

Step Into the Sancaklar Mosque

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A High Schooler's Perspective on Emre Arolat's Sancaklar Mosque

Mosques have distinct architectural features that have a consistent overall structure but can vary in specific features depending on regional traditions and settings. The Sancaklar Mosque stands out amongst its peers with its unique design blending it with the tundra landscape of Büyükçekmece, İstanbul as it eschews architectural and cultural conventions to instead embrace a more simplistic and natural design that aims to help visitors enter a meditative state. In my opinion, it is one of the most striking mosque designs of modern times. It should be seen as a piece of art that helps us experience the universality of faith and spirituality, and it should be visited regardless of a person's faith.



Experience Timelessness and Freedom at the Sancaklar Mosque

According to Arolat, the cave-like structure of the architecture alludes to the Cave of Hira, located in the Jabal Al-Nour Mountain, where the Prophet Muhammad spent time meditating and was presented with his first revelation of the holy Quran by Hazrat Jibreel. Arolat cleverly laid out the structure so that visitors who enter it would be facing the Qibla which is where one is supposed to be facing during prayer. The ceiling consists of several asymmetric layers that migrate inward and will catch the eye of anyone that enters the architecture. It is lined with windows to allow natural light in, which creates an alluring ambience and triggers peacefulness. The mosque is objectively and significantly dimmer than other mosques because there are no direct light sources: all of the natural light is reflected from surfaces and hence is incredibly smooth. To maintain this ambience, Arolat also thought to illuminate the stairway that goes to the main prayer hall with hidden LED lights. This play between shade and light is abundant throughout the design.

Room to Fill Up on Meditation

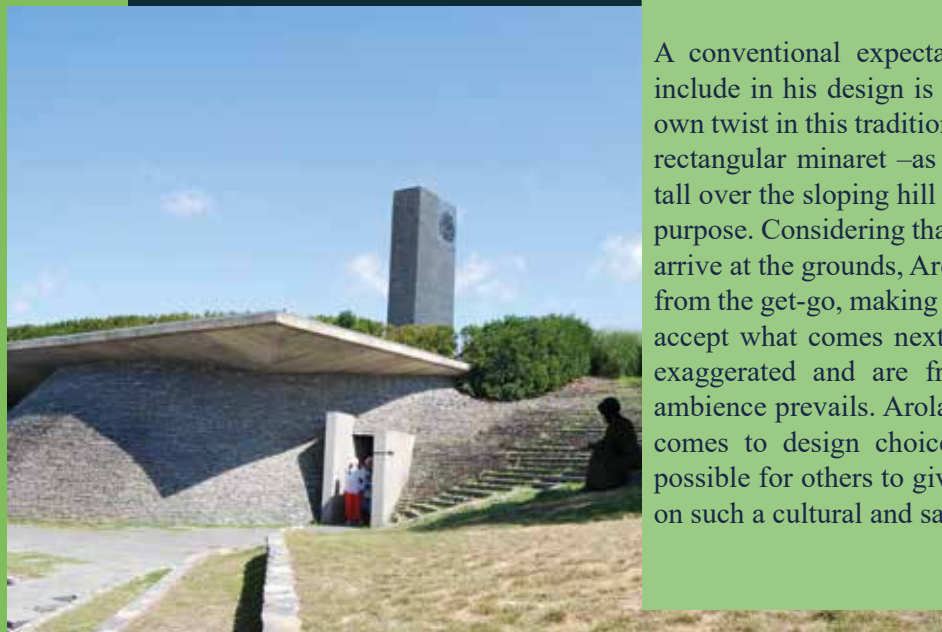
Spanning 1300 square meters and able to accommodate 650 people to answer the call for prayer, the architect Emre Arolat presents an opportunity to pray with nature at the Sancaklar Mosque. Although the mosque is built underground due to its sloping terrain, visitors feel anything but confined while indoors. Its simple and clean feel is partially owed to the basal and slate stones that were used throughout. The design's minimalism creates ample open space that is free from the restrictions of any localised culture or tradition. This helps evoke feelings of awe, of being alone with one's inner self, and primes a meditative mood for its visitors. How Arolat designed the mosque to act as one with the soil alludes to Sufist philosophy with its minimalist, humble and literally down-to-earth properties.



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Your Journey to Your Inner Self Starts Here

A conventional expectation from mosques that Arolat did choose to include in his design is the visible minaret. Still, he managed to put his own twist in this tradition by choosing an unorthodox shape. His bold and rectangular minaret –as opposed to an expected cylindrical one– stands tall over the sloping hill entrance, announcing the mosque's presence and purpose. Considering that the minaret is what greets all visitors when they arrive at the grounds, Arolat's dissent from conventional norms is evident from the get-go, making it somewhat easier for a conservative audience to accept what comes next. The materials used in the design are far from exaggerated and are free of unnecessary clusters: instead, a stylish ambience prevails. Arolat is not greedy with pushing boundaries when it comes to design choices. His overall elegance in defiance makes it possible for others to give Arolat the artistic freedom to put his own take on such a cultural and sacred symbol.



and

Arolat not only communicates his message through architecture but also complements it with Islamic calligraphy on a black reflecting wall: “waw” (“و”) in Arabic, which symbolises love and unity, and is used to connect things together. It may be translated as “and” to English, but if you look at it, you can see what it really is: a comma. The 21st century is the century of globalization. Faith demands being borderless, to be wide open to all beliefs much more than it was possible to be in the past. Perhaps in “waw”'s spirit, Arolat also built a library to go with the mosque, encouraging all visitors to learn and understand one another through shared knowledge.

