

UPE PLUS

Beirut, Lebanon

Taking shelter in the B018

On the landscape of a vast wasteland, one of Beirut's hottest new nightspots thrives in seclusion. Hidden underground, it is a prime example of post-war architecture that held no boundaries during its construction. Welcome to the B018.



Somewhere deep in the deserts of Lebanon, people are heading for shelter. The building that protects them is rumbling and people that are moving around inside are clearly heard across the desert. Lights are flashing, and there is an ominous, repetitive thumping that is shaking the ground.

Contrary to what you may believe, the scene being described above is not from a war film or any other event of conflict. What I am actually describing is a typical night out at one of Beirut's most exciting and stylish nightclubs.

B018 is the brainchild of Beirut born architect Bernard Khoury. Although he spent the majority of his life in the US, he was eventually drawn back to Lebanon after earning his final degree, a Masters in Architecture from Harvard University. He wanted a chance to head back to his original home, to be able to help recreate the damage that had been caused by prolonged periods of war. He was given a chance to work on B018 through his cousin who wanted to scout for land for that was cheap and predominately empty. These requirements drove him to look to the quarantine area where a former refugee camp once stood.

The site location was regarded by many people as an unusual choice to place a club, as it was in a desolate area. However, behind this location was a devastating history, as the camps built there were attacked and razed down in 1976. Building a nightclub on a place with such a traumatic past was considered highly off-putting for a lot of people, and drew a lot of criticism against Khoury's ideas.

However Khoury had a different approach to the situation. He wanted to prove that from an area with so much grief and destruction, it is possible to plough through this and create new life and pathways from where so many people fear to tread.

Whatever the purpose, no one can disagree that Khoury has put together a remarkable piece of architecture that has achieved world-wide fame and recognition for it's obscure concealment and controversial location.

The main structure of the club is based on the design of the war bunkers of old. Passing by the club during the day, one would think that it is simply a relic of the past, a piece of construction that has a certain military feel to it. Nonetheless, the club possesses a secret that is only revealed at night, when the roof of the club opens up (with inbuilt hydraulics) to present the sky to the club's attendees, illuminated by the lights from the club. It is a strangely beautiful and poetic feature of club, almost symbolizing that from a dark and dismal place, you can be freed with the shine of the night sky.

This retractable roof is perhaps not as impressive as the fact that the entire bunker where the club is located, is actually sunk underground. B108 has the capability to actually disappear by day, and lures the crowd in to disappear inside during the night.

Khoury pushed his own boundaries with the club's construction, planning a design that would best link in with the surroundings. Because of this, the club itself is not the only part of his work, but it also includes the infrastructure that runs around the club.



The roads to the club winds around the bunker, forcing the cars to travel around in a circular motion, creating a hypnotic movement in the desert.

Gaining access to the club itself is quite an excursion. Not only do you have to adjust yourself to the idea that you are descending into the depths of a war-theme bunker, but you will also have to get through two "air lock" type areas that is guarded by surly bouncers.

The interiors of the nightclub itself is filled with interesting furniture. Considering limited space, Khoury installed foldable chairs that double up as tables, as well as chairs that stretch upwards for two metres, isolating the drinker at the bar.

Most of the furniture serves different purposes during the day and night. The tables that dot the interior of the club fold away when not in use, transforming into coffins complete with pictures and candles placed atop their surfaces. The photos are reminders of people that have passed, but surprisingly are all the recognizable faces of famous musicians, both Arab and Western.

B018 has been highly acclaimed with coverage in major architecture magazines such as *Wallpaper** and *Abitare*. He has received mention in the first Francesco Borromini International Award for Young Architects, and his reputation that came with B018 opened up a world of design opportunities for Khoury around Beirut and at various other international locations.

What is most apparent about Khoury's ventures is that they are pushing the boundaries of the public's comfort zones. Where people might see areas of inequality, uncomfortable history and conflict, Khoury only sees the area as a potential for development and a way to move forwards into the future. It is because of his vision that we can expect to see a lot more pioneering structures of architecture venture into areas where no one has ever dared venture before.

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