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The Splendor of Worship
**KING HUSSEIN
MOSQUE**

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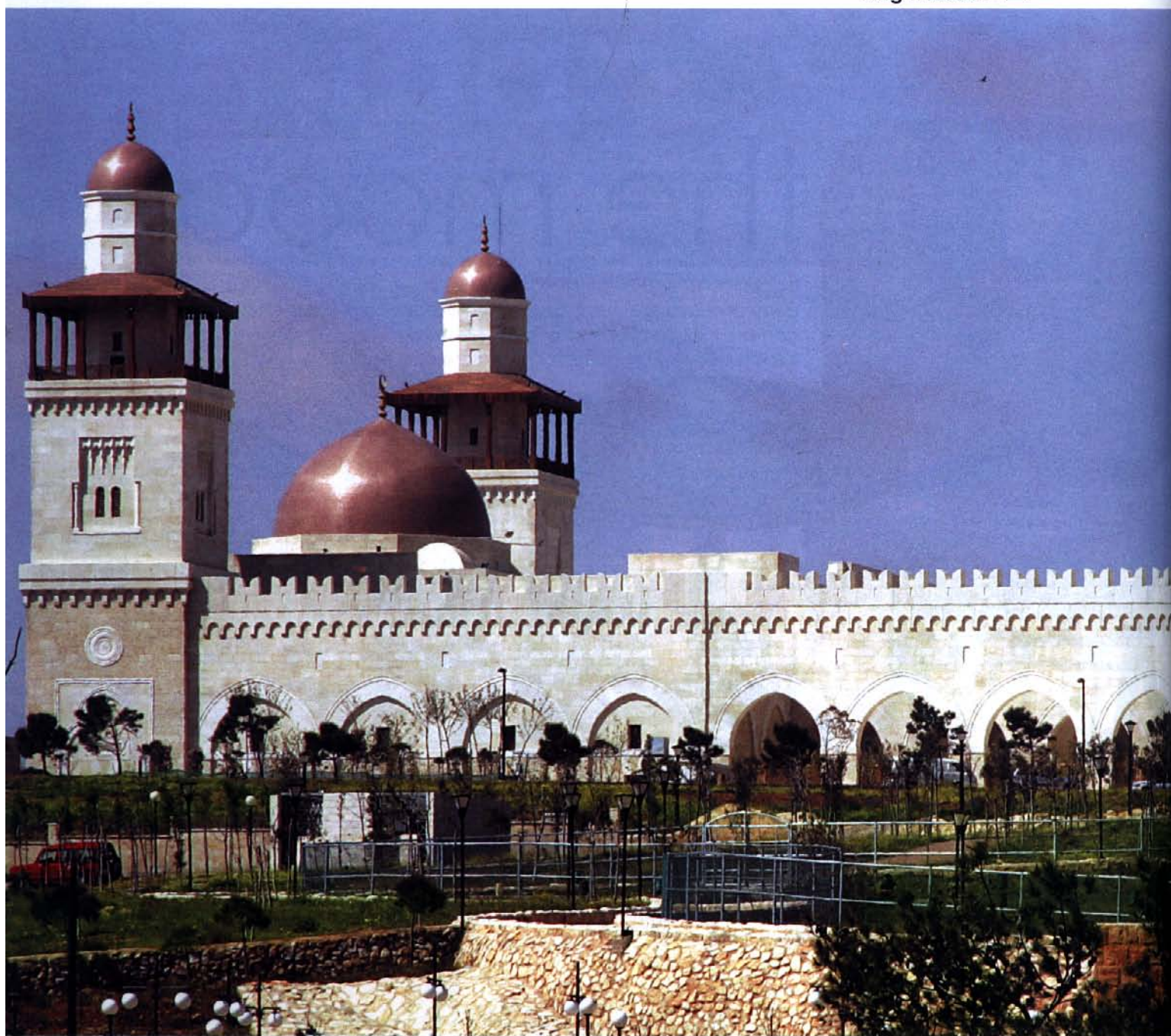
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The Splendor of Worship

For the past few years, a dominant yet calm structure has been constructed on a hilltop in northern Amman, as a tribute to the memory of His Majesty the late King Hussein.





The new mosque was envisioned by His Majesty King Abdullah as a site enhancing cultural awareness of Jordan and its Islamic heritage, and highlighting its rich history and its crucial role in the events shaping the early days of Islam.

naugurated on Tuesday, April 11, in a celebration marking the birth of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him), the King Hussein bin Talal Mosque comes as a landmark commemorating the life of the late King Hussein and his commitment to his Islamic faith and the Muslim world at large.

Standing atop a hill adjacent to the King Hussein Medical City and overlooking the Greater Amman Municipality's King Hussein Gardens project, the new mosque was envisioned by His Majesty King Abdullah as a site enhancing cultural awareness of Jordan and its Islamic heritage, and highlighting its rich history and its crucial role in the events shaping the early days of Islam. With a total land area of 60,000 square meters (sqm), the mosque itself is built on 7,700 sqm. The remaining area has been carefully planned to accommodate up to 450 vehicles in a dedicated car park, along with inner roads, pathways, sidewalks, steps, and green areas featuring a variety of flora. The building is based on white Jordanian stone in various shades and patterns, with various engravings and seamless combinations of Quranic calligraphy in the Kufic and Thuluth fonts. Arches and vaulted ceilings are prominent in the structure.

The four minarets, while clearly massive in size, do not tower far above the rest of the mosque, as one might expect from a typical structure that attempts to rival other landmark houses of worship in the region. Instead, the mosque is a fresh take on the Umayyad style, inspired by the ancient forts and historic mosques of the Levant. Khalid Azzam, director of the Prince's School of Traditional Arts in London and co-founder of the School of Islamic Arts at Al-Balqa University, was approached by His Majesty King Abdullah three years ago to design the mosque. "His Majesty personally chose the site for this project," said Dr. Azzam in an interview with *Home*. "He felt that such a landmark would create the effect of a strong building atop a mountain with a clear, simple expression from a distance that gradually becomes more detailed and refined on the inside."

Seated against a wall in the almost-completed mosque, the soft-spoken Dr. Azzam looks around the mosque he designed with a sense of relief. Albeit an established and well-respected academic, he is no stranger to applied architecture. His private architectural practice operates out of Cairo, Jeddah and London, where he currently resides, and he has worked on other mosques as well as houses, schools, and office buildings with a particular interest in traditional art and architecture.

"In the rush to build during the 1960s and 1970s," Dr. Azzam explained, "we lost a lot of our identity in the buildings that were erected during this time. I try to research and design buildings that are relevant [to modern life] but that also incorporate our traditions."

For him, this has meant looking beyond to environment and context in order to rebuild the chain connecting us with our historic traditions, through a sophisticated architectural response that is deeply rooted in a holistic understanding of Islamic principles. These very traditions, which were shunned as Arab architects followed modern and post-modern theory, once had a direct impact on what we know and recognize as "Islamic" art and style today. In his quest to design the King Hussein Mosque, the architect conducted extensive research on contemporary as well as older mosques in the region, including the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus and the Qarawiyyeen Mosque in Morocco. "I realized that with many of the newer mosques, they were remotely located, whereas ancient mosques were vibrant, living components of their communities," he explained. "With the King Hussein Mosque, we wanted to re-establish the mosque as a place for worshippers to go and spend their time." This is reflected in the design of the mosque's entrances leading into the outer foyer, a dual-use area that can accommodate additional worshippers on Fridays and for special occasions like Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha. This layout gives the King Hussein Mosque a capacity of nearly 5,000 worshippers inside and outside the building, according to Ammar Malhas, engineering adviser at the Royal Hashemite Court and the project manager of the King Hussein Mosque.

Mr. Malhas, whose department directed the entire construction effort, also pointed out the integration of the women's prayer area into a mezzanine level that overlooks the main prayer area inside the mosque, and allows female worshippers to almost seamlessly participate in all prayers and ceremonies with the men as a single unit. This is in sharp contrast to mosques which keep women segregated in a room with a loudspeaker that broadcasts the voice of the imam leading the prayer or delivering the sermon.

Proudly noting that the entire mosque was constructed using materials and furnishings from Jordan, Mr. Malhas said that the two exceptions were the carpets and chandeliers, which were acquired in Turkey due to logistical problems, and because the craftsmanship needed to manufacture the brass chandeliers is not available anywhere else. Otherwise, the entire project was carried out by a local contractor and



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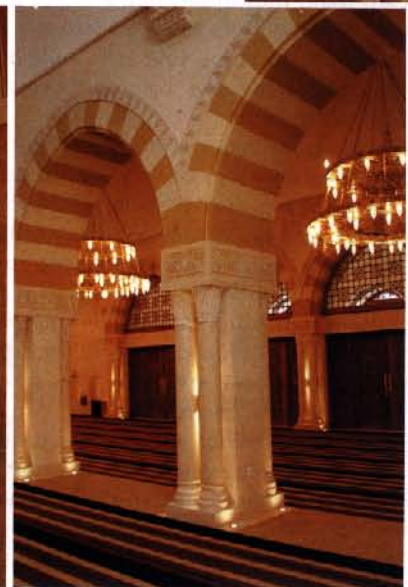


flow of air is created, eliminating the need for any air conditioning units or ceiling fans inside the mosque. A floor heating system has been installed as opposed to conventional radiators, so the carpet is warm even on the coldest winter days.

Looking around the inside of the mosque, not a single loudspeaker is visible, although the sounds of Quranic recitation and the call to prayer appear to come from every direction. A closer inspection, however, reveals something truly ingenious. Loudspeakers have been embedded inconspicuously into the custom-made brass chandeliers, as well as behind the wooden screens on the sides of the mihrab. The mosque has also been pre-

equipped with the systems necessary for television broadcasting of Friday prayers and various religious ceremonies, to allow for minimal usage of additional cables.

Rich with architectural finesse, engineering grandeur and fine craftsmanship, the King Hussein Mosque is Amman's newest and most significant religious landmark to date. But what it achieves, beyond its new status as the official state mosque, is a return to the original role of the mosque in Islam: a place where the worshipper can enter a state of calm and serenity in



order to direct oneself to the Creator. The King Hussein Mosque was financed by generous donations from His Majesty King Abdullah II and Sultan Qaboos bin Saeed of Oman, who wished to make a tribute to his longtime friend, His Majesty the late King Hussein. The mosque and its facilities will be maintained and administered directly by the Royal Hashemite Court. **in**

local suppliers, supervised and administered entirely by local engineers and technicians.

The mosque is closely linked to its surrounding landscape to draw people into it and allow them to see it as an open, approachable area and a natural extension of the King Hussein Gardens. Many visitors were already doing just that, even before the mosque was inaugurated, and the building somehow manages to establish what Dr. Azzam calls in his research a hierarchy of spaces, creating a series of transitional zones.

But how does the King Hussein Mosque achieve this effect of magnitude and serenity at the same time? Dr. Azzam says that the simplicity comes from a very straightforward brief and function for the landmark, and his mission was clear given his disappointment with mosques that are extravagant but interrupt the spiritual flow of the worshippers. "Spiritually, a mosque links the physical horizon with the vertical axis of heaven," he expounds, "so it is important to place the worshipper in a place that speaks to the soul and the spirit, not just to the physical presence."

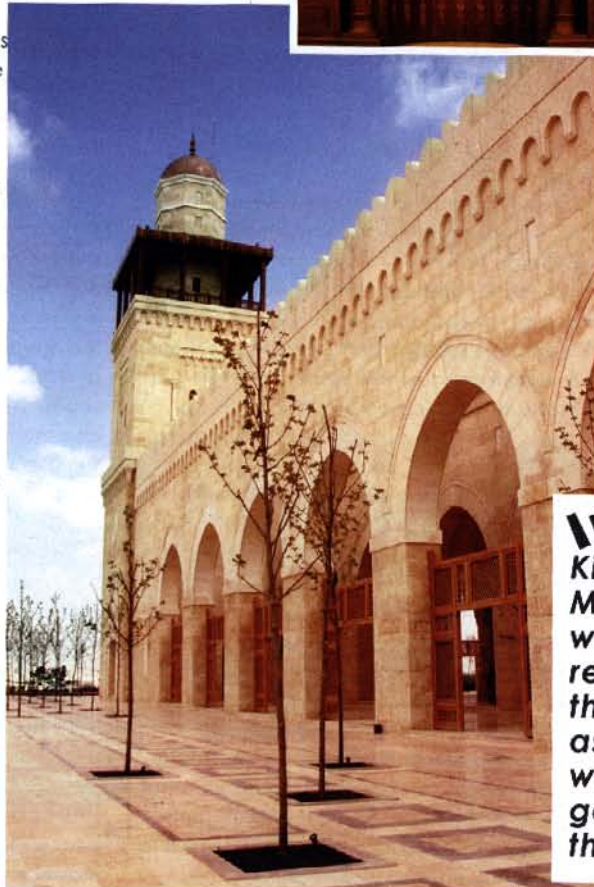
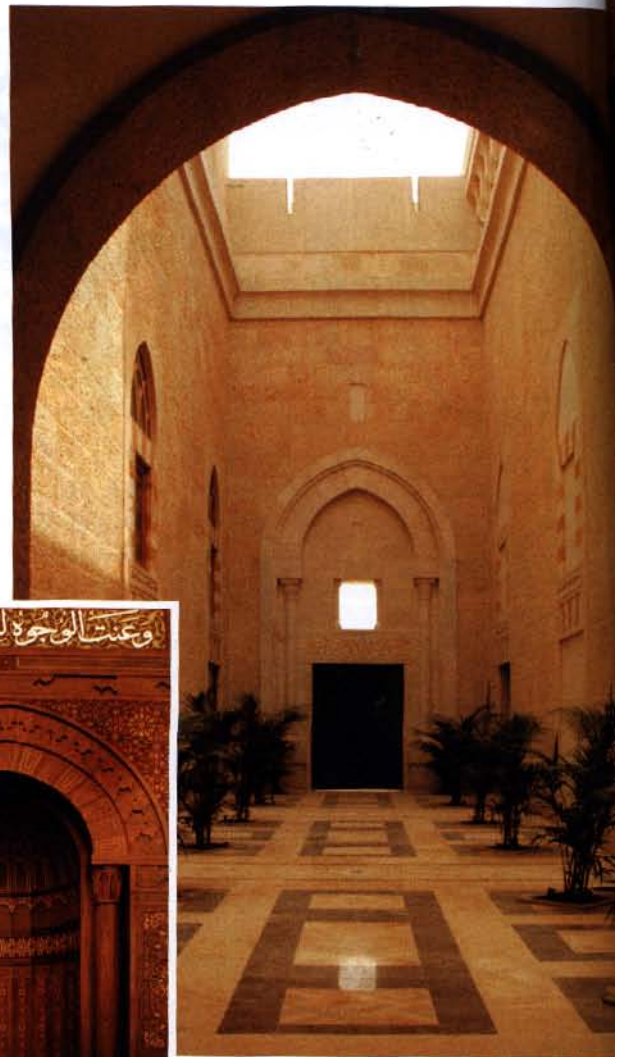
Seeing that people often turn inwards in the hustle and bustle of the loud city, Dr. Azzam has even considered the human response to the place of worship. The purpose of a mosque, according to him, is not to instill awe but rather to make the worshipper consider how he or she fits into the natural order of things. He believes that forgetting this fit is what causes

our problems. "Too many mosques are over-designed," he says as he shakes his head in some bewilderment. "This mosque [the King Hussein Mosque] is simple and creates rhythm. It responds to human need and calms you down rather than being simply a huge dome and a collection of agitating visual patterns."

This does not mean that the King Hussein Mosque lacks examples of Islamic art, as Mr. Malhas points out during a tour of the mosque. The *mihrab* is truly a unique artifact: it is made entirely of walnut, pine and other rare types of wood, a feat which has not been undertaken in mosque architecture for almost 300 years. The *mihrab* was crafted by a team of instructors and technicians from Al-Balqa Applied University's Faculty of Islamic Arts, with participating artisans from countries including Algeria and even Thailand. Wood is also prominent in the four minarets, in the manner of mosques from the

Umayyad period. In spite of the visual beauty of the King Hussein Mosque, its marvel extends to the functionality and aesthetics of its features. The designer's approach utilizes old and new concepts in architecture and design in order to reduce – and sometimes eliminate – invasive technological innovations.

For example, two narrow courtyards on either side of the mosque serve a historically known function: their shape induces cooler air to settle downwards, and this cooler air can then flow into the mosque when the side doors of the mosque are opened. The vault and x-vault designs of the mosque's ceilings make warm air rise faster, and as it rises through dedicated openings in the ceiling a continuous



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