

## Like an open toy chest

### **The Children's Museum in Amman sets new standard for architecture, and not just in the Middle East.**

Jordanian Queen Rania Al-Abdullah is an enlightened monarch for whom the well-being of her country's children is of particular personal importance. As a result, few were surprised several years ago when she proposed the construction of an interactive education museum especially for children. It was intended to become a space to foster children's curiosity and creativity and help them learn in playful ways.

Projects of this kind pose many challenges upon their architects: the architecture must not just fit the ostensible theme, but must also naturally reflect the contemporary architectural trends of a country.

The architectural offices of Faris & Faris from Amman were commissioned to build the museum on a 20,000 m<sup>2</sup> plot in the capital city's Al-Hussein National Park. The interior design was entrusted to the offices of Tahhan & Bushnaq. Prior to creating their designs, the architects first visited several of the world's most famous children's museums to study how they operate. Armed with that knowledge they then launched into concrete development.

The result is a unique architectural work. From a distance it resembles an open toy chest whose individual toys are spilling out. This was precisely the impression sought by Faris & Faris. Three large building components in red, blue and yellow leap out like oversized Lego blocks from a semi-circle. These aren't just decoration. The front sides hold interactive exhibition elements like a water wheel and giant marble track.

At the same time, the coloured blocks offer an important orientational function. They help visitors determine their location, as well as mark the museum's exits.

When it came time to clad the three coloured blocks and the planetarium, the architects decided upon aluminium composite panels coated with Reynobond<sup>®</sup> Architecture's exclusive DURAGLOSS<sup>®</sup> 5000 high-tech coating. This coating offers exceptional durability and resistance to environmental influences, and possesses outstanding colour, gloss and chalking characteristics. The red, blue and yellow colours used were developed based on the architects' unique project specifications. The certifications and the simple processing offered by Reynobond<sup>®</sup> Architecture Aluminium Composite Material were also key factors in swaying the architects to specify the product.

One special area of the museum is its environmental zone: a stainless steel form twines around a glass cylinder. The architects chose this design specifically to illuminate how architecture can mesh with its surroundings. In summer, the leafy branches of trees shade the “Eco Hall” from the rays of the sun and the heat. In winter, they let the sun shine through to heat the hall. Because the temperature does in fact fluctuate in Jordan between summer and winter, a material is required that expands only negligibly. The extraordinary weather resistance was another checkmark in Reynobond® Architecture’s favour.

The playful exterior design with shapes, angles and materials segues seamless into the museum’s interior. Floor, ceiling, walls, furnishings – everything is used to dispel young visitors’ hesitations about learning and discovery. The more than 150 interactive installations on topics like science, culture and technology were created by Haley Sharpe Design, a world leader in that field.

Beyond the exhibition spaces, the museum also houses a restaurant, a computer science centre, a multi-purpose hall, a library, rooms for activities, and a planetarium.

The building opened in May 2007 and set a milestone for Jordanian architecture. It is a particularly magnificent example of traditionally applied stone, yet is also dominated by concrete, glass and aluminium. The modern aspects of architect hence are finally given a portal into this ancient land.

## Facts in Brief:

<b>Project:</b>	Children’s Museum
<b>Address:</b>	Al-Hussein National Park, Amman, Jordan
<b>Architects:</b>	Faris & Faris
<b>Fabricators:</b>	Annab & Co.
<b>Plot size:</b>	20.000 m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Product:</b>	7.000 m <sup>2</sup> of Reynobond® 4 mm, coated with DURAGLOSS® 5000 in red, blue, yellow and silver, using a cassette fabrication system for cladding the three coloured building blocks as well as the planetarium.

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