

## **INTRODUCTION TEXT**

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## Design Criteria

Lebanon is the country of cedars. As it is one of the living organs lives the longest, for centuries for thousands, the tree represents the continuity. The cedars of Lebanon witnessed many different type of cultures connected to many different societies and historical periods. The cedar cradled all of them.

Can we find anything in common in the almost continuous changes to Beirut, other than that it is destroyed again and again, and rebuilt again and again?

We have selected three fundamental principles (processes that have remained permanent during change) from the history of the city, which have determined the architectural essence of our proposal:

- Every re-buildings following destruction keep something from the previous era. Sometimes merely ruins, sometimes the old were to all extents and purposes hidden inside the newly constructed buildings. Beirut is a veritable treasure trove of layers of different architectural periods – one could say, the radical eclecticism.

- The proportions of the houses in the city changed drastically. It is natural that in the course of reconstruction the distribution of plots and the height of buildings changes, and that buildings with new functions are built. But during the twentieth century and at beginning of the twenty-first, this natural course of events went down some unusual paths. Another common characteristic is that of the new buildings that changed the fundamentals of the Beirut's system of proportions, almost all are the result of previously destroyed plots being merged. This unusual process initially even resulted whole-block-size, solid, monolithic, geometric like new buildings that had trouble fitting in with existing proportions.

- The real loss in the overall picture of Beirut as it rose up again and again is that the number of icon-like buildings constantly decreased.

The representation of Lebanon and what we learnt from the changing and development of the urban texture of Beirut defined the final composition of this entry project.

The above mentioned principles prompted us to create a contemporary building which is rather a group of free standing geometrical forms in space instead of monolithic solid blocks in space. The Cedar-building we have designed is a message from the present to the future. It transgresses the boundaries of modelling the past, even if, in doing so, it creates an element in the collection of buildings in Beirut that jars with that legacy. The essence of what we have to say is not to be found in the building's use of materials, design, or aesthetic, but in the fact that it is a bearer of nature as well. Beirut's texture always included confined (closed) crafted oases, as if symbolizing the garden in Paradise. Our building with its cedar tree rising above the city symbolically lifts the symbol of Lebanon out of the city's texture.

Visitors to the Cedar-building see the whole city from its terraces. But in their perception nature is every bit as present as for those who look at the tower from afar. But it is quite sure that Beirut residents passing below the building will not realise that they are about to enter a “cedar-tree”. Only in the silhouette of the city one can see the Cedar in our buildings. Those passing by or walking on the deck garden find themselves in a city oasis of a model of the paradise (represented by the carpet like pattern of the deck garden).

## **Functional and spatial organization**

In order to make possible to create a loose agglomeration of individual geometrical elements around the central tower representing the cedar tree, the design took a unique way of arranging in space the basic functional units of the House of Arts.

The largest unit (incorporating the Performance and Conference unit not in need of natural light) was placed underground, half underground using the possibility of the height differences (8,00 m) of the given lot.

Via this solution a longitudinal axis was created between the Avenue du General Fouad Chebab ( $\pm 0,00$  m = +38,60 m) and the Rue Ghalghoul (-8,00 m = +30,60 m). Both end of this axis public entrances are provided. (The public car entrance for underground parking, the underground delivery bay, the main delivery bay for the performance-conference-exhibition spaces are located on the Avenue du General Fouad Chebab. In addition to the two public entrances, a Deck garden was created over the upper slab of the Performance hall. The deck connected to the Avenue du General Fouad Chebab by large stairs, and through the public entrance on the avenue by elevators.

On the deck the entrance foyer, the ticket office, the information centre and the boutiques are located. Not to mention the “trunk” of the cedar tree like central tower. The trunk incorporates the spiral ramp and the central public elevator that connects of the different public units on different levels. Another group of elevators connecting all different levels is located under the exhibition hall. (The kitchen freight elevator of the roof restaurant is located in the very centre of the “trunk”, around which the public elevator can be found.)

On the first level over the Deck garden the exhibition spaces and the National Cinemateque are located and grouped together by bridges. The bridges connect all these spaces to the central vertical circulation facilities of the cedar tower’ “trunk”.

The open flat roof of the exhibition spaces provides the possibility to create open-air art spaces, and a suspended garden as well.

The egg shape part of the Centre incorporates not only the Cinemateque but the administration unit as well.

The second level over the Deck garden incorporates the workshop and training rooms as well as the documentation centre. This level is accessible via the “trunk” of the cedar tower and also via the stairwell and via elevators in the middle of the exhibition spaces.

### *Vertical circulation*

Besides the previously mentioned main public elevators, four others are serving specially the performance and conference hall. They are connecting this unit to the underground parking. Another two public elevators are serving the vertical public circulation of the performance and conference hall. Besides them there are two other elevator strictly for the staff and the artist of the performance hall. (The freight elevator was described previously.)

The fire escape stairwells are arranged according to the necessities of the underground parking. There are two others, one for the workshop of the exhibition hall, and another one specially for the exhibition hall itself.

### **Structural and technical criteria**

Over the concrete underground parking structure there is one structural level under the performance and conference hall and another one over it. Both are serving the acoustic isolation of the performance hall. The one above is also ensure the stability of the central cedar tower. The full standing vertical structure of the upper levels is also standing on this large scale concrete slab. Besides the large span (performance and conference hall) structures the rest is mainly medium and cantilivered.

The main technical units serving the performance and conference hall are located around the hall. Since the functional units of the performance and conference hall are almost free standing, each of them has its own technical unit. On the flat roof of the workshop and training room and the documentation centre there are solar panels located for the environmental friendly energy supply solution of the whole building.

The provided drawings (presentations) were not sufficient to show all the different levels of the building. There are three different levels of parking. Over them there are levels for technical units and delivery areas. Over the lower entrance lounge of the performance and conference hall there is a so called gallery level with the buffet of the performance and conference hall, the public restroom block and different accesses to the interpretation boots, security room, butlery, infirmary.