

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN
OF A
SUMMER COLONY IN ALEY

By
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May, 1950

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INTRODUCTION:

The Lebanon is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. Nowhere in the world can a tourist find such high, snow-capped mountains so close to the sea as in Lebanon. As a consequence of its natural beauty and excellent climate this country is best suited for summer resorts. As Prof. N. Manasseh rightfully remarked, the Lebanon has been forced by its climate, topography, and geographical position to act as a large hotel for tourists and travellers between East and West. There are very few natural resources in the country and still fewer industries. The greater part of the National income comes from those who visit the Lebanon to see the ruins of Baalbeck and the cedars, and from those who pass the hot months of the summer in the cool, refreshing climate of Lebanon.

This great source of income to the country must be well organized and developed so that more people are attracted to the country every year, spending money which could be used to raise the standard of living here. The first thing that a traveller thinks of is comfort, as cheap as possible. He must find clean, comfortable rooms to hire, healthy food to eat, pleasant entertainment; all at a low price. Due to the lack of proper management, people have started charging exorbitant prices for the most useless of common articles. This has led tourists away from Lebanon to other places of comfort that give more for a lower price. A proper study of the situation is very urgent and must begin at the worst item, which is good lodging and board. This thesis will try to suggest one kind of solution to the problem. The site is very convenient, being in the district of Aley, the most populous resort and the nearest to Beirut. It is also on the main highway from Beirut to Damascus and will attract passers-by to rest a little and have a look around. This is the first time that anything of this sort is to be tried in this country, and I think it is worth trying.

THE IDEA:

The idea of this thesis originated in the mind of Dr. Djidedjian who is a surgeon at the American University of Beirut and who owns the land. He had asked Prof. K. Yeramian if any of the Engineering students would like to study the possibility of building a summer resort up there, in the form of a colony. As I was looking for something of this sort for my thesis, I accepted gladly. I went to Dr. Djidedjian to get the Cadastral plan of the plot and to get his requirements for the colony. Soon after the interview I went up to the place itself in order to study the contours and get the best scenery in order to place the more important units where they would get the greatest advantages of view, air, and sunshine.

The purpose of the colony would be to provide small, clean, comfortable cottages for people who want to pass the summer in the Lebanon but would ~~not~~ like to stay at a hotel for the sake of privacy. These little cottages would provide them with sleeping accommodations and a place for the reception of guests. However, in order that they might make full use of their time in resting, they will not do any cooking but will all dine at a central restaurant which will serve them with good, clean food at moderate prices.

The cottages will all be furnished so that foreigners may not have to buy or bring any furniture with them. This could be an advantage for even Lebanese people who do not want to carry their valuable furniture back and forth. Thus the general pattern will be a number of little cottages, partially surrounding a central building, the former acting as sleeping quarters and the latter as a dining room and a general place of entertainment for the tenants and their guests.

THE PLOT:

The actual plot is located on the Beirut- Damascus highway just a little beyond Aley proper, Plot No. 2533 with an area of approximately 15,650 square dra'as (9,000 sq. m.). One small side is along the highway and the others are bordered by neighbouring plots. The three villas of the Alpha brothers are just across a six meter lane from the land. It is very irregular with many breaks and a generally steep slope. There is a dangerous "S" bend near it, and it is likely that the main highway will be diverted and passed either through or by it, where the six meter lane is now. Thus Mr. Abroyan's villa will lie along a side road instead of being on the highway, and the colony will have easy access from the highway and cars will be able to turn off the road and stop at the Central Building, either for renting a flat or to get refreshed at the bar.

From the above it can be seen that the Colony will be located at one of the nicest and most respectable resorts of the country. There are beautiful villas all around, and the tenants can take long walks into the woods around. Both the place and the arrangement of the units will attract people passing by.

All sides of the land have nice views. To the north, a narrow strip of Beirut and the sea can be seen through a cluster of high oak trees. To the north-west there is a plain and a hill in the background. It looks very beautiful, especially in the evening sunset. The plain at the bottom of the hill is being developed now, and an asphalted road has already been constructed from the main road to this area. The best view is to the south-west where a deep valley passes between two high hills. The hills are covered with thick groves and are studded with cozy little houses here and there. The shadows produced by the sun are very well proportioned and a pleasant sight is afforded at all times of the day. The last view is that looking on the highway and the villas on the other side.

All conditions taken into consideration; the size of the plot, the neighborhood, the scenery, and its nearness to Aley and Beirut make it an ideal location for such a resort. People can always go up for a stroll from Aley and a fifteen minutes' walk will bring them up to the large halls and cool, refreshing bar of the central building. Balls and beauty contests could be held up there, and people from all over Lebanon would flow in to have a nice time. The crowded streets of Aley and Bhandoun will be avoided for the wide expanse and fresh air that the Colony will provide.

FEASIBILITY OF THE PLAN:

Of course, the main purpose of the project is to provide a source of income for the owner of the property, and therefore, the project must not cost too much both in construction and in running expenses. It must pay well. The sources of income will be the following: 1) Rental fees from the cottages, which could go up to as high as L.L. 3,000 per season, with furniture and all. 2) Rental of the bachelors' suites on the second floor of the Central Building. (These will be referred to later on in the discussion of the Central Building.) 3) The bar, which will be open to the tenants of the Colony as well as to any by-passers that might feel like stopping at the place. 4) The restaurant, accomodating about 120-140 people. 5) Rental from balls and other activities which might be sponsored by outside bodies. Balls could also be given by the owner himself, and these will secure quite a bit of profit. As there is parking space in the basement of the Central Building, a gasoline pump may be installed, especially if the lodgers have enough cars to make the installation of the pump economical.

I feel confident that all the cottages and suites will be properly disposed of in no time, and the above-mentioned sources of income will be paying high returns. I would not be astonished if a few years after the Colony is built, if it is built at all, Dr. Djidedjian thinks of buying the neighbouring plots in order to expand the colony.

THE COTTAGES:

As mentioned above, the cottages will serve the purpose of providing for sleep and for the reception of guests. There are two types of cottages, the first type having one bedroom each and the other having two bedrooms each. The purpose of dividing the whole into only two types is to standardize construction as much as possible. The small-sized families will have single-bedroom cottages, and large-sized families will take the ones with two bedrooms. There will be altogether eleven cottages five of which are of the first type and the remaining six are of the second type.

The first type will have a Hall 3.00 x 2.40 m., a living room 5.00 x 4.00 m., a bedroom 4.00 x 3.80 m., a bath room 2.80 x 2.00 m., and a small kitchenette 3.00 x 3.00 m. The entrance will be through a porch 1.60 m. wide, with four approaching steps, and having flower boxes on both sides of the steps as well as all along the porch. The bedroom will have a small private balcony, and the kitchenette will have a separate entrance with a porch. For outdoor reception in good weather a terrace with polygonal tiles will be constructed. Each cottage and its surroundings will be on one level piece of land. This serves the double object of comfort for each unit by itself and for separating one cottage from another by cutting the view as the various cottages will not be on the same level.

The living room is for the reception of guests indoors when the weather is cold or the glare of the sun is unbearable. The family can also use it during the day as their sitting room. The kitchenette is quite necessary in case the tenants want to serve their guests with coffee or lemonade. The guests can go into the living room either through the main entrance and hall or, if there is no need for formality, they can walk in directly from the porch through the French window. The door from the porch to the hall is 1.20 m. net, made of two panels of "Katrani" wood with glass on the upper half and flat iron bars for protection.

A wide glass door of 1.40 m. will join the hall to the living room. The two large windows and the French window on the porch will light up and ventilate the living room sufficiently.

The entrance to the kitchenette is an archway which leads into a corridor. The arch adds to the beauty of the hall and breaks the monotony of rectangular entrances. The partition will be a simple curtain. Just beyond the arch there is a washbasin on the right-hand-side for the use of the guests. The door of the kitchenette is opposite the arch, and the bathroom door is on the left-hand-side. The two closets have their doors opening into the hall and the kitchenette respectively, so that the first will be used for hanging clothes while the other is used for kitchen utensils. The kitchenette has a separate entrance with steps and porch in order that guests may not be interfered with.

The second type of cottages is very similar to the first except that there are two bedrooms instead of one. Again there is a living room for receiving guests, a kitchenette for serving them, and an outdoor terrace for entertaining them. The bathroom and common balcony will serve both bedrooms. In all cases the bedrooms have been placed close to the living room in order to share the best scenery with it. The entrance porch is similar to that of the first type and so are the service quarters.

As the land is steep, the cottages will be built on separately levelled terraces which will be connected by paths and staircases to the main entrance into the colony. Each cottage will look like an independent unit by itself although the distances separating them might seem to be short. Every morning, immediately after breakfast, maids will be sent from the Central Building to clean up and arrange the cottages. Every maid will take care of a few cottages. The living room will be connected to the Central office by telephone, and all necessaries can be ordered by telephone when needed. The office car will go down to Beirut once a day and bring up ordered material.

Since the cottages will have a height of one floor only, it will be unnecessary to build a staircase for each. The roof will not be used for anything, and the laundry can be spread out on the terraces round the cottages. In case anything goes wrong with any one of the roofs, a wooden ladder can be used for climbing up. Rainwater pipes will conduct water from the roofs to the gardens and flower-boxes, and a 30 cm. parapet wall will keep the water from flowing down the walls in case there is a strong wind. The balustrades of the balconies will be 40 cms. above the floor and will have no railing on them as there is no fear of anyone getting hurt. The height of floors will be 3.74 m. equivalent of 22 steps at 17 cms. height each. This is to take care of the addition of more floors in the future, although that is not very likely.

Again I would like to stress the advantages of the scheme. People will hire cottages and live in them with great comfort. There is no housework to be done, no cooking, no shopping, and all so cheap that many applicants will have to be sent back with a "Sorry, no vacancy". With plenty of sunshine, fresh air, and good exercise, people will look healthier than ever before. A carefree, independent life where you do as you please is the ideal for a summer resort anywhere. Wealthy Egyptians, Iraqi's, Jordanians, and Syrians will turn back towards the Lebanon and forget Switzerland.

THE CENTRAL BUILDING:

The Central Building comprises the most important part of the whole scheme. It is called "Central" not because of its location with respect to the cottages but because of its importance in the project. It will be a general meeting-place for all the lodgers, a resting-place for travellers, and a recreational center, not only for the lodgers, but for nearby Aley, and maybe even Bhamdoun and Sofar. It is the nearest of all summer resorts to Beirut, and it will not be strange if a few years after the project is carried out it becomes the center of attraction during the summer season. As mentioned above, charity balls, beauty contests, and even concerts can be given up there. It must therefore accommodate a large number of people and must be attractive in order to conform to the purpose for which it is being built. Whether I have succeeded in representing it properly or not is left to the judgement of my more experienced teachers and future colleagues.

The building consists of the basement containing the service quarters, the first floor which contains the recreational facilities, and the second floor which has suites for bachelors.

In the basement there is the kitchen which is 11.00 x 6.00 m. This provides enough space for the food to be cooked which will usually amount to 200 meals. It has been based on the number of people occupying the cottages, the bachelors, the servants, and the outside customers. From the Kitchen the cooked food will be taken up to the kitchenette and then served to the customers either in the two dining rooms or on the terrace outside. A small lift will be installed to take the food from the kitchen to the kitchenette, but larger articles will have to be carried up the service stairs.

The pantry is 6.50 x 6.00 m. and will be used for washing the dishes and cutlery. A refrigerator will preserve soft foodstuffs and milk products. A washing machine will be installed in order to wash napkins and tablecloths and other laundry.

There are three bedrooms in the basement; one is for the cook and her assistant and the other two are for two maids each. There are also two bath rooms, one for the Cook and assistant and the other for the four maids. The steward has to live in the basement in order to be near his stores and be able to supervise properly. He will be given a bedroom, a bath room, and a small office.

There are three large store rooms to be used for food-stuffs, furniture, and wine, respectively. The first one will be nearest to the kitchen in order that it might be easy to take things when needed. The third store room will be next to the steward's quarters so that he might look after the wine. The furniture will be stored in the middle as there is no special priority for it.

The rest of the basement area will be used as parking space and transit lanes for automobiles. There are two lanes for parked cars and two others for parked cars that want to go out. All over the Colony there will be one-way traffic and proper control is necessary in order to prevent accidents. The roads will all be four meters wide, i.e. wide enough for a car to pass and to turn corners with ease, on condition that there should be no parked cars or cars coming in the opposite direction.

As the first floor is the most important part of the building, an imposing entrance is necessary. This is provided by wide steps with flower-boxes on both sides. However, in order not to have too many steps going up, part of the basement will be below the natural level of the ground. Thus, out of a height of 2.50 m. one meter will be hidden and 1.50 m. will show above ground. To get into the basement, therefore, pedestrians will get into the staircase-room at ground level and go down six steps to get to the basement. The motor-car entrance and exit will have a large slope so that cars can get down to the proper level before entering the building for parking.

The first floor consists of a lobby, a reading room, a games' room, a salon, a bar, two dining rooms, a kitchenette, a pantry, W.C.'s for men and women, an office, and a coat room. There are also two staircase rooms, one for service and the other for tenants and guests. People coming in through the entrance porch will pass into the lobby and on to whatever section of the building they would like to go to. They can be checked upon by the office and can obtain all the information they need. The manager will be in the office all the time and can rent cottages and rooms to lodgers or give them information on time-tables, schedules, etc.

The reading room will be 5.50 x 5.00 m. and will be used as a place of quiet where studious people would sit down to do some reading, write letters, or look at the daily newspaper. A free circulating library with a few hundred volumes can be installed there and lodgers can make use of the books. The local daily newspaper will be bought every morning, and a few periodicals of general public interest can be subscribed to.

Although gambling will be strictly forbidden all over the Colony, the harmless kinds of card games will be allowed. Some people do not enjoy any other kind of passtime, and a games' room has to be provided for those who would like to try a hand at cards. The room will be 7.50 x 7.00 m. and will contain a few tables and chairs for those who would like to use it.

Due to the lack of space the bachelors cannot receive guests in their rooms. This is also true in case the tenants of the cottages receive large groups. So a drawing room or salon is necessary for such formal occasions. In case a dinner is given in honour of some famous person, the guests will first be gathered into the salon and from there be taken into the dining rooms. Being next to the bar, people in the salon can be served with refreshments without having to go into the bar. A piano and a radio-pickup will add to the attractions of the salon.

The bar is 7.00 x 4.00 m., having a long counter, a few stools, and a few tables and chairs. Soft drinks, hot drinks, alcoholic drinks, and sandwiches will be served. Service can be done in the salon, the small dining room, the porch, and the bar itself. Prices will be similar to those in any ordinary café. The system of operation will be very similar to that of the A.U.B. Soda Fountain, except that drinking alcohol will be allowed. The cash box will be at the exit, so that people can pay while going out.

It is improper in a colony of this sort to have the children with all their noise and untidiness eat with the grown ups and disturb them. For this reason two dining rooms will be necessary, the children having their meals in the small one a little before the grown ups start eating in the other one. About 1.50 square meter will be allotted to each person, making the total of 210.00 sq. m. quite adequate, since it is not expected that more than 120 people will be having their meals at the same time. In case of balls the wide doors between the two units can be thrown apart, and a large hall provided for the dancers. The wide porch will also be arranged with tables and chairs for those who prefer the open air to a close atmosphere. The porch will also be used for dancing at balls, creating a romantic atmosphere in the moonlight. When people are through with their meals, they can send word to their drivers in the parking lanes, and the latter will come to pick them up at the end of the terrace.

The other units on the first floor are the kitchenette, which is used to send orders to the kitchen and serve the food; the pantry for keeping table-cloths, napkins, plates, cutlery, etc.; the mens' W.C.'s and urinals; and the women's lavatories and powder room. The office has already been mentioned, where the manager runs the whole scheme. These units have no special features about them, the same with respect to the coat-room.

The second floor of the Central Building is reserved for bachelors and newly married couples that have no children, in case there are any that would like to hire one of the suites. There are altogether seven suites, two of which are made up of a bedroom, a sitting room, and a bath room; the other five have only a bedroom and a bathroom each. Naturally, one of the suites will have to be reserved for the manager who must reside in the building in order to be in close touch with all matters. A large part of the roof of the first floor is left unused so that lodgers may have the opportunity of taking sun-baths during the day and sit down for inspiration and contemplation at night. The service staircase will be stopped at the first floor and will not be extended to the second floor in order not to spoil the facade of the building by competing with the main staircase which is the main feature of the facade. The vertical effect created by the main staircase will lose its effect, and the building will look too flat and horizontal, if the service staircase is extended to the second floor. The maids that go up to clean the second floor will have to use the main staircase. The bachelors' suites will be connected to the office by telephone, so that, in case anything is needed, it can be taken up immediately.

It can be seen from the plans handed in that no provisions have been taken to provide the man-servants with sleeping accommodations inside the colony. Aley is very near to the Colony, and local people can be hired to do the work. Furthermore, the men are not needed very early in the morning or late in the evening, except in very special cases. On the other hand, the maid-servants are needed at all times of the day, and as it is not safe for women to go back and forth in the early morning or late at night, they will have to be lodged within the Colony, and the basement of the Central Building has enough space for them. The gateman is the only person who must stay within the Colony, and a special lodge will be built for him at one of the gates. (This is not shown in the plans because it is not considered to be an important unit in the scheme.)

THE LAYOUT:

The original Cadastral plan of the plot was drawn to a scale of 1:1,000 and was then enlarged to the present scale of 1:200. Furthermore, the Cadastral plan did not contain any contours, and facilities for levelling were lacking, so that both the boundary lines of the plot and the levels used are approximate. However the effect of these discrepancies on the general arrangement of the scheme is not very great. Another approximation is the location and width of the projected change in the highway. I was unable to get the exact location from the municipality, and I designed the location plan based on the opinion of an official at the municipality who thought he knew something about it.

The first impression that a by-passer gets must be a good one. For this reason, and in order not to have too many roads to build and too much walking to do, the Central Building will be built nearest to the highway and parallel to it. The main facade has been well studied with respect to proportioning the masses and beautifying features in order to have an imposing effect on the onlooker. It is flanked on both sides by cottages which, being small, will help to carry the observer's eye to the Central Building and focus it on its main features. The trees all around the Colony will add to its beauty and prevent loiterers from annoying the occupants. Another general item is the grass which covers all unused areas, providing a soft cushion both for those who walk over it and those who feel like lying down for a while.

Cars and people will enter the Colony at the North-western gate, go round or through the Central Building,; this is for cars of course; and go out at the North-eastern gate. Cars can only go around the Central Building and out again but cannot reach the cottages because of the prohibitive slopes. The rest of the communications will be done by concrete-surfaced paths and steps. Cars can therefore pass either in front of the Building, or through it, or around it. This will take care of the one-way traffic lanes.

In selecting the position of the Central Building, the main considerations were the effect it would produce on by-passers, its nearness to the highway, and its convenience for traffic control. The cottages serve a different purpose. The main considerations were the balance of cut and fill, privacy from each other and from the outside, comfort for lodgers, and the existence of an attractive view. The last item is not difficult because all directions look nice. After each cottage is located, it is oriented in such a way as to turn the bedrooms and living room in the direction of the best scenery and most constant refreshing breeze. Each cottage is given a terrace with polygonal tiles for outdoor reception. Where the steps end and the boundary of a cottage begins, the concrete paths change into tiled footways. It is usual to find people in summer resorts interested in gardening. For the fulfilment of such desires and hobbies, tenants can prepare flower beds and plant them with anything they like. Seeds and seedlings are available at the garde^s at Jamhour, a little off the highway. They could be brought up by the office car on its way up to the Colony.

In the location plan, the various structures have been coloured in the following way: The buildings proper are dark brown; the balconies and terraces are light brown; The flowers have all sorts of colours; the grass and trees are green; the polygonal tiles are yellow, with the grass in between the stones green again; all roads, pathways and steps, which are of concrete are light blue.

It should be noted that my thesis is the Architectural design of the Colony and is not a Town-planning scheme. Use has been made of the lectures of Prof. N. Manasseh and the course he teaches. However there is no particular theory or method applied to the arrangement of the units. They have been located to conform to the above-mentioned requirements. As all units of the cottages have at least two openings to the outside at right angles, whatever way they are turned around, they will get enough sunlight and ventilation.

List of Drawings:

- 1) Plate I Cottage Type 1, One Bedroom
Plan, Facade, and Perspective 1:50
- 2) Plate II Cottage Type 2, Two Bedrooms
Plan, Facade, and Perspective 1:50
- 3) Plate III Central Building, Basement, 1:100
- 4) Plate IV Central Building, First Floor, 1:100
- 5) Plate V Central Building, Second Floor, 1:100
- 6) Plate VI Central Building, Facade and Perspective 1:100
- 7) Plate VII Location Plan, 1:200

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