

that country, resembled a Bedouin tent or a bare mud house. It invited viewers to fly, in their imaginations, to those far-off lands.

PROJECT FOR A SECTOR OF THE NEW RESIDENTIAL AND FINANCIAL NEIGHBORHOOD DE BAB-AL-SHEIKH

Ricardo Bofill and Taller de Arquitectura

"This is about a job from the Iraqi government for the development of a neighborhood in Baghdad. The zone for the project is situated some one hundred meters from the Al-Gaylani Mosque with a group of old houses that should be conserved. We are planning for the construction of more than one hundred and fifty single-family houses with a maximum height of three floors. The urban renovation sought by this project is based on a linear rationalism that can be easily inserted into the existing design, with much traditional flavor. The streets are mainly pedestrian, clearly defining those streets for circulation and services ad giving special treatment to the passageways for communication with the walls of the Mosque. The new neighborhood consists of a layout of parallel pedestrian streets, perpendicularly crossed by a transverse street that in every intersection forms a covered patio. This street acts as the dorsal spine: with two more levels of height, with porticos and covered patios, it becomes a point of attraction for the inhabitants. The two nuclei of existing houses flow together, a place that adopts a more noble form, in a form of hipostilic hall. The architecture conjures the attraction of existing traditional constructions, with the design of a few new buildings faithful to the Islamic cultural legacy. The political problems that have affected the country have postponed the construction of the project various times."

(Memoir of the project)

PROJECT FOR THE COMPETITION FOR THE STATE MOSQUE OF BAGHDAD (1982)

Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura

First Prize¹

"The design of the mosque is based on Koranic concepts which indicates what parts should form the house of worship: mihrab,

minbar, prayer hall, exterior patio with a pond for ablution and a minaret visible from all four cardinal points. The architectural reference taken is the mosque of Samarra, a prototypical Arab mosque where the prayer hall is a large hipostilic room with a very straight shape for the building, with a small dome over the mihrab. Within the Islamic cultural tradition it is important to take into account the vital elements: light, water, land and vegetation. The alternation of sun and shadow in patios and covered spaces is strongest in the hall of 300 columns, illuminated by skylights, which enhance the size and define the spaces. The water follows a path from the outside to the interior of the mosque. It begins in the minaret, situated in the center of the building, on the other side of the mihrab, and flows through a canal to the central patio and toward the ablution fountain eventually ending in a lake behind the mihrab. The equilibrium between the constructed and space and the vegetation organized like a geometrical garden represents the relationship between sacred places and nature".

(VERGANO, Serena- revision-: Ricardo Bofill, Gustavo Gili, Barcelona, 2005)

Notes

- ¹ The bibliography about Ricardo Bofill and the Taller de Arquitectura publishes that he won the international contest for the State Mosque of Baghdad. The verdict of the jury was made public upon ending an international symposium that Saddam Hussein organized in Baghdad in 1982 to talk over the appropriateness of the proposals presented. Upon ending, the jury's decision was made public. The records show this, as do the films of the symposium (included in the exhibition), in which one hears the name of the winner in Arabic: Rasem Badran, from Jordan, considered one of the best Arab architects of the time (Aga Khan Foundation Prize for the Riyadh mosque in 1995). The result was surprising. Was there political or religious pressure? Undoubtedly, Badran's project was excellent. What happened? Were there two decisions? According to some specialists, the decision by the judges would not have been well received by the institutional representatives, which provoked the organization of the symposium. The projects from Bofill and Venturi were the favorites of Chadirji, the mayor of the city, and of Saddam Hussein. However, given that Venturi's representatives denied that he was declared the winner together with Bofill, the judges' verdict ended up being accepted (HOLOD, Renata, KHAN, Hasan-Uddin: "State Mosque (Competition), Baghdad, Iraq", *The Mosque and the Modern World*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1997, p. 85. About this negative response, Denise Scott Brown writes to Octavio Learco Borgatello (in response to the question as to the veracity of the previous information) in an e-mail from April 23, 2008, "Renata and Hasan are more or less right. From what we heard, someone or ones in high authority, maybe including Saddam (who attended at least one assembly where Bob was present) liked our project and presumably Bofill's. I never heard of a prize, but there was pressure on us to get together with Bofill and unite our efforts in going further. "This we were reluctant to do. But