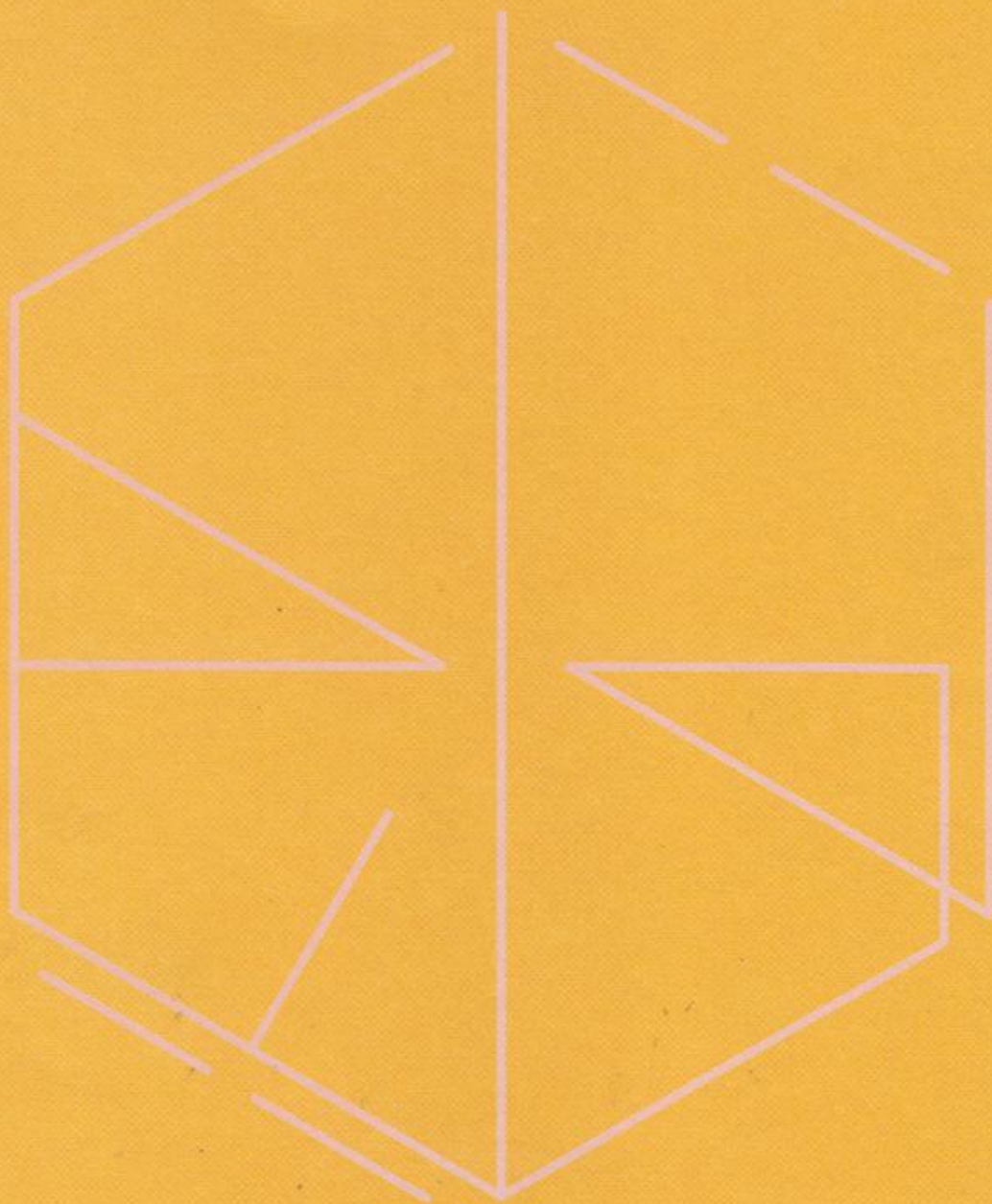


# BROWNBOOK

AN URBAN GUIDE TO THE MIDDLE EAST

الدليل الحضري للشرق الأوسط



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Villa Beit Ziraa is a painstaking reconstruction of a century old Jordanian summerhouse. It was made using the same mathematical dimensions and is the result of a long architectural study

# Back to the Land

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In his landmark work, *A Timeless Way of Building*, Christopher Alexander spells out a vision for the future of architecture. In it, he states, there is a DNA to all buildings that can be identified and recreated in a new form by simply following their mathematical dimensions. Tareq Qaddumi, a Palestinian architect based in Dubai, inspired by this theory, took a stately mansion in the centre of Jordan's one-time capital and resurrected it in a modern form.

He measured the geometrics of the original Beit Abu Jaber, the one-time residence of the merchant Abu Jaber family, who lived in As-Salt, north of Amman. The now dusty brown three-layered structure is noted for its adherence to classical geometry, known as the Golden Square, complete with protruding Greco pillars. Using this formula and with painstaking precision, Qaddumi then constructed a new house based on the same formula amongst the wheat fields of Beit Ziraa, an area to the south of the city. 'Beit Abu Jaber looked complex and I didn't know where it was from. It was on a hill, it negotiated a building on its side and opened up to a vista on the square,' Qaddumi remembers.

The architect's creation is a three-bedroom seasonal residence named Villa Beit Ziraa, a summerhouse for his parents and thus serves the same purpose as the Beit Abu Jaber house did a hundred years ago.

'It is a similar idea to Albrecht Dürer's etchings where he would draw a fish, shift the dimensions, stretch and pull the same fish and make a barracuda. It is just the same elements but you can make an enormous amount of permutations,' explains Qaddumi, referring to the German romantic painter noted for his developments in the way Renaissance artists composed objects through geometrical calculations.

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Tareq Qaddumi







was also implemented in the design of the building. 'A house can be seen either as an interior space or a series of roofs,' he says, explaining that Villa Beit Ziraa adheres to the latter principle. 'The idea was that the house would be an extension of the landscape so that there are three floors which cascade and shade each other,' says the architect.

The highest level of the house was built simply to cast shade over the other terraces rather than to act as a communal space. It works with the original Beit Abu Jaber residence formula where views turn away from neighbouring buildings and instead face the town square below.

Qaddumi says the wide terraces, which form the other two roof sections, were modelled to reflect the residents' Palestinian childhood. 'Sleeping under the stars was a very romantic thing for my mother and father when they were children so I wanted a space for this, although I don't know if they have slept ever there yet.'

The prominent concrete beams and high ceilings are also reminiscent of traditional architecture in the

area. 'I would walk around with somebody and they would say that the house reminds them of the vaults in old Levantine houses. You don't get vaults anymore but you do get beams, so we used this to evoke these memories. The essence of Middle Eastern architecture is keeping the DNA of something old and taking it to the next step. Modern means it is a modern interpretation of a building rather than creating something alien [to its aesthetics],' he explains.

By sticking to this DNA the villa expresses the original language of Beit Abu Jaber. The Greco pillars might take a more modern form but they are still there, dancing out from the structure in strict formation. The stonework still bears a resemblance to the original house in As-Salt but here it can be seen growing untamed from the earth, which Qaddumi describes as putting in a new language to a classic story.

'Every stone was turned to uncover [the message of] this building. All the elements, the stairs and the pillars, were brought together. In the countryside, you go to search for the truffle hidden in the ground, this house is the result of a similar search.'