





Bernard Khoury/DW5  
**N.B.K. RESIDENCE (2)**

On the top levels of a skyscraper he built in a very specific spot in Beirut, Khoury has made his own home as a privileged lookout over the city, with help from the extraordinary construction skills of several local artisans

Text Bernard Khoury  
Photos Ieva Saudargaite



Photos Ieva Saudargaitė. © DW5 Bernd and Khoury

In my part of the world, during the last 40 years, our dwellings have become increasingly opaque. They were directed to withdraw into themselves, impermeable to the city as if it had turned into a hostile environment. Real estate developers have been building alliances with passive architects. They imposed on us deep slabs, poorly lit and poorly ventilated interiors garnished with dusty balconies. These gloomy introverted apartments are most commonly accessed through blind circulation cores, often apathetically located in the centre of the plan.

It is odd to notice that up until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the traditional Mediterranean habitat was more intrinsically connected to its environment. Staircases were generous; they were proudly exhibited and exposed to the natural elements, joined by terraces that were integral parts of the

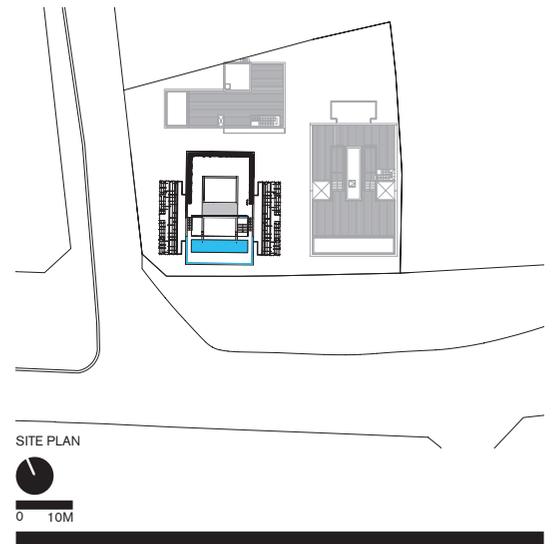
neighbourhood's fabric. They were also the natural continuation of interior living spaces. Our predecessors were not familiar with blind corridors, with segregation of spaces, with the seclusion of the family quarters from the visitors. They mastered natural ventilation; they had no need to be lectured by Anglo-Saxon environmental specialists with codes of conduct. They did not resort to the complex artillery of mechanical heating, air-conditioning and ventilation systems. They did not brag about being green.

I am not naively nostalgic about the disappearance of the old Mediterranean urban fabric. It is not the romantic desolation of witnessing the remnants of this Levantine architecture vanish from the landscape of our cities that drove me to re-evaluate the standards of housing and the prevailing

trends that dominate the residential market in my part of the world. It is more the will to re-establish an engaging relationship between the urban apartment and its social environment. I would go as far as saying that this battle is in the order of the political. This combat has cost me innumerable defeats, aborted projects that were caused by my resistance to the undisputed standards that the local market and the industry had imposed on me. In a practice dominated by the private sector, where the rules are radically different from those inherent to public commissions, financial viability is the ultimate criterion of a successful performance. I survived the difficult realities of the private sector by building improbable alliances with entrepreneurs who were willing to question the trends of their industry.

**This page: the apartment is on the ninth floor of plot #2251, and goes up two more levels by means of an independent structure resting on the building. The outdoor pool on the roof is crowned by two "antennas" containing illumination units. Facing south, they rise above the building's height, and are easily visible from neighbourhoods in the vicinity**

**Opposite page: the spacious living room offers a spectacular panorama of the surrounding city, including views of the nearby Maronite cemetery, the racetrack and institutional buildings, framed by Mount Lebanon, which marks off the southern districts of Beirut. The eastward view extends to the border formed by Damascus Road**



SITE PLAN

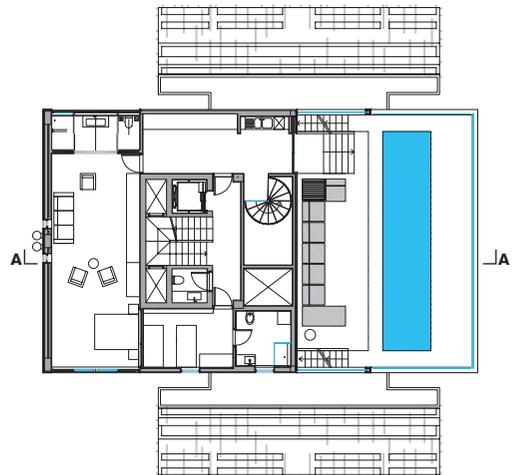
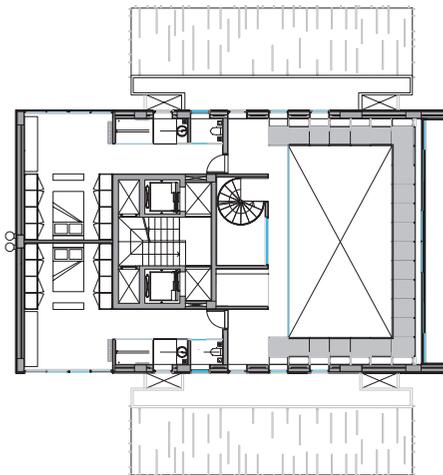
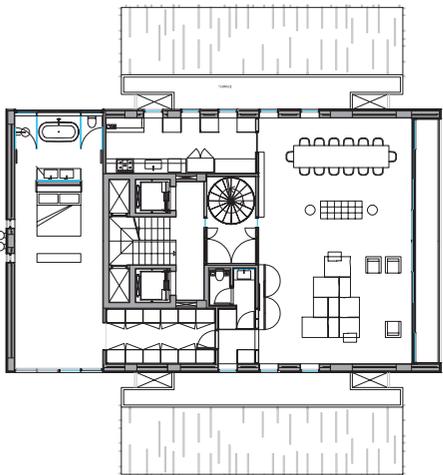
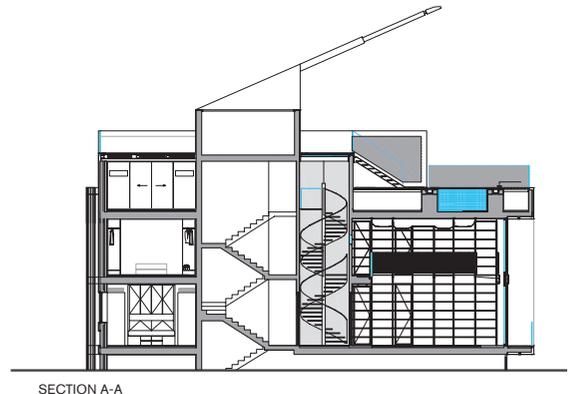




**N.B.K. Residence (2)**  
**Plot #2251, Beirut,**  
**Lebanon**

Architects  
**Bernard Khoury /DW5**  
 Structural engineering  
**O.T.C.E.**  
 Electrical engineering  
**Roger Noujeim**  
 Mechanical engineering  
**Roger Kazopoulo**  
 Metalwork  
**ACID**  
 Woodwork and carpentry  
**Doumit Tannous**  
**(independent)**

Client  
**Bernard e/and Nathalie**  
**Khoury**  
 Floor area  
**373 m<sup>2</sup>**  
 Total floor area  
**600 m<sup>2</sup>**  
 Design phase  
**2006-2011**  
 Construction phase  
**2007-2012**

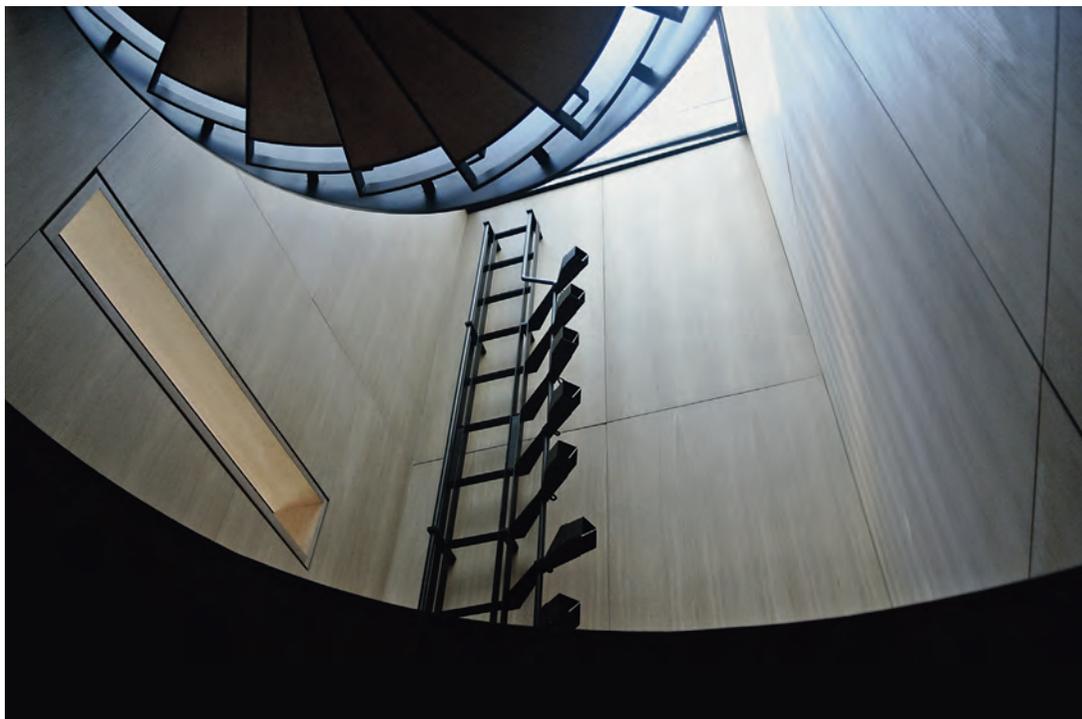


A recurrent protagonist is a client of ours with whom we have built to this day six projects within the boundaries of Beirut. One of these projects is where I chose to settle. I decided upon this site because of its geographical situation. It is located neither in East Beirut nor in West Beirut, but on the demarcation line that separated the two sectors of the city, in a zone that was deserted during 15 years of conflict. The immediate entourage of the plot is surrounded by cemeteries, churches, institutional establishments, remnants of the French mandate and the early glorious years of our young nation. The relatively low density of the neighbourhood offers an exceptional view in all directions, particularly towards the south where, in contrast with the foreground, the background glorifies Beirut in all its splendour, its atrocious density, its urban chaos; consequences of an extremely rapid and unregulated development. Beirut is a city that evolved without master planning and in the absence of coherent urban regulation. This tableau confirms the bankruptcy of public institutions, the collapse of the state and the total exhaustion of the national project.

In the early stages of the design process, I chose to detach the top three levels of the building located at the forefront of the plot, giving way to a structurally autonomous body that I would later inhabit, perched over the city, turning my back to the sea in a

very un-Mediterranean way. With an eager determination to open up to the surroundings, the main facade is a large oversized opening, framing a portrait of Beirut that is far from idyllic. It is sour, radiant with ungraspable energy, marvellously incoherent. The facade symbolises the will to celebrate a carnal relationship with the violence of the urban landscape. This project allowed me to embark on a fabulous adventure and an incredibly rewarding experience, shared with the artisans who executed the works, those last survivors of endangered practices. A carpenter, who happened to be my late grandfather's apprentice, exercised on me the authority of the master over his pupil. A plasterer, who had spent half a century moulding white decorative cornices, saw himself compelled to paint the ceiling device I had commissioned him in mat black polyurethane – a hull, carefully plotted by the mechanical engineers to conceal the complex air conditioning and ventilation machinery.

I also find gratification in all the unexpected surprises that animate otherwise banal everyday tasks, such as the fact that my daughter can now bathe on her own balcony, and that I can walk across the highest pedestrian bridge overlooking Beirut within the warmth of my living room. I also offered myself the prerogative of enjoying yet another decadent position over the city: my rooftop terrace, which hovers above the brutal panorama. @



Opposite page: the apartment is divided over three levels. The first features the entrance, dining and living room, master bedroom and kitchen. The second is a mezzanine with two bedrooms and a full-height bookcase, accessible by means of a suspended walkway in metal grating that crosses the full length of the living room. The third has a terrace with an outdoor swimming pool and a guest room. Above: ending with a skylight at the rooftop level, the entrance spans the entire height of the residence and houses a spiral staircase (manufactured by ACID)

Right and pages 68-69: the polyurethane structure on the ceiling, matte black and with the appearance of a hovercraft, was modelled by mechanical engineers and local artisans working together. It covers the complex machinery for air conditioning and ventilation. The N.B.K. Residence 2 represents Khoury's experimentation on interiors, furniture and materials conducted over the years, including the N.B.K. 1, conceived 12 years earlier. The main themes he develops are the reinterpretation of materials and the appreciation of ancient craft techniques







