

Baghdad Resurgent

It has become a truism to say that Baghdad nowadays is like one great building site. The report which follows is about development in two specific areas, Bab al-Sheikh and Kadhimiya, and to appreciate their significance, at least in terms of size, they have been set in the wider context of some of the building operations which are in hand or at an advanced planning stage all over the city.

Baghdad is bisected by the Tigris, which flows roughly in a south-eastern direction. On its right bank Al-Mansour established his Round City, which marked the foundation of Baghdad in 762 AD and gave rise to the early extensions of Kadhimiya and Karkh, both of which survive in name. On its left bank Rusafa developed into a large medieval city, losing its walls and being criss-crossed by modern roads only in the 20th century. This opening-up process exposed many mosques which had hitherto lain embedded in the city's dense fabric. It also introduced the western concept of the street (the arcaded Rashid Street is an attractive example which the authorities hope to preserve) into a typically irregular Islamic context.

It is this haphazard and half-hearted modernisation which the present Mayor, Samir M. Abdul Wahab and his organisation, the Amanat Al-Assima, are turning into a systematic effort to bring Baghdad into the 21st century and re-establish its supremacy in the Arab world. What has made this effort unique, however, is the appointment some two years ago of Rifat



Chadirji, as the Mayor's counsellor in all matters of planning and design (Chadirji's own work was covered in MIMAR 5). It is largely due to him that the quality of foreign consultant is changing and that the type of development encouraged is now more in sympathy with the surviving traditional fabric, a substantial part of which is to be preserved and restored. Chadirji has developed a "theory of compatibility" with guidelines within which every consultant is expected to work.

Often it is the size of the understandings which astounds. In terms of infra-structure alone in the last three years the city has spent

*Below: View of the river Tigris with the old town of Baghdad beyond. There is no road development on the river-side.
Photograph: Anup Associates.*



*Article by
Sherban Cantacuzino.*

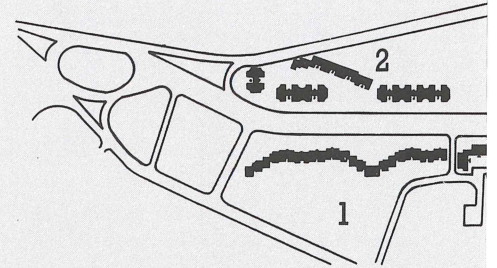


Above: Plan of central Baghdad showing the two sides of the river, Karkh and Rusafa. Also shown are the projects discussed in this article.

- 1. Bad-el-Sheikh
- 2. Kadimiya
- 3. Haija Street
- 4. Karkh
- 5. Khulafa Street
- 6. Abu Nuwas
- 7. Unkenown Soldier
- 8. Medical City

Left: General view of Baghdad looking north, with the Ahrar bridge linking Karkh on the left with Rusafa. Photograph: S. Cantacuzino.





TEST Technical Studies Bureau
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Reinicke Consult **REINICKE**
Ireland, Ltd. Dublin, Ireland



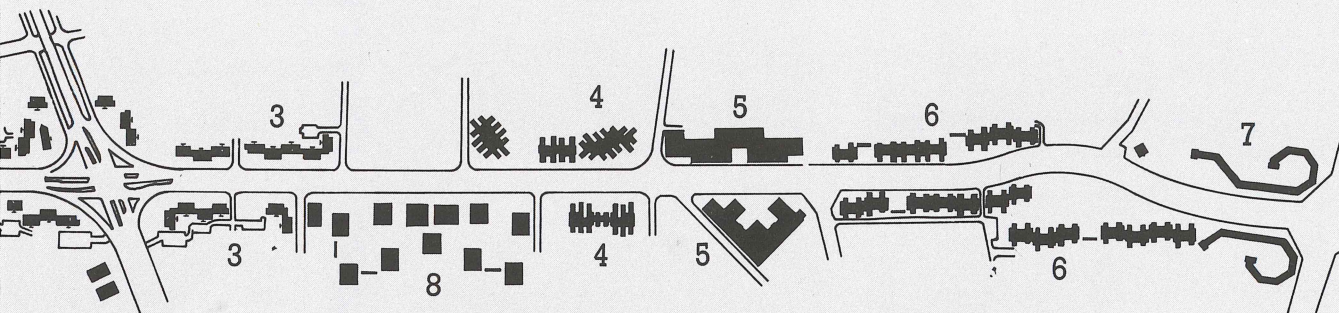
more than US\$1,690 million on sewerage and more than US\$2,366 million on water supply. It is building roads, bridges, pedestrian overpasses, car parks and is spending unspecified amounts on the ambitious new metro. It has completed 45 shopping centres in different parts of the city, and is in the process of constructing a major tourist centre on an island in the Tigris, as well as the second stage of the Medical City. More immediately impressive is the US\$135.2 million project, already well advanced, for a monument to the Unknown Soldier, which consists of a 190 metre diameter circular platform over an underground museum, supporting two 40 metre high domes, the whole apparently floating on a lake.

Of the central redevelopment projects the most ambitious and longterm are Khulafa Street and Haifa Street. Khulafa Street runs parallel with the Tigris on the left bank and Haifa Street does the equivalent on the right bank. Between these streets and the river are the remains of old quarters with houses and *souks* (markets) which extend to the water's edge and which are worth preserving. The Khulafa Street project, which consists of many new buildings along the street, two squares, a civic centre, a mosque extension and the rehabilitation of

Left, above: A typical urban scene in a minor street. The shanshils, characteristic of Baghdad, cantilever over the street.

Left: View of the Al-Gaylani Mosque from the Bab al-Sheikh site. The older buildings around the mosque were demolished over two years ago.

Photograph: Anup Associates.



Architects Part 1:
M+R International, Brussels, Belgium

Architects Part 2:
Presenté/Mesny, Paris, France

Architects Part 3:
ARC Design Consultants, London, England

Architects Part 4:
Richard England, La Valetta, Malta

Architects Part 5:
Ali Mousawi, Baghdad +
Sami Mousawi, Manchester, England

Architects Part 6:
TEST Technical Studies Bureau,
(Maath Al Alousi) Baghdad

Architects Part 7:
National Centre for Engineering &
Architectural Consultancy, Baghdad

Architects Part 8:
AMANAT AL ASIMA -
Design Department, Baghdad

Structural Engineers:
Ove Arup International, Manchester,
England

Services Engineers:
Parsons Brown, Bristol, England

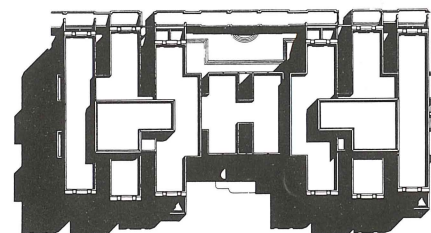
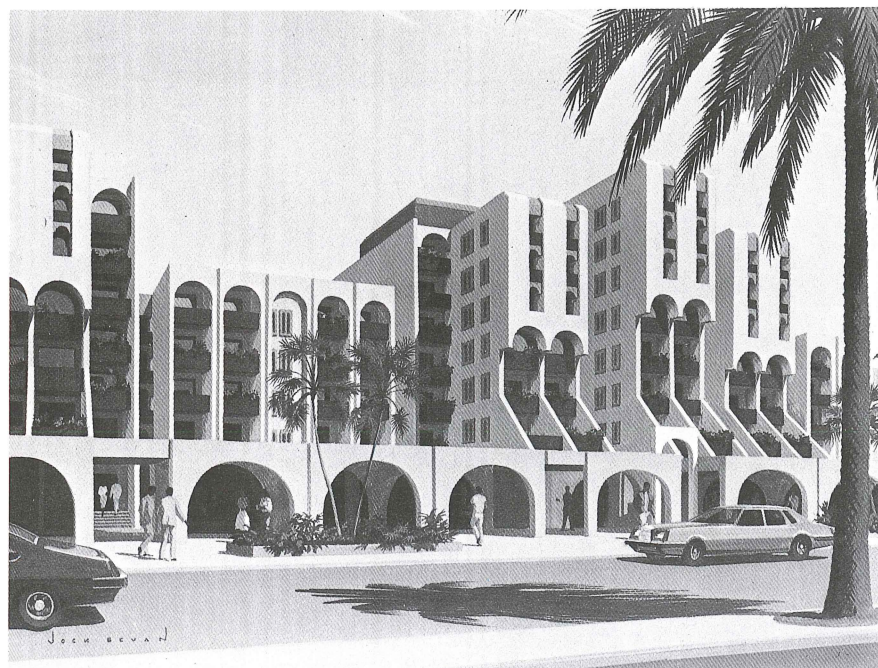
The Haifa Street project: despite the spurious sense of continuity provided by the arcades at street level, it will read like a series of disparate projects by different architects consisting mainly of isolated blocks without the possibility of creating a street. The very antithesis of Bab al-Sheikh; when the Karkh conservation project was introduced in 1981 the nine-storey block (see 7 in key), which was already built, appeared impossible to integrate with the existing low buildings behind.
Plan: Amanat Al Assima, Baghdad.

Haifa Street project is being co-ordinated and managed by Reinick Consult and Test (Maath Al Alousi). It is in eight parts and is being carried out by as many architects. Unfortunately the idea of rehabilitating Karkh, the area between Haifa Street and the river, was conceived when some of the blocks along Haifa Street were already under construction. At the presentation of the Karkh project, last April it became apparent that a completed 9-storey block could never integrate with the existing low and dense fabric behind, and that it was more important to look the other way and

consolidate the links which have traditionally always existed between the two sides of the river.

The Haifa Street project in its entirety will cost more than US\$507 million. Of the same order of magnitude is the Abu Nuwas project by Arthur Erickson. Abu Nuwas is a road which runs south-east from the Jumhuriya bridge on the left bank of the river. It is the nearest to a corniche, with gardens between the road and the river, and a proposal to extend the corniche north-west of the bridge has been quashed for the time being. At the very heart of the old city

old quarters, is in the hands of TAC, (The Architects Collaborative) who also helped the Amanat Al-Assima to set out design guidelines for consultants generally. The

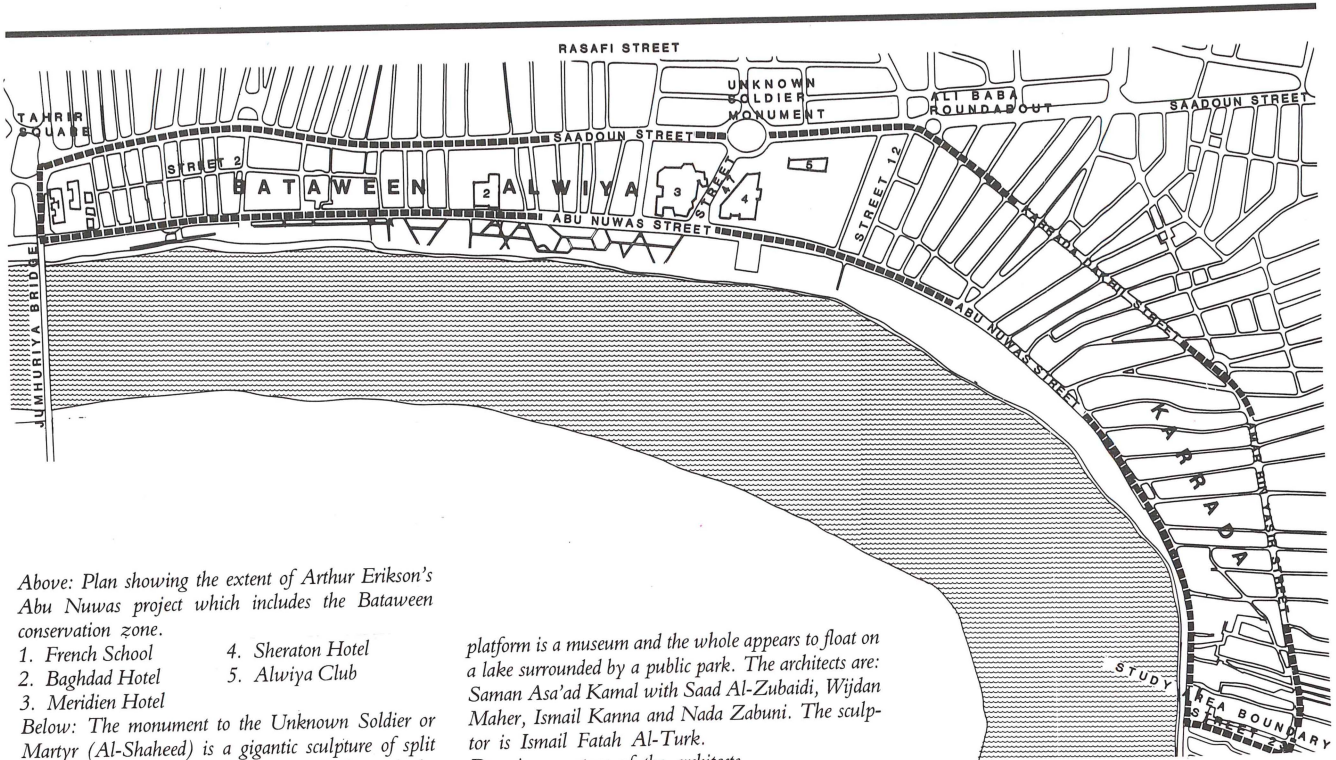


Richard England

Left: Haifa Street Development, Part 4 (Block 4), by Richard England and Partners is presently under construction.

Above: Roof plan of the Haifa Street Development Part 4 (Block 4).

Drawings courtesy of the architects.



Above: Plan showing the extent of Arthur Erikson's Abu Nuwas project which includes the Bataween conservation zone.

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. French School | 4. Sheraton Hotel |
| 2. Baghdad Hotel | 5. Alwiya Club |
| 3. Meridien Hotel | |

Below: The monument to the Unknown Soldier or Martyr (Al-Shaheed) is a gigantic sculpture of split domes sitting on a circular platform. Underneath the

platform is a museum and the whole appears to float on a lake surrounded by a public park. The architects are: Saman Asa'ad Kamal with Saad Al-Zubaidi, Wijdan Maher, Ismail Kanna and Nada Zabuni. The sculptor is Ismail Fatah Al-Turk. Drawing courtesy of the architects.

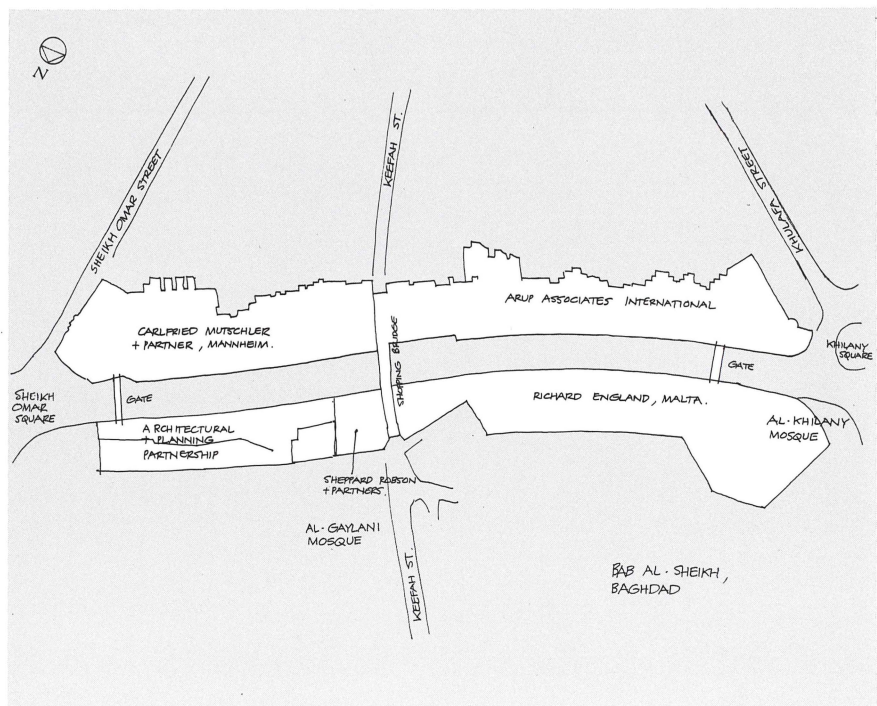


the river has so far escaped land reclamation and embankments.

The buildings of Karkh and Rusafa still step down to the river's edge, facing one another across the water. A laudable part of Erickson's project is the conservation of traditional houses in Bataween which are no more than 50 years old. Its acceptance, however, of the corniche principle, with the inevitable and interminable line of buildings all facing in the same direction, and set well back from the river is more questionable. The use of Saadoun Street as the main traffic artery, with a system of "feeder" roads leading down to the river might have produced a far more varied and spatially exciting solution, which could have included buildings with their feet in the water.

So much for the context. The first of the two specific areas is Kadhimiya. But APP (The Architectural and Planning Partnership), who are responsible for the redevelopment around the great Shia shrine of Kadhmain are also working adjacent to the Gaylani shrine in Bab al-Sheikh, the second of the two specific areas, in which they are but one of seven consultants, each handling his own separate part. There are similarities about the two APP projects. Both are the result of large-scale clearance, and implemented progressively until, as John Warren of APP has written, "the high bare walls of the shrine ... stood gaunt, bleak and forbidding above hectares of rubble and urban wasteland".¹ Both endeavour to restore something of the original dense and continuous fabric as well as the traditional mixed uses of the quarters: bazaars, offices, manufacturing, social facilities and courtyard housing. Both attempt the definition of a wider conservation zone, and include the restoration of a number of old houses in the surrounding areas. Both propose a system of grant aid, a building survey and the rehabilitation of the adjacent historic areas.

One reason for clearance is to make way for the motor car. Any rebuilding, therefore, must accommodate modern services with vehicular access, and the Amanat Al-Assima as client has opted for the expensive solution of basement servicing so as to be able to reserve the narrow, irregular streets at ground level for pedestrian use. Although the creation of this basement has avoided piling, its viability with a mere two, or at most three, stories on top, and its consequent value as a model, must remain questionable. In this respect it is interesting to compare the APP projects with the solutions offered by Arup Associates, Carlfried Mutschler and Richard England, at Bab al-Sheikh, all of which provide servicing



and vehicular access mainly at ground level, with five stories on top, incorporating a raised pedestrian deck.

The APP projects must be rated as one of the first attempts in the Arab world to re-create a substantial part of a traditional Arab medina to modern standards and without imitating the designs of the old buildings. Climatically appropriate, the new is also in scale and uses materials (mainly local brick) which are in sympathy with the old. At Kadhimiya the shrine is surrounded with and accessible through, the new bazaars. At Bab al-Sheikh the way through the shrine leads into the new bazaars. In each case the shrine is provided with additional accommodation and improvements. The new houses follow tradition with their inward-looking courtyards, but depart from it with their basements of service rooms and garages, and with their reduced size (to fit the reduced size of Iraqi families) which is made possible by air-conditioning. Also traditional is the fact that there are no repeated designs. The areas between the lanes are divided into plots in the most convenient way, and each house is then fitted into its plot with its rooms arranged around two or more sides of a courtyard. Another reference to the past is the repeated use of the *shanshil*, the over-hanging first-floor window which is perhaps the most characteristic feature of Baghdad streets.

Seen in conjunction with the desire to protect whole areas, the possibility of grant aid to individuals who own property in these areas and the purchase by the city for

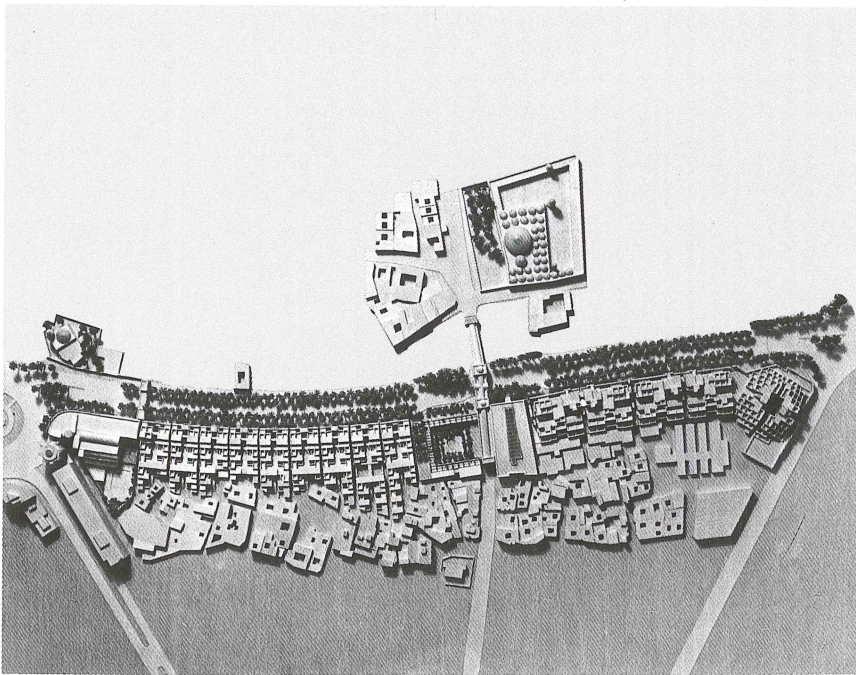
Key plan of the Bab al-Sheikh projects currently under construction.

restoration of a number of the more significant houses, the APP these projects constitute a remarkable effort in conservation which must be unique in the Arab world. Part of Amanat al-Assima's programme is the restoration of 90 old houses, 60 in Kadhimiya, 20 in Bab al-Sheikh and 10 in Abu Nuwas. 24 of these are in the hands of APP and are all due for completion by November 1982. The Amanat Al-Assima compulsorily bought the houses, turned out the people living in them and financed their restoration, which is costing an average of US\$250,000 per house. They are not grand houses, although some have two courtyards. They are barely 100 years old, yet their condition is often so derelict that most of the structure has had to be dismantled and put together again, using as much of the old materials as could be salvaged and making up the rest with new. Nearly everything has to be imported, including the contractor. (the Bengal Development Corporation) and his Bangladeshi labour.

The typical Baghdad house is built of brick and timber, with underground rooms — the cool *neems* and *sirdabs* ventilated by wind-catchers on the roof — whose walls and vaults are of kiln-dried brick. Mud requires regular maintenance; timber is attacked by termites or, when replaced as it often was by steel joists in the cantilvered structure and supporting the *shanshil*, by corrosion; and the underground rooms have invariably been affected by damp from the rising ground water of the city. In a typical house the ground floor contains the kitchen, laundry, bath, etc., and becomes

¹John Warren. "Urban Renewal in Baghdad". *The Arab Cultural Scene: a Literary review Supplement*. Namara Press 1982.

²Two other projects at Bab al-Sheikh, by the French firm OTH and by Riccardo Boffil, are not included in this article.



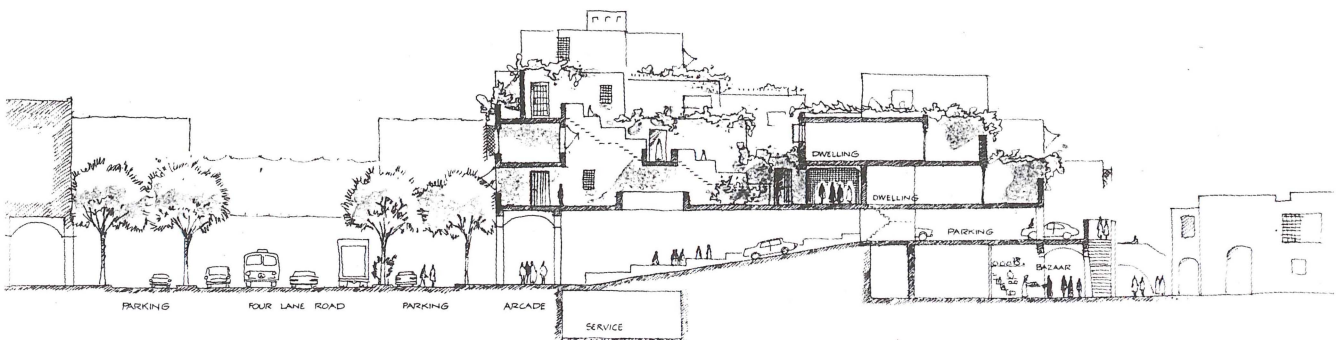
Bab al-Sheikh project by Arup Associates International

Left: Model of the Bab al-Sheikh projects showing the adjacent schemes by Carlfried Mutschler and Partner and Arup Associates International. At a central point along the new road, a pedestrian bridge, incorporating shopping, will link the site to the Al-Gaylani shrine to re-connect the conservation zones divided by the new road. Flanking the bridge is a square on the Arup side (right), and a shopping centre on the Mutschler side. The Arup scheme includes an eight-storey building with a vaulted space around which offices are planned. Below: Ground floor plan showing a continuous arcade on the street side and short shopping arcades at right-angles. At one end is the eight-storey office building and at the other the public square and the bridge. At the back courtyard housing steps down to fill the irregular shape of the site to meet the existing two-storey housing. On the first floor there is a pedestrian deck level. The units are planned on a structural module of 50 metre bays with service zones every 25 metres.

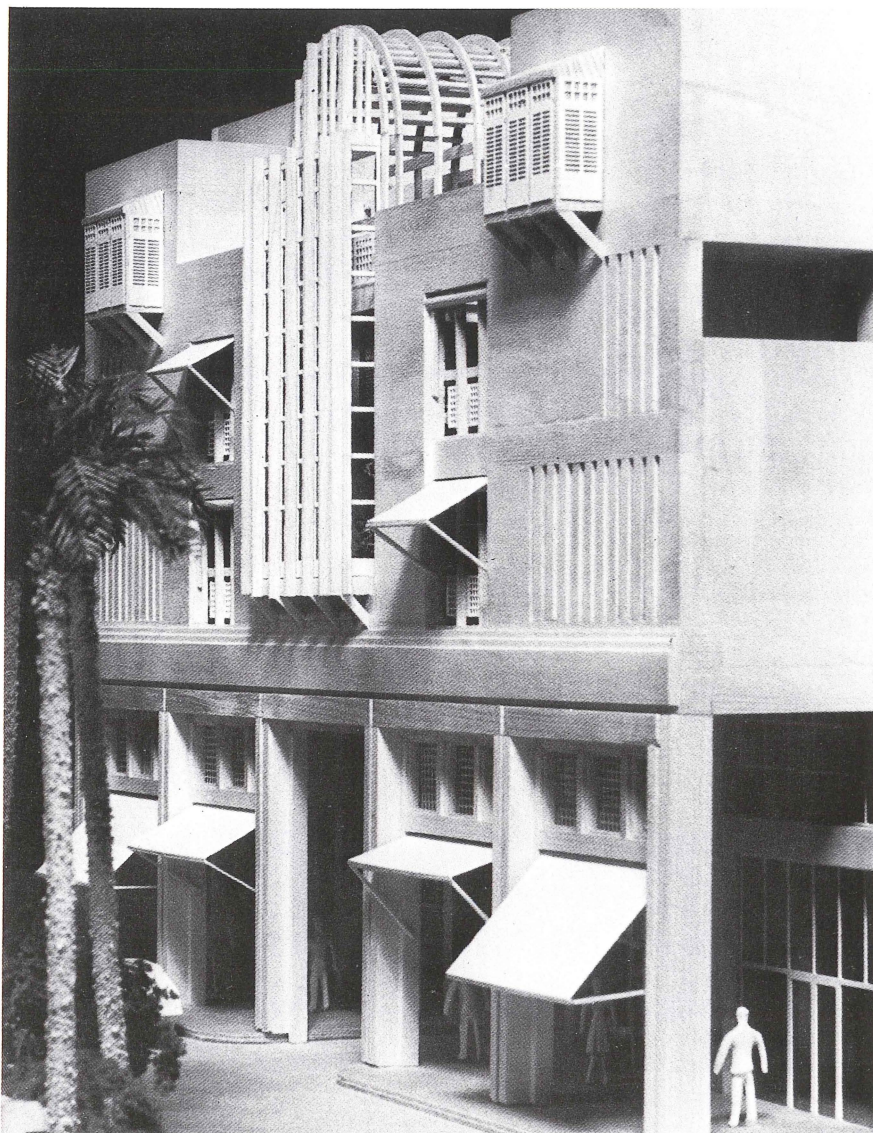
Bottom: A double wall provides the ground floor level arcade with rooms and terraces to the housing above. Right and right, below: Model of the Arup Bab al-Sheikh scheme viewed from the street arcade side. All photographs, drawing and plan courtesy of the architects.



Ground floor plan

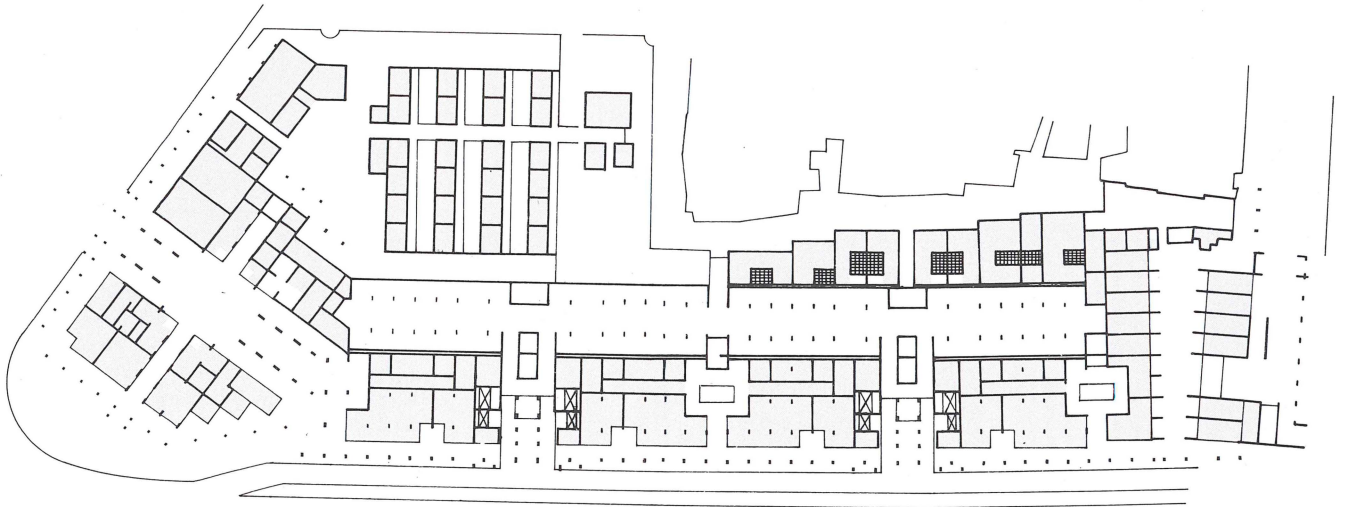


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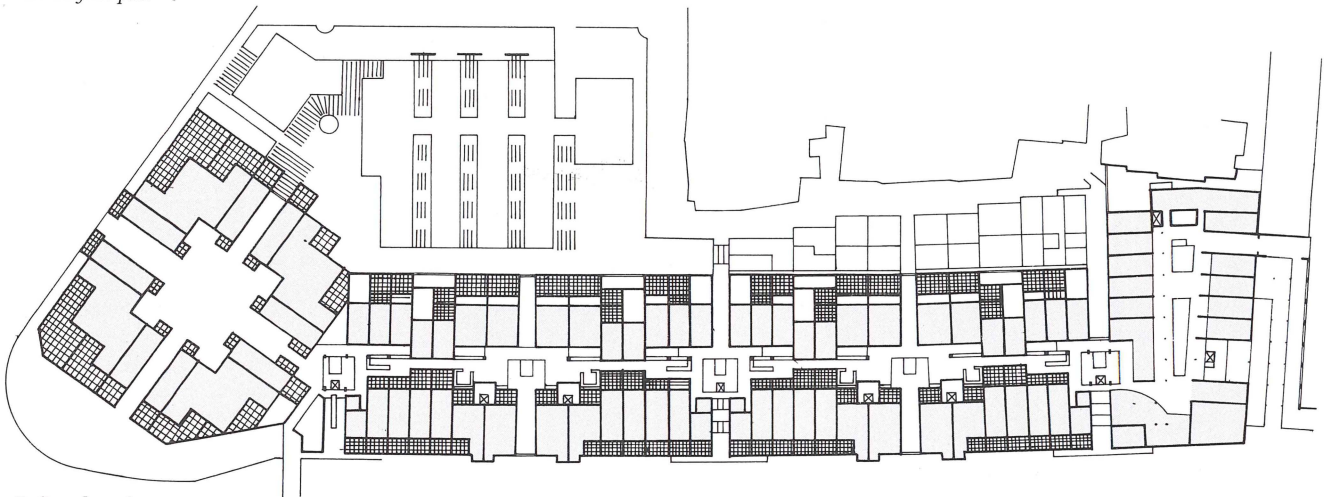


the living area in the summer, while the first floor, with its reception rooms facing one another across the courtyard, set behind a colonnade, provides the living area during the winter and is abandoned in summer. Every room on the *piano nobile* is directly accessible from the balcony and the use of corridors, which made this possible, resulted in the filling of the residual corner spaces with little mezzanine retreats, from where the women of the house could look down into the reception rooms and out through a miniature *shanashil* on to the street. Although the traditional way of life is unlikely to survive the social changes and the advent of new technologies, the houses can be adapted to the new requirements while remaining eminently suited to the climate and an integral part of the scene.

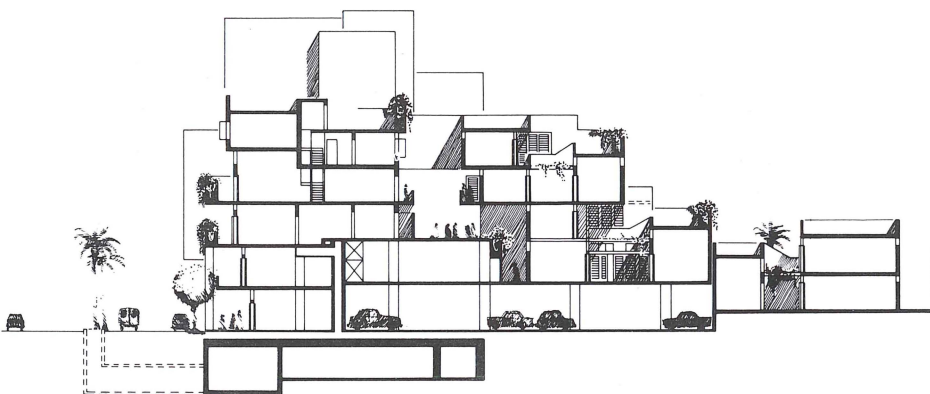
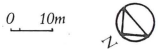
The development of the Bab al-Sheikh area consists of a new street which runs from Khilany Square to Sheikh Omar Square in a gentle double curve. On the south side of this street the project is based on a design competition for housing and commercial development won by Arup Associates, and developed together with the competition runner-up, Carlfried Mutschler and Partners. On the opposite side of the street a scheme by Richard England and Partners faces the Arup site, while schemes by Sheppard, Robson and Partners and APP face the Mutschler site. The new road cuts through the Bab al-Sheikh conservation zone near the Gaylani Shrine. It also bisects Keefah Street, which will be re-connected by a pedestrian bridge incorporating a public square and a shopping centre, linking these facilities with the shrine and re-establishing continuity between one side of the conservation zone and the other. The intention is to create an urban boulevard, with commercial activities at street level on both sides and housing at the upper levels. The street facade is a double wall which forms a continuous arcade at ground-floor level and provides additional rooms and terraces for the housing above. It is what the architects call the organising element, giving cohesion and special identity to the new street. The Arup, Mutschler and England schemes are similar in that they consist of shops and offices on the two lower levels, and stepped courtyard housing, accessible from a pedestrian deck, at third floor level and above. The housing varies in height from six to two stories across the depth of the site, with the two-storey housing at the back relating in height and scale to the existing traditional housing beyond. The scheme as a whole demonstrates how a large mixed urban development may be fitted into the old and fragile fabric of Baghdad. It also suggests a way of combining the European concept of the street and its ability to handle vehicular traffic, with the Arab tradition of shady pedestrian lanes and courtyard housing.



Ground floor plan



Podium floor plan



Section

Bab al-Sheikh project by Carlfried Mutschler and Partner

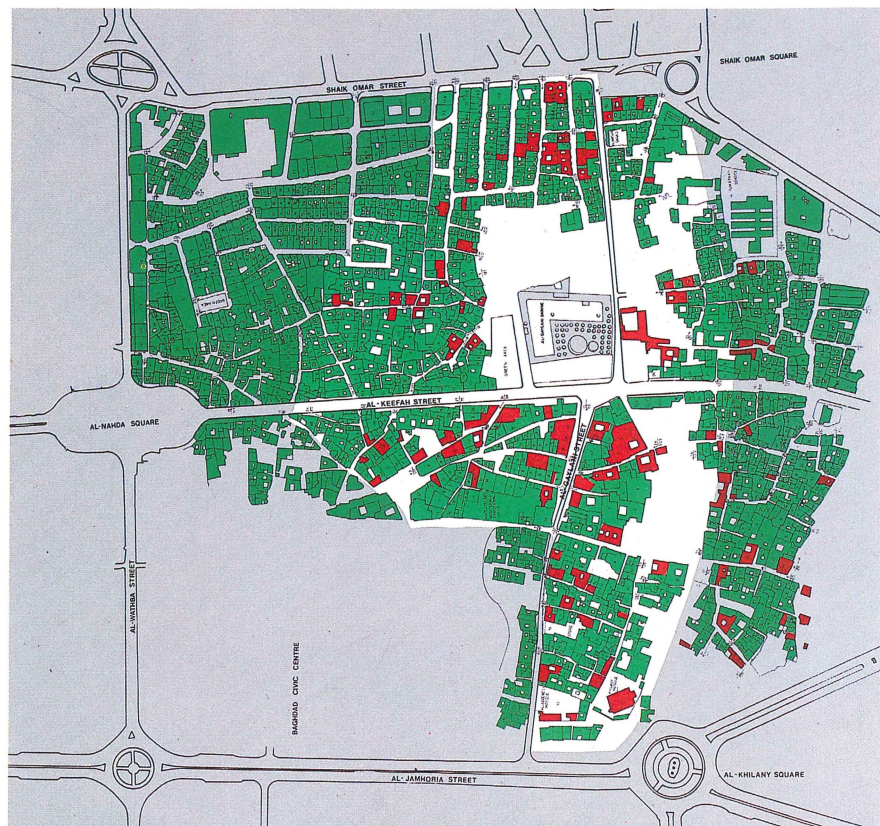
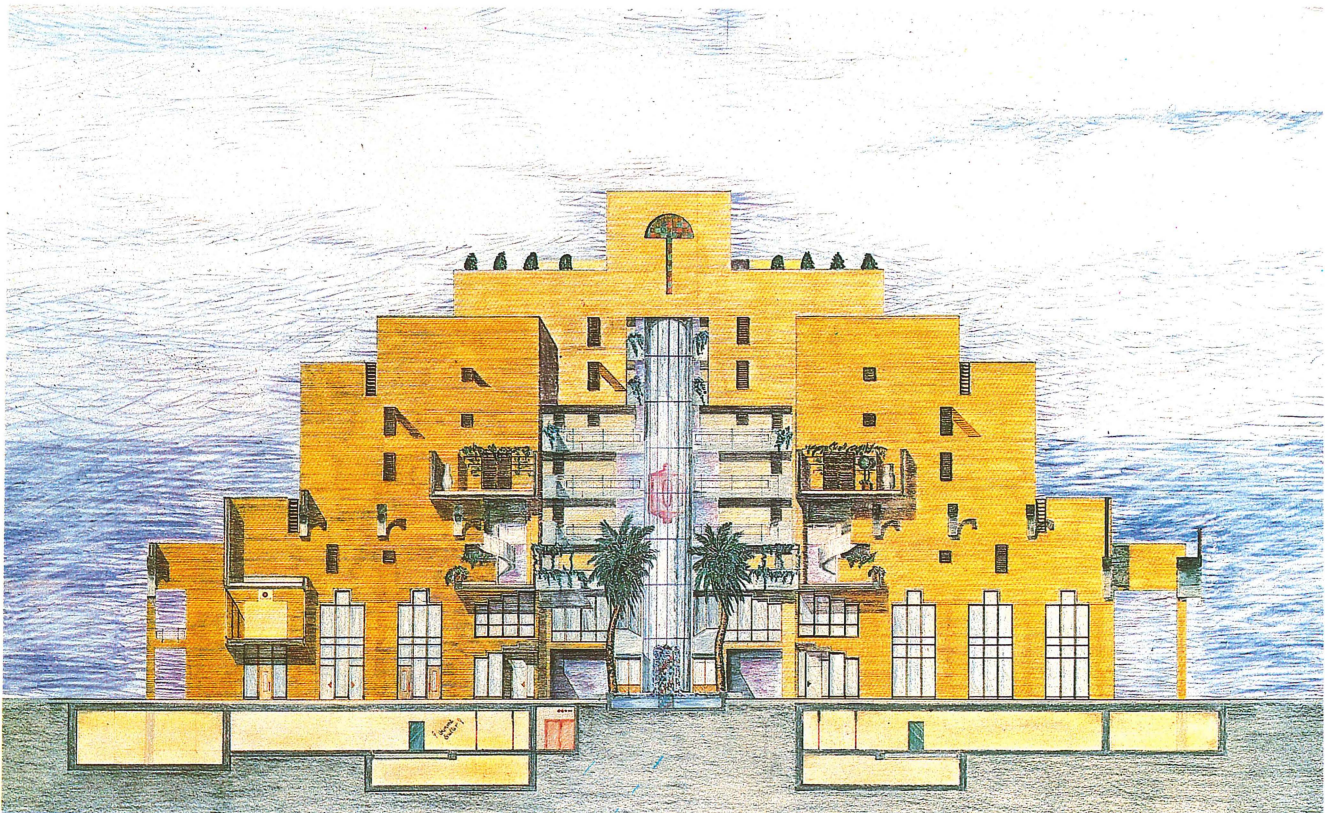
Top: Plan at pedestrian level.

Above: Ground floor plan showing the arcade with shops on the street side and a vehicular access with parking between the back of the shops and the houses in the rear. The central part of the development is a modular structure which is mirrored and repeated four times. At the bridge end there is a shopping centre designed like a three-storey version of a typical oriental souk. At the intersection with Sheikh Omar Street is a ten-storey "ziggurat", behind which is an existing school which will be renovated and extended.

Left: Section showing the street arcade and ground level parking, the elevated pedestrian deck and the way the development steps down at the back to meet the existing two storey housing beyond.

Above, right: The ten-storey "ziggurat" houses shops, community facilities and flats.

Plans and drawing courtesy of the architects.



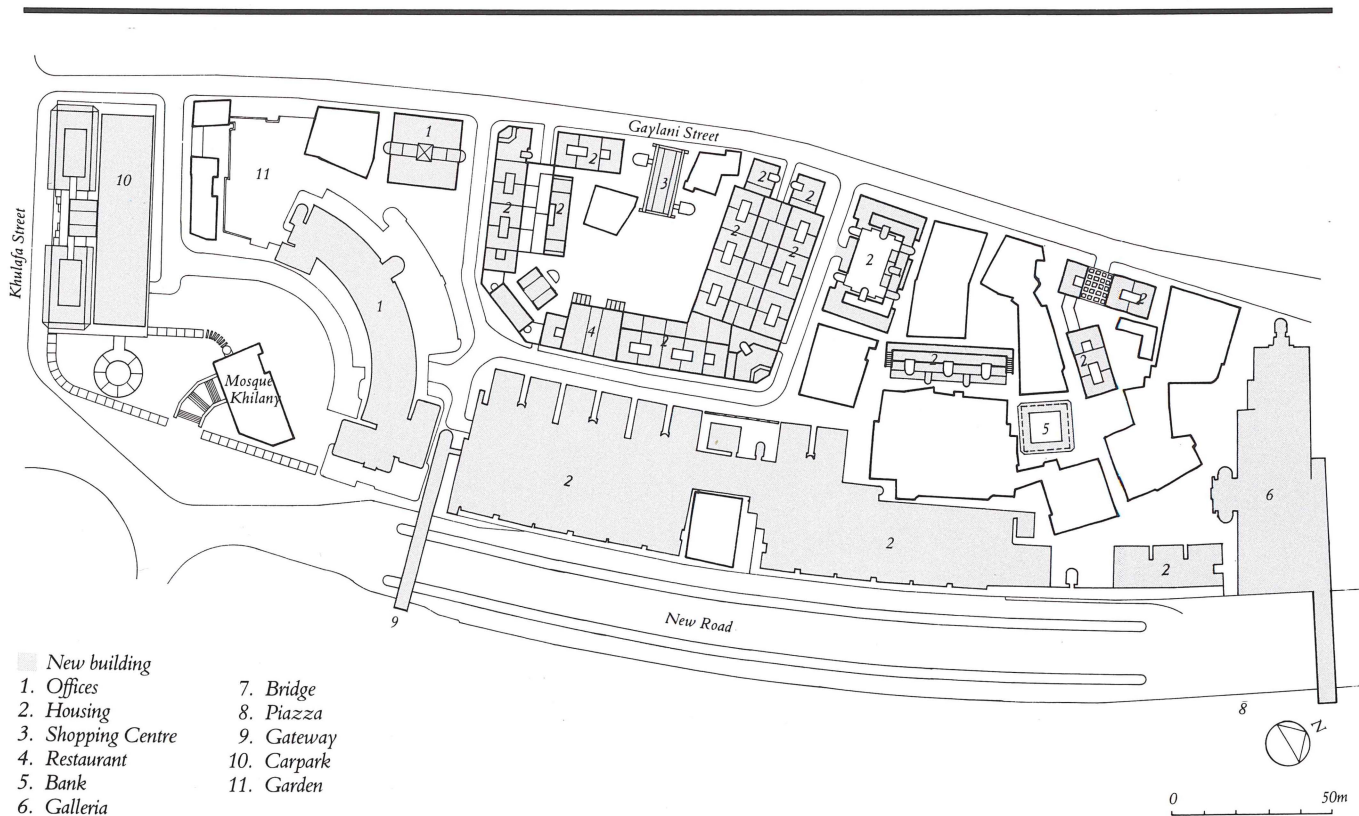
Bab al-Sheikh Conservation Area

Plan of the Bab al-Sheikh area showing the clearance around the Gaylani Mosque, before the construction of the new-road which runs south-east of the mosque and connects two roundabouts. The APP site is north-east of the mosque and the plan shows the conservation area.

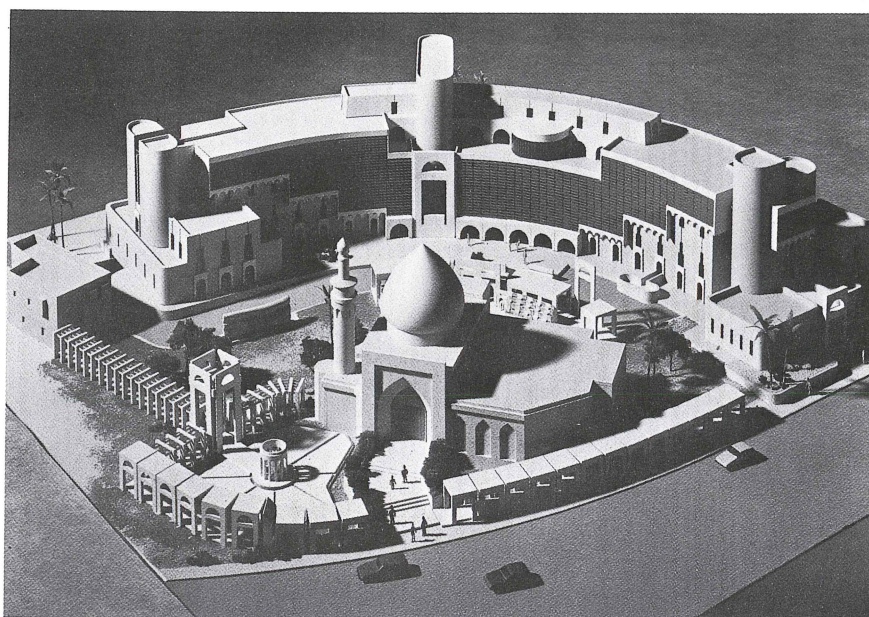
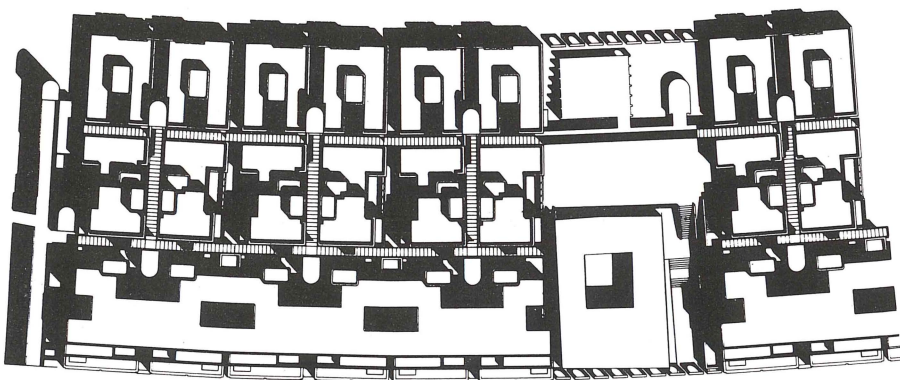
- EXISTING BUILDINGS
- BUILDINGS OF ARCHITECTURAL OR HISTORIC IMPORTANCE
- SHRINE



0 50 100m



- New building
- 1. Offices
- 2. Housing
- 3. Shopping Centre
- 4. Restaurant
- 5. Bank
- 6. Galleria
- 7. Bridge
- 8. Piazza
- 9. Gateway
- 10. Carpark
- 11. Garden



Bab al-Sheikh Development by Richard England and Partners

Above: Site plan showing the complete development. It consists, first, of a four-storey office block curved on plan and forming a background to the Khilany Mosque. Down Khulafa Street there are two linked office blocks; the larger one rising to eight storeys to conform to the design norms fixed by TAC in conjunction with the Amanat Al Assima, and to frame the entrance into the landscaped area around the future civic centre; the smaller one six-storey high to relate to the mosque. Along the new road are shops and housing which extend as far as the Galleria, an internal space full of cafes, restaurants, specialised shops, exhibition areas, etc, related to the pedestrian bridge in the same way that Mutschler's shopping centre is related on the other side of the road. Between the housing and Gaylani Street are two more developments: one consists of 32 two-storey houses (incorporating two old houses), and the other of infill (housing and a bank) between existing houses.

Left: The housing which incorporates an old house, consists of six blocks and relates in scale and rhythm to the housing development by Arup Associates on the other side of the street. There are 56 units of two and three-bedroom houses or flats, each approximately 200 square metres.

Left, below: The curved office block behind the Khilany Mosque is a brick building, enclosed in a louvred screen and covered by cascading stepped projections. At ground level it accommodates a conference hall, an exhibition space and a restaurant.

Drawings and photographs courtesy of the architects.

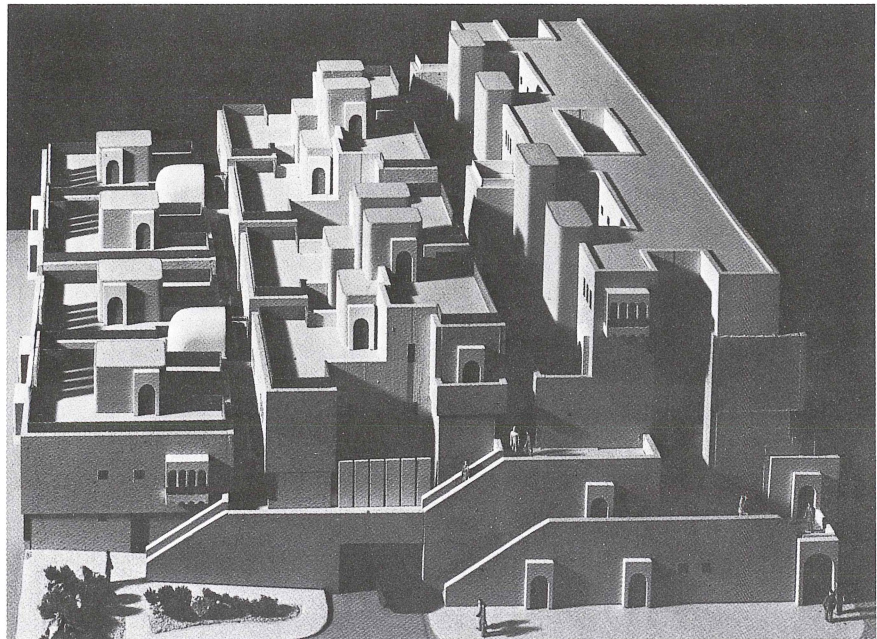


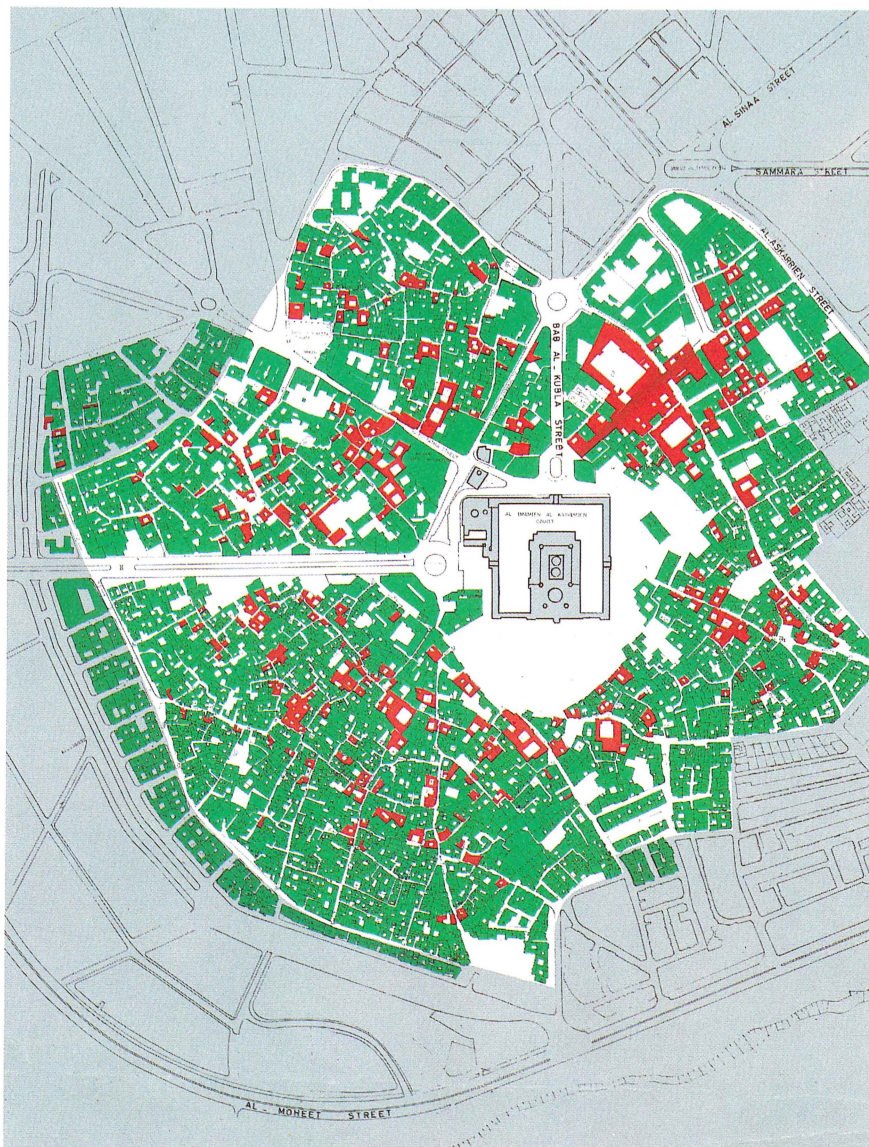
Bab al-Sheikh Development by Richard England and Partners

Above: Part of the housing seen from the new street. The different treatment of the arcade on the left denotes the old house which is incorporated into the development. The first two levels fronting the street accommodate shops and offices. Houses and flats rise from an elevated pedestrian deck. Brick is used on the external walls, and there are traditional elements such as enclosed balconies, narrow vertical openings, corbels and timber screens.

Right: Side view of housing showing the internal streets which run through the development at high level. On the side of the new street the housing rises to five floors, forming a street-defining wall. It then steps down to two floors at the back on the side of the Gaylani Shrine.

Photographs courtesy of the architects.

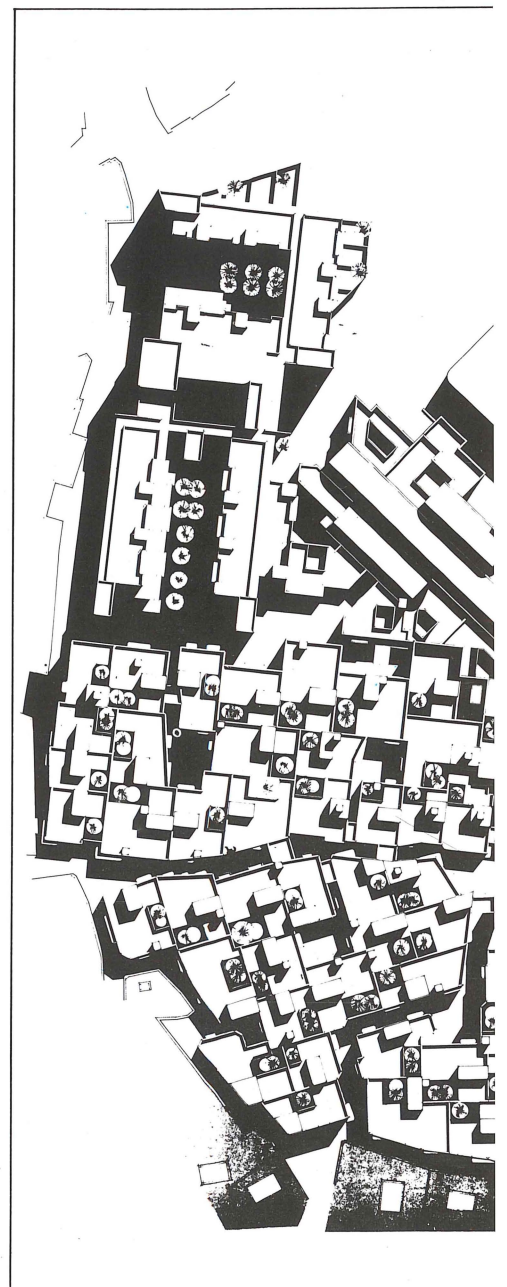




- EXISTING BUILDINGS
- BUILDINGS OF ARCHITECTURAL OR HISTORIC IMPORTANCE
- SHRINE



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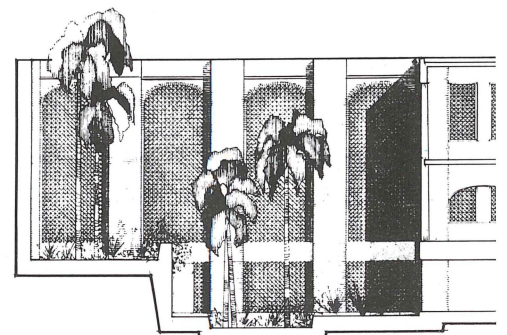


Al-Kadhimiya Redevelopment by the Architectural and Planning Partnership (APP)
 Above: Plan of Kadhimiya Shrine showing slum clearance in the immediate vicinity and the surviving traditional Quarter around. Two new roads, from the east and from the south, have been cut through the dense fabric of the old town. The empty area around the shrine is the site which is now being built up with housing and commercial development by APP. The plan as a whole shows the conservation area.
 Plan: The Architectural and Planning Partnership.

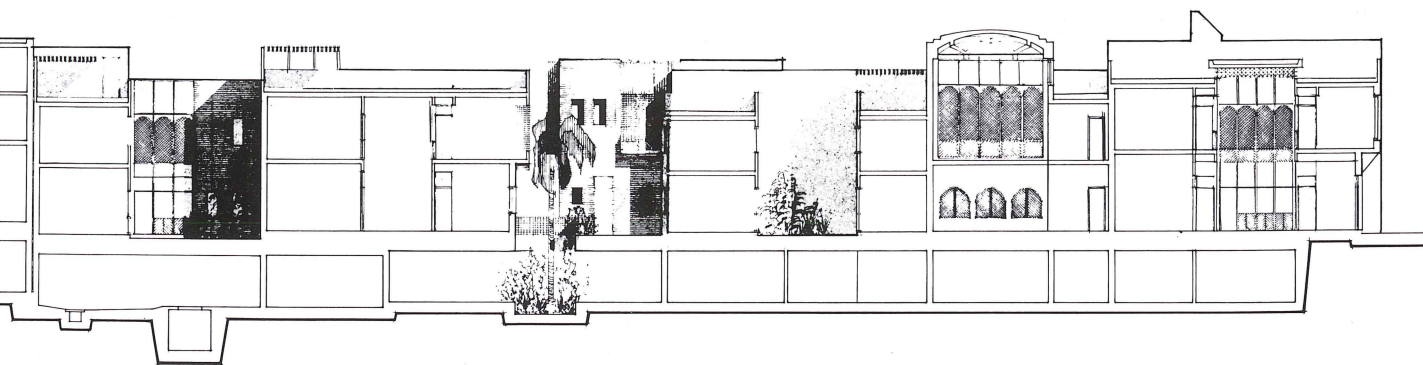
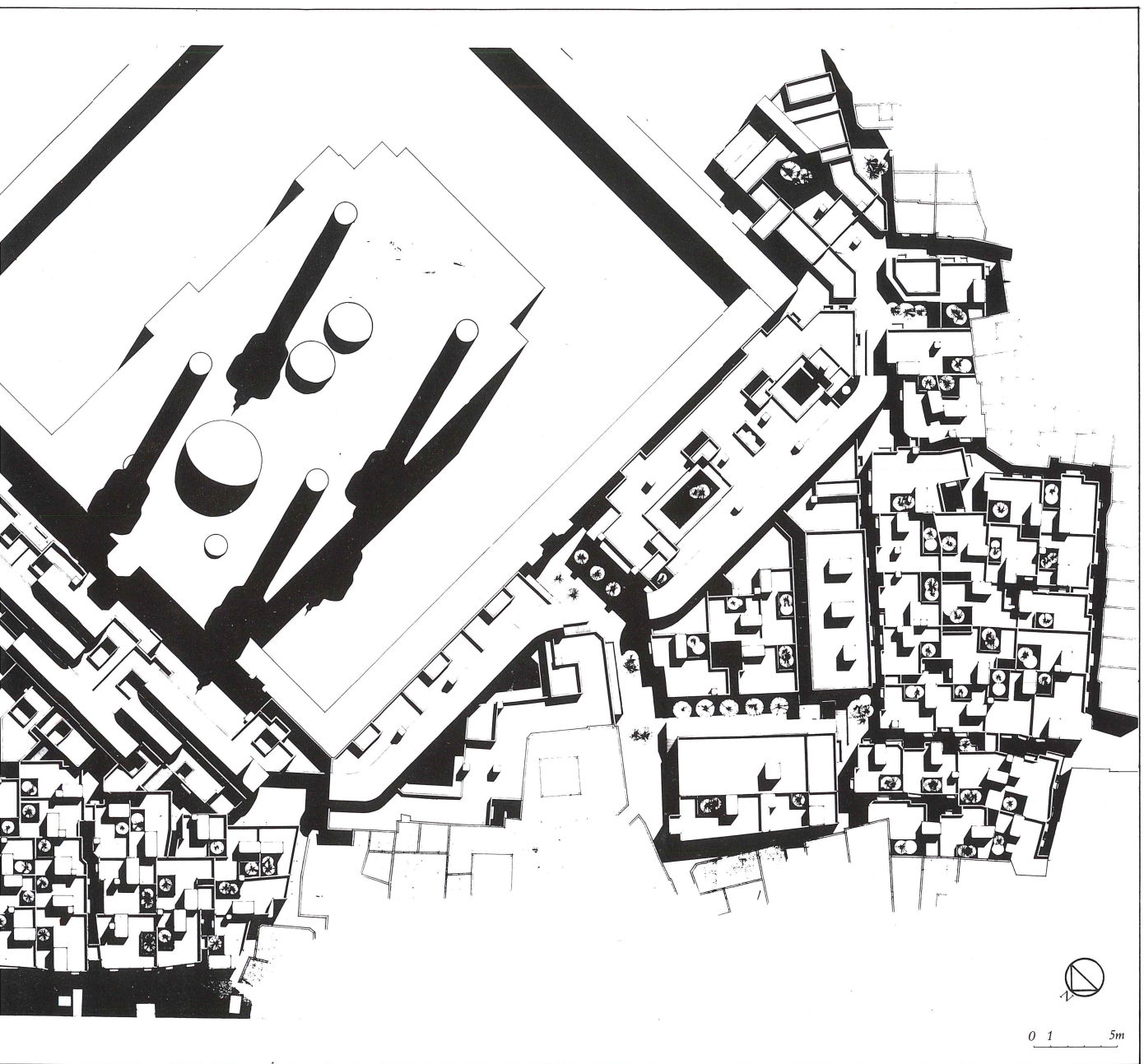
Right, above: The APP Kadhimiya scheme, in John Warren's words, attempts "to predict natural desire lines in conjunction with community needs. Our task is to create a new segment of the city, sympathetic to the character of the past but designed for the needs of the future." The plan shows the use of smaller-than-traditional dwelling units which do not completely surround the courtyard. This leads to relationships between dwellings which are rather different from the traditional pattern. The new housing also caters for modern needs such as the motor car, air-conditioning and smaller families.

Right: Section through the APP housing (now under construction), uses the basic principle of inward orientation and create a new sub-ground level primarily for services and the motor car. This new level replaces the sirdabs and neems (cellar and half-basements) of the original housing. Whether this new lower level will function as planned or become a dark refuse-gathering point remains to be seen.

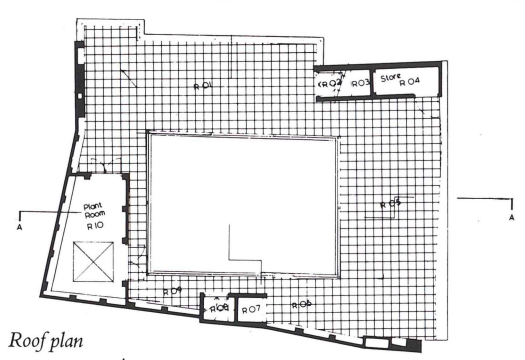
Plan and drawings courtesy of the architects.



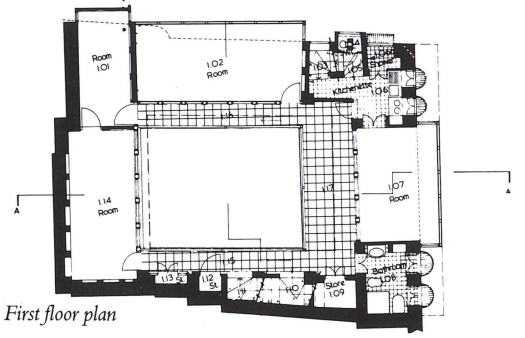
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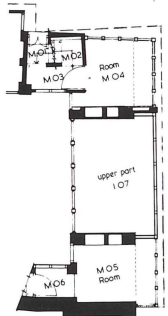
House to be restored in al-Kadhimiya by the Architectural and Planning Partnership



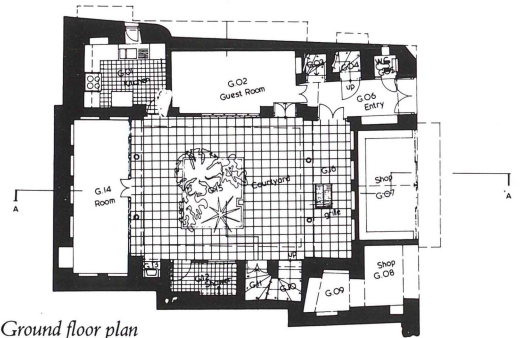
Roof plan



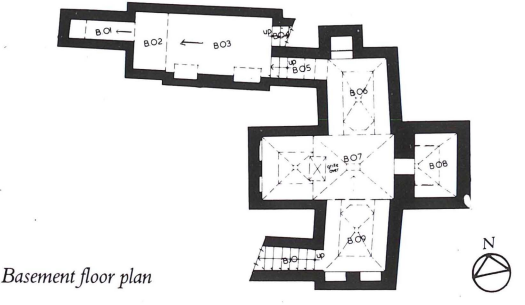
First floor plan



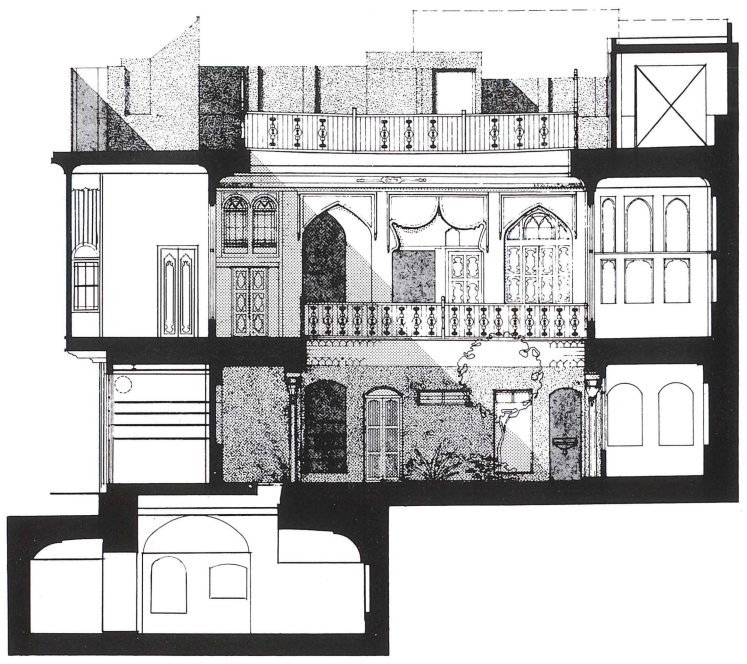
Mezzanine floor plan



Ground floor plan



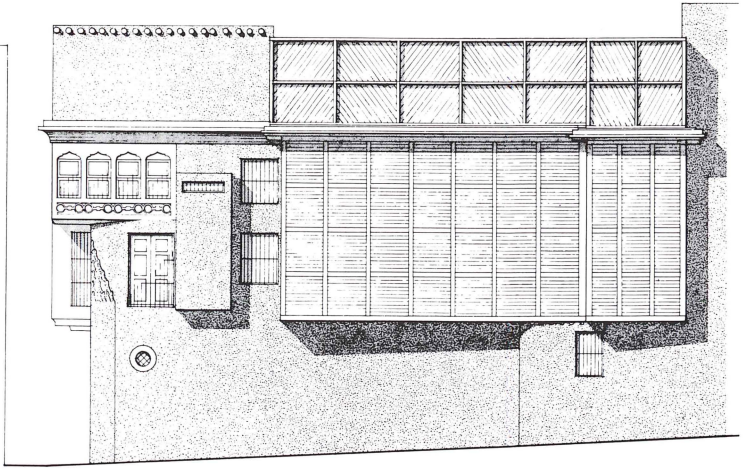
Basement floor plan



Section AA



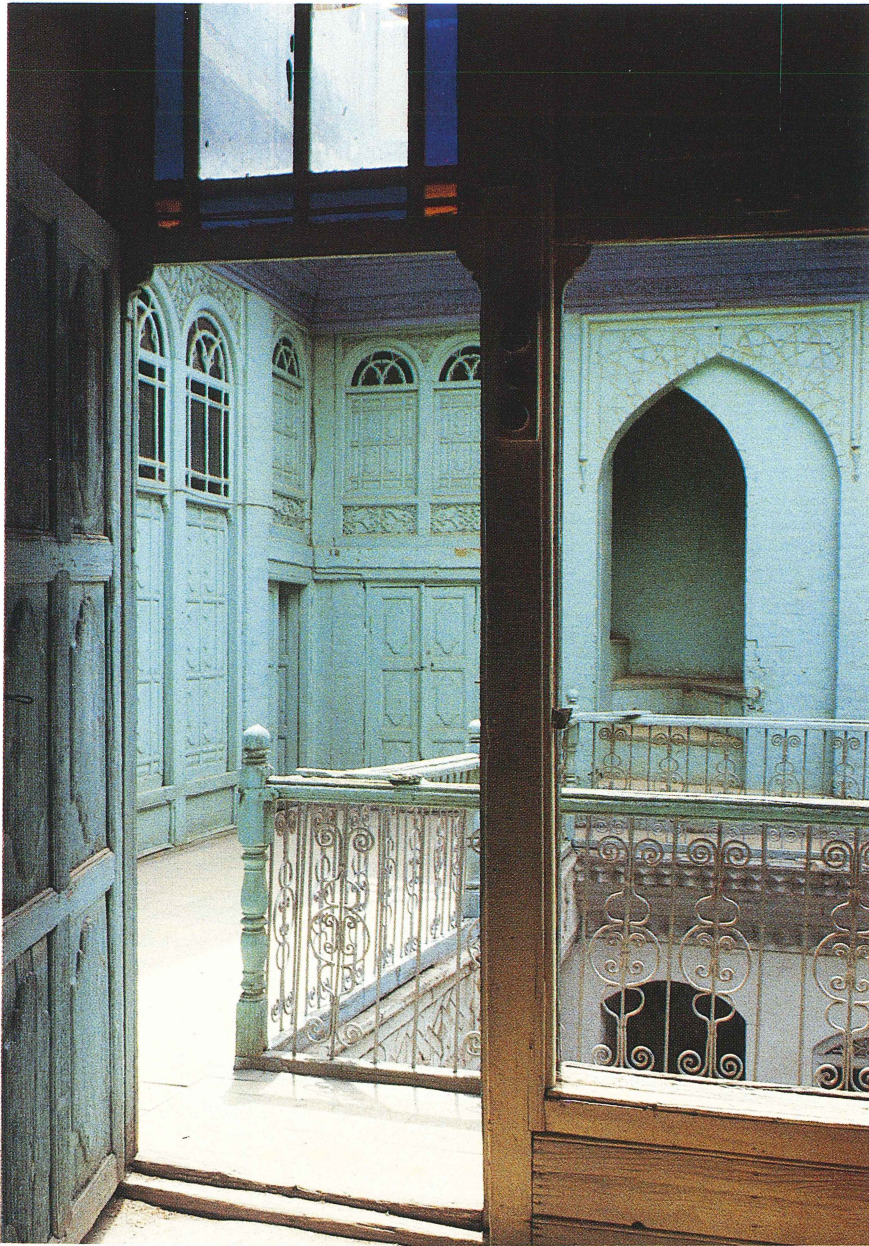
East elevation



North elevation

Drawings: The Architectural and Planning Partnership.





Left and left, below: The house in Kadhimiya is one of the 14 to be restored by APP. The photographs show the first floor balconies leading into reception and family rooms. Photographs: S. Cantacuzino.



Sherban Cantacuzino, the well-known architectural writer, was editor of the Architectural Review for many years and is presently Secretary of the Royal Fine Art Commission of Britain. He is also a member of MIMAR'S Board of Advisors and wrote this article after a recent visit to Iraq.

