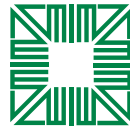


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Aga Khan Award for Architecture

2016

WINNING PROJECTS

Bait ur Rouf Mosque

Dhaka, Bangladesh

Architect: Marina Tabassum Architects

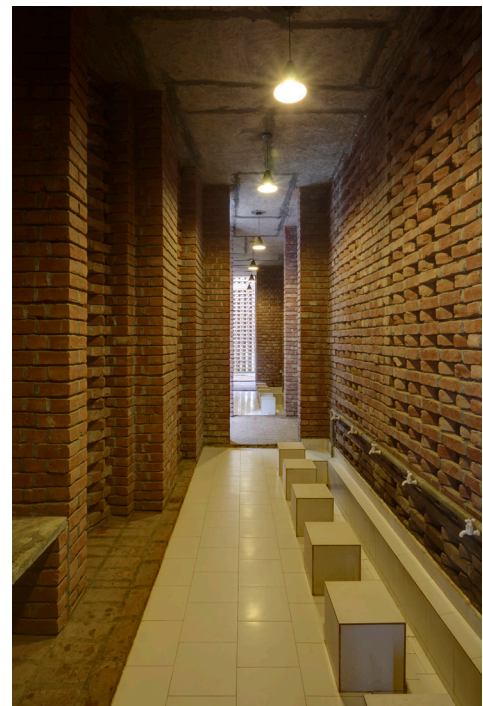
Client: Sufia Khatun

Project description

An adherence to the essential – both in the definition of the space and the means of construction – was crucial in formulating the design of Bait ur Rouf Mosque. With land donated by her grandmother and modest funds raised by the local community, the architect has created an elemental place for meditation and prayer.

The irregularly shaped site is covered by a high plinth, which not only protects against flooding but provides a gathering place set apart from the crowded street below. On top of the plinth sits the mosque, a perfect square, 23m x 23m and 7.6m high. Within this square is a cylinder, displaced to the northwest corner of the perimeter wall to create additional depth for the colonnade and the ablution area on the south- and east-facing sides respectively. And within this cylinder is in turn a smaller square, 16.75m x 16.75m and 10.6m high – that is, 3m taller than the perimeter wall. Rotated within the cylinder to orientate itself with the qibla, this pavilion contains the prayer hall, which is separated from the rest of the building by open-to-sky lightwells.

There are two structural systems in place – the load-bearing brick walls that define the outer perimeter and the smaller spaces, and the reinforced-concrete frame that spans the column-free prayer hall. The brick walls exploit the depth between the outer square and the inner cylinder, allowing



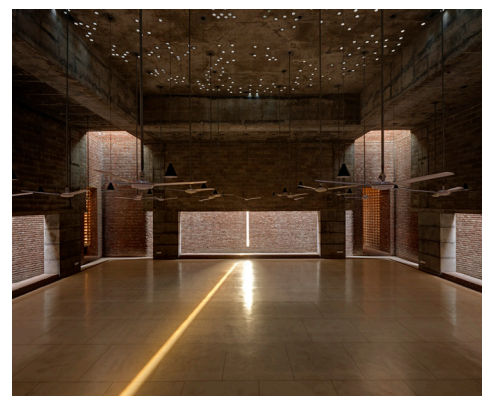
for buttressing in the interstitial space. This in turn makes it possible for panels between the load-bearing structure to have a jali of brick, leaving out alternate bricks and rotating them. In the prayer hall itself a simple vertical gap in the brick denotes the direction of the qibla, but the recess is splayed so that worshippers are not distracted by sight lines onto the busy street. What they see instead is sunlight bouncing off the wall behind. Awash with light, open to the elements, the mosque ‘breathes’.

Jury citation

“In a transitional area caught between urban hyper-density and rural proximity, the terracotta mosque is an exquisitely proportioned building that is both elegant and eternal. Funded primarily by community donors, the mosque design challenges the status quo and understands that a space for prayer should elevate the spirit. The mosque does so through the creation of an interior space that is rich with light and shadow, but at the same time possesses a robust simplicity that allows for deep reflection and contemplation in prayer.

“The mosque appears to be inspired by multiple sources – one essentially traditional reference is to the heritage of the formal terracotta brick structures of the Bengal Sultanate of the fifteenth century; another inspiration is the Capitol complex built by Louis Kahn in Dhaka.

“The quality of construction frequently raises the quality of life. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Bait ur Rouf Mosque, which contains an intricate geometric layering of space – a square prayer chamber contained within cylindrical walls, which are in turn enclosed by a square terracotta brick structure that serves as the austere public face of the building. Within the prayer chamber, the architect has created a delicate interplay of bare walls textured in red brick and pierced by shafts of light that create an abstract, almost primeval symbolism when viewed in conjunction with the spots of light that punctuate the surface of the bare floors at different moments of the day. This abstract symbolism is undiluted by conventional forms of mosque architecture. Gone are the dome and the ever-prevalent minarets, the decorative panels of designed relief and calligraphy. In their place stand intricately structured brick walls that imbue the structure with a unique aura of spirituality.”



Project data

<i>Clients</i>	Sufia Khatun, Dhaka, Bangladesh Marina Tabassum, Dhaka, Bangladesh Bait ur Rouf Mosque Committee, Dhaka, Bangladesh: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mohammad Abdul Hai, head and treasurer• Zulfiqer Ali Hyder, member• Jamal Abdul Naser, member
<i>Architect</i>	Marina Tabassum Architects, Dhaka, Bangladesh: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Marina Tabassum, principal• Asaduzzaman Chowdhury, Tomal, Chowdhury, Hysum Mohammad Neville, Nazmus Saquib Chowdhury, Sabrina Aftab, Kaniz Saima Tuly, Shawly Samira, Sadia Afroze, Hassan Mohammad Rakib, Rahfatun Nisa Nova, project team
<i>Structural engineer</i>	Daud Khalid Sarwar, Dhaka, Bangladesh
<i>Electrical engineer</i>	Mohammad Rafiqul Islam, Dhaka, Bangladesh
<i>Site engineer</i>	Bazlur Rahman, Dhaka, Bangladesh
<i>Brick and concrete work</i>	Shariful Islam, brick mason, Dhaka, Bangladesh
<i>Terrazzo, tile and floor</i>	Mohammad Esharul, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Project data

<i>Site area</i>	755 m ²
<i>Ground floor area</i>	700 m ²
<i>Cost</i>	150,000 USD
<i>Commission</i>	April 2005
<i>Design</i>	June 2005 – August 2006
<i>Construction</i>	September 2007 – July 2012
<i>Occupancy</i>	September 2012

Marina Tabassum

Marina Tabassum graduated from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) in 1995. The same year, with Kashef Mahboob Chowdhury, she founded URBANA, an architecture practice based in Dhaka. In 1997, her second year into practice, the firm won a prestigious national competition to design the Independence Monument of Bangladesh and the Liberation War Museum.

In 2005, Tabassum ended her ten-year partnership in URBANA to establish MTA (Marina Tabassum Architects). MTA began its journey in the quest to establish a language of architecture that is contemporary to the world yet rooted to the place. The practice is consciously kept and retained at an optimum size, and projects undertaken are carefully chosen and are limited by number per year.

Marina Tabassum is the academic director of the Bengal Institute for Architecture, Landscapes and Settlements. She has conducted design studios in BRAC University since 2005. She taught an Advanced Design Studio as visiting professor at the University of Texas.

Tabassum has lectured and presented her works and ideas on architecture at various prestigious international architectural events. She has curated exhibitions and directed architecture symposia in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her project the Pavilion Apartment in Dhaka was shortlisted for an Aga Khan Award in 2004. Tabassum received an Ananya Shirshwa Dash award which recognised the top ten women of Bangladesh in 2004.

Website

<http://mtarchitekts.com/>

