

Challenges for Rebuilding Iraq

Contributed by Uriya Saed, PhD adapted from an article that first appeared in AIArchitect.

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SUMMARY

Uriya Saed offers his suggestions towards a successful reconstruction of the built Iraq. He lists twelve issues that a potential designer or builder should be aware of.

BUILDING FOR A NEW FUTURE

“The evil that men do lives after them—the good is oft interred with their bones.” This is most likely a true statement for the last Iraqi regime. However, we cannot let the good of the U.S. intervention be forgotten in time with only the current turmoil as a remembrance. What can we do as architects and builders to ensure a lasting legacy of good will between Iraqi and U.S. citizens? By rebuilding the physical infrastructure of the major cities of Iraq—the



public and industrial buildings that are symbols of a country and a government—we can help demonstrate to the Iraqi people that the U.S. is committed to making life better for the average Iraqi and provide much-needed jobs for the large number of unemployed in the major cities.

Public-building construction can be a rallying point for ensuring the development of a secular government and must reflect local customs and culture to ensure acceptance and use. This implies using Iraqi architects and planners as part of the reconstruction team. As a former official in the Ministry of Municipality in the North of Iraq (Iraqi Kurdistan) and an assistant professor at the University of Technology in Baghdad, I can assure

all that there are enough trained Iraqi individuals to provide the needed input to ensure both design and construction success.

I would emphasize that we not simply rebuild public buildings as they once were but redesign the buildings for a new Iraq, incorporating past classical architectural components into the design of new buildings that provide hope and promise for a strong and peaceful democratic Iraq.

Iraq is about the size of Texas and lies northeast of Saudi Arabia and west of Iran, with a population of about 25 million, the greatest number of whom live between the twin rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates. This area is thought by many to be the home of humankind’s earliest organized settlements.



It is a given that Iraq will undergo major reconstruction. Initially, this process will be dominated by large U.S. and U.K. corporations, but there will be significant opportunities for subcontractors with expertise in all phases of design and construction. Interested companies that want to participate in Iraq reconstruction projects should begin now to form their teams.

TWELVE IMPORTANT ISSUES IN IRAQI DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

- There is no recent tradition of open competition for design and construction projects.
- There are no provisions for handicapped access in town planning and public buildings and housing, although the need clearly exists.

- Traffic flow is heavy and needs a consistent planning effort as well as more focus on public conveyances (e.g., a bus and subway system).
- Little low-income housing built under modern codes and traditional architectural design methods exists or is currently planned.
- Local materials and customs must be used as part of the traditional design process, such as stones, fired bricks, and proper site placement and building orientation.
- Middle Eastern design style is important: inner courtyards, verandas, sheltered balconies, green spaces, water elements, arches, and garden spaces as public meeting areas. The idea is to manufacture a comfortable microclimate that enhances the building and its visitors and occupants. Natural air conditioning (referred to as the badger system, pronounced bad-ger) has been the traditional means of protection from the harsher elements of direct sunlight and temperature extremes.
- There is a need to increase the amount of public parks and green spaces in town planning.
- Involve the affected citizens in the design process, not as if it were a formal environmental impact statement but simply as a good design practice that the people expect.
- Dust-control systems are essential in every design. Violent storms are possible all year. The prevailing winds are from the northwest.
- Working conditions are difficult. Construction workers have a nine-hour day, with one hour for lunch. Provisions can be made to provide longer breaks but are dependent on the company.
- The workweek is six days. Friday is the day off, with Thursday being a short workday ending at 3 p.m.
- Iraqi construction laborers are relatively low skilled because of the emphasis on military training in the past. Extensive supervision is essential, with liberal changes in schedule to be expected.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

Uriya Saed, PhD, is a native of the Kurdish Region of Iraq and has had a long, illustrious career as an architect, manager, and professor in Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries. He received his basic education in Iraq and his MS and PhD, architecture, in Leningrad. Saed started as a lecturer with the architecture and planning department, the University

of Technology, Baghdad, in 1978. In 1993, he moved to Sana'a, Yemen, where he headed the school of architecture for four years. He was also a full professor at the universities of Bengazi and Khumus in Libya. Fleeing the Saddam Hussein regime, he moved to the Washington, D.C., area in 2002.

More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic

- 06.04.02 Managing International Teams
- 06.04.02 Managing International Teams
- 06.04.09 Lessons from Working in China

For More Information on This Topic

See also "Practicing in a Global Market," by Roger B. Williams, FAIA, JIA, and C. Richard Meyer, FAIA, *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 6, page 100. The Handbook can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by sending email to bookstore@aia.org.



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