

1:1 architecture

An Interview with Maysam Al Nasser

By Mariam Eshaq

The modern art world has brought a breath of fresh air back into architecture design. Today what is considered chic and elegant is a cross between the classic, rustic, and traditional along with a twist of new age designs. Many designers and architects are now trying to incorporate traditional designs that are full of culture to newer buildings.

Preserving the traditional styles and electrifying them with simple modern touches gives buildings a different feeling. A once broken down, good for nothing, waste of space, can be transformed into a beautiful building through the local culture yet still have a modern feeling to it.

Rowad today interviews one of Bahrain's youngest architects and designers Maysam Al Nasser. Maysam has taken on a number of projects that included the heritage festival and many others.

Rowad Asked:

Tell us more about Maysam as a person not as an owner of 1:1 architecture. Was art part of childhood?

Art has always been part of my life. My mum used to take me with her to the cultural center everyday where I was exposed to music, visual and performance arts, and got to participate in a lot of competitions, locally and internationally. After homework, she used to take me to the seashore with a painting kit to draw outdoors, and showed me there is beauty in everything even a dead palm tree. I grew up to marry a music composer, who lived in a house of poetry. So art has always been around me.

What led you to your career path as an architect?

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The ability to impact a person or a community's quality of life through the built form is what I aspire for.

How does art influence your architecture designs?

Like all other art forms, architecture is not just functional; but conceptual and abstract, with meaning behind every line. The difference between it and other forms of art, in my opinion, is that each "art piece" is not complete till it's inhabited. Occupants add the last touches to spaces by the way they utilize them, letting their lives spill into those spaces. And a good design allows for this unity..

How does Art affect your daily life?

From color of food, the choice of electronics, to the route I take to go somewhere, designs has always been the main force influencing my daily decisions. But above all, (as art is not about visual aesthetics only, but the concept and meaning behind things), it makes me interpret things differently, whether it's the real plot in a movie, the concept behind a piece of music, an abstract painting or the real meaning behind a picture. Art gives a way of thinking that helps decode all the symbols that life throws around us...

What makes Bahraini architecture unique? How does it stand out to others?

The indigenous architecture emerged from the people, lifestyle and the environment around. The pattern and orientation of the small alleys for example, came as a response to the sea, which influenced a lot of aspects of daily life. Alleys were, at some areas, perpendicular to the seashore to drag boats back and forth easily. The design of houses is also an environmental and cultural reaction; houses were centralized with a courtyard, bringing nature to the heart of the house and pushing the door right at the boundary at the edge of the small alleys, opened, with a curtain behind, as a clear welcoming statement. Houses in a neighborhood were integrated and almost identical from the outside, to reflect important social values like equality.

How important is it to maintain and preserve traditional Bahraini architecture and integrate into contemporary design?

The traditional architectural language was contextually and culturally specific to us. There were so many symbols embedded in the built fabric that got formed as accumulation of the life details of the older generations. We should study those symbols, and add to them our experiences and lifestyle to maintain our identity. Architecture should transform and increase in complexity as we evolve, without disregarding the roots. A new building is not a new creation but an extension to the existing, every wall holds history record, every window is a political and social statement, and the door should always be opened.

