

# COPPER FOR THE

# BRONZE AGE



Photo: Gerry O' Leary

by Chris Hodson

Set in the deserts of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, a multi-award winning visitor centre celebrates a Bronze Age archaeological site and features copper as part of a restrained palette of enduring materials.

The Mleiha Archaeological Centre is at the heart of an eco-tourism project to protect the rich archaeology, environment and wildlife in the region, creating a coherent setting suitable for potential World Heritage Site status. Focused on and wrapping around the circular Bronze Age Umm an-Nar tomb – considered the most impressive grave building of the many ancient funeral sites in the area – the new building was designed by Dabbagh Architects and conceived as a double curve mirroring the spectacular Fossil Rock mountains nearby.

**Architects:** Dabbagh Architects  
**Copper Installer:** Arabian Profile  
**Copper Product:** Nordic Brown Light

## SINUOUS PLAN

The sinuous, curvilinear plan form terminates in a copper-roofed reception and exhibition area, fragmenting into copper-clad folded elements spanning the café, with glazing opening out to the landscape. Copper proved to be the ideal material for the complex geometry, with careful detailing and fabrication by the cladding specialists, working closely with the architects.

Given the historic importance and eco aspirations of the project, durability and sustainability were paramount in material selection. Principal architect Sumaya Dabbagh explained: "Alongside the regionally-sourced sandstone, we chose contrasting copper which is recyclable and will weather organically over time, thus enhancing its natural beauty. Apart from its obvious contextual relevance to the Bronze Age site, copper is exceptionally durable with low maintenance – essential in this harsh desert environment".



Photo: Shurooq