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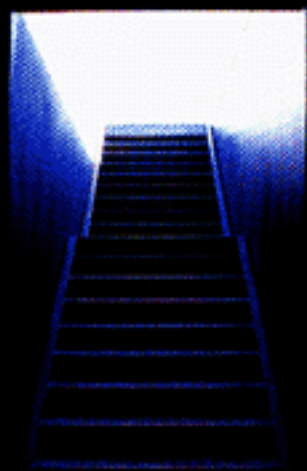
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INTERIORS * ENTERTAINING * TRAVEL

TOPLESS BAR: opening hours. Clockwise from right, aerial view of the submerged bar against the Beirut skyline. The mirror above the bar tilts as the roof retracts. The surreal interior by evening. Exit to street level



zone' in Beirut. What that zone will be exactly is, as yet, not defined.

The original B 018 ran out of the apartment – unit B 018 – of Lebanese musician Nagi Gebrane during the war. It began as a gathering spot for Gebrane's friends – an escape from the fighting outside. In 1993, he moved the club to a building called 'The Black Box' in an

TO DRIVERS ON THE HIGHWAY, THE MIRROR REFLECTS A VAGUE IMAGE OF WHAT IS HAPPENING INSIDE THE BAR

industrial sector of Beirut, accessible only by a dirt road. Four years later, Gebrane was forced to close. By the time of the bar's final night, he was ready to pack up and leave Lebanon, but as the people around him danced and drank, he started talking to his old architect friend,

Khoury. The next day they went out in search of a location for a new bar.

Khoury wanted to design a new B 018 brimming with contradictions. The result is underground, but its roof retracts to form an open-air space. In contrast to its social function, the bar offers privacy in the shape of rotating chairs with tall backs which shield the drinker from the view of everyone but the bartender. One mirrored segment of the bar's ceiling tilts up at 50 degrees when the roof is opened. To drivers on the highway outside, the segmented mirror reflects a vague image of what is happening down below – the distorted, alluring, even decadent reflections of flashing lights and dancing. The patrons inside see the hazy flickering of passing cars and lights from the highway. And if you squint really hard on approach to Beirut International, you can pick out your seat in Khoury's sultry bar. ✿



underexposure

Submerged beneath the streets of Beirut, architect Bernard Khoury's recipe for a hot nightspot was one part bar and two parts bunker, discovers **Robert Tuttle**

This summer, if you really want to live out all your airline-lounge-cum-Mossad-agent fantasies, then you'd best book a ticket on MEA to Beirut, throw on a kicky little safari shift and get your driver to take you to the most inspired space in the eastern Mediterranean.

Built underground, like a bunker or bomb shelter, B 018 serves up the best nightlife in the Levant. Behind the front door lies a wall into which is cut a thin sniper's window. The husky guards at the door are instructed to present themselves as toughened soldiers, while the barmen dress in white uniforms resembling nurses at a sanatorium.

B 018 is both shocking and absurd, but then so is Beirut. 'People fear developing anything that will make them think about their present state,' argues Bernard Khoury, the architect of B 018. People see Lebanon as either a romantic, historical cliché, or as a nation striving toward a utopian future, but they ignore their scars. In 1976, soon after the

WAR IS OVER: underground movement. The surreal interior of Beirut's B 018 bar; the chairs around the tables fold into boxes which resemble musical-instrument cases

outbreak of the Lebanese civil war, militia forces stormed the area where the B 018 is currently located. Back then, it was the site of a Palestinian refugee camp. The militia forces massacred hundreds of its civilian residents, expelled most of the remainder and bulldozed the camp. That massacre was just one of many which took place during the fifteen years of fighting.

Although Khoury designed a number of architectural projects since his return from the United States to Lebanon six years ago, most never went beyond the planning stage. B 018 is the first project Khoury

'PEOPLE FEAR DEVELOPING ANYTHING THAT WILL MAKE THEM THINK ABOUT THEIR PRESENT STATE'

was able to do 'his way'. 'I prefer to stress the importance of events more than the physical structure,' he says. For this reason, Khoury likes to take his time in defining the themes he wants to deal with in a project. Drawing sketches is secondary: 'At university, I would try to get through the entire semester without doing a single drawing.' He is now defining the issues for what he describes as 'a decompression