

PRESENTATION NOTES

A – SITE ANALYSIS AND CONCEPT

The analysis of the site and its immediate surroundings confirmed that the natural access to the project is from the north, where Rue Ghalghoul separates the site from a square. The south is bordered by the hostile ring road. To the west, a road with a slope of 12% lends itself well to becoming a pedestrian street. And a defining factor for the concept of the project to the east, a pedestrian street – in planning – linking the high speed Avenue Fouad Chehab to the square. The square will establish its final identity once the surrounding plots have been fully developed, becoming a quiet green haven.

The organization of the pedestrian street has become an integral part of the project: It has been longitudinally split into two. Following the slope of the actual curved side-walk pavement, the first section climbs southwards in a stepped tree-lined ramp leading to the elevated Avenue. Bordering the project, the second section extends horizontally – at the level of the northern street – to the south where it re-connects with the ramp at Avenue Fouad Chehab via a terraced staircase. This affords some breathing space to the rear of the building at ground floor level, and provides the opportunity for a gallery, an indoor street marking the edge of the exhibition space and leading to the retail outlets.

The project sits on a horizontal platform, the glazed north-eastern facade at ground level opening outwards to the parvis (forecourt) and the square. Ideally, the paving of the public square would continue into the House of Arts and Culture and through its ground level, making the square an integral part of the project.

Two rows of columns line the north parvis, elevating the foyer to the Large Performance Hall about 13m above. The foyer is conceived as a glass box overlooking the full length of the square. At night, this box will glow like a huge lantern illuminating the parvis and the square below during cultural events. Its facade, straight on the square, opens to the east in a curve, mirroring the street below. Wide steps at ground floor level link the sloping pavement and the stepped ramp as a continuation of the parvis. The first row of columns is external; the second internal with the exception of one – left outdoors by the curvature of the glazing. This extends the parvis southwards and opens it to the east through the two end columns.

Exactly the same length of the square, the glazed facade of the parvis abuts onto a mass of stone, which follows the line of the existing building on the square. This solid volume forms an edge to the parvis. A stone-clad wall at a sharp angle invites you from the square through the parvis and leads you into the building, marking the main entrance. The angled, glass plane thus acknowledging both the square and the north-east corner. The stone mass is punctured

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by the vehicular access into the building. Reminiscent of old Beirut, the north-western corner (square through the rest of the levels) curves at ground floor for a smoother flow.

B - THE FUNCTIONS

I – Large Performance Hall (level + 2): the most challenging item required by the brief is unquestionably the 800-seat performance hall. The brief calls for the possibility to host a multitude of events such as concerts, operas, ballets, plays, etc... The lower seats of the stalls are removable. The horizontal concrete floor below could thus accommodate a central stage of various heights. Upper stalls and balcony seating is conventional. A tall fly-tower is required, as well as generous backstage and wing areas. The rear of the building is along Avenue Fouad Chehab and is easily accessible for a large truck delivering stage sets and equipment to the loading bay. Due to its significant span ($\approx 29\text{m}$), the Large Performance Hall is positioned on the highest level of this zone: the only load on its structure is a planted landscape for public enjoyment. The completely glazed foyer addressing the square and the east, is accessible from the main entrance hall (GF level 0) by lifts, escalators and the impressive main stair that also provides access to the cafeteria on the first floor.

II - Exhibition Spaces (levels 0 & – 1), Shops & Boutiques (level 0)

Exhibition hall ($\approx 725\text{m}^2$): the most versatile space, and that which will attract the greatest number of visitors, must be highly accessible, and so at ground floor level and to the north-east via the main entrance hall. This becomes a showcase (*or centerpiece*) for the project. In addition, its proximity to Rue Ghalghoul allows direct receipt of large sculptures or heavy objects. At the back (south), the deep hall is serviced by a goods lift (cabin int. $2.0 \times 3.07\text{m}$). Located below the Large Performance Hall, this space exploits the incline of the stalls to offer greater floor to ceiling heights ranging from 5m to 11.3m towards the parvis. As required, the exhibition hall may be subdivided into three or four separate exhibition spaces thanks to its modular, movable partitions. The playful wave-like ceiling is in contrast with the strict angle of the east facade, distinguishing the inclined floor of the large performance hall and the separation from the entrance hall. A more intimate space ($\approx 4.20\text{m}$ clear height) continues to the floor below, via a double-height stair.

Access to the exhibition hall from the south-east is via the shopping gallery. The boutiques are less prominent, though they retain an important presence: the 20m glass wall of the gallery runs parallel to the exhibition hall, with direct access to the boutiques: a prime spot for the sales of exhibition-related artifacts. Outside, two shop fronts are angled to offer a better reading of the separate functions. In the first basement, facing the Small Performance Hall and the Movie Theater, an autonomous third exhibition hall could be managed in-house or by independent operators. It gains exposure to the crowds passing through their foyer. Accessible by lifts, escalators and the main stair to visitors, deliveries can be made via the goods lift at the

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north-west corner. This facade is along the disabled access ramp and so its floor is staggered into 4 platforms.

III – Small Multimedia Performance Hall and Movie Theater (level – 1), Meeting Rooms (level 0)

Together, these two halls with identical spans (14.20m), make up the overall width of the Large Performance Hall. In this way, it is possible to stack these facilities on top of one another, overlaying the structural grid: the exhibition hall at level 0, and the Large Performance Hall at level + 1.

The Small Performance Hall, with its horizontal reinforced concrete slab and removable seating may also be re-configured for a central stage. Its back stage is served by the south goods lift (also servicing the Large Performance Hall) and is adjacent to the Movie Theater, with the artists' facilities on two levels and a double-height foyer leading to internal stairs.

Located at the south-west corner of the ground floor (level 0), the Meeting Rooms are easily accessed from the main entrance hall as well as from the gallery. As they do not require exposure, this is a convenient location for them. The concept is simple: a single foyer serves two meeting rooms with eight shared interpretation booths and projection booths on a slightly higher level.

IV – The "Tower "

The Small Performance Hall, the adjacent Movie Theater (level -1), the Exhibition Hall (level 0) and the Large Performance Hall (level + 2) together occupy the bulk of the project. The "Tower" is erected on the remaining western part, in the prolongation of the vertical circulation and houses ancillary facilities such as offices.

a – Lebanese Cinémathèque (level + 3): The administrative offices are predominantly orientated onto the square, with store rooms along the western elevations. The curator's office has a privileged position at the intersection of the two facades that meet in a sharp angle internally: the stone-clad facade of the Large Performance Hall, continuing into the offices, and the oblique north glass curtain wall.

b – Documentation Centre (level + 4): The reading rooms and library are accessible to the public, with store rooms for books to the south, serviced by the goods lift. The audio-visual stations are arranged in two groups: the video stations are located in a central island (without windows) whilst the audio stations benefit from a view onto the north facade.

c - Workshops and Training Rooms (levels + 6 & + 7): These facilities are spread over two levels. On the seventh floor west, four workshops: Music and Theatre I; Art I; Art II; and Dance. The latter two benefit from double-height spaces useful for such disciplines (large sculptures, mobiles, acrobatics, lifts and jumps, etc.). An internal stair connects the two levels and, at the higher level, a distribution corridor is animated by views onto the Art II and Dance workshops.

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d – Administration: On the last floor of the "Tower", it consists of a series of peripheral offices around a central core. The west circulation corridor is enriched by a landscaped patio onto which open two of the offices.

V – Cafétéria (level + 1)

Half-way between the Large Performance Hall foyer (level + 2) and the Exhibition Hall (level 0), it overlooks the parvis and opens onto the square as well as onto the void of the Exhibition Hall. It is rendered more pleasurable by a small terrace, pre-empting its use during clement weather as a street cafe at ground floor level (parvis and square) via the north-west lift.

C – SUSTAINABILITY

- Effective thermal insulation of the building (double walls and high-performance double glazing).
- Vertical sun shades on the east and west facades, limiting the use of sheer glass curtain walls to the north facade.
- Solar panels for hot water (this does not negate the need for a boiler).
- Rain-water collection and storage in the water tanks (level -4).
- A cost efficient, superimposed, structural grid (Beirut is in seismic zone).

D – FACADE MATERIALS

- Two types of curtain walling: one with apparent external horizontal profiles, and the other with an internal aluminum framework (VEC). The latter is limited to the north facade of the 'box' foyer, with its eastern corner (level + 2) and the west facade of the oblique volume (levels + 1 & + 2).
- Natural stone penetrating into the entrance hall and foyers.
- Vertical aluminum sunshades.
- A giant screen truncating the south-east corner and facing the traffic flow coming from Avenue Fouad Chehab, announcing current and up-coming activities and events.

E – NOTE (MISCELLANEOUS)

The vertical extension of the project (dictated by the site) and the wide range of facilities with exacting dimensions – in plan as well as in section – has lead to a distribution of the services such as circulation cores, the various foyers, the sanitary facilities, storage, etc. with an increased surface area. On the other hand, the structural grid, the product of the overlaying of multiple functions, had to be carried down into the basements and resulted in an increased area with an increase in the number of car parking spaces from 278 to 302.

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