Reflections of the Arabesque in AUB Buildings

A design known for its perpetual repetitive pattern, and geometric and floral shapes, decorates the indigenous buildings, ceramics, fabrics, glass, and books of the Middle East. This patterned design, known as arabesque, dominates the aesthetics, culture, and even literature of the Arab world. Also, it structures extensively the history of this region. Its exotic features have proved to be intriguing to many, inspiring many works of art and music.

Many buildings on the AUB campus contain hidden traces of the arabesque, thus giving the campus an authentic feel of the arabesque background that permeates Middle Eastern culture. This calendar highlights the arabesque, whether geometric or floral, found in several buildings on the AUB campus, by piecing close-up photographs of those designs. The arabesque facades of these buildings reflect the aesthetic culture of the Middle East that AUB hopes to preserve.

Below is a brief history of each of these buildings.

1 - College Hall, 1873
College Hall was the first building to be completed on the new campus in 1873. On December 7, 1871, the Honorable William E. Dodge, Senior, treasurer of the Board of Trustees, laid the cornerstone. Initially known as "the main building," College Hall housed the library, chapel, classrooms, dormitory, and the geological and archaeological collections. On November 8, 1991, College Hall was totally destroyed in a bomb blast; subsequently, AUB immediately committed itself to reconstruct the historic building. A special fundraising campaign was launched to rebuild College Hall. The newly built College Hall, officially inaugurated in 1999, preserves the original design, but in 25 percent larger and located slightly to the west of the original position.

2 - Ada Dodge Memorial Hall, 1873
Originally constructed in 1873, Ada Dodge Hall was rebuilt and enlarged in 1885 with a grant from Dr. Stuart Dodge, who named the building in memory of his daughter, Ada. The hall was used until 1898 by the Preparatory Department, now International College. It was the original home of the School of Commerce, and from 1900 it accommodated administration offices. In 1962-63 Ada Dodge Hall was remodeled to house the main cafeteria, a milk bar, a faculty dining room/saloon, and the Post Office. Completely remodeled in 2003-04, it now contains, in addition to a new cafeteria, the faculty dining room, the Post Office, the Department of Economics, the Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies (CAMES), and the Office of Information and Public Relations.

7 - West Hall, 1914
Completed in 1914, West Hall was named after Robert Haldane West, who taught mathematics and astronomy from 1884. This student activity building was originally equipped with an auditorium, rooms for student clubs, a lecture hall, a common room, a bowling alley and roller skating rink, overnight rooms for visitors, and eating facilities. It was renovated, equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, and redecorated in February 2002. The building houses the Office of Student Affairs, numerous offices and meeting rooms for student activities, lecture and seminar rooms, and the Subuh Bathish Auditorium.

8 - Architecture Building, 1930
The Engineering and Architecture Building was formerly the chemistry building, constructed with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1926 and completed in 1930. A new chemistry building was opened on the other end of lower campus in 1968, leaving the old chemistry building for the use of the Department of Engineering and Architecture.

9 - Van Dyck Hall, 1931
Funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and named after Dr. Cornelius Van Dyck, founder of Abey Academy in Lebanon in 1843, Van Dyck Hall was completed in 1931. It was originally a new outpatient clinic, and a chemistry and laboratory building equipped with the latest facilities. It was completely renovated in the mid-1970s and now houses the Faculty of Health Sciences as well as Computer Networking Services.

10 - Jafet Library, 1951
Built in 1951, and dedicated to Nami Jafet, the building of Jafet Memorial Library was funded by the son of Nami Jafet. Furnishing the library was funded by other members of the Jafet family. Nami Jafet was originally a poor child, who grew up in the Lebanese village of Shweita. Later in his life, the Scotch Mission School helped educate Nami Jafet. He won a scholarship to study at "an old college" in Beirut, from which he graduated. After teaching for a few years, Jafet traveled to Brazil where he became one of the pioneer industrialists of Sao Paulo.

11 - Nicely Hall, 1960
Built in 1960, James Nicely Hall, also known as the humanities building, was officially dedicated on April 26, 1965. James Nicely was associated with AUB throughout most of his lifetime. His father, John W. Nicely, was professor of English language and literature at the Syrian Protestant College and also the first official college treasurer (1896-1933). James Nicely died on March 15, 1964; at the time of his death he was vice-chairman of the Board of Trustees. The building was renovated in 1972.

12 - Saab Medical Library, 1975
The Medical Library was established in 1925 and occupied the ground floor of Van Dyck, which was then the Medical School Building. Before that date, books and periodicals were housed in the University Library in College Hall. In 1975, the library moved to its present premises, the Saab Medical Library Building, dedicated, through a generous gift from his parents, to the memory of the late Dr. Nicholas Saab, who graduated from the AUB Medical School in 1959. The building consists of three floors with four-tier stacks. At present the library occupies one and a half floors of the building, while the other rooms on the second and third floors are occupied by the office of the medical dean.