

Inside Outside

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Rs 50

Eclectic design by
Husna Rehman
in Bangalore

Interview with
architect
Christopher
Benninger

**ULTRA PLUSH HOMES
IN MUMBAI**

by ZZ Architects
and Talati and Panthaky

IN HYDERABAD

A dramatic home created by
Aamir and Hameeda Associates

ACROSS THE SEVEN SEAS

The dynamic architecture of
Nabil Gholam in Lebanon

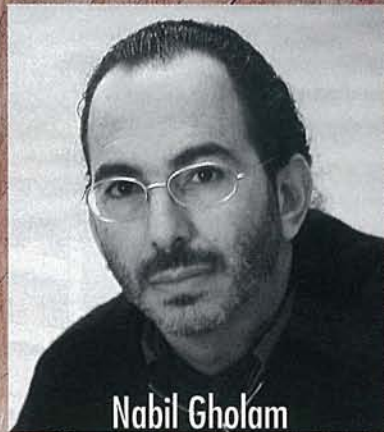
Debbie Palao from the Philippines
shares her stylish home

A photograph of a modern building with a prominent stone wall and a balcony. The building is reflected in a pool of water in the foreground. The sky is clear and blue. The overall scene is serene and architectural.

off the beaten path

Architect Nabil Gholam shares two projects with Inside Outside that he has designed in Lebanon. One, a luxurious residence in Dahr El Sawan is sited on a pine-covered hilltop, 1,200 mts above sea-level and commands a panoramic view, and in Faqra, are two chalets, which are perched on the edge of a cliff.

PHOTOGRAPHS: GERALDINE BRUNERL, NABIL GHOLAM, AND JACQUES ARIDA
DESIGN: NABIL GHOLAM AND JACQUES ARIDA




Nabil Gholam

After seven years of working in France, Spain, China and the United States, as Senior Partner in charge of international projects with Ricardo Bofill's Taller de Arquitectura, Nabil decided to set up his own practice and founded Nabil Gholam Architecture & Planning (NGAP) in Beirut in 1994.

Fourteen years later, the practice has expanded considerably and comprises a team of over 50 full time professionals, working with the support of several former team members and a broad network of top international specialty consultants. In line with the firm's growing visibility on the international scene, a satellite office in Barcelona was established in 2006, to be followed shortly by a second one in Istanbul.

The portfolio of NGAP comprises over 200 projects, and the firm has won numerous awards.

NGAP's ever curious and enthusiastic team is engaged in a perpetual process of researching, questioning and experimenting. It remains committed to delivering quality design, maintaining broader social, cultural, economic and ecological sensitivity,



There are generous indoor
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the clients' social lifestyle.



Nabil's clients were a high profile young couple with two children, who wanted a new family residence to live and entertain in, so they organised a competition for selecting their architect. The general plan comprised five en-suite bedrooms for family and guests, generous indoor and outdoor living areas, spaces for dining and recreation that would complement the couple's social lifestyle, and of course, the usual amenities.



The brief was much less straightforward: while the aim was to have a modern Mediterranean house ('not organic, not monolithic'), the couple brought two very different stylistic expectations into it. HE had grown up in a family that had been living in homes since the 1960s, which were in the modern architectural style (including houses by Mallet-Stevens and Niemeyer), in Lebanon, Europe and the USA, and had a preference for its clean lines and austerity. SHE came from a background in the hotel and tourism industry, and had a more romantic vision of ornate and plush luxury, which



she recognised in vernacular oriental architecture. In addition to these two seemingly contrary visions that risked making the client-architect relationship a tougher than normal challenge, the clients requested Nabil to ensure that their house, despite the size of the plan, should exude a sense of discretion, and not act as a superfluous social statement of wealth.

THE SITE AND CONTEXT

The 11,000 sq mt site sits on a sumptuous pine-covered hilltop, 1,200 mts above sea-level on Mount Lebanon, commanding extraordinary vistas in all directions. The climate, because of

the location, is excellent all year round: in the winter it is relatively warm and dry and despite the occasional snow, the house is easily accessible, while in summer, it is breezy and cool. The strong slope of the land had posed many challenges to Nabil: he had to create a structure whose architecture would be in harmony with the hill and one with the surrounding environs; harness the rising sea breezes, take full advantage of the views and the open skies, while keeping a layout that was flexible.

THE PHILOSOPHY

The commission for this house came at a very significant time in

the history of the firm. Says Nabil, 'After seven years of operating in Lebanon, we were gradually and consciously adopting a more assertive architecture, that nevertheless strived for an "egoless" expression. The multiple challenges of this project (the site, the plan, the brief and the clients' clashing expectations) provided the perfect opportunity to show the validity of our philosophy. Rooted in a strong desire to satisfy the end user without making concessions to the integrity of our architecture, we developed a position that can best be interpreted as essentialism, or the reduction of each aspect of the



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Fact file

Architecture: Nabil Gholam Architecture & Planning
Landscaping: Vladimir Djurovic Landscape Architecture
Structural engineer: Bureau d'études Rodolphe Mattar
Electro-Mechanical consultant: Barbanel Liban
Area: 1,200 sq mts + 1 basement



From within, the views framing the pine woods and the valleys beyond are gradually unveiled and broadened, eventually opening fully to great vistas of the sea.

brief and context to its most poetic and essential quality, before giving it architectural form. In that sense, we strived to reinterpret the “Modern Mediterranean” house as a dwelling with the following essential qualities:

- An ecological outlook respecting the site and a use of local materials throughout.
- A simple, legible massing language that belies a rich collection of spatial experiences and framed views.
- A powerful and seamless integration between the inner (architectural) and outer (landscape) realms, with a subtle delineation of public (social) and private (familial) realms.’

THE CONCEPT AND DESIGN

A sweeping arched retainer wall holds back the hilltop, allowing a series of orthogonal local sandstone walls to spring out from the land. Cascading down the site, they direct the gaze and frame views of the blue sky, the lush pine forest, the snow-capped mountains, and the eternal horizon of the Mediterranean Sea. From the highest point of the hill, they read as archaeological traces of a timeless structure sunk in a field of indigenous flora.

Horizontal planes of cross-cut travertine slabs, cool reflecting water ponds, and cantilevered canopies intersect the walls in a dialogue with the slope, generat-

ing the living spaces of the house. Careful orientation and sun-shading, planted roofs, crawling greenery and obsessive attention to proportion help the house to sink considerably into the hill and respect its ecology (existing trees were carefully protected and only indigenous species were added). Yet the choices and expressions of material reveal that these walls are very much man-made: a rational layering of horizontal joints overlaps the ashlar construction of the main sandstone walls, which act like horizontal incisions in the landscape.

Effectively, the house has two faces it offers to the world. The first one it presents, is a mute



succession of stone walls with occasional vertical slits and trees pecking from behind, hinting discreetly at the private world beyond. It is a facade that plays hide and seek, creating a sense of subtle mystery that enhances the clients' desire for discretion, while expressing a calm opulence and a safe haven for the family. Passing through these first layers of filters, one goes through a succession of quiet spaces, mirrored by shallow reflecting pools and open to the sky, but shielded from the hills around.

The second face is more private, yet fully glazed to allow a complete communion between house and nature: the bedrooms open to the views on the upper floor; the gym, pool house, service and playrooms are arranged around the courtyards of the semi-enclosed basement. All of them have cross ventilation, which captures the sea breeze rising from the valley. From within, the views framing the pine woods and the valleys beyond are gradually unveiled and broadened, eventually opening fully to great vistas of the sea.

Light and air cross freely through the living spaces. The passage through the house at ground level is an almost ceremonial procession from a public to a private realm.

'The resultant architecture was made possible through a sustained enthusiasm and a very personal involvement in the process on our end, building the clients' confidence as the project took shape.' The solid friendship and appreciation that developed between the clients and the architect by the time the house was completed, was also helped by the architect's strict respect of the original budget and the reunion of the couple around what turned out to be a fully consensual design vision.

A photograph showing the interior of a chalet. Large floor-to-ceiling windows offer a panoramic view of a mountainous landscape. The floor is made of light-colored wood. A balcony with a metal railing is visible through the windows. The ceiling features a wooden slat design.

D+H Chalets Faqra, Lebanon

Tucked into the steep landscape of the Faqra Resort on the edge of a cliff, these two single-family chalets are designed to provide all the comfort and amenities within a relatively compact space. Access is gained from the planted roofs at street level, and the houses lie below in order to disrupt as little as possible the natural settings. They are tucked in the mountain, adopting the slope of the land. The roofs are covered with a layer of natural earth, and the existing vegetation on site invades it slowly to further integrate the houses in the mountain flank.

The interiors are free of structural members and, instead, have timber portioning throughout. Each house is framed on one side by an ‘intelligent wall’ that carries all the accessible

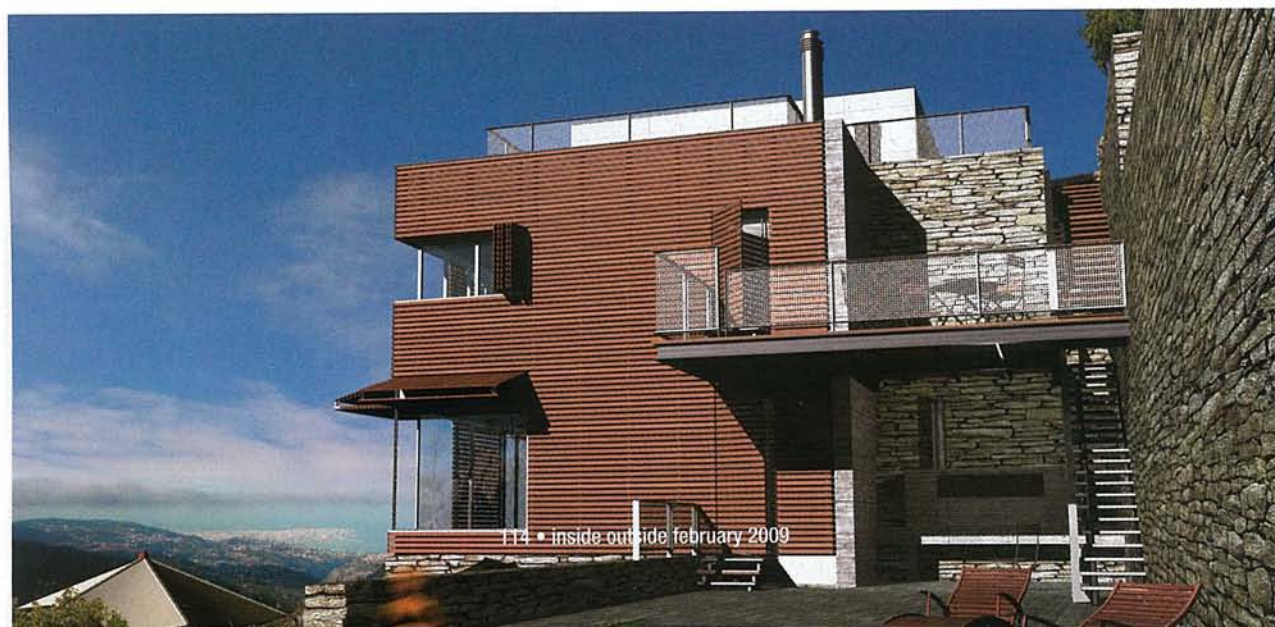
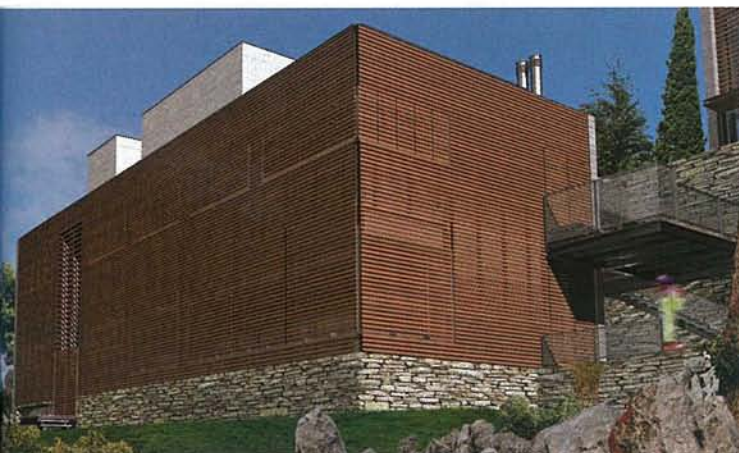




Image by www.ateliers-u.com




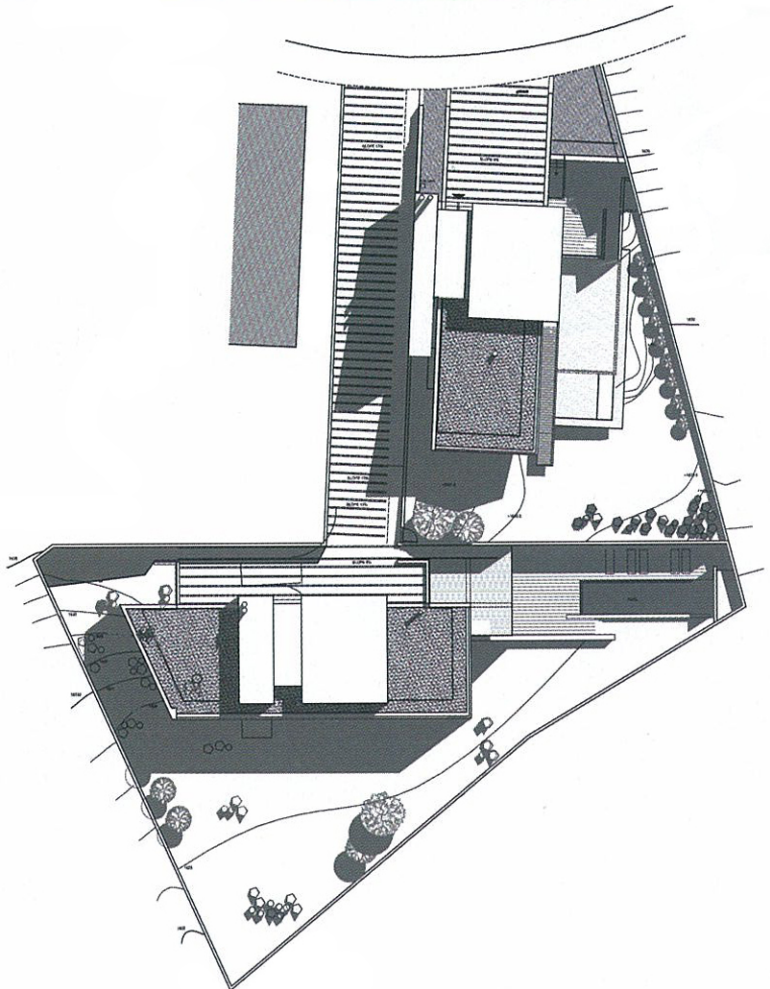
When the owner leaves and closes the house, it returns to its mute simple box shape.



On one side there is an 'intelligent wall' that carries all the accessible technical conduits and natural ventilation shafts to the open floors.



technical conduits and natural ventilation shafts to the open floors and on the others, it opens up to the spectacular views of the valley and the Mediterranean beyond. When the owner leaves and closes the house, it returns to its mute simple box shape, reminiscent of old mountain structures in Lebanon, which invariably have a simple platonic form, inserted in the landscape. 



Fact file

Area: 400 sq mts each,
with 2 car parking above
Client: Private Architecture: NGAP
Structural engineer: Sleiman Serhal
Electro Mechanical Engineer: Bureau d'études
Kamal Sioufi
3D images: Ateliers-U