

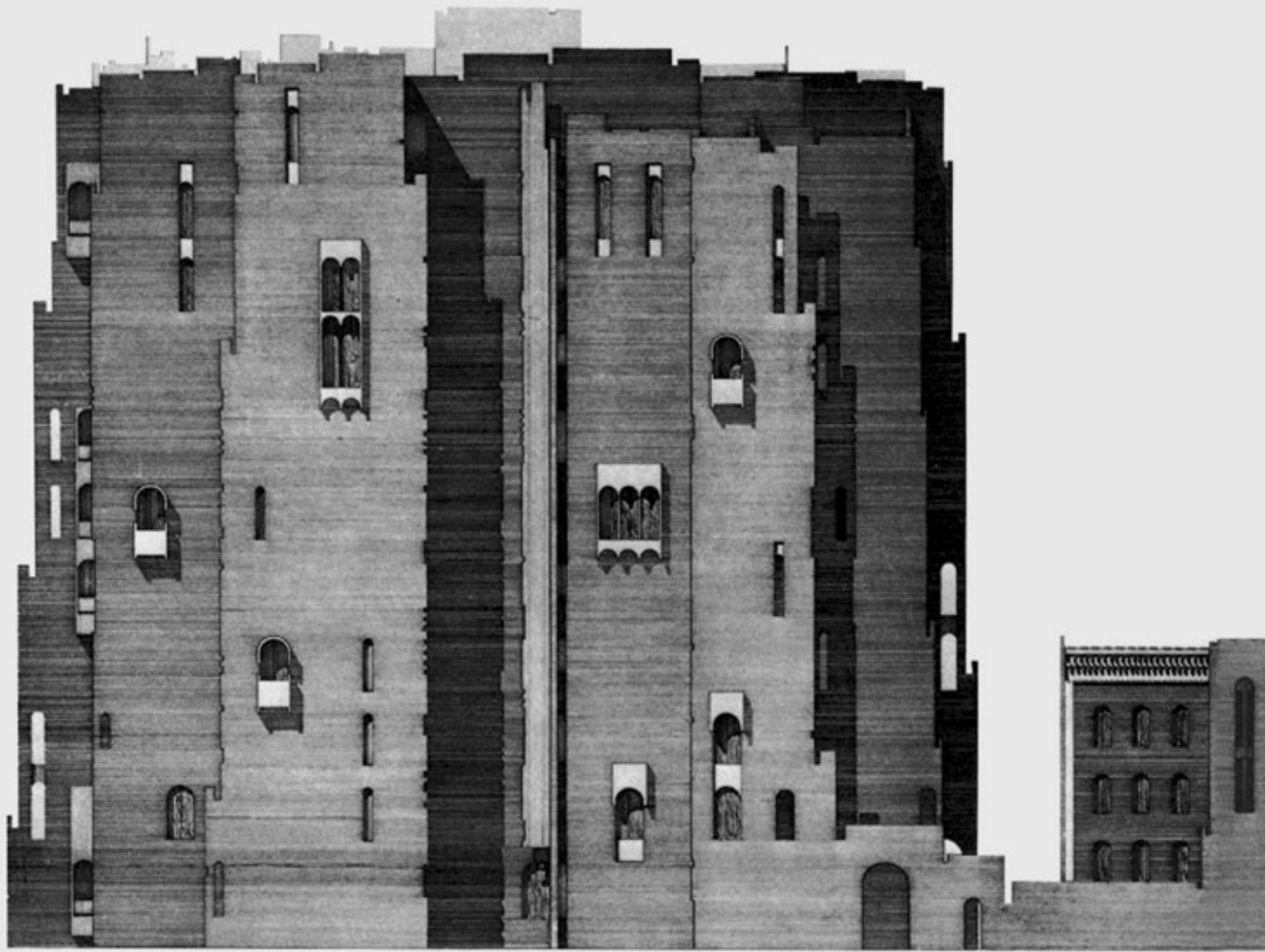
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CHAIRMANS'S AWARD

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RIFAT CHADIRJI





*Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, Baghdad.*

## RIFAT CHADIRJI

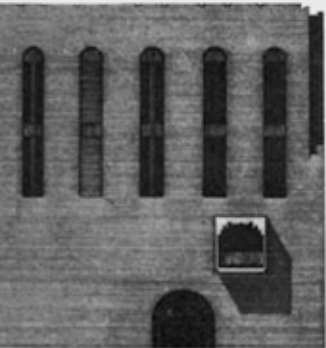
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**CITATION.** To Rifat Chadirji, Iraqi architect, critic and teacher, for a lifetime dedicated to the search for an appropriate contemporary architectural expression that synthesises elements of a rich cultural heritage and key principles of architecture in the twentieth century.

The exemplary dedication and tenacity, the intellectual and personal integrity, and the constant concern for teaching and communicating that have characterised this intellectual and artistic journey of over 35 years deserves world recognition and appreciation.

For the guiding principles of this search to produce an authentic regionalism are an important contribution to the universal cultural achievements of our age. They exemplify an openness to time and its imperatives, along with a deep appreciation of the ancient, Islamic and Arab cultural heritage of Iraq, generating a distinctive corpus of work, relevant well beyond the borders of Iraq.

Born in 1926 into a wealthy and intellectual environment in Iraq, Rifat Chadirji learnt to appreciate art and culture from his youth. These formative years are recorded with vivid realism in his autobiography *Taha Street and Hammersmith*. He travelled to England in 1946 where he completed his architectural education in 1952. He then returned to his native Iraq. Here he confronted the intellectual challenge posed by the contrast between the high technological development of building in the West and the situation in the Middle East where most building were still traditional. The Middle East was then in a state of flux as rapid modernisation was changing every facet of traditional life. The need to maintain this vibrant, modern drive without losing touch with the traditional roots



was to remain at the heart of Rifat Chadirji's work from that time to the present.

Chadirji maintains that the best architecture is the natural outcome of the interaction between social technology and social need. He argues that architecture's future lies in lessons learned from its past — where it can be categorised as man's most important way of dealing with regional variations in nature and his means of production.

Chadirji believed that every region should have its own modern architecture, that is, that modern architecture should be regionalised. Regionalisation should not imply a strict return to the past, or to a traditional architecture, since this in his view represented an anachronism. At the same time, he recognised the perils of adopting new building forms, already questionable in the West. However, the opportunities which the new technology offered were too important to ignore. Chadirji's concept of regionalisation required the abstraction of regional forms within the context of internationalism, that is, within the context of technology and aesthetic values generated by international architecture. The end result is an architecture that is international in its concepts and technology yet regional in its character.

His many projects serve as important examples for study, and they raise critical questions on architecture in Islamic society. Islamic architecture, he believes, is extremely varied and rich; and its values should form the basis of a contemporary Renaissance in architecture in the Islamic world.

Chadirji's contributions to built form transcend individual buildings. His influence on the urban form of Baghdad has been remarkable. In the last assignment he undertook in Iraq, he took over the responsibilities of Advisor to the Municipality of Baghdad for the most massive urban reconstruction in that city's history. With a boldness that matches that of Baron Haussmann's restructuring of Paris in the nineteenth century, Chadirji elaborated a vision of the future townscape that will mark that city forever. In executing his vision he invited some of the best architectural talent in the world to participate. Whatever becomes of that bold approach in the wake of a war-shattered economy, Chadirji's vision and drive have launched an architectural enterprise of epic proportions.

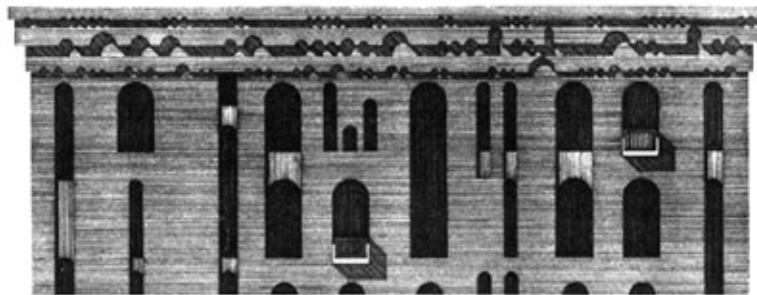
Chadirji's search for an effective synthesis of modernity and tradition that would enhance the architecture of the

region is advanced through his contributions as teacher and critic, not just as practitioner.

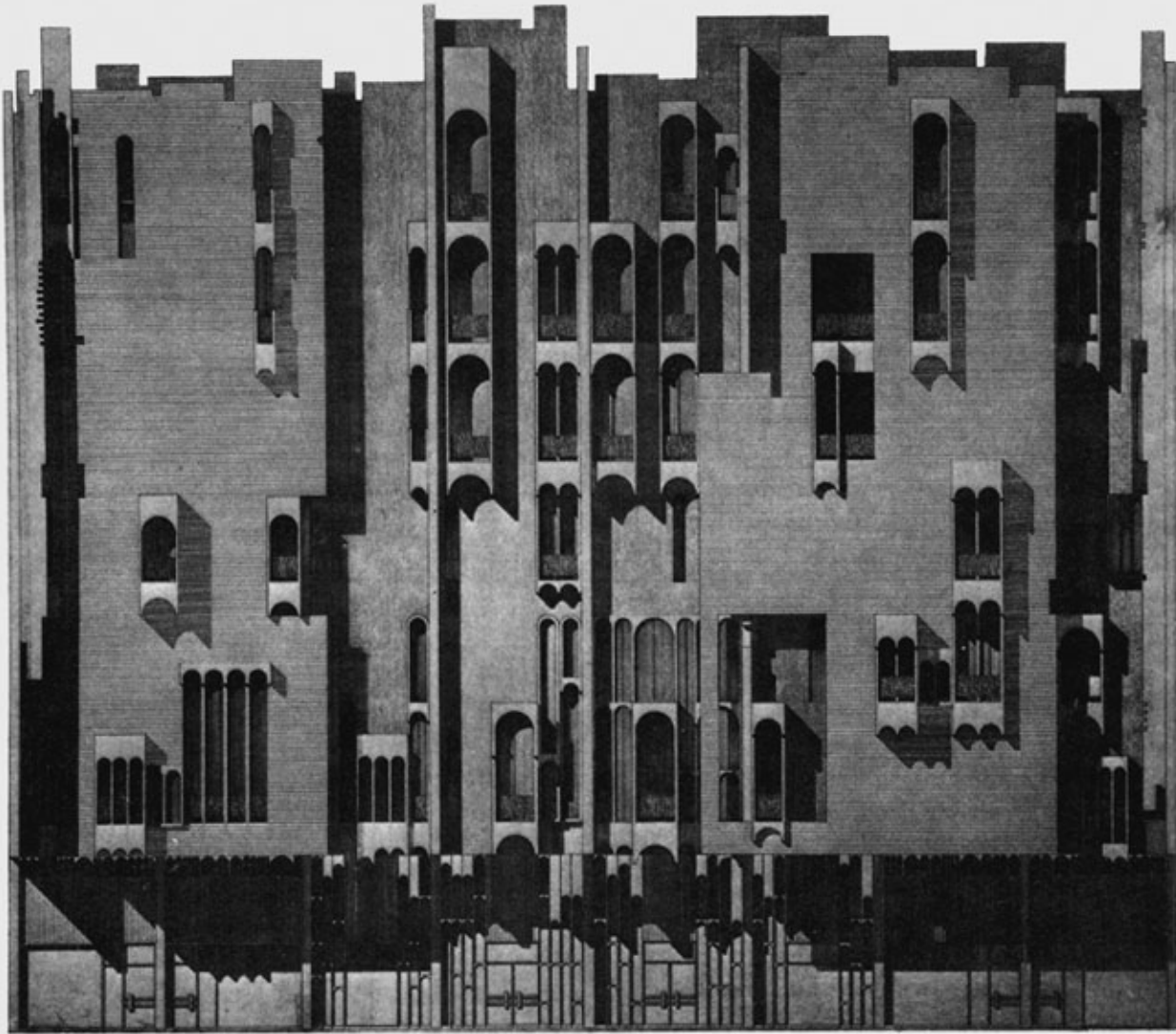
In his analysis of architectural expression, Chadirji made many contributions to architectural thinking in the Arab world of which two are particularly noteworthy. First, he saw the evolving architectural form as mediating between societal needs and the prevailing social technology. This, he postulated, partly explained the rupture observed in post World War II Iraq's emergent built form. Secondly, Chadirji saw the relationship between the local architectural tradition and the internationalist modern movement as one where an authentic regionalism, based on the abstraction of classical forms and the internalisation of traditional building approaches and design concepts, was to be synthesised with the liberating concepts of the modern movement and with international building technology. This would produce an authentic, modern regionalism that would enrich the international movement rather than remain purely derivative from it.

By the 1970's, a critical perspective on the issue of "function" emerges in Chadirji's architecture, further separating plan from façade. In his theoretical writing, he turned further from accepted Western definitions of "function", which rely heavily on structure as the genesis of plan organisation and expression. He argued that this relationship was not deterministic or inevitable. These ideas led him to intensified plastic exploration, whose roots clearly were closer to his native culture than to Europe. At the same time, Chadirji did not lose his commitment to working within the context of an international discourse, and he did not slip into the realm of the provincial or sentimental. His recent text, *Concepts and Influences: Towards a Regionalised International Architecture*, has further advanced the concern of much of the most important critical theory of the past two decades. He has remained insistent in his criticism of "fashion" including regressive traditionalism. His voice has acted as a conscience for Arab and Muslim architects everywhere.

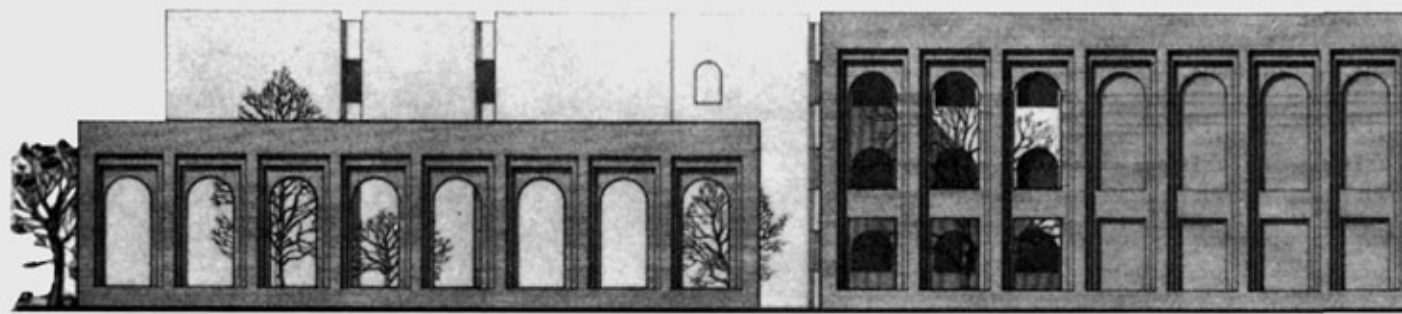
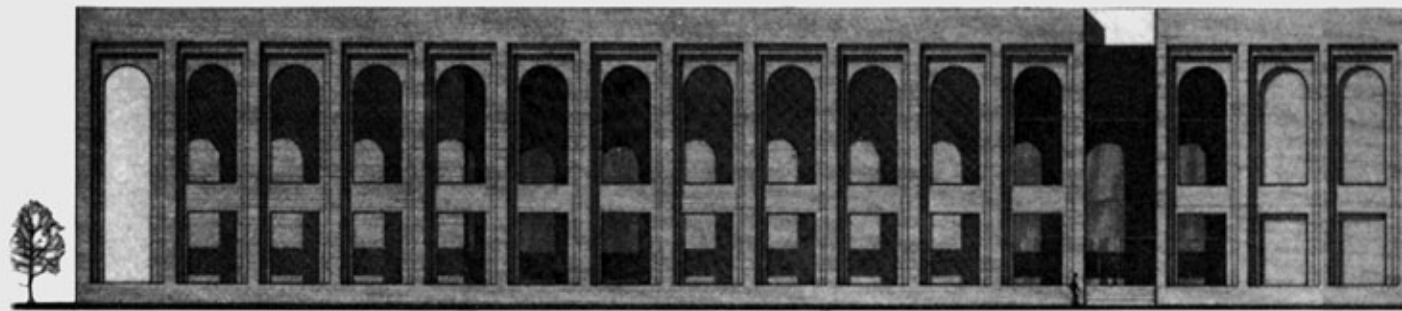
His work has been exhibited all over the world. He is an honorary fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and has been a visiting scholar at Harvard University. He is currently devoting himself to research and writing and is pursuing his interests in affiliation with the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University and M.I.T.



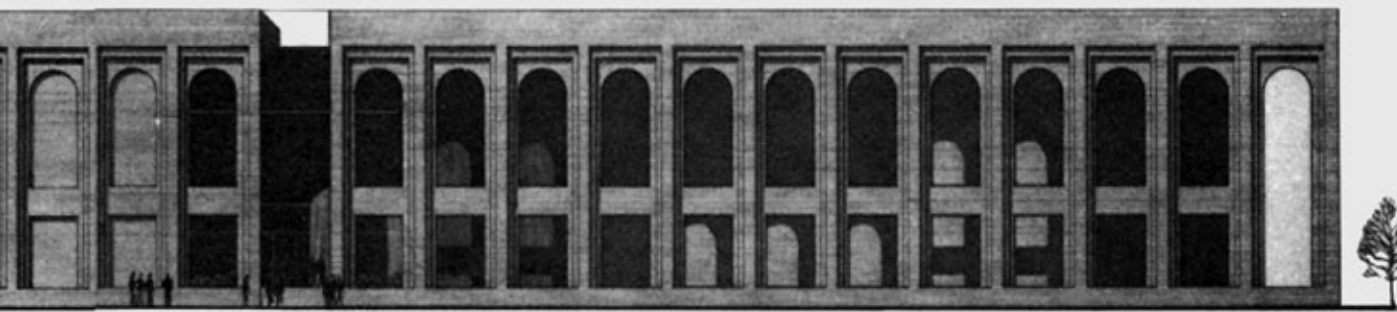
Villa Al Hamad, Kuwait.



*Federation of Industries, Baghdad.*



*Medical Auxiliary Training Centre, Baghdad.*





*Tobacco Monopoly Offices and Stores, Baghdad.*

#### CHADIRJI SPEAKS

*Architectural Form, Modes of Production, Social Needs and Social Technology.* Long before starting an architectural practice in 1952, I recognised that architectural form was not something static, apprehended passively, and describable from some singular underlying morphology. I was also aware of the nature of the modes of production and their effect on the creation and development of architecture. Therefore, I thought of architectural style in terms of the state and the properties of a mode of a production rather than as a series of stylistic events.

Architecture, or the material entity we perceive to be the

form of architecture, is the manifestation, the end product in its state of repose, of a dialectical interaction between two opposing determinants: man's social needs and his social technology. Social need is composed of many constituents: the material and functional requirements of the society or individual, as well as the emotional and spiritual. Technology is also composed of many constituents: the availability of materials used in the production process, their natural properties and knowledge of these properties, the economic and social potential to interact with these materials and the manipulations to which they can be subjected. An equilibrium between the two determining poles of architecture — social need on one hand, social technology on the other — is a prerequisite for excellence in architecture.

*Revolutionary Forces in the Development.* Four new forces revolutionised social needs and social technology in the modern era. The first and most important of these new forces was the machine. It transformed production relationships. The second factor was the general abundance from the economic growth made possible by modern machine technology. It became possible to produce and distribute far beyond national and regional boundaries, which overwhelmed traditional values, creeds, faiths and political values. The third force was the standardisation of building elements and building systems. Because of economic necessity, competitive labour and lucrative markets, franchised production, and the universal dissemination of knowledge, structures and elements became increasingly homogenous. But it was an unorganised and unsystematised homogeneity, hectic and restless, directed chiefly by individual self-interest. Disseminated universally, it was partly responsible for the loss of national and regional character and the destruction of coherent styles that had been characteristic of architecture from the earliest times until the emergence of technology. The fourth force made itself felt through international media. These exerted a dichotomous influence on society. On one hand, the standardisation and internationalisation of science, art and academic training began to take place. On the other, aesthetic values became more heterogenous. Aesthetic values were no longer relegated to a unified style that regulated every kind of production — whether architecture, clothing, jewelry, furniture or domestic utensils — as they had in the past. The impact of these new forces — the widespread use of the machine, the heterogeneity of the new materials, the loss of a coherent and well-defined national style and the dichotomous influence of the new international media — threw the relationship between the two fundamental determinants of architecture, the needs and the technology, into confusion. This confusion introduced ambiguity into the processes of production, academic training and furthermore into architectural practice.

*Dissemination of Architecture.* Until the modern era, the dissemination and export of form from one culture to another was usually accepted or even sought by the receiving culture. The dissemination of culture usually became possible only when the receiving society was culturally prepared to absorb the new forms impinging on it. But since the universalisation of methods of production, the designer in an affected culture has been confronted with many stylistic options, technological methods, and materials from which he was forced to choose. Modern technology is not just development; it also carries with it all the prestige and improved welfare associated with modernisation. These are options that the designer cannot ignore but must interact with. Like it or not even outright rejection is a form of interaction.

Many of the choices available to the contemporary designer are both alien and novel to the extent that they have not yet been tried and tested in this culture. They are not the

products of social and technological developments indigenous to the region — they are imports. Although they augur new kinds of production they cannot be absorbed immediately; nor have they yet been fully understood. The imported aesthetic and social values, technical knowledge and methods have still to be assimilated with the natural social potential of the receiving culture.

The modern designer has been deprived of his traditional technology because it is no longer economically viable. His aesthetic values are not equipped to satisfy contemporary daily needs, because his everyday life has been transformed and nourished by international standards and his own culture is too local and too stagnant. With no definite culture and technology of his own to act as a base from which to receive and absorb new influences, he must now choose between alternatives which he perceives as undifferentiated and unintegrated. His designs must be produced in conditions for which he is culturally unprepared. And because he cannot absorb the new input, cultural frustration and aesthetic collapse result.

*Towards A Regionalised Architecture.* By 1953, I thought modern architecture should be regionalised. In other words, I thought that every region should have its own modern architecture. But because I was convinced that architecture is the manifestation of a dialectical interaction, I believed that regionalisation should not imply a strict return to the past, or to a traditional architecture. Replication, a wholesale borrowing from traditional technology and aesthetics, represents an anachronism, a regression to the pre-machine-aesthetic era, and was therefore invalid.

I determined that my concept of regionalisation required the abstraction of regional forms — whether urban or rural, whether traditional or a definite past style — within the context of internationalism, that is, within the context of the technology and aesthetic values of international architecture.

By the mid-sixties, a new mode of production was emerging — the computer. The new phase this development heralded could not be determined because of the sheer magnitude of the potential involved and because of the opportunities the user would be given to participate in design and production. The opportunity for instantaneous participation in these processes reintroduces a continuous feedback relationship in architecture at a higher level, and new aesthetic values will be created in the future.

I was determined to follow a path that would synthesise concepts gleaned from the international avant-garde with abstract forms derived from tradition. I excluded from my experiments simplistic replicas of traditional elements or features. I also excluded conventional rural or primitive technologies, because neither is compatible with the mechanical-aesthetic mode. I hoped that my experiments would provide the raw materials for new architectural concepts, and thus leave a milestone on the road towards a regionalised international architecture.