

DEGREE PROJECT

Project: "RESEARCH CENTRE FOR THE PROMOTION AND CONSERVATION OF THE HERITAGE OF NEW GOURNA (LUXOR, EGYPT)"

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PROJECT MEMO

The judges valued the rigour, development and coherence of a project whose principal difficulty lay in creating a contextual language with the existing constructions, achieved through the use of structural and building systems based entirely on ceramic elements.

See the video

DESCRIPTION

The project is located in New Gourná, just a short distance from the west bank of the River Nile on the outskirts of the Egyptian city of Luxor, heading towards the Valley of the Kings and not far from the major archaeological sites at Thebes. Designed by Hassan Fathy in the mid 20th century, the village of New Gourná is currently in a poor state of conservation; indeed the situation is so serious that UNESCO has embarked on a restoration plan. Fathy's intention was to create a prototype village for the regeneration of the Egyptian countryside that would address the principal needs and difficulties encountered by Egyptian countryfolk. A firm believer in Lamarck's theory, whereby the current genetic solution is merely the result of trial and error, Hassan Fathy considered local architecture to represent the optimum response to the needs and requirements detected.

Taking the village's specific circumstances into consideration, the project aims to address the recovery of New Gourná by providing a starting point for organising and managing the restoration process whilst at the same time satisfying the curiosity

of all those interested in finding out more about this architect's legacy.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE CHOICE OF MATERIALS

Coming up with a project solution naturally involves weighing up a seemingly endless number of variables, and this is even more the case under extreme circumstances. The combination of the economy, the climate and the situation of New Gournia itself required an in-depth prior study and a highly efficient proposal.

It is precisely for this reason that the solution adopted aims to remain in line with Fathy's original ideas, based on two key elements: simplicity and sincerity.

The chosen construction had to offer an effective and final solution for the project's interior and exterior layout, ensuring the optimum reconditioning of the spaces and a building capable of taking maximum advantage of the scant natural resources available.

In this sense, the project applies a systemised approach to a series of key 'inter' 'outer' and 'inner' elements that boast both a functional and constructive content, with the partitioned ceramic vault forming the axis on which the rest of the project hinged.

The harsh climate and lack of means demanded an outstanding degree of efficiency. Consequently, light tone ceramic tiles were chosen for the roof covering in order to reflect and mitigate heat absorption. The partitioned vault provides a simple and fast building solution that offers excellent levels of performance due to its capacity for internal ventilation and inertia, as well as effectively resolving the finishes for all the interior spaces in both the centre and the museum. The structural character of ceramic tiles confers a sense of dignity and appropriateness, as well as determining the

variable nature of the interior spaces. They contribute to establishing a tactile language that glides along the floor, and is reflected in details such as the gates and benches, without forgetting the permeable wall, projected through the use of 'inter' corner pieces.

Having established a clear vision of the circumstances surrounding this village, the project aims to provide a starting point for the recovery of New Gourna with a return to the teachings of the past, systemised into an adapted and highly efficient language.