

MANSION



FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

An Architect Turns His Back on the Sea

Lebanese designer Bernard Khoury says he prefers 'harsh contemporary' views of Beirut to 'classic views' and has designed his city penthouse to open up—literally—to a hodgepodge cityscape

BY BROOKE ANDERSON

FROM HIS SPACIOUS PENTHOUSE in Beirut, Bernard Khoury has a view of the city in all its beauty and imperfections: the grassy gardens and headstones of three cemeteries, the red roof tiles of university buildings, the steeple of a church across the street, the dome of a mosque in the distance, the French embassy in the foreground and the tops of unfinished skyscrapers with cranes attached dotting the skyline.

The 45-year-old Lebanese architect chose a home with its hodgepodge city view over the more sought-after romantic sea view, saying he prefers "harsh contemporary" over "classic, sugarcoated" Beirut.

It happened by circumstance, when his friend, Marc Doumit, a developer, bought the land on Damascus Road at a low price in the late 1990s after it had been sitting deserted for nearly a decade following the end of the 15-year civil war. Mr. Khoury at the time was eager to make a home for himself, his wife, Nathalie, and his two children after having lived for 12 years in a small apartment with his family in the seaside city of Jounieh just north of Beirut. They moved in last year.

Mr. Khoury designed the 12-unit residential building and his own 4,306-square-foot, five-bedroom, seven-bathroom penthouse in the venture with Mr. Doumit. His unit cost him less than \$1 million when he purchased it in 2008, and he estimates it to be worth about \$4 million today.

The area had been part of the Green Line demarcation between Christian east and Muslim west Beirut; over time it became a series of abandoned lots overgrown with weeds. But for the visionary developer and architect, it was a place with tremendous potential. Soon after they began building, local businesses began moving into the area, bringing back a vibrant community of shops, cafes and restaurants to a neighborhood that Mr. Khoury always knew would bounce back.

"You can't go wrong with a university neighborhood," he said. "You have the services, the trees, the libraries."

His design was based on the idea that neighbors should have the chance to get to know one another. He said that for the past four decades most buildings in Beirut were designed in a standard style of an elevator going through the center of poorly ventilated and dimly lit boxy rooms with sitting areas in the front and bedrooms in the back.

"This has social implications. When people are partitioned behind walls, they're removed from their environment," he said. "These blind, claustrophobic corridors started becoming standard in the 1970s, a poor interpretation of modernist designs."

His penthouse, by contrast, opens onto Beirut. An entire wall of the



A HARD LOOK The city view from the living-dining area of Mr. Khoury's penthouse, top. The outdoor pool he built for his private use, clockwise from above, the architect at home, a side table, the unit's winding staircase done in black and brown contrasting materials, and the exterior of the architect's building, which he designed for a plot of land bought by a friend of his for development.



main room is a window that fully slides open to the outside. The openness is more pronounced when walking across the "bridge"—an overhead walkway on the floor above—or when using the swing that hangs right next to the open wall.

Inside the room, Mr. Khoury has his own furniture designs: low cream-colored couches, tan cabinets that hold books and artwork and hide the built-in sound system built, and a 12-seat wooden dining table.

The kitchen is a simple narrow room of light-gray marble counters. The space, like the rest of the rooms, has natural light streaming through the windows. Through a door on the other side of the sitting room is the master bedroom with light colors, whitewashed walls and a full view of the three cemeteries—Maronite, Armenian, and in the distance a small set of gravestones for Lebanon's now-exiled Jewish community.

Upstairs are the bedrooms of his

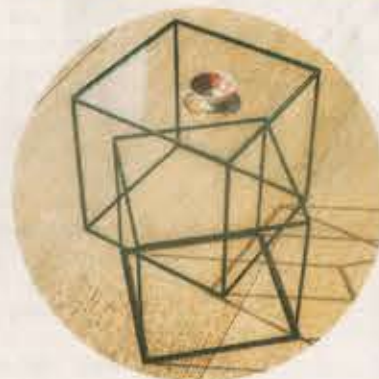


14-year-old son and 10-year-old daughter, each with their own marble bathrooms. A guest suite on the roof terrace has its own kitchen and a private stairway.

Also on the roof is the swimming pool and a 2,153-square-foot roof terrace, which Mr. Khoury uses throughout the year. The glass divider outdoors gives the same feeling of being suspended over Beirut that the sliding windows do on the floor below.

Mr. Khoury returned to his home country in the mid-1990s after having completed his studies at the Rhode Island School of Design and then his master's at Harvard. He thought he would be part of the reconstruction of the war-torn country. Instead, he was commissioned to do a series of temporary projects in the entertainment industry.

He is best known for designing the BO18, a nightclub built on the site of a former refugee camp in the area of Karantina, or Quarantine, where a



massacre took place in 1976 at the beginning of the civil war. The area became an unpopulated industrial center for waste disposal, leather tanneries and slaughterhouses.

As a symbol of the empty space and the missing people, Mr. Khoury designed the club to be underground, so that from above there appeared to be a gap. Completed in 1998, it was set to disappear in 2003 to make way for redevelopment, but has survived its expected life span by 10 years. Mr. Khoury said the club will be long gone within another decade, as the area's seafloor is developed.

For now it is the area where his office is located. Although he was widely praised for the project, he laments that it was seen as "the bad boy dancing on graves." He sees it as something better. "Sometimes when I'm doing an all-nighter at the office, I'll hear the music playing," he said. "It's a very promising sign of life in an impossible setting."

Other Khoury Buildings



CHEHADE STREET
A residential building built in 2008. The east-facing facade was fully glazed to get the maximum light in an otherwise densely built-up neighborhood.



CHAFIK EL MOUAYYAD ST.
The shallow floor plan is meant to "embrace" the street. Terraces along the facade give access to any room from the outside, blurring the line between indoors and outdoors.



ACHRAFIEH STREET
The building has a relatively modest width of 46 feet, with apartment units that are long and narrow, each overlooking an interior garden.



GEMMAYZE AREA
The structure, facade and common areas are designed to allow owners maximum flexibility in shaping their own living spaces. Each home has high ceilings and a split level.

COURTESY OF BERNARD KHOURY ARCHITECTS; PHOTOGRAPHY: AMY SHAW/DWVS BERNARD KHOURY (CHAFIK EL MOUAYYAD, SAH)