

CL/174

Subject :

Bahrain Cultural Centre  
Competition.

Mr B. NILSSON  
Projects and Research  
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P.O. Box 5

STATE OF BAHRAIN

Paris, 12th April 1976

Dear Mr Nilsson,

Thank you for sending me the excellent report of the jury regarding the Bahrain Cultural Centre Competition.

So as to better appreciate the value of the projects, it would be useful to receive photographs of them without delay.

Many thanks in anticipation.

Yours sincerely,

Michel WEILL  
Secretary General

STATE OF BAHRAIN  
MINISTRY OF WORKS, POWER  
AND WATER  
PROJECTS & RESEARCH  
DIRECTORATE  
P. O. Box 5



دَوْلَةُ الْبَحْرَيْنِ  
وَزَارَةُ الْأَشْغَالِ وَالْكَرْبَاءِ وَالْمَاءِ  
إدارة المشاريع والبحوث  
ص . ب : ٥

Ref. A-10/1/291/76  
Date 3rd April, 1976

الرقم .....  
التاريخ .....

Union Internationale des Architectes,  
1 Rue d'Ulm,  
Paris, 75005,  
France.


Dear Sirs,

re: Bahrain Cultural Centre Competition

We hereby send you a copy of the Jury's recommendation. The Jury meeting was held in Bahrain on 20th to 22nd March, 1976.

As Professor Raymond Ghosn no longer is among us, his assistant, Professor George Contavellis was functioning as our advisor.

Yours faithfully,

  
B. Nilsson  
Projects & Research  
Directorate.

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## REPORT OF THE JURY

The Jury met on March 20th, 1976 and spent its first day visiting numerous sites on Muharraq and Bahrain for direct observations of local landscape, architecture and building methods. We discussed the programme of the National Cultural Centre and visited the proposed site on an area now being reclaimed from the sea.

Detailed examination of the five projects submitted began on March 21st at 9.00a.m. The acting Professional Adviser reported from his survey of the projects instances on non-compliance with the mandatory requirements of the programme. We considered them in detail and reached the decision not to disqualify any entries but to weigh these departures negatively in comparing their merits, except as they appeared to be reasonable and constructive.

The Jury believe that the following principles should be kept in mind in evaluating the excellence of any projects:

1. The climate of Bahrain, generally equalble but with extremes of heat, very low rainfall, wind and dust, must influence design.
2. The characteristics of the local building materials, notably the impurities in sand and gravel which require unusually careful control.
3. Islamic culture has had long experience with these climates and materials, developing living habits, clothing and building techniques that have not lost their validity even though Industrialisation is adding new possibilities.
4. The Cultural Centre wants to be a vital part of Bahraini life. But at the same time it must protect its visitors provide a quiet shelter for their enjoyment of significant performances, and be a safe place for the deposit and study of books and works of art.
5. Convenience and flexibilitiy for many different activities are essential to a successful design; the skill is in accomplishing these qualities in a simple way without redundant structures or extravagant architectural gestures.

On March, 22nd, by secret ballot, the Jury unanimously decided that entry No. 3 submitted by Professor Timo Penttilae meets all the criteria stated above in a way clearly superior to the others. The designer recognised that, since the Centre will be built in what is intended to be a park-like environment, it will best achieve a strong identity by having a simple compact form contrasting with the surrounding openness. In order to make clear this intention he suppressed all unnecessary streets, brought in a new diagonal vehicular approach from Sheikh Daij Road, and indicated a continuous palm grove on three sides of the Centre.

The palms are interrupted along the Sea Scenic Road only to expose the eastern facade of this rectangular compound. The Centre will therefore show to powerful effect from the sea side, including the airport's glide path, but it will be approached only from the land side. We find this to be a sound solution as to both

architectural image and good traffic behavior.

In satisfying these local conditions the architect was led to a plan organisation that reflects in a modern way the close combination of interior building spaces with intimate outdoor courts and passages familiar to palace, mosque and urban design in the Islamic tradition.

Once inside the compound, one is in a protected world where noise wind and sun are not allowed to interfere with the maximum experience of social participation. Perimeter walls are pierced sufficiently to invite entry at the appropriate points; otherwise daylight is admitted only through shaded windows giving on interior courts. A fine arrangement of contrasting chunky and linear building elements creates these courts and controls vistas and circulation. Visitors' cars are brought in under cover to discharge passengers and then go out to adjoining parking areas absorbed in the palm grove.

All of the elements to which the public has access are linked together on the ground floor by a single continuous lobby space, and this is so arranged that secondary entrances can allow entering more directly to sub-auditoriums, library, art gallery and conference centre. Service access is generally on the periphery.

This type of solution, while admirable for public access, makes it difficult to share service and support facilities for the two stages but were these services to be consolidated the public access to the two auditoria would be greatly complicated, as is demonstrated in all the other entries. We think the winning designer made the wiser choice, and although the scenery facilities serve only the larger stage, the musicians have access to both orchestra pits through a basement connection, and the other performers reach both stages by connections on the upper floor.

There are details in the winning design that will require prolonged study and improvement. The two auditoria are admirable in seating the audiences in good visual and auditory distance without the use of balconies, but the cylinder form for large spaces has inherent acoustic problems. There is proposed a brilliant solution for positioning and access to off-stage lighting, and the under-sides of these supports can be acoustically helpful. We cannot see any benefit to be derived from skylights in these auditoria and we question the way drainage is packeted in even those skylights (art gallery, library, cafeteria, conference room) where such lighting is perhaps more appropriate.

Consideration should be given to providing a visual relation between cafeteria and sculpture court.

The connections to and the circulations within the linear elements along the north and south sides need improvement both for convenience and safety. In common with most competitors, the author has failed to identify above-ground locations for chiller and cooling tower air-conditioning components.

We consider the notion of containing all service vehicular circulation within the compound to be somewhat exaggerated. No concession has been made to getting trucks around narrow right-angle turns. Would

it not be better to allow this traffic to go around outside where there is plenty of room?

We also suggest that the complex be placed slightly further back from the Sea Scenic Road and we feel the need for the approach driveway to expand into a modest plaza before the cars enter the enclosure.

Such modifications would not weaken the powerful feeling of unity and appropriateness conveyed by this design, and we firmly believe that when this project takes its final constructed form, it will be a unique cultural instrument, a magnet for all in the Gulf region and countries beyond.

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Entry No. 1 submitted by Mr. Andre Wogenscky displays an overall concept diametrically opposed to that of the winner. An extended array of square mushroom structures covers much of the enclosed public spaces and is elaborated by prolonging open covered spaces diagonally toward three corners of the site, stepping down to invite strollers to the roof. The generous covered space gives flexibility and provides access to all activities.

The exterior has an elegant overall character.

Unfortunately the idea demands an amount of covered area far in excess of that actually needed for easy circulation.

The flower gardens shown on the roof of the model would be difficult to establish and maintain in a hot, windy and dry climate. The tower on the roof is a striking symbol, but it contributes little to the programmed functional requirements. The arbitrary and rigid geometric form of the conference centre does not happily provide for the accommodations contained within it. This comment also applies to the stage towers.

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Project No. 2 was submitted by Sir Basil Spence.

The Project with its various elements, is well integrated in the site. The author was searching for an architectural expression which reflects traditional eastern forms. This may be one of the reasons for neglecting the inner functional organisation according to the idea of a contemporary cultural centre with the maximum flexibility in use. The art gallery the cafeteria have no visual connection with the very long sumptuous lobby. Its gallery serves only the balcony of the main auditorium. The conference complex shows again a very rigid arrangement with circular rooms accessible by a narrow corridor with difficult identification.

Project No. 4 was submitted by Professor Roland Rainer.

This design shows a nice relationship between the buildings, water and landscape. Unfortunately the proposed lagoon would be difficult to execute having in mind the tidal nature of the Gulf.

The scheme does not comply as drawn with the site requirements.

The formal aspect of the buildings to the lagoon is good, and the linear composition clear.

The two auditoriums placed back to back having common stage rooms work well but the overall linear concept gives unsatisfactory circulation especially to the two auditoriums.

This design has the advantage of requiring only a very small basement to be constructed below the water table.

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In Project No. 5, submitted by Mr. Paul Rudolph, the Centre is placed in the western part of the site, with the main entrance from the Sea Scenic Road. This provides a generous forecourt across which the building can be seen to advantage. Secondary entrances on the other three sides provide for direct access to smaller elements and for service.

The building is very compact and the support facilities for the two stages are contiguous to both. The two auditoria are parallel to each other, and the extensions of lobby space to enter each from two sides result in considerable complexity, especially since each has a balcony. Also the access to the library as an independent element is very difficult.

The designer has adopted a system of parallel concrete vaults and by placing these vaults at various heights above the floor has been able to achieve considerable variety in the quality of the different spaces. But between the vaults he has introduced clerestory lighting in inaccessible locations which would be difficult to maintain.

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