

## The Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre - Shuwaikh, Al Asimah, Kuwait

Essay by Mohammad Mothaffar

The Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre (JACC) is one of the staples of Kuwait regarding culture, history, music, and art. It took 22 months for it to be designed and erected and was completed in 2016, then opened by the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad, the brother of the Amir who was before him and who the cultural centre was named in honour of. In fact the Amiri Diwan, which belongs to the royal family, are the clients who are responsible for the project being built. Being from Kuwait, and living there all my life I am very familiar with the project, including some details that do not get mentioned on some of the blogs and magazines. One such detail is that the structure is by the road which runs across the coast of Kuwait, filled with beaches including the stunning Shuwaikh beach which is right next to the structure, as well as parliament, some piers and a traditional cafe which has been around since the mid 1900's, and finally further down the road you will find the palace of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad, who opened the cultural centre.

The JACC which cost USD775M to build is composed of four structures each of which contains massive courtyards for the entrances, and the buildings themselves host theatres, concert halls, cinemas, conference and exhibition halls, and a library archive. All of this will be placed in a parkland setting which was created only to serve the buildings. The buildings themselves span 214,000m<sup>2</sup> and are clad in a steel structure separate from the concrete block of the building. The metal used was titanium, so this not only makes it the largest cultural centre and opera house in the middle east, but also one of the largest titanium structures in the world, reminding me of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain.

Nevertheless, you do not need to be aware of all these facts to know that the JACC has won numerous international awards. You can come to that deduction just by looking at the structure. The complex geometric forms inspired by Islamic architecture forming the outer skin of each building, as well as the design itself being distilled down from jewels such as diamond, those things put together give us this remarkable sight to behold and what adds much more to it is the location. Being right by the coast makes it complete and much more pleasing to look at. The punch in windows which match the pattern design on the exterior and create interesting forms from light are all factors that come together which make the aesthetics of this building truly something great. The structure itself is composed of a concrete foundation and ring base, then as you move towards the shell you will find primary and secondary steel members, as well as air and water barriers between the shell and skin of the structure. The gutters within the shell form a network similar to that of an organism's veins for water collection.

SSH international were responsible for designing the project and the construction supervision. In fact, their firm did most of the work on this project and was one of their earlier works, thereby putting their name on the map in bold. Alhani handled the construction of the project, and dsa ENGINEERING provided the complete mechanical and electrical design for the structure. There weren't many firms involved in the project itself, and the firms that were involved were all local, which I believe led to easy communication and is what made the 22 month timeline possible.

Sources for this paper:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sshic.com/our-projects/the-sheikh-jaber-al-ahmad-cultural-centre/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dsaengineers.com/sheikh-jaber-al-ahmad-cultural-centre>

<sup>3</sup> <https://kuwaitlisting.com/item/sheikh-jaber-al-ahmad-cultural-centre/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2856719>

