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THE ROCKS...THE SEA... AND FAMILY BY MY SIDE

A spectacular home in Mounsef, Lebanon takes its inspiration from the elements surrounding it - rock formations and the magnificent Mediterranean Sea. This bungalow by BLANKPAGE Architects + Karim Nader Studio lies low on the land, its lines superbly echoing the horizontality of its locale.

Once in a way, an architect comes across a site so exquisite, that extra efforts are merited to make the built form one with its surroundings. This site certainly qualifies. It is situated in front of the Mediterranean Sea, on the coast of Lebanon in the town of Mounsef, north of Beirut. "A home by the sea, for friends and family," said the brief. But this is not just any home. A luxurious beach front mansion, it sprawls over a site measuring 3,000 sq m, is surrounded by beautiful rock formations and enjoys a clear access to the sea. "Our focus was on the quality of the spaces," says Karim Nader of Karim Nader Studio.

Add Walid Ghantous and Patrick Mezher of BLANKPAGE Architects, "Our goal, always is to start every project from a blank page, without any preconception of form or style. We have reinterpreted a series of environmental aspects of the site: the sunshine, the air, the rock formation of the coastline on which it sits - to embrace the seashore without any unnecessary mediation other than the perpetual sound of waves crashing onto the shore."

Text By Devyani Jayakar
Photographs Courtesy NadimAsfar,
Marwan Harmouche and
BahaaGhoussainy.



Photo credits Marwan Harmouche

At the entrance, visitors are guided from the parking towards the central courtyard by water features.



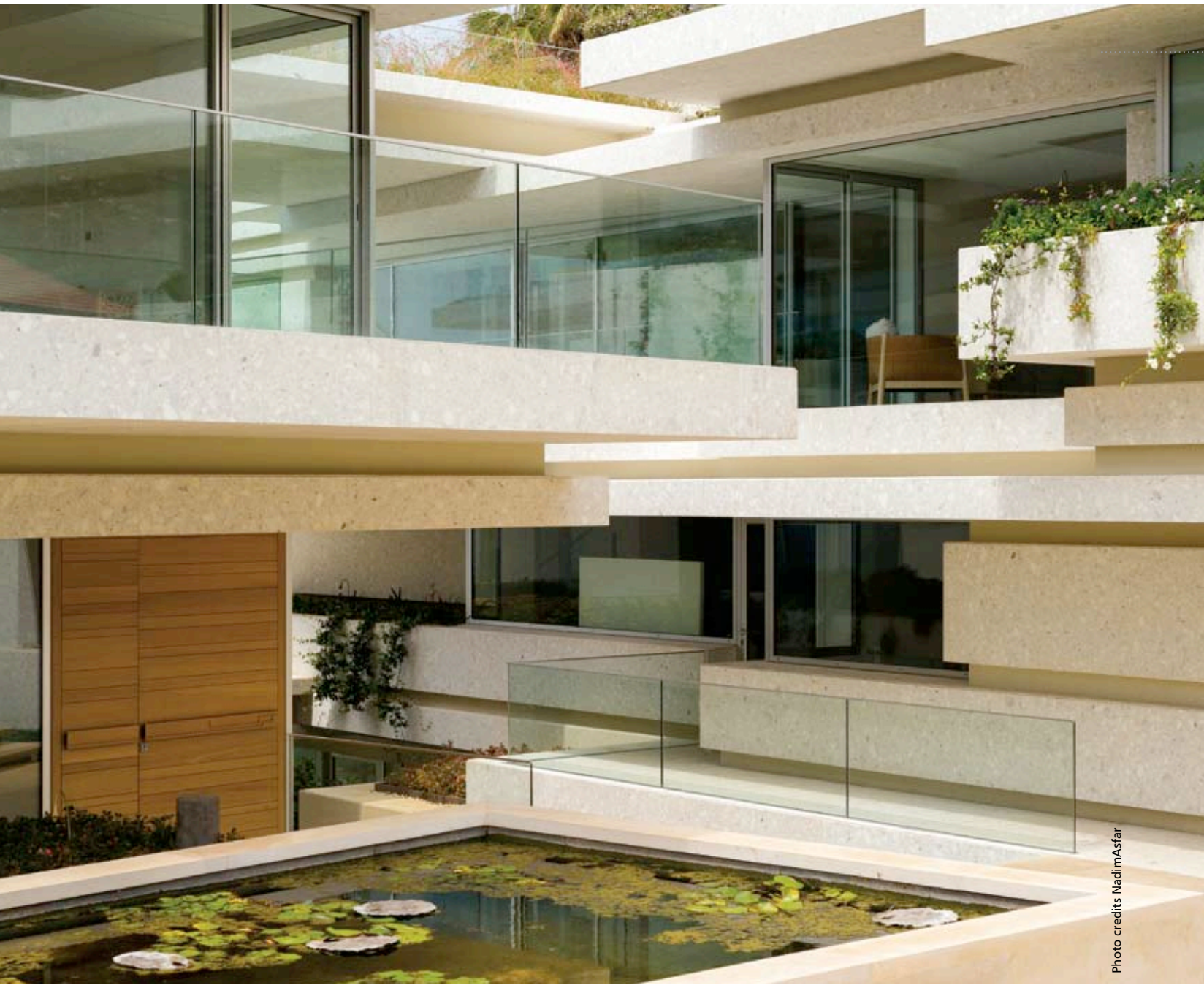


Photo credits Nadim/Asfar

"Its composition of overlapping levels is inspired by the nearby rock formations and the house recalls the layout of traditional homes where rooms are grouped around a courtyard. The courtyard here opens up completely towards the sea, the two side volumes set at an angle that allows them to embrace as wide a horizon as possible with nature flowing through them," says Karim.

In this sense, the topography and the rock formations of the coastline continue within the house; the sea itself is very much part of this residence, as water and salty breezes appear to converse with the stratification of the home's architectural elements.

"The client wanted as many bedrooms as possible, since he has two daughters and two sons. Two of these children are married with children of their own, so when the family gets together, they need several bedrooms. We have also designed the public spaces in the bungalow to extend to the outside, so as to benefit from the beautiful landscape," says Karim.

The site dictated an access to the home from one side. "Even though this was imposed on us, we used it to enable visitors to discover water features before seeing the real sea," says Karim. "From the parking, the walkway is perpendicular to the house with the water features hinting at the discovery of the sea which is to come further on." The bungalow has a total surface area of 2,000 sq m and is divided into two volumes placed in a V-shape with connecting bridges, to maximise the view of the sea even from the rooms at the rear.

The two side wings direct people's gaze towards the Mediterranean through an ample staircase that leads from the garage to a reception area, in the very core of the house. The plan has three levels which are indented, while the courtyard in the middle recalls oriental shading and ventilation methods.

The external void revealed by this split of the volumes reveals a cascading spine with a terraced staircase and water pools that gently fall down from the terrace via the bridging reception area. The lowest level is the basement which holds all the public spaces and connects to the sea.



The master suite on the second floor shows an interplay between inside and outside with a smooth flow of spaces and materials on a minimal white canvas.





All the furniture is in pale woods. The square dining table seats 12, providing space for the large family to be together at mealtimes.

Photo credits Marwan Harmouche

The reception here has a large glazed façade spanning over 10 m which slides open to dissolve the vestige of a barrier between the inside and the magnificent shimmering seascape. Also located here are the living room, the bar, the gym and the kitchen.

From the reception area one may step out onto the terrace, walk towards the pool and descend towards the beach. The ground and first levels hold 11 bedroom suites, each with views of the shoreline and the water, and other living rooms.

At the ground floor, a suspended terrace facilitates circulation between the two wings and also functions as a breakfast space, while the roof is like a garden terrace with a bridge connecting the two volumes. Natural light floods the spaces, the courtyard assisting in inviting a significant amount of light into the inner spaces. At night, the house looks like an assemblage of glass light boxes, its horizontal lines accentuated by illuminated coves.

“We’ve adopted a Zen approach to the aesthetic,” says Karim, “white walls, light woods and a neutral palette of fabrics with just touches of aqua. The flooring is in durable white terrazzo, its marble chips echoing the outside terrain. Glass, of course, is impervious to the salty air and the aluminium has been specially developed for a sea side environment. Exposed steel has been kept to a minimum, to reduce corrosion issues.”

The language is a celebration of the horizontality of the sea and the horizon as well as the striation of the rocks. This linearity is reflected in the lines of the house, sitting low on the site. “Although the building laws dictated that we couldn’t go too high, what we’ve done is stretched the building sideways even more to accentuate this aspect,” says Karim. And of course, in addition to the sights and sounds, the pervasive presence of the salty breeze wafting through the rooms is a constant reminder of the proximity of the sea.



Even the bathrooms appear to be one with nature, the glass windows pulling in the landscape all the way up to the horizon.

Photo credits Marwan Harmouche

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