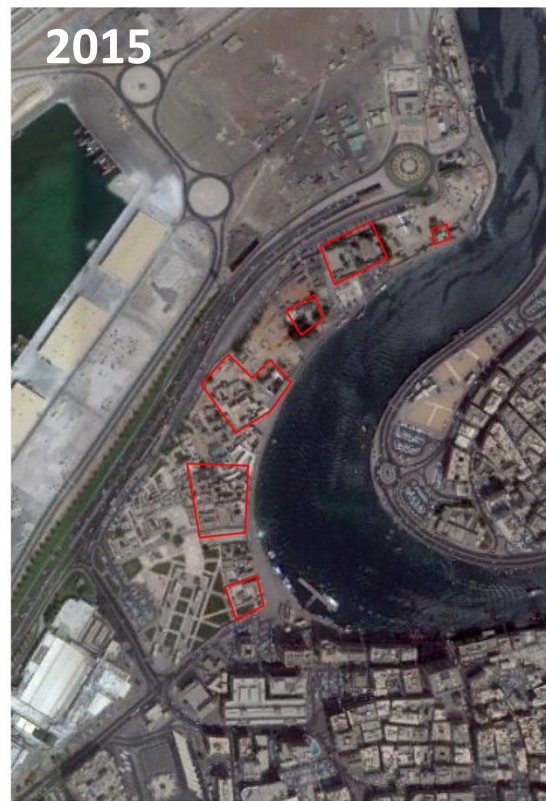
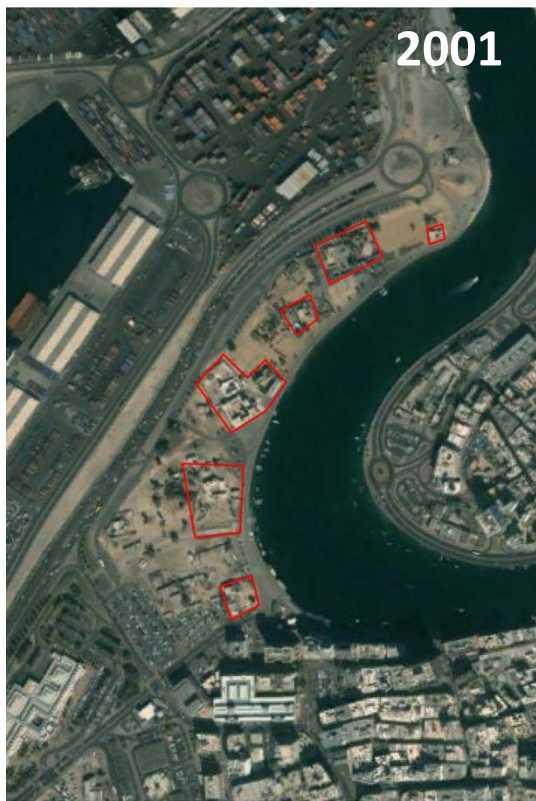


Al Shindagha – Artifacts, Layers, Traces, and Trends

This essay is of particular interest to me because it portrays my outlook on life. I go through life understanding what was, appreciating what is, and creating what could be. So it is always interesting when I can study an urban fabric and trace some of its artifacts to the past and predict its future. I do that almost on a daily basis, for example; while traveling to and from university, introspecting and trying to intuitively understand and analyze the nuances that are embedded within these structures. I reflect on it and try to read and research as much as possible, and then imagine a utopia. This process is what I tried to emulate with al Shindagha, I walked through the site and took down a lot of notes (mentally and physically) and tried to explore my findings on a deeper level.



I spent a lot of time thinking and trying to decide how I was going to present my findings and talk about my different ideas, and then suddenly it hit me! I could organize it according to my new knowledge of architecture. During my recent readings I found a definition of 'architecture' that really resonated with me – Architecture comprises of artifacts, the knowledge of artifacts, and the professional practice of designing artifacts, connecting with each other in a recursive network. In this way, I've come to understand that artifacts do not necessarily have to pertain to just buildings, rather they include 3 scales of design; urban fabric, building, and component. For example, we learned about the city of Rome which is a polycentric amalgamation of the Colosseum, the Vatican, the Spanish Steps, and the Pantheon; a good example of a building is the Monolithic church in Ethiopia which I found while doing my research on African Architecture; and lastly a component, for example the

Greek Orders – Doric, Ionic, Corinthian. Moreover, I would like to communicate my conceptions of artifacts I found interesting in al Shindagha through the 3 scales of architecture and design.

The first scale that I tried to analyze and trace is the urban fabric. Because of the demarcation of the site from the surrounding context, it was not too hard to study it as an autonomous body. While walking through the site you will undoubtedly experience a nostalgia and deep history of the site as well as a disconnection from a history of emptiness that the site went through. This is a very major factor that I noticed and in fact talked about in the previous papers; at first I did research about the first recorded settlements by British Lieutenant Cogan who talked about the smallpox outbreak in 1841 which result in a large migration of people from the Bur Dubai side of the creek to move to Deira. When I experienced the 'ghost town' feeling (a sense that there was a period of static engagement), I immediately thought that this was a direct result of the occurrence in 1841. But then in my last paper I discussed a new finding that I discovered, which surprised me very much; I downloaded the Google Earth software and used the 'history' tool to study older maps of my site (oldest available is 2001) and I found that in this period most of the buildings there today were not even built, only the Sheikh's Palace and few other buildings were there. The reason this is so interesting is because it gives a much better explanation for the 'deserted' feeling the site emits. It raises the question 'When did people move out?' and 'For how long have people not lived there?' because after the 1841 smallpox outbreak, people moved back to settle on the site along with Sheikh Saeed al Maktoum, who lived there until 1958. According to my research, it was between 1980s and 1990s that most residents moved out to enjoy the expansion and luxury that Dubai was beginning to have, which left Shindagha uninhabited until 1997 when the Dubai government decided to restore Shindagha as a Heritage Village. And then in 2009 they rebuilt most of the buildings that are visible today, which explains the 'ghost town' feeling that still lingers on the famous Shindagha site.



Rem Koolhaas is one of my favorite architects, not because of his buildings per say, but mostly because of his writings and perspective on architecture and the world. I recently read his most popular book – Delirious New York – and it was perfect timing because he did with New York exactly what I am aiming to do with al Shindagha. He analyzed everything from forms, functions, and structures, to the sociology of its inhabitants and the tracings and formation of it's history, and he wrote it in such a way I've never read before. That is the approach I have aimed to emulate with my writings. With that being said (or rather written), I would like to make a guestimate and prediction of the state that al Shindagha will be in the future.

I imagine that the market capitalism or the market economy will affect it again tremendously. The reason I say this is because it has already happened and it is currently happening in the rest of Dubai. The potential money gain dictates the potential investment and/or approval, therefore I think it is highly likely that Shindagha will undergo yet another transformation (masked as a restoration) that will render it denser and possibly built vertically as well. The same thing was experienced in between 1997 and 2009 when they decided to turn it into a heritage village and 'restore' some of the old buildings there that would then become museums that would attract visitors and tourists. My prediction of verticality is due to the restriction of the site for future growth; it is already demarcated and would likely remain that way, so I find it highly likely that to accommodate more influx of visitors they will likely expand vertically.



There are many buildings in al Shindagha that I could analyze as artifacts but that could be a paper on it's own, so I have decided to narrow it down to 2 prominent buildings on the site, both built around a hundred years ago. The first building is of course Sheikh Saeed al Maktoum's Residence, it was built in 1896 to serve as the residence for the ruling Al Maktoum family. I see this building (and many like it) as a time portal into recent history, as I discussed in paper 1 & 2, it is embedded with a lawful inscription of information that you can read like braille. There are so many clues that become apparent to anyone that looks closely enough and studies the artifact, of course to the untrained eye this is just 'another nice palace from

the 20th century', but to us architects who understand the sociology, psychology and identity embedded within the walls of a building, it opens up a window into the past. The new buildings that were built in 2009 were built to emulate the past structures that existed on the site, in terms of orientation, spatial arrangement, materiality, etc. A very evident feature of this house is the two contradictory elements it is built around – wealth and simplicity. If you asked me, as an architect, to design a building that embodied these two features, I would have thought it impossible but Sheikh Saeed al Maktoum's house does that exactly. The empirical presentation and size of the house, with its many wings and variety of styles shows that the owner had to be wealthy, even giving the fact that this house was built over a hundred years ago. The simplistic materiality and modest façade of the building come almost as a shock, if you were told you were going to the Sheikh's Palace and arrive at a building that seems very similar to the surrounding buildings when studied at a superficial level. So this juxtaposing feature coupled with the proximity to the surrounding buildings (which were built to represent existing buildings of the past) gives an insight into the psychology and identity of the royalty of 19th century Dubai, as well as the sociological disposition of its residence. This is especially evident when you compare it to the existing Sheikh Maktoum Palace, in Zabeel, which is extravagant – so much so that it has a horse ranch in the back. The new palace is very disconnected with its citizens through acres of land and a demarcating fence. There are, though, some similarities like the privacy factor; he uses fences and a forest of trees.



The second building I would like to analyze is Sheikh Juma al Maktoum's house; although it is also somewhat of a royal palace, it shows more of what a 'regular' life consisted of at the time. It has many features that can be extrapolated and used to describe life at the time; firstly, the courtyard which of course exemplifies the religious, cultural and climatic responses to the context that I spoke about in the second paper. There are also many other features, both indigenous (from the context) and traditional (passed down). Like the courtyard and the wind towers, that cool the building through conduction and the stack effect; the intricate

carvings on the wood panels that exhibit traditional Islamic architecture. but must of all is this element – the balcony overlooking the creek. Imagine a business man today who works from home, that has a computer screen with cameras in his business or warehouse to manage the activities and workers. The same concept is used here, the balcony is overlooking the creek so it was possible to monitor trading activities from home. This is such an insightful artifact!

Another very interesting concept that I think applies to this is Mr Massimo's lecture that he gave on Wednesday the 16th about 'Incremental Architecture', or as I like to call it 'open-source architecture'. This is a nice parallel to draw because as he explained, there is a sense of unpredictability that architects should become comfortable with when designing, like Alejandro Aravena's buildings. This is interesting because of the change that this building had to go through and might have to go through in the future, like the adaptation to a new function. It originally designed and built to serve as a residence for Sheikh Juma, in 1927, then later became the Traditional Architecture Museum. In the future it is possible that it could undergo further transformation and have to adapt to new possibilities.



Component. There are so many elements, features and types that could fill this category, and I could write another 10 pages just on components. The one that has the most interesting story and most challenging future application is the 'barjeel' or as it is sometimes referred to, the 'Bastakiya', which cools the the building through conduction in a rather sophisticated way. The area known as 'Bastakiya' was actually home to immigrants from Persia – Bastak people, who called it 'badgir'. They introduced these barjeel towers that are now popular in 'Dubai Architecture'. The 3 observations I would like to make are; tradition origin, kinetic capacity, and future application. As I explained in my second paper, there is a difference between 'traditional' and 'indigenous', traditional is that which is passed down through generations or

that which has come to be accepted, while indigenous is that which was developed by the local people's experience or self expressions. So it is interesting to find out that, contrary to popular belief, the barjeel/bastakiya is not actually an element of indigenous architecture, rather it is actually traditional architecture that has been passed down through generations.



I have always been interested in kinetic architecture, because to me it was always 'the other' and I have always loved 'the other'! Growing up in Nigeria, until the age of 13 with post colonial modernist architecture, and then moving to London until I was 20, with Victorian/neoclassical architecture, it became embedded in my head that 'architecture' was a term synonymous to 'static', so anytime I would see an introduction of kinetic or responsive architecture I would get excited. Now that I research history a bit more I find out that in fact many different style have used kinetic elements (maybe not automated) and this is one example. Originally the barjeel was a dismountable component that was built during the summer and then dismantled during the winter seasons, this is fascinating to me because it means already architects were thinking of responsive elements, kinetic capacities, and adaptable architecture; it might be primitive but it is still much more advanced than many buildings that are completely irresponsive today.

The future is bright, but I cant find the light to shine on windtowers. I have been researching and thinking about a modern/future application for windtowers that would be efficient, and not just compensatory as an aesthetic representation, since the first paper. I have not been able to develop anything solid, and the main reason for this is the invention of the air conditioner, there is no compromise that could accommodate both sustainably. For example if you have an air conditioner in a building then the building has to be completely sealed for it to be efficient. The only alternative is to give an option to tenants, to have an automated

opening that allows the windtower to cool the rooms when the air conditioner is turned off, but as realist I doubt very much that this option will be popular or a good alternative. So my hypothesis remains – the air conditioner killed the windtower!

In conclusion I think this site has layers of meaning and history at all scales; as an urban fabric, in terms of buildings, and components. I could read and write about it for days! The only thing I would not do for days is walk around the site, because it is situated in a site with a scorching desert sun. The site as a whole has transformed over time, experiencing periods of isolation and reconstruction, and I predict we will see further reconstruction in the future as the visitors and tourists increase. The buildings teach us a lot about the state of the people during the 19th century and early 20th century and it will be very interesting to see how they will further develop in the future, possibly in terms of adapting to new functions. Lastly the barjeel is a very popular component, seen on nearly every house in Dubai, yet it happens to be a traditional element and not an indigenous one, and I still cannot find a future application for it so it might be time for Dubai to adopt new traditional elements, or possibly even create a new indigenous one.