

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 and 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 Prize<sup>1</sup>

*"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

Bofill did visit our office. He arrived in a long black limousine, a small man, dressed in black, with a large black hat. He spoke only French and Italian and, as I remember, the conversation was conducted in French. He had eyes for Bob alone, and said to him, "You throw away your scheme. I'll throw away my scheme. And we can start work together." To which we replied, "No," thereby losing our chance to build the biggest building we would ever build in our lives. "Our reasons for rejecting were numerous. We had previously cleared with the US State Department that it would be in order to work in Iraq. (This was during the famous "tilt" of our government toward Iraq) but we had found the atmosphere in the country strange and scary and noted how white some Iraqi architects had turned on hearing veiled threats from officials at the meeting. And our chief client there had been imprisoned by the regime. And, being Jewish, I couldn't go there at all. Also a Philadelphia scholar began telling us some of the more lurid aspects of Saddam's rule, saying he was "worse than Hitler." And at that time, hostilities between Iraq and Jordan meant that Bob's plane had to fly over Jordan with its lights out. Added to these highly convincing reasons was the fact that we could see no good outcome for our collaboration with Bofill. "So we asked ourselves why Bob should risk life and limb in an evil, scary place and on behalf of a project that we could not love. And the answer was clear. Nevertheless, we agreed, for the sake of our friend Rifat Chadirji, to go one step further and attend a conference on the project in Paris. However Iraq's war with Iran intervened and the conference never took place."

(Denise Scott Brown)

To complicate the facts even more, a recent article maintains that the winner of the contest was the team of...Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown! (VAUGHAN, Richard: "Saddam's Architect. How Rifat Chadirji masterplanned Baghdad in exchange of his freedom", *The Architects' Journal*, 17.04.08, p. 34).

## PROJECT FOR THE COMPETITION OF THE NATIONAL MOSQUE OF BAGHDAD (1982)

Robert Venturi, John Rauch, Denise Scott-Brown  
Studio: Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

Besides being the capital of the caliphate between the IX and XIII centuries, the multiple invasions of Baghdad kept it from possessing, like Damascus, Aleppo, and Jerusalem, a grand mosque which could cater to all the Muslim sensibilities.

The contest for a state mosque, which was to be added to the group of mosques built in all the country, reflects Saddam Hussein's desire to favor the most conservative sectors. The municipality of Baghdad (Amanat Al Assima AAA), advised by the architect Rifat Chadirji, and the presidential department of architecture, organized a restricted competition, by invitation only, in July of 1982. They established an initial list of twenty two

international architecture studios, which was finally reduced to seven: Maath Alousi (Iraq), Rasem Badran (Jordan), Ricardo Bofill and the *Taller de Arquitectura* (Spain) in collaboration with an Iraqi consulting team, Qahtan Al Madfai (United Kingdom), Mohamed Makiya (United Kingdom), Minoru Takeyama (Japan) and Venturi, Rauch, and Scott-Brown (United States).

The guidelines were drawn up by the ministry of Awqaf (religious buildings), with the mediation of Rifat Chadirji. Can non-Muslim architects build a mosque? The argument began with the contest (the selection of land, considered profane, had already raised protest on the part of fundamentalist religious journalists). The Christians were tolerated, because, like the Muslims, they believe in only one god and in the final day of judgment; it was the etymology that saved the selection of the Japanese architect (Takeyama): the verb (*amara*) with which Allah ordered the faithful to build a mosque, the first common house (Koran, 2, 144) (a verse recited when the foundation of any mosque is begun, and which Venturi reproduced on the principal façade of the sanctuary he designed), really means "to use, to live". Thus, the job of physically building does not only include the faithful?

They tried to design a grand Friday mosque (the day on which the faithful should go to temple), the biggest in the world, capable of holding 15,000, and later 30,000 (with a hall for 3000 women), and to widen the space to include 4000 more people, together with rooms and annexed buildings: a school, a library, guest houses, an administrative center, meeting rooms and a large cafeteria. The guidelines were posted at the end of September, and the projects were turned in on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1983.

After the private deliberations of the jury, presided over by Rifat Chadirji, who declared Rasem Badran to be the winner, Ricardo Bofill second, and Maath Alousi third, but recommended that the last two help Badran, Saddam Hussein decided to organize a large meeting of three hundred specialists (architects, historians, philosophers, etc.) in Baghdad, to which the architects were invited. The objective was to discuss the suitability of the final projects. During a break in the symposium, upon hearing a private conversation in which an Iraqi architect mentioned the necessity of changing the location to be more urban, less peripheral (a Friday mosque ideally must be in the heart of the urban center), Saddam Hussein forced this topic to be the object of the debate, deciding upon a new location, close to the old airport, nowadays known as the Green Zone (the previous site was not far from the neighborhood designed by Doxiadis).