

House of Wisdom (Sharjah Digital Library)

Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Foster + Partners

Press pack

2021

The House of Wisdom in Sharjah is a forward-looking conception of what a library should be in the 21st century – embracing a digital future while playing a crucial role as a community hub for learning, underpinned by innovation and technology.



House of Wisdom (Sharjah Digital Library)

Sharjah, United Arab Emirates 2018 – 2021

Located on the Sharjah International Airport Road, ten kilometres from the city centre, the two-storey building embodies a sense of clarity and lightness, with a large floating roof cantilevering on all sides of a transparent rectilinear volume.

The 15-metre-wide overhang shades the façades throughout most of the day, while fixed aluminium screens with differing densities filter the low sun in the evenings. Movable bamboo screens at low level are deployed by the building users, to provide privacy or to control glare. When not in use the bamboo screens are left open, preserving the visual connections with the landscaped gardens.

Visitors enter the building from its western edge into a double-height reception hub with a central courtyard that brings light to the interior spaces. This densely planted green area creates a comfortable outdoor environment for social events or quiet contemplation. The ground floor contains large spaces for exhibitions, a café alongside a children's educational space, and the archive and a reading area with facilities such as an Espresso Book Machine that prints and binds books on-demand.

The floating roof is supported by four cores that also contain all the back-of-house and service spaces, creating a large column-free floorplate. The two cores closest to the entrance contain large sculptural staircases that guide people up to the mezzanine floor. The upper floor hosts a series of pod spaces suspended above the central courtyard, which offer both quiet and collaborative spaces, exhibition areas and reading lounges including a prayer room and a women-only area. Throughout the building, there is an emphasis on establishing and retaining a connection with the outside, looking onto the gardens surrounding the building.

The landscape is divided into two sections – a knowledge garden and children's playground to the south, which has several native species and a water feature, alongside a more formal, geometrically arranged garden to the north containing The Scroll – a new piece of public art by British sculptor Gerry Judah that is a contemporary interpretation of the ancient Arabic scrolls as a single, spiralling sculpture that loops towards the sky.

“The House of Wisdom in Sharjah is a forward-looking conception of what a library should be in the 21st century – embracing a digital future while playing a crucial role as a community hub for learning, underpinned by innovation and technology.

The straight, minimalist lines of the building complement the dunes of the desert, set within a lush landscape. The House of Wisdom is set to be an oasis for the local community, led by research and innovation, at the heart of a new cultural district.”

Gerard Evenden

Head of Studio, Foster + Partners

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The Scroll sculpture © Chris Goldstraw



The Scroll sculpture © Chris Goldstraw



Water feature in front of the House of Wisdom © Chris Goldstraw



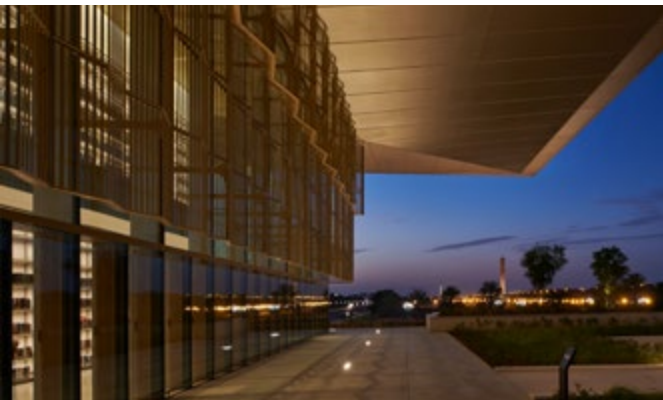
Water feature in front of the House of Wisdom © Chris Goldstraw



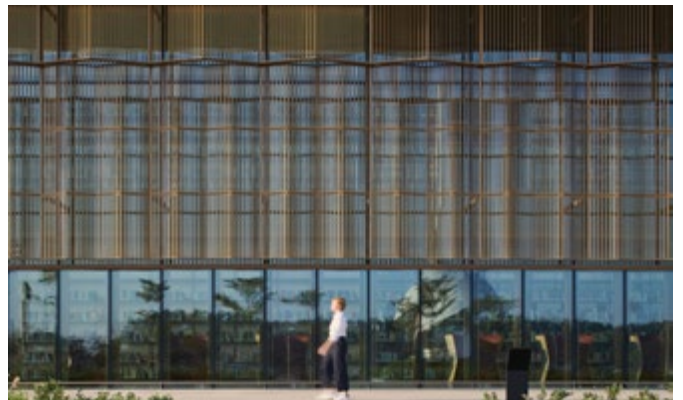
Exterior elevation view of the House of Wisdom © Chris Goldstraw



Exterior view of the House of Wisdom © Chris Goldstraw



Perforated aluminium sun screens © Chris Goldstraw

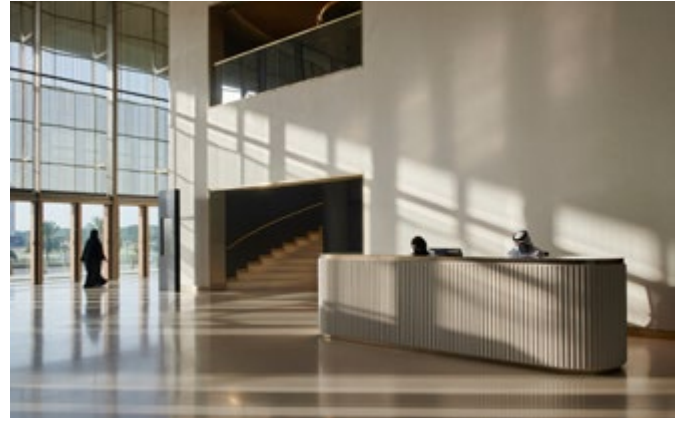


Perforated aluminium sun screens © Chris Goldstraw

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Perforated aluminium sun screens © Chris Goldstraw



Reception desk © Chris Goldstraw



Interior library study area © Chris Goldstraw



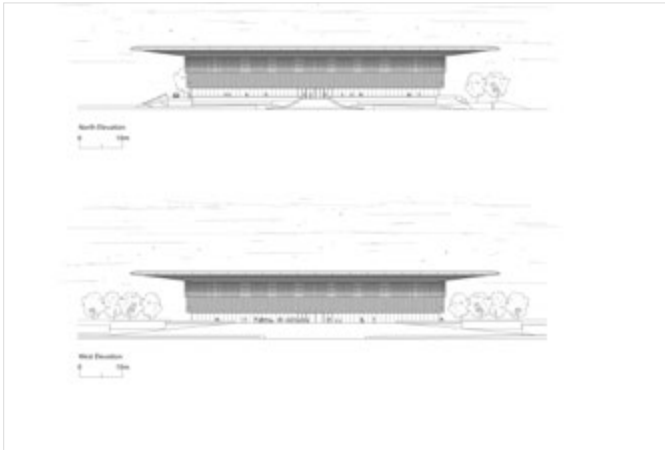
Spiral staircase and elevator © Chris Goldstraw



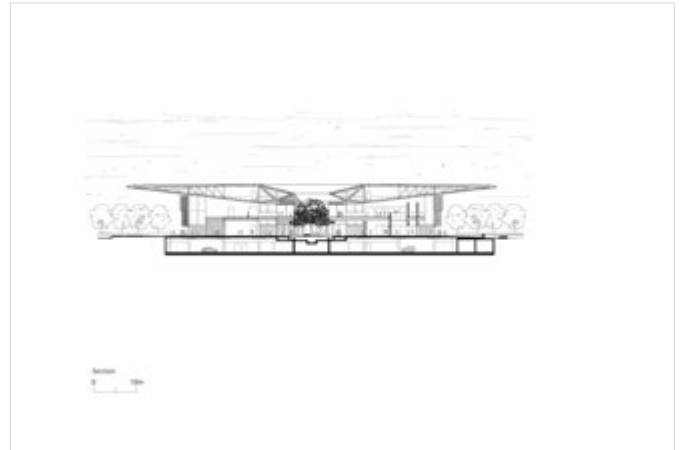
Mezzanine area © Chris Goldstraw



Interior knowledge garden © Chris Goldstraw



Elevation drawing © Foster + Partners



Section drawing © Foster + Partners



Site plan © Foster + Partners



Ground floor plan © Foster + Partners



Mezzanine floor plan © Foster + Partners

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Credits

Client

Shurooq

Architect and Interiors

Foster + Partners

Foster + Partners Design Team

Gerard Evenden

John Blythe

Dara Towhidi

Ricardo Abreu

Rafael Alcantara

Eugenia Bandera

Souraya Fathallah

Matas Belevicius

Qishan Huang

Dimitri Chaava

Alvaro Ferrandiz

Joe Paxton

Juan Pommaré

Local Collaborating Architect

Shurooq / Aurecon

Main Contractor

McLaren

Structural Engineer

Aurecon

Mechanical Engineers

Aurecon

Cost Consultant

RLB

Landscape Consultant

Cracknell

Lighting Designer

Delta Lighting Design

Glazed Façade

Alico

Steel

Unger Steel

Aluminium Screens

Alba Tower

Internal Ceiling

Obaid Al Abd

Bamboo Shutters / FF&E

Poltrona Frau

Landscape

Green Concepts

External Concrete Paving

Lamar

Stone

Rio de Janeiro

Terrazzo Flooring

IKK

Bookshelves and Internal Blinds

Eurosystems

MEP

Paramount

Joinery

Satco

Facts and Figures

Construction start

2018

Completion date

2020

Site Area

40,000m²

Net Internal Area

13,000m²

Number of buildings

1

Number of Floors

4

Building Dimensions

Height: 16m

Length: 60m

Width: 60m

Roof 90x90m with 15m cantilever

Capacity

1500

Facilities

- Library
- Internal courtyard garden
- Café
- Exhibition space
- Entertainment space
- Reading lounge
- Children's educational space
- Prayer room
- Women-only area
- Children's playground

Parking facilities

- Cars: 120
- Coaches: 1
- Disabled: 4

Structure

- Concrete and steel work.
- Façade: Steel stick system with a steel adapter.
- Perforated aluminium shading screens.
- Foundations: raft slab.

Materials

- Concrete
- Glass
- Aluminium
- Stone
- Terrazzo
- Timber
- Steel

Wellbeing

Two large public gardens on both sides of the Library (North and South) with 'The Scroll' a monument by Gerry Judah in the North Garden.

Sustainability

- To give protection from the middle eastern harsh sun a 15m cantilevered shades the façades.
- Fixed aluminium screens filter low sun in the evenings.
- Movable bamboo screens at low level control glare.
- Central courtyard brings light to the interior spaces and creates a comfortable outdoor environment for social events.
- Throughout the building, there is an emphasis on establishing and retaining a connection with the outside.

Monument

- 'The Scroll' Monument was erected to start the celebration of Sharjah as UNESCO 2019 - World Book Capital.
- Artist: Gerry Judah, British Sculptor
- Height: 36m
- Materials: 72 tonnes of steel. 240 tonne concrete foundation.
- Inspiration: The Scroll is a contemporary interpretation of the ancient Arabic scrolls - a single, spiralling sculpture that loops towards the sky. The design and inspiration are representative of a celebration of reading and the power of books to unite people, is central to the purpose of the library and that of the UNESCO World Book Capital initiative. The sculpture stands at the front of the Library amongst landscaped gardens and shaded walkways.