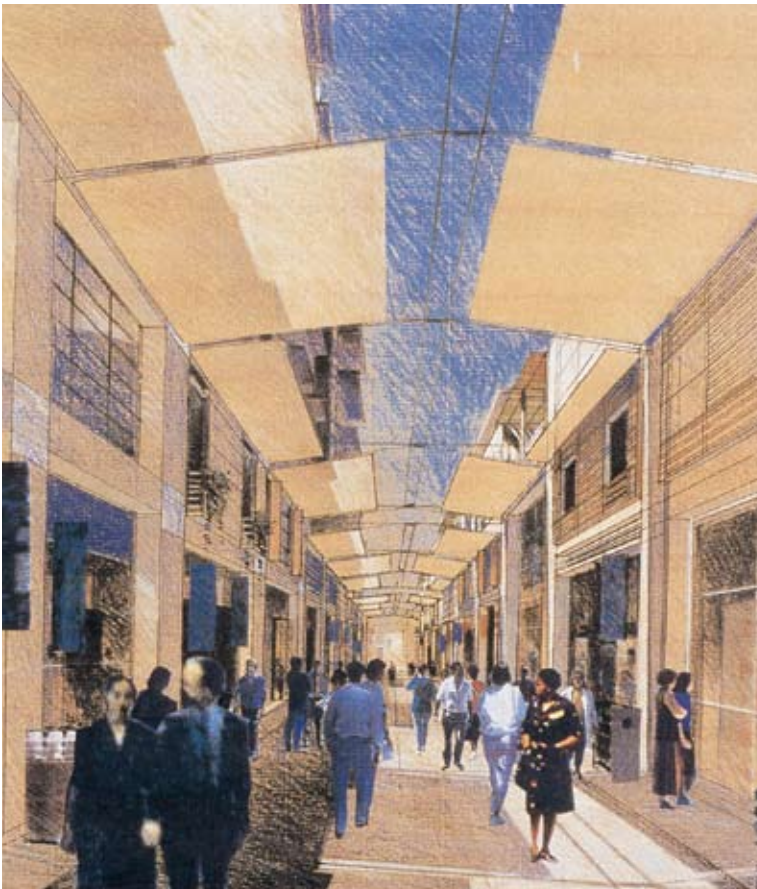


Axonometric drawing: the chinks and slippages created where the layouts collide.



O-J: But doesn't this run the risk of the project being no more than a reconstruction?

AKK: You mean what we call Pastiche? No. With the exception of Khan Antoun Bey, which will be fully restored, there is not one single element of pastiche, not an arch, not a façade that will be reconstructed as it was, as a copy of what it once had been.

Actually, I wanted to recapture the past at a more subtle level, that of the palpable spirit that characterized the souks. That's why I first worked on its organization and vibrancy. The result is architecture built with contemporary means and materials, in response to actual needs. These balconies, these awnings of coloured canvasses, these shop fronts are of a new concept, simple, designed for today. So there is no pastiche. What is crucial for me is that architecture disappears behind the organization and vitality of the souks, in order to rediscover the most important thing: the ambiance, the essential link with the past.

O-J: What do you exactly mean by vitality?

AKK: The act of making something live. The past is alive insofar as it is the result of real life, of a culmination, of history. Here vitality is encouraged by architectural elements: the passages between buildings, the different levels, the colours, the flooring, the play of light and shade...the location of shops, their unexpected and varied locations all constitute parts of the promenade... Ultimately, it was about giving Beirutis back the taste for the ritual to which they once gave themselves so happily, that of mixing business and pleasure, of shopping while strolling.

Before I began my design, I interviewed many people of different ages and social classes. Listening to them, I realized that they needed to rediscover their bearings. That was the most important thing.

O-J: Do you think that such a set-up will bring back the pre-war level of activity?

AKK: In the past, architecture was in some way the organizer of life and life cannot be simply replaced. This is why we suggested a kind of contemporary architecture clearly aimed at disappearing behind the life of the souks. When I remember what these places were about before the war, a single image lingers in my mind, that of the drive for exchange that hung in the air like perfume. This is what we call the spirit of a place and we had to create an environment that would allow it to appear again.

O-J: What are your feelings as you tackle this project?

AKK: That of a great reconciliation with Beirut. It is as if I am beginning to feel healthy again, because there was an enormous rupture and it was becoming quite difficult for me. I believe that the rebirth of this part of the city could produce a certain joy, a certain enthusiasm and a will to live.

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