



## FROM THE TOP FLOOR OF HIS BEIRUT PENTHOUSE, LEBANESE ARCHITECT BERNARD KHOURY NEVER LOSES SIGHT OF THE UNRULY ENERGY OF HIS BELOVED HOMETOWN

Enter the apartment of Lebanese architect Bernard Khoury and the first thing to hit you is the city. Perched at the top of a residential building he designed in Beirut's Mathaf neighborhood in 2013, it's centered around a 24-foot-high floor-to-ceiling window that pulls the chaotic urban fabric inside. Located near the civil-war demarcation line and surrounded by institutional buildings, the Mathaf district has not quite reached the same density of other areas in Beirut, which is exactly what drew Khoury here.

"My relationship with this house starts with my relationship with the city," Khoury says as he opens the window, leaving the entire front of the apartment exposed to the streets below. "In any Mediterranean city, apartments turn their back to the city and look toward the sea. I've chosen to do the exact opposite, to have a very constant relationship with this landscape." Khoury describes the speed with which Beirut's urban fabric has changed since the 1950s as "scary." "Beirut is evolving without any master plan. There is a very high exploitation factor that kept on going up. The bankruptcy of the state translates basically into what you see, this incredible cacophony."

Khoury returned to Beirut in the 1990s after completing his Master of Architecture

degree at Harvard, keen to contribute to the post-war rebuilding effort. But the Société libanaise pour le développement et la reconstruction (Solidere), set up by the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri to rebuild Beirut's city center, had an amnesiac approach, skipping over the modern history of the Lebanese Republic in their preservation plans. For Khoury, it denied the present and "surrendered to a history that was a product of the West."

And so he jumped to plan B, becoming the posterboy for the entertainment industry, designing nightclubs, rooftop cocktail bars, and restaurants for Beirutis only interested in the present. "I started these processes that were in complete contradiction to what I had initially imagined. I didn't get any museums, didn't build any institutional buildings... It was a way of trying to produce meaning on alternative territories." B 018 (1998) remains Khoury's most legendary

ARCHITECT BERNARD KHOURY KICKS BACK IN THE LIVING ROOM OF HIS PENTHOUSE ON THE NINTH FLOOR OF A RESIDENTIAL BUILDING HE BUILT IN 2013 IN BEIRUT'S MATHAF DISTRICT. TRAINED AT HARVARD, KHOURY RETURNED TO THE LEBANESE CAPITAL IN THE 1990S AND HAS SINCE BECOME ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S MOST SOUGHT-AFTER ARCHITECTS.



work: a hole in the ground resembling a bunker or a mass grave, it's a nightclub with a retractable

roof that allows rev- KHALIL KHOURY, elers to dance under BERNARD KHOURY'S the stars. B 018's lo- FATHER, WAS AN ARCHITECT OF THE MODERNIST TRADITION WHO BUILT A TOTAL EXPERIENCE, DESIGNING EVERYTHING DOWN TO THE LAST FIXTURE. KHOURY JR. CONTINUES THE TRADITION WITH A DINING TABLE OF HIS OWN DESIGN. IT WAS MADE FROM A SINGLE PIECE OF WOOD BY LOCAL CRAFTSPEOPLE, JUST LIKE THE SHELVING AND CABINETRY, WHICH ELEGANTLY HIDES THE HEATING AND SOUND SYSTEMS.

**I n s i d e**

Khoury's apartment every detail is precisely designed, showcasing the work of local craftsmanship in an approach influenced by Carlo Scarpa and Jean Prouvé. A black-metal structure runs round the main reception space, carrying a perimeter footbridge and providing the frame for wooden shelving. "This is my machine," Khoury says, nodding toward the ceiling centerpiece, a matte-black oval housing fans, lighting, and air-conditioning equipment. "It's the optimum way of cooling and ventilating this space. You usually associate plaster with very classical ceilings, not with contemporary architecture and certainly not with black." From solid-wood cabinets to a 24-foot light fixture that doubles as a ladder — allowing bulbs to be changed with ease — everything is made locally.

KHOURY'S APARTMENT FEATURES AN ECLECTIC MIX OF FURNITURE, INCLUDING THE PENTAGONAL-SHAPED ARMCHAIR *LUI 5* BY SWISS DESIGNER PHILIPPE BESTENHEIDER. A SPIRAL STAIRCASE LEADS UP TO THE SECOND FLOOR AND A MEZZANINE LIBRARY THAT FEATURES A WRAPAROUND METAL CATWALK.





“This is a form of resistance to the construction industry, to the shit from China that’s completely banned in my house,” Khoury exclaims.

While many rooftops in Beirut are a dumping ground for water tanks and satellite dishes, Khoury has incorporated a self-contained flat for guests and a pool. Two cannon-like light fixtures protrude from above. Though he insists it’s a design based on practicality not provocation, the army’s secret services came round to investigate. “One of the co-owners was also convinced that if we have another war with Israel, the building would be targeted. I told him it would be great if they hit us. I would be the martyr of my own architectural absurdities,” he laughs.

Some of Khoury’s buildings have become victims of Beirut’s lack of urban planning; the restaurant Centrale in the Gemmayzeh district, for example, has been boxed in by other buildings since completion in 2001. “What you end up with in Beirut is an extreme density of solitary buildings. It’s as if you put



THE ARCHITECT BELIEVES ARCHITECTURE AND ITS USERS SHOULD HAVE A DIALOGUE WITH THEIR URBAN ENVIRONMENT. INSTEAD OF FACING THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA, LIKE MOST BUILDINGS IN BEIRUT, KHOURY’S APARTMENT FEATURES WINDOWS THAT OPEN WIDE TO THE CITY, INCLUDING A VIEW OVER THE NEARBY MARONITE CEMETERY.





200 people in a room who turned their backs on each other,” he says. Plot #1282, also known as Factory Lofts, was designed in response to this. Completed in 2015 in an area surrounded by yet-to-be-developed land, the building’s unusual shape was born out of its imagined future neighbors closing in. Each floor is offset inwards to allow breathing space if new structures rise on its perimeter. “I didn’t design [the apartments], the absurdity of the situation produced them.” Featuring balconies set in front of floor-to-ceiling glazing, the façade is open, connecting residents to their future neighbors and to the city.

With his architecture, Khoury seeks to reach out to Beirut and show how it could be shaped.

THE LIGHT-DRENCHED APARTMENT IS HOME TO NUMEROUS IDIOSYNCRATIC TOUCHES, INCLUDING A SUPER-SIZE ANT FROM THE HISTORIC PARISIAN TAXIDERMIST DEYROLLE. THE BRASS AND LEATHER SWING INSTALLED IN THE LIVING ROOM ALLOWS FOR PLAYFUL SWINGING ABOVE THE ROOFTOPS OF BEIRUT.

“This is where the real political work is done,” he says. “Not through rotten institutions, or the ministries that are corrupt and incompetent, but through individual warriors who resist this bankruptcy. It’s about trying to produce meaning, wherever you can.”

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