

PRELIMINARY PLANNING STUDY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF
THE NIZWA SOUK.

Research and Proposals by
THE THIRD WORLD RESEARCH GROUP
Architectural Association,
36 Bedford Sq.

London. W.C. 1. England.

Architects: John Norton, Omar el Farouk, Allan Cain,
Farreukh Afshar.

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PRELIMINARY STUDY NIZWA SOUK.

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INTRODUCTION.

Following on a request from Mr M Underhill, we spent some time while in Nizwa studying the Souk area with the view for its future development. Our discussions with the sellers proved particularly useful. The suggested location for the new Souk came from them.

IMPORTANCE OF SOUK AREA.

The Souk, Cafe and Mosque have functioned for centuries in the Islamic world as social gathering places, and continue to do so. In most settlements we visited in Oman, the Souk was invariably one of lively social and commercial activity. This was particularly so in Nizwa. As an area and a built form it embodies the collective expression of the people. As a meeting place, particularly when combined with a cafe, it functions as a centre for the exchange and development of ideas. Thus it is a need for both commercial and intellectual development. Its development requires very careful consideration.

SURVEY OF ACTIVITIES IN SOUK AREA.

Under Trees.

The shade of two nearby trees attract the more informal kind of commercial activity. Under the large tree at the fork of the Wadi, animal auctions take place. The owners run their animals, goats and sheep, around a circle formed by buyers and spectators. They shout out prices as they move around, having prices shouted back at them by buyers, stopping when one wishes to have a closer look at the animal he is going to bid for, and then moves on shouting out the latest bid. It is quite a spectacle, a social as well as a commercial event, judging from the numbers who are there simply to watch. In the winter months with the area under water the auction is discontinued.

Under another tree between the two souks, onions, dried fish and garlic are sold.

Outdoor Stands.

Along the North wall of the souk, small sellers have recently set up their stalls. There are often no more than the tops of the trunks in which they carry their goods. They sell general merchandise, hardware articles, canned food and some fruit. In the winter months the area is flooded.

The main fruit sellers are on a raised platform, with corrugated roofing, further down the North wall.

At the time of the survey there were 80 fresh fish stands, 20 fresh vegetable stands and 14 general goods stands.

Silver and General Goods Souk.

These are single unit shops, 6 jewellery shops, 36 shops selling cloth, hardware, pots and pans and 28 selling canned and dry food. Besides these shops a more mobile form of selling takes place. A silver craftsman walks through the souk, holding up his particular article while shoppers and shop keepers alike bid for it.

Mud Brick Souk.

Just inside the entrance to the souk, under the arcades approximately 20 meat sellers operate. The meat is cut and sold on the floor, and the insanitary conditions make it one of the more blatant areas needing improvement in the souk. Some fish is also sold here under similar conditions. (See sketch) Further in there are about 18 shops selling canned and dry food, hardware etc. At the far end grain and dates store and selling are carried out.

PRELIMINARY PROPOSALS.

The mud brick souk forms an important part of the architecture of Nizwa, as a continuation of the fort and adjoining residential areas. On its own toe it has definite architectural merit characteristic of Nizwa. For example, the pointed arch is used in Moorish architecture, but the proportion and size of the ones in the souk is unique. The souk is in a bad state of disrepair, but with some care and sensitivity the full potential of its internal spaces will once more be realised and upgraded to acceptable 20th century standards. The north elevation, illustrated in the Oman, needs to be restored, the high level window opened to function again for much needed ventilation. The souk needs a new roof which in re-designing can combine with the windows providing an opportunity to provide a natural ventilation system. (See sketch).

New Development.

Judging from the numbers selling in ad hoc stalls in areas outside the souk and in its circulation spaces, and with the commercial expansion of Nizwa, more shops are obviously needed. There is also a need for a central cafe in the souk area. This is a planning problem that should be tackled carefully and comprehensively. A solution should be based on a thorough study of the area and the needs and wishes of the people. The area can only be ruined by stop gap building of blocks of shops or one of shops in a haphazard fashion.

The suggested extension includes (see sketch) a number of shop units to fulfill the demand, a Cafe and Restaurant centrally placed where people can meet for social and business reasons, a pavillion space for the more informal sellers now in outdoor stands or filling up interior circulation areas, and a central courtyard where animal auctions could take place in the winter when the original spot is flooded. Through it the nearby Falaj could be channelled to water the animals.

MATERIALS AND CONSTRUCTION.

We favour the use of indigenous materials and forms developed and used creatively to meet present day needs. The resulting buildings should be more economical, climatically comfortable and culturally more consistent with the area. The local materials as used have room for improvement and innovation. For example though the local clay is good for mud brick, with some additives and a better mix of straw it could be more durable structurally and against rain. A vault and dome roof construction could economically replace expensive spanning methods such as reinforced concrete, or totally inappropriate ones such as the widely used corrugated tin sheets.

CONSLUSIONS.

It must be emphasised that the above proposals are our initial comment after a brief if intensive study of the area. The area warrants far greater attention. If you are interested in our proposals we suggest the following work schedule.

An indepth social and architectural survey of the area. This should take about three months.

Designs for the improvement of the existing souk, upgrading it to the necessary planning, structural and service standards. The design for the new souk.

The last two should take a further five months approximately.

Nizwa as it stands is a beautiful town and the souk area is a critical integral part of this beauty. It is being eroded by neglect and insensitive building.



Nizwa.

ABDEL RAHMAN MOHD. EL KHOROUSI.

Head of Balodeya.

plastered mud-brick walls with cement.

check effect:

Sir Wim. Halcrow - Berka - low cost housing.

Subsidized RENTS. - NOMINAL

BUILDING COST: 7000 RIALS

IF ONE OF THE SKILLED WORKERS WORKING ON THIS PROJECT ~~WANTING~~ EARNING 2.50 RIALS/DAY

WANTED TO ~~BUILD~~ A SIMILAR HOUSE. &

COULD GET AN INTEREST FREE LOAN;

SAVING 25% OF HIS SALARY IT WOULD

TAKE HIM 46 YEARS.

NIZWA

THE CLAY IN THE NIZWA AREA IS VERY GOOD FOR MUD BRICK MAKING.

STRAW IS USED IN THE BRICK MIX. THE MIXTURE IS MATURED OR FERMENTED FOR 15 DAYS BEFORE FORMING BRICKS. THE BUILDINGS ARE PLASTERED

WITH A STRAW MUD MIXTURE. THE RAIND

LARGE MUD BRICKS 35 cm x 10 cm x 16 cm

IN NIZWA AREA IF HOUSE CATCHES FIRE IT DOES NOT SPREAD TO OTHER HOUSES.