

Press release

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Foster + Partners pavilion for United Arab Emirates opens at Milan Expo

The United Arab Emirates pavilion at the 2015 Milan Expo opened today. 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 are suggestive of the narrow pedestrian streets and courtyards of the ancient desert city – and its contemporary reinterpretation in the sustainable Masdar City masterplan in Abu Dhabi, designed by Foster + Partners.

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 express 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. The GRC (Glassfibre Reinforced Concrete) panels are supported by a steel frame, which can be easily demounted and reconstructed for the pavilion's eventual relocation in the UAE.

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A ramp leads gently upwards from the entrance towards the auditorium, and augmented reality devices help to bring the story of the Emirates to life. The 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. At the end of the exhibition trail visitors reach a green oasis. The landscaping around the pavilion and in the open public areas is designed to evoke the terrain and flora of the UAE.

The design follows the principles of LEED with a combination of passive and active techniques. Most significantly, the building is designed to be recycled and rebuilt in the UAE after the Expo.

In creating the pavilion, Foster + Partners has worked closely with The National Media Council, United Arab Emirates, Chairman, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Commissioner General Salem Al Ameri.

"We are very proud to be chosen to create the national pavilion for the United Arab Emirates. 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 welcomes people inside,

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and the channels between the high walls provide intuitive circulation, naturally leading visitors to the auditorium, exhibition and courtyard spaces."

Norman Foster, Founder and Executive Chairman

"Our pavilion is unique for its representation of the desert landscape and planning traditions of the Emirates. In terms of climate and water scarcity, the UAE is experiencing today what the world will experience tomorrow. Our design highlights the challenges of sustaining life in a desert climate, while demonstrating how efficient passive design solutions can help to support sustainable modern communities. Like the UAE pavilion in Shanghai, the structure is designed to be dismantled and rebuilt after the Expo."

Gerard Evenden, Senior Executive Partner

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