic principles of balance and restraint.

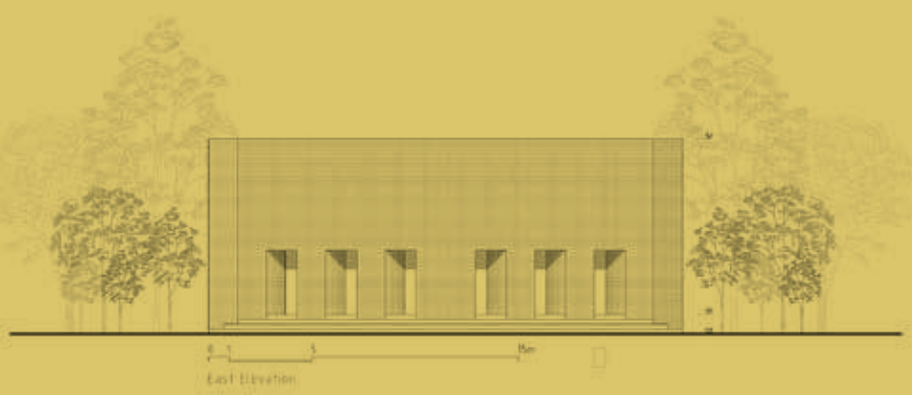


Prayer hall, with the surrounding deep wall acting as a natural light supplier along all interior edges.




Section A-A'


Section B-B'


East Elevation

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

While modest in scale and understated in expression, the Alfadanga Mosque quietly fulfills its role as a living religious space, rooted in daily use rather than symbolic display. Serving as a Jumu'ah mosque for a dispersed rural community, it offers a dignified and inclusive setting for collective worship—one that is deeply embedded in its local rhythms, yet open to future growth.

The mosque's social performance is intimately tied to its setting. Rather than functioning as an isolated object, it integrates into a familial and village ecosystem—bordered by an ancestral house, a communal pond, and informal gathering spaces. Its presence is known more by habit and memory than signage or visibility. There is no need to announce its function; the surrounding residents intuitively recognize its role, guided by proximity, routine, and trust.

Despite lacking formal programming for community services, the mosque plays a latent civic role. During Eid and large Friday congregations, the brick-paved forecourt transforms into an extended prayer platform. The structure's verandah-like openness, with 36 operable apertures, offers a spatial generosity that allows the mosque to breathe with its users, both literally and socially. In this sense, its form anticipates, rather than dictates, future modes of gathering.

Accessibility is adapted to local realities. There are no formal ramps or tactile paths—features rare in the rural Bangladeshi context—but the shallow steps, wide doors, and simple layout accommodate elders and disabled users with relative ease. Chairs are available inside for those unable to sit on the floor, and the ablution areas—whether the pond or the tap stations—are reachable with minimal exertion.

Gender inclusivity, however, remains limited. Like most mosques in the region, the building does not include dedicated spaces for women. Cultural norms largely dictate female prayer at home, though the spatial configuration of the rear prayer hall could accommodate future adaptations should the community's needs evolve.

Ultimately, the mosque's success lies in its equilibrium: it neither overperforms with spectacle nor underperforms in function. It meets the community where it is—spiritually, socially, and culturally—while offering a flexible architectural frame for how that community may change. It fosters belonging not by imposition, but by quiet resonance.

1. *Relationship between the building and the natural setting.*

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The Alfadanga Mosque may be modest in size, but it is profound in meaning. Through its quiet architecture and sincere rootedness in place, it distances itself from the symbolic clichés that mark much of contemporary mosque design. It does not assert itself through domes, minarets, or visual ornamentation, but speaks a different language—one of contextual resonance, architectural honesty, and spatial humility.

This mosque is not built upon an idealized model from the past. Rather, it is a mature, original work of contemporary architecture—anchored in its land and cultural memory, yet free from nostalgic mimicry or visual spectacle. At a time when mosque design often leans toward symbolic verbosity or overwhelming form-making, Alfadanga offers a counter-lesson: one of spiritual density, quiet asceticism, and an architectural experience that engages the senses and the soul, rather than the camera lens.

From a distance, the mosque might not arrest the eye. But for those who enter its space, it leaves a lasting impression—a resonance of calm, clarity, and Sakeenah . This may be what makes it one of the most distinctive projects in this award cycle—not because it is the most technologically ambitious, but because it is among the most faithful in expressing what a mosque can be: a space for stillness, reflection, and communal presence—not for display or self-assertion.

Placed within the wider context of Bengali mosque architecture, Alfadanga's distinctiveness becomes clearer. It neither imitates the sculptural austerity of the Chandgaon Mosque, with its dramatic bisected dome, nor seeks to rival the grandeur of historical landmarks like the Sixty-Dome Mosque. Instead, it pursues a quieter ambition: to craft a spatial harmony that lives on in memory without noise.

Even in relation to Bait Ur Rouf —a seminal work by Marina Tabassum herself, renowned for its use of light as ornament—Alfadanga moves differently. It does not repeat that vocabulary but distills it to its essence: a thickened, dignified volume, precisely tuned apertures, and a luminous calm that opens not onto spectacle, but onto everyday life. If Bait Ur Rouf made a bold statement in the discourse of contemporary mosque design, then Alfadanga whispers a reply—subtle, grounded, and no less impactful.

In this sense, Marina Tabassum has once again given us a landmark in the evolving narrative of modern mosque architecture. A landmark not measured in structural complexity or scale, but in spiritual depth and the capacity to reclaim meaning through simplicity.

While mosque architecture across the Islamic world continues to search for forms that reflect the present without abandoning the sacred, Alfadanga makes a valuable contribution. It reminds us that architectural innovation does not always lie in novel shapes—but sometimes in a return to those elemental architectonic truths that have always governed our discipline: to walls, shadows, silence and light!

1

2

3

1. *Wall details.*

2. *Prayer hall crowded with worshippers.*

3. *The exterior brick wall conveys clear visual rigor while simultaneously producing a balanced interior light-and-air environment.*

SCULPTURE AND LIGHT

AS-SALAM JAME

Mosque

As-Salam Jame Mosque
Location: Lakshmipur, Bangladesh
Architect: Ar. Nabi Newaz Khan Shomin
Firm: Archeground Ltd.
Year of Completion: 2017
Plot Area: 1,034 m²
Built-Up Area: 669 m²
Capacity: 342 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Jemma Chidiac

As-Salam Jame Mosque stands in the rural settlement of Shekher Killa in Lakshmipur District, on the southeastern coast of Bangladesh. Positioned at the edge of the village beside open fields and a water pond, it forms the first built component of a small educational and community cluster that includes a Hafezia madrasa (school focused on Qur'an memorization and traditional Islamic education) and planned girls' school facilities.

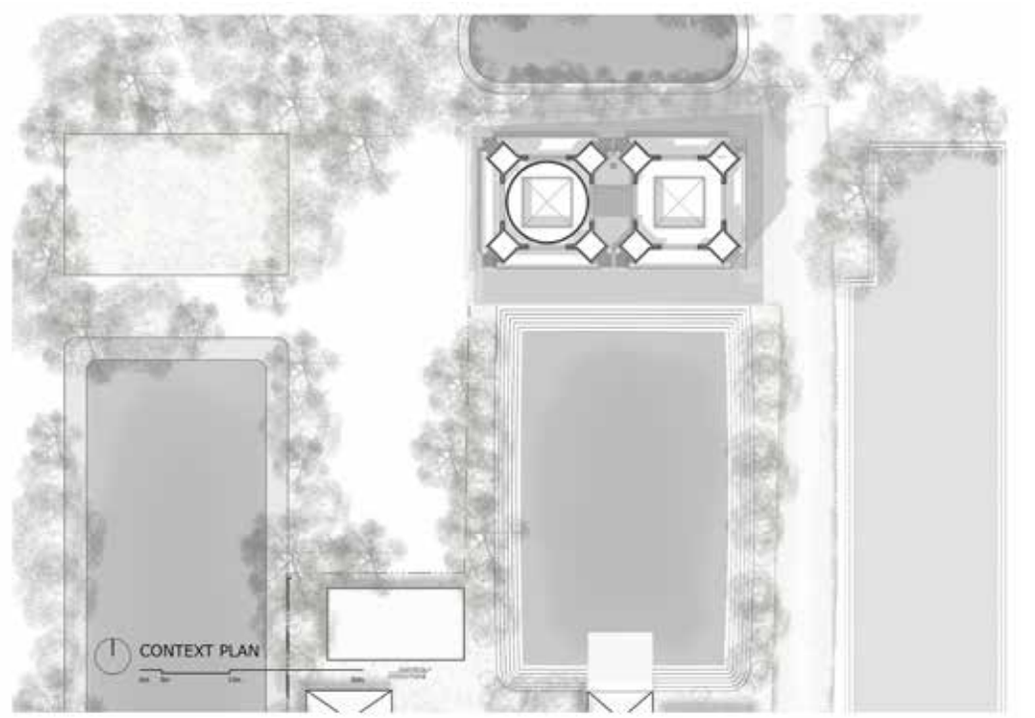
Designed by Archeground Ltd. and completed in 2022, the mosque occupies a footprint of 1,034 m² and accommodates between 600 and 700 worshippers. The project was commissioned and funded by a local charitable trust, which also donated the land.

Architecturally, the mosque is conceived as two brick volumes set on an earthen plinth—an approach rooted in the region's flood-adaptive traditions. A single-story western hall serves daily prayers, while a taller eastern hall is reserved for Friday and Eid congregations and religious instruction. These are joined by a vaulted, water-lined passage that acts as both environmental buffer and symbolic threshold.

The building is defined by thick brick walls, perforated screens, and controlled apertures that create a largely windowless yet luminous interior. Brick surfaces, water basins, and carefully shaped roof lanterns work together to maintain thermal comfort with minimal mechanical intervention.

Beyond its modest scale, As-Salam Jame Mosque has already established itself as a community anchor—supporting daily worship, Qur'an memorization, informal teaching, and small social gatherings. As an architectural experiment, it offers a quiet but persuasive model for a contemporary rural mosque grounded in local climate, local craft, and a disciplined architectural language.

1



2

URBAN INTEGRATION

As-Salam Jame Mosque is situated at the edge of Shekher Killa village, where the built fabric dissolves into open farmland, orchards, and the water bodies characteristic of coastal Bengal. The site occupies a natural transition zone—neither fully rural nor formally urban—allowing the mosque to operate simultaneously as a neighborhood place of worship and a landmark in an emerging civic cluster.

The mosque sits on an elevated earthen plinth formed by soil excavated from the adjacent pond, a gesture rooted in local settlement patterns where houses and communal structures rise above seasonal floods. This plinth not only protects the building but also establishes a quiet podium that distinguishes the mosque from its surroundings without resorting to monumental scale.

Approach to the mosque is intentionally modest: a narrow lane leads toward a brick threshold, with the building revealing itself gradually as a set of low, grounded volumes. The setting encourages walking, gathering, and pauses along the pond's edge—small spatial rituals that strengthen the building's everyday social presence.

The relationship between the mosque and the water body is central to the site's character. The reflective surface, the cooling effect, and the sequencing of shaded outdoor spaces all contribute to an understated sense of calm even before one enters the prayer halls. In a context where many rural mosques are either crowded by later extensions or isolated without civic gravity, this project manages a careful middle ground: connected but not engulfed, present but not overbearing.

The larger masterplan hints at a future educational cluster around the mosque, yet the architectural handling of landscape and access avoids the typical fragmentation seen in such compound developments. Instead, the mosque anchors the site with clarity and restraint, allowing future buildings to grow around a stable, dignified center.

.

1. *Prayer extends beyond the built mass; water surrounds and interweaves with open spaces*

.

2. *Context plan.*

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The exterior of As-Salam Jame Mosque presents a disciplined, quietly confident composition in brick. Two rectilinear volumes—one taller, one lower—sit firmly on an elevated earthen plinth, giving the building a grounded presence that feels both contemporary and deeply regional. The massing relies on proportion, depth, and shadow, avoiding ornamentation in favor of an architecture shaped by material truth and clarity.

The façades are defined by thick brick walls, recessed joints, and perforated jali screens that establish a calibrated porosity. Air and light enter through tightly controlled openings, making the building read as a carved monolith responding to climate, orientation, and ritual. Along the roofline, the volumes are discreetly animated by modest lantern-like roof apertures—subtle vertical rises in the roof plane that gather daylight and release heat. These are not expressive skylight towers but quiet infrastructural devices whose presence deepens the spatial and environmental performance of the building.

The vaulted passage linking the two halls introduces a gentle inflection into the otherwise orthogonal composition. Flanked by shallow water channels, the vault acts as both climatic mediator and symbolic threshold. Its curvature softens the exterior volumes and heightens the transition from the surrounding settlement into the contemplative interior world of the mosque.

Importantly, the building abstains from any monumental vertical element. The absence of a minaret is a deliberate architectural position: the mosque asserts its presence through mass, horizontality, and crafted brickwork rather than through vertical signaling. This restraint aligns with the rural setting and reinforces the architectural stance of dignity through reduction.

Beyond its material and spatial clarity, the mosque situates itself within a broader architectural lineage. Its reliance on brick as a tectonic and atmospheric medium reflects the enduring influence of Louis Kahn's work in Bangladesh, where essential geometry, thick walls, and calibrated light became instruments of architectural and spiritual weight. This lineage extends into the contemporary moment through Marina Tabassum's Bait Ur Rouf Jame Mosque—echoed here in the plan logic, the pairing of volumes of different scales, and the subtle use of elevated roof openings to draw in diffuse light.

This resonance is not formal alone. It reflects a shared commitment to architecture as an exercise in order and essential geometry—principles that descend from Bengal's own Mughal brick traditions and later reinterpreted by Louis Kahn in his Dhaka works. In this sense, the mosque aligns with an architectural lineage where mass, proportion, and the disciplined handling of light are treated as primary spiritual instruments.

In a rural context where mosque architecture often gravitates toward decorative surfaces, As-Salam Jame Mosque proposes an alternative: an architecture of groundedness, climatic intelligence, and cultural continuity that derives dignity from reduction rather than embellishment.

1. *General aerial view.*

2. *A majestic interior height within the prayer hall.*

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of As-Salam Jame Mosque is defined by an atmosphere of measured calm shaped by brick, proportion, and diffuse light. Entering either prayer hall, one encounters a space where material honesty and restrained illumination replace decorative ambition. The result is a contemplative interior shaped by thickness, shadow, and quiet spatial order.

The brick walls, expressed fully inside, give the halls a grounded sense of enclosure. Their presence is offset by the soft illumination entering through jali screens, narrow slits, and modest lantern-like roof apertures. These elevated openings are not large skylight towers but subtle roof rises that collect and temper daylight before casting it downward in controlled gradients. Their effect is neither dramatic nor theatrical; rather, they create a slow, even luminosity that shifts gently through the day.

The two halls offer distinct interior characters. The taller eastern hall—used for Friday and Eid congregations—benefits most from these roof apertures, as the increased volume amplifies the downward wash of natural light. The more intimate western hall, used for daily prayers, is illuminated primarily by lateral and diffused light filtered through brick screens. This differentiation reinforces the rhythmic distinction between everyday worship and communal gathering.

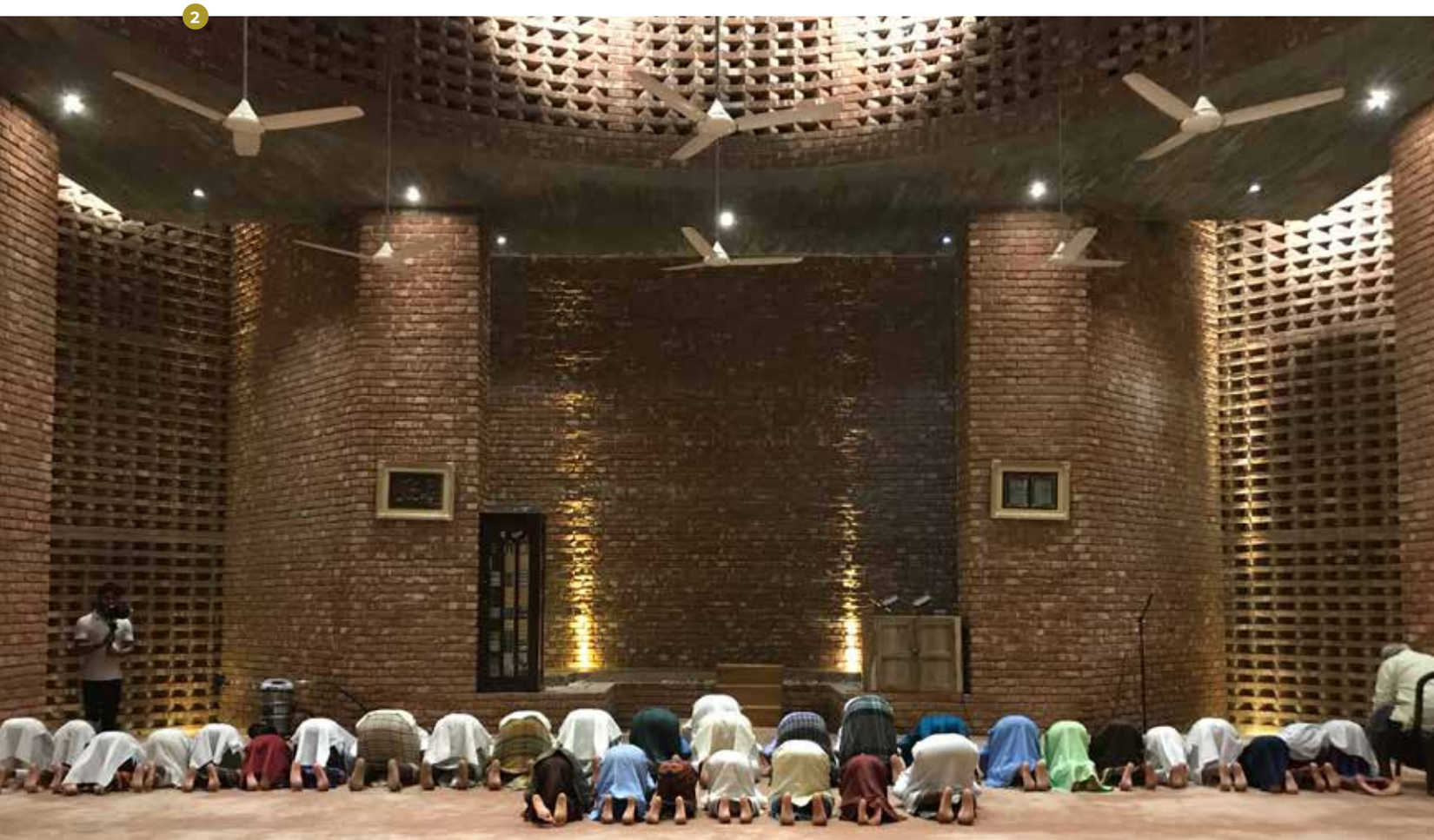
The mihrab is integrated with deliberate restraint, expressed as a slight deepening of the brick plane rather than as an ornamental niche. Its clarity relies on proportion rather than embellishment, allowing orientation to emerge from the spatial logic itself.

The vaulted transitional passage also plays a key interior role. Its curvature, acoustics, and adjacency to water help condition the air while preparing worshippers for the stillness of the halls. It acts as a hinge between exterior and interior, one of the building's most successful spatial transitions.

Materially, the interior maintains the same austerity as the exterior: exposed brick, brick-chip mosaic flooring, and unadorned concrete elements. This minimal palette, combined with the lantern-like roof openings and the calibrated play of light, creates an atmosphere that is contemplative without being severe, and dignified without relying on symbolic excess.

Overall, the interior achieves a refined balance—humble in material means yet spiritually resonant in atmosphere. It demonstrates how a rural mosque can generate depth through proportion, brick craft, and the subtle intelligence of light.

2



1

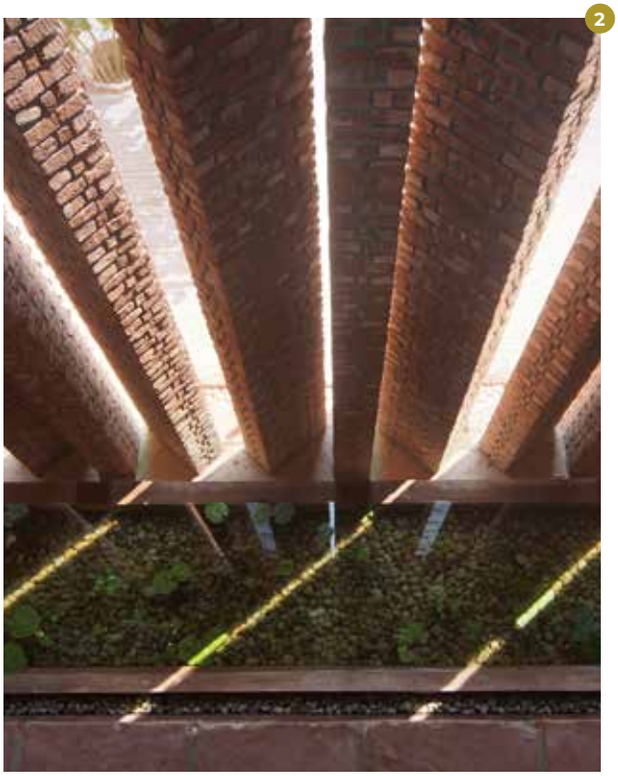
TECHNICAL SYSTEMS & SUSTAINABILITY

As-Salam Jame Mosque relies on a set of low-tech, climate-responsive strategies rather than mechanical systems. The elevated earthen plinth, formed from soil excavated from the adjacent pond, protects the building from seasonal flooding and damp, while also improving ventilation at ground level—a direct continuation of traditional Bengali settlement wisdom.

The brick envelope works as both structure and environmental moderator. Thick walls, perforated jali screens, and controlled openings enable cross-ventilation and provide thermal mass, softening temperature swings throughout the day. Modest lantern-like roof apertures further assist in exhausting warm air and bringing in diffuse daylight, reducing the need for artificial lighting and cooling.

Water plays a subtle environmental role. The pond and shallow channels along the vaulted passage contribute to evaporative cooling and support a more comfortable microclimate around the building. Material choices—locally produced brick, brick-chip mosaic floors, and simple concrete elements—reduce embodied energy, support local craftsmanship, and keep maintenance demands low.

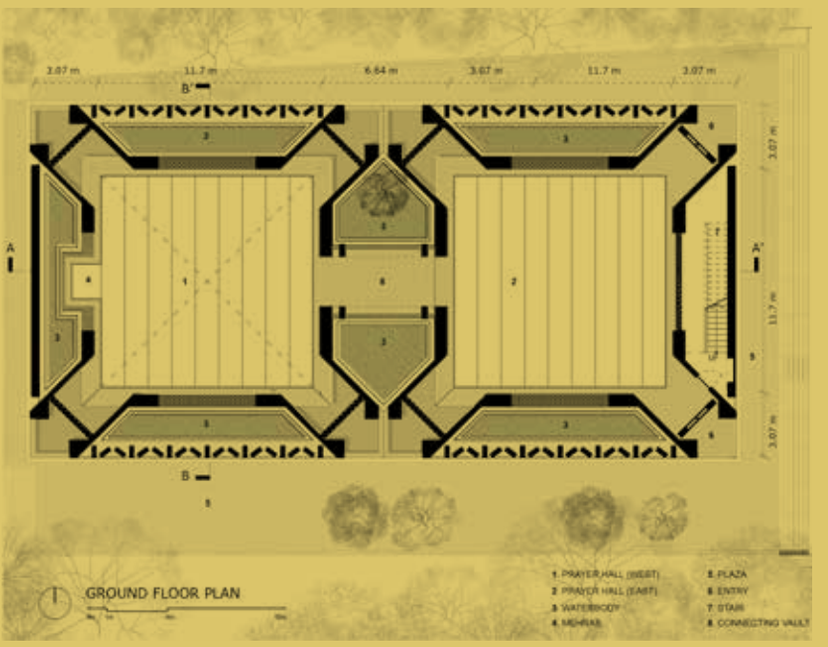
Taken together, these measures position the mosque as a rural prototype for environmentally responsive architecture: a building that performs well in its climate with modest resources, relying on intelligent form and local knowledge rather than technological complexity.



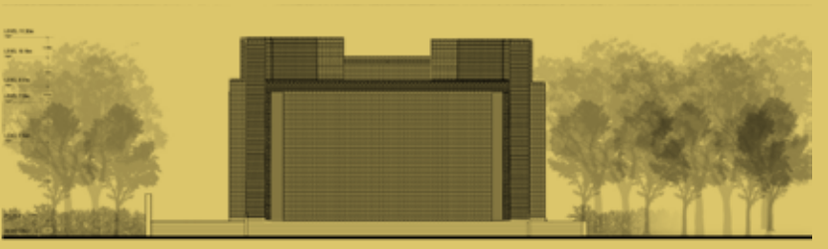
2

1. *Bird-eye view of the mosque during the evening.*

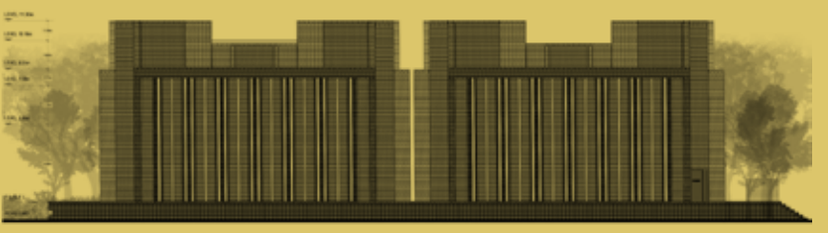
2. *The exterior wall acts as a light filter within the prayer hall.*



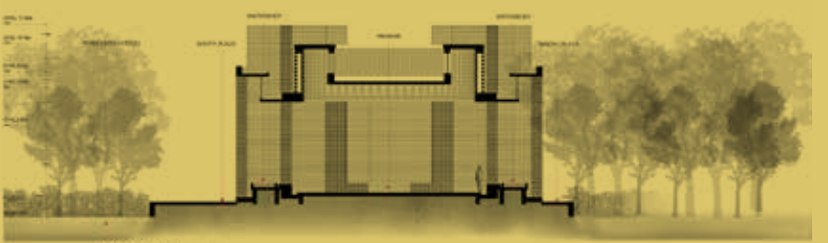
GROUND FLOOR PLAN



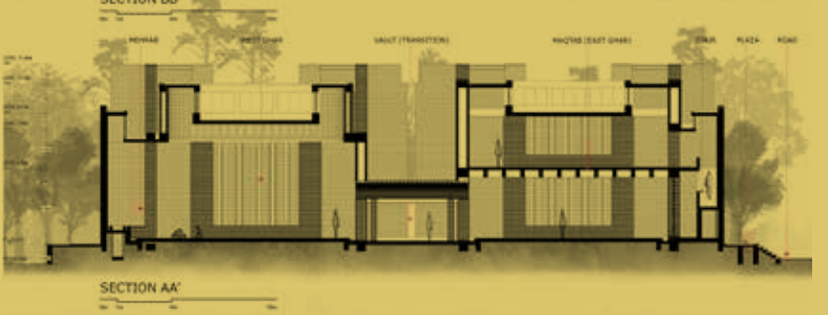
EAST ELEVATION



NORTH ELEVATION



SECTION BB'



SECTION AA'

1. Details of light entry from the building corners and how the wall openings (jali) function as a filter for ventilation and light.

2. The prayer hall roof is cylindrical and open to the sky, centered by a square volume allowing light to enter from the perimeter of the circle.

Water plays a subtle environmental role. The pond and shallow channels along the vaulted passage contribute to evaporative cooling and support a more comfortable microclimate around the building.

1

2

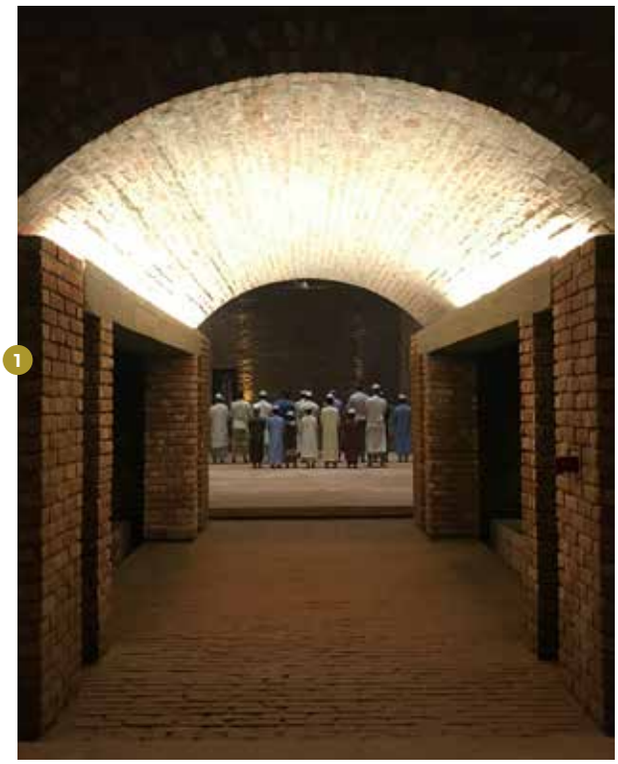
SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

As-Salam Jame Mosque has become a quiet social anchor in Shekher Killa village. Its position at the edge of the settlement—between homes, fields, and the pond—allows it to serve daily worshippers while remaining accessible to all age groups. The direct entrance, ground-level plinth, and uncluttered circulation support ease of movement, particularly for the elderly.

The mosque's adjacency to the Hafezia madrasa, and the planned girls' school, situates it within a growing educational cluster. This creates a steady flow of students and families throughout the day, giving the site a gentle civic presence. Informal gatherings naturally occur on the shaded plinth and along the water's edge, where people pause before and after prayer.

The reliance on local materials and passive environmental strategies reduces long-term maintenance costs, strengthening community ownership and ensuring that the building remains feasible for rural stewardship. Small-scale economic activity—such as vendors appearing during peak prayer times—has already begun to form around the mosque.

Socially, the project succeeds through its quiet integrity. Rather than asserting itself as a landmark, it integrates into the daily life of the village, offering a dignified and familiar space that supports worship, learning, and everyday interaction without imposing itself on the community it serves.



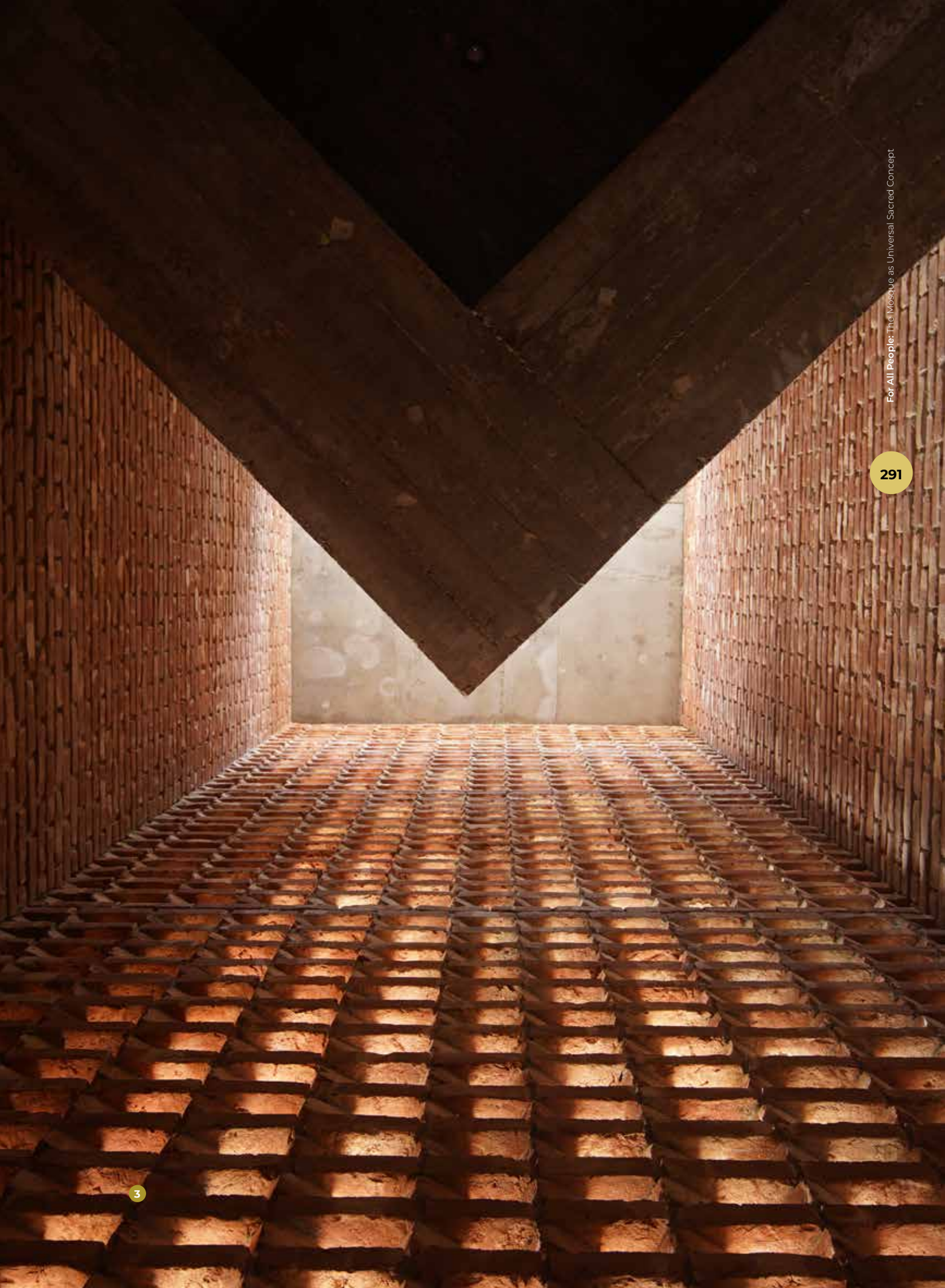
1. *A transitional space that connects two halls, acting as a barrier between the most sacred part and the part that is an extension of it.*

2. *The mosque mass appears to float above water.*

.

3. *A sculptural scene showing the relationship between brick, concrete, and light.*

.



3

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

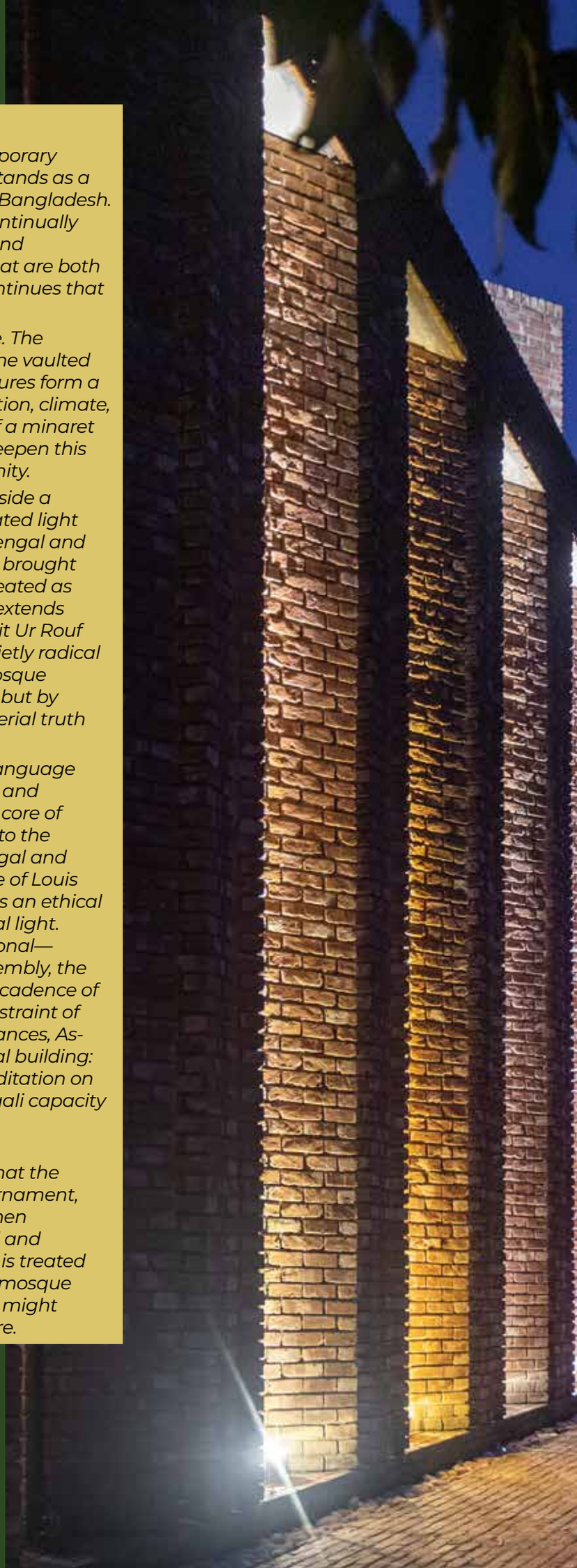
Placed within the broader landscape of contemporary mosque architecture, As-Salam Jame Mosque stands as a refined contribution to the evolving discourse in Bangladesh. Over recent decades, Bengali architects have continually demonstrated how modest means, local craft, and disciplined geometry can yield mosque forms that are both rooted and quietly experimental. This project continues that trajectory with composure and clarity.

Its strength lies not in assertion but in coherence. The paired volumes, the disciplined brick envelope, the vaulted passage, and the modest lantern-like roof apertures form a unified architectural stance grounded in proportion, climate, and material honesty. The deliberate absence of a minaret and the avoidance of ornamental vocabulary deepen this commitment to reduction as a path toward dignity.

Within this stance, the mosque positions itself inside a wider lineage. Its essential geometry and calibrated light recall the brick-based cosmologies of Mughal Bengal and resonate with the interpretive power Louis Kahn brought to Dhaka, where order, silence, and light were treated as primary architectural instruments. This lineage extends into the present through Marina Tabassum's Bait Ur Rouf Jame Mosque, with its volumetric clarity and quietly radical embrace of the rural setting. As-Salam Jame Mosque participates in that continuum not by imitation, but by adopting the same ethical commitment to material truth and environmental intelligence.

In a broader sense, the mosque's architectural language participates in a lineage where geometry, order, and the disciplined play of silence and light form the core of spiritual experience. This lineage stretches back to the brick-based Islamic cosmologies of Mughal Bengal and is refracted through the transformative presence of Louis Kahn in Dhaka, whose work treated geometry as an ethical framework and brick as a vessel for metaphysical light. The volumetric echoes—whether faint or intentional—recall the timeless clarity of Kahn's National Assembly, the geometric rigor of the Exeter Library, the spatial cadence of the Erdman Hall Dormitories, and the solemn restraint of the First Unitarian Church. Through these resonances, As-Salam Jame Mosque becomes more than a rural building: it becomes part of an ongoing architectural meditation on light, matter, proportion, and the enduring Bengali capacity to find transcendence in brick.

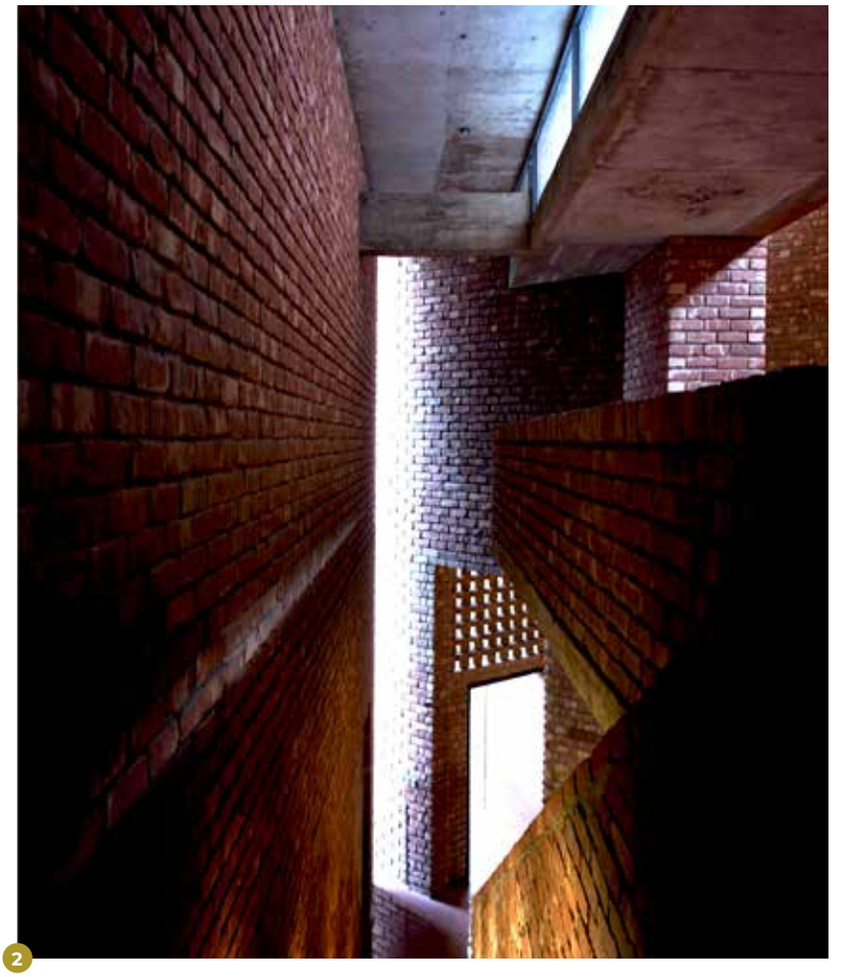
Seen in the context of this book, As-Salam Jame Mosque offers a quiet yet persuasive reminder that the contemporary mosque need not rely on scale, ornament, or technological display to achieve presence. When architectural thinking is rigorous, when material and climate are read with care, and when geometry is treated as the basis of spiritual order, even a small rural mosque can extend the conversation on what a mosque might become—faithful to its past, and alert to its future.



1. *This is how the mosque façade appears in the evening.*

2. *A sculptural scene showing the relationship between bricks, concrete, and light.*

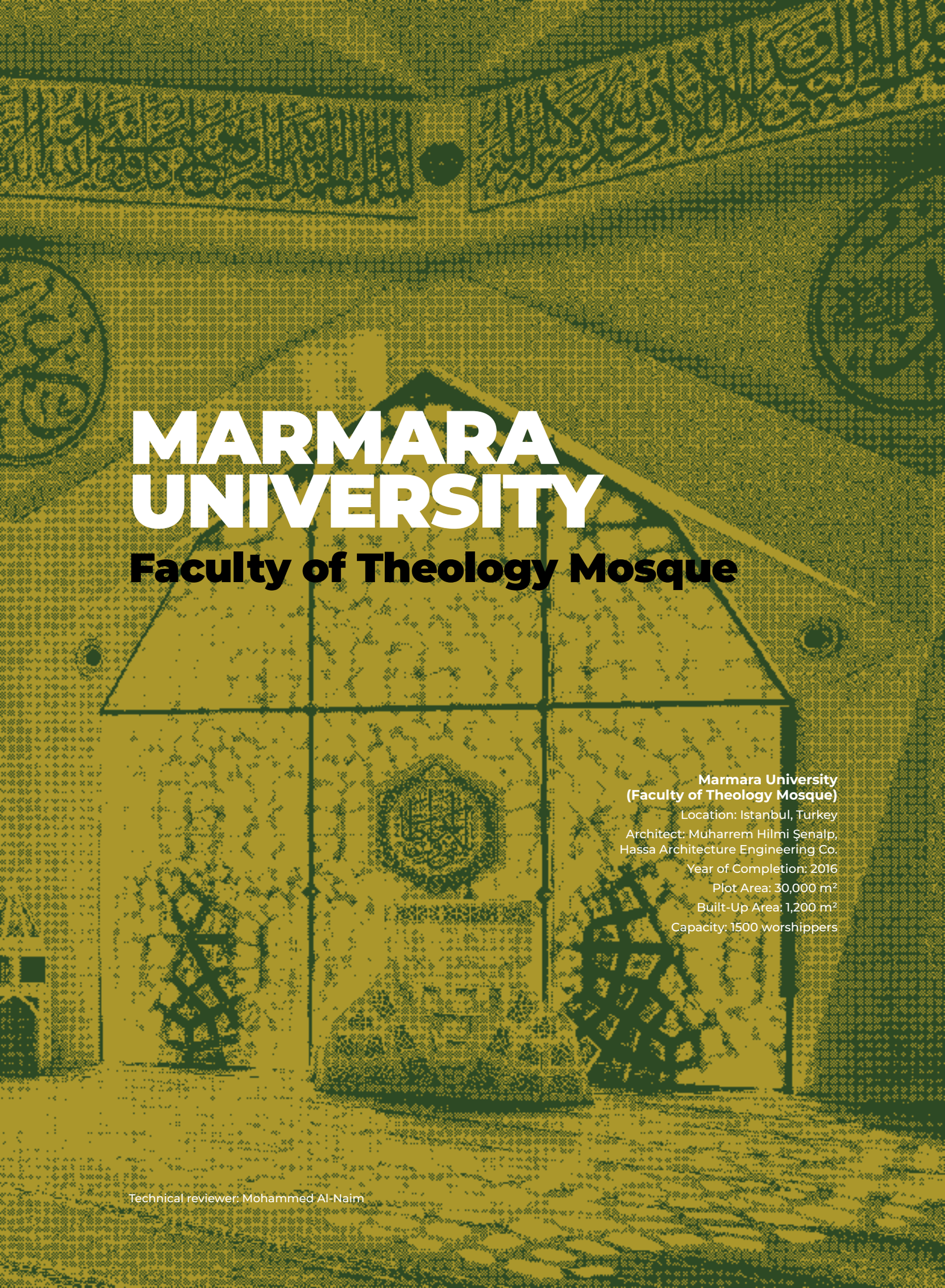
3. *The wall itself was employed in the mosque as an artistic element.*



2

3

A QUIET ASCENT
TO THE SKY



MARMARA UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Theology Mosque

Marmara University
(Faculty of Theology Mosque)
Location: Istanbul, Turkey
Architect: Muharrem Hilmi Şenalp,
Hassa Architecture Engineering Co.
Year of Completion: 2016
Plot Area: 30,000 m²
Built-Up Area: 1,200 m²
Capacity: 1500 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Mohammed Al-Naim

The Marmara University Faculty of Theology Mosque, completed in 2016, occupies a prominent site in Istanbul's Altunizade district. It was conceived not only as a space for worship but as an institutional anchor—a contemporary reinterpretation of the traditional külliye typology—blending prayer, study, and public life within a single architectural framework.

Designed by Hassa Architecture under Muharrem Hilmi Şenalp, the mosque is part of a broader university complex and sits between a busy commercial area and academic buildings. This position gives the project a dual role: to serve its campus community and to invite the wider city into dialogue.

At its core, the mosque explores the tension between inherited forms and contemporary expression. Its domes and minarets recall Ottoman archetypes, but the materials and structural language are unmistakably modern. Steel, glass, and composite panels are used to articulate both symbolic ideas and tectonic clarity. The building's layout—with an upper prayer hall atop a large plaza and a lower level housing cultural facilities—attempts to layer sacred and civic functions in a seamless experience.

The project's conceptual foundation draws on geometry, repetition, and symbolism to build a space charged with both meaning and structure. And while its ambitions are admirable, they also introduce a set of challenges: the complexity of its symbolic language can occasionally eclipse spatial clarity, and the density of functions demands careful orchestration to avoid confusion.

Still, the mosque stands as a serious and thoughtful attempt to articulate what a 21st-century mosque might be—one that is open, learned, spiritually grounded, and architecturally self-aware. It is a space that looks both inward and outward, and one that invites critical reflection rather than easy conclusions.

1

URBAN INTEGRATION

Positioned on a triangular plot in Istanbul's Altunizade district—wedged between a university campus, a busy commercial axis, and a public avenue—the Marmara University Faculty of Theology Mosque confronts a complex urban condition. Rather than retreating into symbolic detachment, the project embraces its surrounding density and negotiates multiple layers of urban life: academic, civic, and commercial.

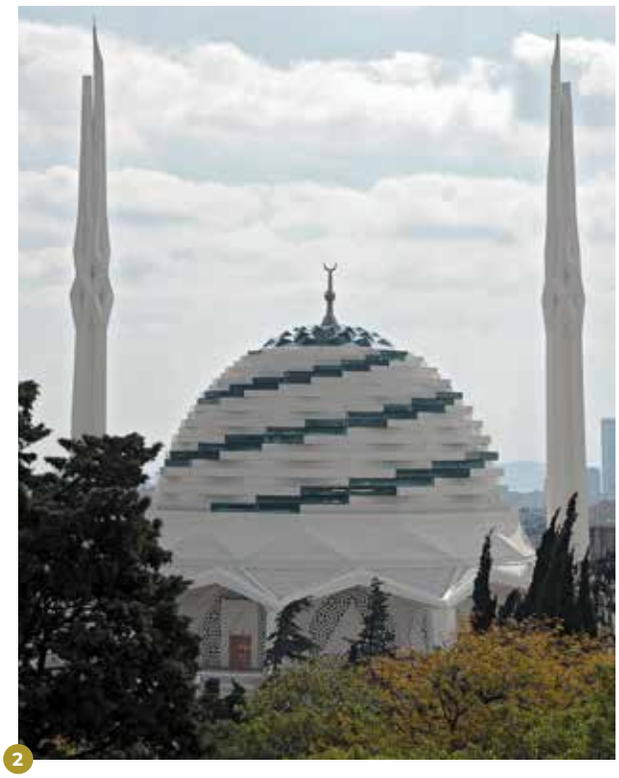
The building responds with a sensitive yet assertive gesture: it elevates its main prayer hall atop a broad plaza, subtly separating sacred space from the street-level bustle. Below this public forecourt lies a cultural complex—lecture halls, exhibition areas, and a book café—integrated into the sloped topography. This sectional strategy allows the mosque to remain prominent without dominating the cityscape, and to offer both openness and retreat without contradiction.

The absence of perimeter walls is a notable departure from classical mosque courtyards. Here, the edges remain porous, inviting pedestrians to move through, around, and into the mosque space as part of their daily routines. Students cross the plaza on their way to classes, visitors gather on its steps, and worshippers approach it without ritual detour. The mosque thus becomes less a monument to be approached ceremonially, and more a civic platform—present, permeable, and engaged.

The building's position along Mahir İz Avenue also lends it strategic visibility. While the dome and twin minarets rise with confidence, their forms are neither overbearing nor self-aggrandizing. Unlike many contemporary mosques that pursue visual dominance through scale alone, this mosque maintains a respectful dialogue with its surroundings, aligning its proportions with neighboring academic blocks and using lightness of form—rather than height—to establish presence.

Yet this integration is not without friction. The density of surrounding traffic, the adjacency to a shopping center, and the intensity of pedestrian flows at times blur the mosque's sacred perimeter. And while the plaza's openness allows for social mixing, it can also dilute the sense of architectural approach and spiritual preparation that mosque thresholds traditionally evoke.

Still, it could be said that the mosque succeeds in embedding itself within the city's lived fabric without sacrificing its identity. Its careful modulation of ground levels, openness to the public realm, and quiet assertion of form suggest a model of urban integration that is neither nostalgic nor defensive. In a district where commercialism and urban pressure threaten to flatten meaning, the mosque holds its ground—present, porous, and poised.



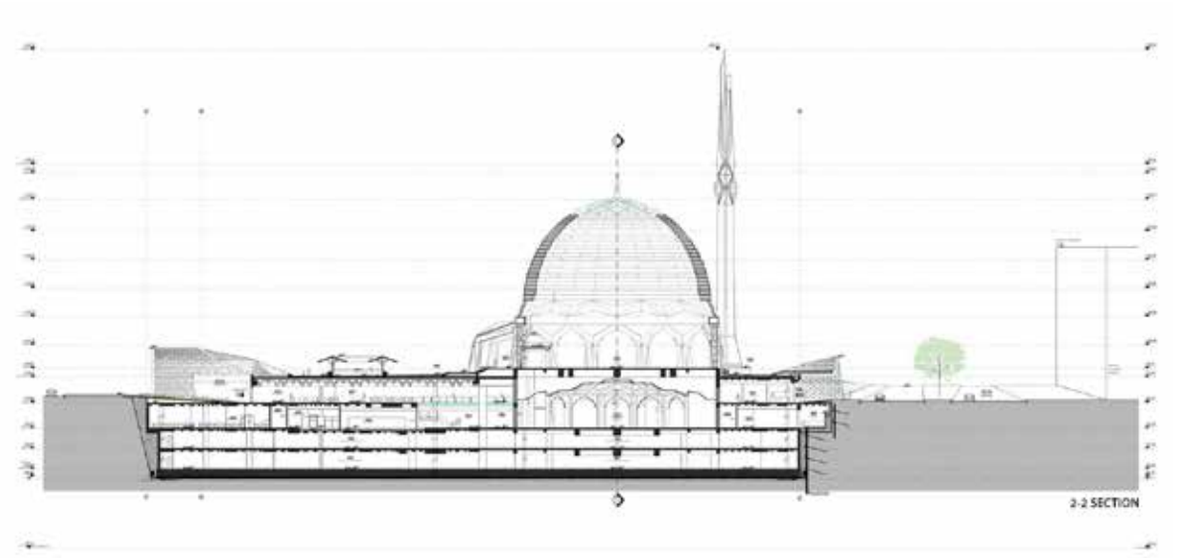
2

3

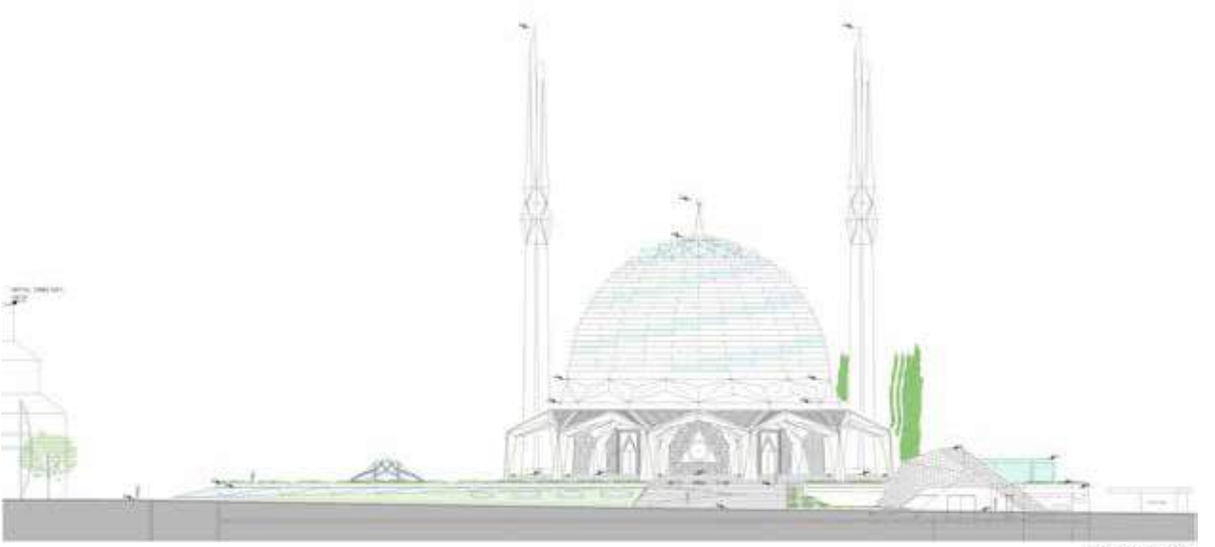
1. *A formative element illustrating the relationship between the dome and the external arcades.*

2. *The mosque from the outside.*

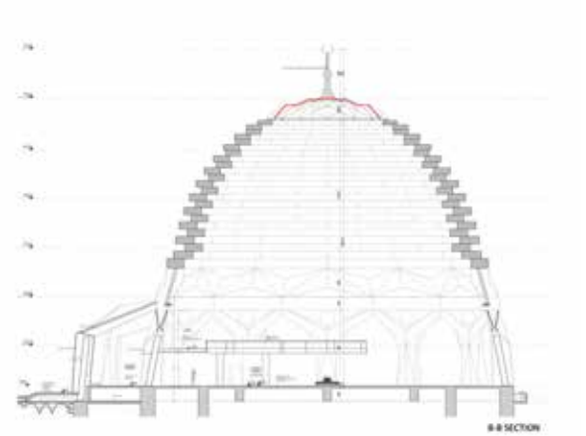
3. *Mezzanine floor plan.*

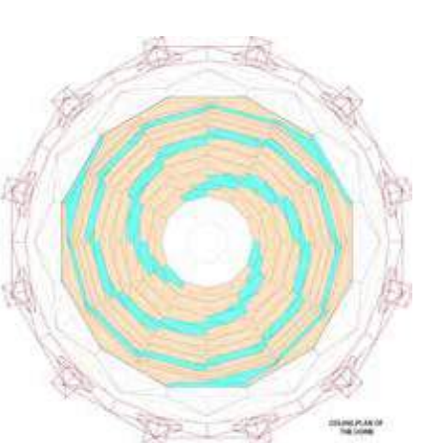


1



2





3

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The exterior of the Marmara University Faculty of Theology Mosque presents a carefully choreographed interplay of tradition and modernity, where classical references are neither copied nor discarded, but restructured through a contemporary lens. The result is a building that feels unmistakably Ottoman in spirit—rooted in the typology of domes, minarets, and arcades—yet visibly determined to rethink its material, geometric, and symbolic language for the present.

The mosque's most immediate formal gesture is its dodecagonal plan, which anchors the entire structure in a spatial logic that departs from the conventional square-based Ottoman layout. Rising from this plan is the central dome, 35 meters in diameter and height, composed of interwoven wood and glass helices that spiral upward in a visual echo of the nautilus. This dome does not rest upon a drum in the traditional sense but emerges as a light, lifted volume that floats above Turkish triangular supports—an architectural reinterpretation of the pendentive muqarnas in its structural logic.

Two slender, polygonal minarets flank the mosque's northern face. Their tapering profiles evoke the memory of Ottoman towers, but their construction—steel-framed and clad in fiberglass-reinforced panels—is unmistakably modern. Rather than asserting dominance through mass or scale, they offer vertical punctuation, contributing to a layered silhouette that holds its own in the mixed urban skyline without overpowering it.

The mosque's façades continue this balancing act. Perforated screens, etched glazing, and stylized girih patterns populate the surfaces—not as applied decoration but as integral components of enclosure and light modulation. Here again, the spirit of Ottoman ornament is present, but abstracted and embedded within a more geometric, even tectonic language. The use of light-colored stone and composite panels recalls the luminous clarity of Istanbul's historic mosques, while affirming the building's material contemporaneity.

Of particular note is the absence of heavy perimeter walls or fortress-like gates. Instead, the mosque meets the city with open edges and generous thresholds. The plaza level forms a plinth that elevates the main volume, giving it prominence without detachment. The transition from plaza to mosque façade is not marked by barriers but by a gradual layering of arcades, shaded riwāqs, and framed entrances—echoing Ottoman principles of approach while reframing them for an open, civic-facing site.

That said, the design's ambition to unify the symbolic and the structural sometimes risks aesthetic overload. The multiplicity of patterns, materials, and geometries—while impressive in intent—can border on visual saturation when viewed up close. In seeking to embody the "part in the whole and the whole in the part," the façade language occasionally leans toward complexity for its own sake. This is a delicate line to tread, and while the mosque largely holds its balance, it does so with effort.

Ultimately, the building's exterior offers a compelling case study in architectural mediation: between permanence and lightness, memory and invention, sacredness and openness. It does not simply modernize Ottoman vocabulary—it translates it. And in doing so, it preserves the typological essence while expanding the architectural language available to contemporary mosque design.

1. *Longitudinal section.*

2. *Side elevation.*

3. *Detailed study of the dome.*

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of the Marmara University Faculty of Theology Mosque unfolds as a natural continuation of its architectural exterior. The transition from city to plaza, and from plaza to the prayer hall, is not abrupt; rather, it gradually tunes the visitor to the mosque's spatial rhythm and symbolic intent. Yet even with this architectural prelude, the moment of entering the central dome remains a powerful revelation. Looking upward, one is met not by the expected weight of a traditional structure, but by a spiraling, luminous canopy that lifts the gaze—and perhaps the spirit—with it.

This dome is the heart of the mosque's interior experience. Formed of interlaced wooden and glass helices, it rises in a geometrically layered ascent, drawing light from a central octagonal skylight. Throughout the day, daylight cascades through the dome in shifting patterns, animating the floor below and echoing the Qur'anic motif of Divine light as guidance. The design does not rely on spectacle, but on a quiet modulation of light and geometry—an architecture of presence rather than performance.

Surrounding this central space, the prayer hall is defined by a dodecagonal rhythm of columns and arches, establishing a sense of structural clarity and formal repetition. The materials—soft carpeting, neutral stone finishes, and finely detailed metal grilles—support the calm, meditative atmosphere. Wall surfaces are punctuated with geometric calligraphy and perforated screens that allow filtered glimpses to the outside, maintaining a dialogue between enclosure and openness.

The liturgical elements are rendered with particular care. The mihrab on the upper floor, carved in red marble and framed by muqarnas and calligraphic bands, anchors the qibla wall with both spatial gravity and visual finesse. Nearby, the minbar—executed in composite material—features intricate star motifs and vegetal forms, bridging tradition with contemporary fabrication techniques. These elements neither imitate nor reject classical references; rather, they reinterpret them with restraint and precision.

A second prayer hall on the lower level provides a contrasting yet complementary spatial experience. It is quieter, more introspective. Light enters obliquely through garden-facing windows, and the central dome here—smaller and lower—emphasizes enclosure and inwardness. A peripheral ambulatory encircles the space, echoing historic precedents such as the Dome of the Rock, while allowing for ritual circulation and contemplative pacing. Visitors often report feeling a psychological shift between the two levels: above, openness and collective energy; below, silence and solitude.

Gender-sensitive spaces have also been handled with dignity. The women's galleries, located on mezzanines and side zones of both levels, are integrated spatially rather than hidden peripherally. Visual access to the dome and mihrab is preserved through sandblasted glass screens bearing subtle geometric motifs—ensuring privacy without severing participation.

There is, however, a latent tension in the richness of the design. The interior's layering of symbolic geometries, calligraphy, and materials—while undeniably refined—can at times verge on excess. The complexity of visual information occasionally competes with the intended spiritual stillness. Yet this too is part of the mosque's architectural identity: it aspires not to minimalism, but to a fullness that remains grounded in metaphysical meaning.

In sum, the interior is not an escape from the world outside, but a deepening of its architectural language. It offers a spatial encounter that is ordered yet poetic, rooted yet inventive—affirming the mosque's dual vocation as a place of worship and a vessel of architectural thought.

1

1. This is how the mosque appears in the evening.

2. Dome composition from the inside.

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Beneath the elegant geometry and luminous interiors of the mosque lies a robust technical infrastructure—one that aims to harmonize environmental comfort with contemporary structural ambition. Yet the design's successes here are both striking and, at times, quietly conflicted.

Structural Innovation & Material Integrity

The mosque is among the first of its kind in Turkey to fully employ a steel structural frame—erected above a reinforced concrete base—which allows for the daring dodecagonal dome and the clean, columnar rhythm below. This system is not only an engineering achievement; it reflects the mosque's broader aspiration to reinterpret tradition with clarity and precision. The central dome, 35 meters in both diameter and height, is carried by twelve steel columns linked through 'Turkish triangle' pendentive beams—an elegant structural motif that bridges memory and innovation.

Climate Control & Thermal Comfort

Situated in Istanbul's temperate yet humid climate, the mosque relies entirely on mechanical systems for heating, cooling, and ventilation. While this ensures reliable thermal comfort across seasons and changing occupancy levels, it also points to the absence of passive ventilation strategies. The extensive use of glass, coupled with large crowds during peak times, places high demand on these systems—raising questions about long-term energy efficiency.

Lighting & Envelope Performance

Daylight is masterfully orchestrated through the spiraling dome, clerestories, and perforated façades. The interior is bathed in soft, shifting light that elevates the experience of worship without theatricality. At the same time, these luminous surfaces inevitably contribute to heat gain, particularly in summer, necessitating further reliance on artificial cooling.

Sustainability Ambitions & Gaps

The mosque's technical ambition is significant, particularly in terms of structure and atmosphere. However, there is little evidence of environmental stewardship in its design logic. Renewable energy systems are absent, and passive design principles appear secondary to aesthetic and formal priorities. The result is a technically competent building that falls short of demonstrating leadership in sustainable mosque design.

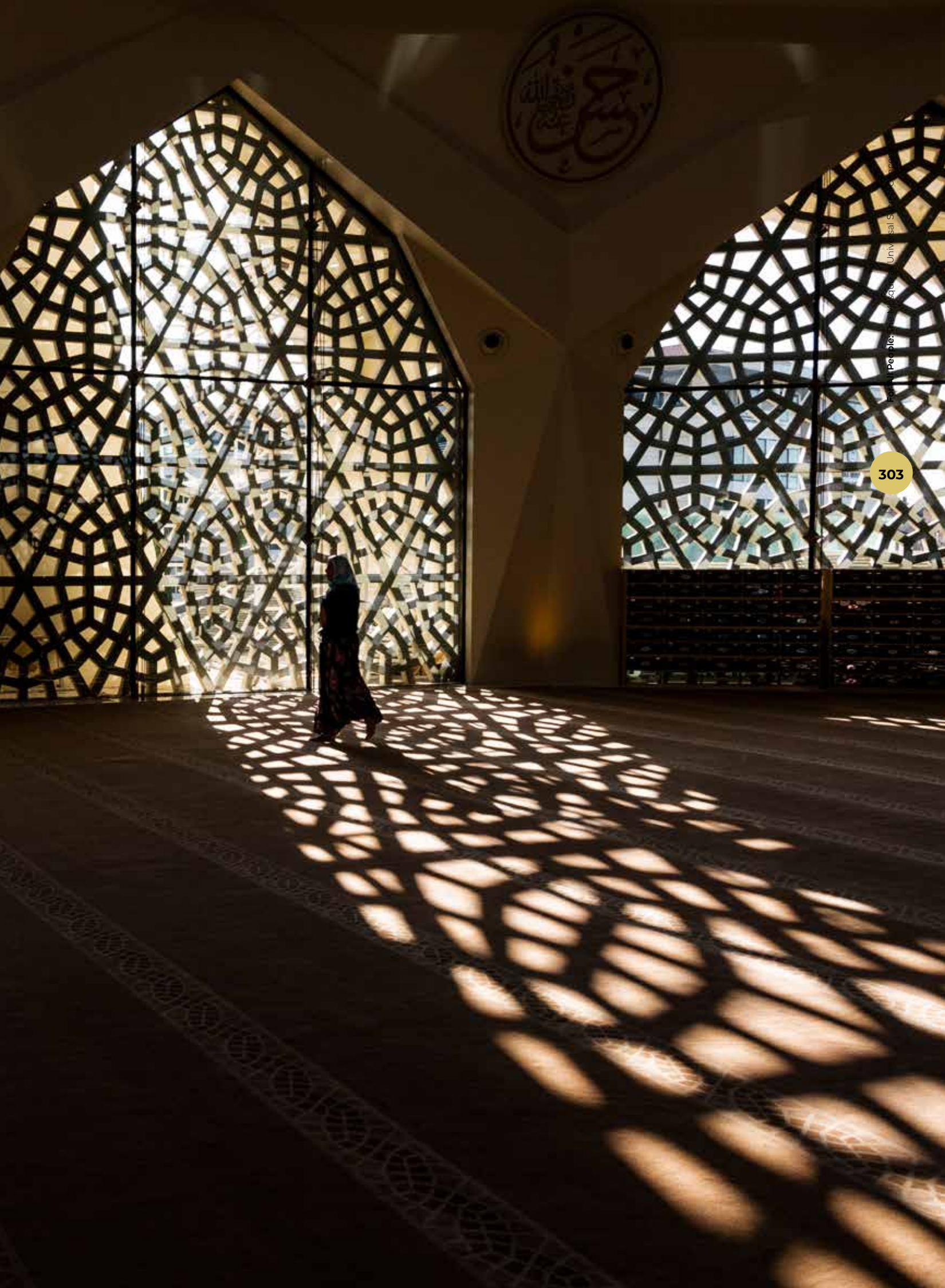
Sensitive Integration—Balanced Outcomes

It is clear that the technical systems were chosen in support of spatial experience, not ecological performance. Steel and glass offer formal precision; HVAC systems and lighting schemes create calm, religious interiors. But this comes at a cost—one that could have been mitigated by a more integrated environmental strategy, especially given the mosque's symbolic role as both a house of worship and a university landmark.

In summary, the mosque's technical systems are effective and architecturally coherent—but not environmentally forward-looking. It performs well in service of form and function, yet misses the opportunity to align architectural excellence with ecological responsibility. For a project of this visibility and ambition, the absence of a more assertive sustainability ethos feels like a quiet contradiction.

Beneath the elegant geometry and luminous interiors of the mosque lies a robust technical infrastructure—one that aims to harmonize environmental comfort with contemporary structural ambition. Yet the design's successes here are both striking and, at times, quietly conflicted.

Prayer hall interior.



1

1. *Mihrab.*

2. *One of the glass domes in a building associated with the mosque.*

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

From the outset, this mosque was envisioned not only as a place of prayer, but as a living institution—one that could support religious life while remaining deeply embedded in the rhythms of the university and the wider city. Situated within the academic precincts of Marmara University and adjacent to a major commercial zone, the mosque stands at a complex urban threshold. How well, then, does it serve the social, communal, and educational needs of its diverse user groups?

A Multilayered Social Node

The project succeeds in establishing a mosque that is more than a prayer hall. The inclusion of a full cultural center beneath the main plaza—featuring lecture halls, exhibition rooms, a book café, and even cinema functions—extends the mosque's reach far beyond liturgical purposes. These facilities remain active throughout the week and are accessible not only to students and faculty but also to visitors and local residents, turning the mosque into a point of intellectual and cultural encounter. It reflects the historical külliye model while avoiding the detachment often found in contemporary civic campuses.

Importantly, the open plaza at the heart of the complex operates as a kind of informal urban living room. During his site visit, our technical Reviewer Dr. Mohammed Mashary Alnaim observed that students were seen gathering there between lectures, families passing through, and worshippers preparing for prayer. The absence of enclosure—no boundary walls, gates, or thresholds—means the space invites use even outside formal religious times. This permeability reinforces the mosque's social presence not through program alone, but through openness of gesture.

Inclusivity and Everyday Use

Social inclusivity is another dimension where the mosque shows deliberate attention. The design supports access for all groups: women, elderly users, children, and persons with disabilities are all accommodated with visible and respectful circulation systems. Elevators connect the prayer halls and cultural zones, signage is clear, and ablution facilities are proportionally distributed across user groups. Women's galleries, in particular, are integrated with spatial dignity and acoustic clarity, helping normalize the presence of female worshippers without spatial marginalization.

Moreover, the mosque does not isolate these user groups into separate zones. Instead, it allows for a layered sharing of space—children learning in designated rooms during Ramadan, students mingling in the café after Friday prayer, and faculty using seminar rooms for informal dialogues. These scenes are not accidental; they are the result of a spatial and programmatic approach that genuinely encourages coexistence and interaction.

Ritual, Community, and Informality

In terms of liturgical life, the mosque performs well. Both prayer halls remain in active use—daily on the lower level, and weekly or during festivals on the upper level. Friday prayers often overflow into the plaza, transforming it into an open-air sanctuary. During such moments, the architecture demonstrates its flexibility: civic space becomes devotional space without needing to be physically transformed.

Yet equally important is the mosque's role outside of formal prayer. The café is frequented even during non-prayer hours; the exhibition spaces host academic and cultural content; and student groups use the plaza and foyer as informal gathering zones. This elasticity of use reinforces the building's identity not as a closed sanctuary but as a social condenser—a place where sacred, academic, and urban energies intersect.

Still, the project's very ambition comes with subtle limitations. The layering of functions—while admirable—can create occasional confusion in wayfinding, especially for first-time users. The integration of so many uses into a compact footprint occasionally tests the clarity of spatial transitions. And while the openness of the plaza is socially generous, it lacks shade or intimate seating areas, which could have further extended its everyday usability.

Likewise, while the mosque's architectural language is expressive and symbolic, its formality may, at times, deter casual or spontaneous engagement—particularly from non-university populations. The mosque succeeds best when it welcomes informality; it is strongest when its architecture allows itself to disappear, even briefly, into the life of the community it serves.

The Marmara University Faculty of Theology Mosque demonstrates a serious and thoughtful commitment to social performance. It does not isolate sacred space from everyday life, but rather works to weave the two together. Through its spatial openness, inclusive programming, and thoughtful cultural layers, it advances a renewed understanding of what a contemporary mosque can be: not only a place for prayer, but a shared platform for learning, gathering, and belonging— "for all people."

2

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The Marmara University Faculty of Theology Mosque presents itself as a serious and thoughtful architectural statement—an attempt to reframe the Ottoman külliye model within a contemporary academic setting. Rather than proposing a new mosque typology, it revisits a familiar one with updated imagery, materials, structural techniques, and spatial programming. It is a work of translation more than reinvention—faithful in spirit to classical precedents, yet articulated in the language of modern engineering and form. Its strengths lie in this careful reinterpretation. The project achieves a dignified presence without resorting to mimicry. It succeeds in offering a prayer environment that is both elevated and functional, while embedding the mosque within a wider social and cultural complex. The integration of a public plaza, cultural facilities, and dual prayer halls reflects a genuine effort to align architecture with the spiritual, educational, and civic roles of the mosque in Muslim society.

Yet the project stops short of engaging more radically with the evolving discourse of mosque architecture in contemporary Turkey. In contrast to more experimental works such as Emre Arolat's Sancaklar Mosque—which won the previous cycle of the Al Fozan Award for its radical spatial and conceptual departure—this mosque remains anchored in the formal language of historical continuity. It does not challenge typology; it affirms it!

Some of the building's expressive gestures—particularly its sculptural dome and layered geometric motifs—introduce moments of architectural ambition that enrich the experience. While these features add symbolic and spatial depth, they may occasionally temper the clarity of orientation and devotional focus, particularly for first-time visitors. Likewise, the inclusion of cultural programming broadens the mosque's role, though it sometimes introduces a degree of spatial complexity that calls for more intuitive circulation.

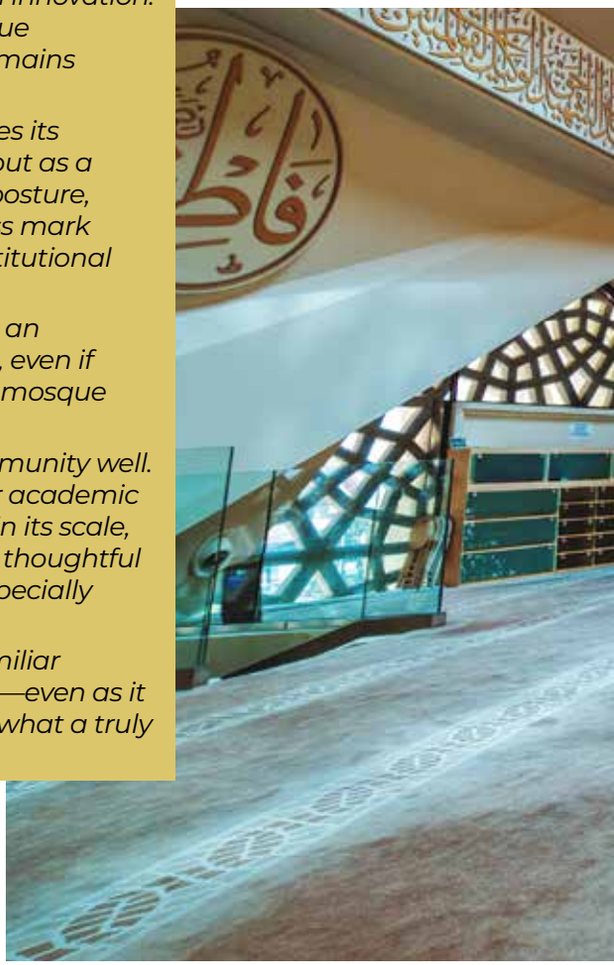
On technical grounds, the project demonstrates confidence in structure and execution, yet makes only limited gestures toward environmental innovation. The opportunity to model a new generation of sustainable mosque architecture—especially in a high-profile institutional setting—remains underexplored.

Even so, the mosque has succeeded in crafting a space that serves its community very well. It functions not only as a place of worship, but as a center of academic and cultural exchange. Its restrained urban posture, especially in scale, architectural discipline, and functional richness mark it as a commendable addition to the canon of contemporary institutional mosques—particularly within the Turkish context.

Rather than offering a break with the past, this project reinforces an architectural lineage. It does so with clarity, care, and composure, even if it leaves open the deeper question of what a truly contemporary mosque might yet become.

Still, the mosque succeeds in crafting a space that serves its community well. It functions not only as a place of worship, but also as a center for academic and cultural exchange. Its restrained urban presence—reflected in its scale, architectural discipline, and programmatic depth—marks it as a thoughtful addition to the canon of contemporary institutional mosques, especially within the Turkish context.

Rather than departing from tradition, the project reinforces a familiar architectural lineage. It does so with clarity, care, and composure—even as it leaves open the deeper, and perhaps more pressing, question of what a truly contemporary mosque might yet become.



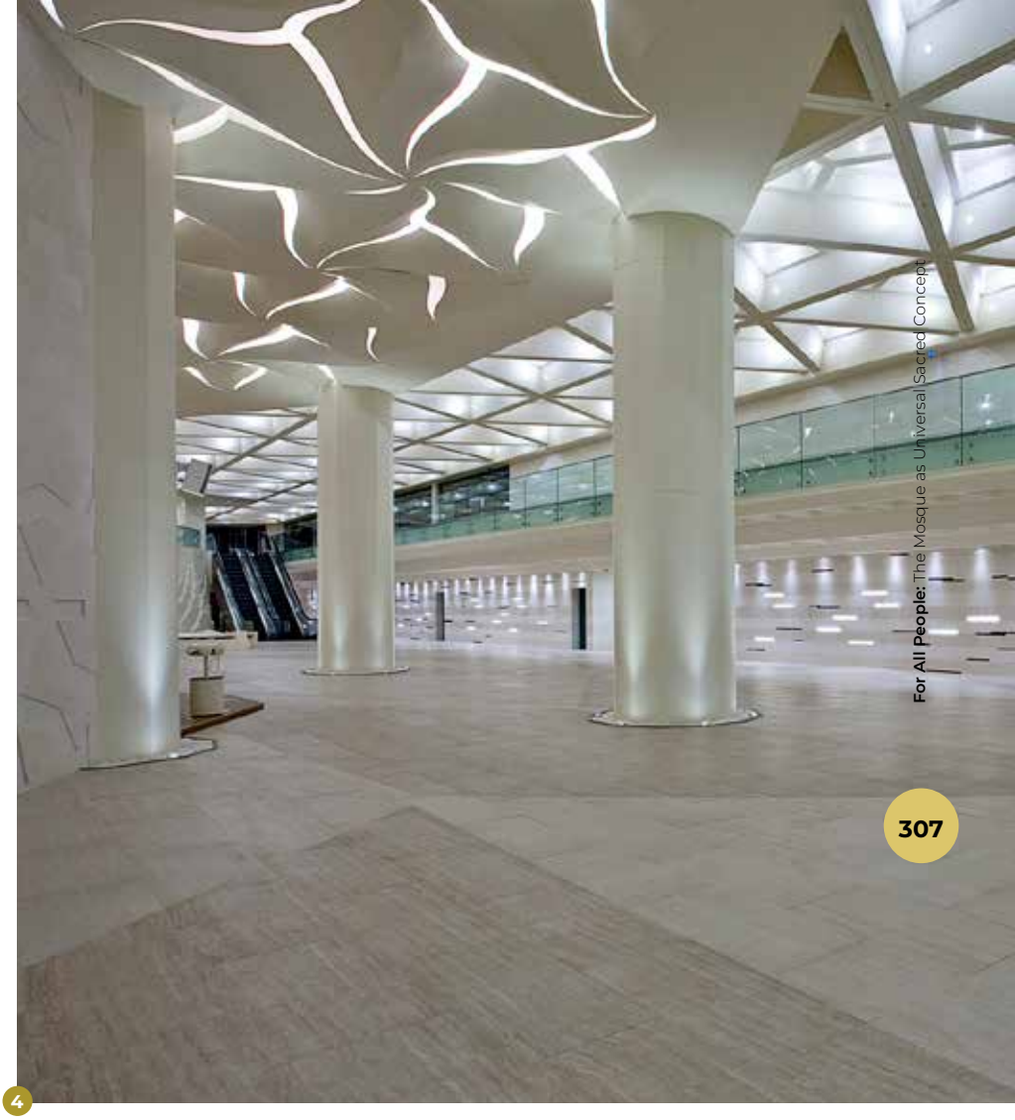
2

1. Details of arches and walls.

2. A sculptural motif repeated across multiple parts gives the building a sense of unity.

3. Internal facilities of the mosque.

4. Femal prayer room.



4

3

BETWEEN PAST
AND FUTURE

E-ZUBAIDA

Mosque

E-Zubaida Mosque
Location: Raichur, Karnataka, India
Architect: Neogenesis+Studi0261
Year of Completion: 2022
Plot Area: 268 m²
Built-Up Area: 750 m²
Capacity: 140 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Aya Musmar

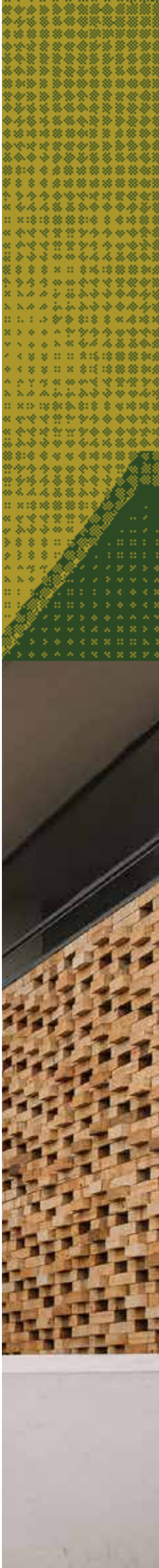
1

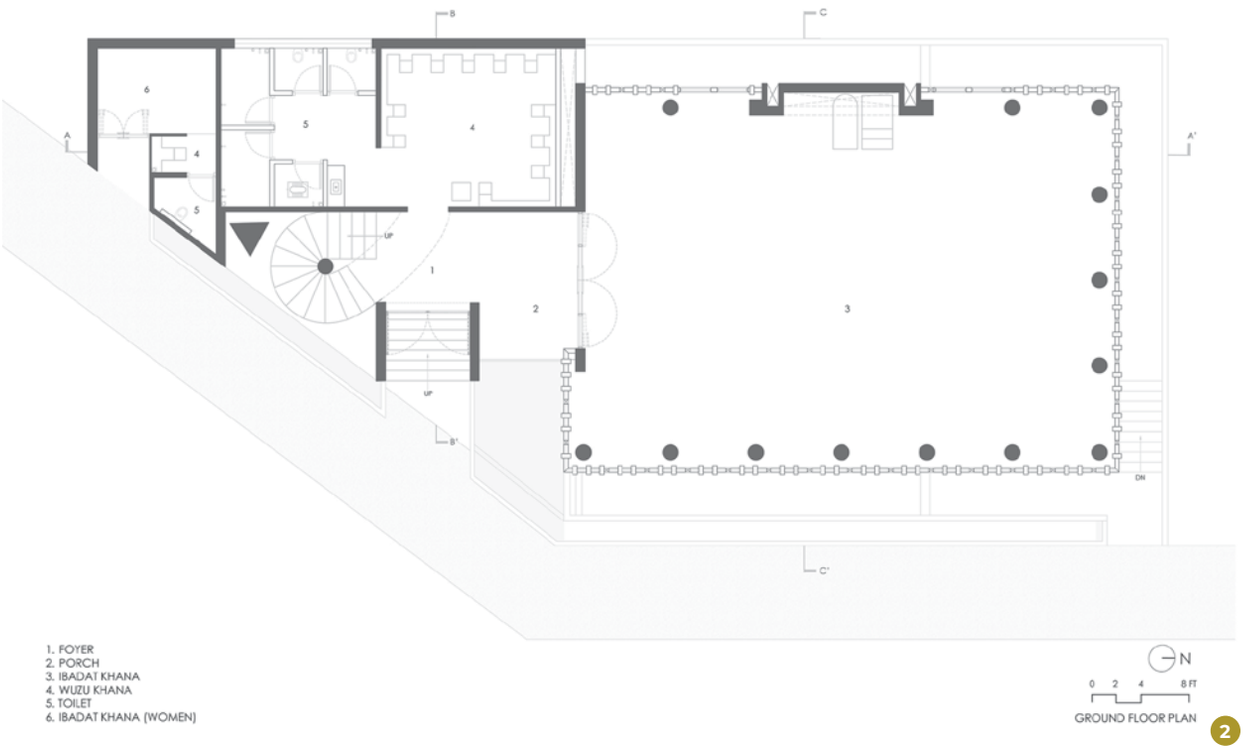
E-Zubaida Mosque is a contemporary community mosque in Raichur, India (2022), designed by Neogenesis+Studi0261, with a reported project area of 750 m². The building sits on the western edge of the city along a highway within Raichur's planned expansion zone, where building-material shops, universities, schools, restaurants, informal housing, and ongoing construction coexist in a transitional condition that is neither fully rural nor fully urban.

The on-site report notes that the mosque is located in a predominantly Hindu neighbourhood and is intended to serve the local Muslim minority, while also functioning as a practical stopping point for travelers along the road. This recalls the long-standing role of mosques along routes as places to pause and pray. The land belongs to a family originally from Raichur who have lived abroad for decades and previously built Masjid Fatimah; the new project was funded through money raised on the premise of building an "architectural artefact for the people."

Architecturally, the mosque adopts a deliberately modern stance: concrete construction and flat roofing, with a conscious departure from the conventional dome, while the tall, slender minaret provides the primary civic signal. Two features define its public image from the highway: a spiral external staircase wrapping the minaret and animating the façade through vertical movement, and a carefully executed brick frontage that gives the prayer hall elevation texture and rhythm while maintaining a measured link to local craft practice.

Spatially, the mosque prioritizes use over procession. The plot is almost fully occupied, leaving little room for a defined forecourt; the approach is described as open-ended and somewhat unresolved, yet also a pragmatic response to limited land. The building is organized across two levels: the main platform accommodates the prayer hall and men's ablution facilities, while the lower level extends the mosque's daily role through a madrasa/learning space, a kitchen for preparing and sharing meals, and quarters for the imam. The report observes this lower level as actively inhabited, especially by children who use the place with a strong sense of familiarity and ownership.





1. *Movement and Visual Formation.*

2. *Ground floor plan.*

URBAN INTEGRATION

The mosque occupies a highway-edge site on the western side of Raichur within an expanding urban strip where the city is still forming its edge condition. The surroundings read as a growth corridor rather than a settled neighbourhood. Building-material shops, educational institutions, eateries, informal housing, and ongoing construction sit side by side, producing a transitional and somewhat unfinished fabric that remains active and legible.

In this setting, the mosque functions less as part of a continuous street wall and more as a civic marker within a landscape of movement. Its minaret and façade articulation operate as the primary tools for visibility from the road. The on-site technical report also notes its dual role as a community anchor for the local Muslim minority and a practical stop for travelers.

At plot scale, limited land leads to a compact footprint that leaves little room for a defined forecourt or a generous transitional plaza. The approach is described as open-ended and not fully resolved as a spatial threshold. This can be read as a weakness in civic staging, yet it also reflects a clear prioritization of internal program and daily utility over external ceremony.

Overall, the site strategy emphasizes efficiency and recognition. The building relies on vertical presence and clear architectural identity to assert itself within an evolving, heterogeneous urban edge.

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

From the outside, E-Zubaida Mosque presents a deliberately restrained architectural stance. The massing is compact and mostly rectilinear, expressed through flat roofs and a clear concrete structure rather than through the conventional dome profile. The minaret becomes the primary urban sign, slender and vertically emphatic, giving the mosque recognizability within a highway corridor where buildings compete for attention through signage and surface noise.

The most defining exterior element is the brick jali façade, which functions as more than a decorative skin. It mediates between inside and outside by filtering sunlight, supporting airflow, and providing privacy, while also giving the mosque a tactile presence rooted in a familiar construction culture. The report notes that the designers initially intended to use compressed stabilized earth blocks made from excavated soil, but the blocks failed compression testing. The project then shifted to fired bricks produced in the client's factory, which effectively strengthened the material logic of the façade as a crafted screen.

A second strong public gesture is the external spiral stair wrapping the minaret. It reads as an architectural event rather than a concealed service element, introducing movement and depth to the street elevation and turning circulation into part of the building's identity. In a project with limited site area and little room for a forecourt, these vertical moves help compensate for the absence of a large external gathering space by giving the mosque a clear profile and a readable public face.

Overall, the exterior succeeds when it is most direct. It avoids historicist replication, relies on clear mass, texture, and shadow, and uses the façade as a climatic and perceptual device rather than as an image.

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior experience is built on restraint and controlled light rather than on ceremonial grandeur. Entry does not unfold through a pronounced threshold or a long preparatory sequence, yet once inside, the prayer hall is shaped to feel calm and continuous. The architects frame the space as one that supports khushū, meaning a state of humble, inward attentiveness in prayer, deeper than ordinary concentration. This intention is reinforced through a visually quiet floor plane and an emphasis on uncluttered surfaces that reduce distraction.

1. *Externally, the jali creates a clear contrast in the main prayer hall mass in both color and materiality.*

2. *Interior jali details: a perforated formation lending the prayer hall calm and serenity.*

2

Daylight is the primary interior material. The brick jali and the louvered glazed elements filter light and soften contrasts, while higher openings and clerestory-like cuts bring brightness deeper into the hall. The qibla wall is treated as a plain, serene surface, positioned to receive a gradual wash of light from above. This approach gives the wall presence without turning it into an object of display, and it aligns symbolic intention with a perceptual effect that worshippers actually feel.

At the level of elements, the mosque keeps the essentials legible. The mihrab and minbar are present but not theatrically staged, and the overall language remains contemporary, relying on a controlled palette and careful detailing. The result is an interior that tries to be devotional through atmosphere, not through excess.

The on-site technical reviewer also points to interior asymmetries that matter socially and spatially. The women's prayer room is more enclosed and reportedly underused, and women do not have ablution facilities equivalent to those provided for men. These are not minor details, because they affect how equally the interior supports different users, and they shape whether the mosque's calm architectural stance translates into a genuinely inclusive lived space.

1 Abdullatif Al Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture: FIFTH ROUND

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

The mosque pursues comfort largely through architectural means rather than heavy building services. A double-skin or offset-wall approach, together with higher openings and layered brick and glass elements, supports daylighting and cross-ventilation across both levels. Near the qibla wall, segmented panels and horizontally divided openings assist airflow. Mechanical support remains modest, with electric fans used when occupancy increases.

Materially, the building combines a concrete structure and flat roof slab with a brick-and-glass envelope. Compressed stabilized earth blocks made from excavated soil were initially planned but failed in compression testing, so the project switched to fired bricks produced in the client's factory. Floors are largely polished precast concrete, with more robust finishes in wet areas such as the ablution zone.

Basic usability measures are present, including tactile grooves on steps for visually impaired users and functional lighting where needed. Accessibility, however, remains incomplete. There are no ramps or dedicated provisions for people with disabilities, and women's facilities are limited, including the absence of equivalent ablution provision. The roof is accessible and could support roof gardening, and ablution water could be reused for irrigation with drought-resistant planting, but these measures have not been implemented.

1. *Externally, the jali creates a clear contrast in the main prayer hall mass in both color and materiality.*

2. *General exterior formation.*

Prayer hall interior... spaciousness filled with natural light.

The mosque pursues comfort largely through architectural means rather than heavy building services. A double-skin or offset-wall approach, together with higher openings and layered brick and glass elements, supports daylighting and cross-ventilation across both levels.

1. External view of the mosque.

2. Educational and social annexes make the mosque an extended part of everyday social life.

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

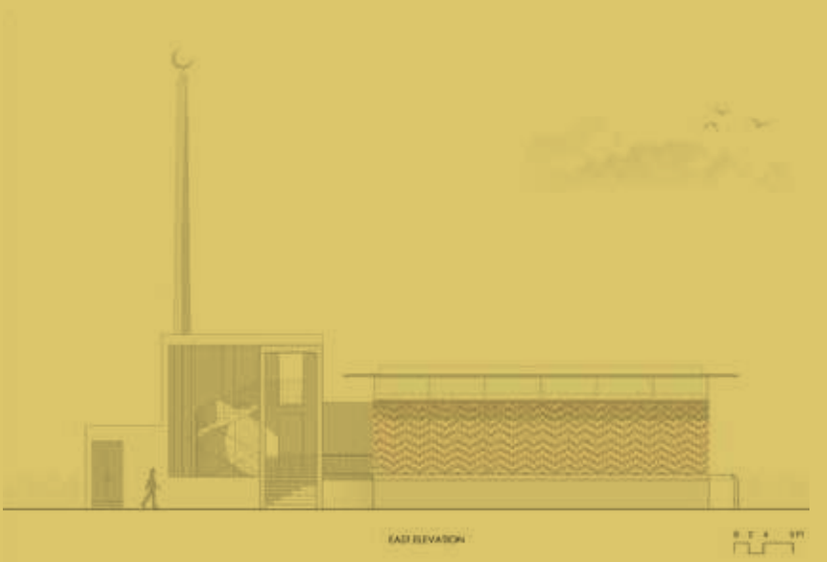
The mosque operates as more than a prayer space. Its highway-edge position gives it a dual role, serving the local Muslim community within a predominantly non-Muslim area while also functioning as a practical stop for travelers. This keeps the building socially connected to everyday movement and use.

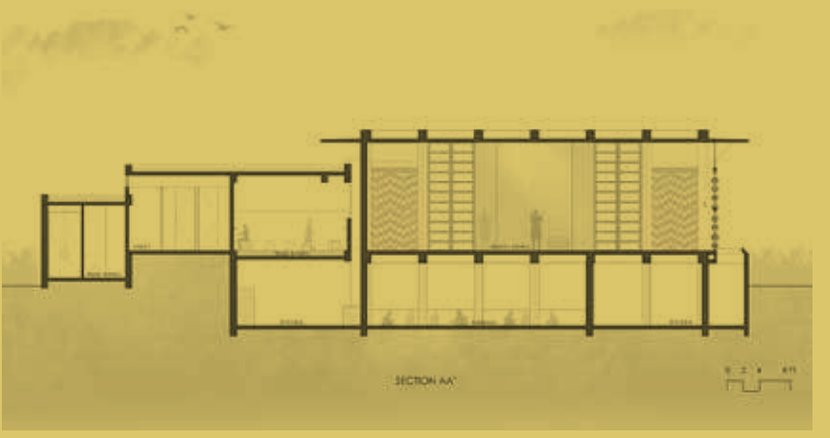
The lower level is central to this broader role. It accommodates a madrasa or learning space that also supports informal occupation, a kitchen for preparing and sharing meals, and quarters for the imam. These programs extend the mosque into education and hospitality, and the space is described as especially active with children, indicating a lived familiarity rather than a purely formal atmosphere.

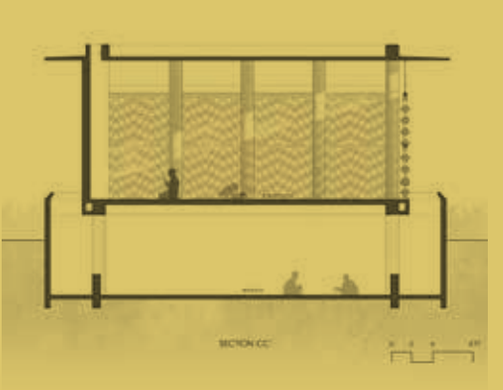
Inclusivity, however, remains uneven. The women's prayer area is more enclosed and reportedly underused, and women do not have equivalent ablution provision. Accessibility is also limited, with no ramps or dedicated provisions for people with disabilities. Overall, the mosque performs socially through everyday programmability, but it is weakened by gaps in gender equity and universal access.

1

2


EAST ELEVATION


SECTION AA'


SECTION CC'

SECTION BB'

1

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

E-Zubaida Mosque presents a clear contemporary stance in a setting that is still forming its urban identity. It avoids historicist replication and builds its presence through a compact mass, a tall minaret, and a brick screen that performs climatically while offering a crafted civic face. Within a limited plot, the project prioritizes usable program and daily occupation, extending the mosque beyond worship through learning, hospitality, and community support functions.

Its strengths are most convincing when architecture is treated as an instrument rather than an image. Filtered daylight, controlled privacy, and ventilation logic are integrated into the envelope, and the interior seeks calmness through restraint. The building also benefits from its highway position, which allows it to serve both a local minority community and travelers, strengthening its relevance in everyday life.

At the same time, the project's social claims are tested by uneven inclusivity. Women's provision is limited in both spatial quality and services, and universal access is not addressed through ramps or equivalent accommodations. The external arrival sequence is also less resolved, with little transitional forecourt space, which reduces the civic generosity that a mosque can offer even at a small scale.

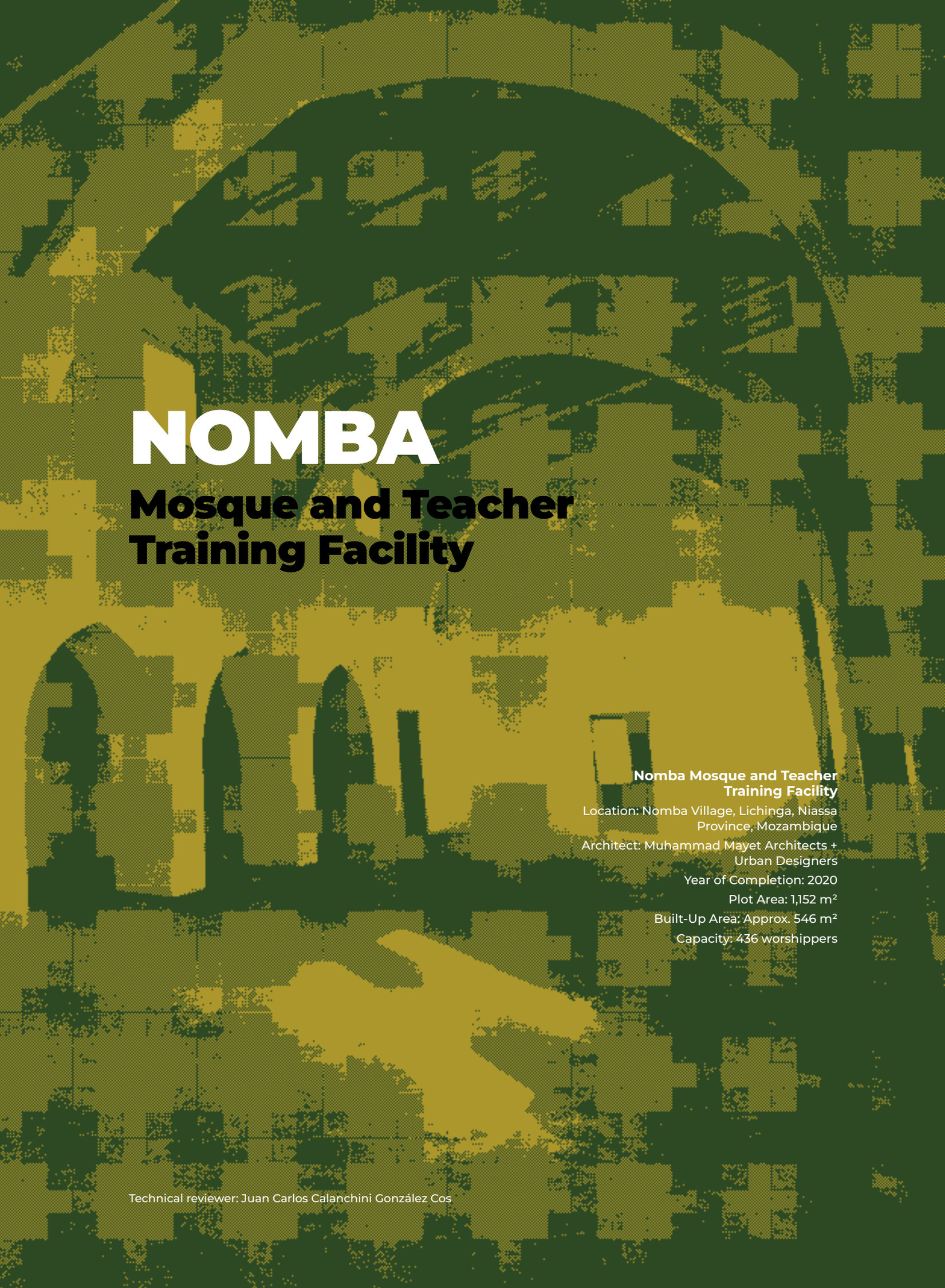
Overall, the mosque achieves a distinctive identity without reliance on familiar monumental tropes, and it demonstrates how essential elements can be reassembled into a sober contemporary language. Its next step, if it is to fully mature as a civic religious institution, lies less in formal refinement and more in completing its ethical and spatial inclusivity across all users.

1. *General external formation.*

2. *Ablution area.*

2

AN EYE OPEN
TO HISTORY



NOMBA

Mosque and Teacher Training Facility

Nomba Mosque and Teacher Training Facility

Location: Nomba Village, Lichinga, Niassa Province, Mozambique

Architect: Muhammad Mayet Architects + Urban Designers

Year of Completion: 2020

Plot Area: 1,152 m²

Built-Up Area: Approx. 546 m²

Capacity: 436 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Juan Carlos Calanchini González Cos

Set in the remote high plateau of Niassa, the Nomba Mosque was conceived to support an educational initiative serving hundreds of rural schools in northern Mozambique. Alongside its role as a place of worship, the project hosts short-term training residencies for groups of teachers, giving the mosque an unusual civic presence within a region marked by fragile soils, limited infrastructure, and dispersed settlements.

The complex is organized around a shaded courtyard linked by vaulted verandas. This compact arrangement brings together the prayer hall, balanced gendered spaces, classrooms, dormitories, dining areas, and ablution rooms, forming a cohesive environment that responds directly to climate, solar exposure, and the absence of nearby public facilities.

Built from sun-dried brick, lime plaster, timber trusses, and corrugated roofing, the project embraces an economy of means. Its brick vaults offer structure, shade, and passive cooling without dependence on skilled labor. The minaret doubles as a water tower fed by harvested rainwater, addressing one of the site's most pressing needs.

1

Inside, the prayer hall is modest and calm, relying on proportion, daylight, and the gentle rise of the vaults. The women's area follows Shāfiʿī considerations while maintaining visual access to the mihrab through low screens. Finishes remain simple, reflecting local maintenance realities.

Constructed largely by unskilled villagers under remote architectural supervision, the mosque has quickly become a much-used communal centre, now serving a population beyond its original scope. Its success reveals a deep local need for civic, educational, and social infrastructure, making the project both a spiritual anchor and a rare public resource in Nomba.

2

URBAN INTEGRATION

Set within the dispersed rural fabric of Niassa, the Nomba Mosque occupies an open plot on the high plateau, where villages stretch loosely across fragile soils and unpaved tracks. With no formal urban structure, buildings in the area stand as isolated points in the landscape; in this setting, the mosque becomes one of the very few communal anchors available to residents.

The complex adopts a compact courtyard plan that responds directly to climate: the vaulted verandahs provide shade, ventilation, and sheltered circulation, creating an inward focus that offers spatial coherence in an otherwise formless environment. Its open edges allow people to approach informally from all sides, reinforcing the mosque's civic role in a region lacking public facilities.

Because it also hosts teacher-training sessions for educators from remote villages, the mosque functions as a micro-hub in a wider educational network across Niassa and Cabo Delgado. Daily use has further integrated it into community life—drawing children, worshipers, and visitors to its shaded spaces and its water tower. The site would now benefit from simple landscape improvements—paths, shade trees, and clearer thresholds—to support the increasing intensity of use.

1. *A row of arches forming a transitional portico to the prayer hall.*

2. *Areal view.*

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Externally, the Nomba Mosque presents an architecture shaped by necessity but elevated through clarity of form. The complex is unified by a continuous band of brick vaults that outline the courtyard and give the ensemble its quiet, rhythmic profile. These low vaults—constructed from sun-dried brick and lime plaster—establish a stable horizontal datum across the site, anchoring the mosque in a landscape otherwise without architectural order.

The material expression is straightforward: earth-based brickwork, lime-rendered surfaces, corrugated roofing, and timber truss supports. Yet the consistency of this palette gives the project a coherent identity. The vaults provide both structure and climatic performance, casting deep shade along the verandas and allowing hot air to rise and escape. Their modest height also maintains an intimacy befitting the small scale of the settlement.

The courtyard façades are defined by repetitive arches and shaded walkways, producing a sense of calm enclosure without resorting to ornament. Openings are minimal and carefully scaled to balance daylight, privacy, and ventilation. The overall impression is one of restraint—an architecture that derives its character from proportion, material honesty, and the disciplined use of simple construction techniques.

The minaret is the only vertical element in the composition. Its significance, however, is as much infrastructural as symbolic: it houses a gravity-fed water tank supplied by rainwater harvested from the surrounding roofs. This dual function lends the tower a pragmatic dignity; it is both a sign of the building's mosque role as well as a beacon of the essential daily utility the mosque provides for the settlement.

Landscape treatment remains minimal, shaped largely by the existing terrain and the absence of formal paths or planting. While this simplicity aligns with the region's realities, the growing intensity of use suggests that future enhancements—shaded seating, defined walkways, and ground stabilization—would strengthen the mosque's exterior presence and improve accessibility during seasonal rains.

1. *An arch formation defining the character of the interior spaces.*

2. *Mosque courtyard (sahn).*

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Inside, the Nomba Mosque relies on refined proportions, daylight, and the gentle rise of the brick vaults to create a calm and dignified prayer space. The interior is intentionally modest: lime-plastered surfaces, minimal openings, and a simple mihrab niche define an atmosphere shaped more by light and shadow than by decorative intent. The vaulted ceiling gives the hall a quiet monumentality, while its thermal mass helps moderate heat throughout the day.

The spatial arrangement follows Shāfiʿī considerations regarding women's prayer placement. Here, the women's area is not confined to a peripheral corner but positioned so that worshippers maintain a visual relationship with the mihrab through low, finely scaled screens. This preserves both dignity and presence within a culturally grounded framework.

Materials remain practical and local. The floor covering—simple plastic tarpaulin—reflects village habits and maintenance realities, even if it lacks the sensory warmth associated with woven carpets. Openings are placed to admit controlled daylight and ensure cross-ventilation, reducing reliance on mechanical systems. Acoustics benefit naturally from the vault geometry, allowing speech and recitation to carry clearly without amplification.

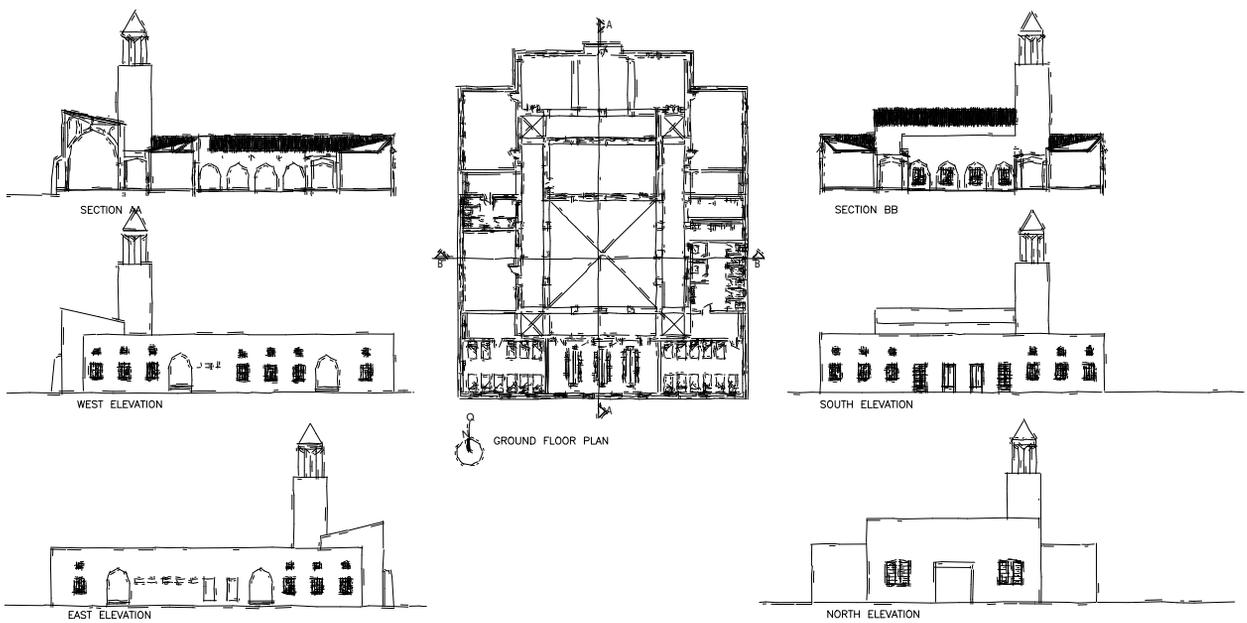
The verandas surrounding the courtyard serve as transitional spaces: shaded, airy, and continuously used. They act as extensions of the interior, hosting informal gatherings, children's study circles, and moments of rest. In many ways, these shaded perimeters are the project's most socially charged zones, absorbing daily rhythms that spill beyond the enclosed prayer hall.

Taken as a whole, the interior architecture is defined by restraint and consistency. Nothing is superfluous; all design choices have taken into consideration the local climate, material availability, and the desire for a space that is easy to build, easy to maintain, and gentle in its spiritual expression.

1

2

1


SECTION AA
WEST ELEVATION
EAST ELEVATION
GROUND FLOOR PLAN
SECTION BB
SOUTH ELEVATION
NORTH ELEVATION

2

1. Part of the mosque's exterior façade

.

2. Architectural drawings of the mosque.

3. External view of the mosque.

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS & SUSTAINABILITY

The Nomba Mosque relies almost entirely on low-tech, climate-responsive strategies rather than mechanical systems. Its brick vaults and lime-plastered walls provide thermal mass that absorbs heat during the day and releases it slowly at night, stabilizing indoor temperatures in a region with strong diurnal swings. Cross-ventilation is achieved through carefully placed openings and the natural chimney effect of the vaulted ceilings.

Rainwater harvesting is integral to the project. Roof surfaces channel water to the minaret, where a gravity-fed tank supplies water for washing and general use—an essential service in a village with limited access to reliable water sources. Greywater is reused for irrigation, minimizing consumption and reinforcing a circular water strategy suitable for the plateau's fragile soils.

Lighting is predominantly natural. The controlled sizing of openings brings in adequate daylight while limiting glare and heat gain. After sunset, lighting requirements are minimal and served by simple, low-consumption fixtures that match the project's overall modest energy profile.

Construction methods were deliberately simple to reduce environmental impact and allow unskilled villagers to participate. Locally produced sun-dried bricks, lime mortar, and lightweight timber trusses minimize embodied energy and shorten transportation needs. The vaulted system, though technically astute, remains material-efficient and well suited to the skills and tools available in Nomba.

Overall, the sustainability of the project emerges not from advanced technologies but from architectural intelligence: passive cooling, climate-appropriate materials, water management, and a construction process rooted in local capability. This pragmatic approach makes long-term maintenance feasible and ensures that the mosque can continue functioning without dependence on external expertise or costly systems.

Lighting is predominantly natural. The controlled sizing of openings brings in adequate daylight while limiting glare and heat gain. After sunset, lighting requirements are minimal and served by simple, low-consumption fixtures that match the project's overall modest energy profile.

The sense of history's presence shapes the mosque's identity inside and out.

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

The Nomba Mosque has quickly become one of the most active communal spaces in the region. Beyond its function as a place of worship, it supports an educational program that brings together groups of teachers from remote villages for short training residencies. This regular influx of visitors gives the mosque an unusual civic role in a landscape where public institutions are scarce.

Daily life has further integrated the mosque into the rhythms of the settlement. Children study and play under the shaded verandas, villagers gather for water at the minaret tower, and the courtyard hosts informal meetings and community events. The openness of the site—no gates, no hard boundaries—allows people to approach the mosque freely from all directions, strengthening the sense of collective ownership.

Importantly, the mosque is perceived as a dignified and welcoming environment by both men and women. The careful positioning of the women's prayer area, with clear visual access to the mihrab, reinforces this sense of inclusion. The attached dormitories, kitchen, and classrooms support the teacher-training program without isolating it from the life of the mosque.

With its growing popularity, the mosque now faces the challenge of accommodating more users than originally planned. Worshippers often exceed the capacity of the prayer hall, and the community has expressed aspirations for additional facilities such as a clinic or expanded gathering spaces. This demand reflects both the project's success and the pervasive infrastructural gap in the region.

Overall, the Nomba Mosque performs as a rare civic anchor: socially accessible, programmatically flexible, and trusted by the local population. Its impact extends well beyond its modest scale, revealing the importance of small but well-crafted institutions in rural contexts.

1-2. *Local social relationships are formed within and around the mosque*

.

3. *General view of the mosque massing.*

4. *Interior shot showing sunlight in the hall.*

1

2

3

4

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The Nomba Mosque and Teacher Training Facility achieves a rare balance between modest means and architectural clarity. Its strength lies not in spectacle but in the disciplined use of simple materials, climate-responsive forms, and a layout that unifies prayer, learning, and communal life within a compact courtyard plan. In a region with almost no public infrastructure, the project provides a dignified centre that is both spiritually grounded and socially indispensable.

The architecture is at its best when it engages directly with local realities: the brick vaults that temper heat, the verandas that serve as everyday social rooms, the minaret that doubles as a water tower. These gestures reveal an intelligent responsiveness rather than an imposed aesthetic. At the same time, the project's restraint avoids romanticizing poverty; instead, it demonstrates how careful design can elevate even the humblest of materials and conditions.

Yet the mosque also exposes the pressures facing rural communities in Niassa. Its rapid adoption by residents—and the regular influx of visiting teachers—has already pushed the facility beyond its intended capacity. The need for expanded gathering areas, improved landscaping, and ancillary services such as a clinic reflects both the success of the project and the wider absence of civic institutions in the region.

Ultimately, the Nomba Mosque stands as a quietly compelling example of architecture acting with precision, empathy, and responsibility. It addresses immediate needs while opening a path for future development, proving that modest projects can carry significant civic weight when shaped with care and rooted in the life of their communities. It is precisely this blend of humility, intelligence, and social relevance that renders the project worthy of recognition, and that justifies its place among the shortlisted works presented in this Al Fozan Award book.

1

2

1. An external arcade with five-lobed arches reinforces the concept of visual unity throughout the building.

2. One corner of the building massing where overall visual calmness is evident.

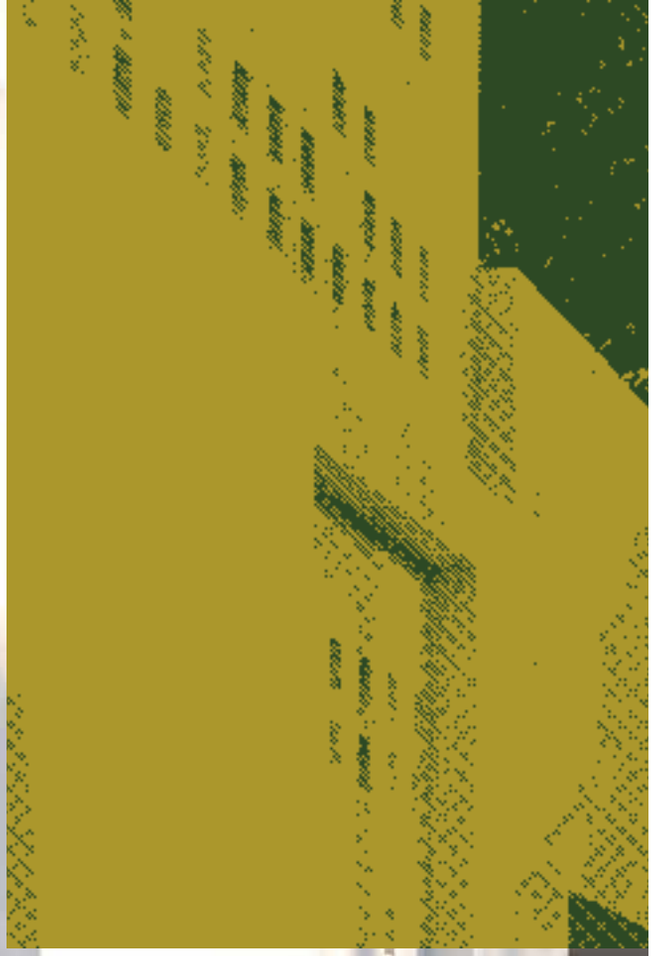
3. This is how the mosque façade appears from the inner courtyard.

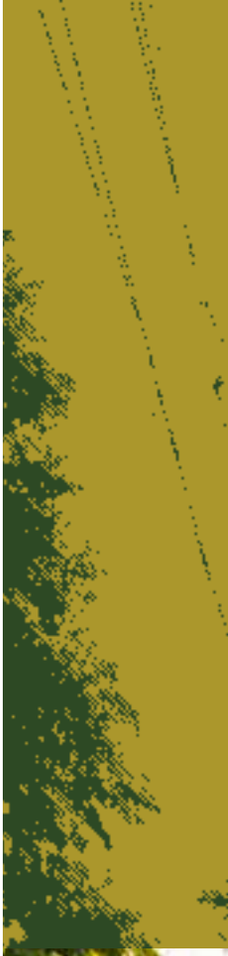
A SILENT VISUAL DISCOURSE

KUSHTIA
Neighborhood Mosque

Kushtia Neighborhood Mosque
Location: Kushtia, Bangladesh
Architect: Ahsan Habib + Chinton Architects
Year of Completion: 2022
Plot Area: 483 m²
Built-Up Area: Approx. 464 m²
Capacity: 386 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Jemma Chidiac





The Kushtia Neighborhood Mosque is a modest, community-built mosque in a semi-rural district of Kushtia, Bangladesh. Designed by Ahsan Habib + Chinton Architects and completed in 2022, it occupies 483 m² and accommodates roughly 300 worshippers. Its architecture is shaped by three forces: limited budget, climatic necessities, and the everyday livelihood requirements of the surrounding village.

The mosque's white cubic massing and perforated brick façade form a quiet presence within narrow village paths, homes, small workshops, and an adjacent graveyard. Instead of adopting a monumental posture, the project relies on proportion, filtered daylight, and material restraint to create a sense of dignity. The single minaret—added at the community's request—punctuates the skyline without disturbing the simplicity of the whole.

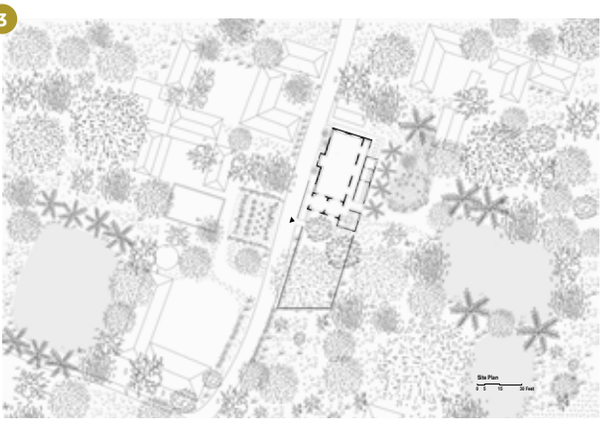
Interior spaces remain deliberately plain, relying on cross-ventilation, a roof opening at the mihrab, and controlled daylight to define atmosphere. Two prayer halls (ground and upper level) maintain spatial clarity and thermal comfort with minimal means. The overall language echoes contemporary Bangladeshi mosque architecture—particularly the influence of Kashef Chowdhury / URBANA—yet remains grounded in the village's scale and social rhythms.

Beyond worship, the mosque serves as an open community platform: a shaded 'shaan' (courtyard), terraces, and unbounded outdoor areas naturally accommodate gathering, children's play, and informal teaching. These spaces extend the mosque's use into daily village life, allowing it to operate as a familiar and accessible civic place.

1

2

3



URBAN INTEGRATION

Set within a semi-rural neighborhood of Kushtia, the mosque occupies a small plot bordered by narrow paths, modest houses, small workshops, and an adjacent graveyard. Rather than asserting a dominant presence, the mosque sits quietly within this fabric, its white cubic form legible but not imposing. The approach is informal—unpaved lanes, scattered vegetation, and open sightlines—reflecting the reality of village life rather than an idealized urban condition.

The building's orientation follows the qibla, while respecting the existing circulation routes, allowing pedestrians to approach naturally from multiple directions. This ease of access reinforces the mosque's role as an everyday destination rather than a special architectural event. The absence of a formal threshold, gate, or landscaped buffer further dissolves boundaries between the mosque and its surroundings; entry into the shaan happens almost intuitively, continuing the daily movements of the community.

The adjacency to the graveyard is particularly significant: it anchors the mosque within the cultural and spiritual continuum of the village, while maintaining the graveyard's natural character and existing trees. Light industry and the donor's residence nearby shape the immediate context, yet the mosque negotiates these differences through restraint and compositional clarity. The result is a building that neither competes with nor retreats from its setting—it simply integrates.

1. *The mosque is a spontaneous extension of the town's public realm.*

2. *General view of the town.*

3. *Site plan.*

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The Kushtia Neighborhood Mosque adopts a restrained architectural language built around simple cubic volumes, perforated brickwork, and white plaster. This compositional clarity allows the building to sit quietly within the village while remaining identifiable from a distance. Its façades rely on modest tectonic gestures—brick perforations, mahogany-framed openings, and a single slender minaret—to create rhythm without ornament.

The perforated brick screens are the building's most expressive exterior component. While structurally basic, they filter daylight, soften the boundary between inside and outside, and provide a subtle visual identity. The patterning is neither overtly symbolic nor decorative, but functions as a climatic device that creates a constantly shifting play of light and shadow across the interior surfaces.

Mass-wise, the mosque breaks down into horizontally stretched volumes with minimal articulation, aligned with the graveyard to the south and the village paths to the north. The absence of a dome or assertive roofline is deliberate: the architecture derives presence from proportion and light rather than from inherited typologies. The minaret remains modest in height and form, acting as a local signal without disrupting the building's quiet discipline.

Overall, the exterior achieves a balanced expression—neither purely utilitarian nor self-consciously iconic. Through its handling of light, air, and openness, the building settles into an understated but coherent presence within the rural context.

1

2

3

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of the Kushtia Neighborhood Mosque is defined by clarity, openness, and an intentional absence of embellishment. The prayer halls—on both ground and upper levels—are column-free, allowing an uninterrupted spatial field where alignment, light, and movement remain fluid. This simplicity heightens the presence of daylight, which becomes the primary architectural medium.

Light enters through the perforated brick façade, a roof opening above the mihrab, and a series of mahogany-framed glass doors. These elements soften the interior atmosphere, producing a calm, breathable environment that shifts gently throughout the day. The interior relies on cross-ventilation and cavity walls for comfort, with minimal mechanical intervention except for locally donated air-conditioning in the lower hall.

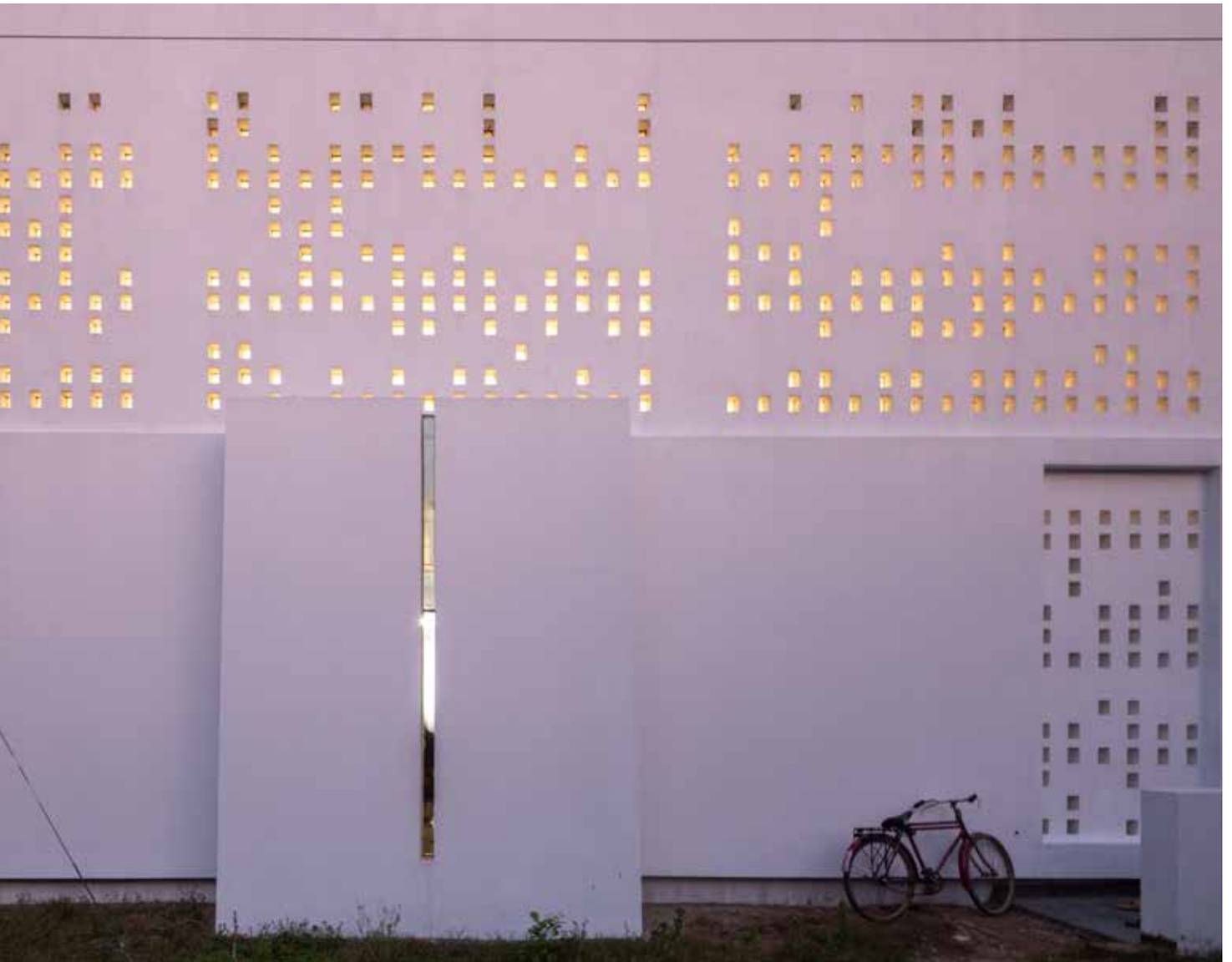
Materially, the space combines brick, reinforced concrete, local tiles, and treated mahogany wood. Their textures remain visible and honest, giving the space a tactile warmth without compromising the mosque's deliberate restraint. The mihrab wall—gently illuminated by the skylight—acts as the only focal element, while the minbar is integrated as a simple extension of the raised floor, maintaining a unified architectural language.

The result is an interior that achieves tranquility through proportion, temperature, and light rather than ornament, reflecting both the climate-conscious logic of Bengali mosques and the modest aspirations of its community.

1. *Humility, simplicity, and a connection with nature.*

2. *Prayer hall interior where the walls express the same language that connects the hall to natural light—an intelligible, readable language.*

3. *The external qibla wall as a silent visual language.*



Isometric view showing functional distribution, Ground Floor

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

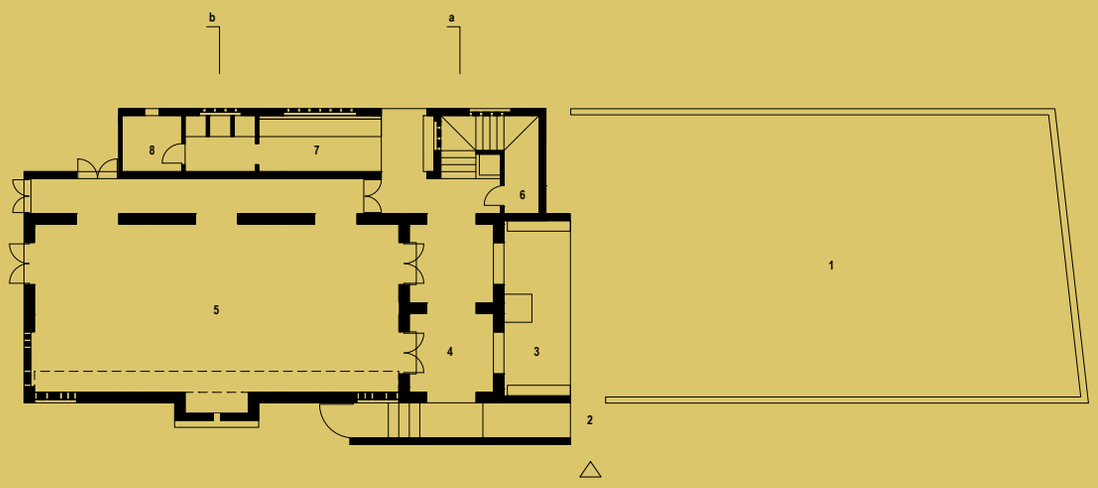
The mosque adopts a straightforward, low-tech technical approach that aligns closely with its rural context and limited budget. Passive strategies form the core of its environmental performance: cross-ventilation through perforated brick walls, operable mahogany doors, and a cavity-wall system that keeps interiors cool in summer and temperate in winter. A small skylight above the mihrab provides daylight while reducing dependence on artificial lighting.

Materials are locally sourced—handmade bricks, limited RCC (reinforced cement concrete), simple ceramic tiles, and treated mahogany wood—ensuring both affordability and ease of maintenance. The mosque's flat roofs incorporate basic drainage lips and channels that prevent water infiltration during the monsoon season, with groundwater used for ablution and service needs. These systems are simple but effective, and they can be repaired or replaced entirely by local craftsmen without specialized tools.

Although designed to function fully without mechanical cooling, the lower prayer hall now contains donated air-conditioning units. Their placement, however, interrupts the otherwise clean exterior façades, indicating a need for more discreet integration should the system be expanded.

Overall, the mosque's sustainability lies less in technological innovation and more in its modesty: minimal energy use, local materials, low carbon footprint, and a construction logic fully aligned with local skill and climate.

1. *Transitional spaces linking the mosque to the town's space.*



After life	1	**Graveyard**
Invitation	2	**Main entry**
Meeting space	3	**Shaan**
Preparation	4	**Fore-room**
Submission	5	**Prayer Hall**
Maintenance	6	**Store**
Cleanliness	7	**Ablution**
Refreshens	8	**Toilet**

Ground Floor Plan

0 5 15 30 Feet

The mosque adopts a straightforward, low-tech technical approach that aligns closely with its rural context and limited budget. Passive strategies form the core of its environmental performance: cross-ventilation through perforated brick walls, operable mahogany doors, and a cavity-wall system that keeps interiors cool in summer and temperate in winter.

Light, whiteness, and the silent language.

1

2

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

The mosque serves a local urban population in Salmiya, The Kushtia Neighborhood Mosque functions as an open social platform embedded in daily village life. Its informal forecourt, shaded shaan, terraces, and unbounded edges naturally accommodate gathering, children's play, rest, and conversation—activities that extend the mosque's role far beyond scheduled prayers. This openness is strengthened by the absence of gates or hard boundaries, allowing the mosque to remain visually and socially accessible at all times.

Pedestrian paths from surrounding homes lead directly into the mosque grounds, making it a seamless part of the community's movement and routine. While cultural practice in Bangladesh limits women's presence in mosques, the architecture itself does not reinforce exclusion; the upper prayer hall, though currently used by men, could readily host more inclusive functions in the future.

Socially, the mosque serves as a quiet civic anchor: a place for informal teaching, neighborhood meetings, refuge during monsoon conditions, and a symbolic marker within the village landscape. Its material modesty and openness contribute to a sense of belonging rather than intimidation, allowing residents to treat it as an extension of their shared public space.

3

1. *Spaces are available for all age groups... relationships begin early and are nurtured through daily encounters in the mosque.*

2. *A shot of the surrounding of the mosque.*

3. *The mosque here can be viewed as an extension of the town's public realm.*

1

1. *This is how the mosque appears externally in the evening.*

2. *The mosque mass within its natural surroundings.*

3. *A portion of the mosque's interior space.*

2

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The Kushtia Neighborhood Mosque offers a quiet, measured architectural response shaped by the limits of its setting and the modest means of its community. Its approach relies on clear volumes, controlled daylight, and uncomplicated materials rather than on formal symbolism or expressive architectural gestures. Within this framework, the interior achieves its presence through calibrated natural light, straightforward ventilation strategies, and a palette grounded in local construction culture. These decisions anchor the mosque within its rural environment and within the everyday temporalities of village life.

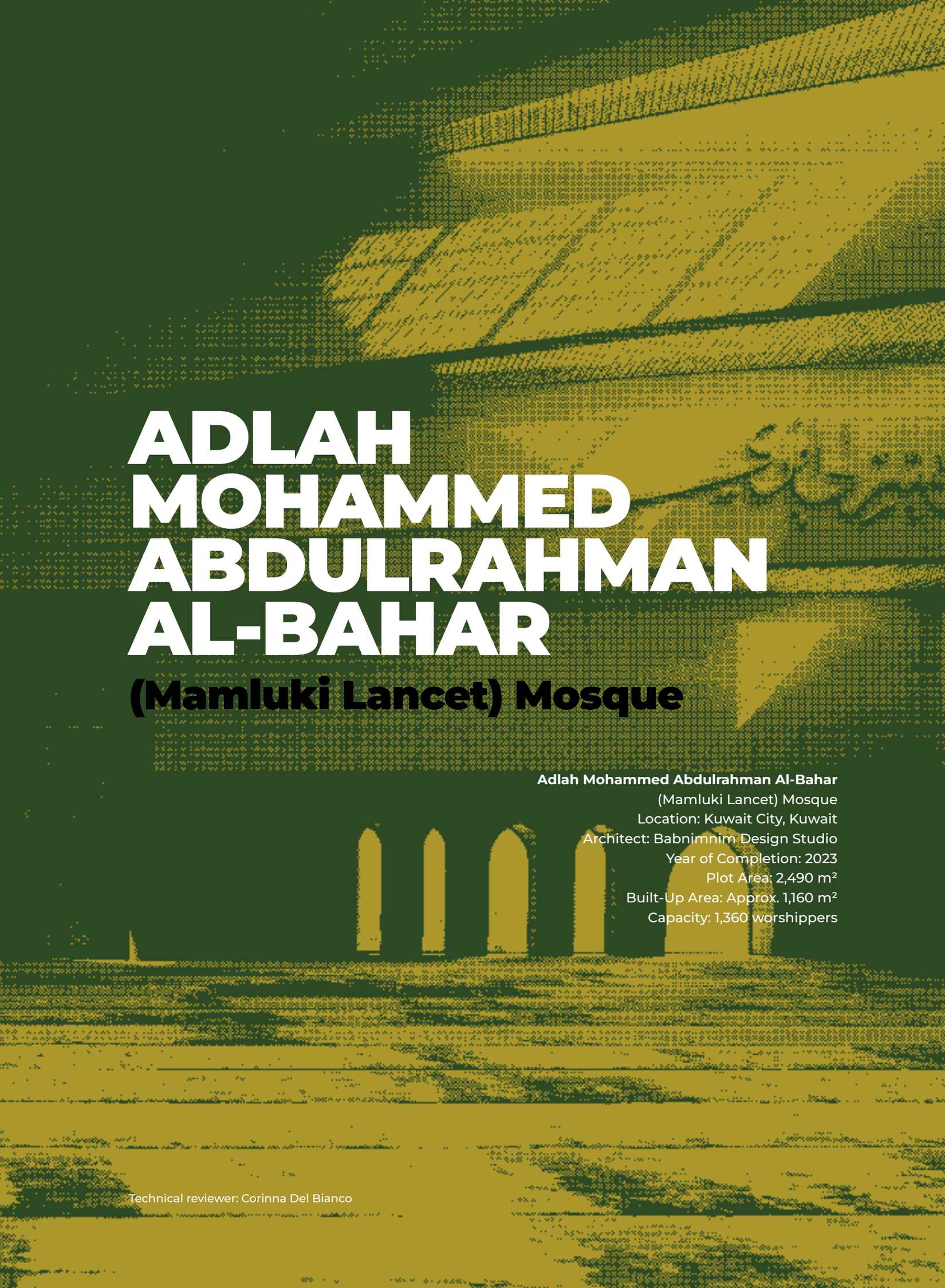
The mosque's relationship to its surroundings remains one of proximity and ease. It meets the village paths directly and extends outward into a shaded shaan and an informal forecourt, allowing it to function as a small civic platform where children gather, neighbors pause, and daily movement folds into its edges. The architecture does not seek to amplify its social role beyond what the village can sustain; rather, it maintains a stable civic presence that residents can turn to without formality or hesitation.

A notable aspect of the project is the decision to cover the brick with a white lime wash. In the context of contemporary Bangladeshi architecture—where exposed brick carries both structural clarity and cultural resonance—this choice stands apart. As noted by Jemma Chidiac, the technical reviewer, the architect's intent was to introduce a sense of visual purity. Yet the coating obscures a material language that has long connected Bangladeshi mosques, past and present, through the expressive use of brick. The decision does not diminish the building's performance but does shift it away from a lineage that is both historically rooted and architecturally distinctive.

Within these boundaries, the project remains grounded in its intent. It does not propose a new architectural language, nor does it pursue symbolic or spatial exploration beyond the simplicity that shaped its inception. Yet this restraint, marked by clarity and practical judgment, situates the mosque within a lineage of small-scale buildings that demonstrate the value of architectural frugality when aligned with community capacity and local patterns of use.

In essence, the Kushtia Neighborhood Mosque stands as a modest example of how a religious building can align itself with limited resources and a clearly defined social context without resorting to visual or technical excess. It maintains its integrity through straightforward means and inhabits the village landscape with a gentle rhythm—more a familiar place that lives with its residents than an object striving for presence beyond its natural scale.

FROM VISUAL
DISSONANCE TO
SERENE UNITY

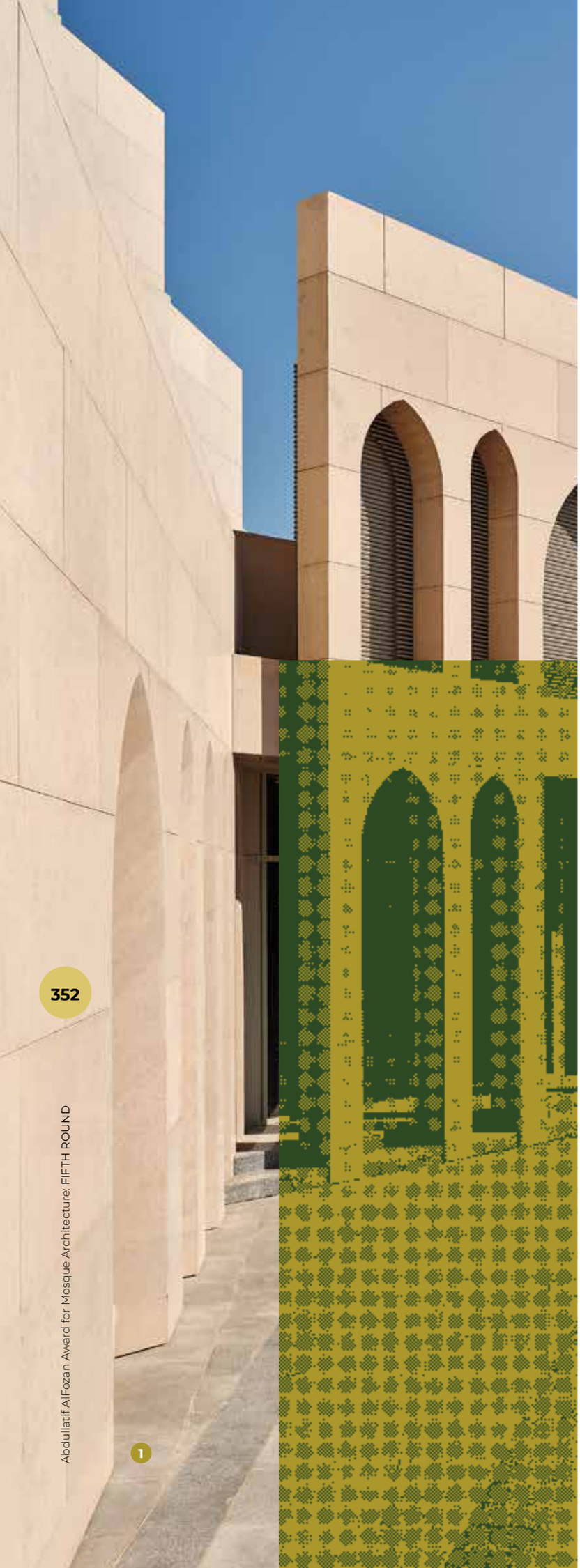


ADLAH MOHAMMED ABDULRAHMAN AL-BAHAR

(Mamluki Lancet) Mosque

Adlah Mohammed Abdulrahman Al-Bahar
(Mamluki Lancet) Mosque
Location: Kuwait City, Kuwait
Architect: Babnimnim Design Studio
Year of Completion: 2023
Plot Area: 2,490 m²
Built-Up Area: Approx. 1,160 m²
Capacity: 1,360 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Corinna Del Bianco



The Adlah Mohammed Abdulrahman Al Bahar Mosque, also known as the Mamluki Lancet Mosque, occupies a corner plot in Kuwait City's Salmiya district—an urban quarter known for its eclectic mix of modernist residential blocks and sprawling commercial developments. In stark contrast to its contemporary surroundings, the mosque asserts a decidedly revivalist architectural stance. Drawing overtly from the formal lexicon of Mamluk Cairo, it anchors its identity in the dramatic verticality of the pointed lancet arch—a motif so dominant that it lends the mosque its very name.

Designed by the Riyadh-based Babnimnim Studio, the mosque attempts to re-engage historical Islamic motifs—particularly those of the Mamluk tradition—through a contemporary material palette and an exacting tectonic syntax. Rather than embracing ornamental excess, the design relies on variation, repetition, surface modulation, and the vertical emphasis of its pointed arches to establish a distinct architectural language that gestures toward tradition without fully reimagining it.

Although the mosque includes a minaret and a semi-dome-like form, it does not foreground them as dominant symbolic elements. Instead, it emphasizes a composition of tall, pointed arches and thick stone cladding as its primary visual markers. These elements convey a clear formal strategy grounded in geometry and repetition, opting for architectural discipline over decorative embellishment. Yet, the design's referential vocabulary remains firmly tied to historical precedent, without radically departing from it.

The Mamluki Lancet Mosque positions itself as a contemporary reinterpretation of historical Islamic architecture. Drawing from the formal vocabulary of Mamluk Cairo—most notably the pointed lancet arch—it integrates these elements within a newly introduced architectural composition. The spatial layout spirals from the main prayer hall upward toward a semi-dome, creating a layered vertical movement that departs from static historic typologies. While the project operates within a revivalist framework, it hints at tectonic experimentation and spatial reconfiguration that distinguish it from more conventional historicist reproductions.

1

URBAN INTEGRATION

Situated at a street corner in Salmiya—a dense district marked by utilitarian buildings and commercial sprawl—the Mamluki Lancet Mosque stands out through its formal clarity and material weight. Surrounded by visual noise, it asserts presence not through scale or ornament, but through a compact massing defined by lancet arches, a subdued semi-dome, and a set-back elegant slender minaret that complements rather than dominates.

The mosque engages the city through controlled confrontation. Its sharp geometry and heavy stone cladding distinguish it from its fragmented surroundings, yet its direct adjacency to the sidewalk and lack of generous transitional landscaping create an abrupt edge. The recessed entrance offers some spatial mediation, but the urban threshold remains compressed.

In a Gulf context where many mosques rely on decorative visibility, this project chooses instead the drama of silhouette and tectonic coherence. While it does not fully resolve the challenge of cultivating serenity within a bustling urban setting, it introduces a disciplined vocabulary—augmented by a newly introduced compositional syntax—that asserts its presence without resorting to spectacle.

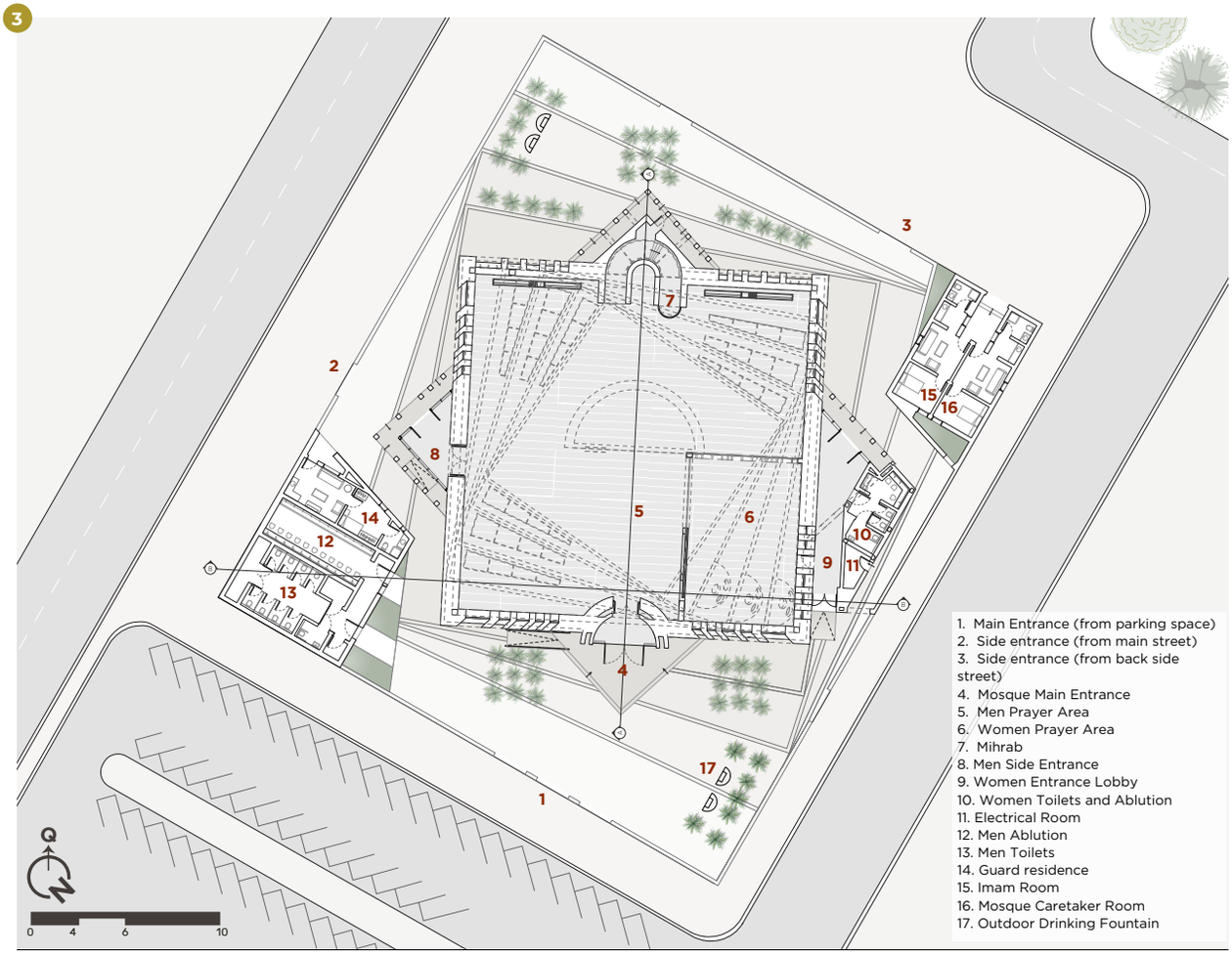
2

1. Arc formations forming a raised perimeter wall create courtyard-like spaces.

2. General view of the mosque.

3. Ground floor plan.

3

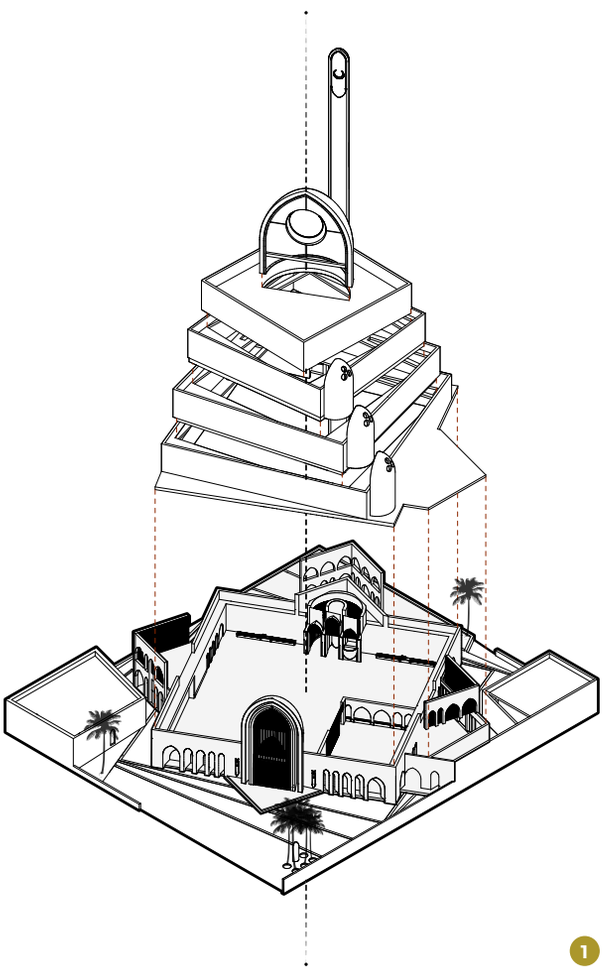


EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN AND EXPRESSION

The mosque's exterior is defined by a spiraling composition centered on the repetition of pointed lancet arches. Referencing the architectural language of Mamluk Cairo, these vertically elongated forms function not merely as decorative motifs but also as loose structural and compositional elements. Their ascending rhythm culminates in a semi-dome and a minaret, both subtly integrated into the upward sequence. Notably, the minaret, semi-dome, oversized entrance portico, and the mihrab itself, all align along a single axis—each taking the form of a mihrab, or a variation thereof. This alignment constitutes a potentially novel design gesture, one not previously encountered in known mosque typologies.

Clad in beige Jerusalem stone, the building conveys mass and permanence. Yet, it seemingly tries to avoid historical literalism. Instead of domes or heavy ornamentation, the design employs geometric repetition and material clarity to assert presence. In a Gulf context often marked by decorative excess or utilitarian anonymity, this abstraction within a historic lexicon marks a measured divergence.

The composition favors restraint over flamboyance. Arches function symbolically and spatially, while the spiral form adds a degree of complexity. Still, the project invites scrutiny on whether it expands mosque architecture or simply reiterates familiar revivalist tendencies.



1

1. *Study of the prayer hall mass explaining the rotation mechanism of the roof mass.*

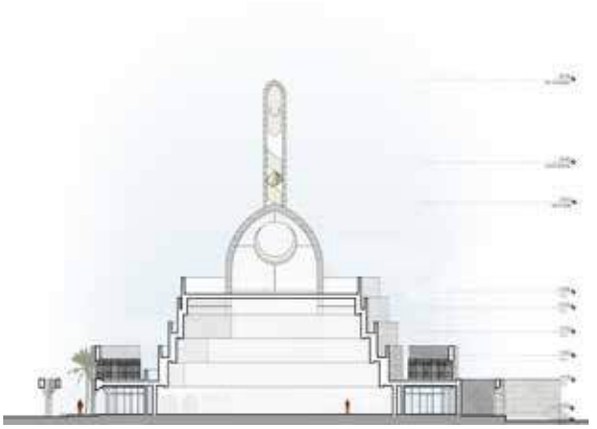
2. *Study of the composition and interconnection of the mosque masses.*

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN AND SPATIAL ORGANIZATION

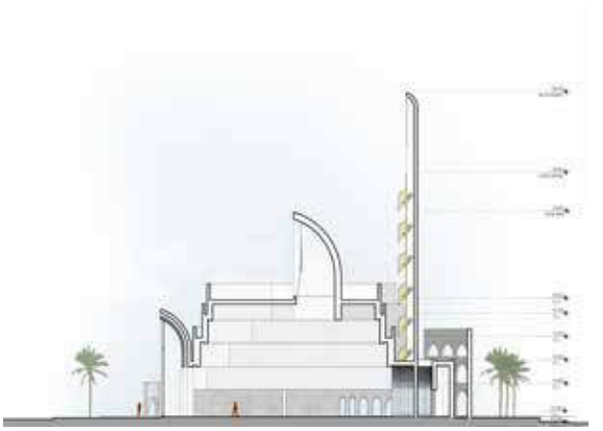
The interior of the Mamluki Lancet Mosque continues the revivalist ethos established by its exterior, carrying the language of pointed arches and stone cladding inward to form a cohesive spatial vocabulary. The main prayer hall unfolds along a longitudinal axis, culminating in a shallow semicircular niche for the mihrab—understated, yet precisely framed by a pointed arch that extends the recurring motif, or perhaps more accurately, the architectural leitmotif of the design. The qibla wall is subtly emphasized by a recessed light strip, lending it quiet prominence within an otherwise restrained and contemplative setting.

Natural light enters sparingly through slender vertical slits, orchestrating a rhythmic interplay of light and shadow that accentuates the verticality of the space. The ceiling remains largely planar, save for the central volume where a shallow semidome—subtly reinterpreting traditional typologies—introduces a measured vertical accent above the main prayer area. The flooring is laid with patterned carpet typical of regional mosques, grounding the space in familiar material culture. Calligraphic ornamentation is minimal, yet quietly elegant and deliberately placed, lending a refined sense of restraint and dignity to the otherwise austere surfaces.

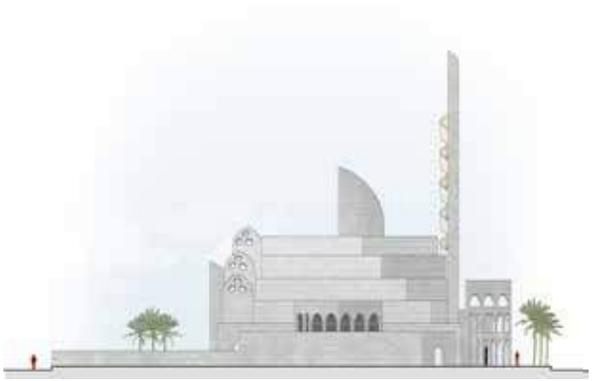
Despite the formal clarity of the space, the interior's austere atmosphere is deliberate rather than accidental. The heavy material palette and disciplined geometry create a seamless continuity with the exterior, emphasizing sobriety and focus. Instead of layering sensory stimuli, the design chooses restraint as a path to spiritual clarity—avoiding overt gestures in favor of a measured spatial experience. This subdued approach may not appeal to all, but it aligns with a growing sensibility in contemporary mosque architecture that seeks meaning in simplicity, proportion, and stillness.



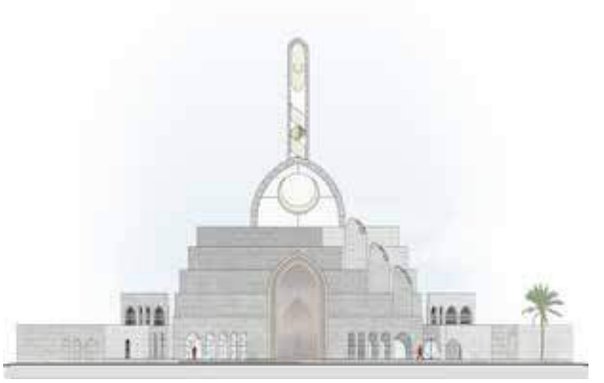
Longitudinal section



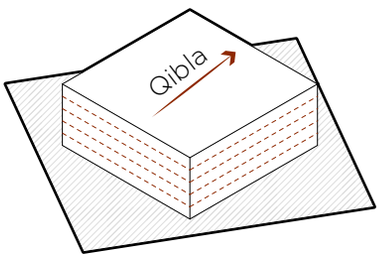
Longitudinal section



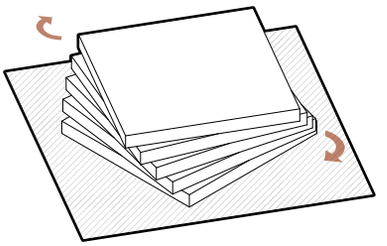
Side elevation



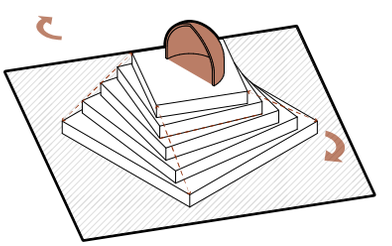
Side elevation



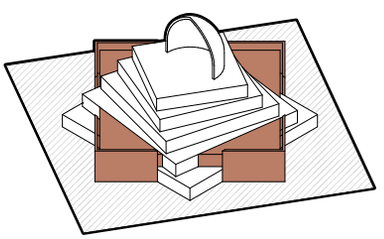
1 . Mass orientation to Qibla



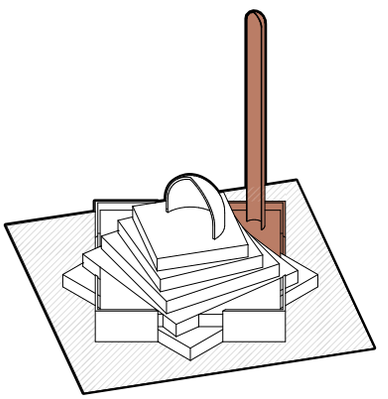
2. Mass rotation according to site



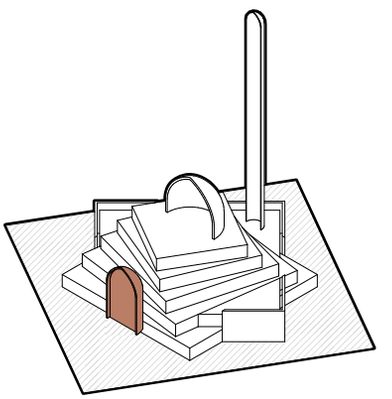
3. Pyramid formation and addition of half dome



4. Intersecting masses forming the Islamic Star



5. Addition of Minaret



6. Addition of half dome main entrance

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS, MATERIALS, AND SUSTAINABILITY

The Mamluki Lancet Mosque employs a predominantly stone construction, both structurally and aesthetically. Clad in light beige limestone inside and out, the building achieves visual cohesion and benefits from thermal mass—offering durability and reduced maintenance in line with regional traditions.

The structural system emphasizes load-bearing walls and pointed arches, expressed with clarity rather than concealment. Openings are narrow and well-shaded, allowing selective daylight while minimizing glare and heat—crucial in Kuwait's climate.

Air conditioning and lighting systems are discreetly integrated, avoiding visual clutter and maintaining formal purity. Beyond the passive benefits of thick stone walls and reduced glazing, however, the project does not demonstrate notable use of advanced sustainability strategies or renewable energy.

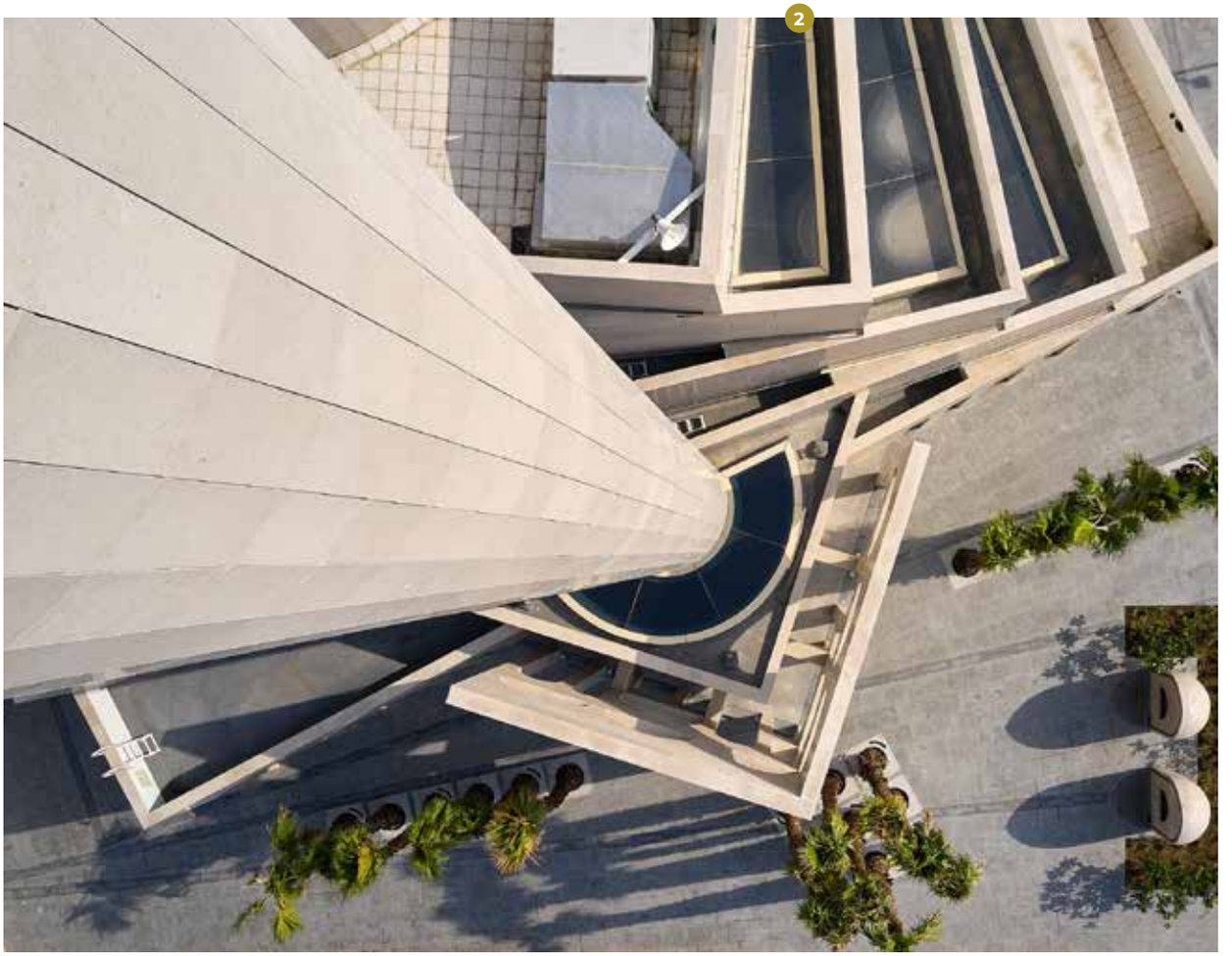
In sum, the technical approach is measured and coherent, privileging material honesty and architectural legibility over technological display. While not environmentally groundbreaking, it delivers climatic responsiveness through traditional means.

1

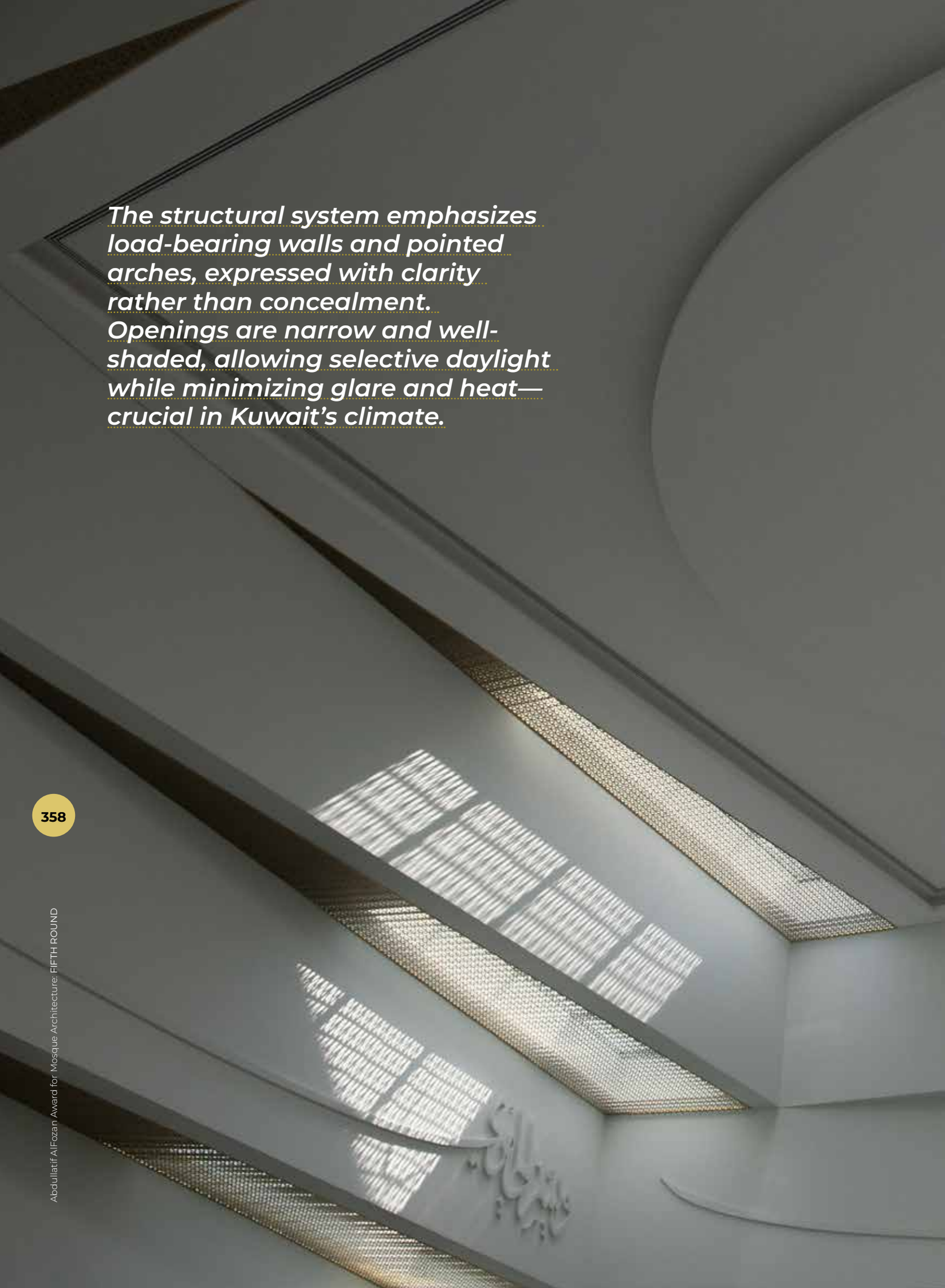
1. *Arches and natural lighting.*

2. *Relationship between the minaret and the moving roof mass.*

3. *Visual relationship between the composing masses of the mosque.*



2



The structural system emphasizes load-bearing walls and pointed arches, expressed with clarity rather than concealment. Openings are narrow and well-shaded, allowing selective daylight while minimizing glare and heat—crucial in Kuwait's climate.

The ceiling moves internally in a geometric matrix to create a geometric configuration that allows for natural light catching and a visual composition that creates the overall image of the prayer hall.

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

The mosque serves a local urban population in Salmiya, offering a clean, organized space for daily and Friday prayers. Its prominent corner site and distinctive architectural identity give it visibility and a degree of civic presence within the surrounding modernist fabric.

Internally, the spatial layout is conventional, with a main prayer hall on the ground level and a smaller mezzanine level for women—accessible yet secondary in scale and spatial experience. Circulation is simple, and outdoor access is direct, though not necessarily generous or socially activating.

There is little in the way of extended public programming or spaces that invite gathering beyond ritual function. This aligns with the project's formal clarity and disciplined composition but may limit its role as a socially integrative or community-enriching space.

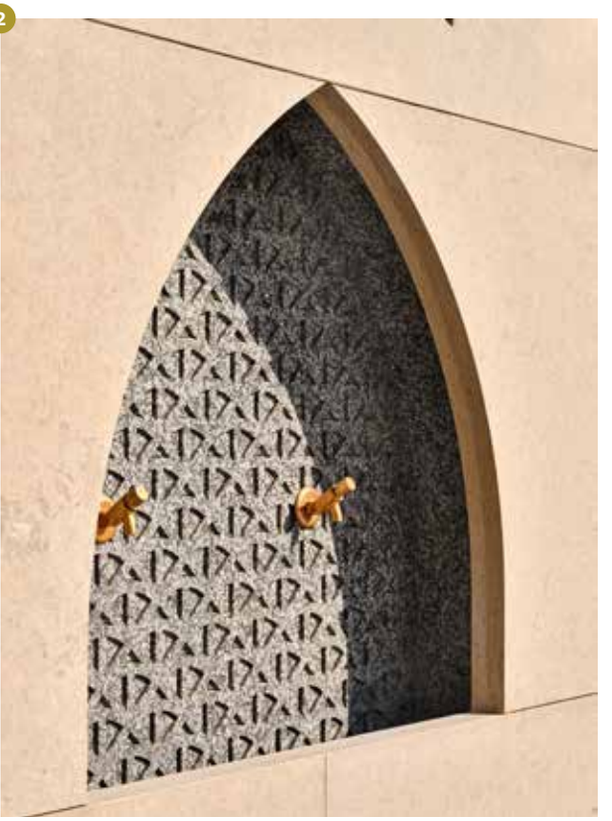
Overall, the mosque fulfills its basic social function, but its design appears more invested in architectural statement than in cultivating an extended public or communal life.

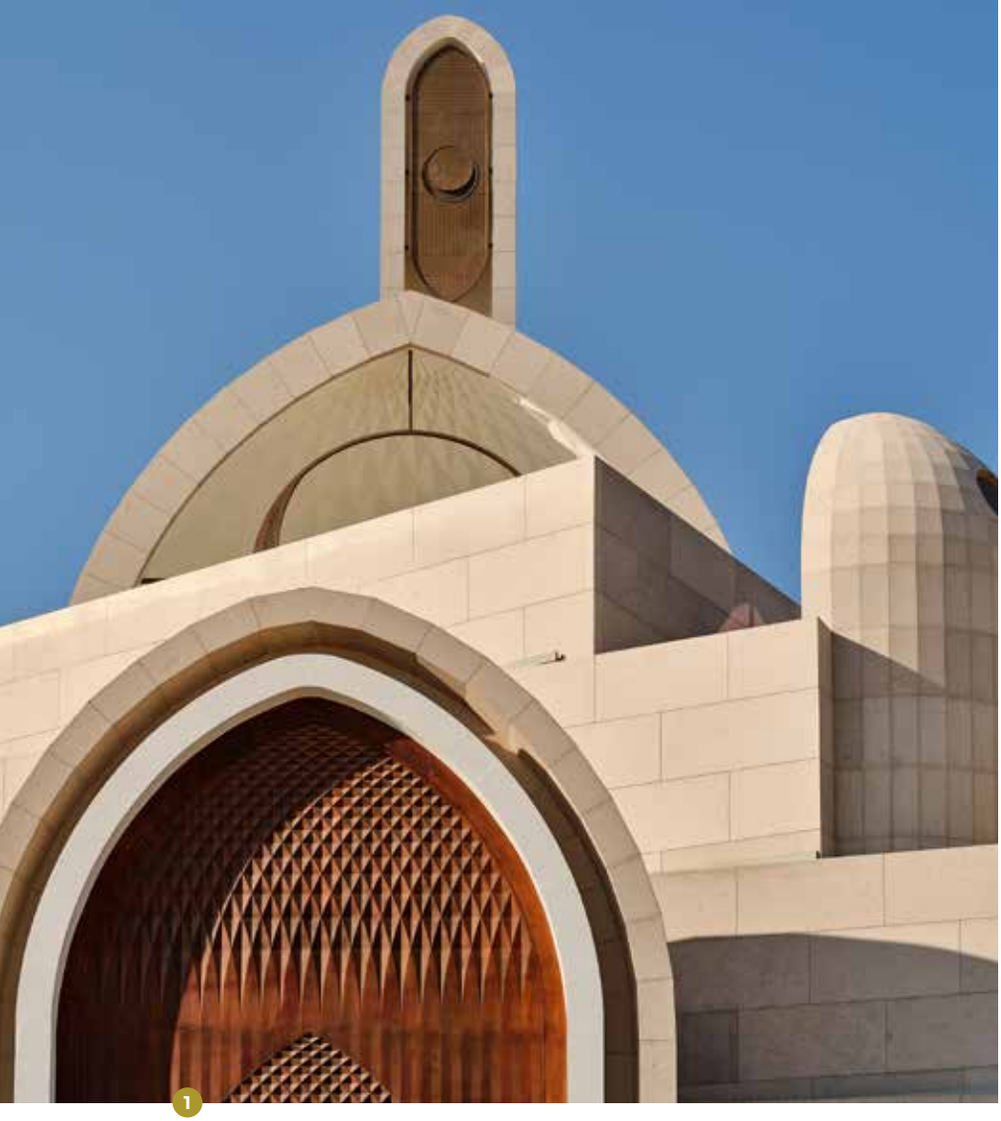
1. *Ablution area.*

2. *Exterior ornamentation details.*

3. *Women's prayer hall.*

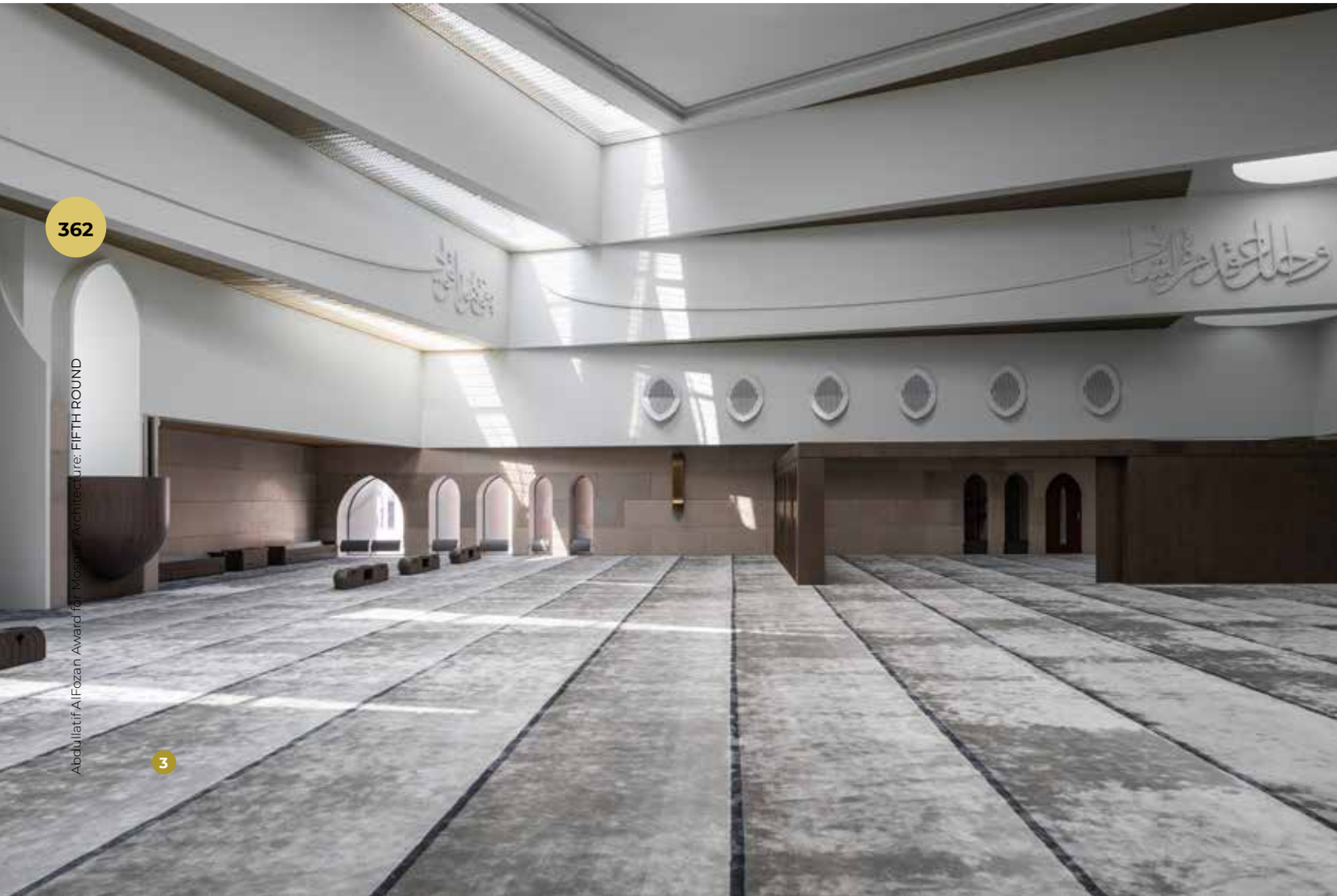
4. *Exterior view of the mosque.*





1

2



3

1. Exterior sculptural composition showing the chamfered dome, the minaret, and part of the roof.

2. Wall screen characterized by arches of varied configurations.

3. Prayer hall interior showing part of the roof movement that enables natural lighting.

4. The minaret appears in relation to the roof as if piercing it at the glazed zone acting as roof-light collectors.

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The Mamluki Lancet Mosque articulates a clear architectural stance: a revival of the formal vocabulary of Mamluk Cairo, distilled through contemporary materials and rigorous detailing. Its repeated lancet arches, measured massing, and controlled material palette mark a deliberate attempt to reassert historical gravitas within a modern Gulf context—an ambition rarely pursued with such architectural clarity.

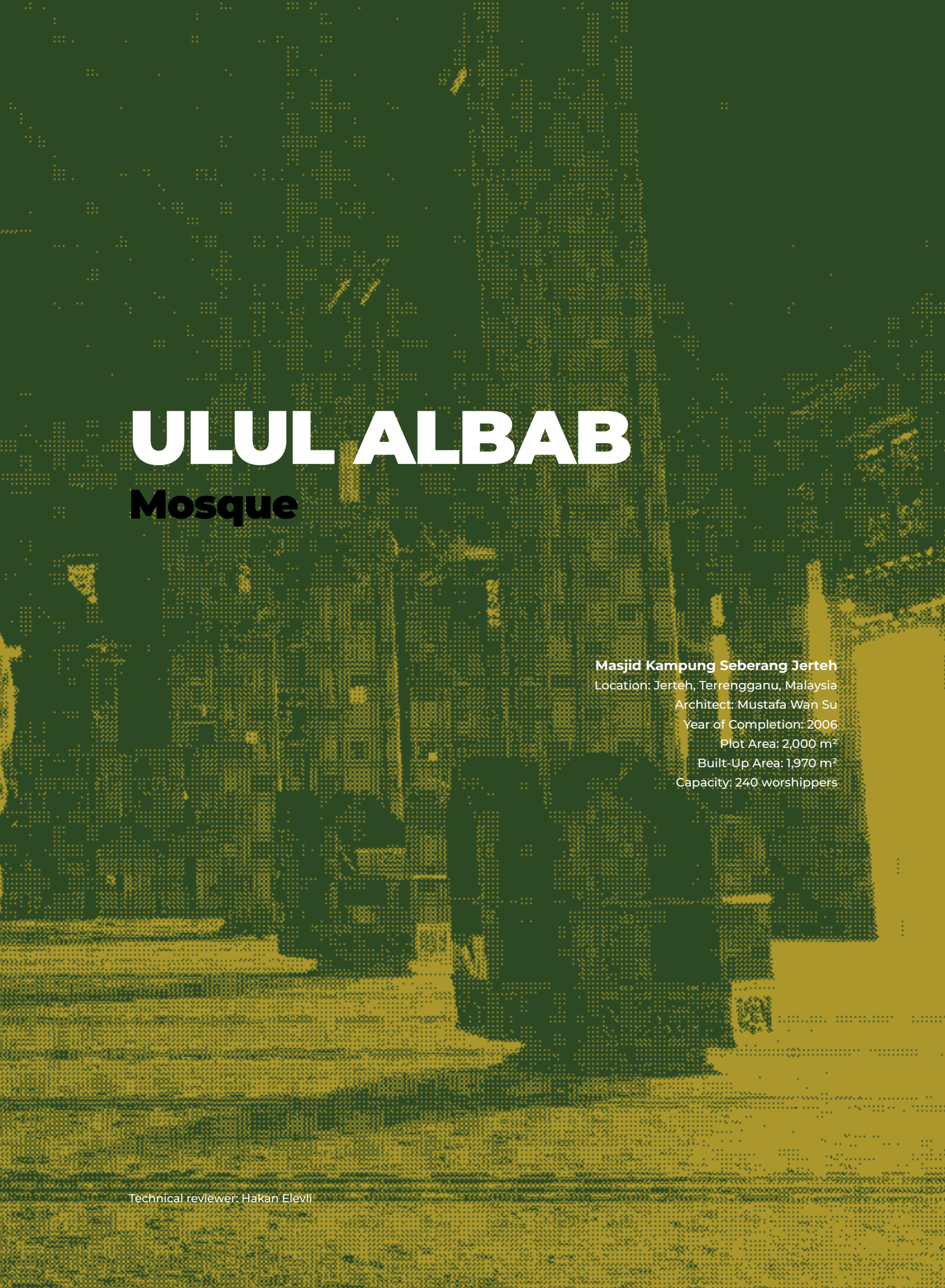
Perhaps the most distinctive gesture is the subtle spiraling movement of the composition itself—a spatial twist that begins at the entrance and ascends toward the elevated semidome. This dynamic orchestration introduces a quiet tension within the otherwise axial layout and offers a notable design innovation within the revivalist canon. The alignment of key architectural elements—minaret, semidome, and mihrab—along a shared mihrab-like motif further suggests a conceptual layering that merits recognition.

The mosque's language is restrained yet articulate. While firmly rooted in precedent, it avoids theatricality and surface excess, choosing instead to speak through proportion, repetition, and material integrity. The interior, though austere, maintains a dignified coherence with the exterior and achieves moments of spatial clarity through disciplined light modulation and subtle detailing. In doing so, it resonates with a growing sensibility in contemporary mosque architecture—one that seeks spiritual depth in simplicity rather than spectacle.

Yet, this very restraint may also circumscribe the mosque's architectural ambition. Its engagement with tradition is thoughtful, but measured—leaving open the question of whether it expands the typology or simply refines an existing one.

In the broader historical context, Kuwait was among the first Gulf states to experiment with modernized mosque design during the mid-20th century, as seen in the Al Othman Mosque (1958), which introduced early modernist expressions into religious architecture. The Mamluki Lancet Mosque belongs to this lineage of experimentation—not revolutionary, but quietly assertive. Whether it signals a new trajectory or marks a dignified reiteration, it remains a meaningful addition to the ongoing discourse on mosque design in the 21st century.

CROSS-CULTURAL PRESENCE



ULUL ALBAB

Mosque

Masjid Kampung Seberang Jerteh
Location: Jerteh, Terrengganu, Malaysia
Architect: Mustafa Wan Su
Year of Completion: 2006
Plot Area: 2,000 m²
Built-Up Area: 1,970 m²
Capacity: 240 worshippers

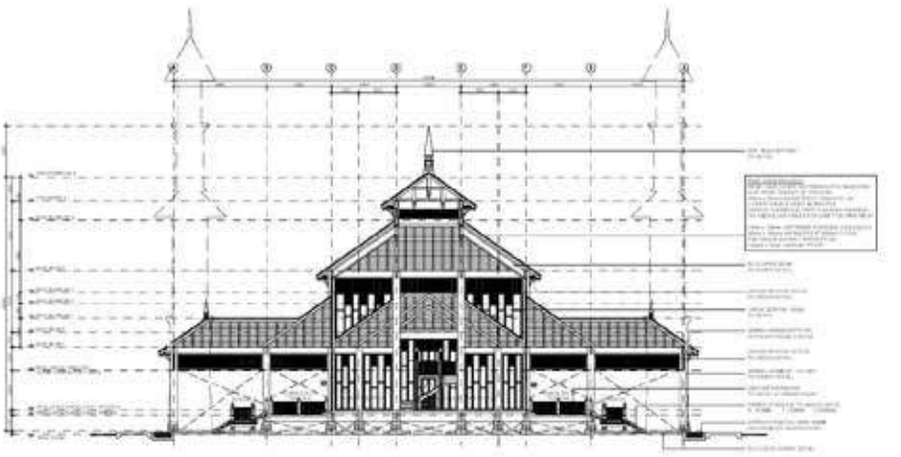
Technical reviewer: Hakan Elevli

The Ulul Albab Mosque stands within a 2,000 m² landscaped compound, characterized by palm-lined lawns, reflective pools, and shaded outdoor pavilions. Architecturally, it reinterprets the Malay vernacular palace aesthetic into a religious typology: multi-tiered terracotta roofs, elaborate timber screens, inverted-lotus canopy elements, and artisanal carvings define its identity. The prayer hall is naturally ventilated and elevated above the ground to address flood risk and maximize airflow.

Programmatically, the mosque functions not only as a place of worship but as a communal hub, offering free meals to visitors, hosting social events, and serving as a cultural destination for domestic and international tourists.

Ulul Albab Mosque represents a convergence of cultural heritage, artisanal mastery, and contemporary communal aspirations. Its architectural language draws from Malay craft traditions without full imitation, producing a building that is at once familiar and interpretive—a living example of how localized craftsmanship can inform a modern mosque capable of serving both spiritual and civic roles in rural Malaysia.

2



3

URBAN INTEGRATION

Ulul Albab Mosque is situated in the rural village of Kampung Seberang Jerteh, within Terengganu's dispersed settlement pattern of houses, agricultural plots, and small community clusters. Approaching the mosque from the regional road network, the building appears gradually within an open landscape, its elevated timber form and terracotta roofs asserting a clear civic presence amid predominantly low-rise vernacular structures.

The site occupies a generous parcel landscaped with palms, lawns, and reflective ponds. This openness allows the mosque's massing and roof tiers to be read from a distance, reinforcing its symbolic role as the village's communal and spiritual anchor. Its placement—slightly withdrawn from the road and framed by orderly plantings—establishes a composed threshold between everyday rural life and the ritual environment of the mosque.

1. *The mosque mass and minaret are a clear sign of the mosque's capacity to integrate into local cultures.*

2. *Isometric study of the mosque massing.*

3. *Side elevation.*

Local climate conditions, particularly heat, humidity, and seasonal flooding, have shaped the architectural response. The mosque is elevated above ground level, enabling ventilation under the structure and reducing flood vulnerability. Extensive roof overhangs, carved timber screens, and open terraces support natural cooling and daylight moderation, aligning with long-standing Malay passive design traditions.

Culturally, the project stands within a region renowned for timber craftsmanship, boatbuilding, and palace architecture. These traditions inform both its material expression and its construction logic. The result is a mosque that integrates seamlessly into its rural context while projecting a distinct architectural presence anchored in local heritage and contemporary communal life.

.

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Ulul Albab Mosque presents a composed timber architecture elevated above ground level, giving the building clarity and presence within its landscaped rural setting. The massing is defined by multi-tiered hip roofs clad in traditional Malay clay tiles, resting on a predominantly hardwood envelope crafted through peg-and-joint construction, a method that leaves no visible mechanical fixings. This lends the exterior a continuous, unified material character rarely achieved at such scale.

Carved timber screens line the façades, providing both ventilation and a delicate visual filigree beneath the eaves. Along the roof edges, vernacular finials—symbolically associated with the reminder of life's transience—punctuate the silhouette, while the inverted finials at the entry pergola reinterpret the motif as an expression of humility and welcome.

1. *Timber details characteristic of Southeast Asian architecture clearly define the sculptural relationships between the mosque elements.*

The perimeter verandahs, exterior stairs, and carved handrails extend the architectural language outward, creating shaded transition zones between landscape and interior. Details contributed by local boatbuilders and master carvers root the building firmly in regional craft traditions, reinforcing the mosque's cultural authenticity.

The mosque's four detached minarets, each clad in timber and capped with a small clay-tiled roof, frame the complex with a measured vertical rhythm. Together they complement the main timber volume without overpowering it, offering a balanced set of accents that maintain proportional restraint and material continuity.

Overall, the exterior achieves distinction not through formal novelty, but through the disciplined, large-scale deployment of traditional techniques. Its strength lies in coherence, craftsmanship, and a climate-responsive vocabulary that feels both rooted and contemporary.

1

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of Ulul Albab Mosque is defined by an immersive timber environment where structure, surface, and ornament merge into a unified architectural fabric. The main prayer hall, located on the upper level, is framed by a lattice of hardwood columns, beams, and roof trusses—all executed through traditional joinery—creating a space that feels both robust and finely worked. Generous ceiling heights and continuous carved ventilation panels beneath the roof allow light and air to diffuse softly across the hall, supporting a naturally tempered interior even in high heat.

Artisanal craftsmanship is present at every scale. The carved wall panels, bookshelves, balustrades, and ventilated screens are the work of individual master carvers, giving the interior a tactile richness without overwhelming the spatial clarity. Details contributed by local boatbuilders—visible in stair components and railing elements—strengthen the cultural grounding of the space.

The mihrab zone and its distinctive minbar form the interior's focal composition. The minbar extends beyond a conventional stepped form into a pavilion-like chamber behind the lectern, an interpretation rooted in Malay cultural tradition. This layered arrangement creates a symbolic niche of authority for the imam, enriching the visual and ceremonial hierarchy of the prayer hall without resorting to monumental scale.

The ground-floor women's prayer areas are more enclosed and modest in articulation but continue the same timber palette and ventilated openings. Their placement beneath the main hall gives them direct access to the landscape and ensures privacy while maintaining proximity to the central liturgical axis.

Throughout the building, the interplay of carved timber, filtered daylight, and exposed structural logic produces an interior atmosphere of warmth, clarity, and artisanal depth. Rather than relying on ornament as surface treatment, the mosque's interior derives its character from the craft of its making, allowing material honesty and fine workmanship to define the spiritual ambience.

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS & SUSTAINABILITY

Ulul Albab Mosque employs a predominantly passive environmental strategy shaped by climate, material logic, and vernacular construction knowledge. The building is elevated above ground level, a response that reduces flood risk in a region prone to seasonal inundation while allowing air to move freely beneath the structure, improving thermal comfort throughout the day.

Cross-ventilation is a defining environmental feature. Carved timber screens, continuous ventilated bands beneath the roof, and open terraces enable air to circulate through the prayer halls without mechanical intervention. During the site visit, interior temperatures remained comfortable despite 32°C external conditions, supported only by natural ventilation and large ceiling fans. The restrained use of mechanical systems reduces energy demand while retaining acoustic and atmospheric calm within the prayer spaces.

1

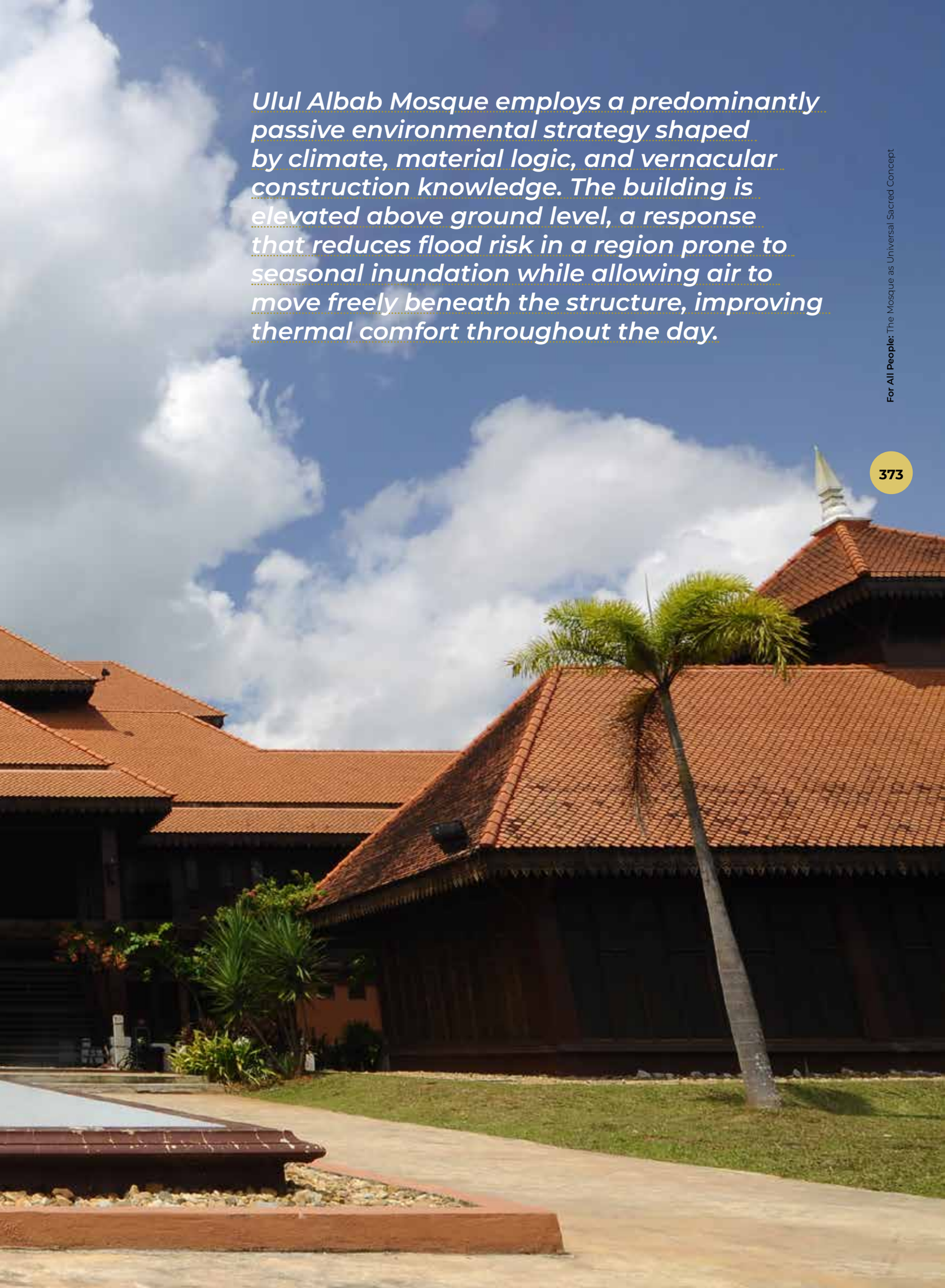
1. *The exterior massing harmonizes with the cultural context, without imposing unwanted visual forms on the urban fabric.*

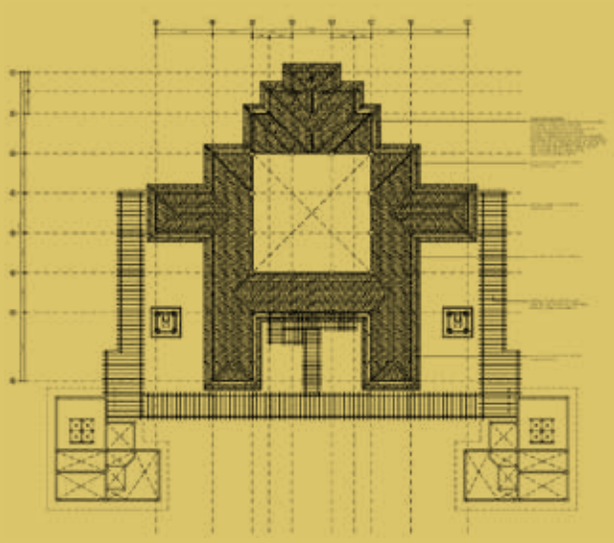
The clay-tiled roof and deep overhangs protect the timber envelope from direct solar exposure and heavy rains, while the hardwood construction—Cengal, Nyatoh, and Bala—provides natural durability in a humid tropical climate. Traditional joinery minimizes reliance on metal fixings, reducing long-term corrosion risks and allowing individual components to be repaired or replaced without invasive intervention.

The ablution areas follow the same logic of simplicity and robustness: terracotta floors, sandstone cladding, and ample screened openings ensure hygiene, natural lighting, and effective ventilation. The overall design favors longevity, cultural continuity, and ease of maintenance rather than high-tech solutions, showing how regional knowledge can deliver sustainable performance at architectural scale.

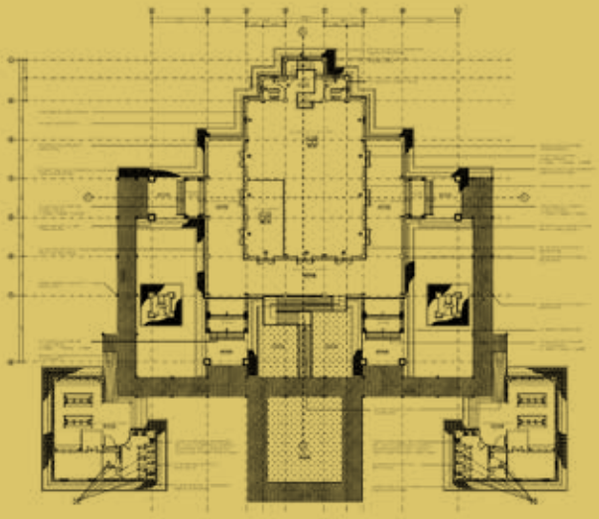
External view of the mosque.

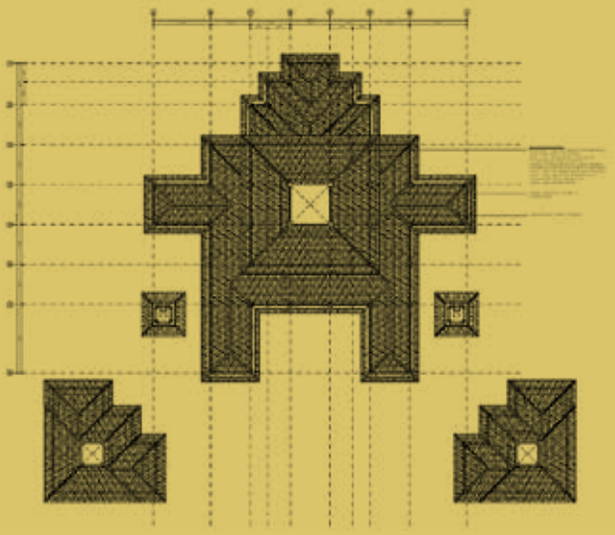
Ulul Albab Mosque employs a predominantly passive environmental strategy shaped by climate, material logic, and vernacular construction knowledge. The building is elevated above ground level, a response that reduces flood risk in a region prone to seasonal inundation while allowing air to move freely beneath the structure, improving thermal comfort throughout the day.





Floor plans





Building massing study

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

Ulul Albab Mosque operates as an active social nucleus for Kampung Seberang Jerteh. Its terraces, shaded outdoor areas, and landscaped grounds support a wide range of activities beyond daily prayer—weddings, Hajj gatherings, lessons, and community events—allowing the mosque to function as both a spiritual and civic space.

Hospitality is central to its identity. The kitchen and dining facilities enable regular meal preparation, offered free meals to visitors and congregants, reinforcing the mosque's role as a place of generosity and communal care.

The crafted timber architecture has also made the mosque a regional point of interest, attracting steady local and international visitors. Yet it remains deeply integrated into everyday village life, used continuously rather than encountered as a detached landmark.

Architecturally, its verandahs and multiple entrances support informal gathering and ease of movement, enabling the building to accommodate social rhythms without compromising prayer functions. Through this balance, the mosque sustains a strong communal presence, where spiritual practice and social cohesion reinforce one another.

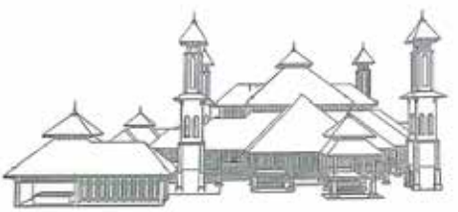


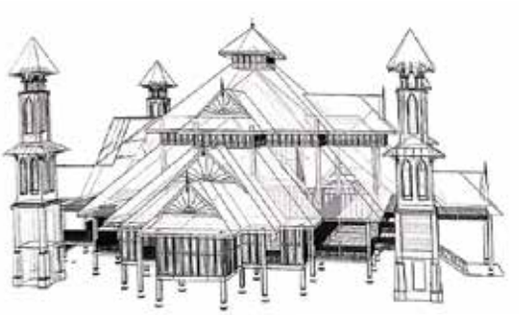
Diagram 1

Diagram 2

Diagram 3

Diagram 4

1



3D representation of the wooden mosque

2

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

Within the wider constellation of mosques presented in this book, Ulul Albab Mosque stands as a quietly persuasive reminder that unity in contemporary mosque architecture does not arise from stylistic convergence, but from a shared orientation toward meaning, community, and openness. Its language is unmistakably local: hardwood construction, carved screens, clay-tiled roofs, and a craft tradition carried forward by master builders whose knowledge is anchored in place. Yet the experience it offers—welcoming, spacious, and socially generous—resonates far beyond its rural Malaysian setting.

The mosque's achievement lies in how it translates vernacular intelligence into a coherent architectural stance. The timber structure, the elevated platform, the permeable envelope, and the layered roofscape are not nostalgic gestures, but functional responses shaped by climate, material wisdom, and communal use. In this way, the building demonstrates how cultural specificity can serve universal human needs—comfort, dignity, hospitality, and a sense of orientation—without resorting to abstraction or spectacle.

At the same time, the project is not without its tensions. The density of carved detail and the sheer scale of the timber articulation may, for some, risk overshadowing deeper explorations of spatial quietness or symbolic abstraction. Yet these very qualities also root the mosque in a living craft tradition, giving the building a presence that is both familiar to its community and legible to visitors from elsewhere.

In its own manner, the mosque embodies the idea at the heart of this book's title: a space open to all people, grounded in its locale yet reaching toward a shared human grammar of gathering and prayer. Its four minarets mark the landscape with restraint, its verandahs welcome movement and encounter, and its interior bears the imprint of hands that have worked timber for generations. These choices do not seek to universalize a Malaysian idiom, but to show how authenticity and openness can coexist—how unity can emerge precisely through diversity.

Ulul Albab Mosque therefore expands the contemporary conversation not by proposing a new typology, but by demonstrating the enduring relevance of craft, climate, and community as foundations for mosque architecture. In doing so, it contributes to the broader narrative of this book: thirty distinct voices, each returning—through their own dialect—to a common center. A center defined not by form, but by intention; not by singularity, but by gathering.

1 Abdullatif Al-Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture: FIFTH ROUND

1. *General view of the building massing.*

LIBERATION FROM THE
CONVENTIONAL SPACE

TABUK UNIVERSITY

Mosque

(Grand Millennium Mosque)

Tabuk University Mosque
(Grand Millennium Mosque)

Location: Tabuk, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Architect: Al-Naim Architects, Engineers, and Planning Consultants

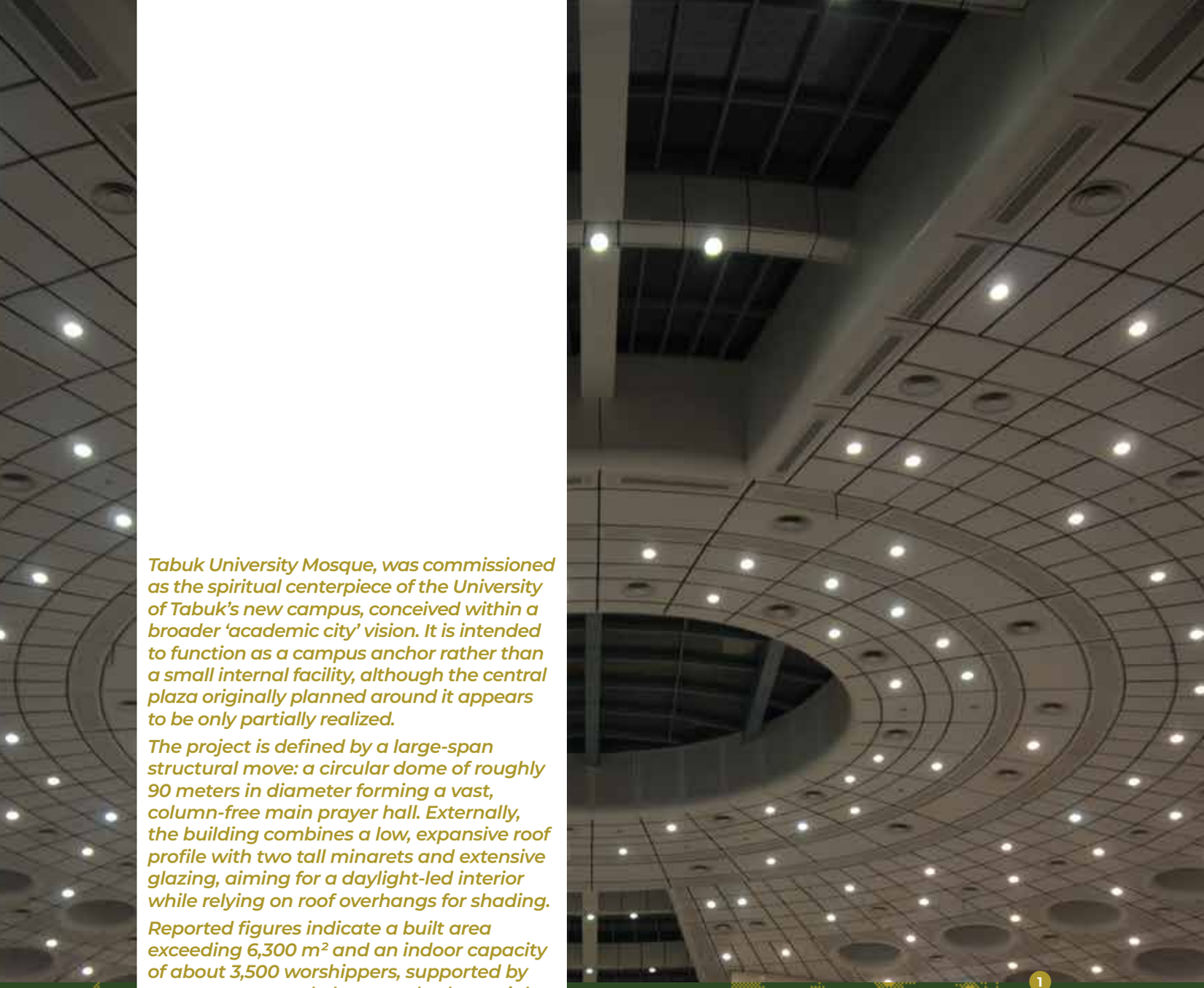
Year of Completion: 2020

Plot Area: 8,000 m^2

Built-Up Area: 6,300 m^2

Capacity: 3,500 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Ahmed Abdel Moneim



1

Tabuk University Mosque, was commissioned as the spiritual centerpiece of the University of Tabuk's new campus, conceived within a broader 'academic city' vision. It is intended to function as a campus anchor rather than a small internal facility, although the central plaza originally planned around it appears to be only partially realized.

The project is defined by a large-span structural move: a circular dome of roughly 90 meters in diameter forming a vast, column-free main prayer hall. Externally, the building combines a low, expansive roof profile with two tall minarets and extensive glazing, aiming for a daylight-led interior while relying on roof overhangs for shading.

Reported figures indicate a built area exceeding 6,300 m² and an indoor capacity of about 3,500 worshippers, supported by generous external plazas and substantial parking. Overall, it is a technically ambitious campus landmark whose spatial success depends heavily on long-term environmental performance and upkeep.

2

URBAN INTEGRATION

The mosque is positioned to function as the campus's main spiritual and ceremonial focus. It was planned to sit at the heart of a central university plaza, but the main central plaza is not yet built, leaving the intended civic setting incomplete.

The report also describes the campus plan as organized around a symbolic axis linking Mecca, Medina, and Al-Quds , with the mosque aligned to this idea.
In use, the mosque is intended to serve both the university community and the wider public of Tabuk, accommodating daily prayers as well as major occasions such as Eid. Its scale and visibility reportedly draw visitors, which strengthens its landmark role but also places pressure on access, management, and the maintenance of a welcoming, everyday character.

1. *Dome ceiling with natural light collectors.*

2. *A view of the mosque's exterior massing.*

Spatially, the column-free main hall is presented as the key communal gesture, supported by an envelope that aims for openness and daylight. In Tabuk's climate, that openness remains persuasive only if glare, heat gain, and upkeep are handled with long-term discipline.

1

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The mosque's exterior is defined by a clear massing logic. A very large, low-lying circular dome establishes a strong horizontal presence across the open campus setting, while two tall, blade-like minarets provide the vertical counterpoint and help frame the building as a visible landmark from a distance. The composition reads as deliberately reduced to a few decisive elements, with the dome carrying most of the formal and structural weight.

Around this dominant roof form, the perimeter relies heavily on expansive glazing, projecting openness and visual permeability rather than enclosure. Climatically, the roof is designed to overhang the glass line and provide permanent shading, turning the architectural silhouette into a passive environmental device as much as a visual statement. This approach can be effective in principle, but it also makes the building's long-term comfort and appearance dependent on sustained control of glare, heat gain, and the practical realities of keeping large glass surfaces clean in a desert context.

Materially, the dome's external identity is intensified by its blue mosaic tile cladding, applied at a very large surface area. This choice frames a traditional material as a contemporary skin at monumental scale, intended to remain colorfast and resilient under sand abrasion and UV exposure. Recent observations, however, indicate visible deterioration and fading, with dust accumulation and streaking that mute the dome's intended color. As a result, the exterior becomes not only an architectural image, but also a test of durability, cleaning strategy, and long-term stewardship at scale.

2

1. From within, the dome reads as a free, infinite void containing everything.

2. This is how the dome appears externally, crowned by a steel bridge forming twin minarets at its ends.

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior is organized around a vast, column-free prayer hall beneath the main dome, with an encircling glazed gallery that acts as the primary buffer between outside and inside. This circumferential portico functions as a gathering and preparation zone and accommodates arrival routines before entry into the central space, giving the transition a clear hierarchy without resorting to heavy formal gatekeeping.

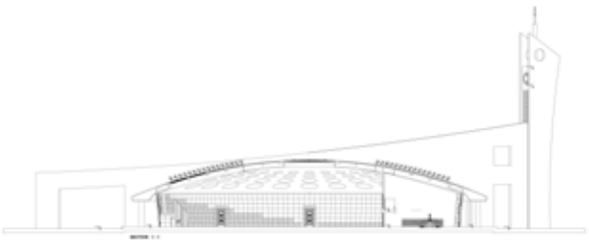
Inside the hall, the most legible spatial and symbolic anchor is the qibla wall. The mihrab is treated as a concentrated visual focus through blue mosaic tilework, set against warmer wall finishes, while the prayer carpet pattern reinforces the discipline of the rows and gives the floor a quiet layer of orientation rather than mere decoration.

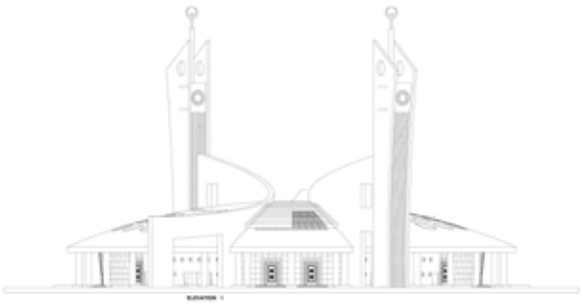
The dome's interior geometry becomes the dominant architectural language. A structural grid articulated in concentric and radial organization defines the ceiling, punctuated by recessed circular skylights that distribute daylight as a repeated cadence rather than a single dramatic oculus. The concept is persuasive, but it places a demanding responsibility on glare control, acoustic calibration, and the long-term maintenance of glazing and high-level surfaces.

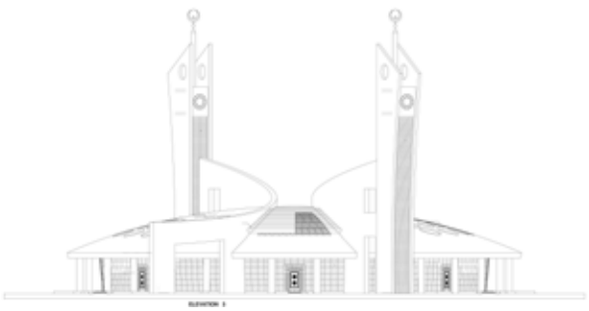
The women's prayer hall is located on the upper floor and is intended to share the same architectural character and openness as the main hall, aiming for a unified spatial experience rather than a secondary condition. The acoustic strategy is presented as relying on the carpet's absorption, sound diffusion by curved and inclined glazing, and a dome geometry calibrated to limit echo buildup. Night lighting is also treated as part of the interior atmosphere, using a 'starry' effect as a contemporary way to charge the ceiling plane.

1

2







TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental performance is shaped primarily by form. A calibrated skylight system brings deep daylight into the prayer hall to the extent that artificial lighting becomes unnecessary for Dhuhr and Asr, reducing electrical demand during the day. The roof mass is also deployed as a climatic device, with deliberate overhangs shading the glazed perimeter and lowering solar gain, which in turn reduces cooling loads. At night, the lighting strategy shifts from daylight reliance to a carefully integrated artificial system, including a dense 'starry-sky' ceiling effect that is architectural in intent, not merely decorative.

Technically, the interior's acoustic performance is addressed through layered, largely passive measures: absorptive carpet, sound-diffusing inclined glazing, and a dome geometry calibrated to avoid disruptive focal echoes. Audio amplification elements are present and discreetly integrated at the qibla wall.

In terms of durability and life-cycle thinking, the reinforced concrete structure and marble finishes read as robust and maintainable; the interior is described as remaining notably pristine over time. By contrast, the external blue mosaic dome cladding is reported to have faced weathering and deterioration, raising a practical question about long-term maintenance at that scale and exposure. Landscape choices emphasize low-water planting and hardscape suited to an arid setting.

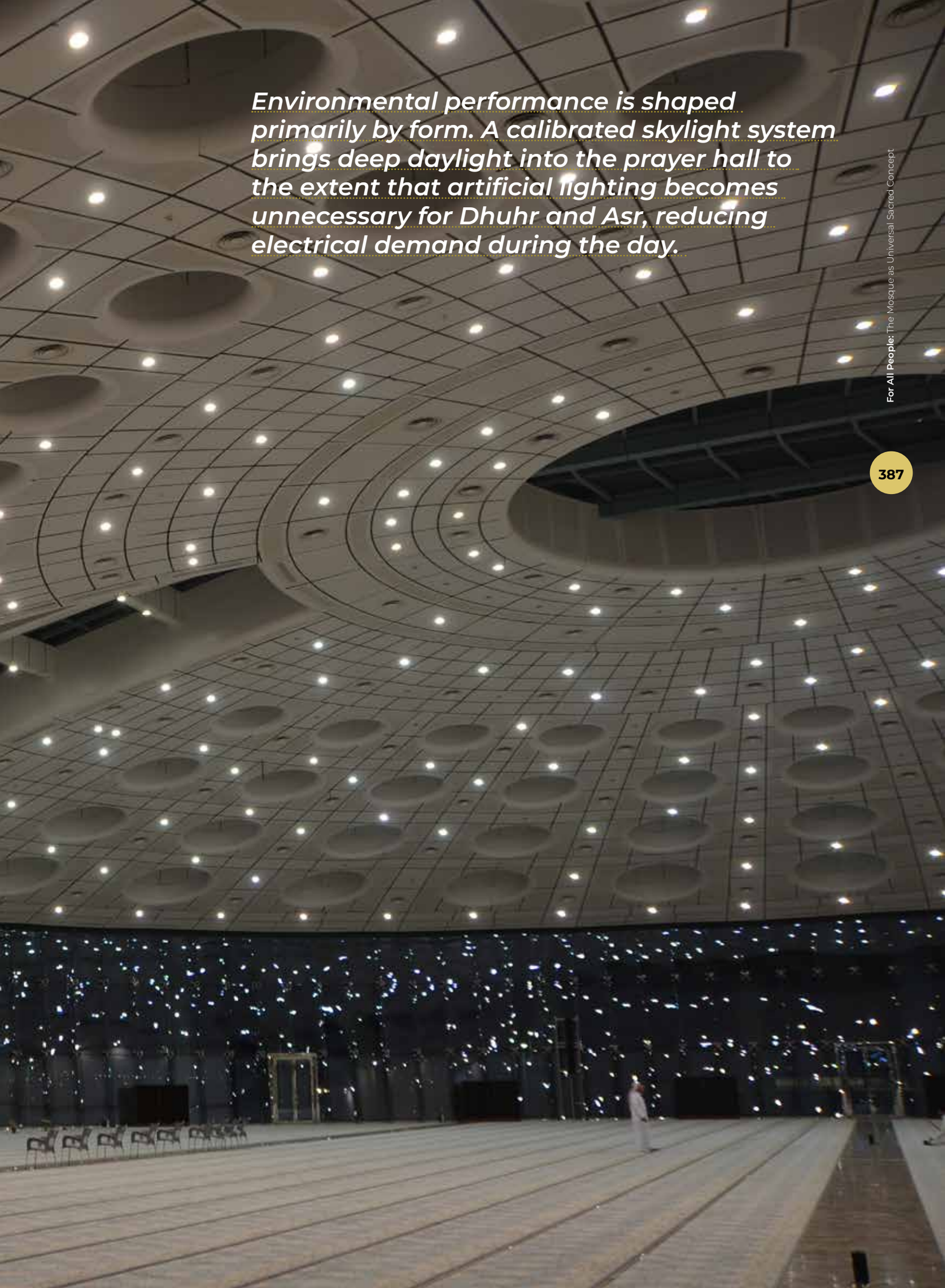
1. *Mihrab.*

2. *Prayer hall interior.*

3. *The glass wall beneath the dome connects the prayer hall to the exterior.*

3

Circular openings in the dome act as natural light collectors, while the lower glass wall functions as both separator and connector to the exterior.



Environmental performance is shaped primarily by form. A calibrated skylight system brings deep daylight into the prayer hall to the extent that artificial lighting becomes unnecessary for Dhuhr and Asr, reducing electrical demand during the day.

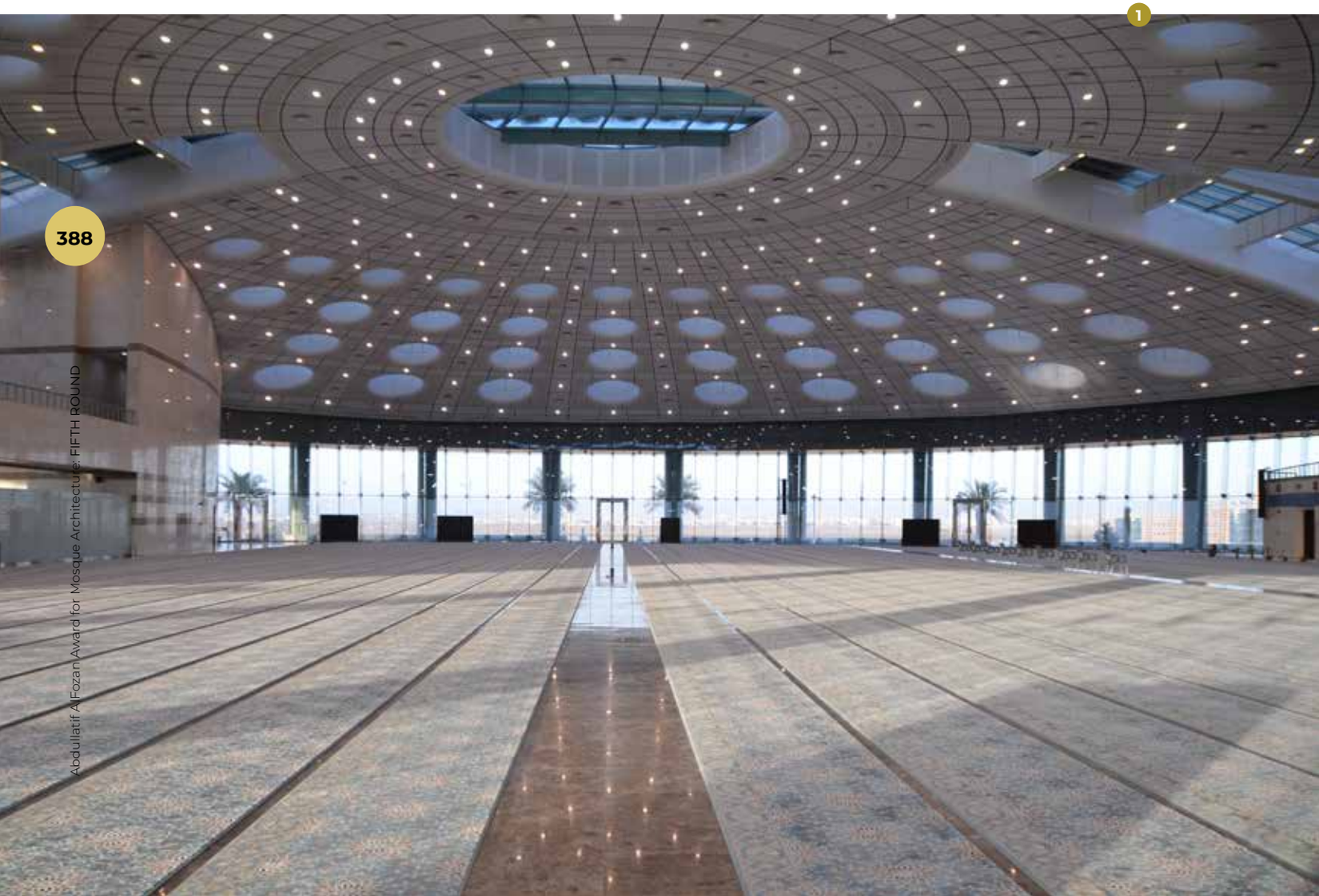
1. Prayer hall interior.

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

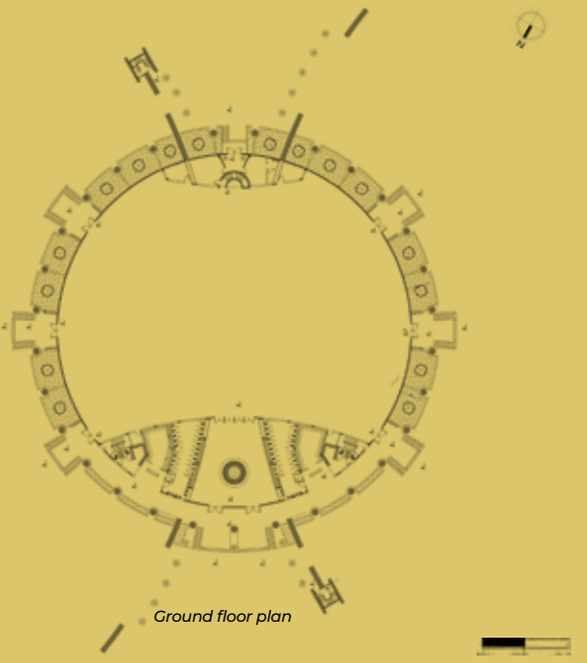
The mosque is intended to serve daily campus prayers while also accommodating peak events such as Friday and Eid prayers. Its scale and visibility make it a destination beyond the university, drawing visitors from the city and surrounding areas.

This public-facing role is an asset, but it depends on management clarity: legible entries, controlled circulation, and steady upkeep so openness does not translate into operational strain. The women's prayer space on the upper level is part of this social structure, and its value rests on whether access and participation feel integrated rather than secondary.

Overall, the project's social strength lies in sustaining an everyday campus rhythm, not only the ceremonial peaks.

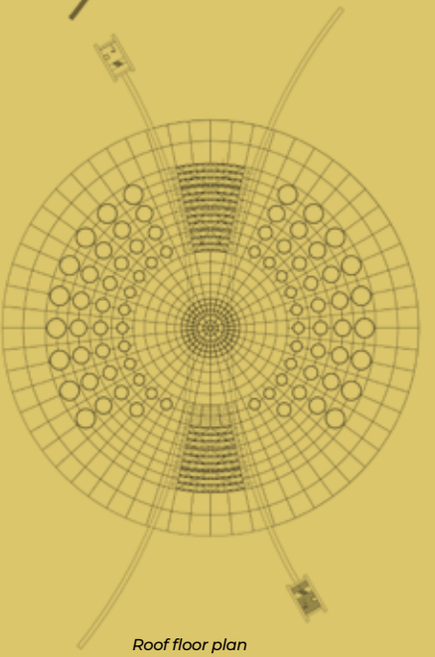


1



Ground floor plan

Mezzanine floor plan



Roof floor plan

1

1. Main exterior façade.

2. Details of the relationship between the dome and the glass wall.

3. Roof glazing details.

2

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

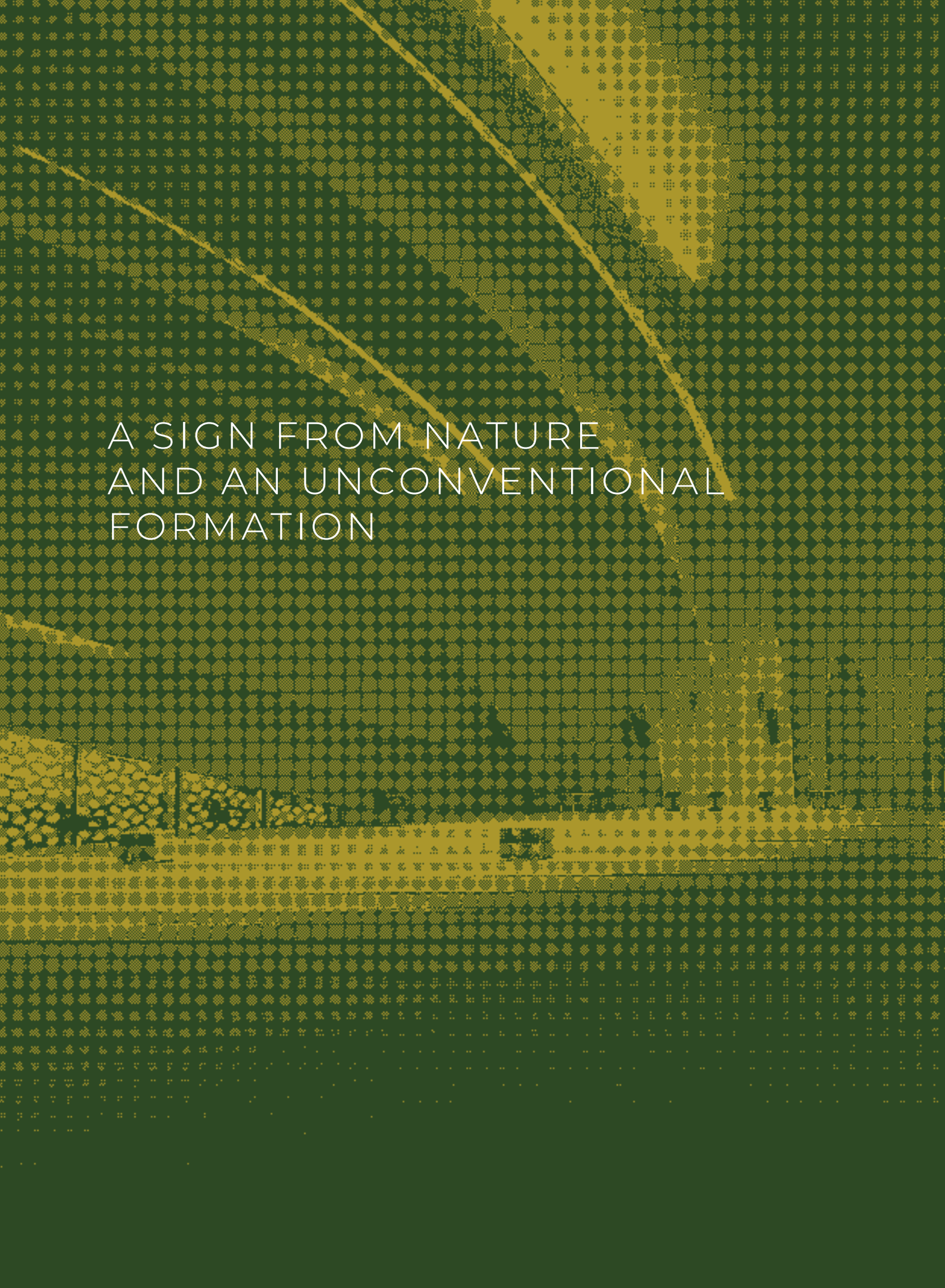
Tabuk University Mosque is, above all, a project of scale and structural certainty: a vast, column-free hall gathered under a single dome, designed to carry the symbolic weight of a university landmark. At its best, this produces a clear communal interior with strong spatial unity and an architectural identity that is immediately legible.

In the context of Saudi Arabia, where mosque imagery is often expected to lean toward conventional historicist cues, the project takes a comparatively bold modern stance, letting a large-span dome and a highly transparent perimeter carry the building's identity. Its presence within the Abdullatif Al Fozan Award discourse further frames this choice as an intentional contemporary proposition rather than a stylistic accident.

The same ambition also sets the project's main risk. A mosque that relies on extensive glazing, deep skylighting, and large exposed surfaces succeeds only when glare, heat, acoustics, and maintenance are handled with long-term discipline. In this sense, the building is not only designed, it is operated. The exterior dome cladding, in particular, becomes a test of durability and stewardship at a monumental scale.

Overall, the mosque stands as a strong campus landmark: persuasive in its structural concept and civic presence, and most successful when its technical ambition remains aligned with the everyday realities of comfort, upkeep, and use.

3


A SIGN FROM NATURE
AND AN UNCONVENTIONAL
FORMATION

GHAZI AL GOSAIBI

Mosque

Ghazi Al Gosaibi Mosque
Location: Mardumah Bay, Al Jubail, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Architect: MYAA Mangera Yvars Architects
Year of Completion: 2022
Plot Area: 5,760 m²
Built-Up Area: Approx. 1,800 m²
Capacity: 1,000 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Ahmed Abdel Moneim

Key Form/Idea: Seashell-inspired roof with five sculptural minarets symbolizing the Five Pillars of Islam; waterfront civic anchor for a new district.

Overview (architectural + urban): Set on the edge of a Bay, the mosque, completed in 2022 to accommodate approximately 1,000 worshippers, is conceived as the spiritual and civic centerpiece for a growing waterfront district in Jubail. MYAA's concept translates the city's pearling heritage into a biomimetic, shell-like envelope that shelters a column-free prayer hall, while five slender minarets operate as beacons and as an explicit symbolic register of the Five Pillars of Islam . As a landmark on the Jeddah Corniche (Jeddah Waterfront), the project is positioned to structure the public realm around it—linking faith, landscape, and emerging urban life.

Commemoration & intent: Named after Dr. Ghazi Al Gosaibi, a statesman, diplomat, poet, and the first Chairman of SABIC, a subsidiary of Saudi Aramco with global reach, the mosque is conceived as a testament to Dr. Al Gosaibi's modernizing and humanist legacy—merging contemporary form with Islamic calligraphy and craft. The commission context and dedication emphasize the building's representative role for Jubail's next chapter beyond the industrial core.

Architectural character: A sweeping, ribbed 'shell' roof creates a singular, column-free volume oriented to the mihrab. The two large, screened openings as well as the minarets produce a clear day-night identity—legible across the bay by day; a luminous ensemble by night—asserting the mosque as both a sacred interior and a public waterfront figure.

Program & scale: The main prayer hall, women's prayer hall, and support areas are organized to maintain clear processional logic and inclusive access, accommodating around 1,000 congregants; the forecourt and Corniche interface extend the mosque's reach into everyday civic life along the bay.

Status & recognition: The project was shortlisted by the Abdullatif Al Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture and appears on World Architecture Festival's (WAF) 2025 shortlist (Completed Buildings – Civic & Community), consolidating its standing as a recent reference in contemporary mosque design.

1

2

URBAN INTEGRATION

Occupying a pivotal reclaimed waterfront site, the Ghazi Al Gosaibi Mosque is conceived not as an isolated sanctuary but as the spiritual nucleus of Jubail's emerging central district. The site forms part of the new Exhibition Park masterplan—an ambitious public waterfront zone envisioned to balance the city's industrial identity with civic and recreational life. Positioned between the open sea and the corporate presence of SABIC's headquarters, the mosque anchors the new district both symbolically and spatially, marking a threshold where industry, city, and faith converge.

Urban Relationship and Orientation

The mosque's placement is deliberate within the urban hierarchy. As the surrounding plots are destined for high-rise development, the architects conceived the mosque as a low, horizontal form—a moment of repose within an ascending skyline. Its organic shell geometry contrasts the anticipated rectilinearity of future towers, asserting the spiritual as well as the compositional and emotional center of the district. The mosque thus prefigures a human-scaled counterpoint to the vertical ambition of the city—a visual and moral ground line upon which the district's identity can rise.

Integration with the Public Realm

The mosque's integration with the Exhibition Park landscape is seamless. Instead of perimeter walls, gentle slopes and open plazas invite movement from the Corniche into the mosque grounds. Wide, shaded walkways guide worshippers and visitors alike through planted gardens, culminating in a forecourt that functions as both civic plaza and sacred threshold. This continuous public interface transforms the mosque into an accessible urban hinge—a space that mediates between the everyday life of the promenade and the contemplative stillness of prayer.

Contextual Resonance

Jubail's broader context amplifies the mosque's meaning. Once a fishing and pearling settlement and later a symbol of Saudi industrial modernity, the city embodies transformation. The mosque translates this dual legacy into architectural form: the shell and pearl metaphor reclaims the city's maritime past, while the advanced engineering of its steel ribs and prefabricated panels affirms its industrial present. Standing at the edge of the bay, the building reads simultaneously as memory and projection—a vessel for continuity amid rapid urban change.

Landscape and Environmental Dialogue

The surrounding landscape is designed as an open forecourt sahn, extending prayer space outward into the environment. Reflective pools and light vegetation moderate the microclimate, while the building's white, self-shading envelope reduces glare and heat gain. The mosque's reflection in the waters of the bay completes the composition, binding the architecture to its horizon. In this dialogue of land, light, and water, the mosque becomes less an object in a park and more a topographical presence—an inhabitable contour within the coastal landscape.

Symbolic Urban Role

In the absence of a historic urban core, the Ghazi Al Gosaibi Mosque performs the function of an urban catalyst. Its placement establishes the district's first civic axis and spiritual orientation; its image defines the skyline long before the surrounding city is built. As such, the mosque is not merely a product of the masterplan but its generative seed—a point from which urban form and collective memory can grow.

1. *Prayer hall interior showing a seashell-like formation.*

2. *Exterior mass model of the mosque.*

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The exterior of the Ghazi Al Gosaibi Mosque is conceived as a single sculptural gesture—an organic shell rising from the coastal landscape. Mangera Yvars Architects replaced the traditional trio of dome, minaret, and façade with a synthetic form where structure, symbolism, and envelope merge into one expressive continuum. The result is an exterior that feels both elemental and engineered, poised between natural softness and industrial precision.

Form and Symbolism

The sweeping, shell-like canopy embodies the seashell and pearl metaphor, recalling Jubail's maritime heritage. The outer shell shelters the inner 'pearl', representing faith's protection and the soul's purity. Five slender, blade-like minarets punctuate the skyline, each inscribed with a Qur'anic verse on one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Together they express a measured tension between groundedness and ascent, the earthly and the transcendent.

Materiality and Surface

Clad in prefabricated white panels, the mosque's smooth skin resists coastal corrosion and reflects the intense Gulf light. Two vast, triangular openings, veiled by geometric latticework, evoke the texture of a shell, filtering daylight into patterns of shade. This play of solid and void roots the modern structure in the visual language of Islamic architecture while maintaining minimalist clarity and unity of form.

Light and Atmosphere

Light is the exterior's most vital material. By day, the reflective shell shifts in tone with the sun; by night, concealed lighting turns the building into a luminous landmark mirrored in the bay. The minarets glow from within like vertical lanterns, extending the mosque's sacred presence across the waterfront and linking architecture to its maritime horizon.

Scale, Proportion, and Context

Though low in height, the mosque dominates its setting through mass and repose. Its horizontal stance contrasts the future high-rise skyline, asserting serenity amid 'ambition'! Broad curvature and controlled proportions give it an optical gravity that anchors the new district and defines its spiritual datum within the developing cityscape.

Craft and Detailing

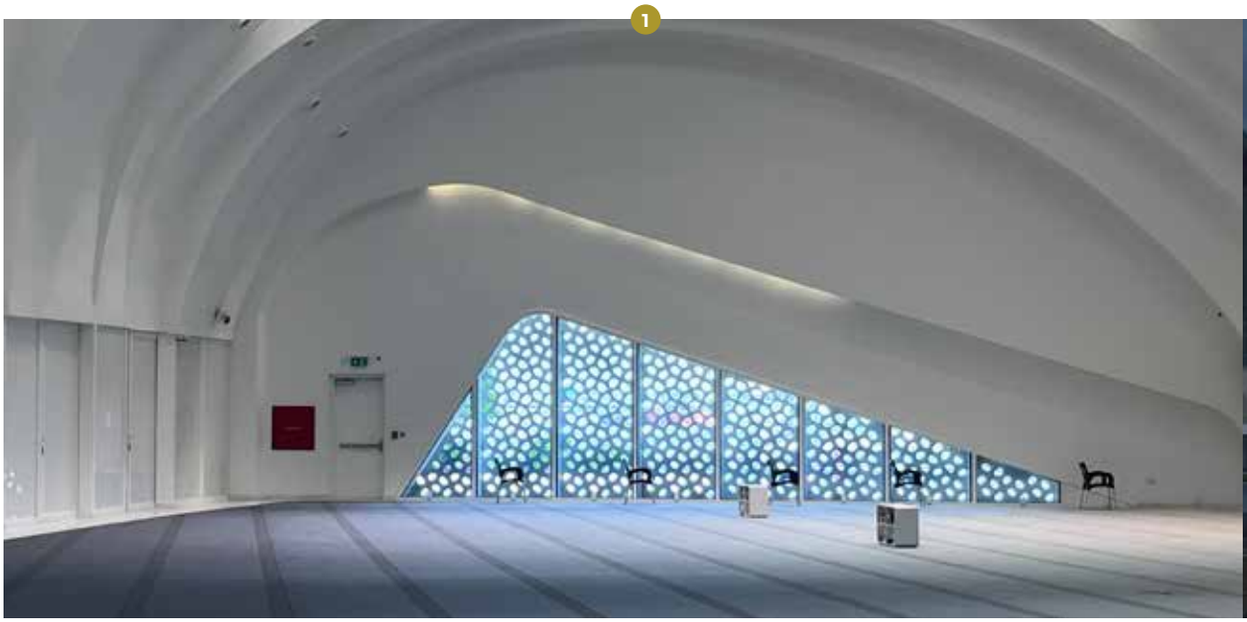
Advanced steel fabrication and BIM coordination enabled the structure's seamless assembly. Joints are minimized; surfaces fold continuously between roof and wall. Calligraphy is engraved, not applied, reinforcing structure with scriptural meaning. This disciplined restraint ensures that construction, concept, and devotion cohere into one expression.

Architectural Character

The exterior achieves a rare synthesis of symbolic clarity and technological grace. Modern yet rooted, austere yet poetic, it translates Jubail's industrial precision and cultural memory into one enduring form. Standing between land and sea, between remembrance and aspiration, the Ghazi Al Gosaibi Mosque becomes a shell that shelters faith and mirrors transformation.

1. *The fluid roof profile in dialogue with the glass walls makes the prayer hall interior visually striking.*

2. *General exterior view of the mosque.*



INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of the Ghazi Al Gosaibi Mosque reveals the full power of its structural metaphor. The sweeping shell becomes an inhabitable vault where space, structure, and light converge in a single, uninterrupted continuum. The architects translate engineering logic into spiritual experience, producing an interior at once monumental and profoundly serene.

Spatial Composition

The plan is organized around a column-free prayer hall, defined by a rhythmic sequence of white structural ribs that rise and meet above the worshipper like converging waves. These ribs direct the gaze toward the mihrab, establishing a natural spiritual axis without relying on ornament or hierarchy. Secondary spaces—entrance vestibule, ablution areas, library, and the women's hall—are composed as calm satellites within the same architectural order, ensuring a clear processional flow from purification to prayer.

Light as Structure

Natural light enters primarily through two large, screened openings and a series of concealed skylights integrated within the ribs. This soft illumination dissolves the boundary between structure and atmosphere, allowing light to read the architecture rather than merely reveal it. The changing dapple of daylight animates the surfaces, transforming the hall into a living instrument that marks time and rhythm. At night, hidden linear LEDs within the ribs recreate this serenity through gentle, diffuse glow.

Material and Color

The interior palette extends the exterior's restraint: white plastered surfaces and a turquoise-blue carpet that deepens toward the mihrab. This gradient evokes the sea, symbolizing a spiritual journey from worldly depth to divine clarity. The absence of decorative clutter heightens the focus on proportion, sound, and light, reinforcing the primacy of prayer over spectacle.

Mihrab, Minbar, and Ceiling

The ceiling is structure—a vaulted shell of ribs whose geometry creates both awe and intimacy. The mihrab is a luminous niche rather than an ornamental cavity; the minbar, a sculpted platform seamlessly integrated into the wall. Together they affirm a design ethos where traditional symbols are distilled to essentials, maintaining purity of line and intent.

Acoustics and Atmosphere

Acoustics are naturally balanced by the curving ribs and absorptive surfaces, allowing the Imam's voice to project without amplification. The spatial envelope thus becomes a resonant chamber, sustaining clarity of recitation and reinforcing collective focus. The atmosphere—bright, cool, and silent—intensifies devotion through architectural stillness rather than ornament.

Women's Hall and Inclusivity

The women's prayer hall, positioned on the same primary level, shares the same spatial rhythm and daylight, ensuring equitable experience. It is neither annexed nor secondary but integrated within the mosque's main volume, reflecting a deliberate commitment to inclusivity and dignity.

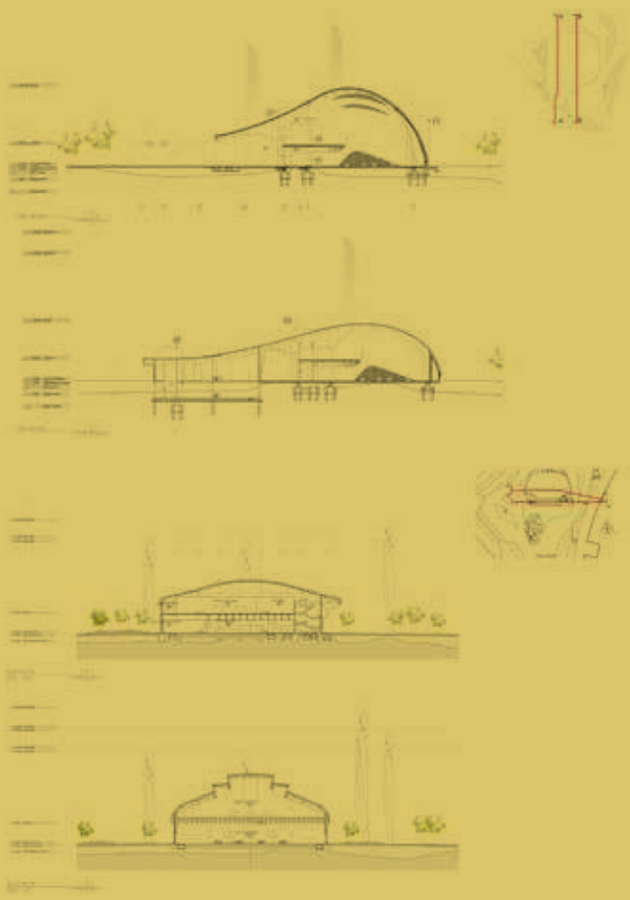
Interior Character

Inside, the mosque transcends formal innovation to achieve spiritual minimalism. Every surface, curve, and shaft of light serves contemplation. The space neither dazzles nor distracts—it gathers, focuses, and quiets. The result is an interior that mirrors the essence of faith itself: simplicity, clarity, and inner luminosity.

Yet one subtle inconsistency disturbs the otherwise seamless architectural language governed by the mosque's shell syntax. While the structure's logic is founded on continuous curvature and fluid transitions, the use of pointed arches at the main entrance and in some interior doorways introduces a note of discord! These elements, more aligned with conventional Islamic revival forms, interrupt the coherence of the dominant geometry and momentarily weaken the purity of the spatial grammar established by the shell. In contrast, the mihrab and minbar arches, resolved with soft, rounded summits, remain fully integrated within the continuous logic of the form. The tension between these two vocabularies—curved and pointed—may be read as an unresolved dialogue between inherited motifs and the project's otherwise unified contemporary syntax.

2

1



Longitudinal sections

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Beneath the mosque's sculptural serenity lies a rigorous technical system that fuses expressive form with environmental responsibility. Conceived under SABIC's patronage and targeting LEED certification, the Ghazi Al Gosaibi Mosque integrates advanced structure, efficient systems, and long-term sustainability.

Structure and Envelope

The sweeping shell is formed by a steel frame of longitudinal arches, spanning the prayer hall without internal columns. Developed through BIM coordination, this system enabled prefabrication and precise on-site assembly, turning structure into the mosque's defining language.

The envelope employs prefabricated metal panels resistant to coastal corrosion, using SABIC steel and locally sourced materials to reduce embodied energy. Prefabrication ensured accuracy, speed, and ease of maintenance, allowing the architecture's complexity to remain technically feasible.

Environmental Systems

A district-cooling HVAC network runs discreetly within the shell's ribs, reducing energy use by nearly 40%. The compact, self-shading geometry minimizes solar gain, while low-E glazing controls heat transfer. Mechanical systems, lighting, and acoustics are all absorbed into the structural rhythm, maintaining the interior's purity and silence.

Lighting and Water Strategy

Daylight remains the primary illumination; at night, LED fixtures concealed within the ribs provide a soft, energy-efficient glow. Exterior lighting is calibrated to accentuate the shell and minarets without glare, turning the mosque into a low-energy lantern across the bay.

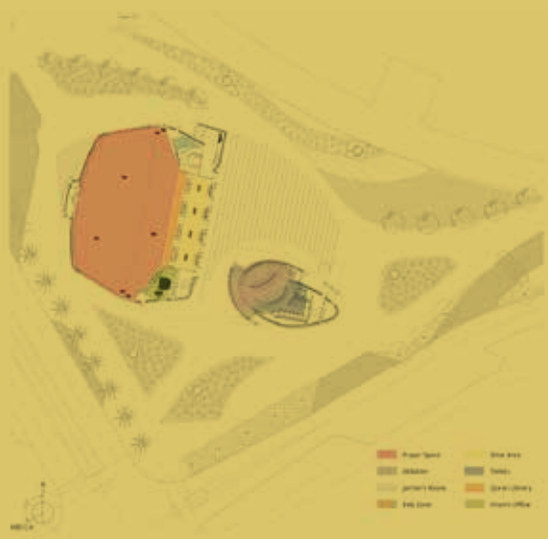
Landscaping uses greywater recycling and native vegetation, reducing irrigation demand and enhancing the site's microclimate. Rainwater collection supports garden maintenance, integrating sustainability into everyday operation.

Maintenance and Ethos

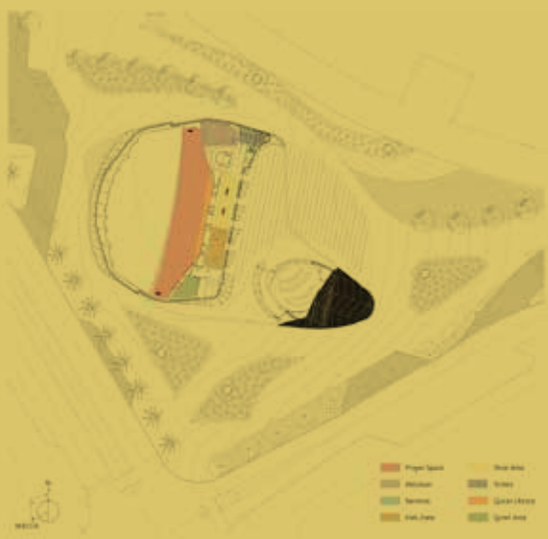
Prefabricated cladding panels can be replaced individually, while corrosion-protected steel ensures longevity. Standard mechanical systems simplify upkeep, keeping long-term costs manageable. Sustainability here is understood as durability, economy, and social continuity—a quiet demonstration that environmental intelligence and spiritual dignity can coexist within a single architectural act.

.

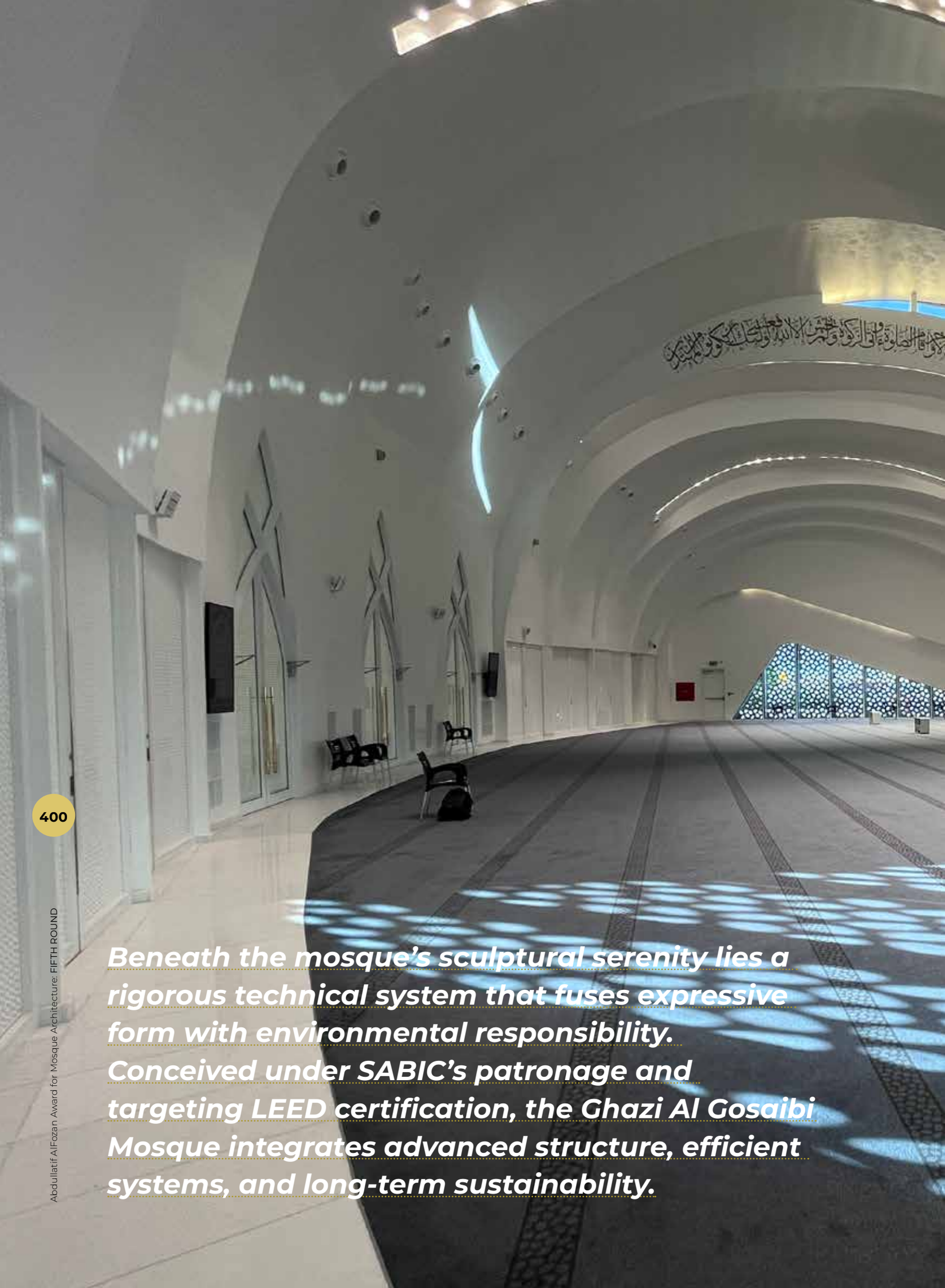
1. *Prayer hall entrances.*



Ground floor plan



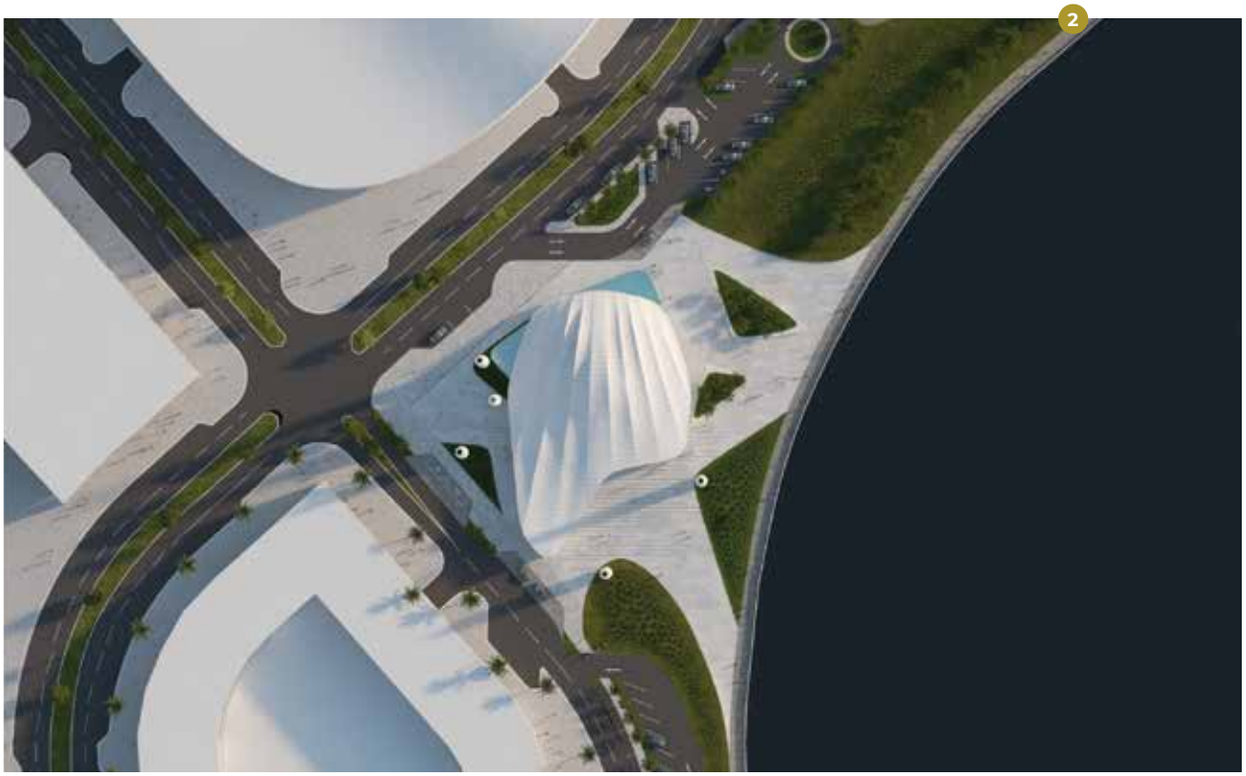
Mezzanin floor plan



Beneath the mosque's sculptural serenity lies a rigorous technical system that fuses expressive form with environmental responsibility. Conceived under SABIC's patronage and targeting LEED certification, the Ghazi Al Gosaibi Mosque integrates advanced structure, efficient systems, and long-term sustainability.

A striking articulation of the roof and mihrab renders the prayer hall an infinite space.

1



2

SOCIAL PERFORMANCE AND SUCCESS

The Ghazi Al Gosaibi Mosque serves as both place of worship and civic landmark, binding faith and community along the Jubail waterfront.

Civic and Social Role

Set beside the SABIC headquarters within the new Exhibition Park, the mosque anchors a district still taking shape. Without enclosing walls, it opens directly to the public realm; its forecourt and shaded walkways invite spontaneous gathering and reflection. The act of approach becomes part of a shared civic ritual.

Inclusivity and Access

Universal access defines the design: gentle ramps, wide paths, and tactile signage ensure ease for all users. Distinct yet equal facilities for men and women affirm dignity and privacy, while the women's hall—sharing the same daylight and rhythm as the main hall—embodies genuine equality rather than segregation.

Education and Outreach

Each of the five minarets bears a verse on one of the Five Pillars of Islam, transforming the skyline into a teaching device. A small library supports quiet study, extending the mosque's reach from devotion to knowledge.

Charity and Everyday Life

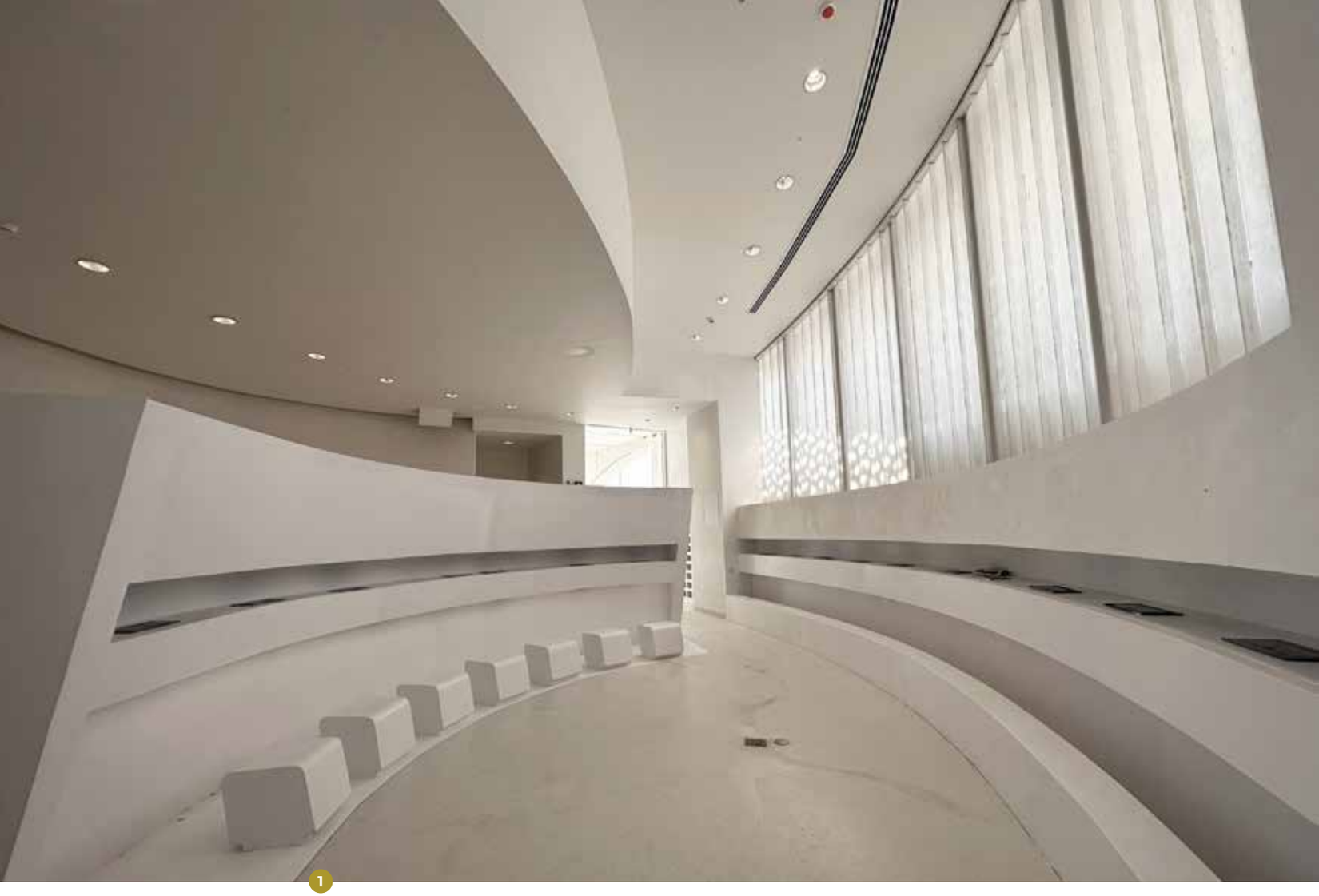
The mosque sustains the humanitarian legacy of Dr. Al Gosaibi through charitable functions, including meal distribution during Ramadan. As nearby neighborhoods mature, it is poised to evolve naturally into a social hub for daily interaction and support.

Social Meaning

Its success rests on openness and clarity. More than a monument, it models a new kind of Saudi civic space—public, inclusive, and spiritually grounded—where worship and communal life coexist as one continuous field.

1. *General exterior façade.*

2. *Site plan.*



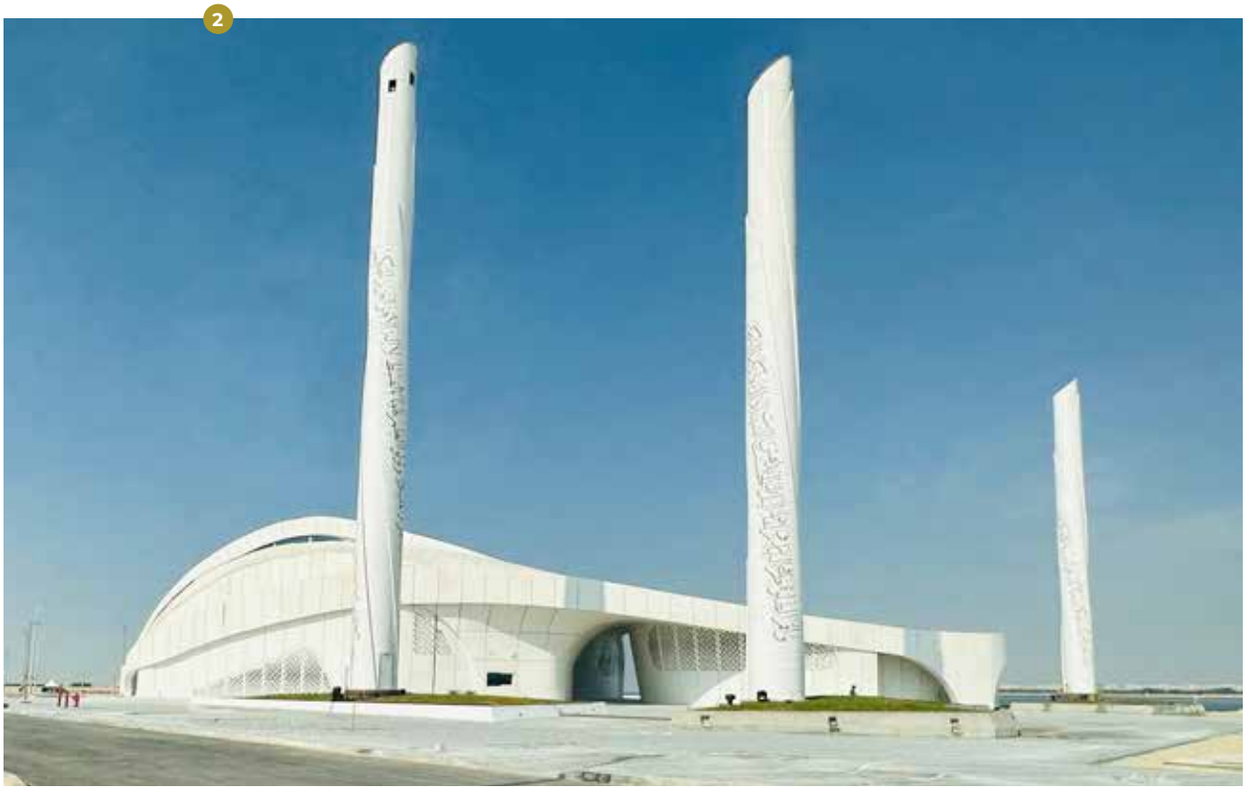
1

1. *Ablution area.*

2. *External view of the mosque.*

3. *Roof details showing Arabic calligraphy long associated with mosque architecture.*

4. *Natural light falling onto the prayer hall floor.*



2

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The Ghazi Al Gosaibi Mosque presents a significant contribution to the evolving discourse on what a contemporary mosque can be—an architecture that speaks كافةً للناس, inclusive in spirit and image, yet firmly rooted in its place. Its sweeping shell on the Jubail waterfront projects a clarity that is globally legible, while its grounding in local memory and typological expectations ensure that the mosque remains immediately familiar to those who worship there. This balance—between openness and belonging, between a universal image and a local anchoring—places the mosque within the Award's broader ambition of encouraging measured, meaningful experimentation in future mosque design.

In its urban role, the building reclaims the mosque as a civic anchor. Set at the heart of a district still taking shape, and fused with the public landscape of Exhibition Park, it assumes the responsibilities once common to historic mosques: welcoming, gathering, supporting learning, and orienting community life. Its edges remain open rather than defensive, reinforcing the idea of the mosque as a shared public realm. Through this posture, it articulates a quiet but confident model for Inclusive Sacred Spaces—spaces where diversity unfolds within the unity of a single architectural gesture.

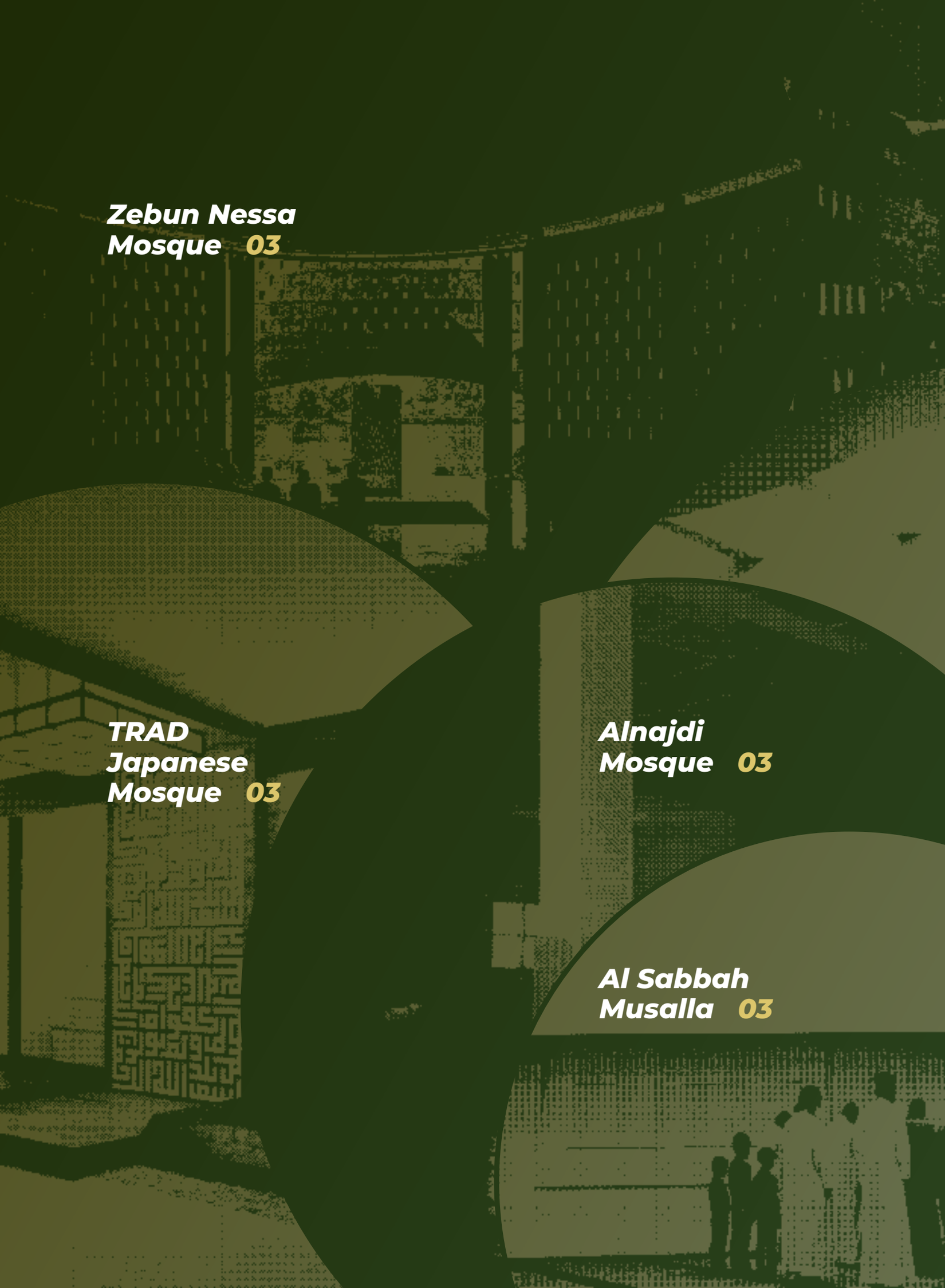
Yet the project's value is sharpened by its own tensions. The main prayer hall achieves a remarkable purity of form: a continuous, column-free volume shaped by the logic of the shell, where structure and light converge into an atmosphere of composure and focus. Within this unified order, the women's prayer hall, although properly integrated beneath the same shell and benefiting from its structural rhythm and daylight, still reads as spatially secondary in the plan. It performs well and offers dignity, yet its positioning does not entirely share the conceptual centrality or symbolic purity of the main haram. This nuance is not a flaw as much as a reminder that the pursuit of inclusivity in mosque design requires more than visual coherence—it requires an equally coherent experiential and spatial hierarchy.

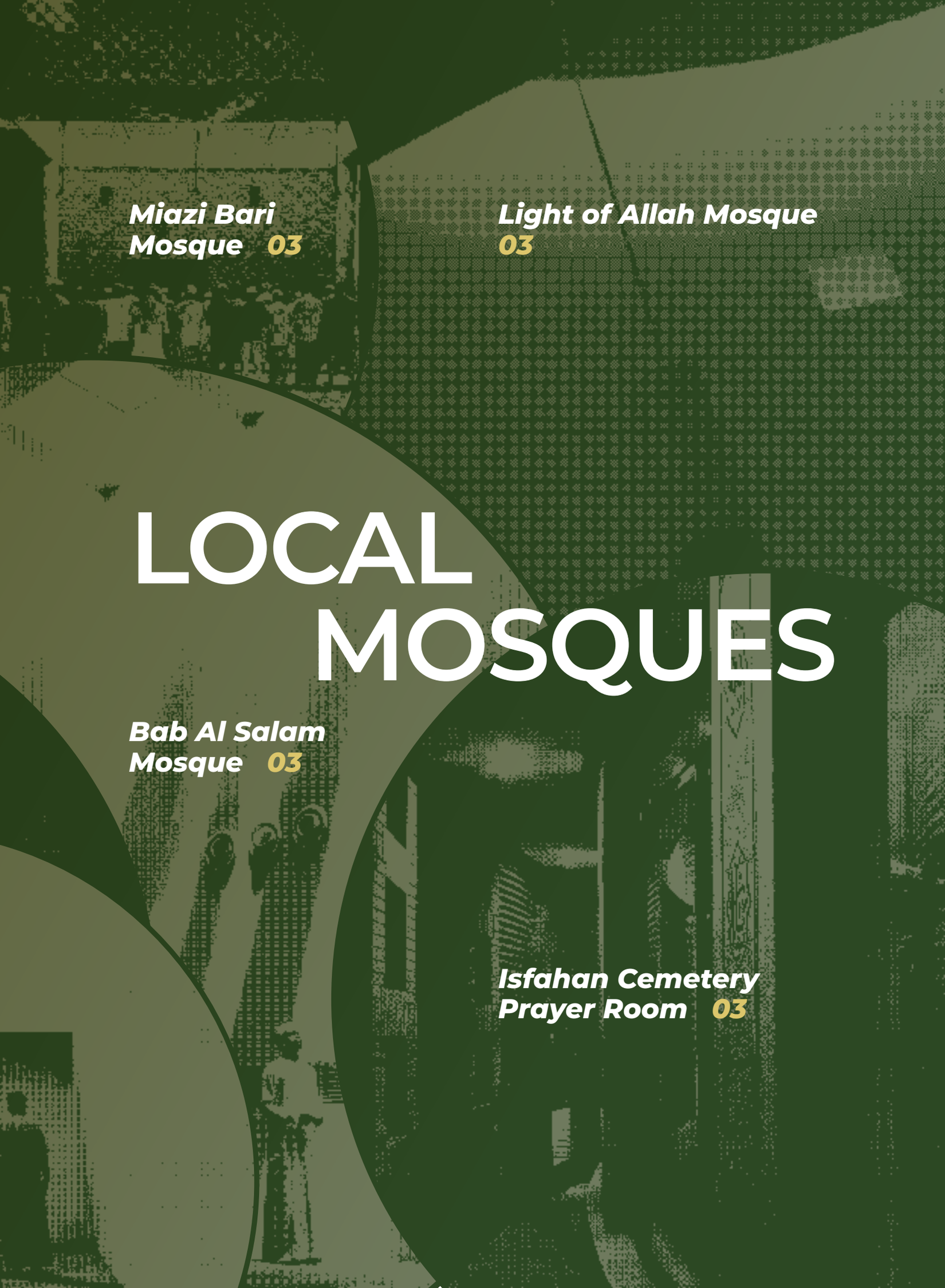
A similar negotiation appears in the use of pointed arches at the entrance and certain interior thresholds. At first glance, these forms interrupt the disciplined continuity of curves and flowing geometry that characterizes the shell's architectural syntax. But within the cultural and social context of Jubail, their presence can be read as a conscious gesture of reassurance—an echo of inherited forms that helps situate a boldly contemporary mosque within the visual expectations of its community. This interplay between the familiar and the experimental suggests a deeper truth about sacred architecture: inclusivity is not only a matter of access or program, but also of emotional and cultural legibility.

Taken together, these qualities position the Ghazi Al Gosaibi Mosque as a thoughtful, responsible experiment—one that advances the typology without abandoning the people it serves. Its innovation is not celebratory or rhetorical; it is measured, grounded, and attuned to its setting. As the new district around it rises, the mosque will continue to function not only as its visual landmark but as its moral and civic datum, a point of orientation where unity does not erase difference, but gathers it into a coherent whole. In this sense, the mosque stands as an example of how contemporary sacred architecture can look forward without losing its footing, achieving a harmony where variation is held within unity, and diversity finds its place within oneness.

3

4


Zebun Nessa
Mosque 03
TRAD
Japanese
Mosque 03
Alnajdi
Mosque 03
Al Sabbah
Musalla 03



Miazi Bari Mosque *03*

Light of Allah Mosque *03*

LOCAL MOSQUES

Bab Al Salam Mosque *03*

Isfahan Cemetery Prayer Room *03*

SILENT EXISTENTIAL RESISTANCE

LIGHT OF ALLAH

Mosque

(Masjid Nuorullah)

Light of Allah Mosque (Masjid Nuorullah)
Location: Xingping, China
Architect: Ibrahim Ma
Year of Completion: 2015
Plot Area: 420 m²
Built-Up Area: Approx. 55 m²
Capacity: 44 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Hakan Elevli

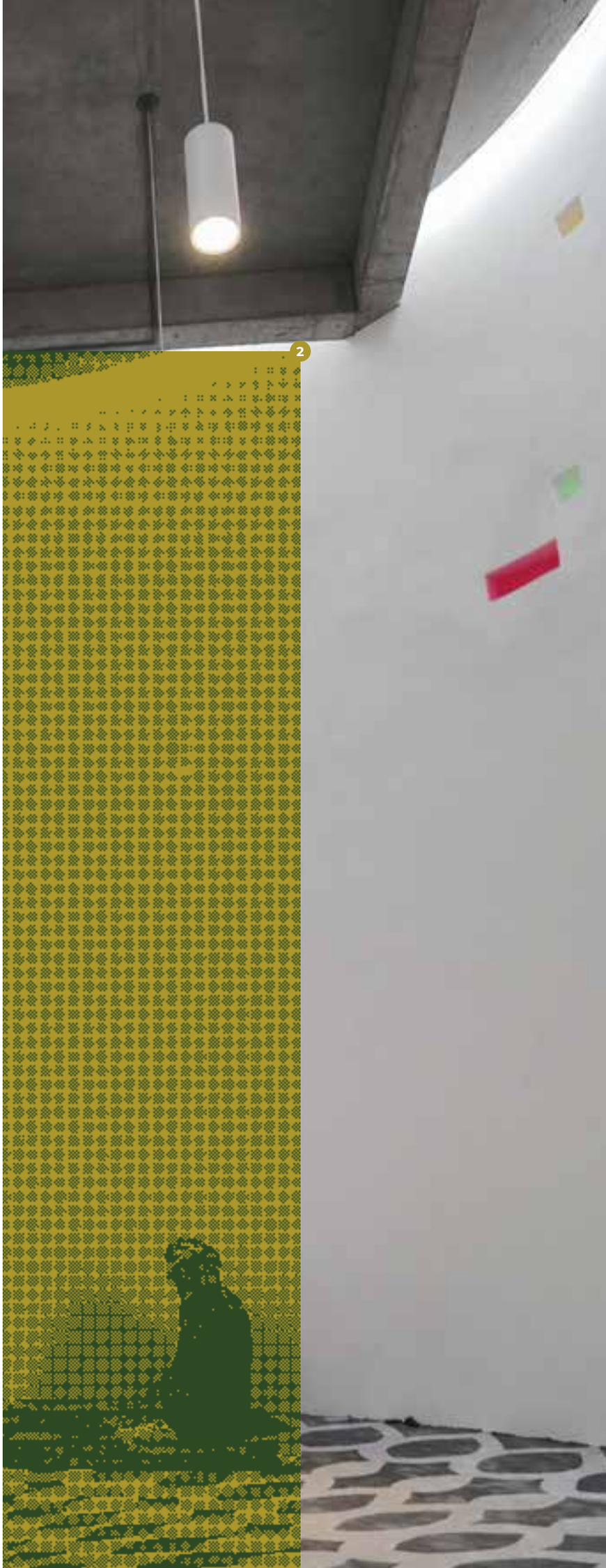
In a small town in Hubei Province, central China—specifically in the Xingping area of Xiangyang City—Masjid Nuorullah (The Light of Allah Mosque) stands as a rare and quietly powerful expression of religious space designed exclusively for women. Modest in size, unassuming in form, and built entirely through local donations, the mosque offers far more than a place of prayer: it carries a deeply symbolic weight in its affirmation of presence, identity, and dignity—particularly for Muslim women, whose visibility in public religious life has often been limited.

The project was not the product of a design competition or government sponsorship. Rather, it emerged from within the community itself, guided by trust and social kinship. The architect, Ibrahim Ma—a young, locally born Chinese Muslim—was selected not through formal credentials, but through personal lineage and inherited community trust, notably through the recommendation of his father, a respected figure in the town. This mode of architectural commissioning is deeply rooted in informal social networks and lends the project a sense of authenticity and cultural embeddedness.

Prior to the construction of this mosque, women had been relegated to a damp, neglected basement below the adjacent male prayer hall. The creation of a dedicated space for them was not merely a matter of functional improvement but a symbolic act of restoration: from marginalization to rightful presence, from neglect to reverence. The new structure speaks this transformation with quiet confidence: it is truly a space worthy of Khadijah, as was the first mosque, and as every mosque since should be.

Architecturally, the mosque is striking in its minimalism: a circular white prayer hall enclosed within a rectilinear courtyard, its forms restrained, its surfaces unadorned. Chinese architectural sensibilities subtly permeate the composition, yet without mimicry or ornamentation. Instead, the building adopts a contemporary language of abstraction, geometric clarity, and spatial dignity—favoring meaning over image, essence over embellishment.

In a national context where religious architecture must often navigate complex social and political terrains, the Light of Allah Mosque stands as a subtle yet profound achievement: a testament to community agency, architectural restraint, and the quiet power of presence. It proposes a new kind of mosque—one that is born of its place, attuned to its time, and faithful to its spirit.



2

2

URBAN INTEGRATION

The Light of Allah Mosque is situated in the modest township of Xing Ping, part of Xiangyang city in China's Hubei Province. The mosque occupies a position set back from the main road, accessed discreetly through a narrow corridor flanked by a school building and the older, traditional male mosque. Its understated entrance—marked by a white rendered wall and minimal signage—makes it difficult for outsiders to identify, but simultaneously embeds it naturally within the rhythms of the local urban fabric.

This unobtrusive insertion is reflective of both the mosque's social origin and the nuanced position of Islamic architecture within contemporary Chinese urbanism. The mosque's location—behind a row of strip shops and adjacent to pre-existing religious infrastructure—demonstrates a conscious strategy of spatial modesty and cultural integration rather than architectural assertion.

1. *Prayer hall... extreme visual simplicity.*

2. *The cylindrical prayer hall mass and the bridge connecting it to the main mosque*

The women's mosque is part of a larger, evolving religious precinct that includes the original mosque (built in 2000), the imam's residence, a classroom block, and newly landscaped courtyards. The journey through the precinct is carefully choreographed: from the urban street edge through traditional architectural portals, into tree-lined courtyards, and finally to the circular prayer space nestled within high white walls. This spatial sequence not only enhances the sense of spiritual transition but also mediates between the dense commercial surroundings and the inward-facing sanctity of the prayer space.

While the older male mosque retains traditional Chinese stylistic features such as sweeping rooflines and decorative turrets, the newer women's mosque introduces a more abstract and minimalist language—cylindrical in form, wrapped in white render, and framed by a dry rock garden. The deliberate contrast between these expressions generates a dialogue between tradition and contemporaneity, continuity and reform, without disrupting the overall urban grain.

The mosque's emergence was not initiated through state planning or religious authority but rather as a response to a critical social need: the absence of an appropriate and dignified space for women's prayer. In this way, the mosque occupies a socially charged void within the urban landscape, quietly transforming an overlooked corner into a locus of identity, equity, and spiritual presence.

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Approached through a series of layered thresholds, the exterior of the Light of Allah Mosque reveals itself gradually and deliberately. From the street, one enters a narrow corridor flanked by the traditional Chinese-style mosque and a school building before arriving at a pristine white wall—punctuated by a single, modestly scaled doorway. This understated entry sets the tone for the architecture beyond: quiet, contemplative, and defined by restraint rather than display.

Once inside, the visitor is met with a carefully curated garden framed by mature trees and a raised viewing platform. This landscape is not merely decorative; it serves as a transitional zone between the outside world and the sacred enclosure of the mosque. A footbridge leads across this garden toward the mosque's cylindrical form, reinforcing a spatial rhythm of procession, pause, and reflection.

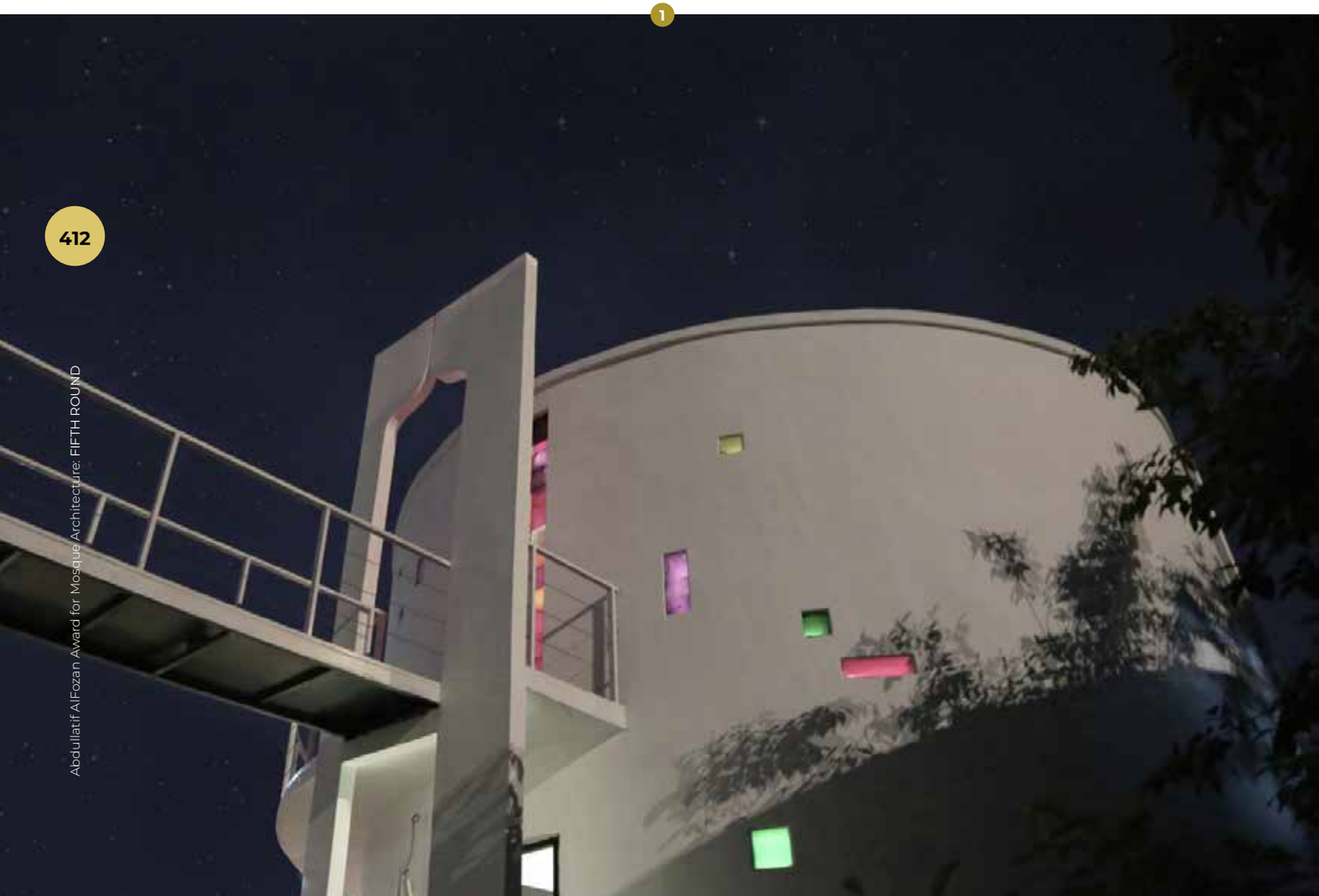
The mosque's primary volume is a simple yet evocative white cylinder—its geometry, as the technical reviewer judiciously observed, is a direct reference to unity and Divine light in Islamic cosmology. The purity of the form is amplified by the use of thick, white-rendered brick walls (400 mm), which provide thermal mass and visual solidity. The structure rises without ornament, relying on proportion, light, and material clarity to express presence. In the absence of minarets or domes, the building asserts itself through spatial calmness and formal integrity.

Across from the mosque stands the ablution building, composed of arched concrete colonnades that reinterpret traditional mosque vernacular through a contemporary sculptural lens. The voids and silhouettes created by these arches play with light and shadow, animating the exterior while offering a restrained visual reference to Islamic motifs. The spatial dialogue between the circular mosque and the linear ablution building is carefully balanced—each structure occupying its own architectural identity while contributing to the shared sanctity of the courtyard.

Perhaps the most striking exterior gesture is the rock garden that encircles the mosque's perimeter. Originally conceived as a water feature, the garden was reimagined into a dry composition of natural stones due to practical maintenance concerns. Yet the symbolism remains potent: in Islamic and Chinese traditions alike, rocks convey permanence, humility, and timelessness. Their placement reinforces the meditative character of the site and evokes a sacred stillness in lieu of spectacle.

Altogether, the exterior architecture of the Light of Allah Mosque embraces a language of abstraction and quiet spirituality. Its forms resist stylistic imitation, choosing instead to convey meaning through geometry, material honesty, and cultural synthesis. In doing so, the building establishes a contemplative presence that resonates within its local setting while offering broader cues for future sacred architecture in minority contexts.

1



INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of the Light of Allah Mosque unfolds with a serenity that belies its modest size. Stepping through the entrance, visitors enter a white, cylindrical prayer space—quietly luminous, inwardly focused, and spiritually composed. The simplicity of the architecture invites stillness rather than spectacle, anchoring the space as a sanctuary of calm and reflection.

At the heart of the spatial experience lies a symbolic interplay of forms. The circular plan—a timeless gesture in sacred architecture—evokes the Divine, unity, and inclusivity. Above, the exposed concrete ceiling is shaped into a series of four nested squares, a subtle nod to Chinese cultural symbolism, where the square represents balance, order, and earthly grounding. This juxtaposition of the Islamic circle and the Chinese square is neither didactic nor decorative; rather, it creates a quiet dialogue between cosmologies, one that is architectural in its logic and poetic in its intent.

The material palette is restrained but thoughtfully chosen. White-rendered brick walls reinforce the purity of the space, while the raw concrete ceiling adds depth, texture, and a sense of gravitas. Colored glass cubes—imported from Shanghai—are embedded above the entrance, filtering daylight into soft hues that animate the interior with a gentle, almost ethereal presence. These chromatic notes are neither ornamental nor overwhelming; they lend the space a subtle sense of femininity and warmth, in tune with the mosque's purpose.

Natural ventilation is limited, but the architectural design attempts to compensate. A mezzanine-level platform, accessible by an external stair and bridge, allows for airflow between levels when needed. Air conditioning and heating systems have been installed and are appreciated by the worshippers, though operable windows are few. The spatial comfort, however, is not solely climatic—it emerges from the proportional harmony, the acoustical softness, and the carefully modulated light.

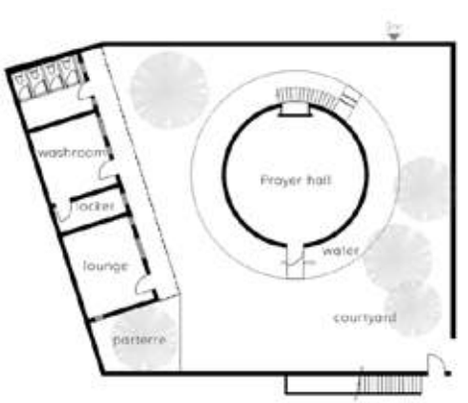
What is most striking is the dignity with which this interior affirms its users. In a context where women have historically been relegated to secondary or subterranean spaces, this mosque offers them a spatial narrative of centrality, elevation, and presence. The architectural language does not preach inclusion—it simply assumes it.

Every surface, void, and volume in the interior seems to have been composed with a sense of measure and modesty. There is no ornament in the traditional sense, but there is grace in the balance of geometry, tactility, and light. The mosque does not seek to emulate traditional Islamic interiors, nor does it mimic vernacular Chinese motifs. Instead, it offers something rarer: a contemporary sacred space shaped by local hands, rooted in cultural hybridity, and responsive to the lived experience of its community.

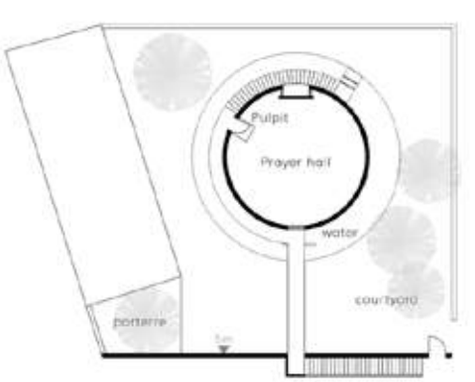
Finally, a discerning eye may detect two notable spatial gestures, even if they were not explicitly declared in the design. The first is the concrete wall directly facing the entrance, slightly projecting in front of the cylindrical wall and extending from floor to ceiling. This element may be interpreted as a contemporary mihrab, carrying both symbolic and functional significance. The second is the upper balcony overlooking the mosque interior, which can be read as a modern reinterpretation of the minbar—not in its traditional role as a pulpit for oration, but rather through its spatial prominence and symbolic association with voice and position.

1. *This is how the prayer hall mass appears in the evening.*

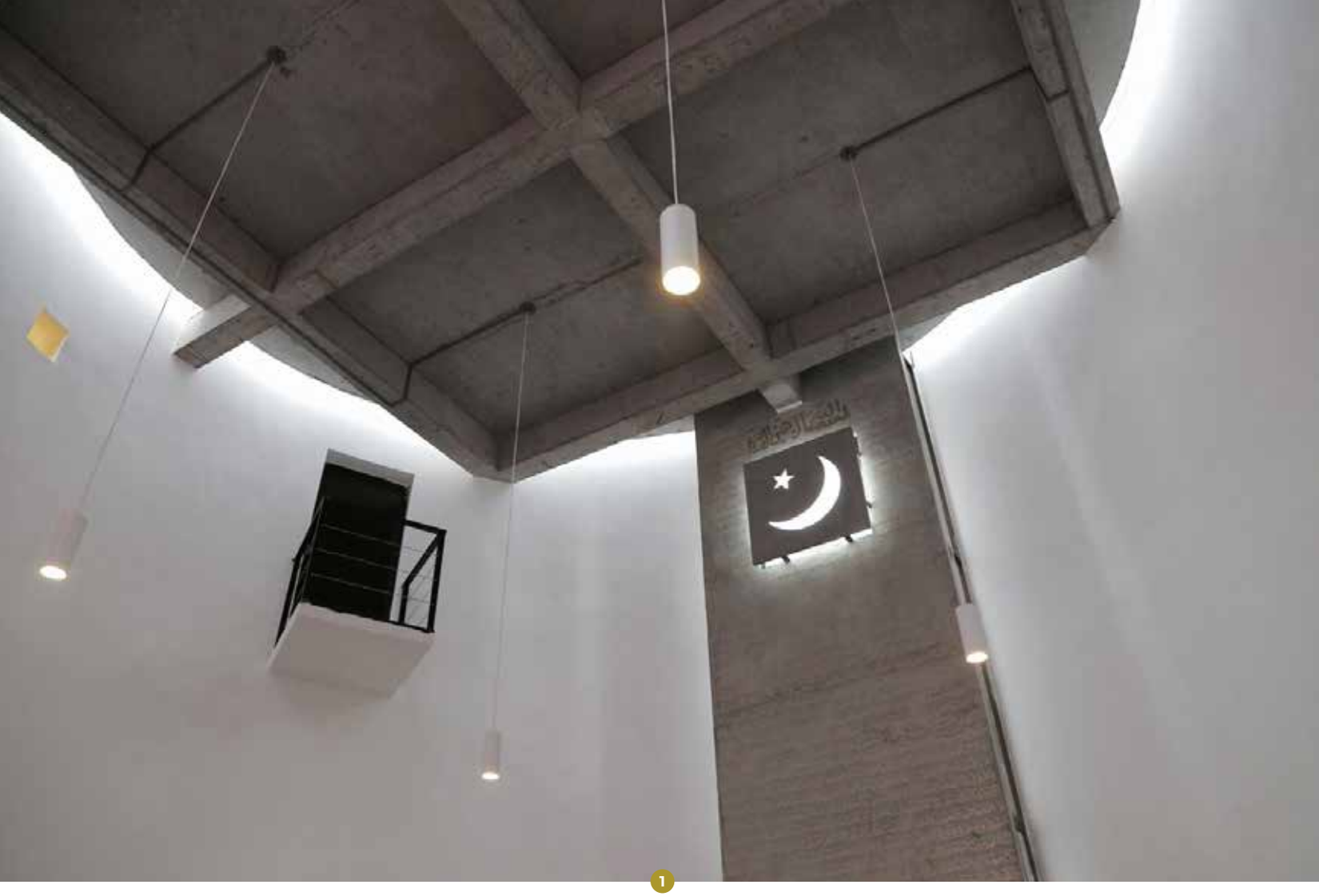
2. *Floor plans.*



Ground floor plan



Floor plan showing the bridge



1

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Though modest in scale and budget, the Light of Allah Mosque incorporates a number of practical solutions aimed at ensuring environmental comfort, ease of maintenance, and long-term sustainability—qualities especially valued in a community-funded project with limited resources.

The mosque's thick, white-rendered brick walls (approximately 400 mm) contribute significantly to thermal regulation, providing insulation during both hot summers and colder seasons. These walls—solid and breathable—help stabilize internal temperatures without relying solely on mechanical systems, demonstrating a passive approach to environmental control rooted in material intelligence.

Mechanical air-conditioning and heating units are installed and actively used, particularly during congregational prayers and seasonal extremes. Female worshippers expressed appreciation for this thermal comfort, though they also noted the spatial limitations posed by the mosque's limited operable windows. Cross-ventilation is facilitated in part by the architectural design: the raised mezzanine platform and the presence of high-level entry points allow for some airflow when both ground and upper doors are opened.

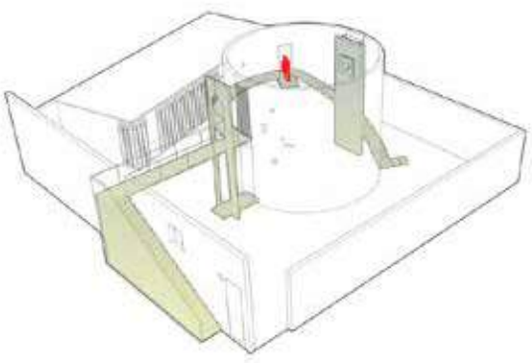
The lighting strategy appears to rely on a combination of natural and artificial sources. During the day, daylight filters through the colored glass inserts above the entrance, casting soft patterns of light into the otherwise restrained interior. At night or in overcast weather, artificial lighting supports visibility while maintaining the mosque's tranquil ambience.

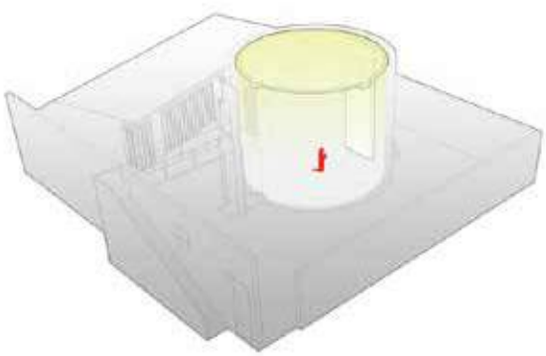
In the ablution facility, functionality takes precedence over formal expression. Clean white surfaces, polished concrete flooring, and well-proportioned stalls support hygienic use and efficient maintenance. The layout offers a straightforward circulation pattern, with adequate provision for privacy and ease of movement—particularly important given the volume of worshippers during peak periods.

While no advanced sustainability systems (such as solar panels, greywater recycling, or high-efficiency HVAC units) are evident, the mosque's design philosophy embraces a form of contextual sustainability. The choice of durable, low-maintenance materials; the simplicity of construction techniques; and the community's engagement in landscape stewardship all point to a sustainable ethos shaped more by necessity than by branding.

A notable example of this pragmatic sustainability can be found in the evolution of the mosque's landscape. The original vision included a reflective pool— with its known symbolic value of purification—but concerns about maintenance and mosquito control led to the adoption of a dry rock garden instead. This shift, while practical, still retained symbolic resonance and offered a long-term solution requiring minimal upkeep.

In sum, the technical performance of the mosque may not rely on cutting-edge green technology, but it reflects a thoughtful alignment between local climate, cultural expectations, and available means. It offers a model of sustainability rooted in community wisdom, material honesty, and spatial restraint.





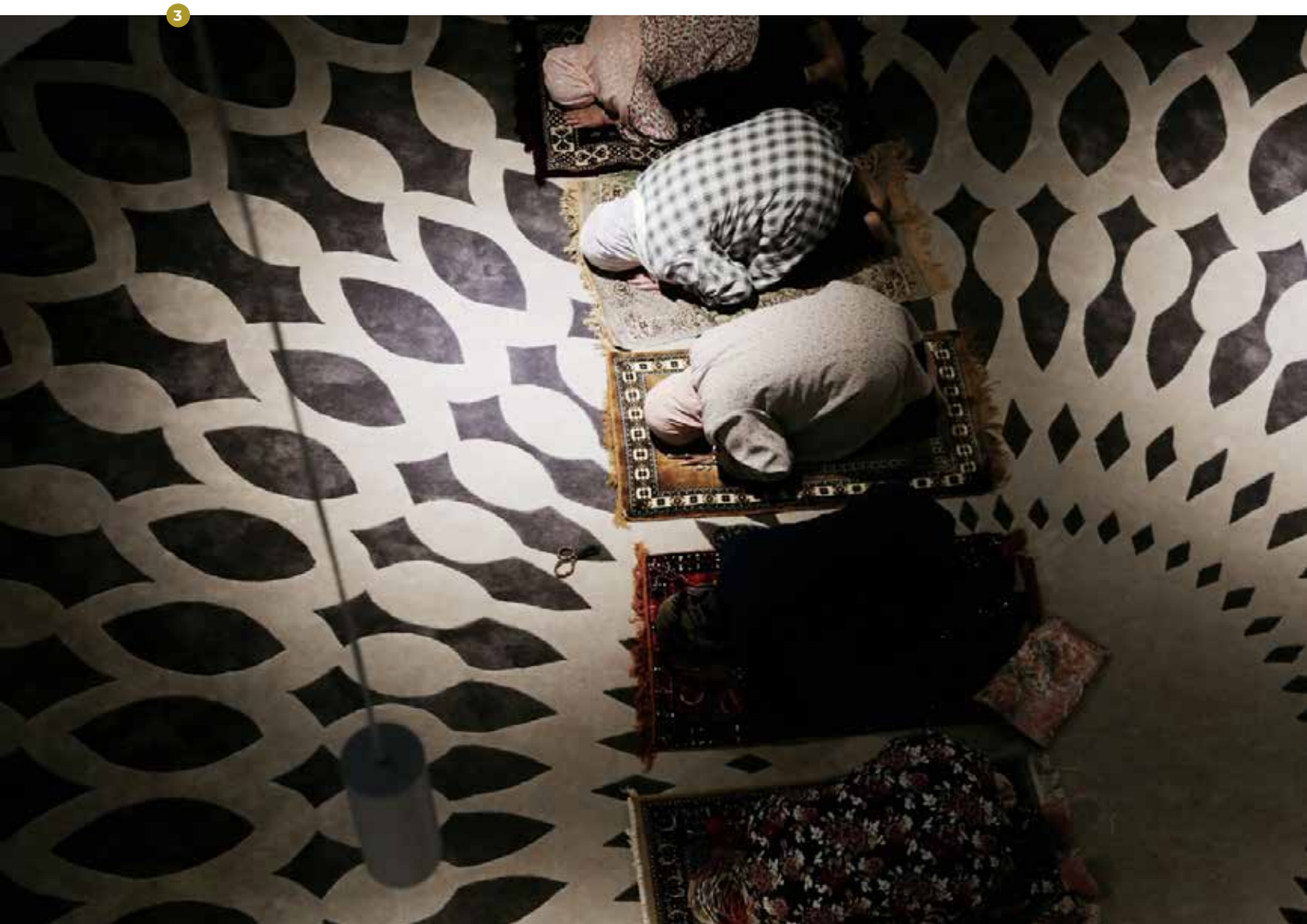
2

1. *Details of the concrete roof of the prayer hall.*

2. *Structural studies of the prayer hall.*

3. *Prayer hall floor showing the prayer spaces and the lower prayer levels... a calm spatial relationship beneath the serene atmosphere.*

3



Though modest in scale and budget, the Light of Allah Mosque incorporates a number of practical solutions aimed at ensuring environmental comfort, ease of maintenance, and long-term sustainability—qualities especially valued in a community-funded project with limited resources.

Service separation arcade.

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

From its inception, the Light of Allah Mosque has been more than a physical structure—it is a manifestation of social advocacy, cultural continuity, and gendered empowerment within a complex religious landscape. In a national context where expressions of Islamic faith are often muted, the emergence of a purpose-built mosque for women—initiated, funded, and supported by the community—represents a quiet but potent act of civic agency.

The mosque addresses a previously unacknowledged need. Before its construction in 2015, women worshippers were relegated to the basement of the main mosque—an arrangement that was physically inadequate and symbolically marginalizing. The new space, by contrast, is dignified, accessible, and designed with deliberate attentiveness to the comfort and identity of its users.

Throughout the on-site visit of the awards representative, Mr. Hakan Elevli, women voiced strong appreciation for the mosque's spatial qualities: its calm interior, climate-controlled environment, intuitive layout, and welcoming landscape. These are not luxuries—they are the architectural language of inclusion. By centering female worshippers not only spatially but also symbolically, the mosque becomes a site of affirmation, nurturing a sense of ownership and belonging.

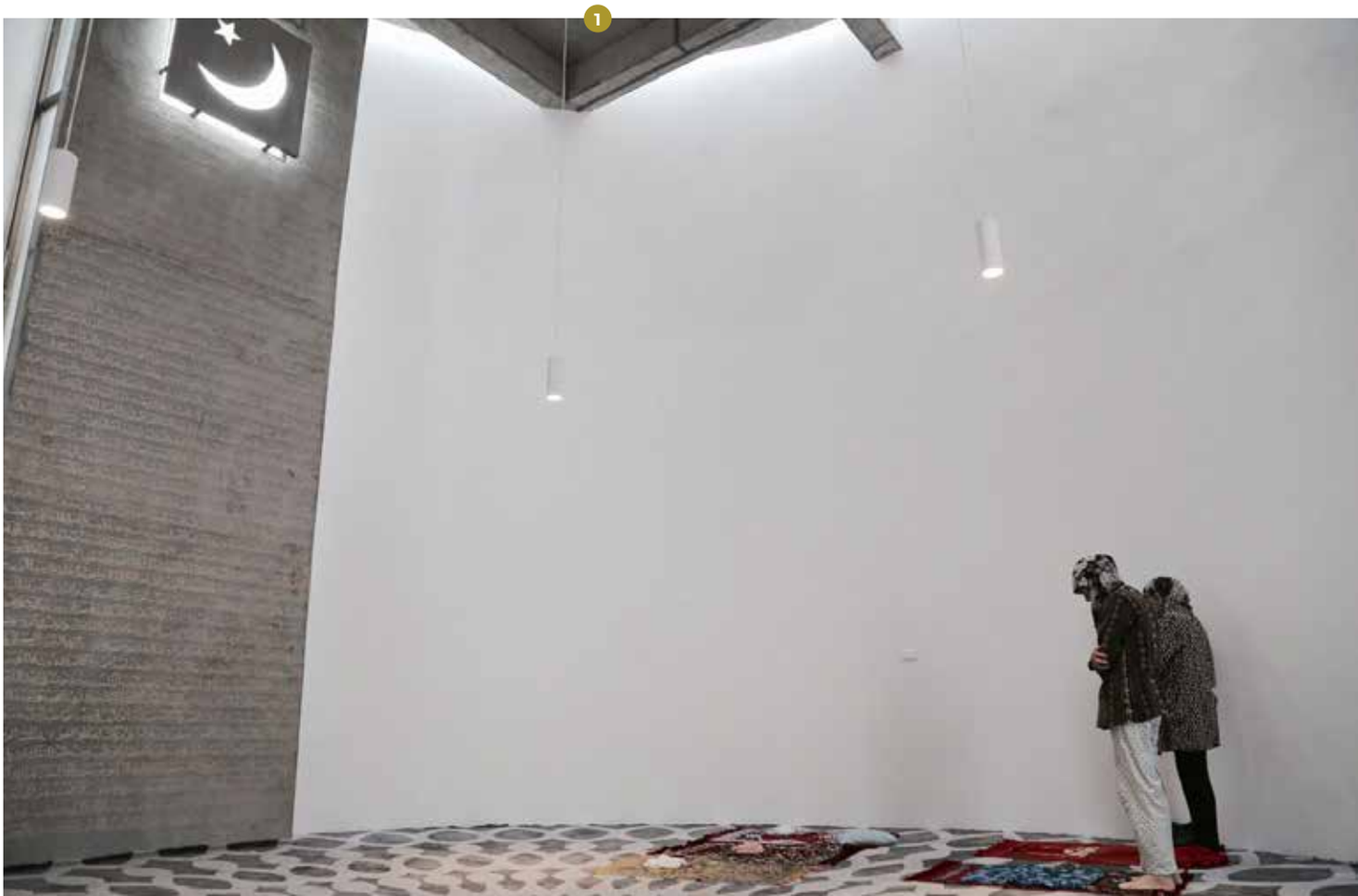
Equally important is the mosque's relational role within the community. Though designated for women, the building operates within a broader religious precinct that includes men's prayer spaces, classrooms, and communal gathering areas. The careful spatial choreography between the two mosques—each with its own architectural identity—reflects an ethos of mutual respect rather than separation. The women's mosque is not hidden; it is distinct. It does not retreat; it reframes.

The mosque is also successful in offering a space of intergenerational engagement. With its landscaped garden, reflective rock elements, and open circulation, it invites not only prayer but informal gathering, quiet reflection, and everyday use beyond ritual obligations. Children accompany mothers, elderly women rest under shaded trees, and the spatial openness allows for flexibility in function without compromising sanctity.

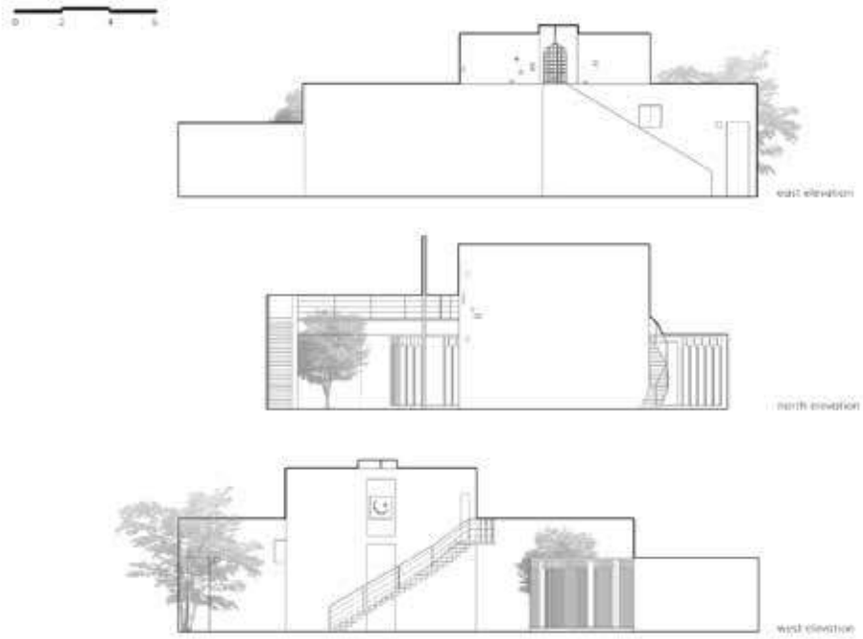
Accessibility, while not universal, is sensitively addressed. The elevated mezzanine platform is reachable by an external stair and bridge, and the flat landscape around the courtyard supports easy movement for those with limited mobility. The ablution area, while simple, is organized with care and dignity, reinforcing the mosque's broader commitment to bodily comfort and spiritual readiness.

Though modest in scale, the mosque's social resonance far exceeds its footprint. It stands as a symbol of community solidarity and resilience—built not through institutional endowments or state funding, but through donations, trust, and the collective will of a marginalized community to define its own spiritual space.

In this way, the Light of Allah Mosque succeeds not only as a religious building, but as a socially transformative environment—one that gives architectural form to dignity, identity, and shared futures.



1



2

1. *Part of the prayer hall.*

2. *Elevations.*

3. *The bridge connecting the main mosque mass with the cylindrical women's prayer hall.*

3

1. *External shot.*

2. *Prayer hall.*

3. *Quiet visual detail.*

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The Light of Allah Mosque is a rare architectural gesture—quiet in its presence yet resonant in its impact. Modest in scale, materially restrained, and tucked away from the street, it nonetheless marks one of the few known mosques in the world designed exclusively for women. Its value lies not in grandeur, but in its ability to reflect, with dignity and clarity, the spiritual and social aspirations of a marginalized community.

Perhaps what sets this mosque apart most strikingly is the way it embodies a distinctly Islamic feminine aesthetic—a language of modesty, concealment, and dignity. The building neither announces itself with fanfare nor seeks to impress with decoration. Instead, it creates a protective and contemplative space, resonating with the aesthetics of ḥishma (حشمة), offering not only seclusion but architectural legitimacy.

Formally, the mosque aligns itself with the ethos of modern architecture—not through mimicry, but through a distilled architectural language that evokes resonances with the work of Russian Constructivist Konstantin Melnikov and the metaphysical modernism of Louis Kahn. The monolithic cylindrical mass recalls Melnikov's House in Moscow, while the interplay of light and silence, along with the dialogue between circle and square, echoe Kahn's spiritual spatiality—particularly in his work in Bangladesh. Here, architectural form becomes a vessel for metaphysical meaning: the circle suggests Divine unity and infinity, while the square evokes matter, order, and earthly balance. In this formal pairing, Islamic metaphysics and Chinese cosmology intersect—each finding symbolic expression in geometric clarity.

Moreover, the distribution of light through narrow openings in the thick walls brings to mind Le Corbusier's Ronchamp Chapel, where light becomes an expressive architectural material. And in its geometric discipline and poetic restraint, the project echoes the spirit of Aldo Rossi, especially in his use of pure volumes charged with memory and meaning.

Yet the mosque is not a derivative work—it is a composed synthesis. Even in its cylindrical shape—uncommon in mosque architecture—it evokes historical resonance with the Arabic ṣāwmaʿa صومعة: the secluded retreat of worship. It would not be inaccurate, then, to describe this building as a female sāwmaʿa—a contemplative sanctuary within the contemporary Chinese landscape expressly for women.

The circular prayer carpet, centered beneath the square ceiling form, adds another symbolic layer. Resembling a Tibetan mandala in its radial geometry, it is visually and culturally evocative. Yet it also introduces a spatial tension: while the circle speaks of cosmic order, it subtly disrupts the Islamic logic of parallel rows facing Mecca. This dissonance does not detract from the project but invites reflection on the balance between visual symbolism and ritual function.

Importantly, this is not a top-down project. It was neither commissioned by a state body nor curated by a global design firm. It emerged from within—from a community that identified a gap, responded to a real need, and shaped a space accordingly. The architect was chosen not for prestige, but for understanding. The garden evolved not through landscape consultants, but through the father of the architect—driven by care and quiet vision.

In the end, the Light of Allah Mosque does not present a replicable model—it offers a living experience. It is not a prototype but a proposition, a social and architectural meditation on what it means to pray, to belong, and to be seen. If it succeeds, it does so not because it dazzles, but because it listens. Not because it performs, but because it shelters.

It reminds us that architecture can still be a form of social prayer — "for all people"!

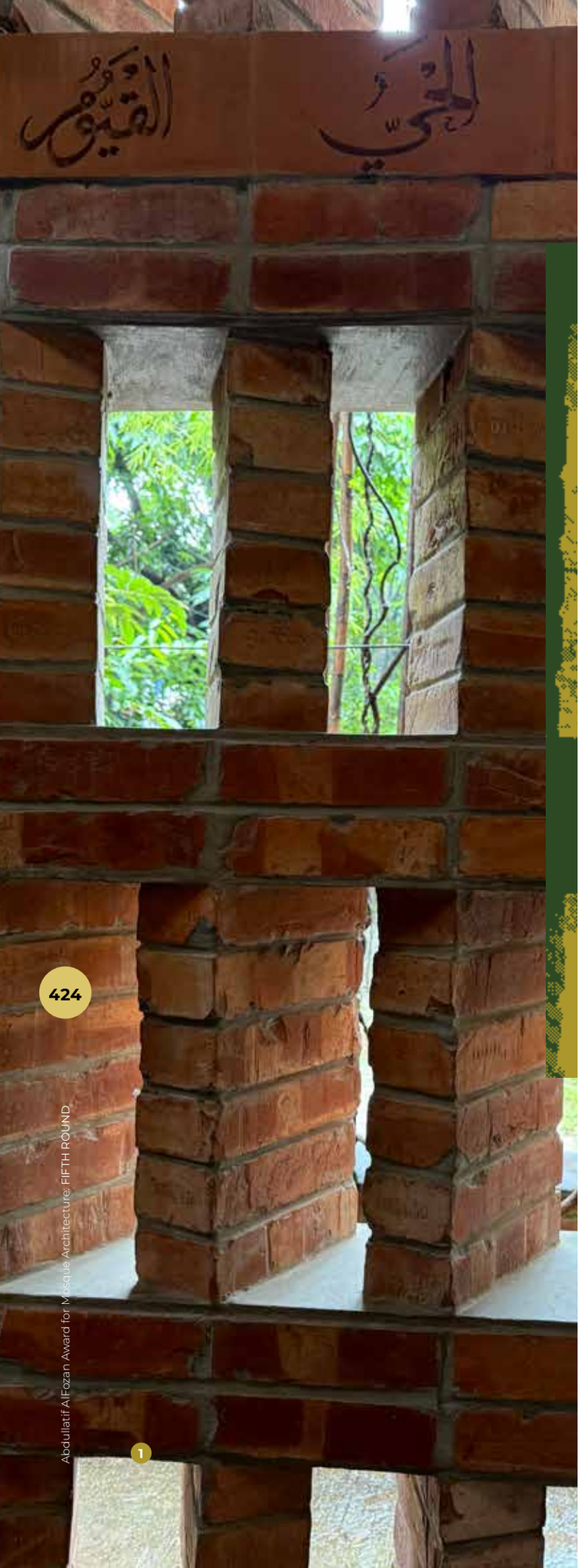
THE SPIRIT OF LOCAL ARCHITECTURE

MIAZI BARI

Mosque

Miazi Bari Mosque
Location: Chandpur, Bangladesh
Architect: GoAat
Year of Completion: 2015
Plot Area: 407 m^2
Built-Up Area: 156 m^2
Capacity: 160 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Sara O Khasib



Miazi Bari Mosque is a small neighborhood masjid in Chandpur, Bangladesh, built on waqf land donated by the Miazi family. It replaces an earlier temporary prayer space and accommodates approximately 160 worshippers across two levels. From the outset, the project was conceived not as a landmark, but as a carefully scaled insertion within a dense residential fabric.

Designed by GOAAT (Group of Architects and Thinkers) and completed in the mid-2010s, the mosque is closely tied to its immediate social context. The surrounding neighborhood is compact, largely pedestrian, and characterized by modest housing and narrow access routes. Within this setting, the mosque positions itself as a local spiritual and communal anchor rather than a visually dominant object.

The architectural intent emphasizes restraint, porosity, and environmental responsiveness. Instead of relying on conventional mosque iconography, the design focuses on spatial experience, climatic adaptation, and material economy. The project is described as operating through a "breathing envelope," suggesting a porous boundary that mediates light, air, and privacy while maintaining a low-profile presence.

Socially, the mosque is conceived as an extension of everyday community life. It supports prayer, gathering, and informal communal use without seeking monumentality or symbolic emphasis. This ambition aligns with the modest scale of the site, limited resources, and the long-term maintenance capacities of the local community.

At the same time, the project's deliberate visual modesty invites closer examination. Questions of legibility, inclusivity, and accessibility-particularly within such a restrained architectural language-will be addressed carefully in the sections that follow.

1

2

URBAN INTEGRATION

Miazi Bari Mosque is situated within a dense residential neighborhood in Chandpur, where daily life unfolds at a close, interpersonal scale. The urban fabric is compact and predominantly pedestrian, shaped by narrow streets, small dwellings, and informal social proximity. In this context, the mosque does not operate as an isolated destination but as part of a continuous lived environment.

The site itself occupies a rare open plot within this dense setting, adjacent to a family graveyard that has long been part of the neighborhood's collective memory. This proximity establishes a layered social and spiritual condition, where daily life, remembrance, and worship coexist within a shared spatial field. The mosque's placement at this threshold gives it a role that is both intimate and communal, without asserting dominance over its surroundings.

Movement patterns around the mosque are shaped by foot traffic rather than vehicles. Approaches occur through narrow paths and local streets that gradually lead toward the site. This mode of access reinforces the mosque's embedded character and aligns with the everyday rhythms of the neighborhood. Arrival is not marked by a sudden architectural reveal, but by a gradual transition from residential space to a quieter, more focused environment.

1. *Details of the brick wall showing perforated openings (jali) allowing natural light and ventilation.*

2. *Aerial image showing the site plan and access roads to the mosque.*

Socially, the mosque serves an immediate and familiar community. Worshippers are largely residents of the surrounding area, and the mosque's scale reflects this reality. Its role extends beyond the five daily prayers to include gatherings connected to life-cycle events, religious occasions, and informal communal use. These activities reinforce the mosque's function as a shared social space rather than a purely ritual enclosure.

Within this urban and social framework, the mosque adopts a deliberately restrained presence. Its relationship to the neighborhood is based on continuity rather than contrast, and on participation rather than representation. This position frames the architectural choices discussed in the following sections, particularly in relation to form, access, and the negotiation between openness and privacy.

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Miazi Bari Mosque adopts a restrained exterior presence that aligns closely with the scale and character of its residential surroundings. The building maintains a compact mass and modest height, allowing it to sit comfortably within the neighborhood rather than asserting itself as a visual landmark.

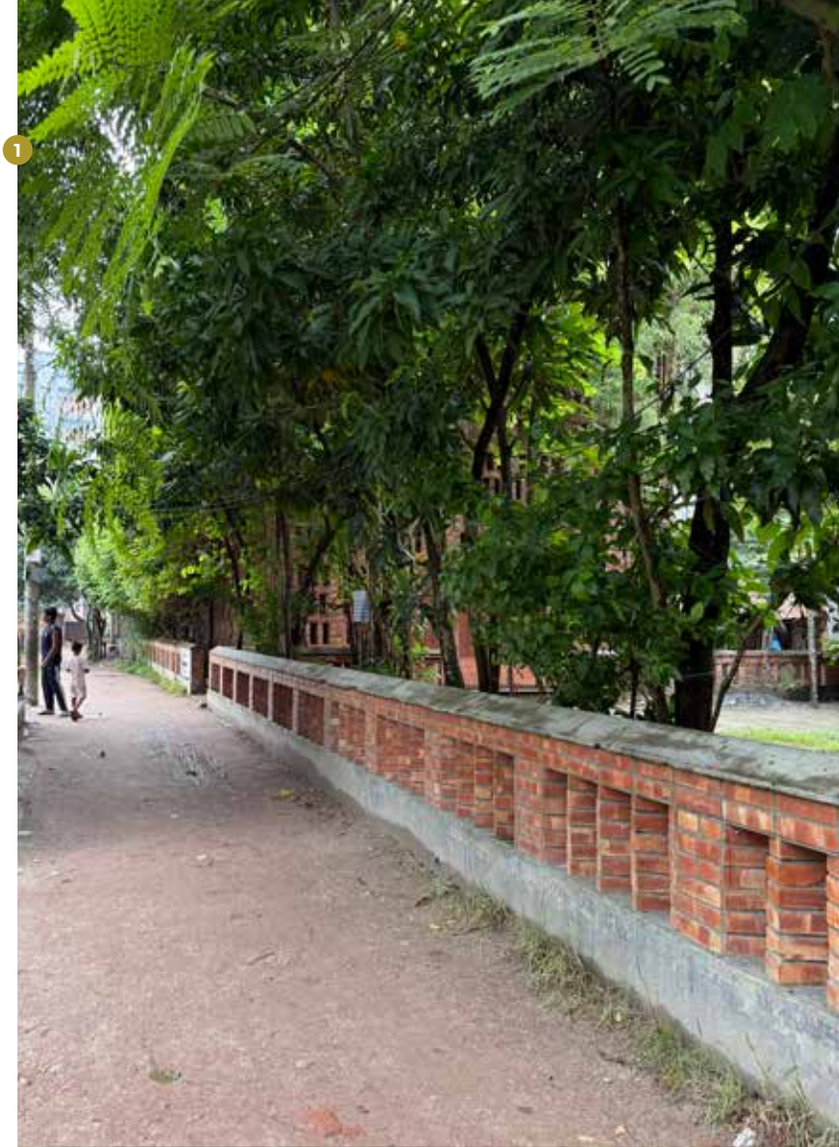
The primary exterior surface is formed by perforated brickwork that acts as a climatic and spatial filter. This porous envelope moderates daylight, supports natural ventilation, and maintains privacy, allowing the mosque to remain environmentally responsive without becoming visually closed or heavy.

Vegetation is integrated along selected façades as a secondary architectural layer. This planted screen softens the building's edges and contributes to shading and cooling, while allowing the mosque's appearance to evolve over time. The green layer largely conceals the roof from street level, reinforcing the building's quiet presence within the urban fabric.

Conventional mosque elements are deliberately recalibrated. The minaret is replaced by a simple sound column that fulfills functional requirements without introducing vertical emphasis. Likewise, the dome is replaced by a lightweight barrel vault. Structurally supported by a steel frame and covered with a semi translucent tensile membrane, the vault is not prominent in street-level views but becomes legible from above and plays a decisive role in shaping the interior atmosphere.

Material choices reinforce this disciplined approach. Locally familiar brick and concrete establish durability, economy, and continuity with regional construction practices, supporting long-term use with minimal maintenance.

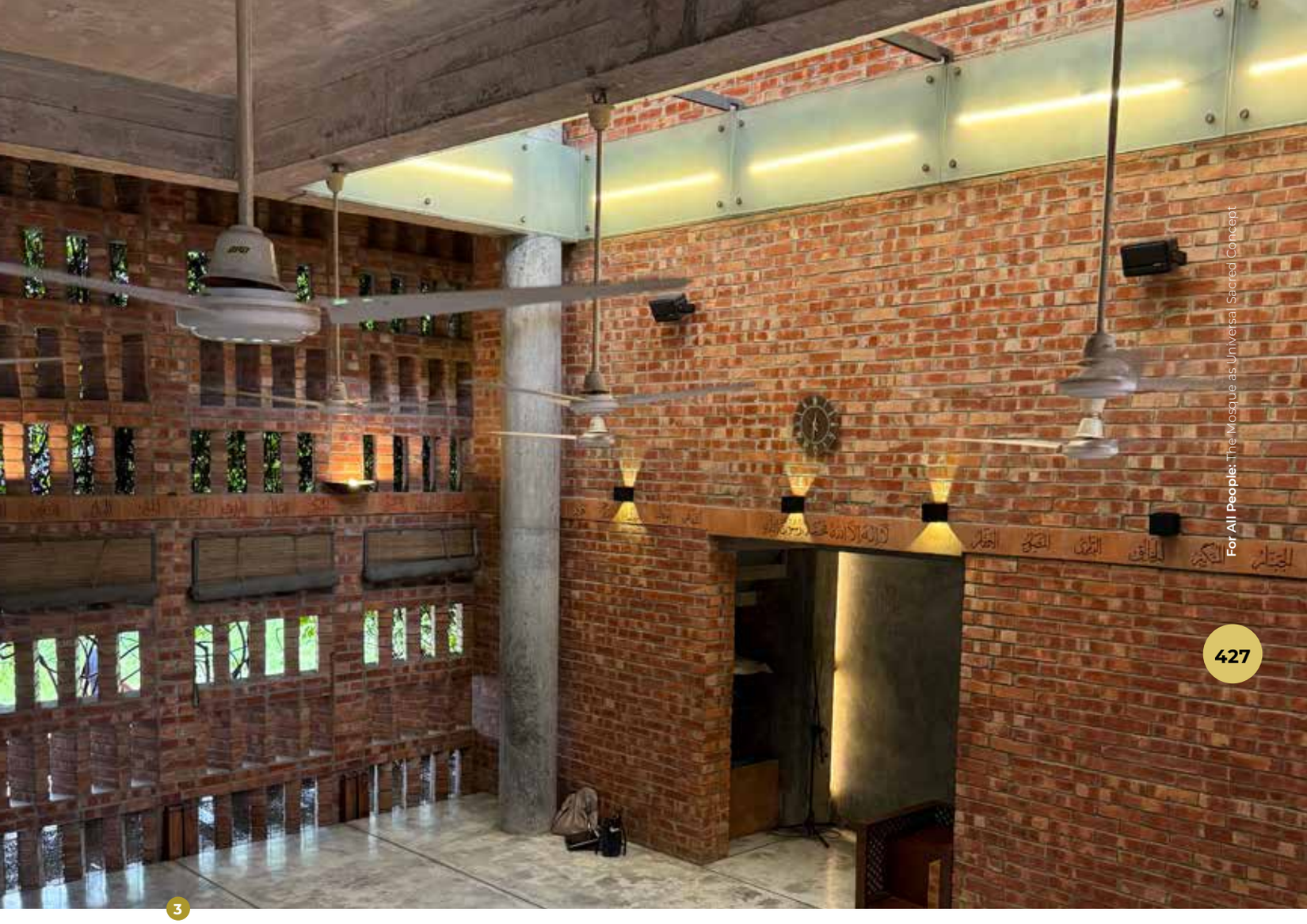
The exterior architecture therefore prioritizes environmental performance and contextual fit over visual assertion. This restraint places greater emphasis on spatial clarity, approach, and interior experience, which are addressed in the sections that follow.



1. *Circulation paths surrounding the mosque.*

2. *The mosque mass integrated with and extending from the urban context.*

3. *Part of the prayer hall.*



3

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of Miazi Bari Mosque is defined by clarity, light, and spatial restraint. Entry into the prayer space is modest, leading into an interior that feels more generous than its dimensions suggest, achieved through vertical continuity and controlled illumination rather than scale.

The prayer hall follows a clear square organization across two levels, unified by a vertical void near the qibla wall. This opening visually connects the lower and upper prayer areas, reinforcing collective presence while maintaining functional order. Circulation remains direct and aligned with prayer orientation.

Daylight shapes the interior atmosphere. Filtered light enters laterally through the perforated brick envelope, producing soft and changing patterns throughout the day. This is complemented by overhead light introduced through the barrel vault, whose semi-translucent membrane diffuses light evenly and avoids glare.

The barrel vault functions as an environmental device rather than a symbolic form. It supports natural ventilation by allowing warm air to rise and escape, while establishing a gentle vertical emphasis within the restrained geometry of the space.

Interior materials are direct and durable, consistent with the mosque's overall economy of means. The mihrab is defined through recession and light rather than ornament, and the minbar remains simple and movable, supporting flexible use.

Overall, the interior prioritizes atmosphere and comfort over representation. Its architectural value lies in how effectively light, proportion, and ventilation support prayer and communal presence, a performance that is closely linked to the technical strategies discussed next.

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS & SUSTAINABILITY

The technical approach of Miazi Bari Mosque is based on simplicity, passive performance, and long-term durability. Rather than relying on complex systems, the project prioritizes architectural strategies that respond directly to climate, budget, and patterns of use.

Environmental control is achieved primarily through passive means. The perforated brick envelope allows continuous air movement while filtering heat and glare. This lateral ventilation is reinforced by the vertical behavior of the barrel vault, which enables warm air to rise and dissipate naturally. As a result, thermal comfort is largely maintained without mechanical cooling, with ceiling fans used only to assist air circulation when needed.

Natural lighting is a key component of the mosque's environmental strategy. Daylight enters through both the porous walls and the semi-translucent barrel vault, allowing the prayer hall to remain well-lit during daytime hours without reliance on artificial lighting. Artificial lighting is therefore limited to early morning, evening, and night use, and is applied in a restrained manner to support orientation and focus rather than visual effect.

Material selection supports both sustainability and maintenance considerations. Reinforced concrete provides structural stability, while locally produced brick forms the primary envelope. These materials are durable, readily available, and familiar to local construction practices, reducing long-term maintenance demands and reliance on specialized repair.

2

Vegetation integrated into the building envelope further contributes to environmental performance. The planted layer provides additional shading, cools incoming air, and mitigates dust and noise, while also reducing heat gain on exposed surfaces.

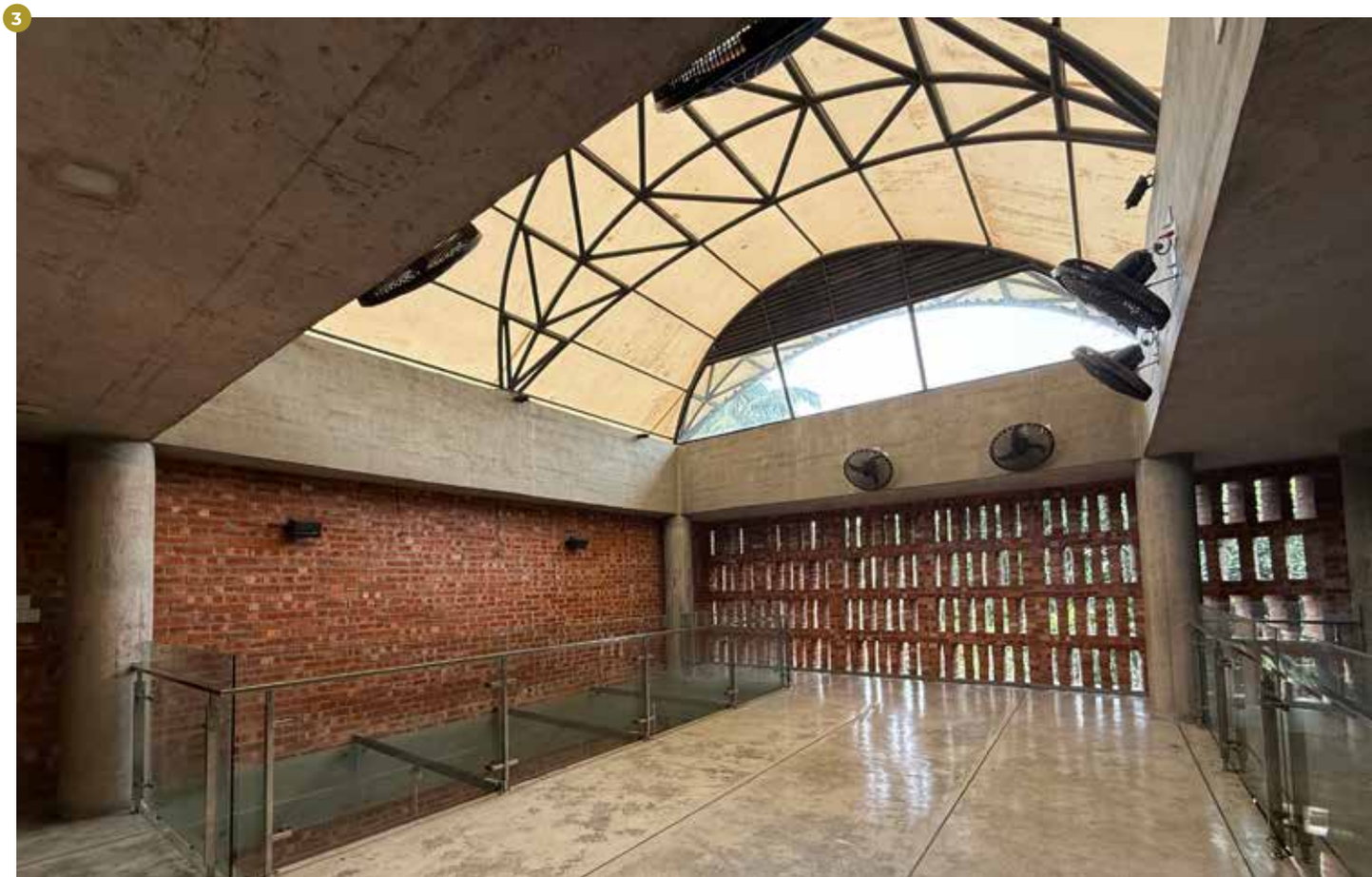
Overall, the mosque demonstrates a technically modest yet effective approach to sustainability. Its performance depends less on technological innovation and more on the careful coordination of form, material, and climate, resulting in a building that remains economical to operate and resilient over time.

1. *The dominance of jali openings makes the prayer hall a space between interior and exterior.*

2. *Prayer hall.*

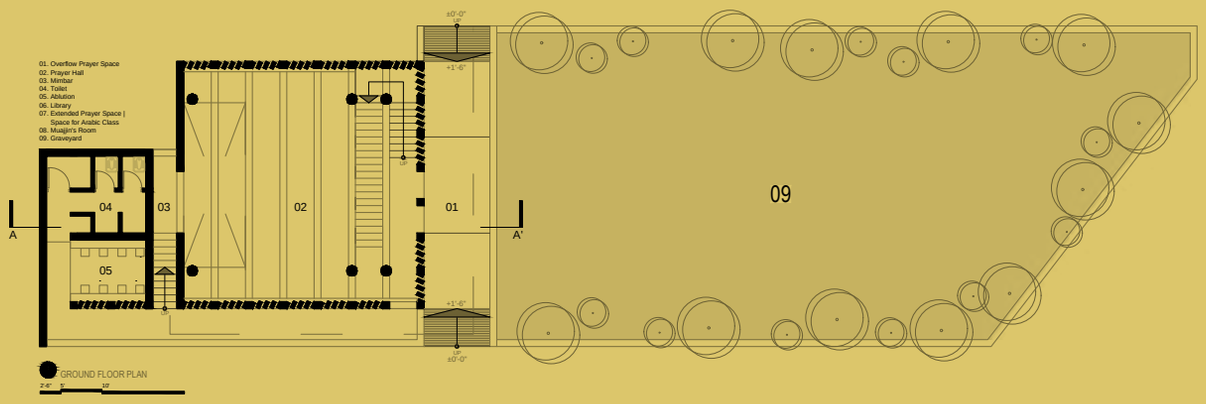
3. *Prayer hall roof.*

3

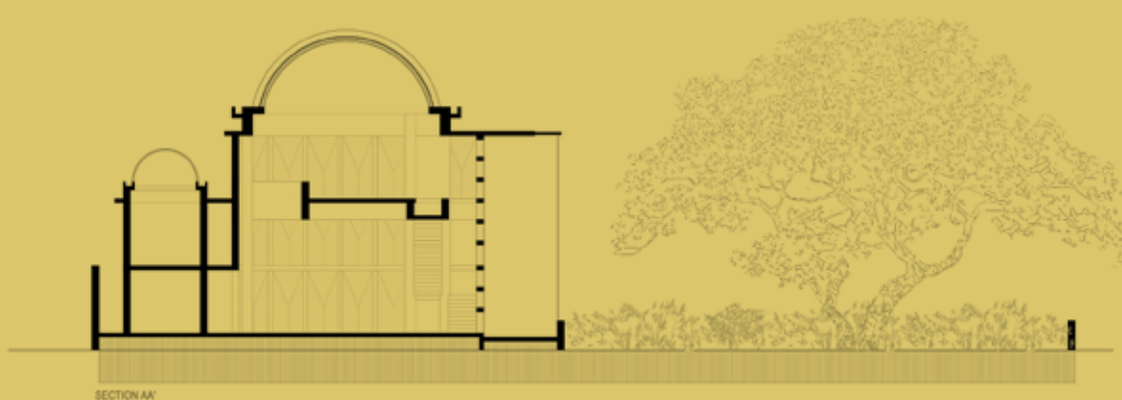


The technical approach of Miazi Bari Mosque is based on simplicity, passive performance, and long-term durability. Rather than relying on complex systems, the project prioritizes architectural strategies that respond directly to climate, budget, and patterns of use.

This is how the mosque appears when viewed in relation to its surrounding residential context.


01. Overflow Prayer Space
02. Prayer Hall
03. Mimbar
04. Toilet
05. Ablution
06. Library
07. Extended Prayer Space |
Space for Arabic Class
08. Muajjin's Room
09. Graveyard
04
03
02
01
09
05
A
A'
±0'-0"
+1'-6"
+1'-6"
±0'-0"
GROUND FLOOR PLAN

SOUTH ELEVATION


SECTION AA'

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

Miazi Bari Mosque functions primarily as a local masjid serving its immediate neighborhood. Its scale, layout, and programming reflect the rhythms of a close-knit residential community, where worshippers arrive on foot and the mosque is integrated into daily life rather than approached as a destination.

Beyond daily prayers, the prayer hall accommodates communal activities such as religious gatherings, funerary rites, and occasional social events, reinforcing its role as a shared civic space. This extended use supports the mosque's social relevance without requiring additional formal spaces or architectural separation.

Accessibility is addressed within the limits of the site and context. Pedestrian access is clear, and transitional ramps are provided along approach routes. However, certain level changes remain at key thresholds, which may restrict full accessibility for users with limited mobility. These conditions appear less as oversights than as outcomes of spatial constraints and incremental adaptation.

The mosque does not currently provide a dedicated prayer space for women, reflecting prevailing local practices and site limitations. While culturally consistent, this decision narrows the mosque's inclusivity and remains an important consideration when evaluating its social reach over time.

Overall, the mosque performs effectively as a community-centered religious space. Its social success lies in familiarity, regular use, and adaptability, while questions of broader inclusivity and universal access are acknowledged as part of its evolving relationship with the community.

1

1. *One of the entrances.*

2. *When natural light penetrates the prayer hall.*

2

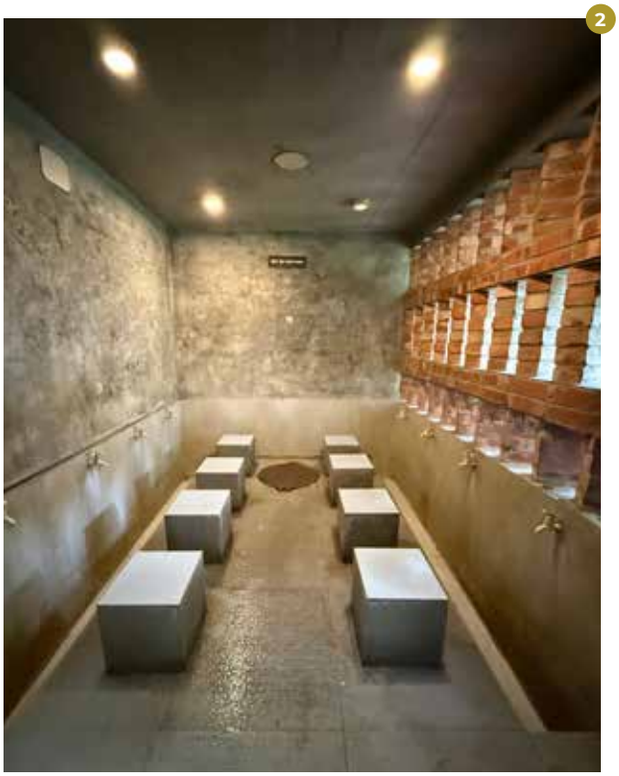
1

1. Details of the exterior brick wall.

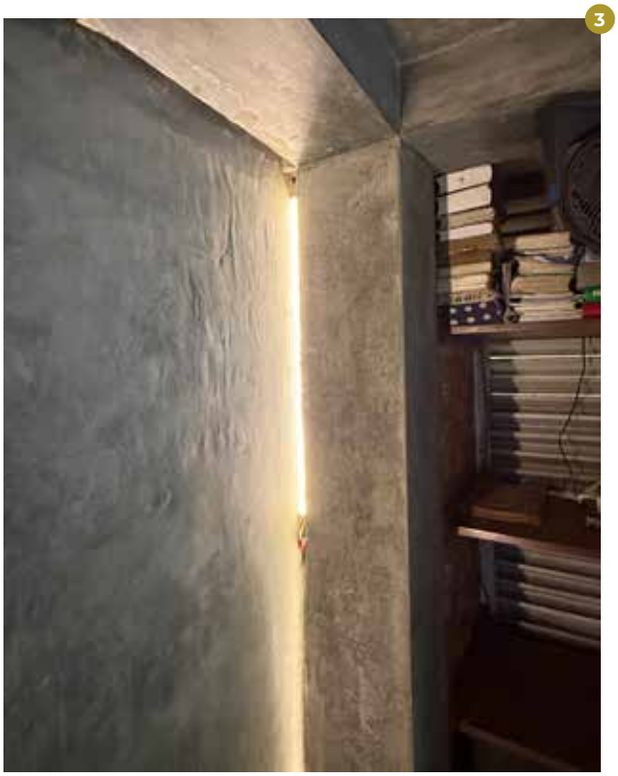
2. Ablution room.

3. Details from one of the walls.

4. The mosque from the exterior.



2



3

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

Miazi Bari Mosque demonstrates how a small community masjid can achieve architectural clarity through restraint rather than assertion. Its strength lies in the careful alignment of scale, material, climate, and use, resulting in a building that fits naturally within its neighborhood and remains economically and environmentally viable over time.

The project avoids symbolic excess and instead relies on spatial performance. Light, air movement, and proportion shape the worship experience more than form or imagery. The recalibration of conventional mosque elements, such as the use of a sound column and a lightweight barrel vault, reflects a pragmatic design approach grounded in context and resources rather than representation.

At the same time, the mosque's quiet presence places greater responsibility on spatial clarity and inclusivity. While it performs effectively for its immediate community, limitations related to full accessibility and gender inclusion remain part of its unresolved architectural scope. These conditions do not undermine the project's intent, but they frame its achievements within clearly defined social and cultural boundaries.

Overall, Miazi Bari Mosque succeeds as a modest yet thoughtful architectural work. It offers a credible model for community-based mosque design where environmental intelligence, durability, and social familiarity take precedence over visual prominence. Its value lies not in what it claims to represent, but in how consistently it serves those who use it.

Within the context of the Al-Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture, Miazi Bari Mosque can be read as part of a broader, quietly consistent body of contemporary mosque work emerging from Bangladesh. Rather than pursuing formal novelty, this tradition has tended to focus on climate responsiveness, material economy, and community-centered use. In this sense, the project does not seek distinction through exception, but through continuity, offering a measured contribution to an evolving architectural culture shaped by restraint, pragmatism, and local intelligence.

FROM THE OUTSIDE IN
AND FROM THE INSIDE OUT

ZEBUN NESSA

Mosque

Zebun Nessa Mosque
Location: Ashulia, Bangladesh
Architect: Studio Morphogenesis
Year of Completion: 2023
Plot Area: 562 m²
Built-Up Area: 1,034 m²
Capacity: 180 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Sara O Khasib

Zebun Nessa Mosque is located in Ashulia, a fast-growing industrial area on the outskirts of Dhaka, within a gated textile factory compound owned by the IDS Group and set directly in front of an existing natural pond. It is intended as a moment of calm within an intense industrial environment, primarily serving the factory's workforce, reported as over 6,000 workers.

The project was initiated by the factory owner and IDS Group managing director, Idris (Mohd) Shakur, in memory of his late mother, Zebun Nessa. Beyond commemoration, the stated intent was to build a place of worship at the heart of the workplace as a social-spiritual gesture that might reinforce respect and care between management and workers. Studio Morphogenesis had already been involved in the compound's broader expansion and planning, with a leftover plot facing the pond reserved for the mosque.

Reported figures indicate an area of about 563 m², with capacity noted as about 180 worshippers on the ground floor, rising to about 250 when including the mezzanine level and outdoor plaza. The design was initiated in 2019, with construction reported between 2020 and 2023.

The mosque was included in TIME's "World's Greatest Places 2025" list, widely presented as the first project from Bangladesh to receive this recognition. This is supported by TIME's own listing and multiple Bangladeshi press reports.

2

URBAN INTEGRATION

The mosque is conceived as a retreat inserted into an industrial compound surrounded by utilitarian factory buildings, including a washing hub, a utility building, an effluent treatment plant, and the main production facility. Its placement on a leftover plot beside the pond positions nature as a counterpoint to factory life, and the project positions this space as a sense of belonging for workers, many of whom are not originally from Ashulia.

1. *This is how the mosque mass appears floating above water.*

2. *General view of the mosque within the urban context.*

Arrival is described as a controlled sequence starting at the factory gate, moving along internal roads and between buildings, until the mosque's northeast entry is gradually revealed. The approach uses a gently curving façade and a forecourt as an intermediary condition before entering the prayer hall.

The building's earth and terracotta-associated palette is translated here into integrally pigmented concrete in a brick-toned, pinkish register, softening the perceived coldness of concrete while connecting the project to local architectural memory. This reading is consistent with architect-published descriptions.

Abdullatif AlFozan Award for Mosque Architecture: FIFTH ROUND

1. *Prayer hall and the women's prayer space on the first floor.*

2. *Exterior mosque courtyards functioning as lively social spaces.*

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Formally, the project is developed as a square outer enclosure containing a circular prayer hall, producing four corner voids that operate as courts, light wells, and planted pockets. The mass is lifted on a plinth, linked to vernacular flood-resilient practices in monsoon climates.

The exterior is defined by mono-material pigmented concrete and a perforated envelope. The perforations read as a reinterpretation of Bengali jali logic, translating a traditionally brick-based porous screen into concrete for durability while retaining ventilation and filtered light.

Two major formal moves organize the massing. The west side curves outward toward the pond, aligning the qibla side with water and horizon, while the east side uses curvature to shape the approach and announce entry. The northeast corner forms a 'hanging' condition that marks the main entrance beneath an overhead void.

The forecourt is treated as more than leftover space: it is built in two levels with a ramp, combining a green zone and a mosaic-like platform that can also function as overflow prayer space. Details noted include large, perforated metal entrance doors (red-oxide finish), sliding and folding along tracks to modulate openness and airflow.

Ablution and toilets are deliberately minimal in number, justified by the surrounding factory buildings that already provide facilities for workers. The mosque includes a single small toilet block and a dedicated ablution zone that frames views to the pond under a curved concrete canopy.

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior sequence begins before entry: when the doors open, the eye aligns directly toward the mihrab and the pond beyond, establishing a deliberate visual axis between prayer direction and landscape.

Inside, the space unfolds in measured steps. A crescent-shaped mezzanine partially conceals the main volume at entry, delaying full comprehension of the circular space and intensifying attention toward the dome above. The floor shifts from exterior warm tones to a polished turquoise surface, repeatedly interpreted as a visual continuation of the adjacent waterbody.

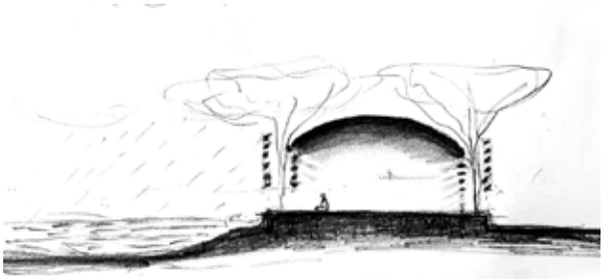
The qibla condition is intentionally not a solid wall. Instead, it is a wide arched opening framing the pond, with a freestanding glass mihrab positioned as the primary focal element. The mihrab is a recycled-glass element, made in collaboration with artist Wakilur Rahman, giving a luminous green presence against the otherwise restrained interior.

Perforated curved walls modulate light and ventilation. Beyond the qibla arch, three primary openings are noted, including the northeast entrance and a southern opening for additional daylight. Artificial lighting is integrated within wall perforations, yet the prayer space typically does not require it during daytime use.

Women's prayer space is placed on the mezzanine level, overlooking the main hall. It is reached via a separate external metal staircase in the southeast corner void. This provides a dedicated and legible women's zone, but access remains stair-dependent, with no step-free route to the upper level from the ramped forecourt.

1

Abdullatif AlFozan Award for Mosque Architecture: FIFTH ROUND



2

1. The outer perforated concrete screen.

2. Preliminary studies.

3. Part of the prayer hall.

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS & SUSTAINABILITY

The primary structural system is reinforced concrete beams and columns supporting a shallow concrete shell dome. The dome is approximately 15 m in diameter and rising to about 8 m at its highest point, with a narrow gap beneath it that admits a ring of light and assists ventilation.

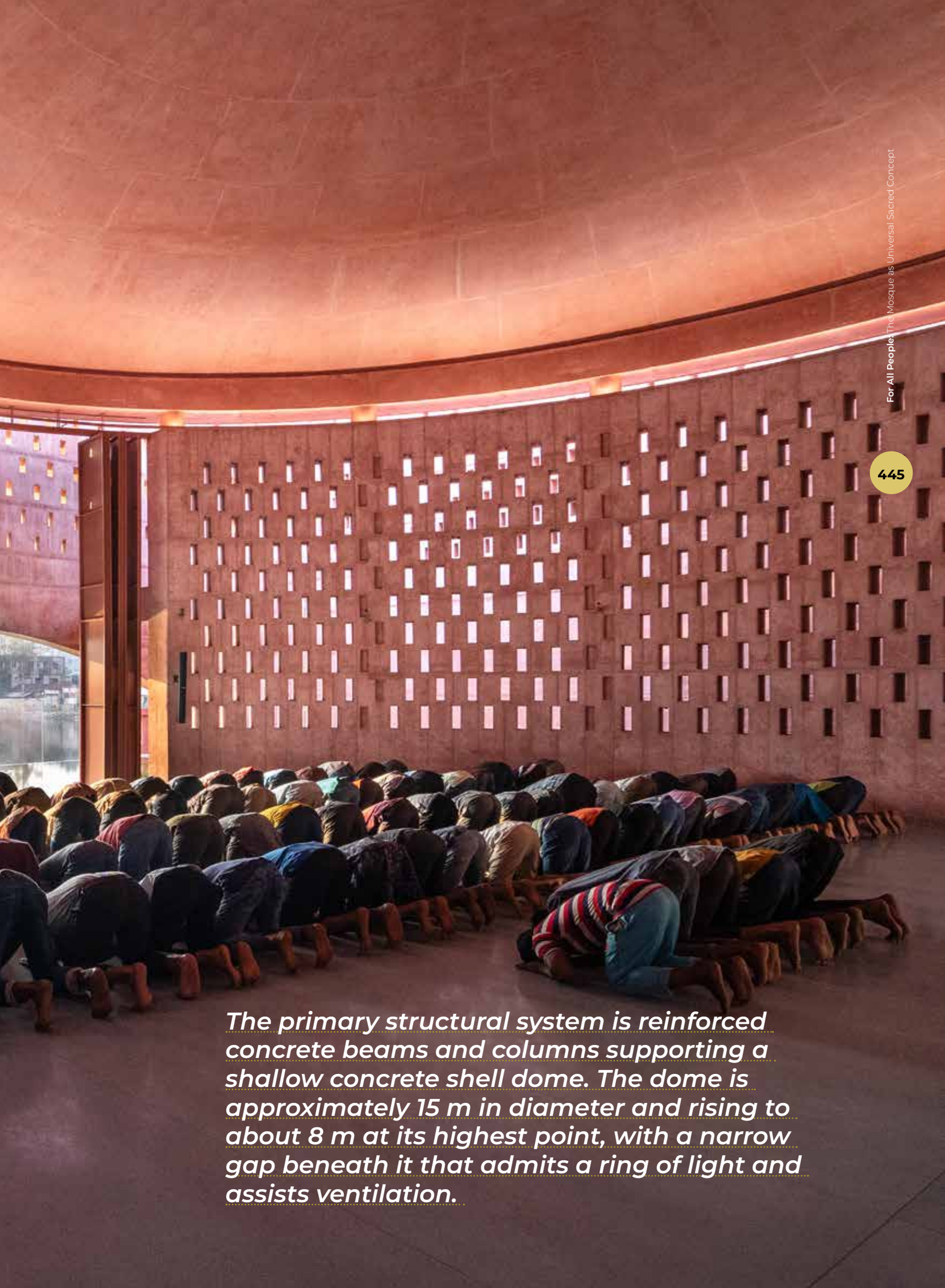
The building is organized as two layers: an inner circular prayer hall wrapped by an outer perforated concrete screen that filters air and light and forms corner courts in between. The outer screen is reported as structurally “hung” from the eastern side through supporting beams, touching down at the north and south, and opening to the west as the qibla arch.

Passive environmental strategies are presented as central to the project: perforated façades, planted courts, the ventilated dome gap, and the waterbody behind the qibla are intended to contribute to a cooler interior without mechanical cooling. Rainwater is directed via suspended metal chains, and greywater from ablution is reportedly collected in a tank beneath the ablution area for irrigation reuse.

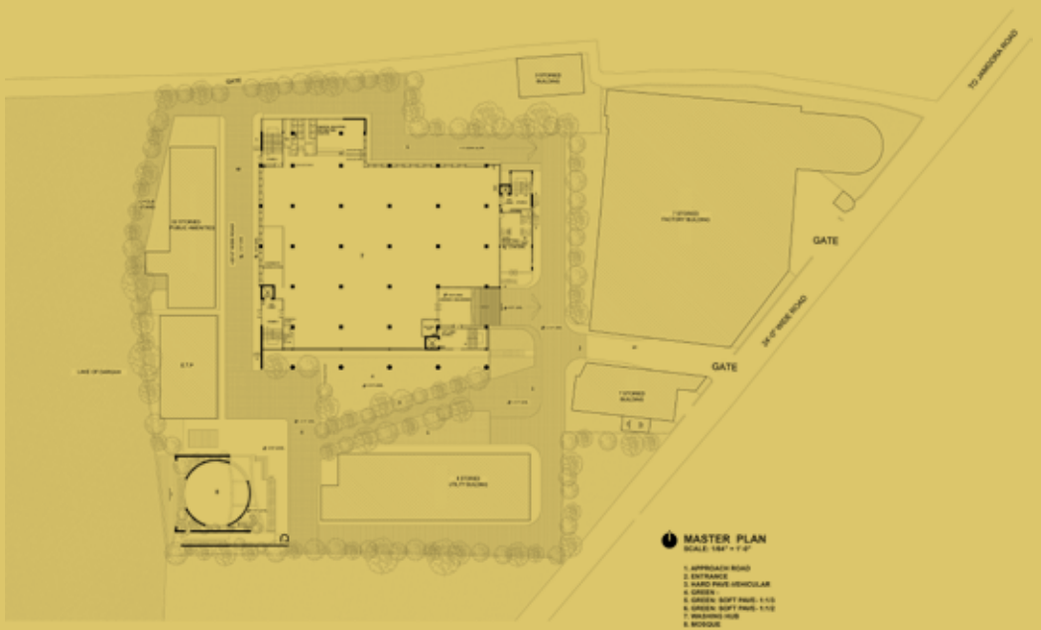
On material strategy and maintainability, integrally pigmented concrete is favored over surface paint to reduce weathering. The construction process also reportedly reused a substantial portion of formwork from adjacent works, along with the wooden blocks used for perforation casting, framed as a practical measure to reduce cost and waste.

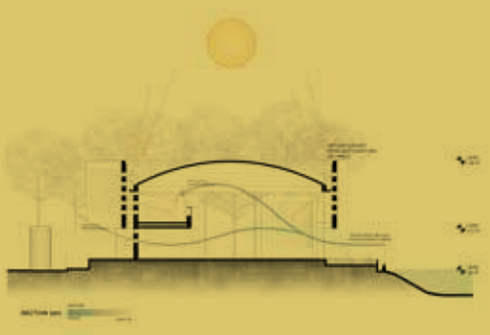
3

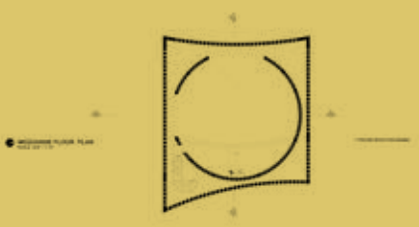
Prayer hall... deep perspective opening toward the exterior.

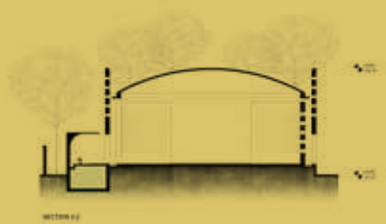


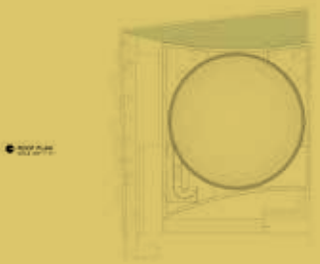
The primary structural system is reinforced concrete beams and columns supporting a shallow concrete shell dome. The dome is approximately 15 m in diameter and rising to about 8 m at its highest point, with a narrow gap beneath it that admits a ring of light and assists ventilation.


GATE
GATE
MASTER PLAN









SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

Within the factory compound, the mosque functions as one of the few meaningful open spaces available to workers, supporting rest, gathering, and informal social life alongside daily prayers. The plaza is repeatedly positioned as a multifunctional extension of the prayer hall, including overflow prayer use.

Recurring community-oriented activities are hosted in and around the mosque, including Ramadan iftar gatherings, medical check-ups, school visits, and informal meetings. External visitors can also access the mosque, though entry is mediated by the factory gate and internal security protocols.

Gender inclusion is treated as a key ambition, addressed through a dedicated women's mezzanine and a separate access stair. At the same time, inclusivity remains partial in mobility terms, since access to the upper level is stair-dependent.

1. *The outer wall is concave and the openings (jali) appear sternly..*

2. *The exterior plaza around the mosque representing a shared social space.*

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

Zebun Nessa Mosque is a carefully calibrated intervention within a demanding industrial setting. It attempts to shift workers from the cadence of production to a quieter register through a disciplined spatial sequence, measured light, and a deliberate reliance on landscape and water as stabilizing anchors.

The design also deserves praise for the clarity of its architectural idea. A limited material palette, a square-and-circle organizational logic, and a dome strategy that prioritizes interior experience over exterior iconography produce a coherent whole that feels authored rather than assembled. The avoidance of conventional mosque markers, such as a monumental external dome or minaret, does not read as loss. It reads as a choice to locate meaning in space, light, and orientation instead of instant recognizability.

Seen within the wider context of recent Bangladeshi mosque architecture, the project can be read as part of a notable contemporary tendency toward rigorous experimentation, where restraint, climatic intelligence, and spatial dignity are often pursued through limited means. In that sense, Zebun Nessa Mosque aligns with a broader architectural confidence in Bangladesh today: the willingness to reimagine the mosque without severing it from its essentials.

This resonates closely with the interpretive horizon of the book's title, Kāffatan li'l-Nās, inclusive for all people. Not because the mosque claims universality in a doctrinal sense, but because it reaffirms, in architectural terms, a constant center that can still gather difference: qiblah, openness, and the possibility of a shared calm. Unity here is not the negation of diversity. It is what allows diverse architectural dialects to remain meaningfully oriented.

From a performance standpoint, the project's strongest ambitions lie in passive ventilation, daylighting, and reduced dependence on mechanical systems, supported by basic rainwater handling and greywater reuse. Its most persistent limitation is not formal but civic: access remains institutionally controlled by the factory gate and security protocols. As the mosque's visibility grows, the tension between a workplace sanctuary and a wider civic destination becomes a governance question more than a design one.

Finally, the commissioning stance itself merits reflection. The decision to entrust a design-driven architectural practice with a mosque of contemporary ambition for a workers' community within a production compound can be read as an ethically aware gesture: a quiet insistence that architectural quality is not a privilege reserved for elites. Yet that dignity ultimately depends on what is sustained over time, particularly daily accessibility, inclusive use, and long-term maintenance, so that the building's care remains a lived reality rather than a symbolic statement.

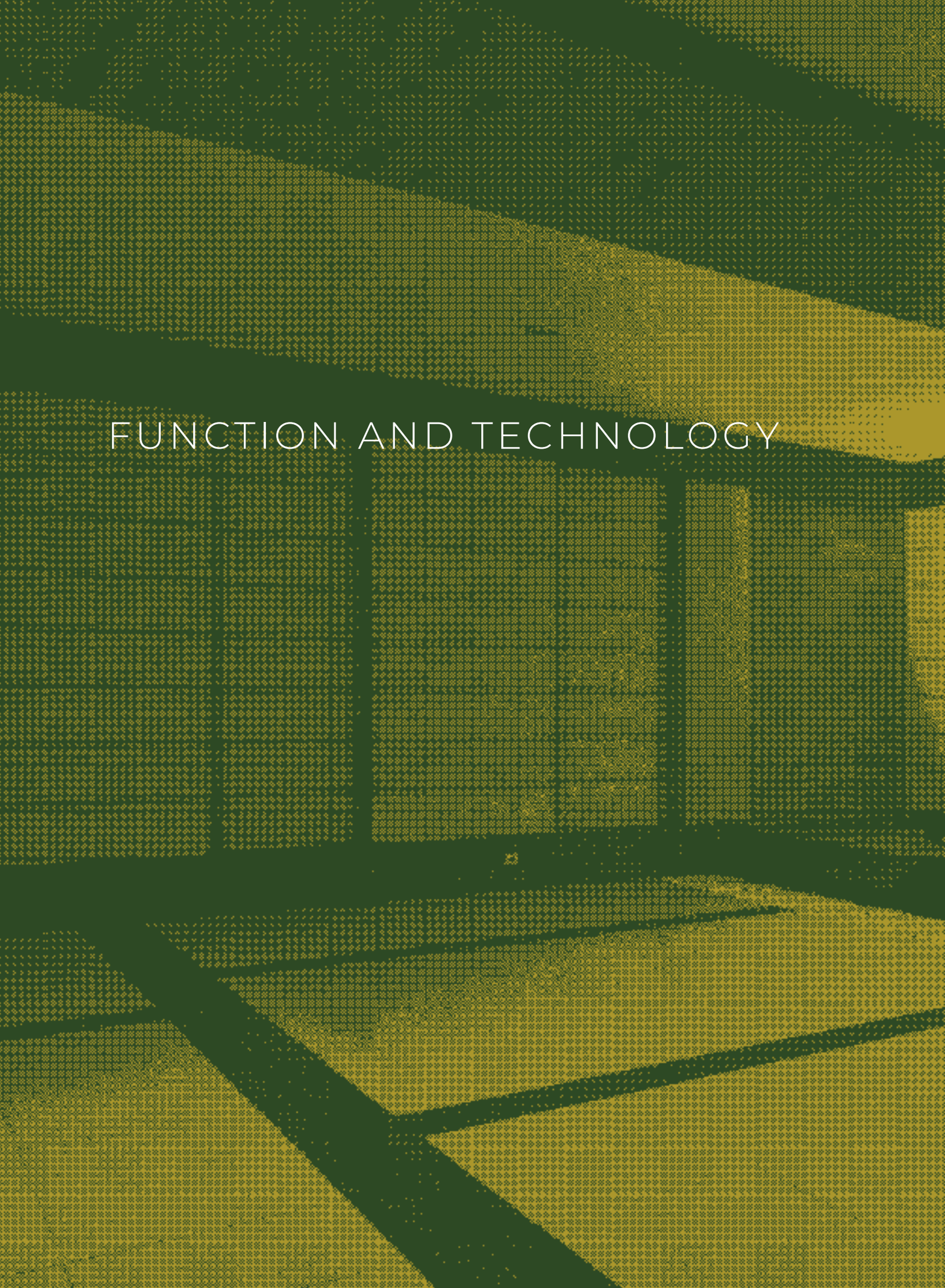
1. *Detail of the relationship between the prayer hall wall and the surrounding wall.*

2. *Ablution area.*

3. *This is how the cylindrical prayer hall appears surrounded by brick walls.*

1

2


FUNCTION AND TECHNOLOGY

THE TRAD JAPANESE

Mosque

The Trad Japanese Mosque
Location: Bekasi Regency, Indonesia
Architect: Muhammad Egha
Year of Completion: 2013
Plot Area: 245 m^2
Built-Up Area: 245 m^2
Capacity: 195 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Amel Abdelli

1

The T.RAD Japanese Mosque is a compact factory mosque within the PT. T.RAD Indonesia manufacturing complex in the Jababeka Industrial Estate, Cikarang Utara, Bekasi, West Java. Serving roughly 600 employees, it replaces and enlarges an improvised musalla. Completed around 2013, its built area is about 930 m². The client is PT. T.RAD Indonesia, a Japanese-owned automotive component company, and the architect is Muhammad Egha, commissioned early in his career.

The pre-existing prayer space lacked cleanliness, comfort, and proper gender separation. The client requested a dignified, dedicated mosque for daily prayers, Friday use, and occasional Ramadan and Eid activities—within a tight industrial plot.

The compact program includes a men's hall, a screened women's area, and basic ablution and sanitary facilities, with a small foyer also serving informal social functions.

Drawing on the factory's Japanese ownership, the architect adopted elements of Japanese domestic design—simple volumes, horizontal roof lines, stratified wall panels, and a restrained palette—while maintaining clear Islamic spatial order. Amid the dense industrial setting, the mosque acts as a quiet pavilion: a transition from machine noise to contemplative space, and a small, yet meaningful, gesture of humanization within an otherwise demanding work environment.

2

URBAN INTEGRATION

Located at the center of the PT. T.RAD Indonesia factory in the Jababeka Industrial Estate, the T.RAD Japanese Mosque is embedded within a dense industrial fabric rather than set on an open plot. It sits at a key junction where pedestrian routes from the main production hangars meet, making it a natural daily waypoint for nearly 600 workers.

The surrounding context is entirely utilitarian—continuous sheds, logistics corridors, and minimal greenery. As the factory expanded, roof extensions gradually concealed the mosque from aerial view, though at ground level blue-and-white safety walkways still guide workers toward its entrances.

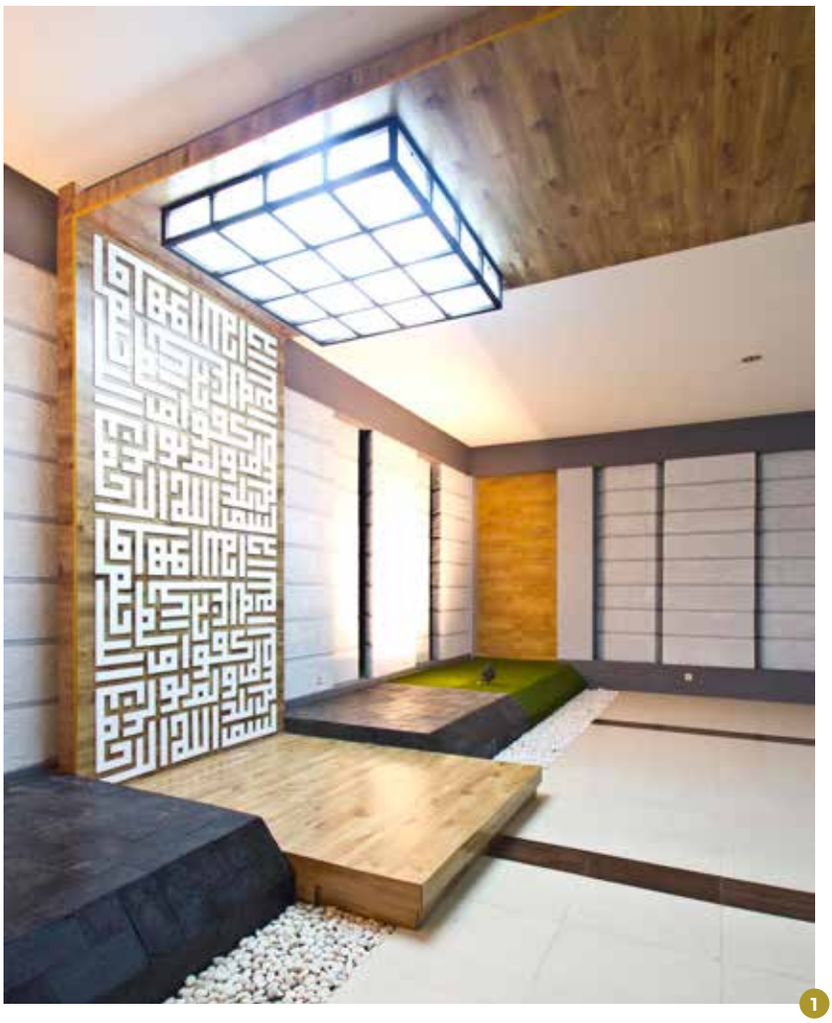
1. *Interior details.*

2. *The mosque from the exterior.*

In an area lacking close prayer facilities, the mosque becomes essential for daily observance; employees maintain Dhuhr and Asr prayers even without an audible call to prayer.

Gender-separated entrances and ablution spaces ensure accessibility for female staff, while a later-added ablution block demonstrates the mosque's continued relevance and adaptation.

Rather than standing out visually, the mosque serves as a spatial and psychological anchor within the factory—a small sanctuary offering orientation, quietness, and human scale amid the rigor of industrial routines.



1. *Some interior details.*

2. *The building form at night... direct functional simplicity..*

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The T.RAD Japanese Mosque presents a modest, calm exterior that contrasts with its industrial surroundings. Its simple rectangular form is topped by a blue sloped roof—initially tiled to echo Japanese houses and later rebuilt in zinc for practical maintenance.

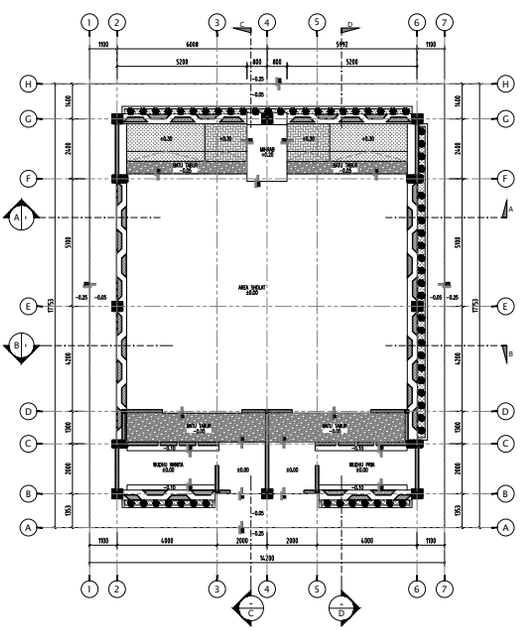
This roofline quietly distinguishes the mosque without competing with the factory structures around it.

The façades use alternating reinforced-concrete panels that act as enclosure, ventilation, and daylighting elements at once. Their spacing creates a permeable skin suited to West Java's humid climate and gives the building an unexpected sense of lightness.

Men's and women's entrances occupy opposite sides, each marked by a simple threshold and wooden lintel with Kufic inscription. Blue-and-white factory walkways lead directly to these entrances, becoming the only real 'landscape' in an otherwise paved, utilitarian context.

Though later factory extensions have visually absorbed the mosque from above, its identity remains clear at ground level. The restrained palette—neutral concrete, wood-like finishes, and the blue roof—supports the Japanese-inspired concept without ornament or excess.

Overall, the exterior conveys clarity, openness, and refuge, offering a gentle counterpoint to the intensity of the industrial environment.



Ground floor plan

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of the T.RAD Japanese Mosque offers a restrained, contemplative atmosphere that softens the transition from the factory environment outside. The main prayer hall is compact yet clearly organized, with the mihrab positioned as the visual and symbolic centre of the space. This mihrab is set within a full-wall panel of carved Kufic Ayat al-Kursī—an unexpectedly ambitious artisanal feature for a factory mosque—gently illuminated to establish an immediate devotional focus.

One spatial issue, however, becomes evident upon closer examination: although the mihrab sits on the central axis of the room, it does not fully align with the direction of the Kaaba! This creates a subtle but perceptible tension between architectural centering and ritual orientation—an inconsistency noted during technical review. In a mosque of otherwise careful simplicity, this misalignment has a visible impact on the clarity of worshippers' positioning.

A similar tension appears in the floor treatment. The interior tile layout, inspired by the rhythm of tatami mats, introduces a Japanese domestic motif that reflects the identity of the commissioning company. Yet the tatami-like grid operates at a different scale and orientation from the prayer rows and qibla alignment. As a result, two spatial systems—one cultural and aesthetic, the other ritual and directional—coexist without fully reconciling! The outcome is not disruptive, but it does generate a metaphorical and visual 'clash' that subtly competes with the functional logic of prayer lines.

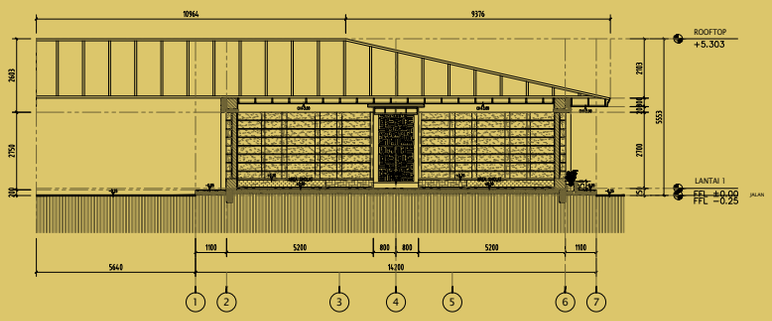
Beyond these points, the interior maintains a calm and coherent character. Natural light and ventilation enter through the trapezoidal wall panels, ensuring a temperate environment with no dependence on mechanical cooling.

Materials remain modest and tactile: beige and brown tiles, soft prayer carpets, minimal furniture, and wooden screens.

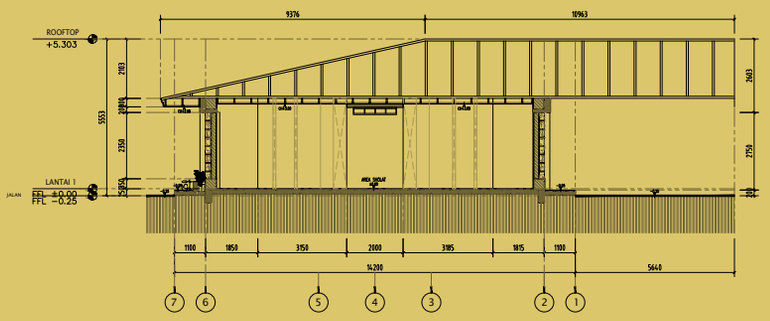
Women enter through a dedicated side door into a screened area defined by a bamboo-colored wooden divider that balances privacy with visibility toward the mihrab. Circulation is straightforward, allowing workers to move quickly and quietly from factory walkways into the prayer hall.

Overall, it could be said that the interior succeeds in establishing calmness, clarity, and transition, yet it also reveals moments where aesthetic intentions and ritual necessities do not fully align. These points, while not diminishing the mosque's social value, open an important conversation about the role of symbolic motifs and cultural references in spaces governed by precise liturgical orientation—an issue returned to in the concluding section.

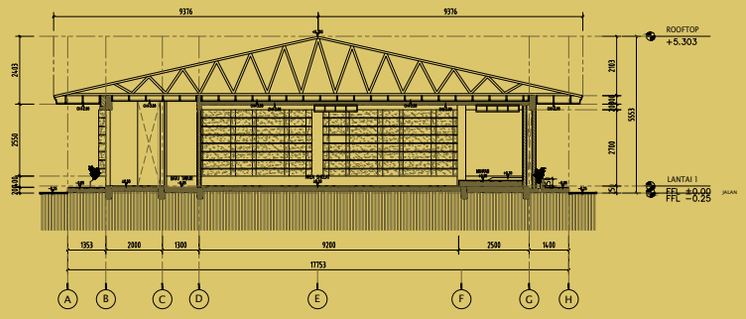
2



Section A-A



Section B-B



Section C-C

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

The T.RAD Japanese Mosque adopts a pragmatic yet quietly intelligent environmental approach, well suited to its industrial surroundings. Its alternating reinforced-concrete wall panels provide continuous cross-ventilation and gentle daylight, allowing the prayer hall to remain comfortable throughout the year without reliance on air-conditioning.

In the evenings, efficient LED fixtures supplement this natural illumination with minimal energy demand.

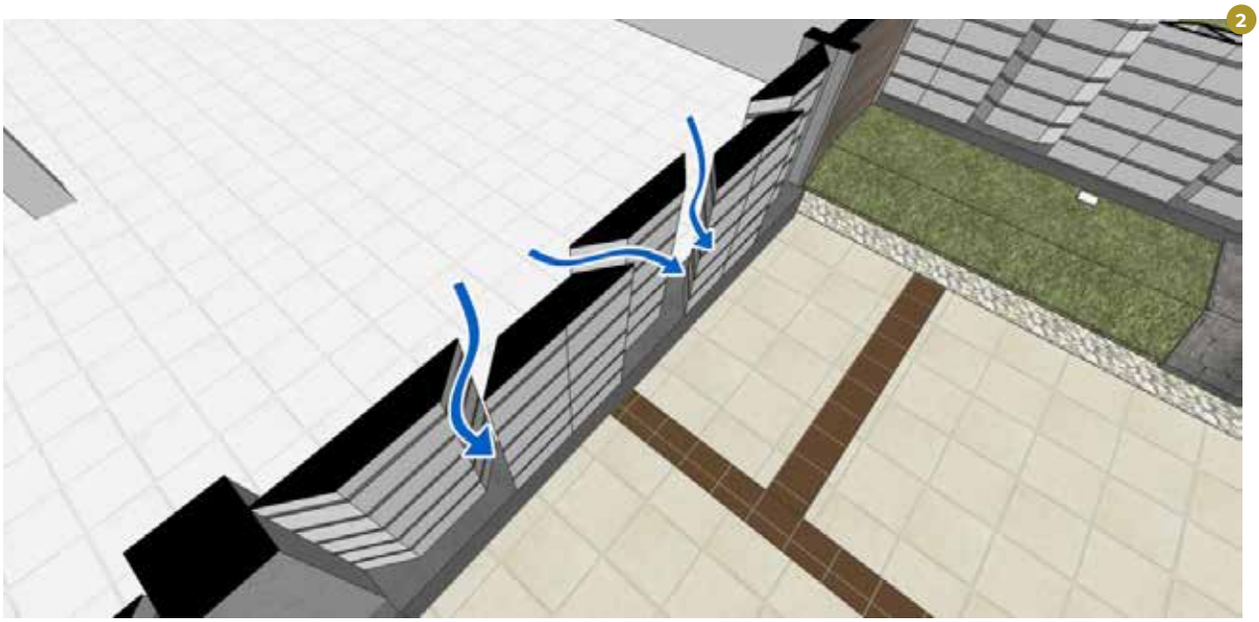
Material choices reinforce the same logic of simplicity and endurance. Locally sourced ceramic tiles, concrete surfaces, timber-colored finishes, and the zinc roof introduced in the most recent reconstruction come together as a palette that is durable and easy to maintain despite heavy daily use.

Ablution and sanitary facilities—expanded in a later phase and positioned directly beside the prayer hall—ensure clean, efficient circulation while keeping maintenance needs modest.

This technical restraint is complemented by a culture of communal stewardship. A small donation corner near the entrance enables workers to contribute voluntarily to routine upkeep and community initiatives, embedding a shared sense of responsibility that strengthens the mosque's long-term resilience.

Together, these elements form a quietly effective sustainability strategy—low-energy and low-maintenance, yet consistently high in functional impact—demonstrating how even a modest workers' mosque can achieve environmental comfort and durability through clear, straightforward design thinking.

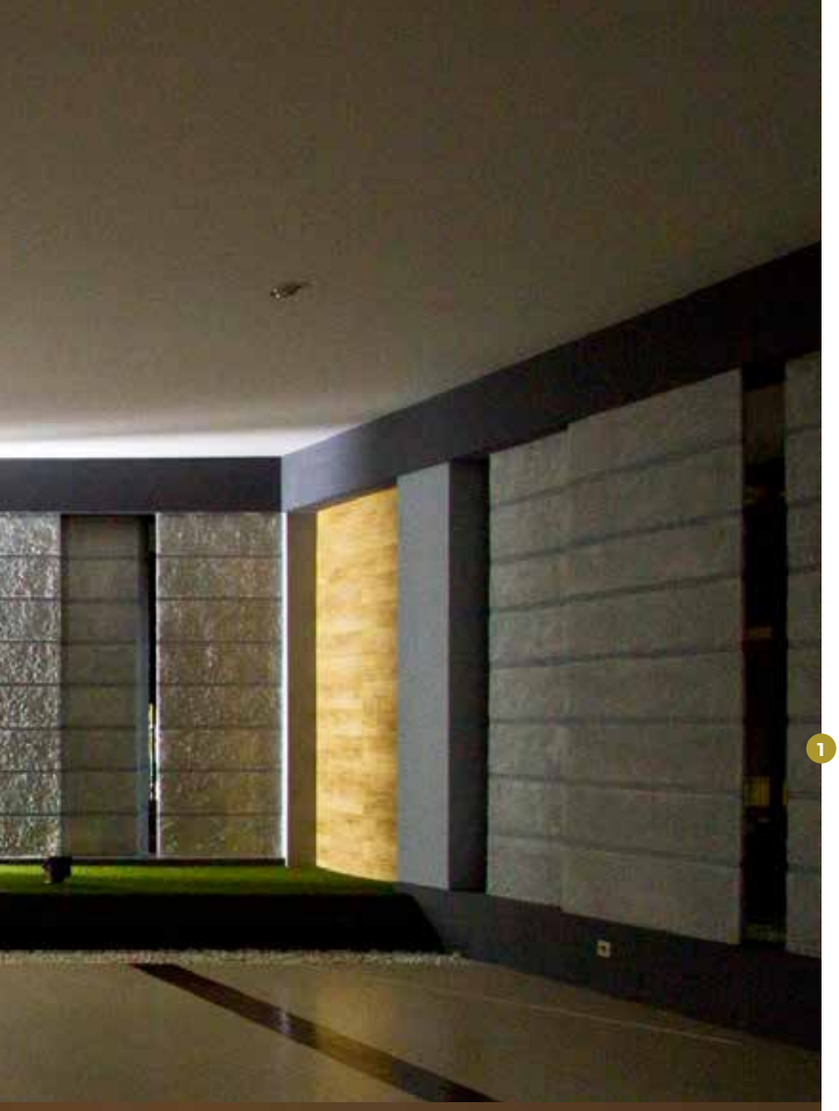
1

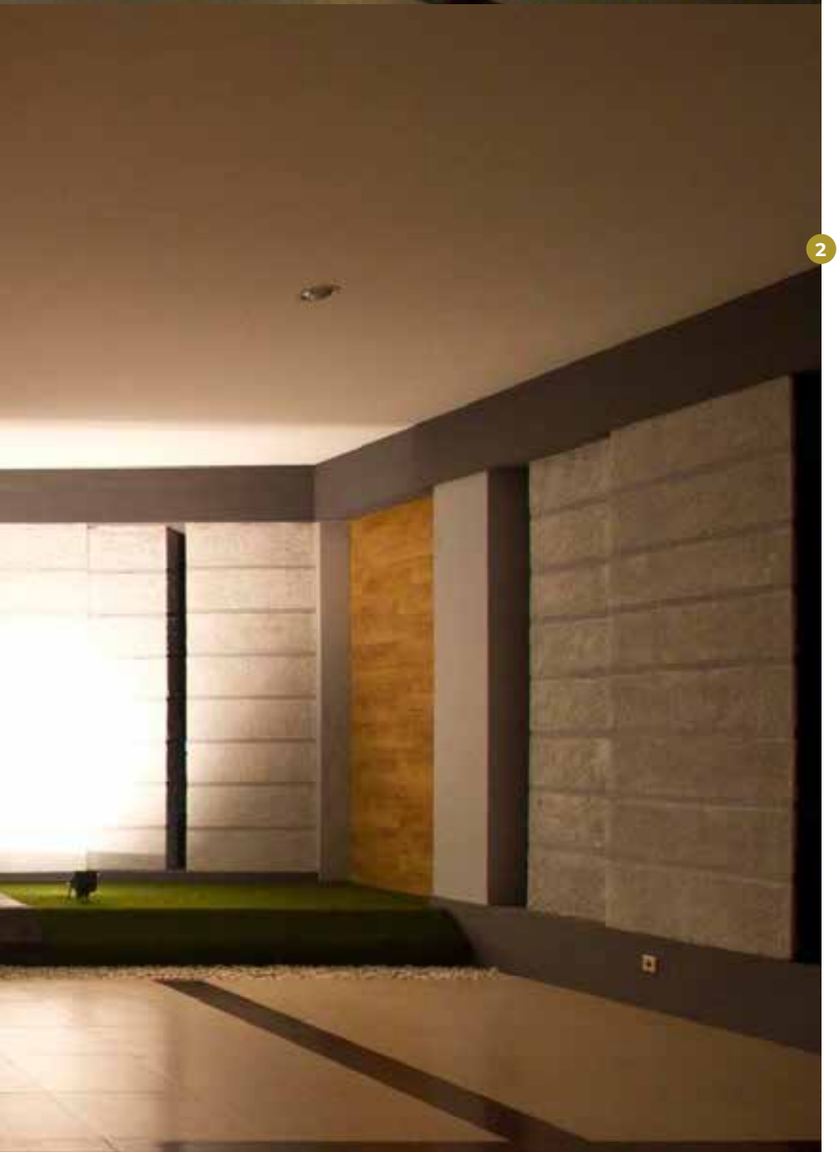


2

1. *External view of the prayer hall.*

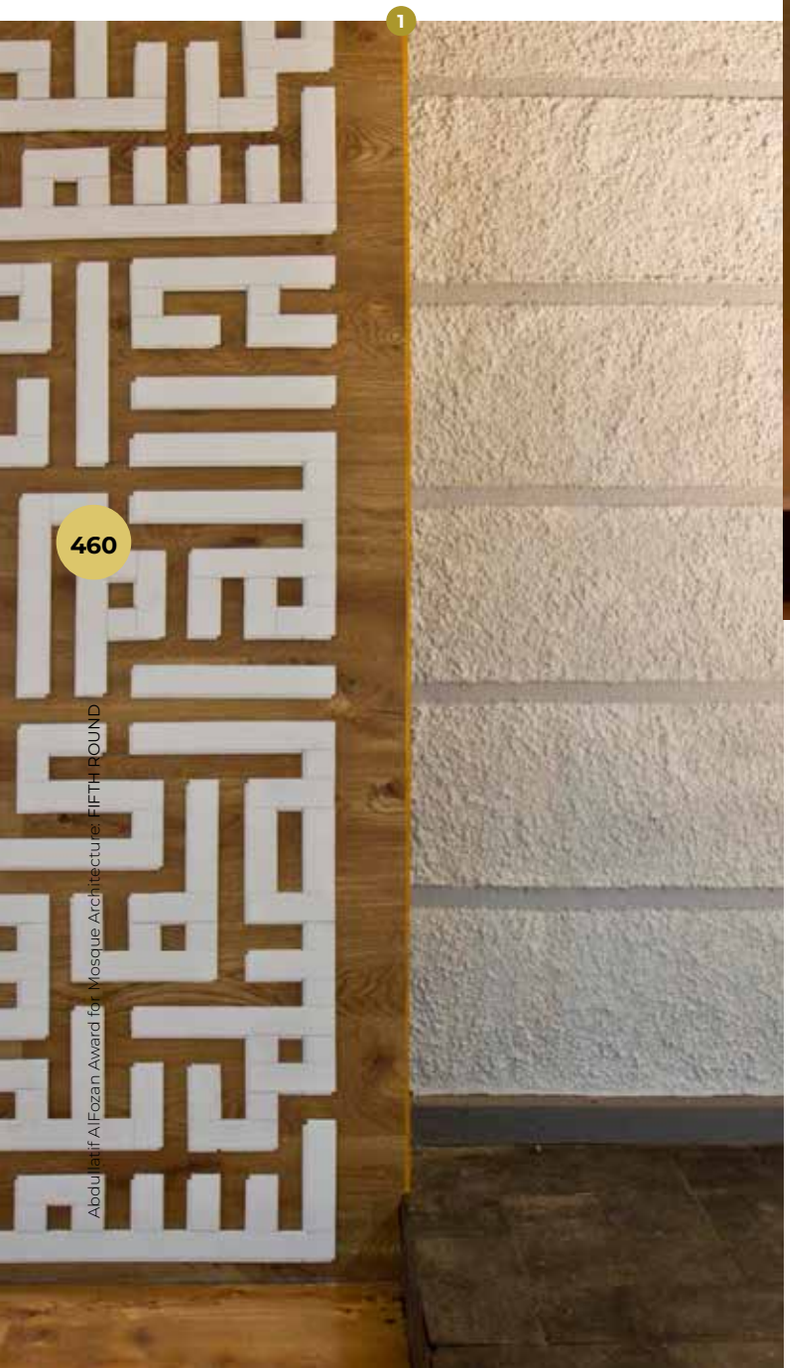
2. *Wall ventilation system*





The T.RAD Japanese Mosque adopts a pragmatic yet quietly intelligent environmental approach, well suited to its industrial surroundings. Its alternating reinforced-concrete wall panels provide continuous cross-ventilation and gentle daylight, allowing the prayer hall to remain comfortable throughout the year without reliance on air-conditioning.

1-2. *Prayer hall from different angles.*



1

2

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

Despite its modest scale, the T.RAD Japanese Mosque plays an outsized social role within the PT. T.RAD factory. Its central location allows workers from all departments to converge naturally at prayer times, creating a shared pause in the industrial routine and softening the rigid hierarchies of the workplace. The transition from factory walkways into the prayer hall has become a daily ritual that anchors employees both spiritually and socially.

The mosque supports inclusive worship, with a dedicated women's entrance and screened prayer area that offers privacy without detaching female staff from the main spiritual focus of the hall. Ablution facilities positioned directly beside the prayer space ensure usability during tight break schedules.

Over time, the mosque has extended its influence beyond daily prayers. It hosts Taraweeh special night prayers during Ramadan, welcomes nearby workers for Friday prayers, and accommodates small community initiatives, subtly transforming it into a micro civic hub within the industrial estate.

A small but meaningful donation corner reinforces its social character, enabling employees to contribute to maintenance and mutual support. This culture of shared stewardship sustains the mosque even as the surrounding factory grows around it, ensuring that the building remains a consistent place of dignity, rest, and human connection within an otherwise demanding work environment.

3

1. *Arabic calligraphy... a fundamental formative element in the interior.*

2. *Roof details.*

3. *Ornamental details.*

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

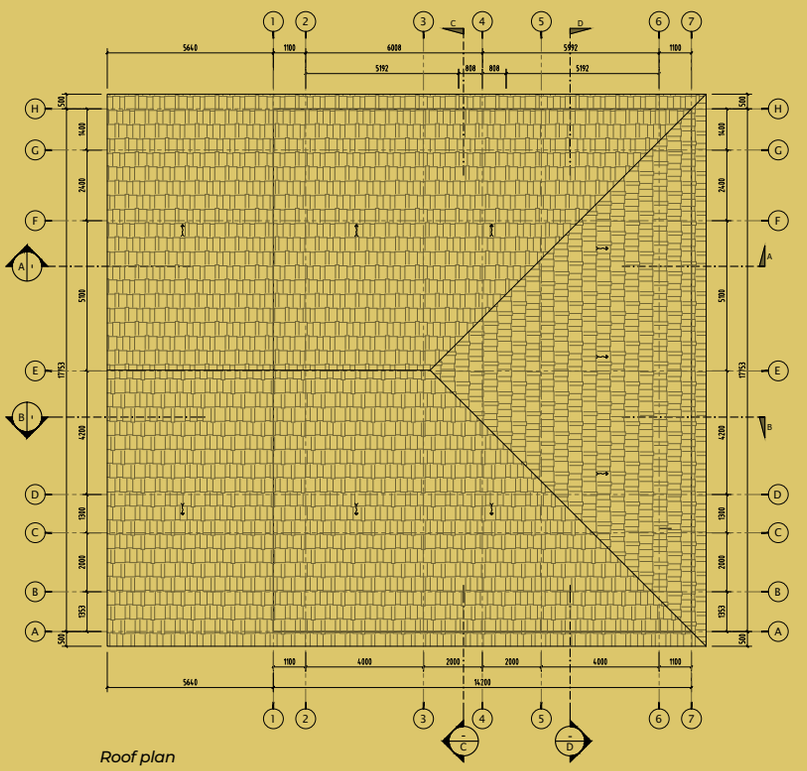
The T.RAD Japanese Mosque stands as a modest yet meaningful intervention within the demanding environment of the PT. T.RAD factory. Its architectural restraint, cultural sensitivity to the Japanese-Indonesian context, and consistently high daily use testify to its social value. Through simple materials, passive environmental strategies, and a clear spatial sequence, the mosque succeeds in offering workers a daily moment of calm, dignity, and collective grounding.

At the same time, a closer architectural reading reveals tensions between conceptual intention and liturgical precision. The central mihrab—eloquently framed by Kufic carving—does not fully align with the qibla direction, creating a subtle dissonance between visual centering and ritual orientation. A similar inconsistency appears in the tatami-inspired floor pattern, which introduces a cultural reference that operates at a different scale and direction from the prayer rows it accompanies. These moments do not diminish the mosque's functionality, but they do highlight the delicate balance required when symbolic motifs intersect with the precise spatial demands of Islamic worship.

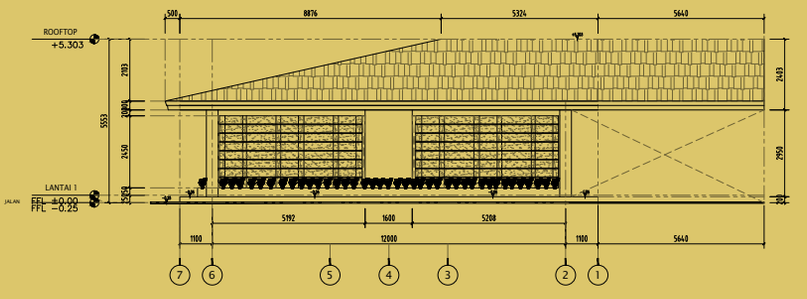
Viewed constructively, these inconsistencies open an important conversation about design decision-making in small mosques, particularly when responding to multicultural contexts or corporate identities. They underscore the need for careful calibration between conceptual gestures and ritual clarity—especially in spaces where worshippers rely on architectural cues to orient themselves with confidence.

Despite these points, the mosque remains a commendable example of how a small, low-budget project can humanize an industrial setting and foster a resilient sense of community. Its strength lies not in scale but in intention: a young architect's effort to create a tranquil, inclusive space where workers gather, rest, and reconnect daily. In this sense, the T.RAD Japanese Mosque demonstrates how thoughtful, context-aware design can quietly elevate the everyday lives of those it serves.

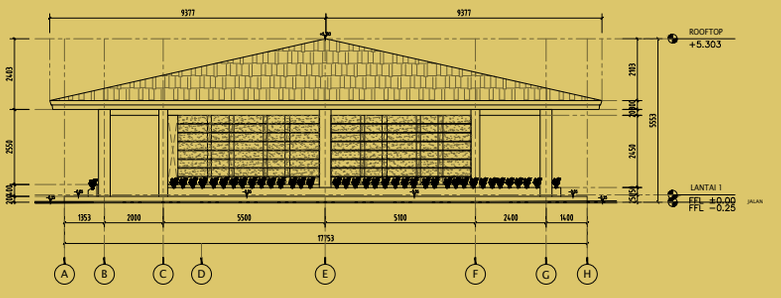
In essence, the Kushtia Neighborhood Mosque stands as a modest example of how a religious building can align itself with limited resources and a clearly defined social context without resorting to visual or technical excess. It maintains its integrity through straightforward means and inhabits the village landscape with a gentle rhythm—more a familiar place that lives with its residents than an object striving for presence beyond its natural scale.



Roof plan



Elevation



Elevation

ROOTS OF AFRICAN
ARCHITECTURE

ALNAJDI
Mosque

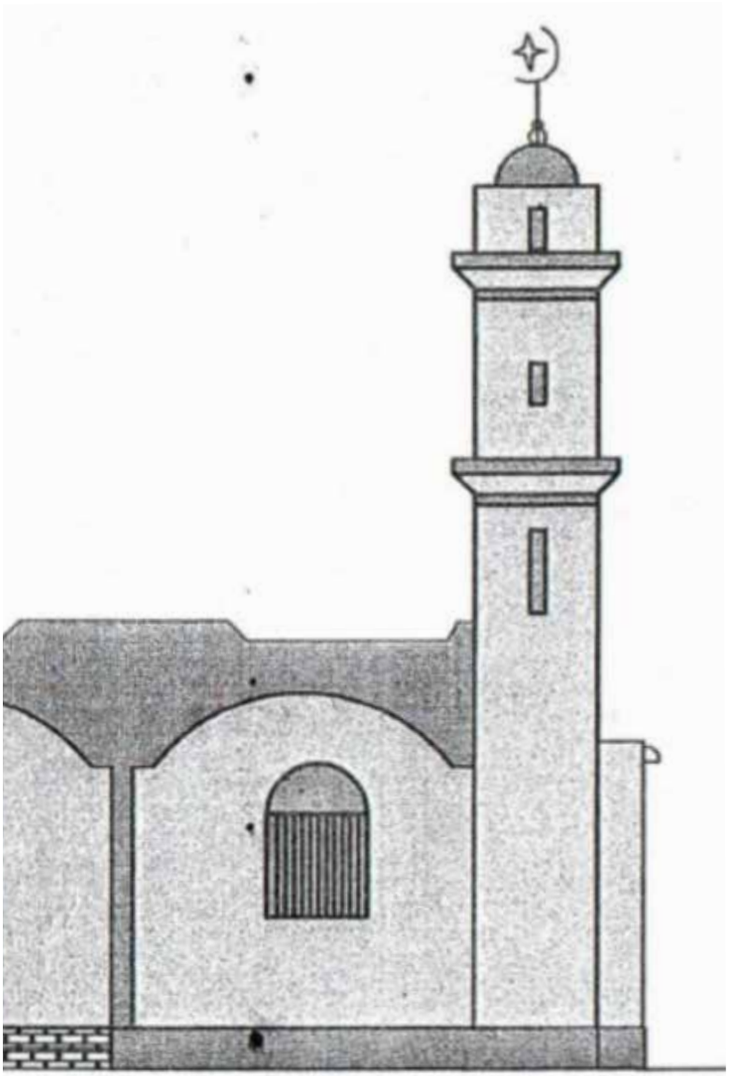
Alnajdi Mosque
Location: Zinder (Damagaram), Niger
Architect: Direct-Aid (Kuwait)
Year of Completion: 2014
Plot Area: 120 m^2
Built-Up Area: 120 m^2
Capacity: 170 worshippers

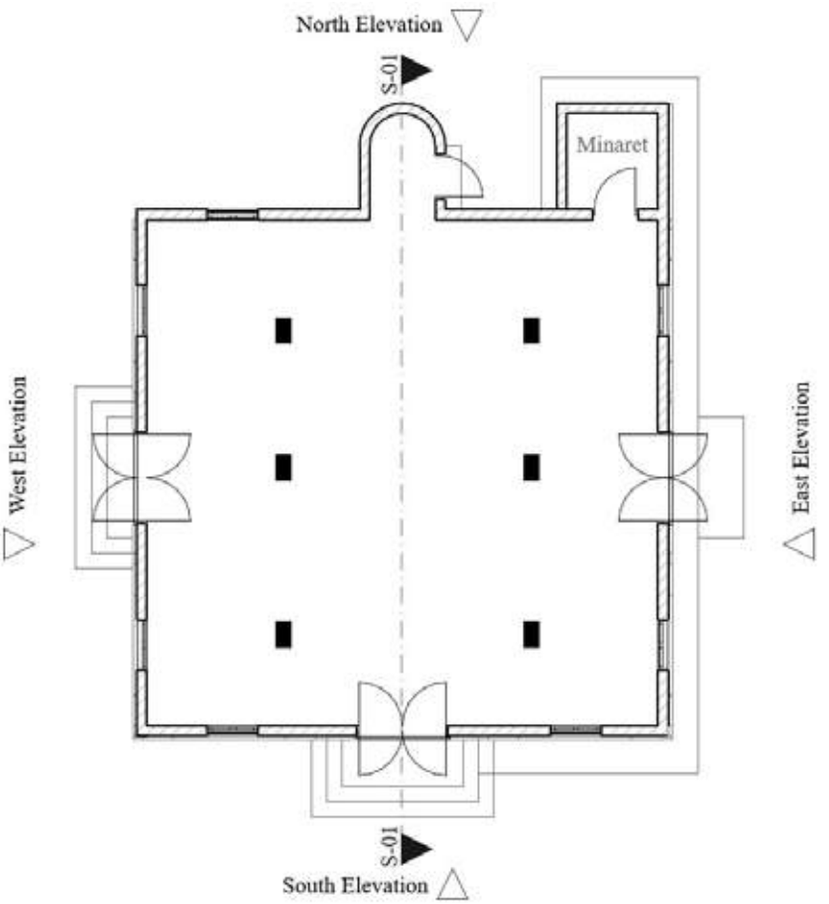
Technical reviewer: Jerry Magutu

Alnajdi Mosque is located in Zinder, in the historic region of Damagaram in southeastern Niger. It is situated within a dense urban fabric shaped by the Sahelian climate , local building traditions, and long-established Islamic practices embedded in everyday life. Within this context of modest scale and limited material resources, the mosque forms part of an ordinary urban landscape rather than presenting itself as a singular or monumental object.

The project was supported by Direct-Aid (Kuwait), reflecting a broader pattern of transnational initiatives aimed at strengthening religious and social infrastructure across West Africa. Within this framework, Alnajdi Mosque was conceived primarily as a local place of worship and community gathering, responding to immediate needs while operating under clearly defined economic and construction constraints.

Rather than seeking architectural prominence, the mosque establishes itself as a quiet and integrated presence. Its role is defined less through visual assertion than through continuity with local patterns of use, scale, and construction. In this sense, the project aligns with a pragmatic understanding of mosque architecture—one grounded in service, accessibility, and daily ritual, shaped as much by necessity and context as by architectural intent.





2

URBAN INTEGRATION

Alnajdi Mosque is embedded within the compact urban fabric of Zinder, where narrow streets, inward-oriented plots, and modest building heights shape the everyday spatial condition. The mosque addresses its immediate surroundings directly, operating within a setting defined by proximity, walkability, and close social interaction rather than by open or monumental urban spaces.

1. *Mosque façade.* ***2.*** *Ground floor plan.*

Climatically, the site lies within the Sahelian zone, characterized by high temperatures, dust-laden winds, and marked seasonal variation. These conditions inform both the mosque's placement and its relationship to neighboring buildings, favoring enclosure, shade, and controlled exposure over visual openness. The mosque does not seek presence at a distance, but establishes its role through ease of access and continuity with daily movement patterns.

The siting reinforces the mosque's function as a neighborhood anchor rather than a city-scale landmark. Orientation and access respond primarily to local use, allowing the mosque to serve as a familiar and reliable point for regular prayer, informal teaching, and communal interaction. Its relationship to context is thus one of integration rather than contrast, rooted in proximity, climate, and lived urban experience.

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The exterior of Alnajdi Mosque is defined by restraint and pragmatic clarity. The building adopts a compact and legible form that responds directly to its urban and climatic context, avoiding monumentality or visual emphasis. Its low and controlled massing aligns with the scale of the surrounding neighborhood, reinforcing its role as a community mosque rather than a landmark structure.

Façades are treated with deliberate simplicity, privileging solid surfaces and carefully limited openings. This approach responds directly to the harsh Sahelian climate, where protection from heat, dust, and glare is a primary architectural concern. Openings are calibrated to allow ventilation and daylight while maintaining the degree of enclosure and calm required for ritual use.

Material choices and surface treatments are guided by availability, durability, and ease of maintenance rather than by symbolic or stylistic ambition. The mosque does not construct its meaning through historical motifs or imported architectural languages. Instead, dignity and coherence emerge from the direct presence of materials, the regularity of the mass, and the careful control of scale.

Overall, the exterior reflects an architectural ethic grounded in sufficiency and restraint. Meaning is not pursued through formal display, but through a calm and serviceable architecture closely attuned to local conditions, reinforcing the mosque's everyday role within its social and environmental setting.

1. *The building from the exterior.*

2. *Prayer hall.*

3. *An African-inspired composition seeking to revive local identity.*

2

3

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS & SUSTAINABILITY

The technical and structural systems of Alnajdi Mosque are based on simplicity and durability. Construction relies on straightforward load-bearing systems aligned with local skills, available materials, and realistic maintenance capacities, ensuring long-term functionality without dependence on specialized technologies.

Environmental performance is addressed primarily through passive strategies. Thick walls, limited openings, and compact massing help moderate interior temperatures and protect the prayer space from heat, dust, and intense sunlight. Natural ventilation through calibrated openings reduces reliance on mechanical systems.

Materials are selected for availability, resilience, and ease of repair. Sustainability is understood here not as technological display, but as an approach rooted in longevity, climatic adaptation, and responsible use of limited resources.

1. *Simplicity of form derived from functional simplicity.*

2. *Prayer hall mass.*

3. *The minaret with its simple and calm composition.*

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

Alnajdi Mosque functions first and foremost as a neighborhood mosque, embedded in the rhythms of everyday life rather than oriented toward exceptional events. Its social role is defined by proximity and regular use, serving daily prayers, informal teaching, and communal gathering within walking distance for most worshippers.

Access is handled in a direct and uncomplicated manner. The mosque's modest scale and clearly defined entrances support ease of use across age groups, while circulation remains intuitive and non-hierarchical, reinforcing inclusivity in practical terms.

Gender separation follows prevailing local norms and is resolved pragmatically, prioritizing manageability and regular use over spatial elaboration. Beyond prayer times, the mosque contributes quietly to community life through its consistent presence and availability, reinforcing a sense of shared ownership and collective care.

Overall, the mosque fulfills its social role through continuity and reliability rather than visibility or scale, integrating seamlessly into the everyday life of its surrounding community.

3

Prayer hall.

The technical and structural systems of Alnajdi Mosque are based on simplicity and durability. Construction relies on straightforward load-bearing systems aligned with local skills, available materials, and realistic maintenance capacities, ensuring long-term functionality without dependence on specialized technologies.

1. The minaret, with its simple and serene design.

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

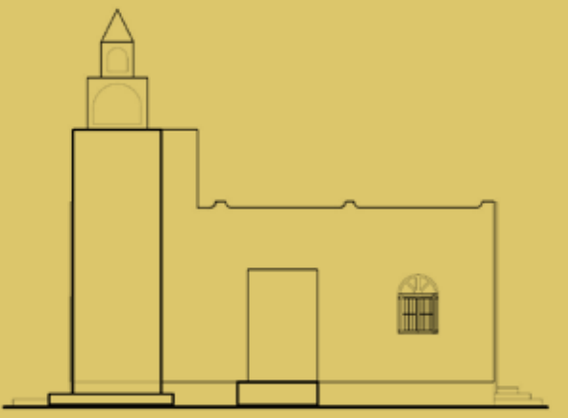
Alnajdi Mosque offers a modest yet instructive architectural response shaped by climatic necessity, economic constraint, and the rhythms of daily religious practice. Its value does not lie in formal innovation or symbolic ambition, but in its capacity to serve consistently and appropriately within a specific social and environmental context.

Architecturally, the project adopts an ethic grounded in careful adaptation to demanding conditions—both climatic and economic. Decisions regarding form, construction, and material are driven by durability, usability, and environmental responsiveness rather than by iconography or visual assertion.

From the perspective of the Al-Fozan Award and the broader narrative of this book, the inclusion of Alnajdi Mosque is deliberate. It broadens the architectural spectrum under consideration, affirming that contemporary mosque architecture is not defined solely by grand statements or iconic landmarks, but also by small, locally embedded mosques whose value lies in service, continuity, and social integration.

In this sense, Alnajdi Mosque offers an alternative reading of architectural quality—one in which merit is as deeply embedded in conscious restraint as it is in expressive ambition. The future of mosque architecture, as this project reminds us, will remain plural, shaped by ordinary places and daily rituals alongside exceptional buildings and singular visions.

EAST ELEVATION

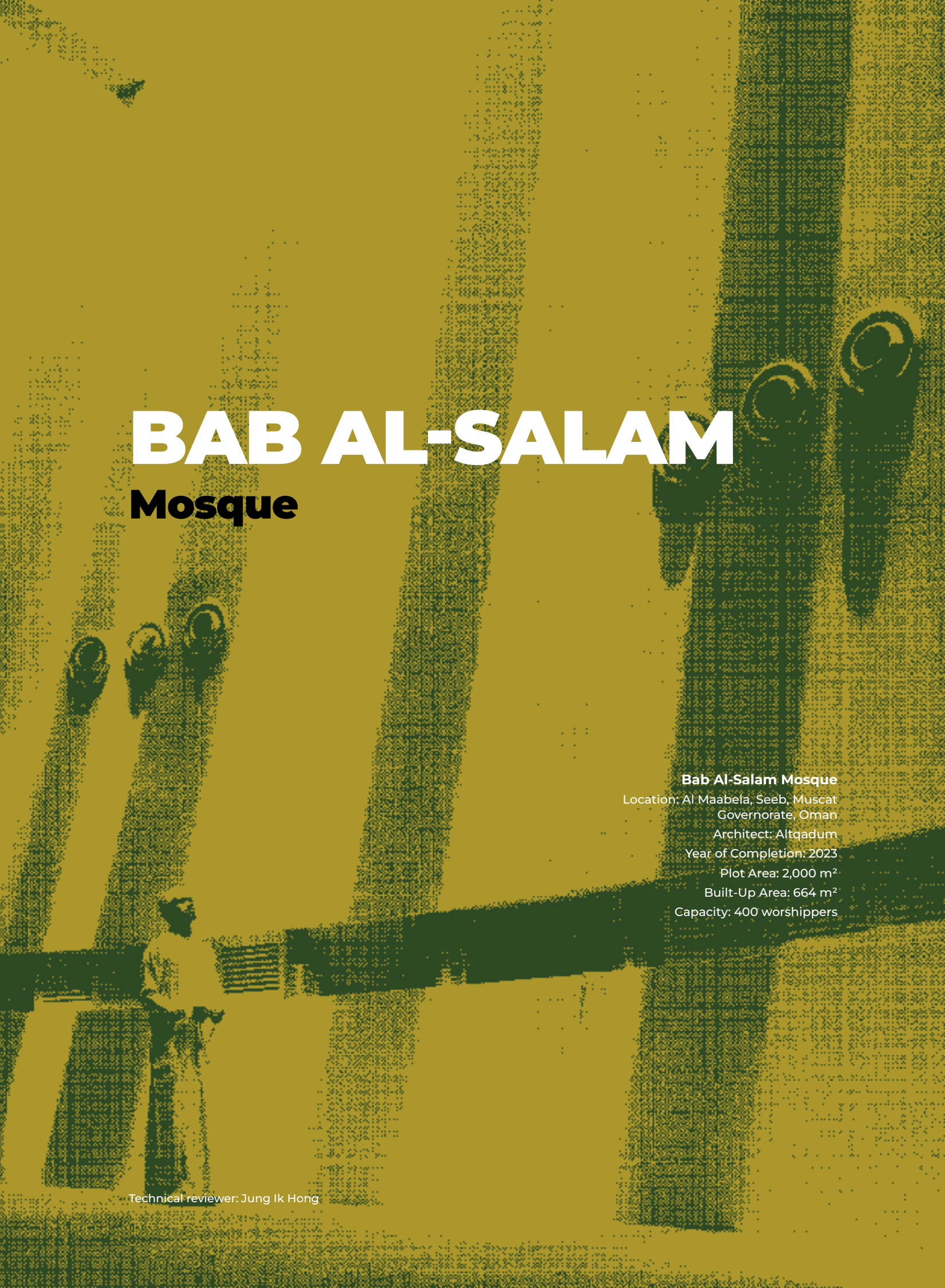


NORTH ELEVATION

SOUTH ELEVATION

WEST ELEVATION

THE OMANI FORT AND URBAN SPACE



BAB AL-SALAM

Mosque

Bab Al-Salam Mosque

Location: Al Maabela, Seeb, Muscat Governorate, Oman

Architect: Altqadum

Year of Completion: 2023

Plot Area: 2,000 m^2

Built-Up Area: 664 m^2

Capacity: 400 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Jung Ik Hong

The Bab Al-Salam Mosque, located in the suburban neighborhood of Al Maabela in Seeb, Muscat Governorate, is a recently completed project that has garnered attention both locally and internationally for its restrained yet striking architectural presence. Designed by the Omani architecture studio Altqadum, under the leadership of architect Marwan Al Balushi, the mosque was completed in 2023 and marks a thoughtful departure from traditional stylistic expectations, while remaining deeply rooted in place, culture, and faith.

The name Bab Al-Salam—literally, The Gate of Peace—captures the project's aspiration to offer an urban oasis of peace, openness, and welcome. Situated in a rapidly growing residential area on the periphery of Muscat, the mosque was conceived not merely as a religious facility, but as a civic landmark: a space of spiritual focus, architectural learning, and community integration. It is set against the distant backdrop of the Hajar Mountains , in a flat terrain characterized by low-rise housing. Rather than assert itself through monumentality, the mosque adopts a modest yet confident presence—a cluster of rose-toned cylindrical volumes gently rising from the earth, blending into the natural palette of the Omani landscape.

The project demonstrates a contemporary rethinking of mosque typologies in Oman, where architectural tradition tends toward either grand state mosques or simple, utilitarian neighborhood prayer spaces. Bab Al-Salam neither replicates nor rejects tradition. Instead, it interprets it—foregrounding simplicity, light, and spatial clarity over surface ornamentation. It eschews the conventional dome-and-minaret composition in favor of five discrete cylindrical volumes, unified by a sense of geometric purity and carefully modulated light. The minaret, in particular, is reimagined as a freestanding conical tower—a quiet landmark that signals without dominating.

Critically, the mosque's openness to the public realm is one of its most radical features. Unlike many mosques in the region, which are often enclosed by boundary walls, Bab Al-Salam remains unfenced, allowing for a fluid interface with the neighborhood. The mosque's courtyard merges seamlessly with its surroundings, encouraging informal gathering, rest, and passage even beyond prayer times. This spatial generosity reflects both an architectural and cultural gesture—rooted in Omani values of hospitality, inclusion, and communal life.

From an architectural standpoint, the project sets out to answer a complex question: How can a mosque be simultaneously rooted in tradition, sensitive to context, and forward-looking in form and experience? The result is a built response that positions spiritual experience over visual spectacle, timelessness over trend, and community presence over institutional grandeur.

In this way, Bab Al-Salam Mosque contributes to a growing discourse in contemporary Islamic architecture—one that honors faith not through mimicry or symbolism alone, but through spatial dignity, environmental responsiveness, and inclusive design. It stands as a model for how architectural modesty can coexist with cultural ambition, and how sacred space can be simultaneously personal, civic, and profound.

1

2

URBAN INTEGRATION

Located on the expanding residential fringes of Seeb—one of Muscat's most rapidly urbanizing districts—Bab Al-Salam Mosque sits within a low-rise, low-density neighborhood marked by modest homes, wide roads, and an open skyline. Its positioning in this suburban context offers both a challenge and an opportunity: how can a mosque be a landmark without overpowering its surroundings? How can it provide civic gravitas without feeling like an imposition?

The design responds with quiet confidence. Rather than presenting a singular, imposing mass, the mosque is composed of five discrete cylindrical volumes, each modest in height and diameter, gently nestled within a landscaped plot. This fragmentation of mass allows the building to harmonize with the neighborhood's scale, rather than dominate it. The tallest element—the conical minaret—rises in visual dialogue with the sky, but never overwhelms. Its slenderness and elegance, combined with the low height of the other structures, ensure a visual profile that remains human-scaled, approachable, and respectful of its context.

A key gesture in the mosque's urban integration is its rejection of boundary walls. Where most mosques in the region are enclosed by fences or gates, Bab Al-Salam opts for complete permeability. The site is unfenced, with subtle shifts in paving, curbs, and vegetation delineating the mosque's domain from the surrounding public realm. This openness effectively extends the urban fabric into the mosque grounds, and vice versa, turning the mosque's landscape into an everyday civic space—part park, part plaza, part sanctuary!

The choice of rose-pink cladding is more than aesthetic. It is a chromatic gesture toward the region's natural environment—recalling the color of Omani mountains, sand, and sky at dusk. This use of color softens the building's presence and roots it in its landscape, while also allowing the mosque to glow subtly in morning and evening light. It is a local color, not a symbolic one, which underscores the project's emphasis on belonging over assertion.

Circulation around and within the site is seamless. Entrances are aligned with natural pedestrian and vehicular flow, and the absence of a single monumental gateway allows for multiple modes of approach. Parking, where present, is discreetly placed at the periphery, ensuring that cars do not visually or physically dominate the site. The building volumes are set back far enough to preserve sunlight, views, and privacy for surrounding residences—avoiding any cast shadows or sightline disruptions.

Perhaps most importantly, the mosque has been embraced by its community. Initially met with some resistance due to its unconventional geometry and color, it has since become a neighborhood anchor—not just a place of prayer, but of passage, play, and pause. Residents stroll through the courtyard, children gather in the shade of the palm trees, and the water feature that encircles the main prayer hall invites moments of quiet reflection. In doing so, the mosque has subtly but decisively redefined the mosque's role within its urban fabric—not only as a destination but as a connector and a presence.

In a context where architectural visibility often means architectural dominance, Bab Al-Salam Mosque presents an alternative paradigm: visibility through dignified restraint, presence through openness, and significance through belonging.

1. *Ablution area.*

2. *The mosque from the exterior.*

1

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

At first glance, Bab Al-Salam Mosque departs from many visual expectations of mosque architecture. There is no grand dome, no layered arches, no overt ornamental gesture. Instead, the exterior presents a series of low, cylindrical volumes arranged in a quiet ensemble—each form distinct yet rhythmically related. Together, they create a silhouette that is instantly recognizable yet deliberately understated.

The most prominent vertical element is the freestanding minaret, designed as a slender, conical tower that rises with elegance rather than assertion. It is crowned not with a metallic finial but with a carved crescent relief embedded into its structure—an integrated symbol rather than an added ornament. This subtlety typifies the mosque's approach to sacred symbolism: present, but never loud.

The external material palette is soft and contextual. The rose-pink render, chosen to reflect the tones of the surrounding landscape, shifts subtly in different light conditions—glowing warmly at sunrise and blending gently into the twilight. The curved façades, free from decorative excess, rely on light and shadow to animate their surfaces. Narrow slits, precisely cut for windows or skylights, pierce the otherwise monolithic walls, introducing scale and rhythm without disruption.

Importantly, the entire architectural composition avoids monumentalism. The lack of a dome does not diminish the mosque's identity; rather, it reframes it. The central prayer hall's volume, slightly larger and more elevated, becomes the compositional anchor. From a distance, the cluster of cylinders reads almost like a geometric landscape, rising from the earth in conversation with the natural topography.

The mosque's openness is equally legible in its exterior. There are no enclosing fences or defensive boundaries. The landscape flows into and around the building volumes, allowing the mosque to breathe into its neighborhood rather than assert itself upon it.

In sum, the mosque's exterior architecture achieves a rare balance: minimalist yet expressive, contemporary yet site-specific. It communicates the sacred not through architectural spectacle, but through measured geometry, material honesty, and spatial generosity.

2

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of Bab Al-Salam Mosque reflects a design sensibility rooted in spatial serenity, light, and restraint. The architecture avoids distraction, inviting worshippers into a focused experience of presence. The main prayer hall is a soaring cylindrical chamber, uninterrupted by columns, defined by smooth white plaster walls and a radial skylight ring that softly washes the space with daylight. The qibla wall features a single, floor-to-ceiling vertical slit—a sculpted beam of light replacing the traditional mihrab. This luminous axis becomes the space's spiritual compass, marking the direction of prayer with quiet clarity.

Suspended at the center of the ceiling is a 9-meter chandelier, composed of over 1,600 crystal spheres, arranged in a broad, hovering constellation. In both form and atmosphere, it evokes the absent dome, not through mimicry, but through memory—answering the deep-seated expectation of vertical sanctity with a new language of light and suspension. It compensates visually for the dome's absence and resonates symbolically as a luminous sky within.

Notably, unlike other circular-plan mosques in this award cycle that impose radial prayer lines, Bab Al-Salam preserves the clarity of straight saff through its carpet design—asserting the primacy of liturgical orientation over formal geometry. The circular plan is not imposed at the cost of the worshippers' alignment; instead, it is inhabited with order, resolving a common architectural tension with elegance.

The material palette is subdued: a soft rose-toned carpet with a subtle gradient, functional elements integrated discreetly, and no overt ornamentation. Here, light is the ornament, and geometry the message.

The women's prayer hall, though separate in access, receives equal spatial care. Uniquely housed within the hollow conical minaret, it becomes a vertical sanctuary of light and solitude. Like the Nur Allah Mosque in China, the architectural gesture here is not exclusion, but veiled celebration—a spatial honoring of modesty through vertical elevation, where concealment is transfigured into dignity.

Together, these interiors propose a contemporary model of sacred space: one that challenges ornament through atmosphere, and reclaims simplicity as a sacred architectural force.

1. *Visual perception of the architectural hall with cylindrical formations.*

2. *The mihrab extends from the qibla wall into the depth of the prayer hall as a luminous divider.*

1

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Bab Al-Salam Mosque approaches sustainability with quiet pragmatism. Rather than relying on visible high-tech features, the design integrates passive strategies and low-impact systems that align with the project's architectural restraint and climatic context.

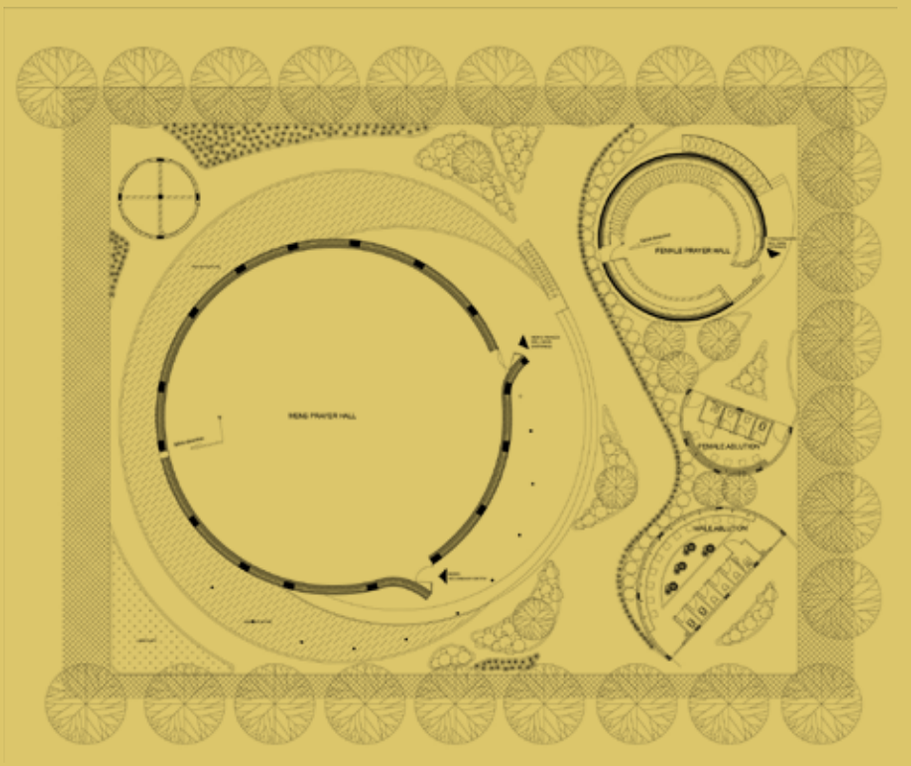
Thermal comfort is achieved through thick insulated walls, limited openings, and high-level skylights that provide ample natural light while reducing heat gain. A concealed mechanical cooling system distributes air through discreetly integrated vents, maintaining comfort without disrupting the space's visual clarity.

A particularly thoughtful gesture is the reuse of ablution water for irrigating the mosque's landscape—an understated yet effective response to water scarcity. The surrounding vegetation, composed of native and drought-tolerant species, requires minimal upkeep and reflects the project's environmental sensitivity.

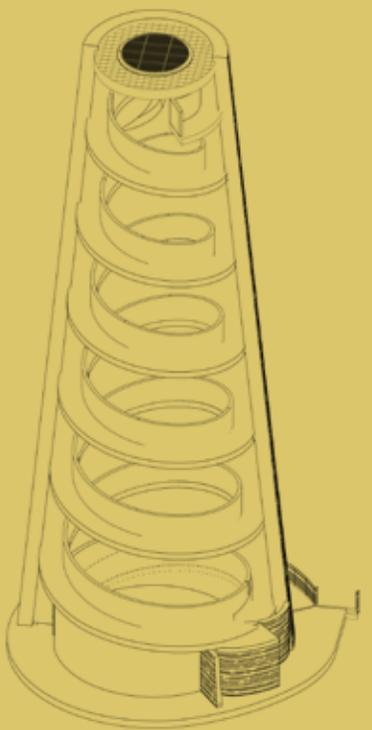
Artificial lighting relies on energy-efficient LED systems, with dimming options tuned to prayer times and ambient conditions. Exterior uplighting is modest, enhancing the building's form without excess.

While no advanced energy systems (e.g. solar panels or automation) are documented, the mosque's sustainable logic is embedded in its design decisions—prioritizing simplicity, durability, and environmental fit over technological display.

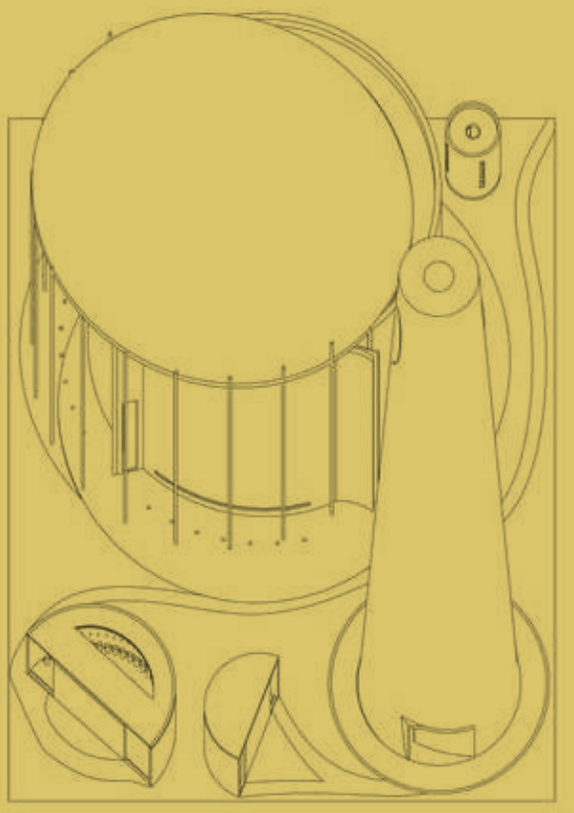
1. *The minaret interior... a functional space shaped by movement and defined by light.*



Ground floor plan

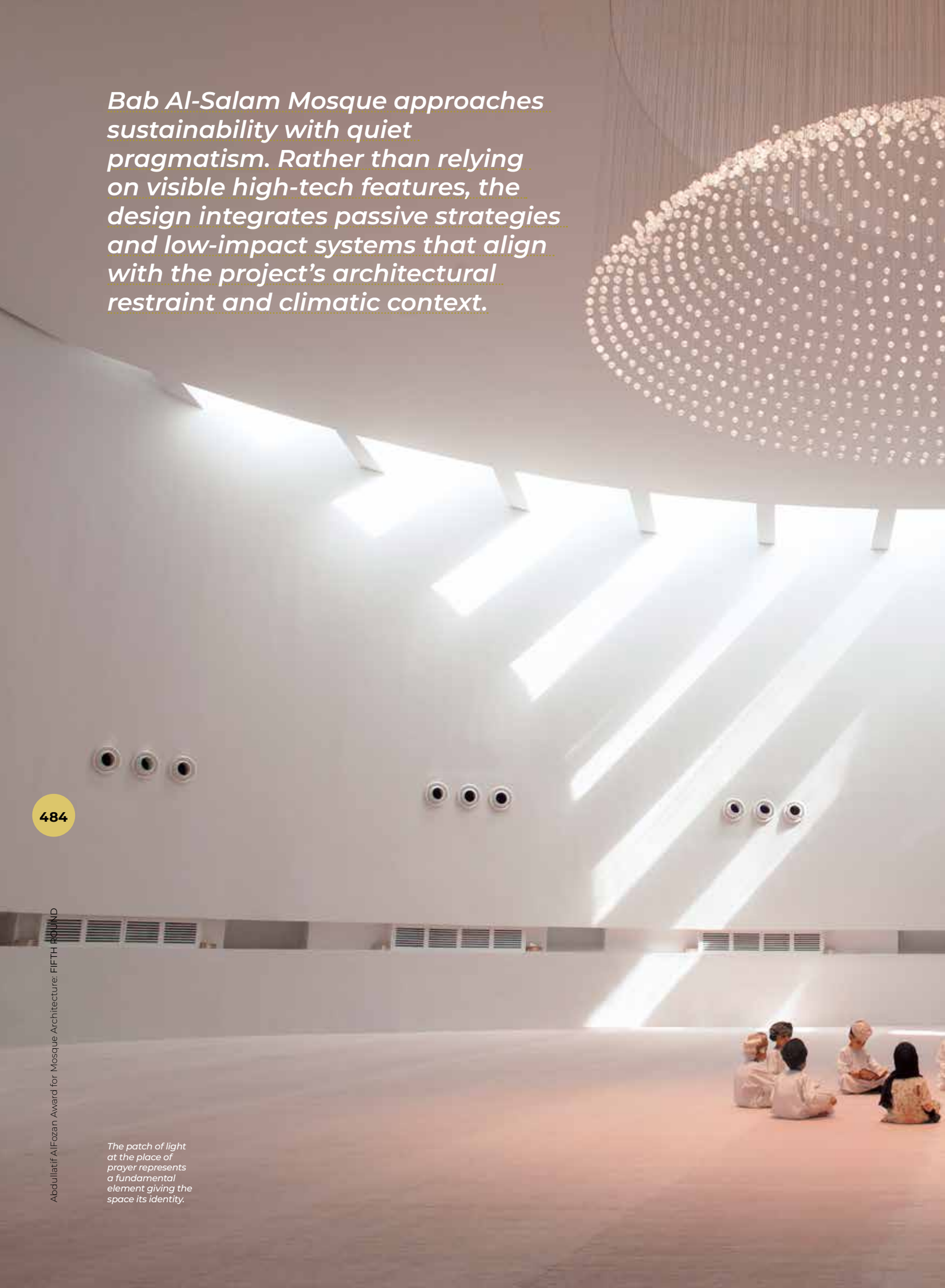


Isometric section of the minaret



Study of the mosque composition and its five elements

Bab Al-Salam Mosque approaches sustainability with quiet pragmatism. Rather than relying on visible high-tech features, the design integrates passive strategies and low-impact systems that align with the project's architectural restraint and climatic context.



The patch of light at the place of prayer represents a fundamental element giving the space its identity.

1

1. *Natural light floods the qibla wall and the mihrab as a luminous element defining the place of prayer.*

2-3. *Some exterior details.*

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

Bab Al-Salam Mosque stands out not only for its architecture, but for the civic generosity of its design. From the outset, the project was conceived as more than a space for ritual—it is a place for encounter, inclusion, and quiet continuity with daily life. This intention is evident in both spatial and social outcomes.

Most strikingly, the mosque is unwalled, inviting people to pass through, pause, or gather—regardless of whether they are attending prayer. Its open courtyard, shaded by palms and animated by a shallow water rill, functions as a shared social ground where neighbors meet, children play, and families linger beyond prayer hours. In this way, the mosque transcends its liturgical role, becoming a public commons embedded in the fabric of the neighborhood.

Accessibility is also carefully addressed. Gentle ramps, wide doors, and tactile guiding strips support users with limited mobility or visual impairments. The flat interior floor plan allows wheelchair users to pray alongside others without separation. These inclusive features are not ornamental—they are integrated into the design from the outset.

Gender equity is likewise considered with care. The women's prayer hall, housed in the elegant conical form of the minaret, is not an afterthought. Like the Nur Allah Mosque in China, it enacts a celebratory veiling—a spatial concealment that elevates rather than marginalizes. The space is luminous, tall, and dignified, offering a parallel journey to the main hall and equal access to spiritual experience.

The mosque's design encourages use by families and the broader public, not just formal worshippers. Its gardens, rest areas, and intuitive flow make it hospitable to elders, children, and passersby. There is no visible exclusion; rather, the architecture models hospitality through openness.

In a region where many mosques remain closed or underused between prayer times, Bab Al-Salam has become a lived space, embraced by its community. Its success lies not in footfall alone, but in the soft integration of sacred space into everyday life—a mark of enduring social relevance.

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

Bab Al-Salam Mosque presents a quiet yet confident rethinking of contemporary Islamic architecture. It does not invent new forms—but rather, redeploys familiar ones with unexpected clarity. The cylindrical volumes, for instance, resonate with the ancient forts and watchtowers of Oman, of which more than a thousand still punctuate the landscape. The mosque's conical minaret is at once a sacred marker and a subtle echo of these citadels, suggesting continuity rather than rupture.

Yet this is no historicist gesture. The architect, Marwan Al Balushi, demonstrates a mature command of modern architectural lineage. Nowhere is this more evident than in the spiral ramp embedded within the minaret, which calls to mind the interior procession of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum—an architectural citation absorbed not as mimicry, but as movement, sequence, and vertical poetics. In this way, the mosque positions itself within a broader global discourse while remaining unmistakably Omani.

Formally, the project achieves balance: modest yet memorable, open yet centered, sacred yet civic. The absence of a dome is neither accident nor deficiency. Instead, the hovering chandelier in the main hall evokes the dome's memory in abstract form—suggesting the celestial canopy without replicating it. It is a dome reimagined as light rather than structure, fulfilling its symbolic role in the unconscious minds of visitors.

The circular prayer space, too, avoids the common pitfall of spatial dissonance. Unlike other circular-plan mosques in this award cycle that impose radial carpet patterns at odds with liturgical alignment, Bab Al-Salam maintains clear parallel rows, reconciling geometry with religious function. This decision may seem minor, but it reflects a broader architectural intelligence: form must serve experience—not the other way around.

Perhaps most importantly, the mosque's openness—physical, spatial, and social—has transformed it into a daily presence in the life of its neighborhood. It is not a museum-piece nor a monument in waiting. It is used, walked through, leaned against, inhabited. In that sense, it fulfills one of the deepest ideals of the mosque: to be a place where the sacred and the everyday coexist without friction.

Bab Al-Salam is not without precedent, but it offers something rare: a sober architecture of peace, in tune with its context and quietly rich in meaning. It does not shout, but it is heard.

1

1. *The spiral composition of the minaret culminates in a point of light.*

2. *Prayer hall in the evening... artificial light as a calm alternative.*

3. *Prayer hall.*

2

3

FROM LIFE TO DEATH

ISFAHAN CEMETERY

(Razvan Garden Cemetery) Prayer Room

Isfahan Cemetery
(Razvan Garden Cemetery) Prayer Room
Location: Isfahan, Islamic Republic of Iran
Architect: Fotovvat Architecture Group
Year of Completion: 2011
Plot Area: 350 m²
Built-Up Area: Approx. 350 m²
Capacity: 160 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Alim Feyzulayev

1

The Isfahan Cemetery (Razvan Garden Cemetery) Prayer Room stands on the eastern edge of Isfahan, positioned along the Isfahan–Naein Road, approximately twelve kilometers outside the city. Designed by Fotovvat Architecture Group and completed in 2011, the project emerges as a small, yet thoughtful, architectural intervention within Razvan Garden Cemetery, the city's largest and most historically significant burial ground. Its modest scale—approximately 350 m²—belies the symbolic and emotional weight of its setting: a landscape visited daily by families, mourners, and pilgrims who come to remember their loved ones.

Conceived as a dedicated space for congregational prayer, remembrance rites, and communal gathering, the building responds to a very specific program: creating a place of spiritual pause amid the long linear expanse of the cemetery. Although the site is well-supported by existing infrastructure—parking areas, services, restrooms—the prayer room itself was tasked with cultivating an atmosphere of calm, dignity, and contemplative focus appropriate to its funerary context.

The design adopts an elliptical form, a gesture that both softens the building's presence and aligns it with the open and gently undulating terrain. This form, wrapped in a porous brick shell and enclosing a glass inner volume, establishes a double-layered spatial system that mediates between the intense sunlight of the region and the interior's need for softness and shade. The single dome, set above a column-free prayer hall, further anchors the building within the continuum of Iranian mosque architecture—contemporary in expression yet recognizably local in its typological cues.

Over the years, the project has been recognized for its architectural clarity and contextual sensitivity, earning awards at both the national and regional levels. Its value lies not in monumental form but in a carefully measured balance: between enclosure and openness, between solid brick mass and filtered light, between contemporary construction methods and an unmistakably Iranian architectural language.

The result is a prayer room that functions not only as a shelter for ritual practice but as a quiet landmark—a place where landscape, memory, and architecture meet in a restrained yet resonant composition.

2

1. *This is how the prayer hall mass appears from the exterior, with the minaret attached to the mihrab.*

2. *General view of the site.*

URBAN INTEGRATION

Set within the vast Razvan Garden Cemetery on the eastern edge of Isfahan, the prayer room occupies a site shaped by steady, daily visitation and the quiet rituals of remembrance. The cemetery's six-kilometer stretch along the Isfahan–Naein Road provides a broad, open landscape in which the building adopts a measured, non-intrusive presence.

Supported by existing infrastructure—parking, services, and access roads—the project focuses solely on offering a dignified space for prayer and memorial gatherings. Positioned on gently rising ground, the prayer room becomes visible without asserting dominance, its form calibrated to the solemnity of its context.

The choice of an elliptical footprint softens the building's outline within the cemetery's organic terrain. Its porous brick shell allows light, wind, and filtered views to pass through, subtly dissolving the structure into its surroundings. This approach echoes the long-standing architectural sensibilities of Isfahan—brick textures, controlled light, and understated ornamentation—while presenting them through a contemporary, restrained vocabulary suitable for a funerary landscape.

Rather than functioning as a standalone landmark, the prayer room acts as a spatial pause within the cemetery's network of paths—a place where visitors gather themselves, pray, or mark moments of remembrance. It reinforces the site's emotional and functional fabric with a calm architectural presence that is both legible and respectful.

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The exterior of the prayer room is defined by its elliptical form and double-layered envelope, a composition that balances clarity, restraint, and symbolic resonance. The outer shell—a porous, hand-laid brick screen—forms the building's primary visual presence. Its rhythmic perforations filter light, soften shadows, and allow fleeting glimpses of the inner volume, giving the structure a gentle, permeable character well suited to its funerary setting.

This brick skin draws from the deep Iranian tradition of light-modulating masonry, yet its execution remains contemporary: patterned, controlled, and free from excess. The choice of brick, in both color and texture, harmonizes with the earth tones of the cemetery grounds and the wider architectural palette of Isfahan, grounding the building within its cultural and climatic environment.

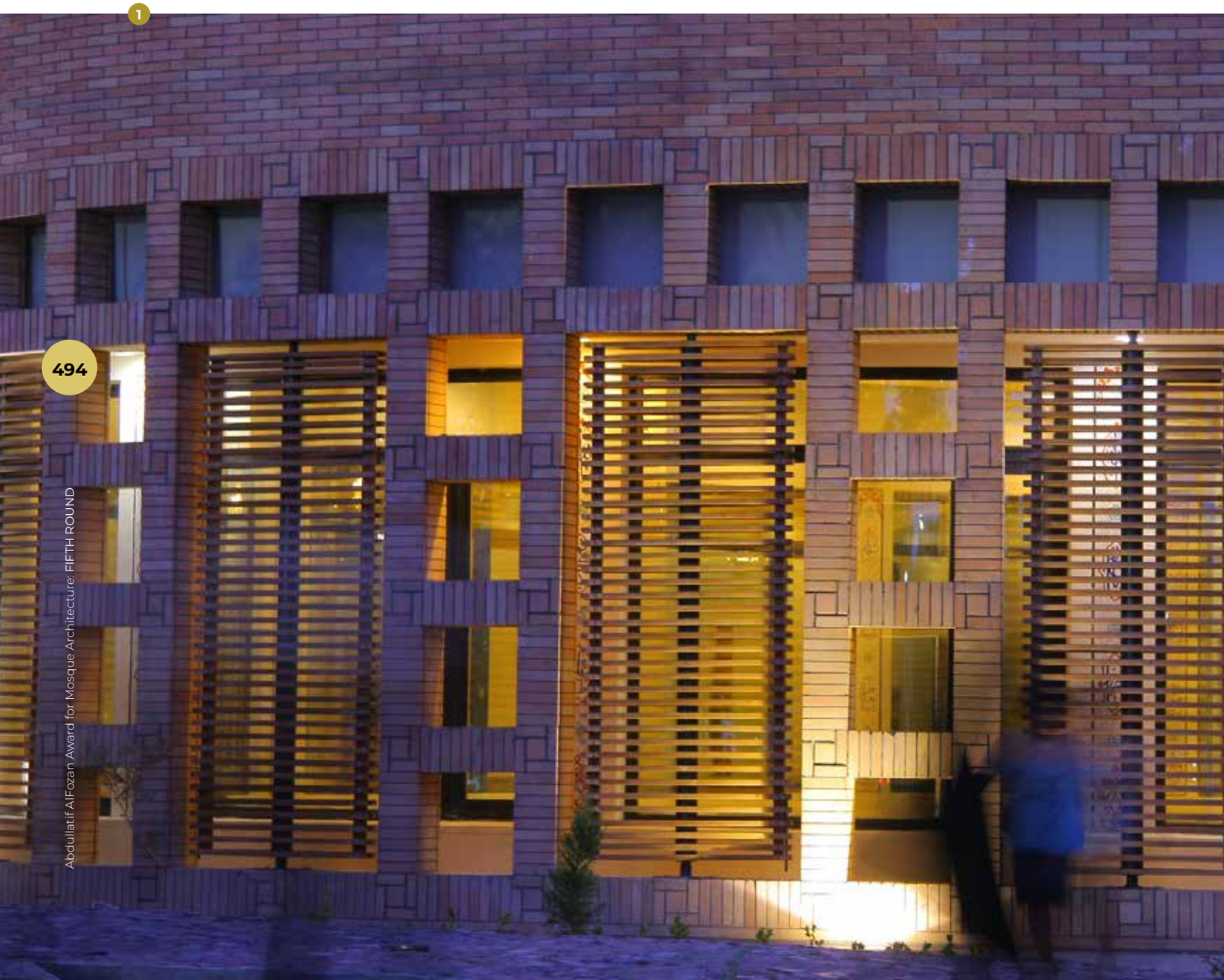
Inside this outer layer sits the inner glass shell, which appears almost as a luminous jewel when viewed through the brick screen. The interplay between heaviness and lightness—opaque brick and translucent glass—creates a calibrated balance between protection and openness, solemnity and invitation. This tension charges the building with a quiet symbolic depth.

A single dome crowns the composition, rising from the elliptical base with restraint rather than spectacle. Its scale respects the flatness of the surrounding cemetery, marking the prayer room without asserting monumental authority. Flanking the dome are two symbolic minarets, modest in height, framing the Qibla axis and providing a subtle vertical counterpoint to the otherwise horizontal landscape.

Openings within the brick shell are shaped to align with movement patterns, ventilation needs, and light paths. These voids, together with the gentle curvature of the walls, give the elevation a softness that avoids abrupt transitions or harsh contrasts. Viewed from afar, the building sits in quiet dialogue with the cemetery's greenery, pathways, and distant urban edges.

Overall, the exterior architecture expresses a language of measured presence: contemporary in its geometric clarity, deeply local in its material logic, and wholly appropriate to a place defined by memory and ritual.

1



1. The exterior wall.

2. The minaret.

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The interior of the prayer room unfolds as a single, unified hall, uninterrupted by columns and defined by a clear, centered spatial logic. The elliptical geometry of the exterior is carried inward, producing a space that feels continuous, soft-edged, and free from directional rigidity. This geometric purity is heightened by the double-envelope system: a translucent inner glass shell embraced by the porous brick skin.

Light is the primary shaping element. As sunlight filters through the brick lattice, it breaks into soft patterns that animate the interior throughout the day. This calibrated interplay of light and shadow—a hallmark of Iranian mosque architecture—gives the hall a contemplative, almost slowed-down atmosphere. The glass inner shell allows this light to enter gently, creating an ambient luminosity rather than sharp contrasts. At night, the relationship reverses: the glass volume becomes a glowing lantern, and the brick shell softens its glow.

The main dome anchors the space. It rises quietly above the hall, not as a monumental gesture, but as an atmospheric amplifier. Its curvature gathers light, deepens acoustics, and introduces a volumetric stillness appropriate for prayer. Beneath it, the mihrab is positioned along the Qibla axis, its placement reinforced by a subtle shaft of sunlight that enters through the gap between the two symbolic minarets—a carefully orchestrated moment where architecture, orientation, and natural light converge.

Finishes throughout remain intentionally restrained. The interior columns supporting the dome are adorned with seven-color tilework, combining traditional Eslimi floral motifs and inscriptions of Divine Names. These touches introduce texture and cultural resonance without overwhelming the space. The floor layout allows for flexible prayer arrangements, and a removable partition can separate the hall into gender-specific zones when needed.

Overall, the interior is characterized by unity, softness, and a quiet luminosity. The design avoids expressive ornamentation, relying instead on the architecture itself—light, geometry, material—to create a space of presence and gentle focus. It succeeds not through grandeur, but through clarity and composure.

1

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

The prayer room's technical performance is anchored in its dual-envelope system, where the porous brick shell and inner glass volume work together as a passive environmental buffer. This configuration significantly reduces solar gain in Isfahan's hot, dry climate, lowering interior temperatures and decreasing reliance on mechanical cooling.

The brick screen filters light, encourages airflow, and shades the glass shell, while the surrounding arcade provides additional thermal protection. The dome enhances passive ventilation by allowing warm air to rise, and daylight remains the primary source of illumination, with artificial lighting used mainly after sunset. At night, the glass volume glows softly within the brick lattice, maintaining visibility with minimal energy consumption.

Material choices—local fired brick, gypsum, stone, and treated wood—support long-term durability and low maintenance. The steel structural system simplifies construction and ensures resilience.

Socially, the building's clear circulation, ground-level accessibility, and flexible, column-free prayer hall accommodate diverse users and community functions, reinforcing its role as an inclusive, adaptable civic space.

2

1. *Relationship between the wooden screen, brick, and the structural system.*

2. *Site plan.*

3. *This is how the exterior wall of the building appears.*

3

The prayer hall where the mihrab appears as a luminous glass divider illuminating the prayer area and emphasizing the place of prayer.

The prayer room's technical performance is anchored in its dual-envelope system, where the porous brick shell and inner glass volume work together as a passive environmental buffer. This configuration significantly reduces solar gain in Isfahan's hot, dry climate, lowering interior temperatures and decreasing reliance on mechanical cooling.

1. Exterior courtyards integrated with the cemetery.

2. Relationship between the prayer hall and the cemetery.

SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

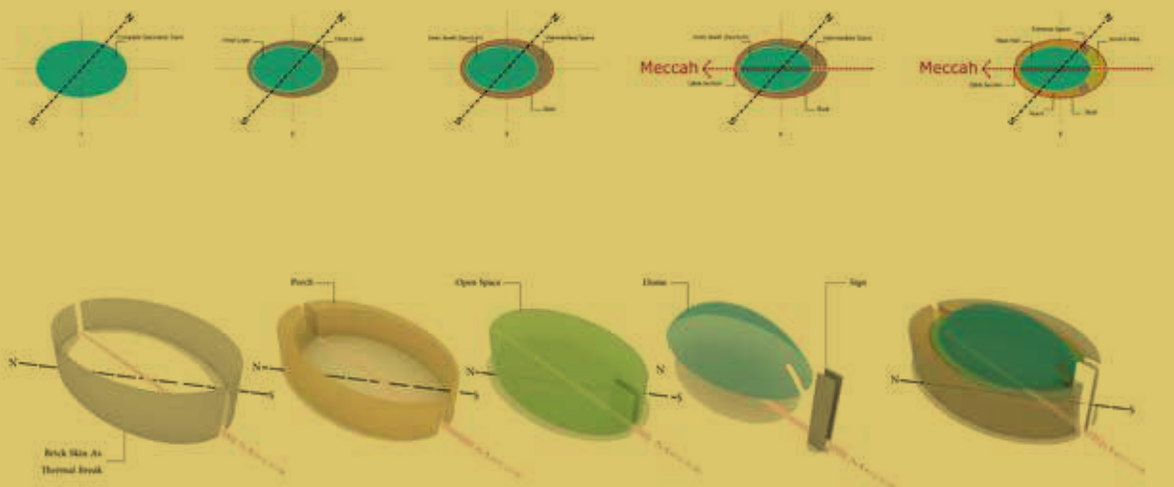
Although modest in scale, the prayer room plays a significant social role within the Razvan Garden Cemetery, a site visited continuously by families and mourners. Its column-free interior and clear circulation allow the space to adapt easily to communal prayers, remembrance rites, and seasonal religious gatherings, extending its function beyond the daily prayer cycle.

Two symmetrical entrances and the possibility of a removable internal partition support equitable access for men and women, while level entry points make the building accessible to the elderly and to visitors with limited mobility. A nearby ablution facility and open green surroundings further enhance comfort and usability for diverse groups.

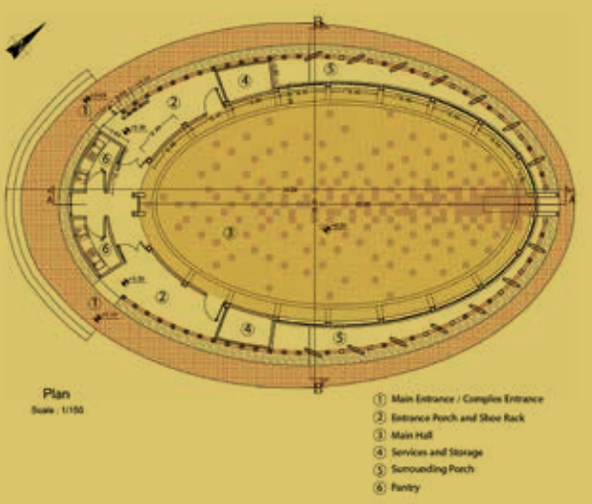
Set within a landscape of memory and emotion, the prayer room becomes a civic anchor—a quiet center where individuals and families can pause, gather, pray, or simply find a moment of shelter and composure. Its restrained architecture encourages reflection rather than spectacle, allowing the community to inhabit the space with dignity and ease.

1

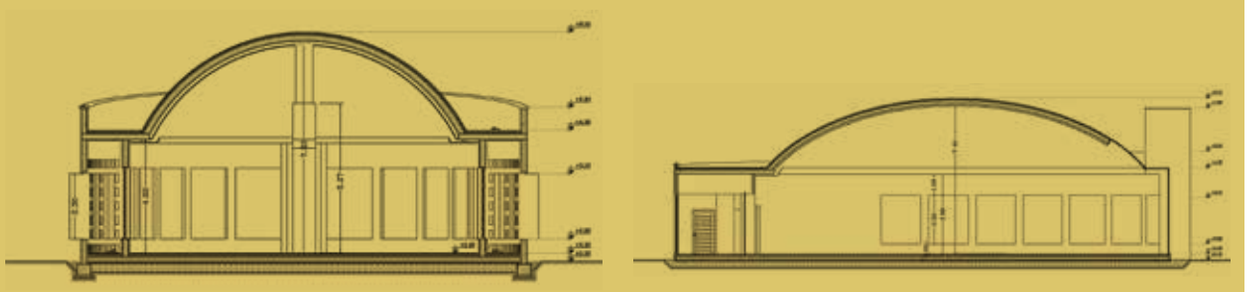
2



Massing studies of the building



Ground floor plan



Sections

1

502

Abdullatif AlFozan Award for Mosque Architecture- FIFTH ROUND

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The Isfahan Cemetery Prayer Room achieves a quiet yet confident architectural presence, offering a space that feels appropriately measured for its funerary setting. Its strength lies in the clarity of its concept: an elliptical plan, a porous brick shell, and an inner glass volume that together shape light, mediate climate, and create an atmosphere of contemplative calm. The building neither competes with nor diminishes its surroundings; instead, it situates itself as a point of pause within the cemetery's vast expanse—recognizable yet subdued, contemporary yet grounded in the material and spatial traditions of Isfahan.

The architectural language succeeds where it remains restrained. The use of brick as a climatic filter, the gentle dome, the carefully articulated openings, and the modulation of daylight all contribute to a space that supports spiritual focus without relying on ornamental excess. The prayer hall's flexibility, ease of access, and gender-sensitive layout enhance its social performance, allowing the building to host daily prayers as well as larger ceremonial gatherings.

There remain, however, a few areas where the architecture's clarity could be further strengthened. The dual-shell system, while effective, occasionally risks creating a visual separation rather than a seamless integration between the outer and inner layers—especially at certain angles where the glass reads as an object inserted within the brick envelope. A more explicit spatial dialogue between the two layers might have yielded a stronger sense of unity. Similarly, the symbolic minarets, though modest and aligned with the Qibla axis, feel more gestural than spatially integrated, raising the question of whether their presence contributes meaningfully to the building's broader architectural narrative.

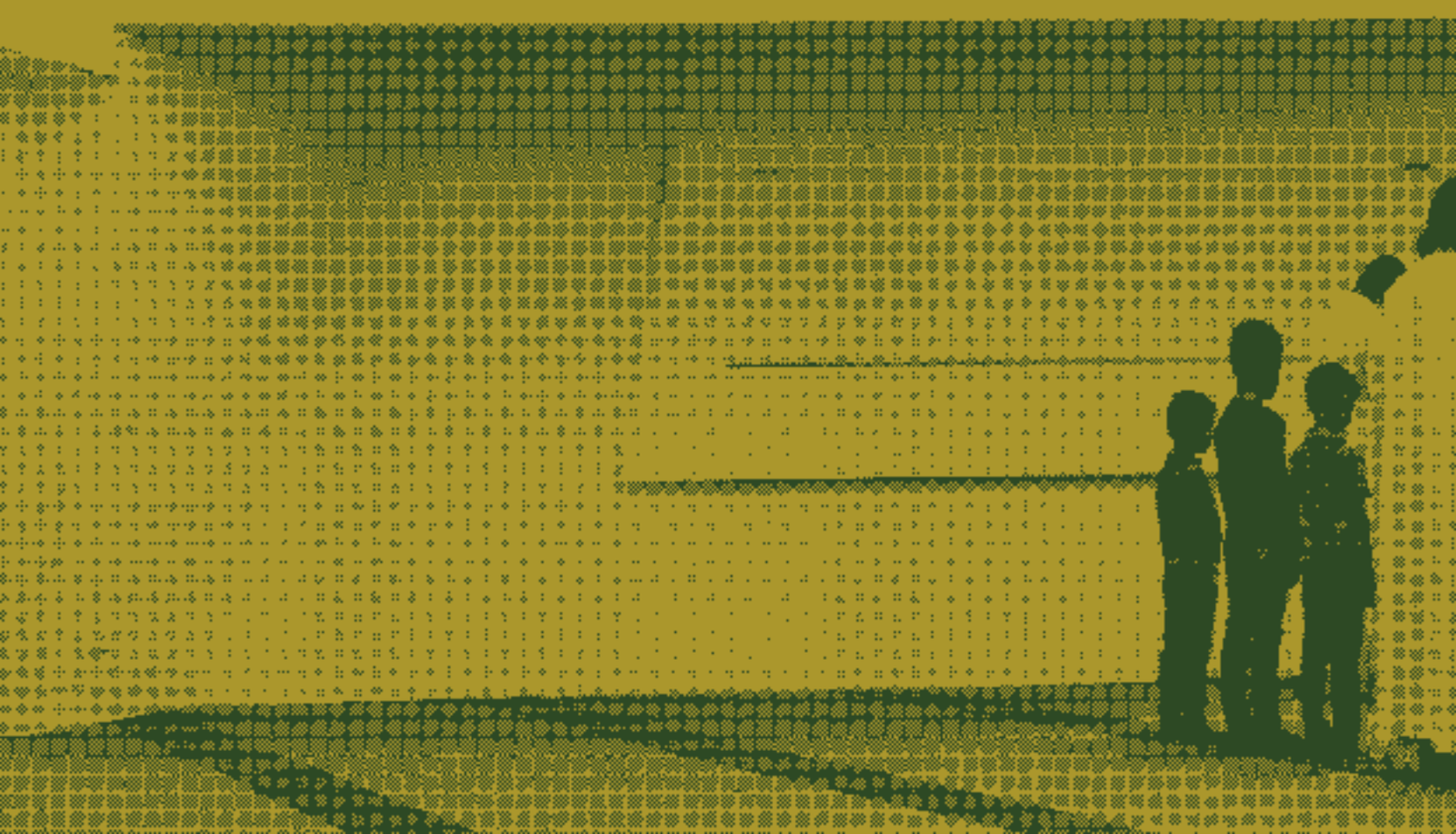
Nonetheless, these points do not overshadow the project's overall accomplishment. The prayer room stands as an example of measured contemporary mosque design—one that honors its context, supports its social role, and engages with Iranian architectural sensibilities in a thoughtful, non-imitative manner. Its atmosphere of filtered light, its quiet dome, and its soft geometry collectively create a space where memory, prayer, and community can coexist with dignity.

2

1. *Exterior wall of the mosque and the surrounding.*

2. *Exterior wall details.*

GO BEYOND THE TRADITIONAL FORMAT



ANWAR AL SABBAH

Musalla

Anwar Al Sabbah Musalla
Location: Nabatiyeh, Lebanon
Architect: Polypod
Year of Completion: 2017
Plot Area: 500 m^2
Built-Up Area: Approx. 500 m^2
Capacity: 50 worshippers

Technical reviewer: Lamia Hadda

The Anwar Al Sabbah Musalla sits quietly in the rolling hills of Nabatiyeh in southern Lebanon, where the urban grain is soft, domestic, and intimately scaled. The project began as a personal initiative by Ali Anwar Al Sabbah, who donated part of his family land to create a place of prayer and contemplation for the local community. His intention was straightforward yet generous: to provide a small sanctuary open to the public, set within a garden he envisioned as a meditative landscape of cypress, fruit trees, and shaded paths.

When Polypod, led by architect Hani Asfour, first approached the commission, the design imagined a larger cultural complex that would include a community hall and a public library alongside the prayer space. But this ambition met resistance from the surrounding residents, who feared that such a complex would disrupt the quiet character of their neighborhood. After extensive dialogue, the project was refined into a modest musalla—an intimate prayer hall that would respect both the social fabric of Nabatiyeh and the aspirations of its patron.

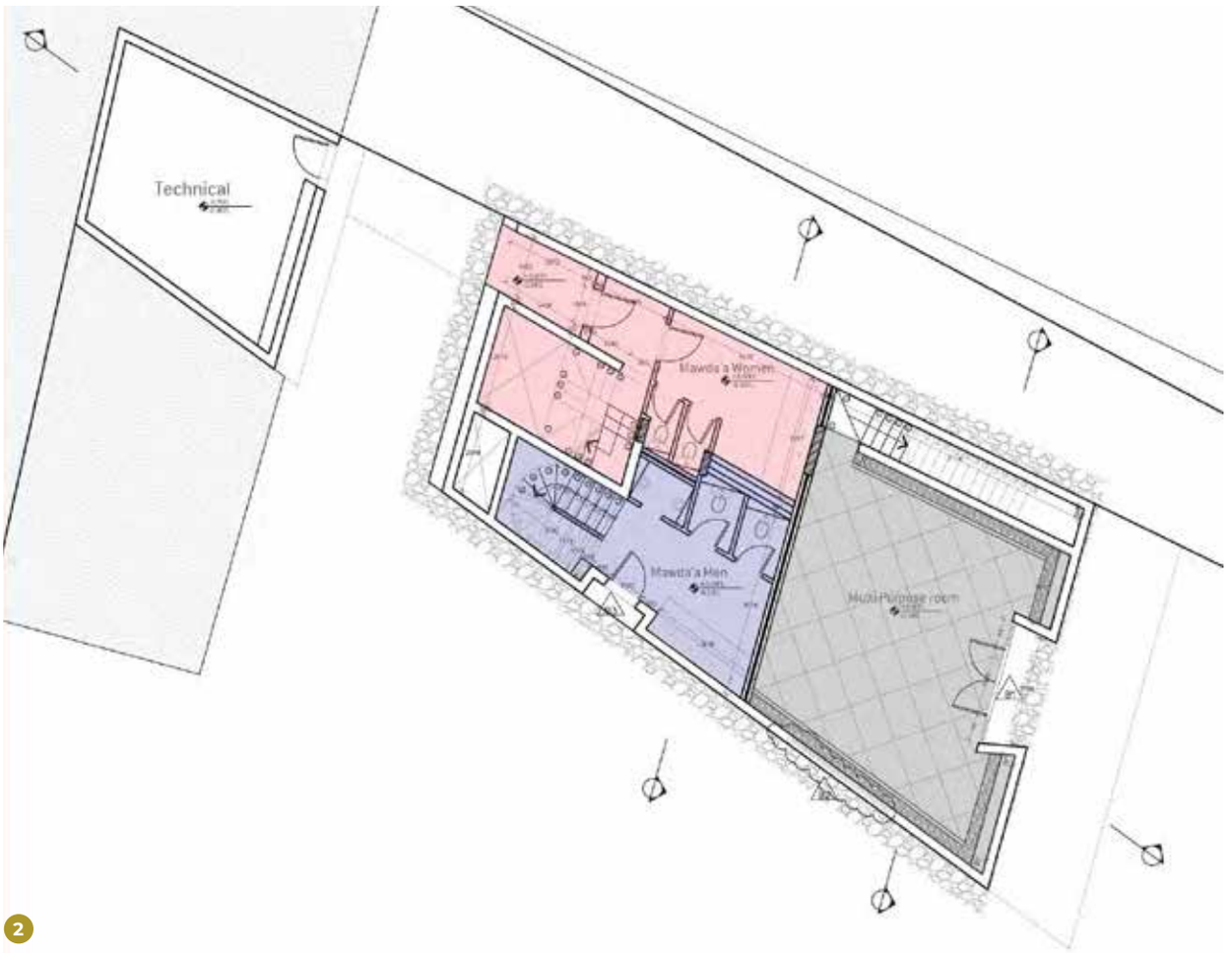
Construction unfolded over several years, marked by the interruptions and delays familiar to Lebanon's building culture. Commissioned in 2011, work began in 2014, stopped in 2015, and resumed later that same year, finally reaching completion in 2017. The process relied entirely on local builders and stonemasons, guided by structural engineer Samer Cheaito and contractor Mohammad Yassine, whose teams had to grapple with the technical challenges of casting inclined concrete walls and cutting stone to the precise tolerances required by the design.

The completed Musalla consists of a single sloping white volume—an inclined cube whose proportions recall the Kaaba and whose entire mass leans toward the Qibla. This gesture anchors the project both spiritually and architecturally. Clad in finely worked local limestone with almost invisible joints, the structure appears as a monolith set within a cultivated garden. The entrance is reached by a narrow bridge and marked by an eight-meter-high, one-meter-wide passage that compresses the visitor's approach, evoking ancient thresholds in sacred architecture and preparing worshippers for the stillness of the interior.

Within the building, two separate sanctuaries—one for men and one for women—are connected to their respective ablution areas on the lower level. A multi-purpose room, modest in scale, opens to the eastern side of the site. Above, a staircase leads upward to a rooftop terrace, an open-air prayer platform that completes the procession and offers expansive views over the hills. The surrounding garden, planted generously with cypress and aromatic species, forms a contemplative perimeter that reinforces the Musalla's sense of retreat.

Taken together, these elements define the identity of the Anwar Al Sabbah Musalla: a small neighborhood sanctuary shaped by negotiation, restraint, and symbolic clarity. It emerges from a local context, responds to a local community, and achieves a distinctive architectural presence not through spectacle, but through orientation, proportion, and the calibrated use of light, landscape, and movement.

1



2

URBAN INTEGRATION

The Musalla sits on the gentle outskirts of Nabatiyeh, where the residential fabric begins to dissolve into gardens and open terrain. This transitional setting shapes the project's character: neither fully urban nor fully rural, the Musalla is quietly embedded within a neighborhood known for its calm, private rhythm. When the initial proposal envisioned a larger cultural complex, residents expressed concern that such a program would bring a scale of activity out of step with their environment. Their feedback guided the project toward a more modest and contemplative form, ensuring the Musalla would remain attuned to the daily life around it.

1. *Relationship between the mosque mass and the surrounding courtyards.*

2. *Floor plan.*

Set within a dense garden of cypress trees, the building appears as a white, sloping volume partially concealed by foliage. The landscape softens the geometry, buffers the nearby houses, and establishes an atmosphere closer to a retreat than an institution. Arrival is choreographed through a simple landing and a narrow stone bridge that lifts visitors over the garden, creating a gentle transition from the street to the sanctuary.

Although unmistakably contemporary in form, the Musalla maintains the scale and restraint appropriate to its setting. Without a minaret or large forecourt, it relies instead on its orientation, material quietness, and the embrace of its garden to anchor itself in the neighborhood. It becomes a small civic presence—respectful, measured, and rooted—serving as a threshold between the domestic world and the inward focus of prayer.

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The exterior of the Anwar Al Sabbah Musalla is defined by a single, deliberate gesture: a white, sloping cube of local limestone tilted wholly toward the Qibla. This inclination gives the building an immediate symbolic charge while preserving a quiet, contained presence in the landscape. The finely jointed stone cladding, with almost imperceptible seams, strengthens the sense of monolithic purity and recalls the timeless solidity of early sacred enclosures.

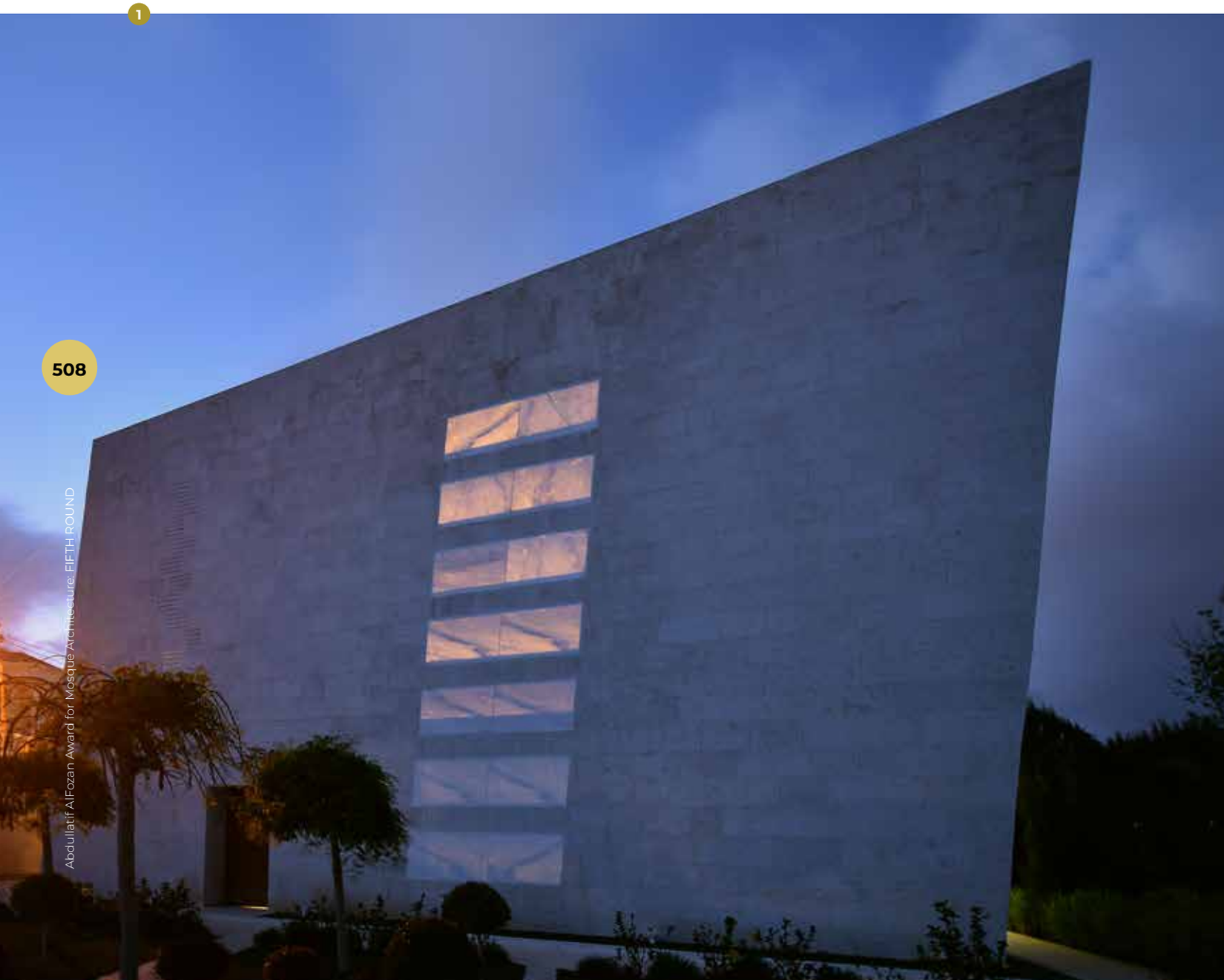
Approached from the garden, the Musalla reveals itself gradually. Its volume is partly veiled by cypress trees, allowing the structure to emerge as a luminous object rather than a dominant landmark. The absence of a minaret, often expected in mosque architecture, further reinforces this restraint. Instead, the building expresses its sacred orientation through the geometry of the whole—letting form replace icon!

The entry sequence sharpens this architectural language. A narrow eight-meter-high passage compresses the visitor's movement and evokes ancient thresholds where light, scale, and proportion prepared the worshipper for an encounter with the sacred. Adjacent to this passage, a triangular promontory marks the orientation toward Mecca, functioning both as a spatial cue and as a carved surface for the Qur'anic 'keys' inscribed along the upper façade. The calligraphy, rendered in relief on smooth stone, animates the exterior without compromising its overall austerity.

Windows are kept to a minimum, organized in horizontal bands of translucent marble that diffuse light inward and register the rhythms of Islamic numerology. From the outside, these thin alabaster-like lines subtly break the mass, providing texture without diminishing the purity of the cube.

Overall, the exterior succeeds through its disciplined clarity. It balances symbolism with simplicity, and contemporary form with deep reverence. Its power lies not in variation or ornament, but in the precision of a single idea carried through with consistency: a quiet volume, inclined in total devotion.

1



2

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Inside the Musalla, the spatial experience unfolds with a quiet intensity shaped by light, geometry, and a carefully choreographed sequence of movement. The building's sloping exterior translates into interiors that feel both grounded and oriented, guiding the worshipper subtly yet decisively toward the Qibla.

The main prayer hall is defined by a trapezoidal plan whose angled corner becomes the mihrab—a decisive departure from the traditional centered niche. This cornered mihrab, illuminated by a soft wash of natural light, transforms a structural gesture into a spatial and symbolic one, allowing orientation to emerge from the geometry itself rather than from added ornament. Above, an oculus directs a focused shaft of light onto the minbar zone, replacing the customary stepped pulpit with a pure moment of illumination.

The women's prayer space, positioned as a mezzanine overlooking the main hall, maintains the same trapezoidal language and benefits from the same controlled natural light. Both sanctuaries draw daylight through horizontal bands of translucent marble, whose warm glow creates a calm, almost weightless ambiance. The five tiers of these window bands register the spiritual logic embedded in the architecture without calling attention to themselves as decorative elements.

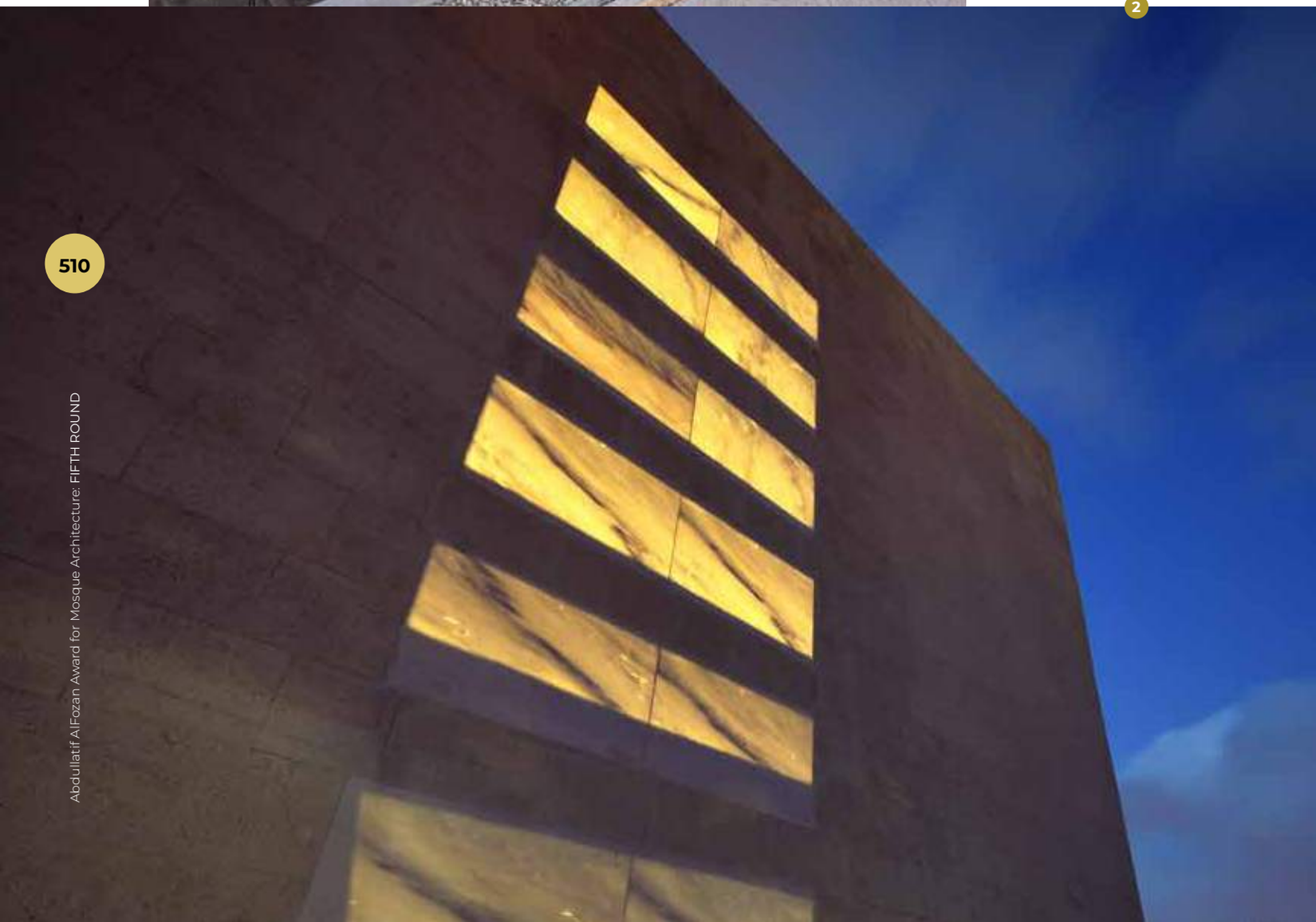
Movement plays a crucial role in the interior experience. Stairs rise and weave between levels, forming a subtle "promenade architecturale" that connects ablution areas, prayer spaces, and the rooftop terrace. The narrow entry passage heightens the sense of transition, opening suddenly into a serene interior where proportions, silence, and filtered light recalibrate the visitor's senses.

Overall, the interior achieves a delicate balance between minimalism and symbolic resonance. It avoids spectacle, relying instead on proportion, light, and the sincerity of its spatial language to cultivate a contemplative atmosphere. In doing so, it extends the architectural promise of the exterior into a coherent and quietly moving interior realm.

1. *A mass inclined toward the direction of prayer.*

2. *Sculptural interior formation.*

1



2

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

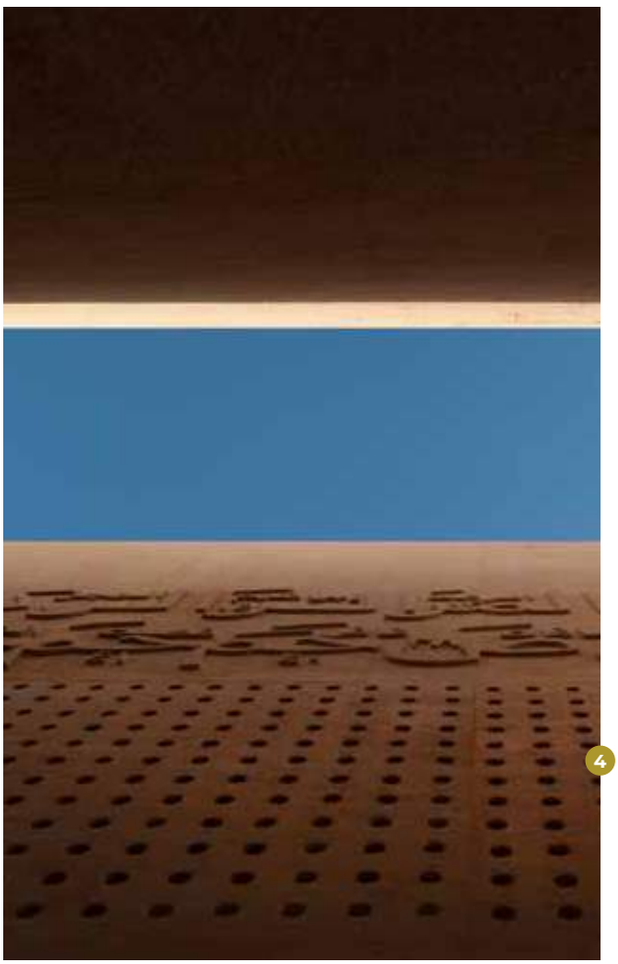
Behind its quiet exterior, the Musalla relies on a set of technical decisions that reflect both the constraints of local construction and a deliberate commitment to material honesty. The most challenging aspect of the project was the inclined concrete structure itself—walls cast in situ using custom wooden formwork and reinforced to accommodate their unusual geometry. This structural strategy demanded a high level of precision from the local construction team, who were unfamiliar with sloping forms but succeeded through careful coordination and incremental testing.

Cladding the entire sanctuary in local limestone further anchored the Musalla in its context while reducing environmental impact. The stone, finely cut with almost invisible joints, performs as both a protective envelope and a thermal mass, moderating interior temperatures during Lebanon's hot summers. The windows—thin slabs of locally sourced translucent marble drilled with small perforations—extend this logic of local material innovation. They soften daylight, reduce glare, and eliminate the need for complex shading systems.

Passive strategies define most of the building's environmental performance. The combination of thick stone walls, limited openings, and carefully oriented window bands reduces heat gain while maintaining visual and thermal comfort. The rooftop terrace doubles as an outdoor prayer space, minimizing reliance on conditioned interiors during temperate months.

Economically, the project's commitment to local materials and craftsmanship kept construction costs controlled and reinforced the social sustainability of the Musalla. The reliance on local masons, stone carvers, and fabricators—especially in producing the calligraphy and marble screens—ensured that the project remained rooted in community expertise rather than reliant upon external technology.

Taken together, these technical choices form a sustainability approach based not on advanced systems but on restraint, material intelligence, and an architecture that works with its climate and labor culture rather than against them.



1. *The suspension bridge appears as an extension of the building's mass.*

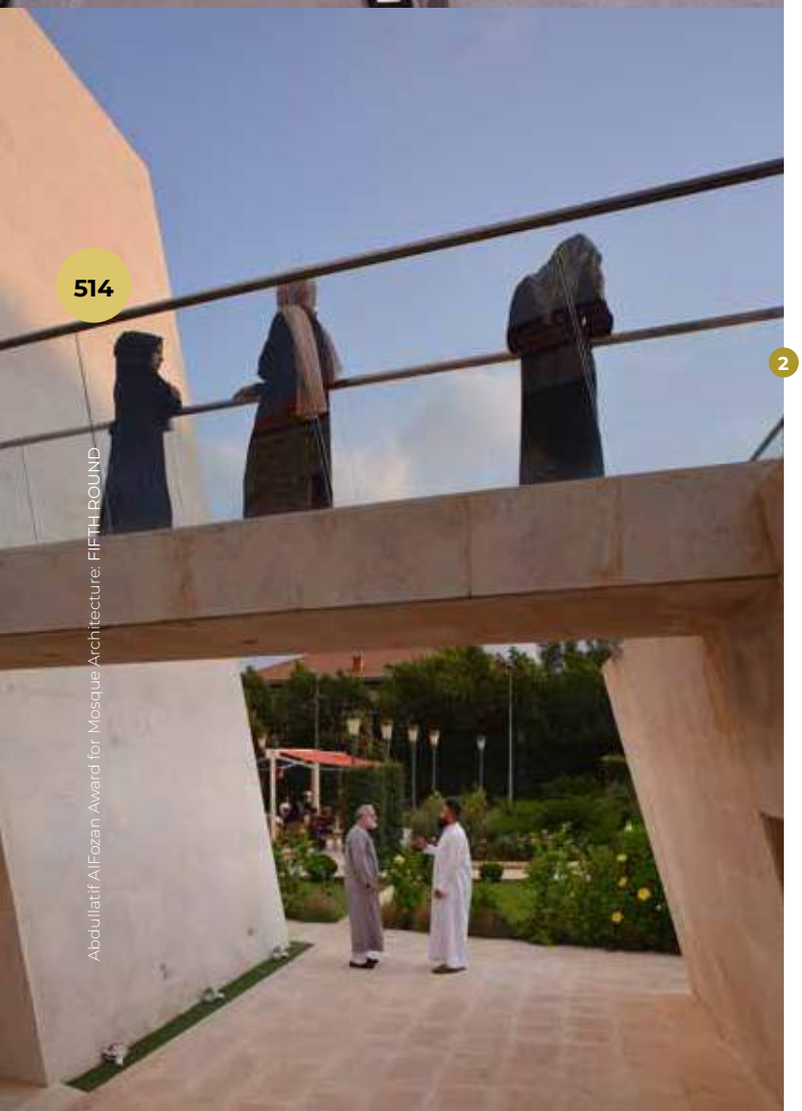
2. *This is how the building mass appears in the evening.*

3. *Interior visual carving.*

4. *A formation open to the sky.*

Passive strategies define most of the building's environmental performance. The combination of thick stone walls, limited openings, and carefully oriented window bands reduces heat gain while maintaining visual and thermal comfort. The rooftop terrace doubles as an outdoor prayer space, minimizing reliance on conditioned interiors during temperate months.

A surreal image of the prayer hall.



SOCIAL ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY

From its earliest stages, the Musalla was shaped as much by community negotiation as by architectural vision. The surrounding residents played a decisive role in redefining the scope of the project, guiding it away from a larger cultural complex toward a smaller, quieter sanctuary that would respect the neighborhood's intimate scale. This early dialogue set the foundation for a building that is socially embedded rather than imposed.

Today, the Musalla serves the community with a gentle and inclusive presence. Two separate prayer halls ensure privacy and ease of use for both men and women, each connected to its own ablution facilities. Circulation between spaces is intuitive, allowing different groups—elderly worshippers, families, and individuals—to navigate the building comfortably. Ramps and graded paths through the garden further enhance accessibility for those with limited mobility.

Beyond prayer, the Musalla's landscape operates as an informal gathering ground for the neighborhood. The cypress-lined garden offers moments of shade, quiet, and social encounter, functioning as a contemporary echo of the traditional sahn—a shared open space that accommodates both reflection and community life. At times, the outdoor areas host small educational or devotional gatherings, extending the building's role beyond its interior footprint.

The absence of a minaret and the restrained exterior expression also contribute to the Musalla's social integration. It neither dominates nor isolates itself, but remains a small civic anchor within the neighborhood fabric. Its scale and demeanor reinforce the idea of a mosque—or in this case, a musalla—as an accessible, everyday place, integrated into the life of its residents rather than standing apart as an institutional object.

In this way, the Anwar Al Sabbah Musalla becomes more than a building. It is a negotiated, shared space—modest in size, resonant in presence, and embedded in the daily rhythms of the community it serves.

.

1. *The prayer hall mass with the suspended exterior walkway.*

2. *The suspended exterior passage creates a spatial enclosure for the surrounding courtyards.*

3-5. *Social activity taking place inside and outside, where the prayer hall becomes a meeting place for the local community of men and women.*

3

4

5

CONCLUSION / CRITICAL REFLECTION

The Anwar Al Sabbah Musalla stands as a quiet yet assured contribution to contemporary mosque architecture—one that achieves presence not through scale or ornament, but through courage, clarity of intention, and disciplined restraint. Its defining gesture, the inclined monolithic cube oriented wholly toward the Kaaba, allows symbolism to arise from geometry itself. In doing so, the project sidesteps the clichés and inherited forms that often dominate mosque design, offering instead a thoughtful and internally coherent architectural stance.

What gives the Musalla particular weight, however, is not only its formal clarity but the decision—shared by both architect and client—to venture into a more experimental, and in many ways riskier, territory. In a context where mosque architecture is often shaped by expectations of familiarity and precedent, choosing to pursue a quieter, more abstract, and more conceptually driven expression requires a certain courage. It reflects a willingness to trust that spiritual depth can emerge from restraint; that orientation, light, and proportion may speak more authentically than the conventional assembly of symbolic elements. For a small neighborhood sanctuary, this is not a minor gesture—it is perhaps a meaningful contribution to the broader global discourse on the evolving possibilities of sacred architecture.

The project's modest scale, shaped by early negotiations with the surrounding community, ultimately deepens its architectural logic. By refusing monumentality, the Musalla aligns itself with the intimate rhythms of its setting. The garden, the compressed entry passage, and the gradual ascent to the roof terrace together construct an architecture of inwardness—one that frames prayer as a movement from the everyday to the reflective.

Technically, the building demonstrates a commitment that surpasses the simplicity of its final form: the construction of inclined concrete walls with local craftsmen, the precise limestone cladding, and the development of translucent marble light-strips, all undertaken within the limitations of local industry. These efforts signal a seriousness of intent and a willingness to pursue refinement through persistence and care.

Its minimalism, however, is not without tension. Some visitors may find its austerity severe, or its absence of a minaret disorienting. Yet these choices remain consistent with the project's ambition: to articulate a sacred space through its essence rather than through symbolic excess.

A closer reading of the project's reductive strategy, however, reveals an additional point of reflection. By presenting itself explicitly as a musalla rather than a full mosque, the project intentionally minimizes the traditional triad of mihrab, minbar, and minaret—suggesting them rather than declaring them. While this approach succeeds clearly in the configuration of the mihrab, and to a lesser extent in the handling of the minbar, one photograph reveals the loudspeaker projecting from the roofline, interrupting the otherwise pristine silhouette. This raises a legitimate question about the absence of a minaret, particularly given the functional requirement of the call to prayer. A subtle vertical element, derived from the project's formal logic, might have accommodated this necessity more gracefully and offered the architect an additional opportunity for architectural articulation.

In the end, the Anwar Al Sabbah Musalla offers a remarkably refined and introspective model for the contemporary mosque. It demonstrates that humility does not preclude ambition, and that a small building—when shaped with conviction, patience, and mutual trust—can open meaningful paths for architectural reflection. In this sense, both architect and client deserve recognition for advancing the discourse on sacred architecture through a gesture modest in scale yet generous in its contribution.

1. *Interior staircase.*

2. *Sculptural formation of the building mass.*

3. *The space as a social gathering place.*

4. *Visual details.*

2

3

4

Epilogue

TOWARDS AN ALL-INCLUSIVE MOSQUE IN A HETEROGENEOUS WORLD

If we try to imagine the future of mosque architecture amid the swift turn of contemporary technologies, the question is not so much one of form as of continuity: how can this architecture give rise to new lineages without breaking from its deeper existential thread? The answer lies in what the mosque has always been. Across its history, it has never stood as a fixed structure. It has been a living presence, adapting without surrendering, changing without losing its core. Technology, therefore, does not threaten this continuity. It brings its latent depths into clearer view, depths through which light becomes a more eloquent language, space becomes more able to receive the human being, and silence grows denser and more lucid. For this reason, the coming lineages of mosque architecture will not be detached futuristic replicas, but organic extensions of a single essence that has remained constant through every transformation: the quiet invitation to enter, to settle into stillness, and to reorder the inner life before the outer world.

1. The mosque is born from the community that surrounds it. The origin is the existence of the community, but the relationship remains tense between the collective bond that is the reason for the mosque becoming a fixed place and the individual bond between man and the Creator that makes every place a mosque.

Technology today does not come to the mosque as an external power that dictates a new form. It comes, rather, as an instrument that brings into clearer view possibilities long latent within it. For at its heart the mosque is a space of light and shadow, of silence, and of the human rhythm, returning five times each day. These are not merely architectural features; they are existential conditions. With technology now entering the scene, the question sharpens: how might these new instruments, from artificial intelligence to intelligent materials to advanced environmental systems, deepen these qualities rather than displace them? How might artificial light intensify, rather than compete with, the presence of natural light? How might acoustic systems refine the meaning of silence instead of simply filling it? How might new materials make space more apt to receive worshippers, rather than more demonstrative, more complicated, or more self-regarding?

The lineages that will emerge in mosque architecture, in this sense, will be quiet ones. They will not seek formal singularity, nor visual competition, but a renewed discovery of the simplicity that has, throughout history, made the

Abdullatif Al Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture: FIFTH ROUND

mosque a universal space. Technology here is not an end in itself, but a means of returning us to fundamentals: to the ground laid for prayer, to light that flows without affectation, to a space that does not impose itself upon the entrant, but withdraws in order to make room. The future of the mosque will not be defined by digital culture. It will be more deeply human. For technology, when used with discernment, can help the human being return to inner clarity, not drift further from it.

In non-Muslim societies, where the mosque stands as an architectural and cultural exception, this future acquires a further meaning. Here the mosque is not merely a building. It becomes a sign of presence, a quiet affirmation of identity, and a space of silent resistance. This resistance is not political in the conventional sense, nor cultural in the sense of conflict. It is existential: a resistance grounded in abiding, in endurance, and in offering another manner of presence within the public realm. In a world where tensions surrounding identity and belonging continue to sharpen, the mosque, by its silence, by its simplicity, and by its capacity to receive all, stands as a counter-proposal to the noise that fills the world.

Embodied by the mosque in such contexts, 'silent resistance' is not merely a defensive posture; it is a form of wisdom. For silence here is not retreat, but a way of speaking without words. In its quiet emergence, the mosque offers an indirect discourse: one that affirms that presence may be modest without being weak, that identity may be open without dissolving, and that the sacred may dwell at the heart of noisy cities without losing its dignity.

1

As the human and cultural weave of the world's cities grows denser, this manner of presence becomes ever more consequential. Here the mosque does not set itself against the world; it abides beside it. It does not impose itself, but offers itself. It does not press for recognition, but allows recognition to ripen in its own time. This capacity to be present without insistence is what makes the mosque a singular form of resistance: a resistance grounded not in conflict but in continuity, not in volume but in silence, not in force but in steadfastness.

Amid this unprecedented mingling of peoples and cultures, the mosque becomes a testing ground for the very idea of shared life. By its nature, it is an open space: it asks for no identity card, it imposes no ritual upon the entrant, and it prescribes no single form of belonging. It is this openness that makes it a an exemplar of what contemporary cities might yet become, cities that define themselves not by exclusion, but by their capacity to receive difference. In this sense, the mosque is not only a place of worship, but also a place of learning. It teaches, quietly, that space can be generous, that architecture carries an ethical weight, and that silence can sometimes do what words cannot, especially among those who do not share the same tongue.

In these contexts, the future of the mosque will not be a matter of form, but of ethics. The real challenge is not how technology is introduced into the mosque, but how its essence is safeguarded in a world that changes with unsettling speed. The question, then, is this: how can the mosque remain a space of sakīnah in a restless world? How can it remain a space of openness in an age that increasingly turns inward? How can it remain a home of simplicity in a world that grows more complex by the day? These are not architectural

1. An eternal dialogue between earth and sky.

questions alone. They are existential ones, because they touch the very meaning of being human in the technological age.

Across its history, the mosque has shown a quiet capacity to adapt without surrendering itself. What has been true of it before will remain true ahead. The new lineages of mosque architecture will not mark a rupture with the past, but a further unfolding of it. And the silent resistance it embodies in non-Muslim societies will not be a reaction, but an act that proceeds from its own nature. In a world that shifts with relentless speed, the mosque, through its silence, its light, its open space, will remain among the few places still able to remind the human being of what has been lost, and of what may yet be reclaimed.

The question remains: does the mosque need an identity, or is it the mosque that grants identity its existential meaning? To attempt to assign an 'identity' to the mosque is to assume, from the outset, that identity is something added from outside, or manufactured through an image, a symbol, or a formal language. Yet the mosque, in its essence, is not a being in search of a definition. It is a source of identity. It is not a vessel to be filled with meanings; it is what overflows with meaning upon those who draw near.

The mosque is not easily reduced to a fixed form or stable symbols. Its identity is perhaps more faithfully read in its existential presence: the ground that receives the body, the direction that orients the heart, and the space that allows the human being to stand in honesty before himself and his Creator. Seen in this light, the mosque is less an identity to be manufactured than one to be recovered.

One might say that the identity the mosque embodies is not so much formal as relational: a relationship between the human being and space, between inwardness and sakīnah, between movement and rhythm, between body and ground, between the individual and the community. For this reason, the question of 'the mosque's identity' becomes, at its deepest level, a question about the human being's own identity: how does one understand one's existence, how does one stand, how does one fall silent, and how does one belong without possessing? The mosque, then, does not require an identity in the usual sense, because it is not an object of representation. It is a practice of being. It is a space that allows the human being to come to self-understanding, not a space that is defined through him.

From this, a second question arises: does the mosque need an architectural image that reminds people of its presence, or can any image, or even many images, belong to its existential identity? History answers with striking clarity: the mosque has never been captive to a single form. It appeared in the desert as a simple shade, in cities as a spacious field, in villages as a modest structure, and in great capitals as a civilizational sign. And yet, each time, it remained a mosque.

It was not form that granted the mosque identity, but the intention that moved it, the function it fulfilled, and the space it brought into being. The first mosque was nothing more than a defined portion of ground, and yet it was fully a mosque. This makes plain that identity does not reside in form itself, but in the possibility that form opens.

Embodied in any form, a mosque remains a mosque so long as it safeguards the essence

of the relationship: between the human being and the qiblah, between body and ground, between inwardness and silence. This is what grants the mosque its universality, not the repetition of a single image, but the recurrence of a single meaning. Form is not the condition of identity, but one of its possible unveilings. Each unveiling bears a share of the truth without laying claim to it.

The real question, then, is not "What is the mosque's image?" but "What makes any image a mosque?" The answer is simple, and demanding: the capacity to bring forth a space in which the human being can orient himself, enter into stillness, and belong without being compelled to define himself through an exterior sign. In this sense, the mosque is not an architecture that goes looking for symbolism. It is a space whose symbolism rises from within. And as its forms multiply, its identity grows richer and more capacious, because that identity does not reside in shape as such, but in the possibility that shape opens.

To think seriously about the mosque's identity leads, inevitably, to the question of identity itself: is it something we manufacture, or something we uncover? Is it an external form, or an inward relationship? Across its history, the mosque has not presented itself as a being in search of definition, but as a space in which the human being may come to self-understanding.

1

For this reason, the attempt to affix an 'architectural identity' to the mosque can, at times, become an act of constraint, narrowing what is, by nature, open and unconfined. The mosque does not require an identity appended to it from outside, because it is the very space in which human identity can appear in some of its clearest and most unforced forms.[1]

If architectural form is capable of bearing meaning, the mosque goes further still. It does not so much bind meaning to form as to lived act. Prayer, orientation, sakīnah, and the shared cadence of collective movement are the elements through which the mosque becomes a space that exceeds the image. For this reason, any attempt to confine the mosque to a single figure, whether dome, minaret, miḥrāb, or any other emblem, is an attempt to diminish a space far wider than any visual sign can contain. One might say that the mosque is not exhausted by what the eye can take in. It comes to fullness in what is lived within it.

1 Al-Naʿīm, Mishārī ʿAbdullāh (2026). "Rethinking Saudi Identity." Al-Riyadh Newspaper, Sunday, 20 Shaʿbān 1447 AH / 8 February 2026.

1. *Movement and stillness come together in the Holy Mosque, and the cosmic, social, and individual space is formed in one space.*

Seen in this light, the multiplicity of the mosque's forms across history has not threatened its identity. If anything, it has helped to confirm it. The first mosque was little more than a simple shade in the desert. Later it appeared as a courtyard, then as a hall, then as a monument, then as a modest space within a residential building, a room in an airport, or a temporary prayer space in a university or a hospital. And yet, each time, it remained a mosque. One might say, then, that multiplicity does not imperil identity. It discloses, rather, that identity does not reside in form as such, but in the possibility that form opens.

In this sense, the mosque may be said to have no need of an identity, because it is not an object of representation so much as an identity to be recovered. It is not an image to be looked at, but a reality to be lived. Not a fixed emblem, but an open possibility. And as its forms multiply, its identity deepens, for multiplicity makes plain that essence is not reducible to a single shape, and that presence does not require a visual sign in order to be real.

In the end, the mosque is not merely an architectural identity, but an existential one. It is disclosed in the capacity to receive the human being as he is, and in the capacity to bring forth a space in which he may stand in honesty before himself and his Creator. Such an identity does not depend on a prescribed form. It depends on a clear intention: the intention to open, the intention to welcome, the intention of sakīnah. So long as the mosque preserves this intention, it remains a mosque, however its forms may change, however its materials may shift, and however varied its environments may be.

When what we have called Silent Invitation is read together with Silent Resistance, and with an existential identity that has freed itself from the confines of form, the question of the mosque's architectural future shifts. It becomes a question about the future of our own relationship to place, not merely about the future of form. For when the mosque loosens its attachment to image, it does not lose its identity; it recovers it. And when it is released from the burden of fixed symbols, it does not diminish in presence, but rather becomes more capable of standing as an open space for all who draw near.

Silent Invitation is not merely a manner of appearance. It names a philosophy of being. It holds that space should receive the human being without prescribing meaning in advance, and guide him not toward a preselected image, but toward discovery. In such a space, meaning is not delivered as a message. It is allowed to arise.

When Silent Invitation intersects with Silent Resistance, a new horizon for mosque architecture begins to take shape. It is a horizon founded not on confrontation but on steadfastness, not on proclamation but on presence, not on noisy symbolism but on a symbolism that arises from the act itself. In societies where the mosque stands as a minority presence, it need not raise its voice in order to be heard. It is enough that it endures, that it keeps its door open, that it makes room for sakīnah within an unsettled world. This capacity to remain without conflict, and to appear without claim, is what renders the mosque a singular exemplar for the architecture of the future, an architecture defined less by form than by the inward imprint it leaves on those who enter.

Not separate ideas, Silent Invitation and Silent Resistance are two faces of a single presence: a presence that refuses collision yet does not

withdraw, refuses noise yet does not vanish, refuses mere representation yet does not relinquish meaning. In this sense, the mosque is not a building that announces itself, but a space that allows the human being to come into self-disclosure. This is what renders it a singular architectural exemplar: one founded not on form but on relation, not on symbols but on experience, not on a manufactured identity but on an identity discovered.

Here a further question emerges: how can the mosque speak to the idea of Kāffatan li-l-Nās, the address to “all people,” even as it functions in some societies as a form of Silent Resistance?

The answer lies in understanding what “all” truly signifies. “All” is not a uniform public, nor a single community. It is an open human possibility. At its core, the mosque does not address a particular group so much as it

addresses the human being as human: a being in search of orientation, of sakīnah, of a moment of honesty with the self and the Creator. For this reason, Kāffatan li-l-Nās is not a social slogan. It is a natural extension of the mosque's existential identity. The mosque does not ask the entrant to be something specific, nor does it impose a ritual image or a prescribed posture. It allows him to enter as he is, to stand as he is, and to fall silent as he is.

In societies where the mosque stands as a minority presence, Kāffatan li-l-Nās, the horizon "for all people," need not stand in tension with Silent Resistance. It may, rather, be understood as completing it. For Silent Resistance is not a refusal of the other, but a refusal of turning inward and shutting oneself off from the world. It is not an opposition to the surrounding environment, but an insistence that openness remains possible even in the most complex settings. The mosque, in such a case, does not stand against the world. It stands, instead, within the world as another possibility for living together. Without words, it suggests that space can remain generous even when surrounded by difference, and that sakīnah can become a shared language even as languages themselves multiply.

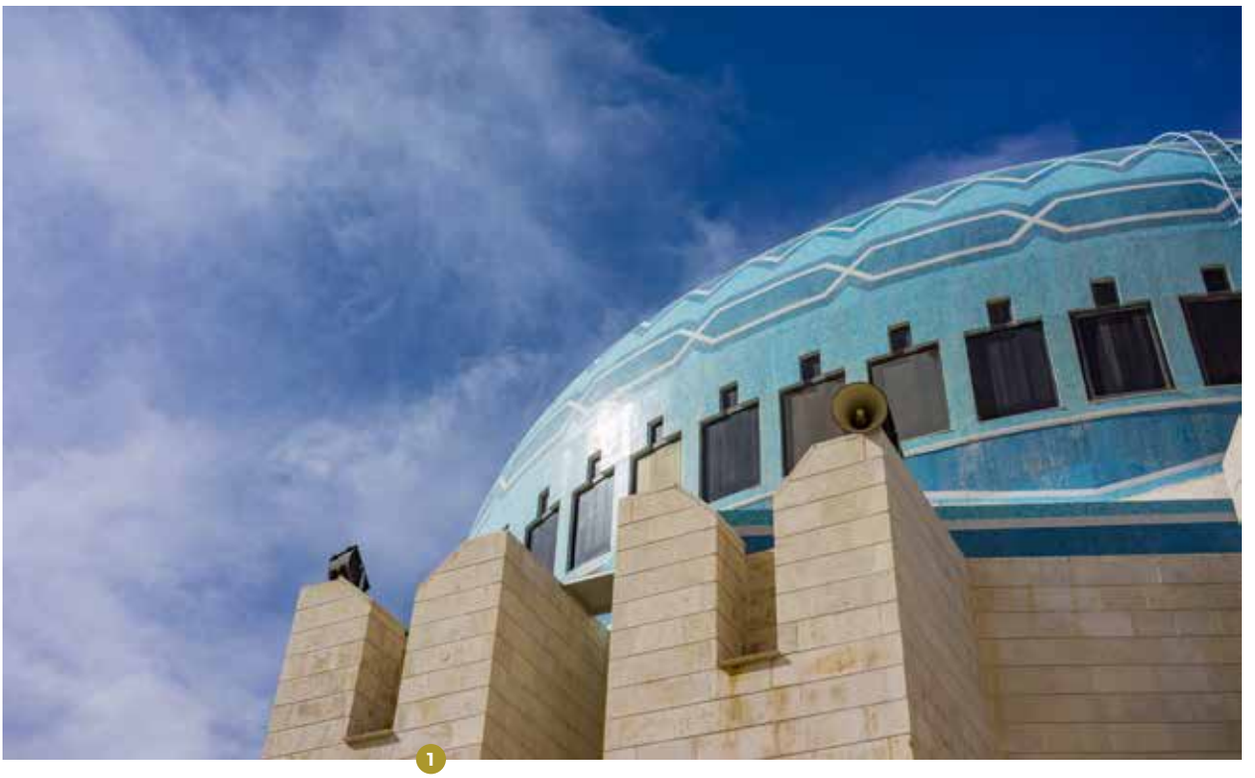
When the mosque functions as Silent Resistance, it does so not by withdrawing, but by insisting that space can remain open to all. This is what makes Kāffatan li-l-Nās not merely a social description, but an existential one: a description of a space that does not ask the entrant to belong to a group, but asks only that he be present. And that presence, in itself, becomes a form of resistance, a resistance against objectification, against classification, against reducing the human being to a sealed identity.

From here another question arises: does Kāffatan li-l-Nās exceed architecture from the outset, opening onto a wider cultural and human horizon, one that the mosque itself comes to embody? One could argue that it does, and in a far-reaching sense. From its beginnings, the mosque was not so much an architectural project as a human one. Architecture served as a means rather than an end. Space became a vehicle rather than an aim. In this light, Kāffatan li-l-Nās is best read not as a modern addition, but as a return to origins: to the first mosque, which was little more than an open space beneath the sky, to a space that did not yet draw hard boundaries between inside and outside, and to a relationship that required no symbols in order to be true.

In this sense, the mosque exceeds architecture because it cannot be reduced to it. It carries a cultural and human horizon wider than any form can contain: a horizon founded on receiving the human being rather than defining him, on opening space rather than constraining it, on allowing sakīnah to emerge rather than attempting to impose it. It is this horizon that enables the mosque to remain Kāffatan li-l-Nās, "for all people," even when it functions as Silent Resistance. For the resistance here is not against people, but against turning inward and shutting oneself off from the world, against objectification, against the hardening of identity into something rigid and inert.

If such questions are taken seriously, the future of mosque architecture will not be an architecture of form so much as an architecture of meaning. It will not be a search for new symbols, but a search for new ways of cultivating the relationship between the human being and space, the human being and the Creator. It

1. *The ability to create new forms that express the visual presence of the mosque lies in not confining the mental image of this building to specific forms.*



1

1. When we consider what local means, we will discover that the stability of function and the multiplicity of forms that the architecture of the mosque contains reflect the vast space that local architecture can express.

will be an architecture that returns the human being to the Divine center of experience, and returns space to its first function: to be a place of sakīnah, of orientation, and of honest presence.

And if we were to ask how future designers might weave together Silent Resistance and existential identity, while the mosque continues to stand in a subtle tension between the universal and the local, the question would quickly move beyond architecture and into philosophy.

For throughout its long history, the mosque has never been merely a building. It has served as a point of meeting between what transcends place and what takes root within it, between what belongs to the wider human horizon and what belongs to the community that shelters it.

This tension is not a flaw within mosque architecture. It is, rather, one of its sources of strength. It is what allows the mosque to be universal without becoming abstract, and local without withdrawing into itself.

For designers to bring Silent Resistance into relationship with existential identity, they may first need to recognize that such resistance is not political in the conventional sense, but existential in nature. It lies in the capacity of space to endure without entering into conflict, to be present without assertion, to generate meaning without imposing it.

When the mosque functions in this way, it does not rely on symbols or proclamations. It speaks through space itself: through light as it filters and unfolds, through silence as it gathers density, through the ground as it receives the body without condition. These are not merely architectural details. They form an existential

language, one that designers must learn to discern and to cultivate if they wish to create a mosque capable of inhabiting the world without relinquishing its essence.

As for existential identity, it is not an identity of form, but an identity of relationship: a relationship between the human being and space, between inwardness and sakīnah, between movement and rhythm. To bind this identity to Silent Resistance therefore means that the designer is called to shape a space capable of receiving the human being as he is, without prescribing a fixed image of belonging.

Such an undertaking demands a refined sensitivity to what is universal and what is local at once. It asks the designer to understand that the universal is not the opposite of the local, but its extension; and that the local is not a constraint upon the universal, but one of its most tangible expressions.

From here another question arises: can the tension between the universal and the local in mosque architecture address contemporary and future architecture in a language it recognizes? One might suggest that it can, and perhaps even that it must. For contemporary architecture, despite its preoccupation with technology, materials, and systems, continues to search for meaning, for relationship, for a space that can move beyond function toward lived experience.

In this regard, the mosque, shaped by its enduring tension between the universal and the local, offers a singular exemplar. It does not ground itself in form alone, but in relationship; not in symbols, but in experience; not in an identity fabricated from the outside, but in one discovered from within.

The tension between the universal and the local is therefore not a problem to be resolved, but an energy to be activated. When the mosque is local, it takes root in the community that shelters it. When it is universal, it speaks to the human being as human. It is precisely this dynamic that enables the mosque to converse with contemporary architecture in terms it understands: the language of space, of light, of silence, of the subtle relationship between person and place. This is not a language of signs, but of experiences, and it is perhaps the language that architecture today most urgently seeks.

From here yet another question presents itself: what must we do for the mosque to participate in the visual discourse of our time, and at the same moment to be woven into local communities without forfeiting its universality or its existential identity?

Any response must begin with a shift in understanding. Contemporary visual discourse is not merely a matter of form; it is perceptual. It concerns how space is seen, how it is encountered, how it is inhabited, and how belonging is felt within it. If the mosque is to take part in this discourse, it need not adopt new shapes for their own sake. Rather, it must reconsider the relationship between human being and space in a manner attuned to the sensitivities of the present.

This implies that the mosque should be capable of entering the urban fabric without dissolving into it, of becoming a sign without becoming strident, of being local without relinquishing its universality. Such a task asks designers to think of the mosque not primarily as a symbol, but as a space; not as an image, but as an experience; not as a ready-made

1

1. *The juxtaposition of shapes does not spoil the harmony in mosque architecture.*

identity, but as one that comes into being through the living relationship between person and place, person and Creator.

For the mosque to participate meaningfully in the visual discourse of the present, it must learn to speak in the languages our age understands: the language of light, of material, of rhythm, of openness. Yet at the same time it must remain faithful to its essence: to its capacity to generate sakīnah, to orient the human being inward, to remain a space open to all.

The future of mosque architecture may well depend on this delicate equilibrium, between openness and essence, between the local and the universal, between Silent Invitation and Silent Resistance.

A designer who grasps this balance will not be preoccupied with discovering a 'new form for the mosque', but with cultivating a renewed relationship between the human being and space, the human being and the Creator. The search will not be for new symbols, but for new ways of making stillness possible. It will not be for a strident visual language, but for one sufficiently quiet to be seen without asserting itself, understood without explanation, and lived without proclamation.

Thus the mosque of the future may be understood less as a building whose form shifts, and more as a space whose meaning is continually renewed. It is not a fixed emblem, but a living relationship; not a sealed identity, but an open one.

Within this openness, and within the generative tension between the universal and the local, the mosque can remain part of the world without relinquishing itself, part of the community without surrendering its universality, and part of the future without loosening its roots.

From a practical perspective, the mosque also encounters daily questions that may appear modest at first glance, yet reveal the depth of the relationship between space and the human being, between human being and the Creator: the organization of shoe removal[2], the cleanliness and dignity of the ablution areas, the choreography of entry and exit, the stewardship of space at moments of peak gathering, the coexistence of different ages and cultural backgrounds, even the way materials and flooring endure repeated use[3].

Such matters are not peripheral. They belong to the fullness of the mosque's experience, because they touch the immediate encounter between body and space, between person and place. For this reason, they cannot be addressed as purely technical problems. They must be approached as extensions of the mosque's existential philosophy, as tangible expressions of the relation it seeks to cultivate.

The organization of shoe removal, for instance, is not merely a matter of order. It marks a passage between two worlds: the world outside and the world within. That passage deserves to be shaped with care, so that it feels gracious, unhurried, and free of confusion.

2 In the Tawrat (considered Divinely revealed by Muslims, Jews, and Christians), the Creator appears to Musa, speaking from a burning bush, telling Musa to, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." (see Exodus 3:5 https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus%203&version=NIV).

3 In the Tawrat, the Jewish people wandered the Sinai desert for forty years in their exodus from slavery in Egypt, yet the Creator miraculously enabled their clothes and sandals to not wear out (see Deuteronomy 8:4 https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy%208&version=NIV).

Designers can create transitional spaces that are legible, generous in scale, and suffused with light, allowing the simple act of removing one's shoes to unfold naturally, without congestion or tension. The choice of materials, from flooring to shelving to illumination, can quietly reinforce the sense of a calm transition. For the mosque, at its core, is a space of sakīnah, and that stillness ought to begin at the very threshold.

> *The cleanliness of the ablution area, likewise, is not simply a hygienic concern. It belongs to the deeper relationship between purification, space, and the Creator. Wuḍūʾ is not only a functional act; it is an existential preparation, a quiet readiness to enter another state of being[4].*

For this reason, the place of ablution should be designed to feel at once clear, comfortable, and composed, free of disturbance or disorder. Water-resistant materials, intelligent and sustainable supply and drainage systems, women's ablution facilities that honor the first Muslim convert and the first person to be taught the practice of wuḍūʾ, Khadijah, and the careful admission of natural light can transform ablution from a hurried necessity into a calm and attentive experience. The space that prepares one to enter the mosque should anticipate, and participate in, the stillness that awaits within.

> *Yet these practical concerns disclose a deeper question. It is not enough for the mosque to be contemplated as a universal philosophical idea. It is also a material and urban reality, encountered and inhabited five times each day. How, then, might one articulate practical bearings capable of holding together its existential philosophy and its lived reality?*

One point of departure may lie in the profound linkage between place and purification expressed in the Prophetic saying, "The earth has been made for me a mosque and a means of purification." This pairing suggests an existential inseparability: the ground itself becomes both site of prostration and site of cleansing. It is a reminder that the sacred is not suspended above reality, but disclosed within it.

> *The mosque, therefore, is not an idealised space hovering beyond the world. It lives at the heart of the world. Practical bearings, accordingly, must not restrain its philosophy but extend it. They translate existential commitments into spatial and material decisions. These bearings might be understood as unfolding across three interrelated levels:*

The mosque ought to be shaped in such a way that it establishes a lucid relationship between the human being and space. The one who enters should sense a passage from outside to inside without rupture or disorientation. The space should be intuitively legible; movement within it should unfold naturally, free of confusion or tension.

> *Within such a bearing, practical details cease to be mere functions. They become part of the existential experience. When circulation paths are clear, congestion subsides. When light is natural and well-tempered, the body relaxes. When materials carry warmth and tactile dignity, a sense of belonging quietly arises. These are not stylistic refinements. They are instruments for restoring the human being to the center of experience.*

4 Performing wuḍūʾ recalls the Creator's instructions to Musa's brother Hārūn (Arabic: هارون) and others to wash their hands and feet with water in preparation for approaching the Creator's altar (see in the Tawrat, Exodus 30: 17-21 https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus%2030&version=NIV).

Here the role of materials, systems, and fine-grained detailing becomes decisive. Flooring must withstand intensive use without forfeiting its beauty. Ventilation systems should prevent odors in ablution areas without drawing attention to themselves. Shoe storage solutions ought to preserve the integrity of space rather than disfigure it. Circulation routes should pre-empt congestion; non-slip surfaces in ablution zones should ensure safety without harshness. If separate facilities are provided for women, they should be equal in quality and appropriate in size. All facilities should be designed with the mobility impaired in mind. Cleaning and maintenance systems must operate continuously yet discreetly, never in conflict with daily use.

These are not technical fixes alone. They are means of safeguarding the mosque's existential core. A mosque that fails in the stewardship of daily realities inevitably loses something of its sakīnah, however refined its design may appear. A space that exhausts the human being cannot serve as an existential space, no matter how profound the philosophy that inspired it.

The mosque is a collective space, and it should therefore be shaped in ways that quietly encourage conduct worthy of its dignity. Clear circulation reduces disorder. Transitional zones ease congestion. Natural light tempers the atmosphere and fosters calm. Materials of warmth and tactile refinement invite respect. Thoughtful spatial distribution prevents unnecessary friction and awkward crossings.

Architecture here is not merely a matter of form. It becomes an instrument for shaping behavior without coercion. A mosque designed with intelligence allows good conduct to emerge naturally, without reliance on instructions or prohibitive signage. The space itself guides, not by command, but by disposition.

In the end, the larger question remains: how might one create a mosque that holds together its existential universality and its practical reality, without sacrificing either? A possible answer begins with a simple recognition: the universal is not the opposite of the practical, and the existential is not the opposite of function.

The mosque is neither an abstract idea nor a merely utilitarian building. It lives within the tension between the two, drawing its strength from that very tension. The designer who truly understands the mosque is therefore the one who can see, in the organization of shoes, an extension of philosophy; in the cleanliness of ablution, an expression of identity; and in daily details, a vital part of the existential experience.

For the mosque to remain a mosque, it must be able to live in the world without losing its silence, to engage the everyday without forfeiting its universality, and to receive people as they are without relinquishing its essence. This is the true challenge for the future of mosque architecture: to become a philosophy that is lived, not one that is merely written.

Water and energy, too, are fundamental to mosque architecture, not only in technical terms but in symbolic and existential ones. Water marks the threshold of entry; it is the medium through which one prepares to cross from the ordinary into another state of awareness. Energy, in all its forms, renders space inhabitable, sustaining light, air, and comfort.

For this reason, the question of how to regulate and steward these elements through contemporary technology is not merely an

1

1. *There is an underlying relationship between humans and the visual images they produce to express their taste. We can say that the wide spectrum of forms associated with the mosque conveys to us, over 1400 years, how broad transformations have occurred in human taste.*

engineering matter. It is, in a deeper sense, an existential one: how might the mosque preserve its spiritual essence while engaging responsibly with the material demands of the world?

> *Consider wuḍūʾ. It is not simply the use of water, but an act of purification, a preparation for entering another state. It marks a passage from exterior to interior, from the ordinary to the contemplative, from noise to sakīnah.*

Yet in its daily reality, this act involves significant water consumption and brings with it practical challenges of drainage, cleanliness, and maintenance. Here contemporary technology has a role to play, not merely in reducing water use, but in reshaping the relationship between human being and water so that the spiritual experience remains intact while resources are stewarded with discernment and care.

> *Contemporary technologies, such as intelligent taps, greywater recycling systems, and ablution basins engineered to reduce waste, can allow wuḍūʾ to unfold in a manner more attuned to environmental responsibility without stripping it of its symbolic depth. Technology here is not a substitute for the experience. It is a means of safeguarding it. A mosque that squanders water risks losing something of its ethical message, for water, in its essence, is a niʿmah, a gift[5], and a gift is meant to be protected. The*

5 Consider the Creator's astonishing gift of water to humanity: water covers about 71% of the Earth's surface, humans are composed of, on average, 60% water (babies are highest, at 78% water), and water has unusual physical properties that support a robust biosphere on Earth, such as: having a lower density as a solid than a liquid (making ice float on water, protecting aquatic life in winter), being able to dissolve more substances than any other known liquid (providing a place for a multitude of chemical processes), having the ability to absorb or release large amounts of heat without changing temperature very much (providing stability), etc.

1

1. Mosque architecture is fundamentally a human idea linked to the principle of "all for the people." It has produced forms that express human taste, and as a function, it has not been content with producing similar spaces, but rather, throughout its history, it has created a spectrum of spaces that are difficult to enumerate.

mosque, as an ethical space before it is an architectural one, should allow this awareness to be felt in every detail.

Energy is no less essential. The mosque is used five times each day, and in some communities it remains active around the clock. Lighting, cooling, ventilation, and sound systems can draw heavily on energy resources. Here contemporary technology can play a decisive role in making the mosque a sustainable space without compromising comfort or sakīnah.

Solar panels, intelligent lighting, advanced thermal insulation, and well-considered natural ventilation can help the mosque work with its environment rather than burden it. Technology can also refine the relationship between light and space, allowing daylight to carry the atmosphere by day, and responsive, carefully calibrated illumination to sustain it by night, so the mosque remains lit without excess and comfortable without waste.

Yet the matter of light in the mosque is never merely technical. Light is part of the experience itself. It is the light that descends from above, the light that settles across the ground, the light that gathers stillness and makes it palpable. Used with discernment, technology can serve this light rather than compete with it, intensifying what the mosque already knows, instead of replacing it with glare.

A deeper question, however, remains: can technology serve the mosque's existential identity without coming to dominate it?

One might say that it can, provided technology is understood as an instrument rather than an end. Technology is not the opposite of spirituality. It can become its extension, if used wisely.

A mosque managed with intelligence, one that uses water and energy with restraint, reflects its ethical values within the material world. And a mosque that can hold together sustainability and sakīnah, technology and silence, artificial intelligence and spiritual intention, is a mosque able to inhabit the future without loosening its roots.

Here we arrive at the central point. The mosque is not only a spiritual space; it is also an ethical one. Ethics are not practiced in discourse alone, but in daily particulars: in the amount of water used, in the energy consumed, in the materials chosen, in the mosque's environmental impact, and in its responsibility toward the community. A mosque that consumes more than it needs, wastes resources, or burdens its surroundings forfeits something of its existential sincerity.

A mosque, by contrast, that balances spirit and matter, philosophy and lived reality, becomes capable of realizing its universality within the contemporary world. It is in this sense that the practical frameworks linking technology to existential identity may be understood across three interrelated levels:

Technology, in this view, ought to be used in ways that strengthen the mosque's values: moderation and generosity without waste, beauty without extravagance, comfort without excess. Such a framework renders every technical choice an ethical choice as well. A mosque that adopts sustainable technologies does so not merely to appear 'modern', but to remain truthful to what it is.

The mosque should stand as an exemplar of sustainability within its community: greywater reuse, solar energy, reduced waste in lighting and cooling, environmentally responsible materials, and a design attuned to the local climate. In this way, the mosque becomes not only a space of worship, but also a space of environmental formation. A mosque that teaches moderation in water and energy quietly teaches moderation in life.

Technology, moreover, should remain as unobtrusive as possible, working in the background without insisting on its own visibility. Systems should operate intelligently and, where possible, automatically. Solutions should be integrated rather than intrusive, preserving the integrity of the space. Technologies should protect visual and acoustic calm, and tools should ease use without disorienting the entrant. Technology here is not display, but service to the essence. A mosque that achieves this balance becomes a place in which one feels that technology is working for the human being, not against him.

In the end, the larger question returns: how can we ensure that the mosque, as it engages water and energy, does not lose its existential identity? A possible answer begins by recognizing that water and energy are not merely resources. They belong to the spiritual experience itself. Water marks the beginning of entry into the mosque, and energy is what allows the space to be truly inhabitable. When these are stewarded with

wisdom, they become part of sakīnah rather than a threat to it.

A sustainable mosque, in this sense, is not a technological mosque, but a truthful one. And a mosque that can hold together spirit and matter, philosophy and lived reality, the universal and the practical, is a mosque able to inhabit the future without loosening its roots.

At the close of this path of reflection on mosque architecture, it becomes clear that the question was never ultimately about form, nor about history, nor even about function. It was, and remains, a question about the human being himself: how does he dwell in the world? How does he seek sakīnah? And how does he find a place that allows him to be present without being defined, open without being reduced, and turned toward others without forfeiting himself?

This book has sought to approach the mosque not as a building, but as an existential condition: a condition in which light meets silence, direction meets movement, interior meets exterior, and the universal meets the local. The mosque is not architecture to be viewed, but space to be lived; not a fixed emblem, but a relationship renewed with each entrance and departure, with each prostration, with each moment of stillness.

In a world changing at unprecedented speed, the mosque becomes a subtle mirror of our larger questions: how might we live with technology without relinquishing our humanity? How might we preserve our roots without withdrawing into ourselves? How might we belong to the world without dissolving within it? And how might space become an invitation to encounter rather than a wall of separation?

The future of the mosque is not fashioned in technological laboratories, nor confined to design offices, nor decided in architectural competitions. It is shaped by the intention that animates it: the intention to open, to receive, to cultivate the supreme value of sakīnah. Technology may alter materials, recalibrate light, and render space more intelligent, yet it cannot bestow the mosque's essence. That essence arises from the human being, from the need for a place that restores order to the inner life before engaging the outer world, that reconnects what has been quietly severed within the self.

In contexts where the mosque stands as a minority presence, this essence acquires an added resonance. The mosque becomes a form of Silent Resistance: a resistance grounded not in conflict but in steadfastness, not in volume but in presence, not in symbols but in the capacity to remain an open space within a world increasingly inclined to turn inward. This resistance is not political in the conventional sense. It is existential. It is a quiet affirmation that sakīnah remains possible, that openness remains possible, and that living together is not a distant ideal but a daily practice.

Yet the mosque also remains a material reality. It engages water and energy, daily movement, and the small particulars through which experience is made. Here the deeper challenge comes into view. How can the mosque remain a spiritual space while living within a material world? How can it preserve its silence while engaging technology? How can it remain Kāffatan li-l-Nās, "for all people," even as it takes root in a particular community?

1

1. *The mosque is part of the land and is born from it, giving it meaning and making it a defined place.*

These questions do not seek final answers. They seek balance: a balance between spirit and matter, between philosophy and function, between the universal and the local.

In the end, the mosque is not merely an architectural undertaking. It is a human one. It proposes another way of being: a way grounded in the pursuit of sakīnah rather than haste, in openness rather than withdrawal, in simplicity rather than display, in relationship rather than form.

If this book has had an aim, it has been to recall that the mosque does not belong to the past, nor is it the preserve of a single culture. It remains an open space for anyone seeking a moment of honesty with oneself, and with one's Maker.

Thus the mosque's architecture does not conclude at its walls, nor is it contained by its history or secured by its symbols. It exceeds them, reaching into what ultimately matters: the human being who enters, the city that receives it, and a world that now, more than ever, is in need of places that restore the capacity to listen. To listen to others, to listen inwardly, and to attend to that silence from which true meaning begins.

Index

A

Abdullatif Al Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture 8, 10, 85, 394
Abdullatif bin Ahmed Al Fozan 11
Abu Dhabi 223, 224
adhan 71
Adlah Mohammed Abdulrahman Al-Bahar 93, 351
Africa 21, 22, 41, 46, 51, 61, 63, 93, 167, 168, 178, 466
African 41, 43, 68, 178
Agarpur Mosque 7, 93, 251, 253, 254, 255, 256, 262, 264
Ahmad Alrashed Alhumaid ARH Consulting Engineers 237
Ahsan Habib + Chinton Architects 337, 338
Akel Kahera 88
Al Ain 7, 93, 95, 196, 197, 223, 224, 225, 228, 232, 235
al-Andalus 41, 43, 46, 52, 55, 56, 62, 63
al-barzakh 82
al-daʿwah al-ṣāmitah 15, 23, 74, 80
Alfadanga Mosque 93, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 273, 277, 278
al-ghayb 81
alignment 8, 21, 25, 51, 79, 89, 130, 192, 198, 211, 224, 227, 232, 248, 255, 264, 269, 341, 354, 363, 414, 435, 455, 469, 481, 488
Al Jubail 393
Al Maabela 477, 478
Al-Naim Architects, Engineers, and Planning Consultants 379
Alnajdi Mosque 7, 92, 406, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 473, 474
al-sahl al-mumtaniʿ 31
al-shakl yatbaʿ al-rūḥāniyyah 87
al-Shām 41, 43, 46, 52, 55, 56, 61, 62, 63
Anatolia 41
Andalusian 41, 43, 51, 65, 68
anonymity 207, 354
Anwar Al Sabbah Musalla 92, 505, 506, 508, 514, 516
Arabian 41, 42, 63, 68
Archeground Ltd. 281, 282
architectural DNA 47, 70, 117
architectural 'taqiyyah' 113
Architecture 4, 5, 8, 10, 34, 38, 45, 74, 82, 85, 88, 91, 92, 235, 264, 295, 296, 394, 435, 491, 492, 529, 534
Ar. Nabi Newaz Khan Shomin 281
Ashulia 437, 438, 439
Asian 41, 43, 51, 122
As-Salam Jame Mosque 7, 93, 250, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 290, 292
Astana 209, 210, 211, 212, 214, 220
Attachment to Place 48
austerity 25, 278, 285, 508, 516
Austria 93, 125
authenticity 77, 78, 79, 80, 168, 268, 369, 376, 410
ʿAsīr 17
ʿAṣr 71
ʿIshāʾ 71

B

Bab Al-Salam Mosque 92, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 484, 487, 488
Babnimnim Design Studio 351
Bahrain 93, 178, 237, 238, 239, 248
Bahria Grand Mosque 93, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 146, 148, 150
Bahria Town 140, 141, 144, 148, 150
Balance 6, 8
Bandung 153, 154, 156, 163, 164
Bangladesh 88, 93, 122, 253, 254, 256, 267, 268, 281, 282, 284, 292, 337, 338, 347, 421, 423, 424, 435, 437, 438, 448
Barisal District 253
Basra 41
Bayaty Architects 195, 223
Bekasi Regency 451
Belonging 6, 13, 29, 30, 35
Beyond the Mosque 19
breadth 5, 24, 25, 43, 51, 55, 73
Bukhara 41
Buraich Moulvi Bari family 268
Byzantine 41

C

Cairo 18, 41, 352, 354, 363
Cambridge 7, 92, 95, 111, 112, 113, 114, 117, 121, 122

Cambridge Central Mosque 7, 92, 95, 111, 112, 113, 114, 117, 121, 122
Chandpur 423, 424, 425
characterless 77
China 21, 22, 41, 46, 51, 61, 63, 93, 409, 410, 411, 481, 487
Chinese cultural symbolism 413
Christians 10, 37, 38, 177, 532
climatic intelligence 42, 108, 284, 448
collective mind 18
community 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 20, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 34, 37, 38, 40, 42, 45, 48, 51, 52, 55, 60, 61, 67, 73, 85, 98, 99, 102, 106, 108, 112, 113, 115, 121, 122, 126, 134, 136, 148, 163, 168, 170, 177, 178, 183, 187, 190, 192, 204, 213, 218, 220, 238, 239, 247, 256, 269, 270, 277, 282, 290, 296, 304, 306, 310, 311, 318, 320, 325, 332, 338, 339, 341, 347, 349, 360, 367, 375, 376, 381, 403, 405, 410, 413, 414, 416, 418, 421, 424, 425, 433, 435, 447, 448, 457, 461, 462, 466, 468, 471, 478, 479, 487, 497, 500, 503, 506, 511, 514, 516, 522, 524, 528, 530, 531, 532, 537, 538
community of thought 10
contemporaneity 77, 78, 79, 80, 299, 411
contemporary Europe 22, 46
contemporary life 10
Córdoba 41, 68, 112
cosmopolitan belonging 51
COVID-19 pandemic 121, 177, 178
Creator 8, 10, 11, 18, 37, 38, 67, 71, 522, 524, 527, 529, 532, 533, 535
Critical Reflection 108, 122, 136, 150, 164, 178, 192, 207, 220, 235, 248, 264, 278, 292, 306, 320, 334, 349, 363, 376, 391, 405, 421, 435, 448, 462, 474, 488, 503, 516
crux 79
Cultural Expression 58
cultural mediation 22

D

Dakar 28, 29
Damascus 41, 68
Dandaji 97, 98, 99, 101, 106, 108
Dave Orlando 181, 182
daʿwah al-ṣāmitah 15, 23, 74, 80
dialectical relationship 70
dialogue 8, 10, 41, 42, 44, 46, 52, 60, 63, 67, 84, 85, 91, 101, 108, 112, 122, 126, 134, 136, 156, 185, 226, 238, 239, 241, 247, 255, 268, 296, 297, 299, 395, 397, 411, 412, 413, 421, 479, 494, 503, 506, 514, 524
dight 71
Direct-Aid (Kuwait) 465, 466
Divine 5, 9, 10, 23, 128, 154, 299, 412, 413, 421, 495, 530
Djenné 41
DNA 47, 56, 70, 117
Dr Abdel Wahid El Wakil 167, 168
Dr El Wakil 169, 170, 171
duʿāʾ 71

E

ecosystem 98, 108, 273, 277
elastic 16
emblem 8, 42, 74, 141, 148, 212, 526, 527, 532, 538
Embodied Presence 48, 58
enduring cultural belonging 34, 35
enduring material belonging 31
environmental psychology 49
episodic visits 32
ethic 27, 37, 207, 273, 274, 468, 474
Existential Genealogy of Architecture 38
existential link 16
existential thread 521
E-Zubaida Mosque 93, 309, 310, 312, 320

F

Faculty of Theology Mosque 93, 295, 296, 297, 299, 304, 306
Fajr 71
Fandy Gunawan 181, 182
Faridpur 267, 268, 269
Fifā Mountains 17
for all people 5, 13, 16, 121, 207, 232, 304, 421, 448, 529, 538
forest of columns 122
Fotovvat Architecture Group 491, 492
fragmentation 5, 8, 122, 235, 283, 479
framework 16, 21, 30, 35, 64, 148, 292, 296, 326, 349, 352, 425, 466, 537
Friday prayer 17, 304
Friday prayers 121, 148, 163, 204, 247, 304, 360, 461
function 8, 20, 22, 45, 47, 79, 82, 102, 106, 122, 128, 140, 143, 144, 183, 190, 201, 204, 226, 232, 239, 247, 262, 277, 301, 326, 332, 343, 349, 354, 360, 375, 380, 381, 395, 405, 418, 421, 425, 441, 467, 488, 500, 524, 530, 531, 534, 536, 538, 539

G

Gerhard Springer 125, 126
Ghazi Al Gosaibi Mosque 7, 92, 250, 393, 395, 396, 397, 399, 400, 403, 405
globality 89
GoAat 423
Granada 41
Grand Jamia Mosque 140
Grand Millennium Mosque 379

Graz 7, 93, 95, 125, 126, 127, 128, 130, 134, 136
Greywater 329
GSP Architektur 125, 126

H

Hafezia madrasa 282, 290
Hani Asfour 506
Hārūn 533
Hazret Sultan Mosque 93, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 218, 220
Hellenistic 41
Heterogeneous World 7, 519
Hijrah 39
HIKMA - A Religious and Secular Complex 7, 95
HIKMA – A Religious and Secular Complex 97
ḥishma 421
Houghton Estate 167, 168, 170, 171
Houghton Mosque 7, 93, 94, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 173, 177, 178
houses of worship 18, 21
Hubei Province 410, 411
human ingenuity 10, 82
humanity 5, 9, 10, 11, 18, 19, 20, 22, 28, 29, 30, 34, 38, 74, 89, 91, 207, 535, 538
humankind 6, 13, 15, 16

I

Ibrahim Ma 409, 410
identity 5, 8, 9, 11, 21, 22, 24, 25, 30, 31, 32, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 45, 46, 48, 49, 55, 56, 57, 60, 61, 63, 68, 74, 75, 77, 78, 80, 81, 82, 85, 98, 101, 106, 114, 117, 122, 126, 127, 128, 136, 148, 154, 155, 158, 163, 164, 182, 196, 211, 214, 216, 220, 224, 241, 256, 270, 297, 299, 304, 311, 312, 320, 326, 340, 352, 360, 366, 375, 382, 391, 394, 395, 410, 411, 412, 418, 454, 455, 480, 506, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 534, 537
IKZ 126, 127, 128, 130, 132, 134
incidental psychological state 48
India 41, 93, 309, 310
Indonesia 67, 93, 153, 154, 164, 181, 182, 184, 451, 452, 453
intelligence of architecture 8, 11
intelligence of society 8, 11
IRCICA 87
Isfahan 7, 41, 68, 93, 407, 491, 492, 493, 494, 497, 499, 503
Isfahan Cemetery 7, 93, 407, 491, 492, 503
Islamic Cultural Center of Graz 93, 125
Islamic Republic of Iran 93, 491
Islamic values 10
Islamisches Kulturzentrum Graz 7, 95, 125, 126, 127, 128, 130, 134, 136
Istanbul 41, 68, 85, 91, 295, 296, 297, 299, 301
Istanbul Technical University 85
īwān 41, 64, 68, 69

J

Jerteh 365, 367, 375
Jews 10, 177, 532
Johannesburg 167, 168, 169, 170, 177, 178

K

Kaaba 101, 455, 506, 516
Kāffah li'l-nās 121
Kāffatan li-l-Nās 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 42, 44, 45, 48, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 60, 63, 64, 69, 70, 73, 74, 75, 77, 79, 80, 82, 85, 88, 89, 528, 529, 538
Kairouan 41
Karnataka 309
Kashef Mahboob Chowdhury 253, 254
Khadijah 410, 533
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 17, 92, 238, 379, 393
King Khalid Grand Mosque 93, 237, 238, 248
Kuala Lumpur 85
Kufa 41
Kushtia 7, 93, 251, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 347, 349, 462
Kushtia Neighborhood Mosque 93, 337, 338, 340, 341, 347, 349, 462
Kuwait 16, 85, 93, 351, 352, 356, 358, 363, 465, 466
Kuwait City 85, 351, 352
Kuwait University 16

L

Lahore 7, 94, 139, 140, 141
Lakshmipur 281, 282
landmark 101, 112, 136, 140, 150, 154, 155, 163, 164, 168, 170, 183, 197, 204, 212, 220, 224, 238, 269, 278, 283, 290, 301, 375, 380, 381, 382, 391, 394, 396, 403, 405, 424, 426, 467, 468, 478, 479, 492, 493, 508
Lebanon 41, 92, 505, 506, 511
Levantine 41
Lichinga 323
Light of Allah Mosque 7, 93, 407, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 416, 418, 421
Lineage 42, 156
lineages 10, 34, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 47, 48, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 60, 88, 89, 521, 522, 524
liquid culture 81, 82
liquid identity 82
li-taʿārafū 16, 18, 27, 29, 45, 84, 85

local cultures 16, 82, 85
local embodiment 41, 63, 70
locally 10, 16, 22, 35, 56, 60, 64, 74, 178, 192, 286, 341, 343, 399, 410, 429, 474, 478, 511
LOCAL
MOSQUES 407
LOCAL MOSQUES 407
local place 18, 59, 466

M

Maghrib 71
Malaysia 93, 365, 366
Mamluk Cairo 352, 354, 363
(Mamluki Lancet) Mosque 351
Manama 237
Mardumah Bay 393
Mariam Issoufou 97, 98
Marina Tabassum Architects 267, 268
Marks Barfield Architects 111, 112
Marmara University 7, 250, 295, 296, 297, 299, 304, 306
Mashary AlNaim 58, 75, 78, 81, 82, 83
masjid 16, 18, 31, 63, 64, 73, 164, 424, 433, 435
Masjid Fatimah 310
Masjid Kampung Seberang Jerteh 365
Masjid Nuorullah 409, 410
Masjid Raya Al Jabbar 93, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 160, 163, 164
Mecca 32, 232, 381, 421, 508
Medina 41, 112, 381
memory 10, 16, 17, 30, 31, 32, 37, 38, 48, 49, 52, 56, 60, 61, 63, 64, 66, 68, 69, 71, 73, 74, 115, 182, 183, 196, 197, 204, 224, 232, 235, 254, 269, 277, 278, 299, 301, 395, 396, 405, 421, 425, 438, 439, 481, 488, 492, 494, 500, 503
Mesopotamian 41
Messenger 5, 15
Miazi Bari Mosque 7, 93, 407, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 429, 430, 433, 435
miḥrāb 22, 37, 41, 45, 47, 59, 65, 67, 198, 526
minimalism 25, 157, 241, 271, 299, 397, 410, 509, 516
Mohamed Gamal Abdelmonem 88, 91
monumentality 108, 113, 114, 128, 142, 143, 150, 171, 184, 197, 232, 270, 326, 424, 468, 478, 516
monumental īwāns 43
Moscow 17, 421
Mosque 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 16, 19, 22, 26, 28, 34, 38, 39, 40, 45, 53, 68, 70, 74, 78, 84, 85, 86, 88, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 111, 112, 113, 114, 117, 121, 122, 124, 126, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 146, 148, 150, 153, 156, 164, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 173, 177, 178, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 187, 188, 190, 192, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 204, 207, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 218, 220, 223, 224, 225, 227, 228, 232, 235, 237, 238, 239, 247, 248, 250, 251, 253, 254, 255, 256, 262, 264, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 273, 277, 278, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 290, 292, 295, 296, 297, 299, 304, 306, 309, 310, 312, 320, 323, 324, 325, 326, 329, 332, 334, 337, 338, 340, 341, 347, 349, 351, 352, 353, 354, 356, 363, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 373, 375, 376, 379, 380, 391, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 399, 400, 403, 405, 406, 407, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 416, 418, 421, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 429, 430, 433, 435, 437, 438, 448, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 457, 459, 461, 462, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 473, 474, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 484, 487, 488, 519, 527, 536
mosque-building 25, 164
Mosque's Universality 6, 13
Mozambique 92, 323, 324
muezzin 71
Muhammad Egha 451, 452
Muhammad Kılıç 87
Muhammad Mayet Architects 167, 168, 169, 323
Muhammad Mayet Architects + Urban Designers 167, 168, 169, 323
Muharrem Hilmi Şenalp, Hassa Architecture Engineering Co. 295
multiplicity 29, 63, 73, 76, 91, 154, 299, 527, 530
Musalla 7, 92, 406, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 511, 514, 516
Muslim 8, 18, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29, 31, 37, 45, 112, 121, 122, 126, 168, 170, 177, 178, 182, 235, 306, 310, 311, 318, 410, 523, 524, 533
Mustafa Wan Su 365
Muthanna Al-Bayati 88
Mutual Knowing 26

N

Nabatiyeh 505, 506, 507
Neogenesis+Studi0261 309, 310
Niger 92, 97, 98, 99, 465, 466
Nomba Mosque and Teacher Training Facility 323, 334
Nomba Village 323
non-confrontational 25
non-Muslim 25, 27, 29, 31, 37, 45, 122, 318, 523, 524
Nurul Yaqin Mosque 7, 93, 94, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 187, 188, 190, 192

O

Oman 477, 478, 488
organic environment 10
organic mosque 88
orientation 5, 8, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 32, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 46, 47, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 59, 60, 63, 64, 67,

68, 73, 79, 85, 91, 101, 108, 126, 155, 182, 183, 185, 192, 198, 225, 239, 243, 255, 256, 257, 284, 285, 306, 339, 376, 383, 395, 405, 427, 429, 448, 453, 455, 462, 481, 495, 506, 507, 508, 509, 516, 526, 529, 530
Ornament 52, 142, 157, 257
Ottoman 41, 65, 68, 69, 156, 178, 296, 299, 306

P

Pakistan 93, 139, 140
Palu City 181, 182, 183
Paradise 10, 38
passing psychological state 30
patterns 39, 61, 84, 88, 99, 115, 154, 156, 177, 198, 257, 283, 299, 349, 396, 414, 425, 427, 429, 430, 466, 467, 488, 494, 495
PBUH 10, 15, 18, 22, 48
Persia 41
Persian 41, 43, 51, 63, 65, 68, 140, 142
Persian and Central Asian lineage 43, 51
phenomenon 8, 10, 18, 35, 57, 67, 69, 70, 71, 73, 80, 82, 84, 85, 87
philosophical dimension 88
philosophical horizons 16
place-identity 25
Polypod 505, 506
Pompidou-Metz 122
Prophet 10, 18, 22, 39, 40, 48, 78, 112
Prophet Muhammad 18, 48
prostration 22, 26, 37, 55, 67, 73, 533, 538
prototype 40, 286, 421
purification 18, 58, 67, 73, 397, 414, 533, 535

Q

qiblah 5, 22, 25, 26, 37, 40, 41, 42, 45, 46, 47, 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 58, 59, 60, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 76, 79, 85, 448, 525
qiblah orientation 37
Qur'anic 5, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 26, 34, 35, 44, 48, 55, 262, 396, 508
Qur'anic verse 15, 20, 396

R

Rafiq Azam 88
Raichur 309, 310, 311
Ramadan 9, 11, 121, 134, 163, 190, 204, 229, 232, 235, 247, 304, 403, 447, 452, 461
Ras Al Khaimah 93, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 204, 207
Rasem Badran 88
Razvan Garden Cemetery 491, 492, 493, 500
recognition 8, 16, 21, 25, 27, 32, 37, 60, 83, 163, 192, 199, 238, 269, 311, 334, 363, 394, 438, 516, 523, 534
religious sign 8
Republic of Kazakhstan 209
rethink mosque architecture 10, 85
rhythm 16, 26, 37, 40, 41, 42, 45, 47, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 60, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 71, 72, 73, 79, 99, 113, 114, 115, 122, 128, 171, 173, 185, 187, 188, 207, 270, 271, 299, 301, 310, 340, 349, 354, 369, 388, 397, 399, 403, 405, 412, 455, 462, 469, 480, 507, 522, 524, 531, 532
Ridwan Kamil 154
Roman 41, 52

S

sakīnah 8, 9, 10, 11, 38, 42, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 59, 60, 62, 64, 65, 66, 67, 69, 71, 72, 73, 76, 523, 524, 526, 527, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539
Saleh Al-Hathloul 88
Salmiya 347, 352, 353, 360
Samarkand 41
ṣāwmaʿa 421
scenes 18, 304
Seeb 477, 478, 479
Shekher Killa 282, 283, 290
Shigeru Ban 122
silent daʿwah 15, 17, 23, 25, 31
Silent Daʿwah 13
Silent Invitation 527, 532
Silent Resistance 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 538
sketch 29, 41, 45, 47
social nucleus 375
South Africa 93, 167, 168, 178
Southeast Asia 41
spatial adjacency 16
spatial design 148
spatial language 52, 168, 509
spatial presence 15, 56, 150, 157
spatial thrust 43
studio chahar 97, 98
Studio Morphogenesis 437, 438
styles 39, 66, 91
sujūd 47, 59, 71
Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud 9
Sustainability 102, 110, 117, 130, 144, 154, 158, 187, 200, 214, 228, 243, 259, 273, 286, 301, 315, 329, 343, 356, 370, 385, 399, 414, 429, 443, 457, 470, 482, 497, 511
symbolic world 30
symbolism 37, 51, 114, 115, 122, 126, 150, 182, 184, 192, 196, 226, 296, 349, 396, 412, 413, 421, 469, 478, 480, 508, 516, 525, 527
Syrian-Egyptian lineage 43

Syro-Egyptian lineage 51

T

Tabuk 7, 92, 251, 379, 380, 381, 391
Tabuk University Mosque 7, 92, 251, 379, 380, 391
Tawrat 37, 38, 532, 533
taʿāruf 26, 27, 29, 44
technological change 34
temporary cultural belonging 32, 34, 35
Temporary material belonging 30
Terrengganu 365
The Award 8
the fourth International Conference on Mosque Architecture 85, 91
The Mosque: A Transcultural Building 16
theology 20
the people of the book 10
The Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed 93, 195, 198, 204, 207, 223, 225, 228, 235
The Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque 93, 195, 198, 204, 207, 225, 228, 235
The Trad Japanese Mosque 93, 451
the ummah 16, 26, 29, 32, 38, 42, 53, 55, 56, 60, 64, 71, 73, 85, 88, 89
this book 4, 5, 10, 16, 45, 67, 192, 292, 376, 474, 539
thresholds 25, 54, 62, 73, 84, 98, 115, 168, 213, 241, 262, 270, 297, 299, 304, 325, 405, 412, 433, 506, 508
Timber 61, 63
Timbuktu 41, 68
Times Square 17
to all humankind 6, 13, 15, 16
togetherness 47, 108
Tokyo 28, 29
Turkey 22, 93, 295, 301, 306

U

UAE 93, 195, 196, 197, 201, 204, 224, 232
Ulul Albab Mosque 7, 93, 250, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 373, 375, 376
ummah 10, 11, 16, 26, 27, 28, 29, 32, 38, 42, 45, 53, 55, 56, 60, 64, 69, 71, 73, 85, 88, 89
United Arab Emirates 196, 223
United Kingdom 92, 111
Universal Acquaintance 16, 26
universal governing premises 16
universality 5, 9, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 29, 30, 31, 48, 57, 59, 60, 63, 64, 67, 68, 70, 73, 74, 77, 81, 448, 525, 531, 532, 534, 537
universal place 31, 59, 85
University of York 91
Urbana 253
Urbane Indonesia 153
urban identity 320
URBAN INTEGRATION 99, 113, 127, 141, 155, 183, 197, 211, 225, 239, 255, 269, 283, 297, 311, 325, 339, 353, 367, 381, 395, 411, 425, 439, 453, 467, 479, 493, 507

V

vertical presence 311

W

weatherproofing 117
West Java 153, 154, 163, 164, 452, 454
worshippers 17, 18, 21, 25, 87, 97, 98, 111, 112, 125, 139, 140, 148, 153, 167, 168, 181, 190, 195, 198, 209, 210, 218, 223, 232, 237, 238, 253, 254, 257, 267, 268, 281, 282, 285, 290, 295, 297, 304, 309, 313, 323, 326, 337, 338, 351, 365, 379, 380, 393, 394, 395, 409, 413, 414, 418, 423, 424, 433, 437, 438, 451, 455, 462, 465, 469, 471, 477, 481, 487, 491, 505, 506, 514, 522
wuḍūʾ 533, 535

X

Xingping 409, 410

Z

Zebun Nessa Mosque 7, 93, 406, 437, 438, 448
zellij 61
Zinder 465, 466, 467, 469
Ẓuhr 71
Zygmunt Bauman 82

Arabic

ک

405 كافةً للناس

Photo Credits

Introduction
shutterstock.com

Centeral Mosques
HIKMA - A Religious and Secular Complex: *(Mariam Issoufou), studio chahar*
Cambridge Central Mosque: *Marks Barfield Architects*
Islamisches Kulturzentrum Graz: *GSP Architektur (Gerhard Springer)*
Bahria Grand mosque Lahore: *Nayyar Ali Dada & Associates*
Al Jabbar Mosque: *Urbane Indonesia*
Houghton Mosque: *Muhammad Mayet Architects + Urban Designers & Dr Abdel Wahid El Wakil*
Nurul Yaqin Mosque: *Dave Orlando, Fandy Gunawan*
H.H Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque – Ras Al Khaima: *Bayaty Architects*
Hazrat Sultan Mosque: *Sanar LLC*
H.H Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Grand Mosque – Al Ain: *Bayaty Architects*
Khaled bn Abdulaziz Al Saud Mosque: *Ahmad Alrashed Alhumaid ARH Consulting Engineers*

Jumu'a Mosques
Agarpur Mosque: *Kashef Mahboob Chowdhury, Urbana*
Al Fadanga Mosque: *Marina Tabassum Architects*
As-Salam Jame Mosque: *Archeground Ltd.*
Marmara University Faculty Of Theology Mosque: *Muharrem Hilmi Şenalp, Hassa Architecture Engineering Co.*
E Zubaida Mosque: *Neogenesis+Studi0261*
Nomba Mosque: *Muhammad Mayet Architects + Urban Designers*
Kushtia Mosque: *Ahsan Habib + Chinton Architects*
Mamluki Lancet Mosque: *Babnimnim Design Studio*
Ulul Albab Mosque: *shutterstock.com*
Tabuk University Mosque: *Al-Naim Architects, Engineers, and Planning Consultants*
Ghazi Al Gosaibi Mosque: *MYAA Mangera Yvars Architects*

Local Mosques
Light of Allah Mosque: *Ibrahim Ma*
Miazi Bari Mosque: *GoAat*
Zebun Nessa Mosque: *Studio Morphogenesis*
TRAD Japanese Mosque: *Muhammad Egha*
Alnajdi Mosque: *Direct-Aid (Kuwait)*
Bab Al Salam Mosque: *Altqadum*
Isfahan Cemetery Prayer Room: *Fotovvat Architecture Group*
Al Sabbah Musalla: *Polypod*

Epilogue
shutterstock.com

The Authors

Dr. Mashary Al Naim

Architect, planner and professor of architectural criticism at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University. He is now the Secretary General of Abdulatif AlFozan Award for Mosque Architecture and was former Secretary General of the National Built Heritage Center at the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage. A writer in the Riyadh newspaper and a researcher specializing in the history, theory and criticism of architecture with several publications..

Dr. Wael Samhouri

Wael Samhouri is Palestinian/Syrian architect, urban designer and academic based in Damascus, with a life interest in sacred architecture. Holding Masters and Ph.D from American and England (the Royal Collage), he is professor and founding-head of three departments of architecture in Syria. He has his own architectural studio that produces several built award winning projects (mainly religious and educational). He is a member of LONAARD group of critics in London, and on the board of trusties of the Aga Khan AKDN, a technical review for the Aga Khan award and Al- Fozan Award for Mosque, since more that 20 years.

https://alfozanawards.org