

## The Embassy of Qatar

### Project Report for the new Embassy of Qatar in Rome

It would be something of a miracle if I could find the right words, the right expressions to communicate the spirit of a project aimed at illustrating the mixture of thoughts, images and feelings that can represent a country, Qatar. A country that wants to be worthy of its past, of the constructions that represent the country, by protecting those buildings yet, at the same time, by creating a new vision of our contemporary world: the modernity with which Qatar has established the laws of community living.

This is the idea that inspired us when we started to put pen to paper after visiting the site of the new building along the Via Camilluccia in Rome and after carefully studying the culture of our Client's Country. We are well aware that here in Rome we are surrounded by traces of the past and ruins. This is something that mankind, especially when it acts only with possession in mind, has forgotten.

The individual forgets that not only he, but all things, grow old and become obsolete once they are built and used. What never changes, what is injured but never cast aside, is nature, the outline of the mountains in the background, the line of the horizon on the sea surrounding this incredible country, its clear blue sky stretching in front of our eyes.

Nowadays, construction depends on the laws of economic profit. Nothing else influences the construction of landscapes and architectures designed to satisfy the here and now, not to leave future generations a sign - the most sincere sign possible - of one's relationship with time and space. Only the present counts and only noise and disharmony can ensue.

The mere fact of looking with sentiment at the landscape, imagining the amazing countryside of Qatar, the relentless force of natural elements like the desert and the sea, means having the right relationship with the ecosystems literally represented by the landscape. If we establish an emotional relationship with the landscape, then we're already ethically correct.

Pierre Von Meiss wrote that "a building can no longer be built just anywhere; it has to create an alliance with the earth (...). Former limitations have contributed to building coherence between the built environment and its universal relationship, and nature

(...). Freed from these limitations, if we want to restore peace between what we build and mother-earth, we have to find other ways to turn a city into "a crowd of places." The most promising methods involve compressing the land, because it is form and history that leads to an architecture that, instead of "camouflaging itself" or ignoring the fundamental traits of the site, highlights them (...). If material limitations are no longer enough to achieve the harmonious occupation of our planet, then they'll have to be ethical."<sup>1</sup>

These are the ideas behind our design, a sort of imaginary citadel that combines gardens and buildings delicately together, a sort of mirage that is timeless yet extremely concrete and capable of bringing to mind different cultures that still live together in peace.

The oasis of the mind is made up of the Embassy Building, majestic, elegant, adorned with an octagonal dome that contributes to highlighting its design while letting the light penetrate inside the great room. The building has a portico, indicating its intention to welcome all guests. Next to this building, like a younger son, is the Consulate, less important but nonetheless just as imposing because it's easy to see that both buildings come from the same family.

On the left, among the palm trees and gardens with rivulets of water, the Ambassador's residence stands out against Roman skyline. The lightness of the fretwork base brings to mind elegant halls with marble floors, perfect for lively parties and convivial meetings. There are another two, very comfortable residences with bow-windows that frame the Roman countryside. The latter, reserved for Embassy staff, complete the citadel.

The buildings have fully equipped and designed to be built using state-of-the-art technology so as to fulfil the requirements of the Tender as well as to represent the civilisation of the population of Qatar in the best possible way, not directly but by allusion, in a sort of inspiring filigree. The population of Qatar, together with its governing bodies, is a lover of peace and wishes to live quietly and with reciprocated respect with all the peoples of the earth. These are the feelings and colours that the land of Qatar wants to illustrate in the cosmopolitan city of Rome.

Our experience in recent years, including important projects such as the Mosque and Cultural Centre in Monte Antenne, means we have acquired important technological know how - from the columns in precompressed concrete to the domes that rest on a system of interlacing arches. We are also aware that certain elements should be included in any proposal we put forward.

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Von Meiss, *Dalla forma al luogo*, Ulrico Hoepli Editore, Milan, 1992, p. 157

In the first place, we want the garden to be important. We'd like it to be a mixture between an Italian Baroque garden and an Arab garden designed to cool and comfort the spirit. A garden where the waters, like the Alhambra in Granada, conjure up images of the Tigris and the Euphrates. Our aim is to emphasise the dialogue, the exchange that exists between our two cultures: the land of origin that espouses the host land.

The date palm reigns over the open spaces planted with many species.

One of the most beautiful images of Qatar and other Gulf States we brought home from our travels and which fascinated us most, was the countless bunches of dates that hung from the thousands and thousands of palm trees lining the roads and avenues.

Date palms have always played a crucial role in the lives of these populations because of how incredibly good this fruit is. It is sold and appreciated all over the world. So it's only right that it become a guest in the city of Rome, a city that has always appreciated Eastern cultures.

Another characteristic element we used in our design is the wind tower (barjjeel) which was once used to cool down the houses. This element can be built using state-of-the-art technology.

The tower is open on all four sides and captures even the lightest breeze. The wind is channelled downwards inside the main chimney and into an underground room. The speed of the air increases and the air cools down. The cooler air, already in the chimney enters the tower thereby conventionally cooling the hot outside air.

The third element is the almost dreamy presence of the perspective of the arches, perhaps unconsciously inspired by the arches of the Duke's Palace in Venice, a city where the seeds of Rome and Byzantium, of Europe and the Orient, of the restless West and the peaceful East all flowered.

I'd like to end this brief description illustrating this proposal that we hope will satisfy all the client's requirements by saying that we would like to see the project turned into stone. Once built and inhabited by the warmth of man, like other architectures that have left their mark on this earth, we hope that we will be able to define it by using these words: "its beauty, even then, made it old, but today it seems to us to be fresh, as if just finished. It exudes an eternal youth that makes it immune to the ravages of time, as though its spirit never ceases to flower and its soul never grows old."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> S. Settis, *Futuro del classico*, Einaudi Turin 2004, p. 81