

The restoration of the Conservation Area and traditional neighborhoods was an essential step towards their revival. The historic core renovation and occupation were accompanied by a remarkable re-emergence of public life in its squares and pedestrian streets. Soon to be emulated in other areas of the city center, Saifi has set a market trend for the recovery or creation of urban villages.

At the heart of the country and its capital, Beirut city center has a rich architectural heritage. The historic core monuments, religious, public and private institutional buildings and commercial landmarks have great symbolic importance. Street façades and arcades, squares, cafés and other meeting places, traditional markets and residential clusters, are part of the city memory. Three sectors of Beirut city center are accordingly deemed 'special policy areas': the Conservation Area, and the Saifi and Wadi Abou Jamil traditional neighborhoods.

The recovery of the Conservation Area has enhanced its four original character precincts, each presenting a unique sense of place: the Serail hill, overlooking the city center and housing the Prime Minister's offices and the Council for Development and Reconstruction; Riad El Solh or Banking street, at the lower eastern edge of the Serail hill, considered as the pre-war financial hub of the region; the Nejme and Maarad area, home of Parliament and of a number of key religious buildings; and the Foch-Allenby area, which constitutes the first office building sector in Beirut dating back to the 1920s and 1930s. This vibrant 'vieux ville' now accommodates a broad range of office, retail, recreational and cultural uses, in addition to important civic, religious and institutional activities. A real showcase of the city center reconstruction, its recovery has created a phenomenal market demand for space. In less than one year, rental rates have doubled, with Beirut registering the highest increase in commercial property values in the world

The successful reemergence of Saifi as an urban village will serve as a model for the recovery of Wadi Abou Jamil.

Below: Foch street.



### The Restoration Process

Placing great significance on the city fabric, the Master Plan maintains surviving street patterns and retains for preservation 265 buildings and 27 public and religious buildings.

The buildings have been the subject of careful restoration, according to a set of rules established by SOLIDERE in cooperation with urban planning authorities.

These involve detailed sector plans, streetwall controls, restoration guidelines including technical requirements and standards for ensuring harmony within the urban context, and restoration development briefs.

Established as guidelines for articulating the design and restoration strategy to be adopted by architects in each case, the developments briefs were based on



architectural photogrammetric surveys, damage assessment and research on the original materials.

A number of professional and technical skills are engaged in the BCD restoration, which also uses a variety of materials. In the Foch-Allenby and Maarad areas, building façades were restored to their original state, through preserving surviving elements - old stone, wood and iron - and completing them where needed with new elements likewise crafted. Particularly notable is the quality repair of stone elevations, executed by experienced stonemasons.

The monitoring of implementation is conducted through a dedicated team, to avoid any delays in the progress of work. The projects go through successive phases of preliminary design approval, restoration permit issuance, mobilization of site works, façade sample approvals, site inspections, design adjustments, and finally occupancy permit procedures.

Restored buildings have to be maintained on a regular basis, and to that effect, owners sign to the Municipality of Beirut a commitment to undertake general cleaning and façade maintenance every five years.

BCD restoration combines authenticity with a progressive outlook. Behind elaborately restored external façades are completely modernized interiors. All restored buildings are fitted with hi-tech equipment for functionality, comfort and efficiency. In residential buildings, modernity is allied with a high sensitivity to the Mediterranean typology. In office buildings, open plans allow optimal and flexible use of floor area.

The final product of restoration is quality space with a special character. Its success has confirmed that heritage buildings can survive, provided they are adapted to the needs of contemporary life and business.

### Recuperated and Sold Buildings

At the inception of SOLIDERE, the heavily damaged BCD buildings had been deserted by their former occupants, with small pockets of residents remaining at the periphery.

The Company efficiently managed the recuperation process, whereby former owners and tenants were given the chance to regain their rights in the buildings retained for preservation. In addition to the requirements applying to all restoration projects, recuperation contracts outlined the financial rights and responsibilities of involved parties, be they returnee owners or tenants.

With the conclusion of the recuperation process, a total of 146 complete built lots have been recuperated. Of those, 124 buildings have been fully restored, 14 are currently under restoration, and eight are pending various legal issues.

Of the retained built lots whose ownership devolved to SOLIDERE, 37 had been sold as is by the end of the year 2001, while one had been leased as is to be restored by its user. Their restoration is proceeding on the part of their buyers/user, with 21 ready and the rest under renovation.

Above: restoration in Wadi Abou Jamil.  
Below: shop in restored Foch-Allenby building.



## RESTORATION



Restored by SOLIDERE, two adjacent Maarad street office buildings, with retail on street level: lot 201, with space offered for lease; lot 820, sold.

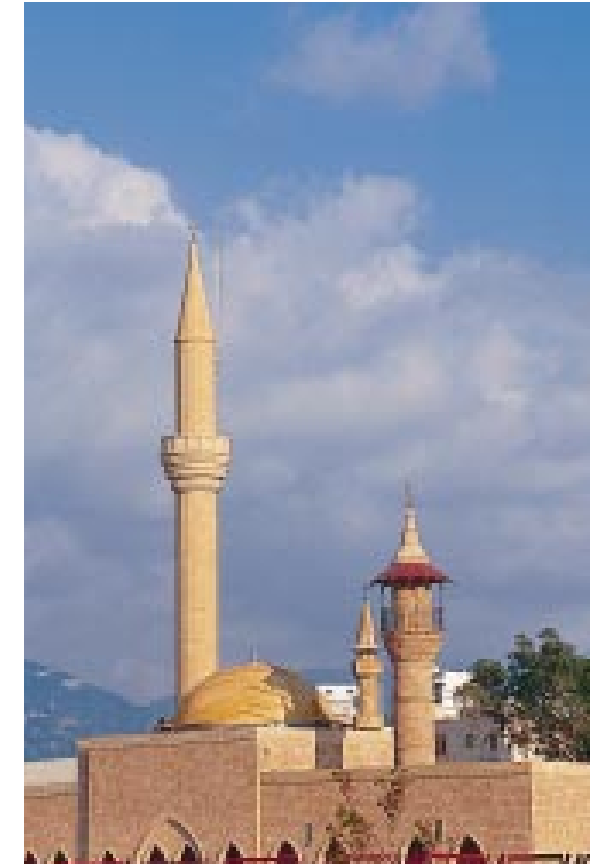
### SOLIDERE Buildings

SOLIDERE took the lead in restoration, doing showcase work on its own properties and closely monitoring other parties' projects. 56 built lots were the object of restoration by the Company. These include two co-owned buildings and two lots leased from the Islamic Wakfs. The restoration of 26 built lots was completed. Of these, 20 were destined for office use in the Maarad and Foch-Allenby area, with retail at street level; while six were destined for residential use in the Saifi and Zokak El Blatt neighborhoods. Work is under way in the other 30 built lots, with 14 at the construction stage and 16 under study.

Four restored buildings, plus sections in a co-owned building, serve as Company premises. Three built lots, designating five restored buildings initially occupied by SOLIDERE, were later successfully put on the market.

Having in some cases sold complete commercial buildings after restoration, the Company also leases office and retail space in other buildings. Retail activity has expanded in the Conservation Area, drawn by its character and the quality of its restoration. Boosted by a pedestrianized environment and successful street activities which animate it all year long, a large number of restaurants, cafés, shops and art galleries have sprung up, further adding life to the city center.

By end 2001, 14 sale agreements, relating to seven restored buildings or sections thereof, had been finalized. Another 95 signed tenancy agreements, relating to units in restored properties, resulted in the occupation of 12,879 sq m of residential space, 3,390 sq m of office space and 22 retail units representing 7,030sq m of floor space.



Clockwise from top: Majidiyah and Dabbagha mosques; St George Greek-Orthodox cathedral; Roman Baths garden with Capuchin church; Emir Munzer mosque and Capuchin church.



### Public and Religious Buildings

18 religious buildings located in the BCD attest to the spiritual value of Beirut. SOLIDERE has helped in their restoration, and 12 functioning places of worship are drawing increasing numbers of people.

The Company continued in 2001 the reconstitution of the old Maarad street façade of the Al Omari mosque, and its expansion to the Weygand street corner.

Restoration works progressed in the St George Greek-Orthodox cathedral and in the Majidiya mosque.

