

Local



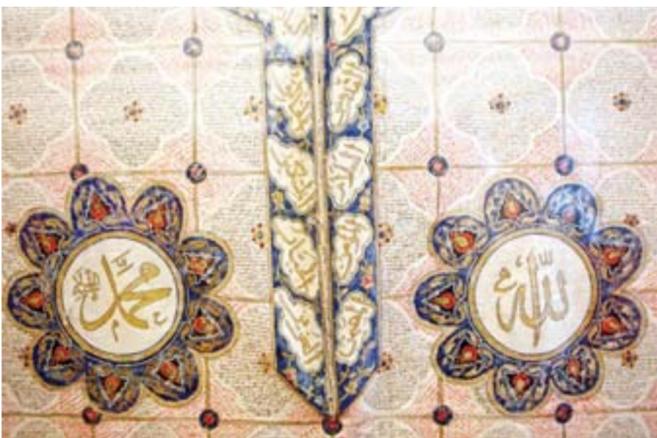
Exploring Kuwait's hidden gem:

The Arab Fund Building

Celebrating Arab artists and artisans

By Jamie Etheridge

Kuwait boasts a bevy of unique and beautiful landmarks, museums and interesting places to visit, though many of them are not well known. Among the most amazing of Kuwait's hidden gems is the beautiful Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) building, known locally as the Arab Fund building.



Designed by local architectural firm Pace, the building was completed in 1994 at a cost of \$150 million over a 50,000 square meter location in Shuwaikh. From the outside, the structure seems modest and unremarkable. Step inside, however, and the wonders of the Arab world are revealed.

On a recent visit to the Arab Fund, Kuwait Times explored the many treasures the building homes, while also learning more about the structure's unique design. The brainchild of Abdlatif Al-Hamad, the director general and chairman of the board of directors, the Arab Fund headquarters is a labor of love, a testament to the craftsmanship and creativity of the Arab world and a commitment to the Arab world's future.

When one enters the building, the first experience is of light. The eight-storey atrium, lit by floor-to-ceiling panels of windows along one wall, invites a soft, quiet light, in sharp contrast to the harsh desert sun outdoors. A hushed quiet pervades the space, woven through by the music from the soft bubbling of a Syrian tiled water fountain that cleans the ears from the honking of cars and industrial noise of Shuwaikh.

Throughout the atrium are strategically located various art installations, traditional and modern paintings and handicrafts from across the Arab world. These artisanal aspects, including the tallest custom-made mashrabiya in the world, highlight the skills and craftsmanship of Arab artisans around the region.

Dominating the atrium, the eight-storey mashrabiya stands 37 meters high. Built with traditional woodworking techniques by craftsmen in Egypt, it is created through the stacking of five separate panels showcasing the traditional window coverings once popular in North Africa and the Levant.

"The idea is to try and recreate the feeling of a traditional Arab home. In the old days, our houses would have a main atrium and all the rooms were around it," explains Eng. Osama Wanas, head of maintenance of the Arab Fund building.

Tradition combines with modernity to create a unique artistic environment. Paintings by modern Arab artists like Hussain Madhi (Lebanon), Nizar Sabour (Syria), Ghadah Alkandari (Kuwait), Ja'far Eslah



(Kuwait) and Mustafa Abd ElMu'ati (Egypt) share the space with historical artifacts. In the center of the main atrium, for instance, stands a nearly 200-year-old hawdaj used to transport the covering of the sacred Kaaba from Egypt to Makkah. Across the atrium, a bridal chair made in Syria and an Egyptian khayamiya tent, hand-embroidered in Arabic calligraphy, represent the past.

On the third floor, 1.5-ton chandeliers from Morocco add illumination to the soft natural light streaming in from the floor-to-ceiling windows. A narrow bridge separates one of the building's two diwanis from the famous Mamluk meeting room, created out of heavy carved oak and ornately paneled walls in the style of