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aïshti magazine

Love & live in style

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Bombshell Beirut

MAKING LOVE TO THE WORLD'S SEXIEST CITY

JUN/JUL 2009 LL10,000 US\$7



Brave new Beirut

WHICH OF THE LEBANESE CAPITAL'S 21ST-CENTURY STRUCTURES DESERVE SPECIAL DESIGNATION?

Next time you see visitors taking photos of the Raouche rocks or the clock tower on Place de l'Etoile, ask yourself why it is they have chosen those spots in particular to photograph.

Is it because they are the most beautiful places the city has to offer? Because they are closely associated in some way with Lebanon's cultural and historical heritage? Because they are so visually distinctive that they could not be anywhere else in the world? Or is it simply because they are considered landmarks, one of those designated places that provide pixelized proof that the photographer has been to a particular place?

Landmarks say a lot about a people. The places they choose to acknowledge as being, somehow, representative of their culture, can tell you about how those people perceive themselves and, perhaps more crucially, how they wish others to perceive them. How else to explain why landmarks are often the first things changed after a successful revolution, revolt or coup d'état.

The question of what exactly constitutes one is not as simple as it might at first seem. Most people can probably agree that the Opera House is Sydney, in the same way that the Eiffel Tower is Paris or the Blue Mosque is Istanbul – though you have to ask yourself if a 324-meter, 7,300-ton, 19th-century metal monolith really is the quintessence of Paris, then just what is this “Paris” that we are talking about in the first place? But I'm quibbling. Countless TV shows,

documentaries, films, T-shirts and postcards all tell us that these places somehow “are” the cities they are located in and surely, they can't all be wrong.

Me, I'm a little more difficult to please because I find that after a while, the prescribed procession of Kodak moments, though lovely, begin to bore. Personally, having lit a candle at Shwedagon, contemplated the reflection of the

Golden Pavilion and seen sunset from Sugar Loaf – all unforgettable experiences shared with approximately 10,000 other camera-clicking people at the same time – I now tend to prefer landmarks that are more personal, if not to me, then at least to someone I know.

I'm thinking here of being shown the spot where my two dearest friends, inseparable for the last 20 years, first met (in their case, a “romantic” tale that begins with a nasty fender-bender outside a Chinese takeaway in north London, that led to a heated argument and eventually, to commiseration cocktails and unexpected passion in a nearby bar). The hidden garden somewhere north of 25th and Broadway – I'm not giving any more away – my friend David visits to catch a little late lunch sun in New York in winter. Or even the way a tour of Tokyo with Keiko, an Osakan friend-of-a-friend, means skipping the tourist spots and focusing on her favorite convenience stores, Takoyaki stands and mobile noodle bars instead.

Which brings us to Beirut. In a city of 1 million individuals, no two people can be expected to agree on the same place – especially not when the city's many faultlines are taken into consideration. Still, I can't be the only one to have noticed that when it comes to “official” landmarks, Beirut is all about 1974. Raouche, the Place de l'Etoile clock tower, the National Museum, Martyrs' Square (then), the St. Georges (then), Hamra street (then).

With everything that has happened, all the changes and all the new additions to the city since then, we at Aishti Magazine thought we'd have a stab at coming up with a few contemporary landmarks of our own. A couple are built, one is being built and a few are still on the drawing board. All, for the moment, are located in and around the city center, and if that offends eastern or western sensibilities, we

offer no apology. When it comes to Beirut, we live firmly in the center.

Built

While there is reason to question the logic that endowed Beirut with a brand-new, Ottoman-style central mosque 90 years after the Ottomans ceased to be, the golden stone, soaring minarets and graceful blue dome make the Mohammad al Amine Mosque one of the most spectacular backdrops in town.

Ignore the statue, whose wildly elongated arms and legs lend the late, great and much-lamented Samir Kassir the air of some human-grasshopper hybrid, and focus instead on Vladimir Djurovic's soothing reflecting pool and the two magnificent Ficus trees that drop their leaves into its water.

Under construction

Of all the buildings going up in this Manhattan on the Med, Nabil Gholam's glass-clad Platinum Tower is easily the most iconic. True, Marina Tower is crowned with that 10-story “flip,” Beirut Tower looks like it will be taller and, if it is ever built, Ivana Trump Tower will surely be more dramatic but the simple, rational elegance of the Platinum means this tower's appeal will last far beyond its completion date.

Planned

Admittedly, a little self-serving but Zaha Hadid's design for Aishti's forthcoming flagship store, which will occupy the site of what was once Downtown Beirut's Khan Antoun Bey, will finally give Beirut what it deserves, a truly avant-garde retail and entertainment space.

Conveniently located on Riad el Solh, Jean Nouvel's 40-story The Landmark is a “city within a city” that will be visible from almost anywhere in Beirut once it is completed.

Warren Singh Bartlett



Mohammad Al Amine mosque



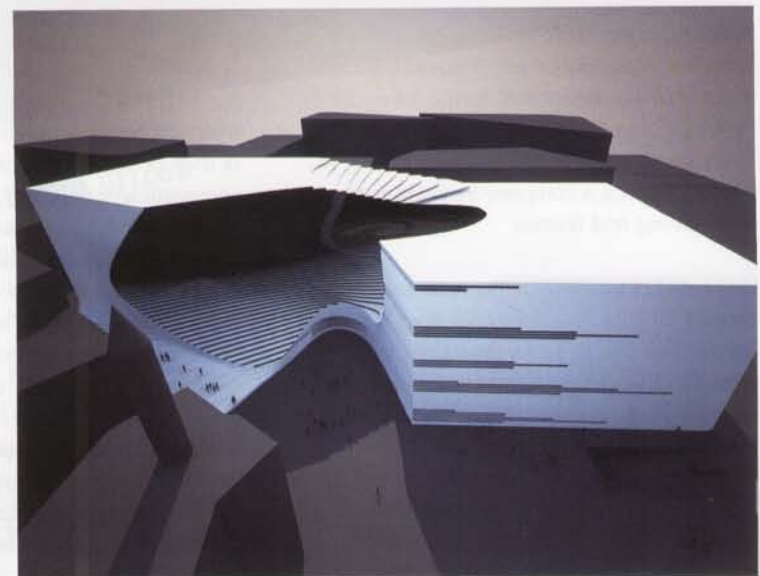
Samir Kassir memorial



Platinum Tower



Landmark



Aishti