

Fujairah mosque: grand on the outside, cosy and spiritual inside

Ottoman mosque brings memories of city's medieval souq.



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August 14, 2012

FUJAIRAH // For Hesham Sheikh Amin, the design of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque is "in his blood".

It is a return to the courtyards, alleyways and heavy wooden doors of Aleppo's medieval souq where his father was a textile merchant.

"I feel like this is my lifetime project," says Mr Amin, of Arkitek ICB, the mosque's design and engineering consultancy.

"Hopefully it will stay for a long time, for more generations to come."

The mosque will be an Ottoman-inspired building made of white Syrian limestone.

It will have 65 domes and a marble courtyard surrounded by embellished arches, marble corridors and narrow, pointed minarets that rise to 100 metres.

It will be able to hold 25,500 men and 2,500 women and have 205 ablution places. The total plot is 22,000 square metres.

The interior is inspired by the repeating geometric patterns of stone work in the Umayyad style, lit naturally by mashrabiya lattice screens.

The marble mithrab prayer niche will be surrounded by stained glass.

Mosque construction poses particular challenges.

Transporting parts for 100-metre high minarets would have been a huge logistical problem, so instead they were poured on-site using a hydraulic slip form that could dry quickly.

The mosque's domes are built using wire frames and reinforced to reduce weight and the need for pillars that would interrupt the line of prayer. It will have a religious school and an underground prayer room for women.

The first phase of construction on the Sheikh Zayed Mosque is due to be completed in November.

Its total budget and final completion date have yet to be announced.

But as to whether the designers have got it right, only time will tell.

"When people walk in they have to feel spiritually comfortable – it's cosy, it's the amount of light," Mr Amin says.

"The atmosphere of a place of worship was another aspect we had to look at very closely.

"And from outside we have to give a look of grandeur, even the finishing, the stone materials and elegance all integrated together.

"We hope that we succeed and it's up to people later to judge us."

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Published: August 14, 2012 04:00 AM