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2004 Aga Khan Award for Architecture:

Promoting Excellence in the Islamic World

By Sam Lubell with James Murdock

FEATURES

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, which since 1977 has encouraged successful building practices and promoted local culture in the Islamic World, was at press time scheduled to announce its 2004 winners on November 27 in Delhi, India.

The seven victorious projects were chosen from a field of 378 nominees by a nine-person jury (listed below). In choosing the winners, notes juror Farshid Moussavi, of Foreign Office Architects in London (and an Iranian native), the panel considered the project's social impact, the integration of private and public spheres, and expressions of power, individuality, and historical memory. But by far the chief component was simply architectural excellence. "It's about how do you crystallize the forces that shape an architectural project into form?" says Moussavi, who was impressed with the overall quality of the work she saw in a volatile region where architecture is often ignored by the western public. Short-listed projects are visited by jurors after being narrowed down by various architects, engineers, and scholars with intensely detailed research on performance, cost, and design concepts, among other criteria.

This year's winners, says awards secretary general Suha Özkan, included more experimental and contemporary work than in past cycles (the prizes are given out every three years), marking a concerted effort to expand the program's boundaries. These included a prototype for sandbag structures, a school building in Burkina Faso, and a sleek, highly adapt-

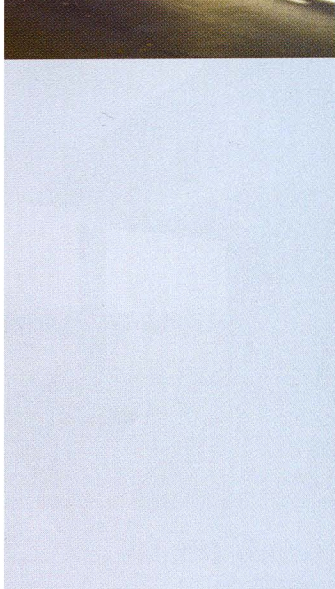
able modern house in Turkey.

"The awards are not only about celebrating the heritage of a certain culture, but celebrating the new ventures coming out of a place," notes Moussavi, who also points out that the jury had the benefit of a very diverse membership that included philosophers, artists, engineers, architects, and historians. "I think it was very healthy to have different perspectives. It becomes tougher to talk about design when faced with a nonarchitect, and I think that's very exciting."

The awards were originally established by His Highness the Aga Khan, the Imam of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims. Awards total \$500,000, making this the largest architectural prize in the world. Winners can include projects in contemporary design, social housing, community improvement, restoration, reuse, area conservation, landscape design, and improvement of the environment.

Master Jury

Ghada Amer, artist, New York; **Hanif Kara**, partner, Adams Kara Taylor Structural and Civil Engineering Consultancy, London; **Rahul Mehrotra**, executive director, Urban Design Research Institute, Mumbai; **Farshid Moussavi**, partner, Foreign Office Architects, London; **Modjtaba Sadria**, professor of Cross-Cultural Relations and East Asian Studies, Chuo University, Tokyo; **Reinhard Schulze**, professor of Islamic Studies, University of Bern; **Elías Torres Tur**, partner, Martínez Lapeña-Torres Arquitectos, Barcelona; **Billie Tsien**, partner, Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects, New York; **Jafar Tukan**, principal, Consolidated Consultants for Engineering and the Environment, Amman.



**Bibliotheca Alexandrina,
Alexandria, Egypt. Snøhetta
Hamza Consortium**

Commissioned in 1988, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina is a revival of Alexandria's legendary ancient library. Its basic form is a tilting disc, with four levels below ground and seven above ground, which helps minimize the building's scale so visitors are not overwhelmed by it. The exterior wall is clad in 4,000 granite blocks that are carved with letters from the world's alphabets. The circular diaphragm wall, 541 feet in diameter and 115 feet high, is among the largest of its kind in the world.