

WILLIAM

# PEREIRA



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## Qatar Planning Studies and the Doha Sheraton

DOHA, QATAR, 1976

Centrally located on the southwest shore of the Arabian Gulf, Qatar is a low lying peninsula 180 kilometers long and 85 kilometers wide which, with a few offshore islands, extends northwards into the Gulf from the Rub al Khali desert or "Empty Quarter" of Saudi Arabia. Other than the Kingdom to the southwest, its neighbors are the United Arab Emirates to the southeast and Bahrain to the north.

Qatar, like all of the other principalities of the Arabian Peninsula, has undergone dramatic changes since the end of World War II, but most particularly since oil was discovered there in the early 1950s. It has been transformed from a small country of 25,000 people, largely dependent on fishing and pearl diving, to a major Middle Eastern oil-producing nation.

When the Pereira office became involved in planning studies in Qatar, in 1970, the capital city of Doha had 91,000 residents, out of a national population of

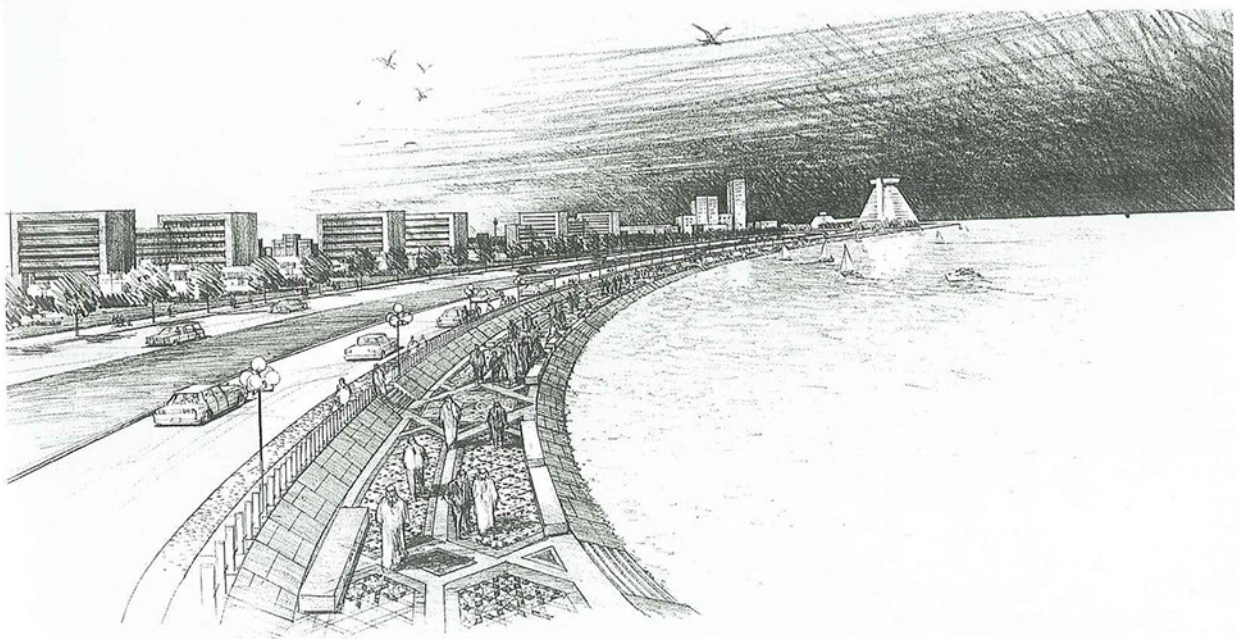
120,000. Other communities, concentrated on the east coast of the peninsula, made up the difference, including Khor, Rayyan, Wakrah, and Umm Said. There are also a number of other small communities in the north and west, including Ruwais, Dukhan and Umm Bab.

The distinctive aspect of the Qatar economy is its almost total dependence on petroleum or petroleum related products for revenue. Although the oil industry employs relatively few people, it is the most important sector of the economy and when the Government tried to diversify by introducing new industrial programs, these were also tied to the petroleum industry, either through processing requirements or energy intensive connections. In 1973, when the Pereira office was heavily involved in Qatar, the small country was the ninth largest oil producer among all of the Arab States. That year marked the point of peak production of over 500,000 barrels per day.

The Qatar General Petroleum Company (QGPC),

The Corniche in the new district of Doha

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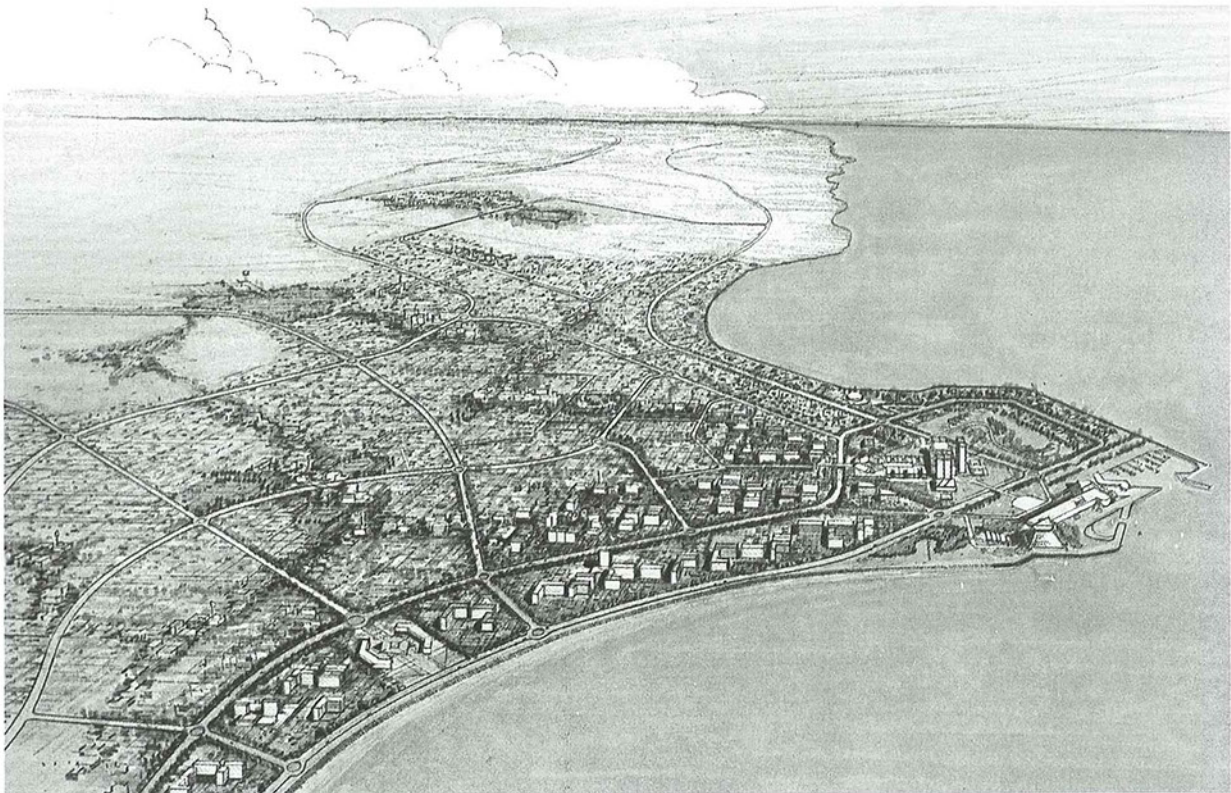
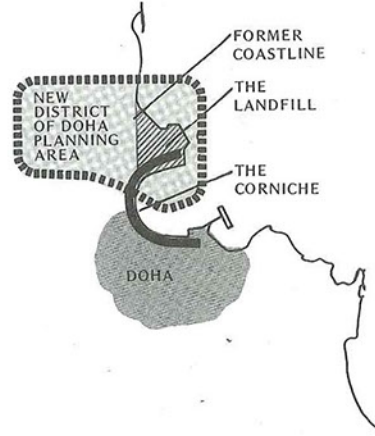
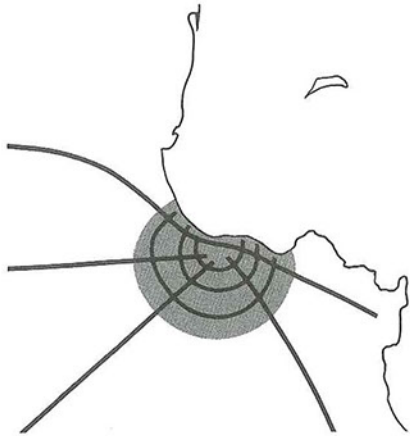


Doha's historic radial pattern

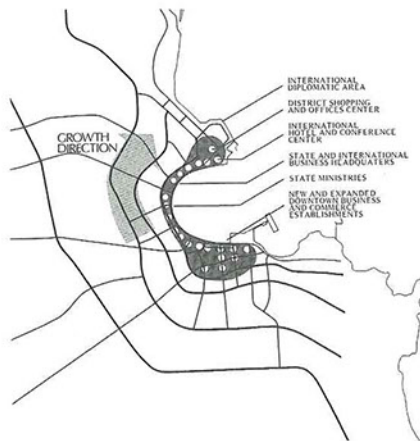
Aerial view from south of the new district of Doha

Restructuring of Doha Bay

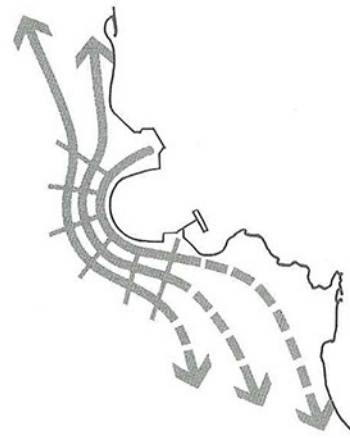
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Expansion of central Doha



Doha urban primary road system



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the national oil company, supervises the operation of this vast industry and holds the state share in all oil, gas and petrochemical ventures inside and outside the country. A number of subsidiaries are responsible for everything from technical operations from the well head to the loading terminal, to offshore exploration and export. Doha is the capital city of Qatar, a small country on the western edge of the Arabian Gulf that projects like a thumb shaped peninsula into the Arabian Gulf. William L Pereira Associates was commissioned to plan the development of the New District of Doha, an extension to the capital city, in the early 1970's, along with the new towns and industrial complex of Umm Said which lies 35 kilometers south of Doha, which involved development of important criteria for staff housing.

The new district covers 1,200 hectares, including 740 hectares of reclaimed land, to the north of Doha, oriented toward Doha Bay, between Khalifa Road and the

new Gulf University. Pereira's plan was intended to guide development for 20 years, to 1997, and has been the framework for growth during a turbulent period of economic expansion in this dynamic region. The goals of the plan were to implement orderly and efficient growth to accommodate the rapidly expanding population of Doha. As one of the first coordinated plans for large-scale development in Qatar, the scheme was approached as a prototype or self-described "laboratory" in which to formulate the administrative, financial and governmental processes which Pereira felt had to be instituted in order to enable high quality large-scale development.

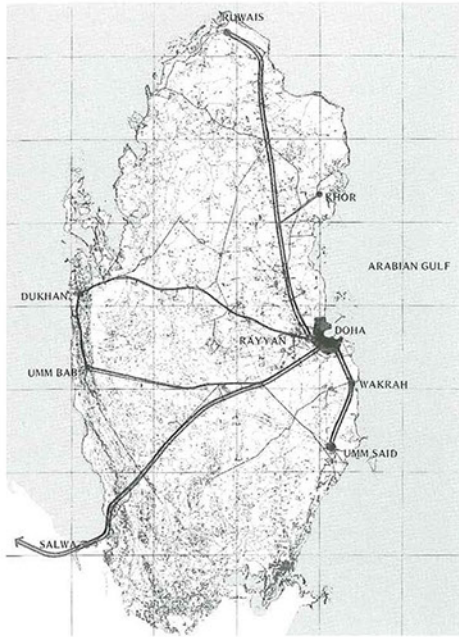
The architect first studied the existing structure of the city, organized in a radial pattern around a bay, with a central business district on the waterfront and major roads, fanning out from it. A landfill project, completed between 1974 and 1977, made possible a sweeping avenue, or "Corniche" around Doha Bay, which in turn led



Aerial view from north of  
Umm Said

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Plan of Qatar

to a government decision to locate many naturally significant projects along the access road, such as a five star Sheraton hotel which Pereira was commissioned to design. The design of these highly visible projects ran parallel to the reconstruction of the existing central area of Doha.

Pereira changed the urban emphasis from a radial to linear plan, believed by the planners to be more amenable to future growth, which occurred very rapidly. Critical attention was given to the new road system that this evolving linear plan dictated, responding to the immediate need to serve the New District of Doha that Pereira was planning, as well as future growth areas to the north, around the university. Pereira also proposed a Growth Management Zone around the old city. The development team eventually included a Japanese construction crew, a Korean general contractor and engineer, West German mechanical engineers and equipment, British furnishings, and construction workers from India and

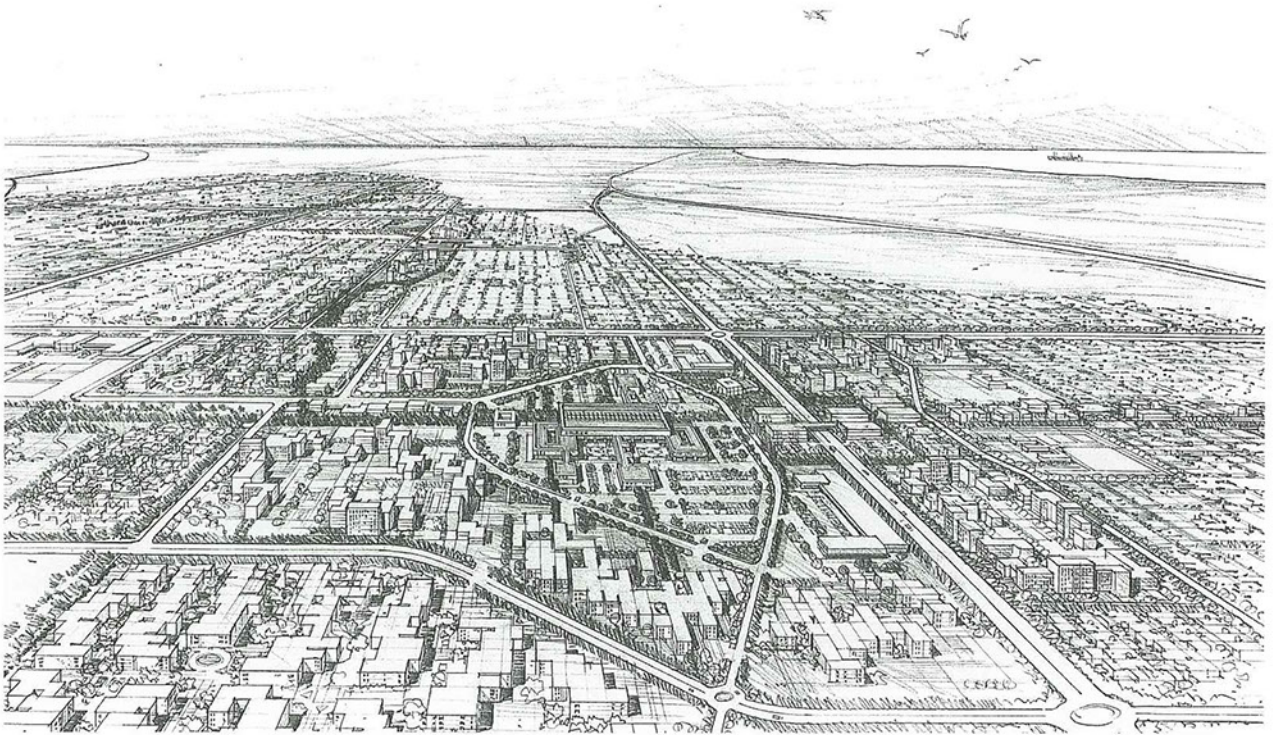
Pakistan. At the dedication ceremony Sheik Khalifa Bin Hamad al-Thani, the Amir of Qatar, praised the hotel complex as proof that Qatar could "combine the world's most advanced technology with elements of its own deeply rooted culture to create an architectural landmark that will be a point of contact between Qataris and the international community." He was followed on the dais by the architect, who made special mention of his awareness "of the importance of the hotel and the conference center to the social and cultural life of Doha, which led us to create a new and complete life style that recognizes the traditions of centuries old culture and will appeal to both visitors and Qataris alike."

The social pressures that have resulted from the "new and complete life style" that Pereira referred to in 1983, when the impetus toward modernization and development were at their height, have prompted a re-thinking of the desirability and benefits of growth in Qatar and



Aerial view from south of  
planned Umm Said town  
center

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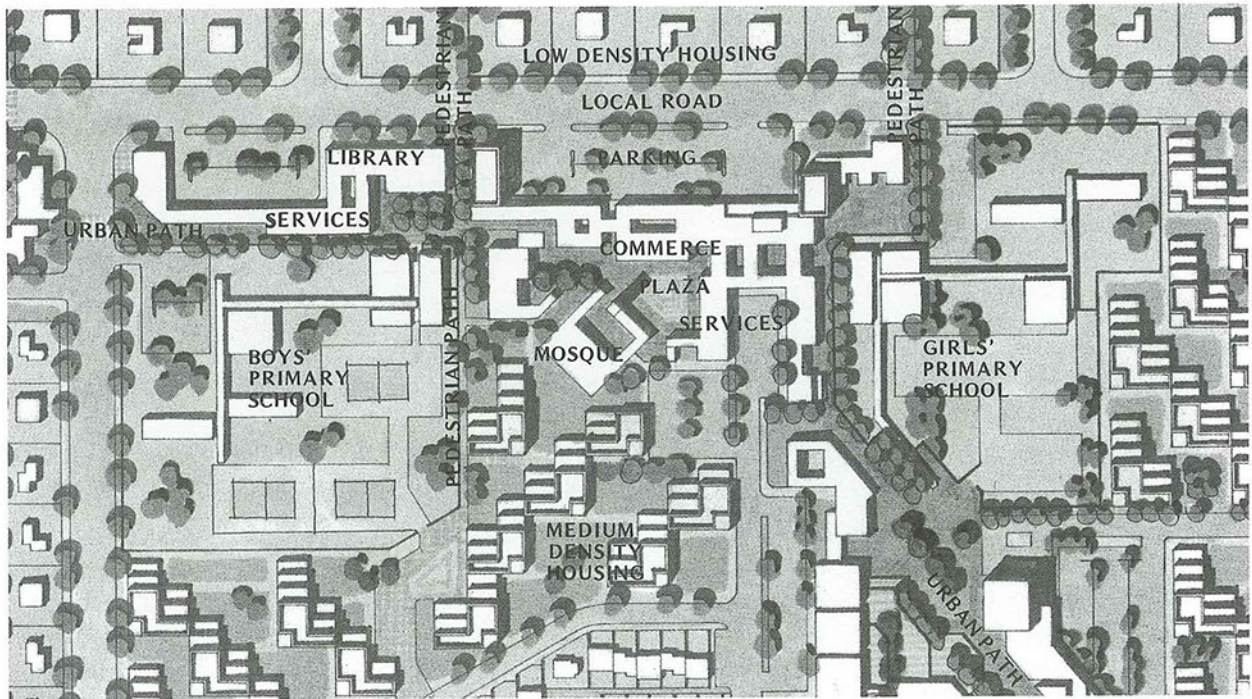
Plan of a superblock in the new district of Doha

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Plan of a typical neighborhood center in Umm Said

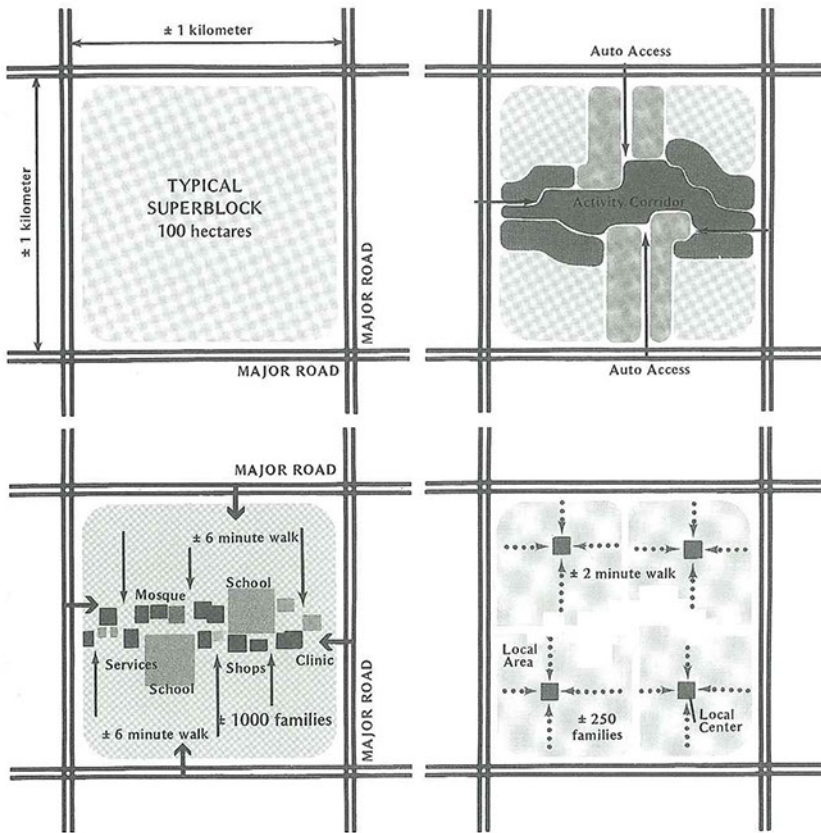
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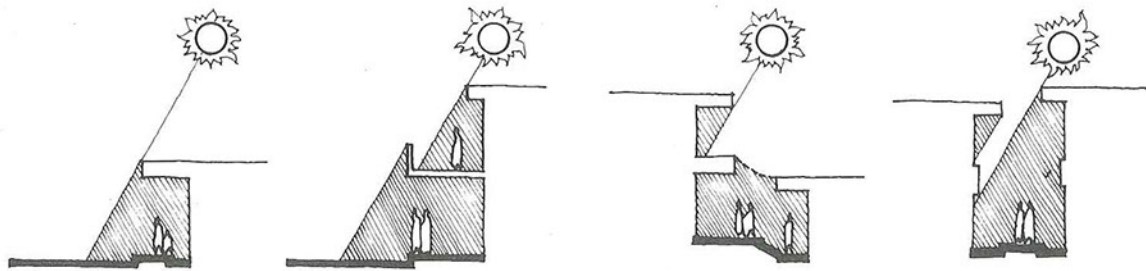




Umm Said:  
Superblock concept  
Housing density distribution

Umm Said:  
Neighborhood concept  
Local areas





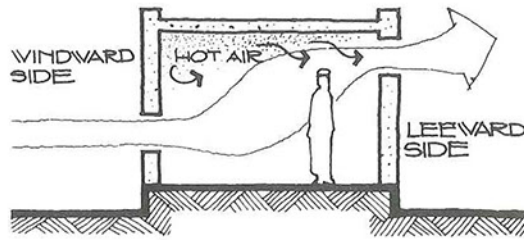
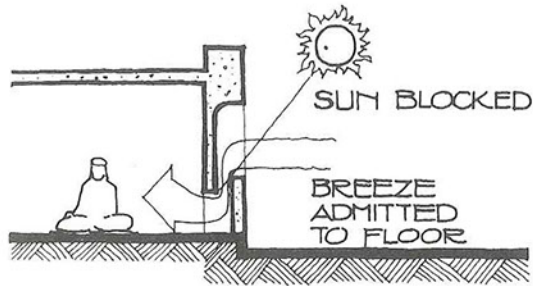
Design techniques for environmental compatibility

throughout the other oil-rich nations of the Gulf, with the consensus now being that the price, in lost heritage, that was paid to go so far so fast, was too high. Pride, however, especially when intended for public consumption or an international audience, is still high in the accomplishments of the last two decades in creating the infrastructure necessary to make Qatar a fully contemporary nation-state. There is now a new awareness of the problems that can result from such an instantaneous transition, without time for sociological adjustment. The upshot has been that master planning at the scale carried out by Pereira is no longer viewed favorably, especially when imposed by foreign consultants. Pereira was in the right place at the right time, perfectly positioned, as he seemed to be in each of the other projects presented here, to take advantage of an opportunity on a scale that is not likely to occur in this region again. Considering the limitations he faced, of dealing with a remarkably different cultural

context as an outsider with a decidedly international style worldview, his contribution has been surprisingly durable, and has stood the test of time.

The Sheraton Doha Hotel was the first project realized in Pereira's plans for the district, following completion of plans for the Diplomatic Area, the District Center, the Ministries Center and State Plaza, the Corniche Promenade, housing subdivisions and commercial centers for the community. The hotel and adjacent conference center, dedicated in early July, 1983, cost \$150 million, and was conceived with the concept of creating a landmark on a promontory arcing into the Gulf, providing a visual terminus for the Corniche and allowing distant views over the water. Following the Islamic tradition of internalization, the focus of the design is a 13-story atrium, surrounded on four sides by 439 luxury guest rooms and suites, each with private exterior balconies for ocean views. The atrium was intended to be an





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oasis in a hot humid region, as well as a *majlis*, or formal reception room for meeting guests typically found in private residences throughout the Gulf. The strong Bedouin heritage of hospitality, takes on a different dimension in this region, so the symbolic value of the atrium is as important as the physical comfort it provides.

The hotel is sited so that the outdoor public spaces, except for the swimming pool, are protected from the sun, and the strong sand-bearing winds, called *shmals*, which frequently blow in from the desert interior, sometimes reaching velocities of 100 mph. The steel structure, pre-cast concrete cladding and pyramidal shape were all designed in response to this periodic wind load. The triangular theme is discernible everywhere, used to unite the disparate parts of the design and to make reference to the Islamic love of geometry in architecture. The motif appears constantly at different scales and in various materials throughout the building complex, providing a

subtle kind of formal integration throughout. The triangular shape of the 13-story atrium is the final, large-scale expression of this geometry, in section.

The Conference Center, attached to the hotel, has a 750-seat auditorium and was designed to include what at the time were state of the art audio-visual and telecommunications services, with complete facilities for press, interpreters and simultaneous translation in seven languages.