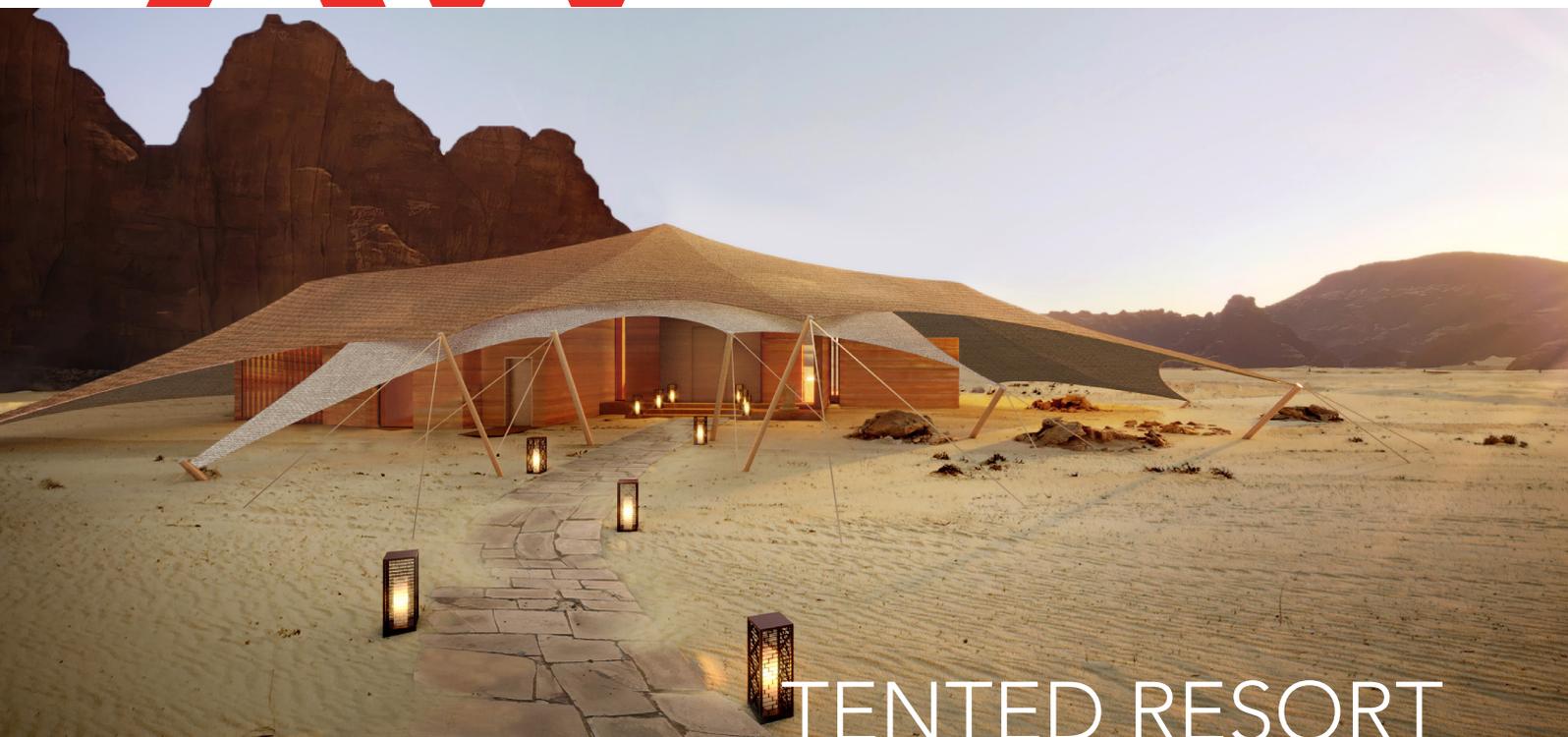


# AW<sup>2</sup>

PARIS  
ARCHITECTURE  
& INTERIORS



## TENTED RESORT IN ASHAR, ALULA PRESS RELEASE



The architecture and interior design studio AW<sup>2</sup>,  
run by Reda Amalou and Stéphanie Ledoux,  
presents a new high-end tented resort project  
under construction in the heart of the AlUla region,  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.





# ALULA

## A NEW VISION OF A HISTORIC REGION

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Nestled deep within the vast desert of northwest Saudi Arabia, Alula is known as a cultural oasis and living museum with more than 200,000 years of human history. Ashar is one of the project sites selected by the Royal Commission of Alula (RCU) to develop the county into a world class tourist destination.

The architecture and interior design studio AW<sup>2</sup> was selected by the RCU in partnership with the French Agency for Alula Development (AFALULA), to design a luxury tented resort on an untouched site within the Ashar valley. The resort will be located 15km from the Kingdom's first UNESCO World Heritage Site, Hegra.

Guided by the Charter Report, Strategic Masterplanning Guidelines for Alula and the Saudi Vision 2030, AW<sup>2</sup>'s design integrates and responds to the Kingdom's future ambitions. The preservation of the natural beauty and rich heritage of the site are at the forefront of the project as well as the understanding of the nation's longterm touristic, cultural and economic goals for the region.

Accor, under the Banyan Tree brand, will operate the Tented Resort with 47 new high-end tented suites in addition to 35 renovated suites positioned on a neighbouring site, bringing the total number of units up to 82. Designed by AW<sup>2</sup>, the new tented suites will be completed by a luxury spa and several gourmet restaurants. This resort will be an upper-upscale product (high-end 5 star).

## MASTERPLAN

Following extensive site studies run by AFALULA assisted by Egis, AW<sup>2</sup> designed a masterplan that placed the 47 tented suites in relation to the coves created by the rock formations. Each tented suite has been positioned to enjoy extended views over the rock formations or desertscape whilst providing a maximum degree of privacy for all the guests by organising the viewlines from each individual tent.

AW<sup>2</sup>'s intention was for the resort to blend seamlessly into the natural scenery of the Ashar valley. Guided by a sensitive design, the landscape remains the centre-stage. Stéphanie Ledoux and Reda Amalou, Partners leading the Tented Resort project said: "Our architecture responds to the fragility of the Ashar site and aims not only to restore but also to protect it from future harm by consciously addressing the balance of Man and Nature."

Pedestrian trails through a landscape peppered with sand dunes create a more intimate experience and reinforce the camping mindset of this exceptional location. Electric buggies provide connections around the resort on dedicated tracks designed to accommodate small vehicles. In this way, the footprint of the resort is reduced to a minimum and the natural habitat is preserved.

Microcatchment gardens have been incorporated to provide flood protection during the months of high rainfall when flash floods can occur in this region. The landscape design overall emphasises the natural growth of greenery, a sustainable design choice that focuses on encouraging the cultivation of local species accustomed to the desert climate.

## TENTED SUITES

Inspired by the nomadic nature of Bedouin architecture, the tented resort concept epitomises AW<sup>2</sup>'s 'light touch' approach to design. Composed of a simple platform and a solid structure evoking the neighbouring rocks in its solidity and presence, the ensemble is protected from the sun by a canvas covering. This three-tiered design is married with a natural colour palette that allows the tented suites to disappear into the site. The main building material will be compressed earth bricks, a local and natural resource. The resulting aesthetic will be a natural harmony of colours and textures that integrate perfectly with the surrounding environment.

The entrance facade is predominantly covered with low tents, allowing for a small opening leading to the front door. The sandstone pathway follows the topography and creates this particular sense of place: to arrive in a camp. At the back of the suite, the tent opens up and reveals a large and private shaded area for guests to enjoy the views and to feel the desert. A private swimming pool is integrated into the terrace whilst an outdoor living space is organised around a fire pit where guests can unwind in the evening under a star-studded desert sky.

As with all AW<sup>2</sup> projects, the guest experience guided the design process. The perception of scale was a key factor that had to be addressed due to the immensity of the site. Privacy and shelter go hand in hand, creating an intimate environment where the breath-taking views are individually framed.





## TENTED RESORT - PROGRAMME ELEMENTS

### 47 TENTS:

- 28 ONE BEDROOM UNITS
- 15 TWO BEDROOM UNITS
- 4 THREE BEDROOM UNITS

### 2 GARDEN PAVILIONS:

- RECEPTIONS, OUTDOOR AREAS,
- RESTAURANTS & GUEST AREAS, SERVICE
- & TECHNICAL AREAS

### 1 STATE OF THE ART SPA

TOTAL: 10,800 SQM BUILT-UP AREA



## INTERIORS

The interiors are designed with Nabataean-inspired patterns and traditionally influenced motifs which are incorporated in light touches to evoke the rich cultural heritage of Ashar. The general concept and aesthetic of the furniture is inspired from AIUla's heritage and history. Materials are selected to exhibit this, using as much as possible locally available resources, craftsmanship and tones that reflect the natural environment.

The spaces reflect a modern and elegant style that runs throughout the resort, as a contemporary interpretation inspired by the traditional Bedouin way of life. In this way, the guests will be immersed in an environment that incorporates a rich local experience guided by the highest international luxury standards in hospitality design.

The colours of AIUla have been extracted from the site and form the basis for the colour palette used throughout the resort. They constitute the essence of Ashar materiality, together with the expression of the main site characteristics.



## RESORT FACILITIES

The concept of the Garden Pavilion serves as a transitional arrival hub, leading guests into the natural beauty of the landscape and bringing them closer to nature. Upon arrival, guests leave behind their fuel-powered vehicles and the city landscape and begin their immersion into the site, exploring the vast natural landscape of desert, cliffs and garden oases by foot or using electric buggies.

Restaurants along with indoor and outdoor lounges have been integrated, fostering an environment of enjoyment and relaxation in a leisure-focused and informal setting. The same design choices, codes of luxury and colour palette as the tented suites are respected throughout.

As with the tented suites, the facade treatment for the exterior walls is made with reference to the layered sand stone rocks. The soft, blurry distinction between the lines provides a very natural look and feel.



“Our concept involves harnessing the natural beauty of the landscape with a project that seamlessly integrates into the site. It is a reflection of the ‘intelligence of the site’ - a design that is adapted and adaptable to the cultural, historical and natural specificities of Ashar.”

Stéphanie Ledoux & Reda Amalou, Partners at AW<sup>2</sup>

In this way, the guests will be immersed in an experience that is even closer to nature. The use of local resources also reduces the project’s carbon footprint and supports the development of local communities creating opportunities for participation in the transformation of AlUla.

In relation to the state of the art spa, Stéphanie Ledoux, Partner at AW<sup>2</sup>, comments: “The spa will bring guests another step closer to nature. It will be the epitome of the architectural experience with treatment rooms facing the rock cliff creating an exclusive sanctuary. A rock pool suspended between two rock cliffs provides guests with a unique sensory experience converging two natural elements – water and earth – to frame an elevated breath-taking view across the valley.”

**More information to follow as the project nears completion.  
Scheduled opening for the first cluster of tented suites in the first quarter 2021.**



## THE AW<sup>2</sup> STUDIO

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AW<sup>2</sup> is an international architecture and interior design studio based in Paris.

Reda Amalou graduated from the University of East London and founded the agency in 1997. Stéphanie Ledoux, a graduate from the Ecole Spéciale d'Architecture in Paris, joined AW<sup>2</sup> in 2000 and became partner in 2003. The two partners have led the studio in tandem ever since and play an active role in the design of each project.

With projects in 40 different countries, the agency has an international reputation for quality high-end design. The studio covers all project typologies including hospitality, education, commercial and residential.

AW<sup>2</sup> has received several awards over the years including the MIPIM Best Hotel Award for the Six Senses Con Dao resort, the Build Architecture Award for Best International Architecture & Design Studio – Paris, and four nominations for the AFEX Grand Prize in French Overseas Architecture for Six Senses Con Dao in Vietnam, the Lycée Français in Amman, Jordan, Ani Private Resort & Art Academy in Sri Lanka and Kasiya Papagayo eco-lodge in Costa Rica.

Initiating a project at AW<sup>2</sup> is all about questioning. It is about defining the conditions that surround the project and about setting, with our client, the ambitions of the project.



We challenge both conditions and ambitions at the early stages of our work in order to avoid preconceptions and give us a deeper understanding of what we are trying to achieve.

Our approach to design is more an open working process rather than a strict theoretical or stylistic framework by which we abide. We bring to the table the experience we have gained from working in 40 different countries, applying relevant techniques and solutions. Our architecture is tailored to its location. It is an architecture of fusion that is the product of a conversation, a dialogue between several parameters:

1. Understanding the site: what sets it apart, what makes it unique
2. Analysing the context: The climate, culture, programme, regulations, economics, construction techniques, local know-how, materials and traditions
3. Incorporating local materials and prioritizing a sustainable design approach
4. Finally, architecture is a response: throughout the design process we elaborate and define our vision of the project to create architecture that truly belongs in its site.

This process allows the agency to approach every subject with an open mind. We formulate the project as it develops rather than starting by describing the outcome. Each of our projects is a testament to this design approach.



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