



Gardens of Forgiveness

BEIRUT

The Garden of Forgiveness is considered allegorically as representing three essential principals, the past, present and future. Lebanon's position at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, placed it at the cross roads of invading civilisations and to this day the cultural exchanges that have occurred throughout history, give Lebanon its distinct identity.

The Garden is placed at the heart of Beirut's Central District and is surrounded by historic churches and mosques. The El Omari, El Emir Assaf and Mohamed Al-Amin Mosques, St Elie's Catholic, St George's Greek Orthodox, and St George's Maronite, Cathedrals and the Nourieh Shrine, shared by both Christian and Moslem women. These six buildings like the rest of the city look into the site, an archaeological excavation at times five metres deep.

Where there had once been souks where fresh fruit and vegetables were sold before the war, the remains of past Hellenistic, Roman and Medieval cities have been revealed. It was clear that this archaeology, located in the southern half of the site would represent the cities shared past and history.

To provide easy access to the Garden from the rest of the city, it was clear that parts of the site had to be reburied. This led to ramped routes being positioned through terraces to its north and south sides, keeping clear of the most important archaeological features.

The present represented by fertile terraces depicting Lebanon's agricultural landscapes is arranged along a typographical time line; a ramp that leads north from the archaeological layers up to a walled garden arranged around a shallow pool at the city level; an entrance space that will hold the future meetings and shared conversations of a diverse city community.

The Garden of Forgiveness will be an oasis of serenity and contemplation within a frenetic city, but at every turn it will bear evidence of Beirut's past and present history. Natural and man made layers and events will drift in and out of focus, held within its surface or momentarily brought to it from outside. The garden will be a reflection of the vibrant city that surrounds it.



In a city recently devastated by civil war, perhaps the most powerful symbol, with the resonance to bring people to a sense of common identity, is the symbol of the landscape that can contain all.

A pre-war puzzle of a landscape held within the borders of Lebanon, at one moment complete and at the next moment shattered, symbolised the fragility of the context. The piecing together of the puzzle, symbolised the journey that the country and people of Lebanon had embarked, to become whole, unified and prosperous. Cultural exchange, both friendly and forced, has defined Lebanon's history. and to the design team Beirut is a microcosm of the nation's political, social and physical landscape. The garden is an opportunity to bring diverse people and cultural fragments together to heal.

The Garden of Forgiveness is considered allegorically as representing three essential principals. the past. present and future. Beyond the dialogue of past and future, the physiography of Lebanon plays an important role in the scheme-s spatial organization in plan and section. How can one find forgiveness for the person who fought against them or hurt their family in the past?

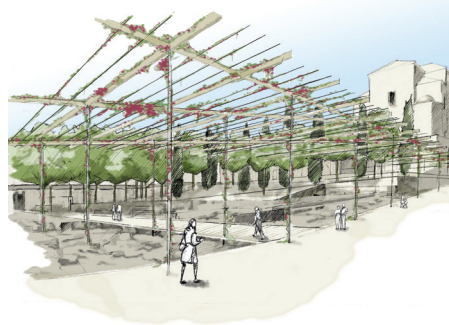
Inspired in part by project founder Alexandra Asseily's idea that forgiveness is a liberating act that gives humans the capacity for peace, we chose to step outside contentious religious issues to

search for common ground. The common ground they found is people's love, pride and belief in their land.

The landscape of the Lebanon offers extraordinary contrasts: the snow capped mountains, the flower festooned meadows, the forest and river gorges, the terraced and cultivated valleys and long rocky coastline. Its timeless beauty creates strong emotional attachments.

The city of Beirut is a microcosm, making scaled references to the wider landscape and cultural heritage of the country. Beirut is a city being rebuilt, looking to its future to give its inhabitants a sense of shared identity and belonging. By observing these principles within the garden, those people who en-ter from whatever background will recognise their shared existence and by sharing and through contemplation we hope they will learn to forgive.

The garden is designed both for visual and experiential discovery. Ramped access at both ends of the garden prevents a singular, prioritized view, while on the east and west sides the design scheme uses dramatic sectional differentials as opportunities to create plays of light and vegetal texture. The Hadiqat as Samah/Garden of Forgiveness exists be-cause of devastation, excavation, interpretation and translation. Its presence in the heart of Beirut is a reminder of the tension between destruction and creation, processes which, as Octavio Paz says, are synonymous in the eyes of the gods.



PROJECT TITLE
Hadiqat As-Samah
CONTRACT VALUE
Confidential
CLIENT
Solidere
PROJECT DURATION
2000-2006
SIZE
2.5ha
STATUS
On hold
COLLABORATORS
ARUP - Engineers
Dar Al-Handasah - Local engineers

