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En plein air: exploring today's pioneering outdoor trends

Beach pearl: lustrous and understated oceanfront elegance

Loving Lebanon: living the contemporary Levantine dream

Interior chic: Sarah Lavoine's five-star Parisienne style

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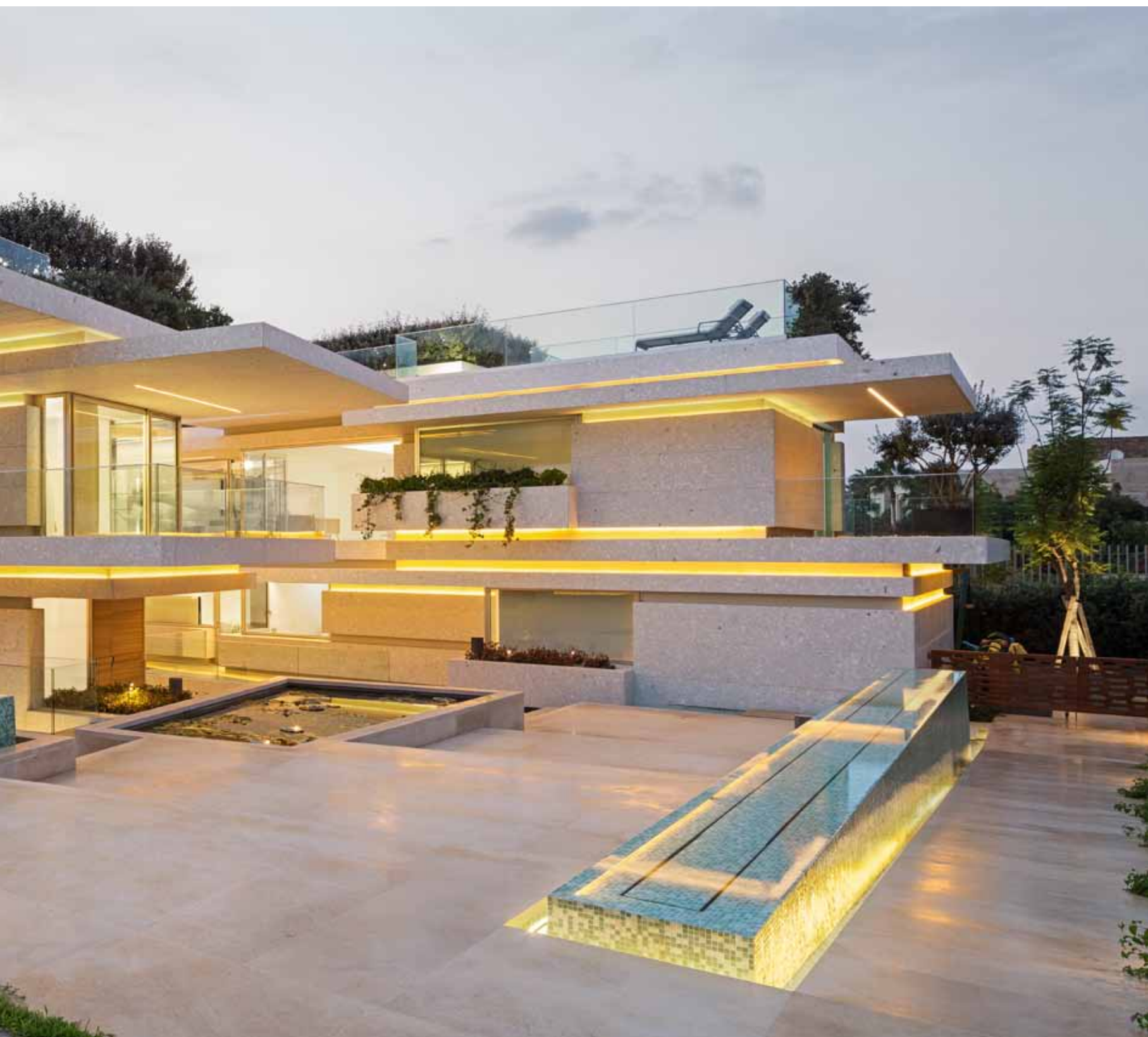


The entrance area includes water features that lead the way towards the sea

Seaside vista

BLANKPAGE Architects and Karim Nader Studio designed Villa Kali, a contemporary oasis in one of Lebanon's ancient cities.

TEXT: JOANNE MOLINA



A vivacious intermingling of classic and modern, Villa Kali sits some 40 kilometres north of Beirut in Mounsef, close to the ancient seaport city of Byblos. Alive with the exhilarating natural elements that create its environs, its inimitable views of Mediterranean Sea are matched only by its sleek, yet inviting style.

Villa Kali was designed by architects Patrick Mezher and Walid Ghantous of Lebanon-based BLANKPAGE Architects, and Karim Nader of Karim Nader Studio, who were commissioned to undertake the project because of their overwhelming success in the region.

In 2011, BLANKPAGE was declared winner of two competitions: with the SEF

355 office complex in Sin el Fil commissioned by Express International; and Triade, a multi-use project commissioned by Medproperties and M-Tower S.A.L. In 2012, the company was declared the laureate of the Kfardebian country club competition, amongst a panel of twelve competing firms, and more recently won the commission for a 20,000 m² eco-resort in Bamako, Mali, organised by Omnium Capital.

Karim Nader, who recently opened his own studio in Saifi, in the heart of the Beirut art scene, was named first prize winner of the Azar Award as well as the third prize winner of the Areen Award for Excellence in Architecture at the American University of Beirut.



PHOTO: MARIAN HARBLOUCHE

Framing sea and sky, the central courtyard cascades down towards the common reception area and all the way to the sea



PHOTO: MARIAN HARBLOUCHE

Main reception: *On the Rocks* sofa by Edra; carpets: *Erased Heritage* by Jan Kath for Iwan Maktabi; suspension, *Cerf-Volant* by Design in Beirut, Karim Nader and BLANKPAGE; coffee tables, *Pebbles Bling Bling* by Nada Debs; floor, reconstituted marble by Quarella with natural wood inserts.



PHOTO: MADMASAR

A view towards the sea



PHOTO: MADMASAR

Large windows offer unimpeded views of the sea



PHOTO: MERWANPANGLOE

An external staircase leads to the roof level

The 2000-square metre home's contemporary design integrates the sunshine, the air and the rock formation of the coastline into a warm, elegant site of respite. But it's the sea – the main character of this architectural production – that takes centre stage.

"The openness to the surrounding landscape was very important for our clients. They wanted a minimal level of obstruction between themselves and the environment. We responded to their requests with an open plan arrangement for the house with rooms that capitalise on views, sunlight and wind exposure. You can smell the salt-kissed breeze passing through the rooms," says architect Ghantous.

The house, whose composition of overlapping levels were inspired by the nearby rock formations, refers to 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, nature flowing through them. In this sense, the topography and the rock formations of the coastline continue ideally within the house; the sea itself is very much part of this residence, as water and the salty breeze dialogue with the stratification of its architectural elements.

The architects spent almost four years working on the luxury beach-front mansion, designing every single detail. The home consists of two volumes opening towards the sea in a V-shape, with connecting bridges.

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. Around this more public area, that may be sheltered or



PHOTO: MARIAN HARKOUCHE

Second bedroom level (north) looking towards the mountain: bed, custom-made by Karim Nader and BLANKPAGE, manufactured by Woodlab; bedsheets custom-made by Antoine Karam for Karim Nader and the architects; tables, *Canoe & Kayak* by Karim Nader and BLANKPAGE manufactured by Woodlab; chairs, *Cyborg* by Magis



Walid Ghantous



Patrick Mezher



Karim Nader

totally opened-up to the elements by means of a sliding glass door system, 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 or descend towards the beach.

"The most important lifestyle components of the villa, which we elevated to the major organising features in the project, are the terrace pool and the courtyard. One continuous glass wall, spanning over ten metres, connects the reception area with the pool, the beach, the shimmering waters of the Mediterranean Sea and beyond. The courtyard brings in additional light to the gym on the ground floor," says Mezher.

The two upper floors contain 11 bedroom suites, each with views of the shoreline and the water and other living rooms. A suspended terrace at ground floor level facilitates circulation between the two wings. A garden

roof completes the composition, referencing once again the rock formations of the site.

"The process of designing, constructing and inhabiting the house has been exciting for us all: architects and owners. As designers, we responded to our clients' request for a light-filled beach house that would be spacious enough to accommodate large parties and gatherings," says Nader.

"We experimented with a surprising interplay of interior and exterior space, taking full advantage of the site and topography. The residents very much enjoyed following the entire home-building process and are now ready to take full advantage of their elegant yet exuberant home, built for entertaining large groups of friends." With its serene style and uplifting ethos, we foresee many festive evenings. 