

ARTS & CULTURE



Left: The dome, aka the Beirut City Center Building, as it was in the early 1990s. At right, how it will look after Khoury's rehabilitation is completed



Beirut's icon of modernist architecture set to be revamped within a year

Solidere reverses its decision to demolish and taps into the talent of upstart young architect Bernard Khoury

Kaelen Wilson-Goldie
Daily Star staff

BEIRUT: Bernard Khoury is not a tall man to begin with, and his poor posture isn't helping. He is slouched so deeply in the chair at his old office behind Sodoco Square (he moved last month) that his desk hits him at sternum level. Were it not for the stub of a cigar in

his left hand, he'd look like a little kid romping around on adult-sized furniture. On the 35-year-old architect's desk lies a red cloth three-ring binder detailing his firm's design plans for the much-loved and much-hated domed building in downtown Beirut: an old, disused movie theater known variously as the egg, the bubble, the blob, or by its official name – the Beirut City Center Building.

Pockmarked by years of war and stranded by decades of structural neglect, the dome is a stark visual icon, instantly recognizable as an emblem of 1960s-era modernist architecture, a relic of Beirut's bustling past, an object lesson in the city's tempestuous political history. Khoury plans to liberate the shell of the building from its concrete slabs and brace it with two-meter-wide scaffolding on all sides to hold its ravaged skin intact. As such, the dome will become an entirely different icon, a ruthlessly contemporary building housing an unprecedented hybrid of commercial and cultural life, an attempt to encapsulate the city in

in the Middle East. The outbreak of civil war in 1975 dashed all that, and the dome suffered heavy shelling and severe drainage problems. When the war ended, the dome was pegged as a site for the new Finance Ministry. According to Angus Gavin, head of the urban development division at Solidere, "We had signed a contract with the government. We had the nose of the dome knocked off; the floors below gutted and built up." This was in the mid 1990s. When Rafik Hariri's first government came to an end in 1998, the new government tore up the ministry contract, and Solidere lost millions.

So why Solidere's sudden change of heart? The most obvious reason is financial. At this point in the reconstruction process, downtown Beirut is saturated with big-ticket developments under way and finding money for further projects is, to use a well-worn cliché, like squeezing blood from a stone. "The dome is a big site," admits Gavin, "and it's not likely to find a developer for some time."

Another reason is that over the past year Solidere in particular and Beirut in general have become architect-crazy. The roster of internationally renowned architects and designers who have descended upon Beirut for work is extensive and growing – Jean Nouvel, Philippe Starck, Stephen Holl, Ricardo Bofill, Michael Graves and more. Each of these high-profile architects has seen the dome and told Gavin, "You can't tear this thing down." It's too precious, too odd, too cool, too much of an icon.

HOROSCOPE

- Aries (Mar. 21 - April 19)**
You could find that you are appreciated or valued for your feelings or your ability to act and get things done. Everything may be pouring in at once today, and it's all good news.
- Taurus (April 20 - May 20)**
You have a built-in sense of what is expected of you, even without guidance. A new beginning may mean a new job or new surroundings. With your imagination, it is easy to problem-solve.
- Gemini (May 21 - June 21)**
Studying the facts of a situation helps you to become clear about your part or your feelings today. You have accomplished quite a lot in your life. Now sit down and figure out what you want.
- Cancer (June 22 - July 22)**
Lots of young people come across your path today. This may mean you are lecturing, teaching or speaking about your work. This is a time for imagination, creativity and motivating others.
- Leo (July 23 - Aug. 22)**
Your awareness at this time is toward a sort of community-oriented achievement or mindset. Planning for a spotlight or a crossing guard at the local school is where you will find your main interests.
- Virgo (Aug. 23 - Sept. 22)**
You are in a planning mood and are very clear-headed and able to view all the paths. Go ahead and make those decisions. You can see the road ahead and will make the right choices.
- Libra (Sept. 23 - Oct. 22)**
Being yourself, and living your life to the fullest, brings you joy. You do not seem disturbed over workplace problems; there is always a good response from you when asked to perform a difficult task.
- Scorpio (Oct. 23 - Nov. 21)**
Others could challenge you in some situation that results in opposition and blockage. Not perhaps a good time to try out new things or break away from an old way of working.
- Sagittarius (Nov. 22 - Dec. 21)**
Communicating and exchanging ideas are experiences you may enjoy now. You are a person with something to say, and you realize that others have information that is essential to your goals.
- Capricorn (Dec. 22 - Jan. 19)**
You will feel much support from those around you, whatever you want to accomplish. Inner searching and a sense of being vulnerable could tempt you to spend more time on personal matters.
- Aquarius (Jan. 20 - Feb. 18)**
You shine when it comes to pulling a group together in order to complete a project today. You have an easy way with those in authority and can often talk your way into better working benefits.
- Pisces (Feb. 19 - Mar. 20)**
You will feel much support from those around you, whatever you want to accomplish. Inner searching and a sense of being vulnerable could tempt you to spend more time on personal matters.

The real estate firm has agreed to freeze any sale of the site for 5 years

flux, now and in the present tense, all young, energetic, adventurous and risky. That Solidere – the private real estate company that owns the vast plot on which the dome stands – has commissioned Khoury to rehabilitate this site is significant on two fronts. One, it signifies a shift in Solidere's strategy for rebuilding the downtown area, suggesting that cultural initiatives may be creeping up on the company's agenda and that after playing it safe for years Solidere seems willing to take a risk on an architect like Khoury. Two, it signifies the taming of Khoury himself. Whether one deems him a genius or a charlatan, Khoury has, over the past 10 years, emerged as an architectural force to be reckoned with. Mainly, he has worked outside the establishment on projects that would make other, more uptight architects, blanch. All along, he has been one of Solidere's most unrelenting critics. As much as the dome project represents Solidere's decision to come round to Khoury, it also represents Khoury's decision to come round to Solidere. Originally designed by architect Joseph Philippe Karam, the dome was built in 1965 as part of a larger complex of towers and cavernous shopping arcades that was predicted, at the time, to become the largest commercial center

No one knows just what exactly the space is to be used for

Solidere is not oblivious to that generation's loyalty and purchasing power. Plus, Khoury has proven himself in precisely this type of rehabilitation. "When you think of the post-war, temporary use of buildings (in Beirut), he has an international reputation for doing this," says Gavin. "He's a talented architect to begin with, but he's a real genius at that." Many people within professional and academic circles alike concede that Khoury is talented but maintain that he's dangerous. He believes in

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flute playing to the rhythm of three white-hooded women playing stones with large, wooden percussion sticks. Beneath a huge replica of a cymbal, alternating in color throughout the night, female dancers swirled in bright costumes of embroidered silk, banging drums like musical dervishes. As 10 dancers moved in rapid unison to the edge of the stage, completing the dance, the audience applauded. The second dance, the "Nature of Dawn," represented the crane, a bird held in high historical and spiritual regard by Koreans, with the dancers dressed in pink silk with tiaras using flower decorated fans. The choreography flowed in perfect coordination, reflecting the pinnacle of 5,000 years of history and culture. Symbolizing the flowing movements of a crane in flight,

STAR SCENE

Safir Heliopolitan celebrates 1st anniversary with style


Leila Hatoum
Special to The Daily Star

BEIRUT: The Safir Heliopolitan Hotel in Raouche celebrated its first anniversary Wednesday with a grand reception in its Emerald Ballroom, which was filled with white balloons for the occasion. 1,500 VIP invitees from the social and political elite – such as Tourism Minister Ali Abdullah, Ali Ballan and Mona Zantout – as well as people in the hotel industry and press were present.

The hotel's three restaurants – The Views, El Fornayo and the Italian Bistrot – had open kitchens installed in the ballroom for all guests to view and experience the different cuisines they offer. As a live band played, a huge sculpture of a birthday cake was revealed in the ballroom, surrounded by more balloons. The balloons each contained a gift, ranging from weekend stays at Safir Heliopolitan's branches throughout the Arab world to complimentary meals and room discounts.



Dine with a Star
From Monday 5th until Saturday 10th of July



Al Premier
has the pleasure to host the "Star Michelin" chef
Alain Reix
from Jules Verne - Eiffel Tower"
Presenting an exciting "New French Style Cuisine" daily for lunch and dinner.

Cooking classes chaperoned by the chef on Wednesday the 7th and Thursday the 8th of July from 11:00 till 14:00.

Gala dinner held on Saturday the 10th of July 2004

Banque de la Méditerranée, sal

INTERCONTINENTAL LE VENDOME BEIRUT

Information and reservation on 961 1 368 300

The "Nature of Dawn" dance symbolizes the crane

5,000 years of Korean culture set to ravishing choreography

Didim Dance Company travels to perform at Casino du Liban

Paul Cochrane
Special to The Daily Star

BEIRUT: "Doom, doom, doom... thakka, thakka, thakka" went the drums as the Didim Dance Company of Korea performed their "Journey Of A Soul" at the Casino du Liban theater Wednesday night. Over 1,000 guests were treated to an exceptional display of traditional Korean music and dance from the famed troupe, organized by the Republic of Korea to bring the Lebanese and Korean peoples closer. "Culture transcends the barriers of geographic distance, touching the heart and soul of the people without the need of a common language," said Korean ambassador Young-sun Kim at the opening of the performance. Indeed, the show captured the audience with its evocations of a distant past, with a

flute playing to the rhythm of three white-hooded women playing stones with large, wooden percussion sticks. Beneath a huge replica of a cymbal, alternating in color throughout the night, female dancers swirled in bright costumes of embroidered silk, banging drums like musical dervishes. As 10 dancers moved in rapid unison to the edge of the stage, completing the dance, the audience applauded. The second dance, the "Nature of Dawn," represented the crane, a bird held in high historical and spiritual regard by Koreans, with the dancers dressed in pink silk with tiaras using flower decorated fans. The choreography flowed in perfect coordination, reflecting the pinnacle of 5,000 years of history and culture. Symbolizing the flowing movements of a crane in flight,

the dancers looked like a very elegant Mexican wave – far removed from those currently seen on TV in the Portuguese stadiums for the Euro Cup. In one of the most powerful musical displays, five male drummers played large bass drums, with smaller drums attached at the rims. The music was historically intended to ward off fears and doubts, encouraging life and a strong spirit, and with the thudding boom of the drums reaching a crescendo, the theatre throbbed with a rhythm of life. The "Morning of the Lotus Flower" dance began to clash symbols, an immediate evocation of the Far East, just like the lotus flower itself. The 15 female dancers were dressed in shimmering silk with lotus emblems, holding large pink lotus flowers that were used to great effect to represent a field of beautiful movement.

The "Salpuri" dance, performed by a single woman in white with a long red ribbon, was a beautiful folk dance of emotion and spirituality, stemming from Shamanism, the ancient, animistic religion of Asia in which mediation between the visible and spirit worlds is effected by shaman priests. The final piece, the "Symphony of Drums," involved the whole line-up of 27 players and dancers, playing four types of drum, from large bass drums to smaller numbers. The stage floor was even used to create sound by seven women banging sticks, and the bass drum players moved backwards to allow the women to beat the men's drums. When the audience thought the show had finished, an electric beat of folkloric, rawara Arabic music played through the sound system, with the players drumming along.