

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

PRESENTS

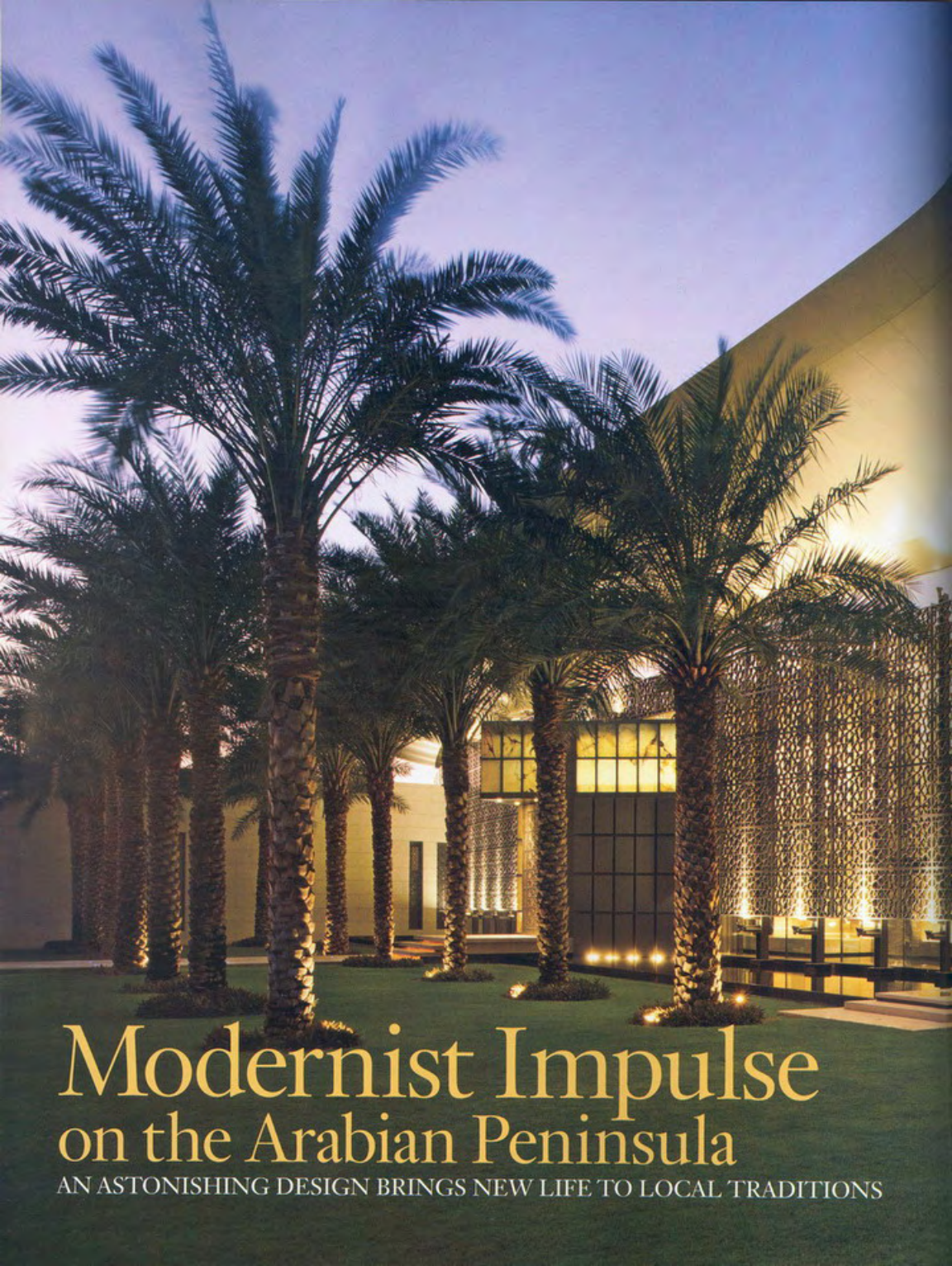
The Architecture Issue



Dialoguing with Nature: Inspiring New Designs Around the World, from Brooklyn to Dubai

When Le Corbusier first pushed aside a floor-to-ceiling sliding glass door to step from the living room out onto the terrace of his newly completed Villa Savoye in Poissy, France, he was in a certain way predicting the future. It was 1931, and the concept of a house having a seamless integration of indoor and outdoor space—the room was not restricted by its architecture but instead flowed unobstructedly from it into nature—hadn't been explored to this degree, ever. That element (like most others of the house's design) forever changed the way architects think. Seventy-six years later, as this year's Architecture issue shows, we're fully engaged by the dichotomy of an indoor-outdoor

experience, of both living under a roof and not having one at all, no matter the house's location. In Pebble Beach, California, a residence by BAR Architects uses the largest sheets of glass in production to wed the building to its sea-sprayed site. In Dubai, a master bedroom of a Steven Ehrlich-designed house opens itself up to a grove of date palms via a massive corner void filled with floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors. In a Texas house by Peter L. Gluck, the entire first floor is window walls and sliding glass doors. Despite being vastly different, these designs all suggest that, with the right architect guiding the way, we can be entirely at home both inside and out.



Modernist Impulse on the Arabian Peninsula

AN ASTONISHING DESIGN BRINGS NEW LIFE TO LOCAL TRADITIONS



California-based architect Steven Ehrlich designed a dramatic 35,000-square-foot house in Dubai, transforming an arid desert site into a modern oasis of gardens, fountains, terraces and courtyards. THESE PAGES: A cast-aluminum *masbrabiyya*, or lattice sunscreen—"decorated with contemporary versions of Islamic patterns," notes Ehrlich—shades the glazed great hall.

Architecture by Steven Ehrlich Architects
Interior Design by Hirsch Bedner Associates/Landscape Architecture by Cracknell
Text by Joseph Giovannini/Photography by Erhard Pfeiffer



ABOVE: Inspired by the crescent moon, "which symbolizes new life and new beginnings," Ehrlich created a swooping roof—supported by 14 travertine-clad columns—that cantilevers over the main structure. "Technology allowed me to reinterpret ancient regional symbols on a grand scale." **RIGHT:** The great hall is cooled by reflecting pools.





By the slow clock of cultural time, Americans conquered their desert yesterday, with the air conditioner. But Arabs, using the technology of the camel, conquered the desert more than a millennium ago, and over the centuries, vast stretches of apparently inhospitable terrain became the homeland of the Arab soul.

Today, in a changed world, as denizens of deserts in the Middle East have become citizens of the world—at home on jets as much as in SUVs cruising the sands—many remain devoted to their deserts, almost as an article of faith. For many Arabs, the desert is a terrain of purity intensified by penetrating light, washes of color and the shimmer of absolute heat. The clarity in this pristine environment fully reveals the fundamentals of nature: the horizon, the moon and a vast night sky sparkling

with the stars that once guided caravans. An unpromising desert floor here is full of history, tradition and lore, and traced with lines of life, like the palm of a hand. For the new nomadic cosmopolites who travel abroad, the desert represents a place and space of spiritual return.

Its minimalist beauty may not be obvious to Westerners, but the way traditional Arab cultures have lived on the land with a light footprint has long interested Western architects, who have appreciated Bedouin tents and vernacular habitats, with their wind chimneys, earthen walls and courtyards. Since his early years in the Peace Corps in Morocco, Los Angeles architect Steven Ehrlich has been a student of indigenous structures, from Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa through Yemen. What he calls “architecture without architects” offers lessons in environmental wisdom. In

“Multicultural Modernism is my term for the philosophy that guides the design of the house,” says Ehrlich. “It incorporates local building traditions with Arabic themes into the modern idiom.” ABOVE: In the women’s majlis, enormous doors slide open automatically, “fusing the indoor space with the outdoor space.” Bergamo chair fabric.

California he has integrated these lessons in his own work, giving designs a subtext that warms and enriches his Modernism, leading it out of simplicity toward a multicultural complexity.

So when a citizen of Dubai asked the architect to design a house in a family compound in the desert, it was kismet. Ehrlich had spent a career preparing for this kind of commission.

In a gesture of traditional hospitality worthy of a Bedouin, the client invited the architect and an associate to spend a

Steven Ehrlich absorbed the spirit of Dubai and fused the



Ehrlich (below), who practiced architecture in North and West Africa for six years, collaborated on the execution of the project with Jason Burnside, of Godwin Austen Johnson. ABOVE: The interior design firm Hirsch Bedner Associates chose furnishings and fabrics for the dining room, as throughout.



week in Dubai so that Ehrlich could understand the site, its moods and his family. "We drove the site in a four-wheel-drive Range Rover, passing camels that were just there, hanging out," he recalls. "We'd work in the morning and then meet in the evening."

In the stillness, Ehrlich gravitated to the major event of the desert night: "The big idea came from the crescent moon, whose profile I thought could form the roof, not unlike a huge shade structure or a Bedouin tent, lifted very high." As he designed the roof, he projected the profile of a crescent at either end of the house. "At the tops of minarets, the same profile symbol-

izes new life in the new moon," he notes. Ehrlich named the house Helal, or New Moon Residence.

Attenuating the crescent shape, he lofted the roof at its edges, floating it like a tented canopy over the structure below. Ehrlich further cultivated the imagery of the Arabian desert by planting the house within shallow basins of water and a grove of palms, conveying the feel of an oasis rather than a suburban house. Evaporation from the pools creates a microclimate around the house, cooling a structure already vented and insulated by the space under the floating roof.

The grace and power of the house lies

contemporary and the traditional, the global and the local.



largely in the tapering ends of the crescent, which cantilever 30 feet beyond seven pairs of evenly spaced, stone-clad piers. The columns establish the organizing divisions within the 35,000-square-foot interiors and emerge through the roof, alluding to flues in the mud towers of traditional Arab dwellings that channel air currents.

A house with a sprawling open plan as large as a football field needs a very tall ceiling, which prompted Ehrlich to call on modern technology. Dubai, fast becoming the Singapore of the Middle East, has witnessed an explosion in structurally ambitious construction, and

Ehrlich did not shy from the modern materials and techniques at hand. He translated ancient building traditions into contemporary terms. The modernism suited the client, who, says Ehrlich, "is a highly educated, global superstar, an international businessman."

The sheltering roof protects enormous glass doors that slide back to establish continuity between inside and outside. "The design puts the residents in touch with the weather and the light," he says, "and engages the full landscape."

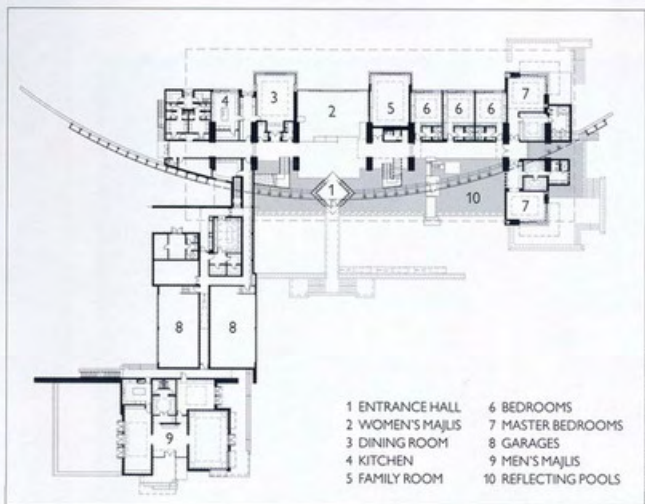
In places, the glass walls rise all the way up to the crescent roof, enclosing majestic

continued on page 322

"Centuries of Muslim tradition dictate that the men's majlis be separated from the women's and also have a separate entrance," remarks Ehrlich, who framed the doorway with onyx panels. He worked on the fountains and terraces with the landscape architecture firm Cracknell.

“The design puts the residents in touch with the weather and the light,” the architect says,
“and engages the full landscape.”





LEFT: The roof, sheathed in shimmering aluminum, shelters an open sleeping porch above one of the master bedrooms, which has glazed doors that slide completely open. **ABOVE:** The L-shaped floor plan shows the main house and the men's majlis, where male guests arrive.



ABOVE: A grove of date palms winds around the pool and flanks the women's majlis. Designing the house, Ehrlich observes, "reinforced my philosophy that for every work of architecture, sensitivity to people, place and culture yields a unique solution."

continued from page 262

This 58-foot-long “gestural arc,” which divides the lower-level family room from the library and an ancillary kitchen, is the house’s spine (“People don’t move rectilinearly”). Its translucence is enhanced by the light gain from the library’s glass ceiling—actually the floor of the gallery overhead—which permits that room to integrate and rise above niche status within the downstairs central volume.

Apart from the cast-glass wall, curved shapes are left to the furnishings, primarily timeless Modernist pieces selected by Studio Gang Architects to balance the insistent linearity. The absence of round surfaces, however, is hardly a comfort issue: The predominantly wood (teak casework and maple ceiling) master bath, for instance, is a wholly orthogonal composition, yet there are few more sublimely sensuous spaces.

Size was a significant factor, in both the physical and the perceived sense. As Graham Hogan, Predock’s project manager, says, “The house was not going to make a grandiose statement. We weren’t asked to do a wine cellar or a media room—that would have been much too obvious and trendy for them.”

Hogan reveals, further, the exigencies of Predock’s world. “His thinking is always so beyond the tangible nature of building that the ideas sometimes get limited when you have to translate them. We had to jump through hoops for the cast glass, which isn’t recognized as a wall by code. We did a lot of structural tests proving the material and then worked with the artist to get the molten glass to Antoine’s original vision: one image in his head that we were able to make a reality.” (Or, in Predock poetics, his architecture “begins in the realm of the unmeasurable, proceeds inevitably through the measurable and then becomes unmeasurable again.”)

Predock once made the statement that his buildings were designed so that he could ski down the faces of them. He’s managed that several times in the past and, again, here: His office holiday card last year had a photo of him impressively traversing in fresh powder one of the northeast bermed walls. For him, reverting to form is about stylish moves on the slopes—not a step backward in the progression of his architecture. □

Watch our interview with architect Antoine Predock at ArchitecturalDigest.com.

continued from page 275

volumes of space, but the roofs of the more intimate pavilions, which serve as terraces or sleeping porches, are another evocation of desert traditions. Ehrlich has fused the Arab idea of outdoor rooms, the California ideal of horizontal space and the New York concept of urbane living in an open, loftlike interior.

The heroic scale is domesticated by delicate details from Arab culture. Inspired by *mashrabiyas*—intricate wood or stone lattices that screen the sun and afford privacy while admitting breezes—the architect built a huge, geometric screen wall of aluminum panels cast in a repeating pattern of interlaced stars. Traversing the length of the house, it protects the interior from the sun while projecting dappled light inside. Ehrlich augments the ephemeral effects by surfacing the belly of the roof in aluminum sheeting, which reflects light that itself is reflected up in moving patterns from the surrounding pools. The polished-limestone floor shimmers, and translucent onyx panels at the entrance glow warmly on the interior during the day and on the exterior at night.

Ehrlich did not parachute in like a missionary preaching Western Modernism; instead he absorbed the spirit of Dubai

Since his early years in the Peace Corps in Morocco, Ehrlich has been a student of indigenous structures.

and fused the contemporary and the traditional, the global and the local, in a hybrid that reconciles what might seem to be opposing styles. The message is agreement.

He takes into account both the geographic and cultural environments. “I don’t believe in a singular global architectural answer but in the counterpoint of the primal and the futuristic—how cultures learn from each other,” he says. “I was not mimicking old buildings, but I was inspired by them, thinking about how an ancient local tradition can be respectfully broadened and transformed. Like Dubai itself, the house is adapting traditions while working toward the future.” □

continued from page 289

“Working with Bob’s architecture means that I don’t have to fill a space with 25 things when it might only call for one simple piece,” Baron Gurney says. Her placement of a Panton chair as a single splash of curvy plastic in the master dressing room illustrates the point, as does her making a George Nelson bench the sole object in the master bath. “What I do with

“It all had to work holistically. Incorporating the garden walls and the paths was as important to the project as the architecture itself.”

furniture and art is never a compensation for the architecture,” she emphasizes, “but a complement to it.”

Gurney imported volume and much-needed light to the living/dining room by exchanging the lower end of a shed roof for a higher, flat roof and solid walls for floor-to-ceiling glazing. “The old space was enclosing and didn’t allow you to participate in the landscape,” he says. “We essentially made it two rooms of glass and completely changed how it feels to be in it.” Black window frames accentuate the views of the immediate outdoor environment: a large *tipe* deck extending from the main living area and the master bedroom, and the bluestone-paved pool terrace, situated beyond the guest room. That the black anodized aluminum “popped out to the degree it did” on the exterior dictated its use elsewhere as well, with Gurney concluding that any additional color would throw off the measured balance he had achieved.

“I was very respectful of the language of ‘50s architecture, its scale and character,” he says. “We had the chance to do something interesting with it, because the property fell into the right hands. A developer would have knocked down this nice little place and put up a monster faux Colonial or some other anemic replication of another time.” Goldstein returns the compliment. “I can’t imagine this house not being here—this house, exactly the way it is now.” □