

Al Ain Museum

UAE-based practice Dabbagh Architects reveals design for Al Ain Museum of Archaeology

Dubai-based practice Dabbagh Architects, founded by Saudi architect Sumaya Dabbagh, has revealed its design for Al Ain Museum of Archaeology, an upcoming development located next to the 7,000-year-old Al Ain Oasis.

Intended to showcase the region's environmental heritage, the museum will serve as a centre for collection, research, conservation and interpretation of the archaeological wealth of Abu Dhabi, and the UAE in general.

According to the architects, the museum's site contains two historically significant structures: the mud-brick Sultan Fort, built in 1910 by Sheikh Sultan bin Zayed, the son of Sheikh Zayed the first; and Al Ain National Museum, the UAE's first museum, which was built as part of the vision of His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan in 1971.

While the fort marked the rising influence of the Al Nahyan family, the national museum was built to showcase the history of Al Ain from the Stone Age through to the foundation of the UAE. Today, it remains one of the last standing witnesses of Al Ain's modern era.

Over the past 40 years, several smaller structures have been added to the site in response to the increased demand for offices and storage facilities. Such additions produced an unintended barrier between Al Ain Oasis and the other elements on site, explained the architects.

"The Al Ain Museum proposal recognises the literal and symbolic significance of the oasis as a source of life and prosperity for Al Ain," said Dabbagh. "It seeks to reestablish its connection with the Sultan Fort and the existing museum. It also creates a new addition that will respect and enhance this rich setting."

The new museum seeks to contribute to the ongoing story told on site by the fort and existing museum, which represent different eras in Al Ain's history.

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Images courtesy
of Dabbagh
Architects







"[The archaeology museum's] role is not only functional as a museum; it also [adds to] the greater system, contributing to a story that conveys the cultural context of the past and present, and [offers] a vision for the future," said Dabbagh.

At the end of the 19th century, the urban fabric of the area adjacent to the newly built Sultan Fort was made up of dispersed, low density, single story mud-brick dwellings surrounded by courtyards, said Dabbagh. **Once referred to as 'Harat Al Hosn', or 'Fort Neighbourhood', the area's built**





forms and human scale provided the basis for the design of the new museum.

Incorporating Al Ain's early build forms with a modern adaptation, the architects' proposed a design that consists of a series of small, closely-knit buildings distributed across the ground floor. With the majority of the museum's facilities located underground, the design allows for minimal impact to

the surrounding, sensitive historical context, as well as maintains the visual connection to the oasis.

Located on the ground level are public facilities such as the café, museum shop and entry lobbies which lead to the various elements of the museum below ground. Some of the volumes incorporate canopy structures, which serve to create shaded outdoor spaces.

A series of sunken courtyards carved into the new museum's plaza further emphasise the connection to the main museum programme below. In addition to providing a visual connection to the exterior, these voids allow natural diffused sunlight to enter the breakout lobbies and galleries on the lower level.

The lower level houses various exhibition spaces, a library, conservation labs and workshop areas, as well as administrative offices. The basement floor contains back-of-house areas that require a controlled environment, such as conservation storage and MEP services plant facilities.

According to Dabbagh, the project aims to achieve a 2-Pearl Estidama rating by incorporating sustainable strategies, including the use of locally sourced materials, energy and water conservation, as well as the provision of comfortable indoor and outdoor environments.

Restoration of the Sultan Fort and the Al Ain National Museum will also be a significant part of the work.

Construction is scheduled to start in Q3 2019, with completion slated for Q4 2020.