

Press release

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Foster + Partners reveals designs for United Arab Emirates pavilion at Milan Expo

Designs have been revealed for the United Arab Emirates pavilion at the 2015 Milan Expo. Bringing the planning principles of the traditional desert city to Milan, the pavilion's interior of self-shaded streets evokes the experience of the UAE's ancient communities, while demonstrating the natural energy efficiency of their compact urban form.

The pavilion occupies a large site close to the centre of the Expo and is accessed via its main circulation axis, the decumanus. From here, visitors are drawn into the mouth of a canyon-like space, defined by two undulating 12-metre-high walls. Influenced by ancient planning principles, the paths through the pavilion evoke the narrow pedestrian streets and courtyards of the ancient desert city – and its contemporary reinterpretation in the sustainable Masdar City masterplan in Abu Dhabi.

The walls continue throughout the 140 metre site in a series of parallel waves, unifying the visitor spaces within a dynamic formal language designed to evoke the ridges and texture of sand dunes. To convey a distinctive sense of place, the texture of the walls derives from a scan taken in the desert and construction will utilise materials to represent the different shades of sand across the Emirates. The GRC panels are supported by a steel frame, which can be easily demounted and reconstructed for the pavilion's eventual relocation in the UAE.

A ramp leads gently upwards from the entrance towards the auditorium. Along this route, the irrigation aqueducts that have traditionally supported agriculture in the region are introduced in digital form, and augmented reality devices help to bring the story of the Emirates to life. A state-of-the-art auditorium is contained within a drum at the heart of the site. After the screening, visitors follow a path through further interactive displays and digital talks, including a special exhibit celebrating Dubai as host city for the 2020 Expo.

The pavilion responds to the Milan Expo's theme of 'feeding the planet' by integrating a variety of dining options around the theme of modern Emirati food. At the end of the exhibition trail visitors reach a green oasis leading into a ground level café, with a formal restaurant on the first floor and a hospitality roof terrace on top. The landscaping around the pavilion and in the open public areas is designed to evoke the terrain and flora of the UAE.

The design targets LEED 'Platinum' through a combination of passive principles and active techniques, from rainwater capture on the roof garden to the integration of photovoltaic cells. Most significantly, the building is designed to be recycled and rebuilt in the UAE after the Expo. The launch of designs has also been considered as part of the environmental impact – to eliminate flights, designs are being presented at a live online press conference that connects hubs in London, Milan and Abu Dhabi.

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Norman Foster:

“We are very proud to be chosen again to create the national pavilion for the UAE. Our challenge has been to design for two climates – to create a naturally cool, comfortable space for visitors in Milan, while considering the pavilion’s ultimate reconstruction in the Emirates, where there is a need to provide shade from the intense sun. The design reflects our investigations into the form of ancient cities and our appreciation for the desert landscape. It also maximises the opportunities presented by the elongated site – the dramatic canyon-like entrance will welcome people inside, and the channels between the high walls provide intuitive circulation, naturally leading visitors to the auditorium, exhibition and restaurant spaces.”

Links:

www.expo2015uae.com

UAE Pavilion Milan Expo 2015 Video

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