

Restoration in Beirut city center has confirmed the sustainability of traditional districts and heritage buildings and their great potential for creating value, provided they are adapted to the needs of contemporary life and business

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The historic core has a rich heritage of religious, public, institutional and commercial buildings. Widely recognized as a conservation showpiece, this 'vieille ville', with its modern interiors behind beautifully renovated façades, has witnessed a high demand for a broad range of office, retail, cultural and recreational uses. The peripheral neighborhoods of Saifi, Wadi Abou Jamil and Zokak El Blatt, have re-emerged as urban villages.

Restoration

Restoration Process

In the Master Plan, 265 buildings and 27 public or religious buildings were retained for preservation. These were carefully restored in accordance with a set of rules established by Solidere in cooperation with urban planning authorities, and involving sector plans and restoration guidelines.

Restoration briefs established for the retained buildings were based on architectural and photogrammetric surveys, damage assessment and historical research on original designs and materials. The briefs provide guidelines for articulating the design and restoration strategy to be adopted in each individual case, and are stricter for those buildings deemed of heritage or architectural value. Projects go through preliminary design approval, restoration permit issuance, mobilization of site works, façade and material sample approval, site inspection and finally occupancy permit procedure. Solidere has a dedicated team to monitor implementation.



Stone repair was important in the Foch-Allenby and NejmeH-Maarad areas, notable for their faithful reconstitution of elaborate façades and high quality stone masonry. City center restoration combines authenticity with a progressive outlook. Buildings are rejuvenated through the use of skylight atria, roof gardens or glazed roofs. Interiors are modern and fitted with equipment for functionality, comfort and efficiency. In residential neighborhoods, this is allied with a sensitivity to the Mediterranean typology. In office buildings, open plan design allows optimal and flexible use of floor area. Restored buildings are maintained on a regular basis. To that effect, owners provide the Beirut Municipality with a signed commitment to undertake general cleaning and façade maintenance every five years.

Recuperated and Sold Buildings

Solidere successfully completed the recuperation process, giving former owners and tenants the opportunity to regain their rights in the buildings retained for preservation. Besides fulfilling the requirements that apply to all restoration projects, recuperation contracts outlined the financial rights and responsibilities of involved parties, be they returnee owners or tenants.

At the end of the recuperation process, 146 built lots had been recuperated. Of this total, 126 buildings are now fully restored and five are under restoration or construction, of which one after sale to a third party. Within the Souks area is lot 16 Marfaa, an office building with retail on the ground floor, designed by Pierre Neema with 415 sq m of floor area. In the Foch-Allenby area are El Patio hotel on lot 1144 Marfaa, designed by Joe Chehwan with a floor area of 2,958 sq m; and the Municipality Annex on lot 243 Marfaa, designed by Nabil Azar as an office building with retail at ground floor, offering 5,179 sq m of floor area. In Mina El Hosn, lot 702 was designed by Jean Harfouche as a residential building with retail at ground floor, covering 3,032 sq m of floor space; Star Tower on lot 121 was designed as a hotel by Natcon, with 4,762 sq m of floor space. One building is under tendering: 771 Mina El Hosn, a private residence designed by Pierre El Khoury Architect and covering 2,054 sq m of floor area. Finally, 12 lots are under study or permitting, of which three after sale to a third party.

Of retained built lots whose ownership devolved to Solidere, 37 original lots, regrouped into 31 lots, had been sold 'as is' by end 2006, while one had been leased 'as is' to be restored by its user. Restoration is proceeding on the part of buyers / users, with 28 built lots ready, two under renovation and one under permitting at Beirut Municipality.

Solidere Buildings

Solidere took the lead in the restoration process, undertaking showcase work in its properties and closely monitoring other parties' projects.

The 44 Solidere built lots were regrouped into 41 lots, including five co-owned buildings. Of these, 37 lots were the object of restoration by the Company. The other four are being restored by third parties, respectively the co-owners and the leaseholder, with lot 164 Saifi completed, lot 1042 Mina El Hosn under restoration, lot 1261 Mina el Hosn under permitting at Beirut Municipality and lot 996 Mina El Hosn under study. In addition, Solidere undertook the restoration of two lots on behalf of the Islamic Wakfs, with lot 141 Marfaa completed and lot 1353 Marfaa under implementation.

By year end, 24 buildings had been restored by Solidere: 13 residential buildings in Saifi, Wadi Abou Jamil and Zokak El Blatt; and 11 for office use with retail at street level in the Maarad and Foch-Allenby areas, which include five built lots (six buildings) serving as Company premises.

The implementation of restoration concepts is proceeding in 13 Solidere built lots, with four at the construction stage, one under tendering, two under permitting at Beirut Municipality, one under study and five demolished for structural reasons.

Solidere leases space in its restored buildings: 72 agreements relating to commercial buildings or sections thereof, and 129 agreements relating to residential properties, had been signed by end 2006. This had resulted in the occupation of around 19,266 sq m of commercial space and 23,751 sq m of residential space.

Saifi Village Two projects designed by Erga Group have been completed: a building of four floors with one apartment each, all leased, on lot 332, with ground floor retail units leased as part of Quartier des Arts; and four buildings on lot 741 around an internal garden over a 50-space car park, with three restored buildings plus a four-story infill building completed and occupied.



Zokak El Blatt Lot 670, designed by Fouad Menem, is under construction, having obtained building permit for its four floors. Parking spaces for the building are provided in adjacent lot 1144, a six-story infill building with 128 car spaces on six basement levels.

Wadi Abou Jamil In Wadi Abou Jamil, Mina El Hosn cadastral zone, two residential buildings are under restoration. Designed by Fouad Menem, lot 799 is a seven-story building including one- to three-bedroom flats and two duplex apartments with roof gardens; while lot 995 is a seven-story building with two apartments per floor.

Religious Buildings

Nineteen places of worship attest to the spiritual value of central Beirut. Solidere has assisted in the gradual restoration of 18 of them, with 13 now in use and drawing increasing numbers of people. The new Mohamad Al Amin mosque took on a profound meaning when the late PM Rafic Hariri was laid to rest near it.

