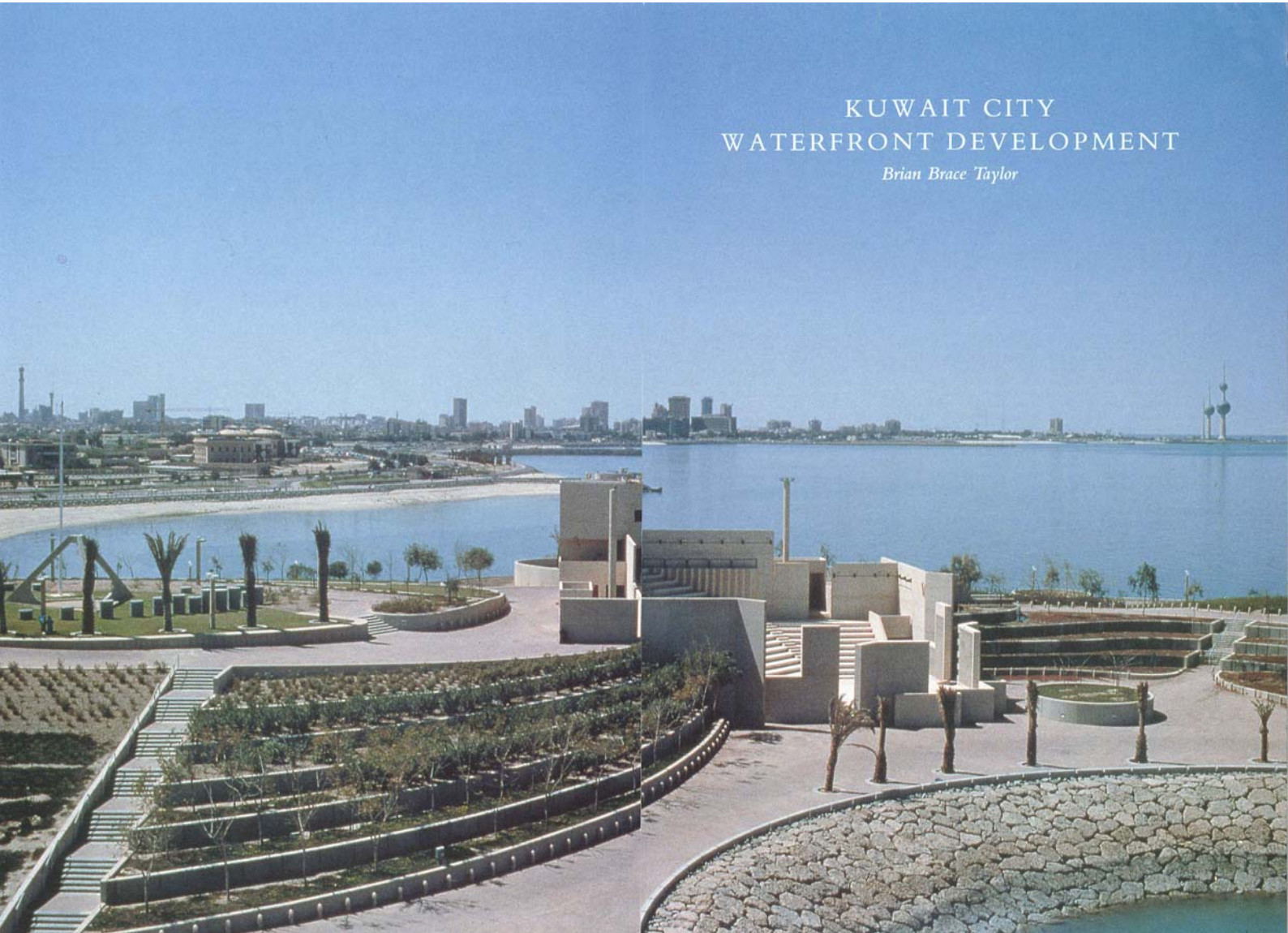


KUWAIT CITY
WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT

Brian Brace Taylor



Project Data

Client: His Highness Shaikh Jabar Al Ahmed Al Sabah, Amir of Kuwait. The Municipality of Kuwait.

Consultants: Ghazi Sultan, Architect. Kuwait Engineers Office – Abdulaziz Sultan. Sasaki Associates, Boston, USA – Paul Pawlowski, Frank James, Clarissa Rowe, Richard Rogers.

Structure: Eugene Rent.

Electrical: Nada Kiblawi.

H.V.A.C.: D.P. Ahuja.

Quantity Surveyors: Ted Chester.

Total cost: (Phase I and II): 49.7 million Kuwaiti dinars (US\$ 165.7 million).

Completion (Phase I and II): 1988.



The Kuwait Waterfront Project is a truly unique endeavour, combining architectural and natural elements with seascape and landscape in a richly diverse but coherent way. Phases I and II have now been completed, allowing one to appreciate the complexity as well as the innovation in what has been achieved. Kuwait City, which has grown from a fishing and trading town founded in the Eighteenth Century to a large metropolis, lost most of what it possessed in the way of traditional Arab architecture after the Second World War as a result of several, expatriate-designed master plans that ensured the demolition of the old urban fabric to adapt this to the needs of efficient automobile circulation. A new coastal

highway, much of which was built on infill in the 1970s, sealed the city's separation from the natural beauty of the harbour. Among the excellent qualities of the present achievement are the development of recreational spaces and facilities along a continuous 21-kilometre strip of land between the highway and the sea, and the creation of strong architectural features where there were none before (or practically none) without being ostentatious. Finally there is the integration of these with newly introduced natural features such as plants, trees and lagoon.

Sasaki Associates, the US landscape firm and Ghazi Sultan, a Kuwaiti architect, formed a team with Kuwait Engineers Office (KEO) to produce a detailed Master Plan for the entire zone in 1978, one which differed from all previous proposals in that it insisted upon recreational and cultural functions, rather than housing or commerce, as the means

for giving the coastline beyond the highway back to the people. While acknowledging the primacy of the car as the preferred means of transportation, and hence providing adequate, easily accessible parking, the planners were also concerned that arrival on foot, on bicycle, by public transport and even boat should be possible. Moreover, the final version of the site plan incorporated twelve shoreline zones for development as a response to the needs of adjacent inland neighbourhoods and physical potential of each of the sites.

Seven key activity centres (called Major Used Areas) among the twelve zones were conceived in order to establish visual points of interest and concentrations of specific kinds of activity. The existing Kuwait Water Towers, for example, were enhanced by a park and promontory; further along the coast a special harbour with a Dhow Museum (to highlight the sea-going craft upon which Kuwait's livelihood depended before petroleum was discovered) will constitute another focus of interest. An intensively landscaped, entirely man-made island and its protected lagoon have been among the first of these Major Use Areas to be executed. The swimming beaches and

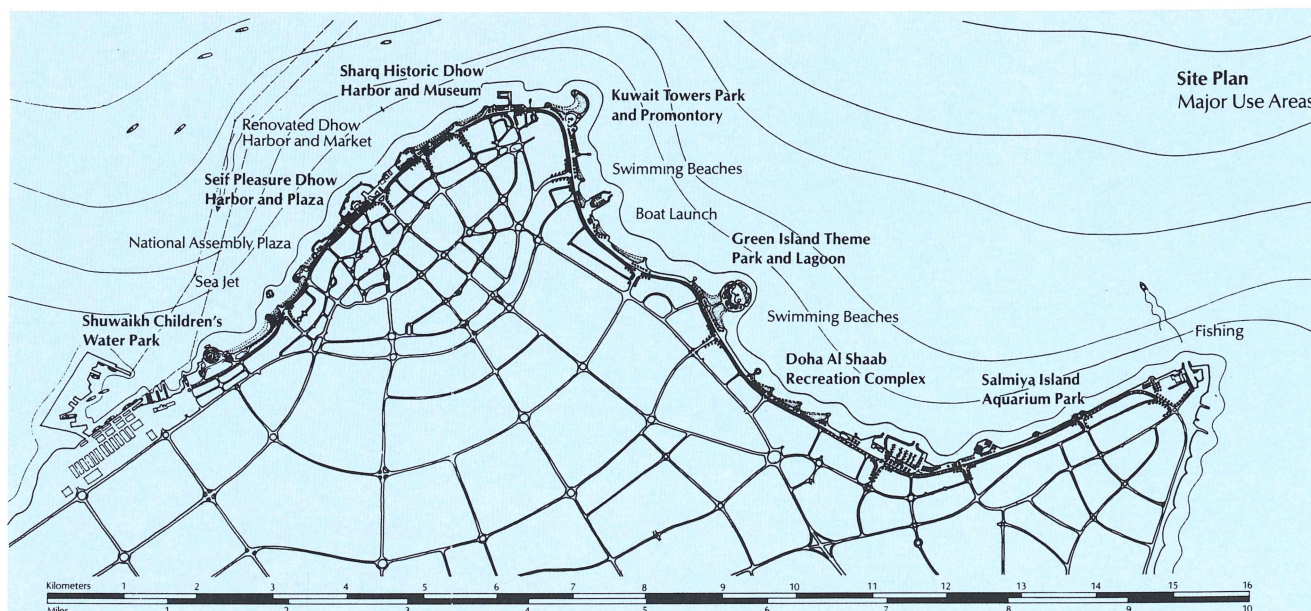
Opposite page, top: Amphitheatre, phase 1, site plan.

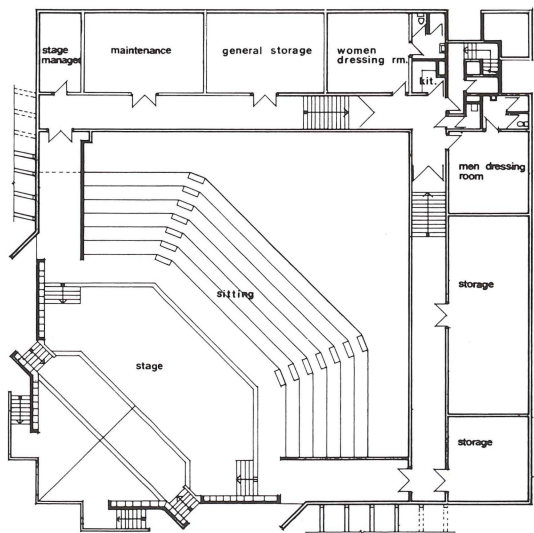
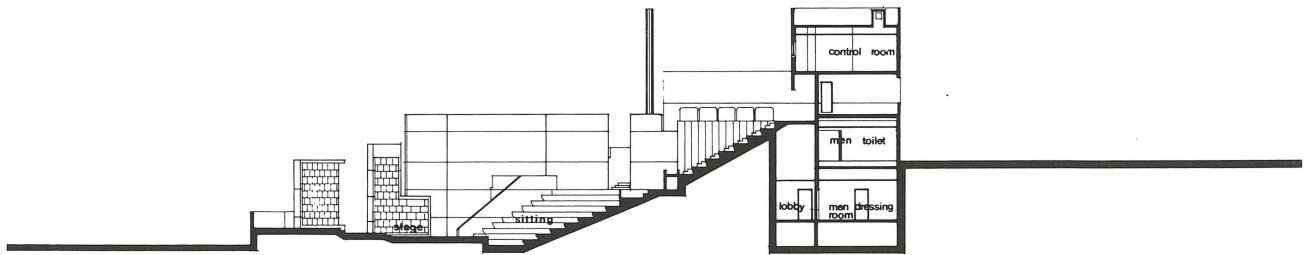
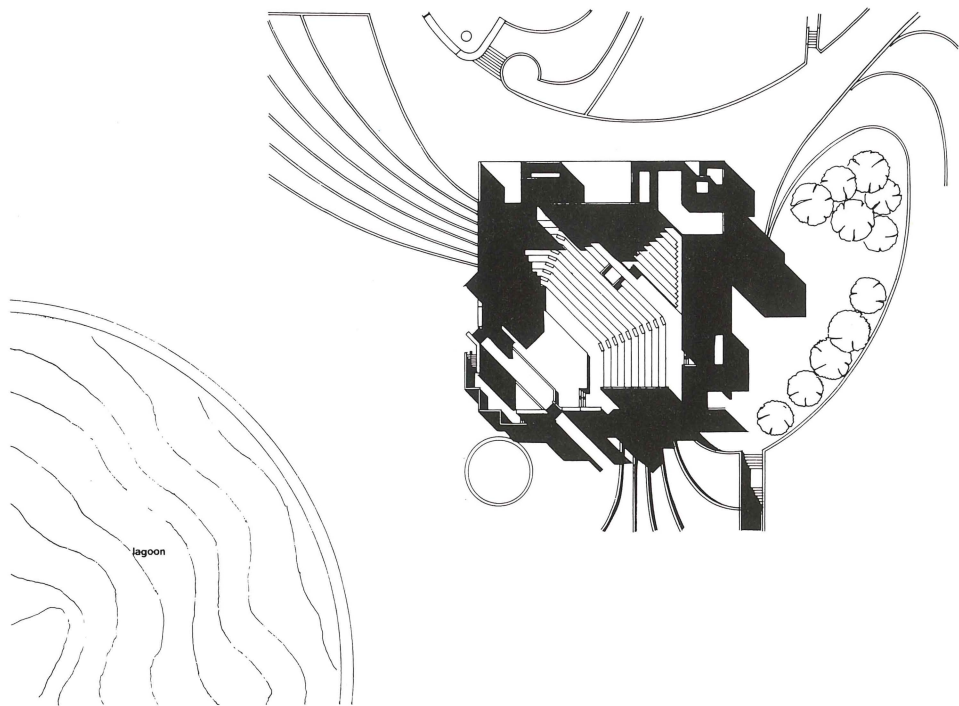
Centre: Amphitheatre, phase 1, section.

Bottom: Amphitheatre, phase 1, floor plans.
SASAKI ASSOCIATES, INC.

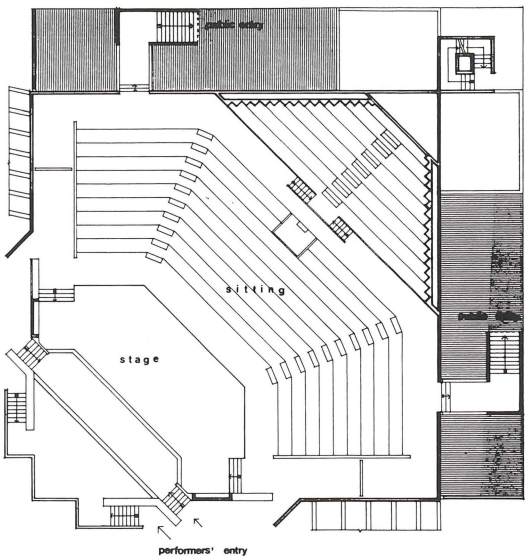
Below: A site plan of the 21 kilometre long waterfront reveals the major activity areas and facilities provided in the Master Plan. Objectives included restoration of the fishing dhow harbour.

Previous page: This panoramic view of the Kuwait waterfront shows the open-air theatre and landscaping of Green Island, with the city and celebrated Kuwait water towers in the background.





ground floor plan



first floor plan



boat launch areas are interspersed with these concentrations, as are the children's playgrounds, fishing areas and pedestrian promenades. Although seemingly strung together like beads when seen in plan, the various components of design are in fact carefully linked and successfully woven into a coherent ensemble.

Much of the beauty of this project, which is still taking form, must be attributed to the close working relationships that evolved among team members, Ghazi Sultan and Abdulaziz Sultan, respectively the pivotal architect and engineer, and Paul Pawlowski, Frank James, Clarissa Rowe and Richard Rogers from the Sasaki firm. They were obliged, as Ghazi Sultan himself puts it "to draw up a detailed brief for non-existent users; we had to imagine, forecast, and predict what Kuwait would be like in the 1990s". Fortunately, the dialogue they pursued with the architect-planners at the muni-

cipality (representing the Amir of Kuwait, the client) was a fructuous one, and the challenges of design continued to be exciting.

Quite conceivably, this was because the site had a history but very little remained, and there are very clear guidelines governing social behaviour in public which had to be respected. One had to imagine places for recreation in public that could offer privacy if needed as well. Doing so on a flat, generally featureless site 21 kilometers long was not a simple task.

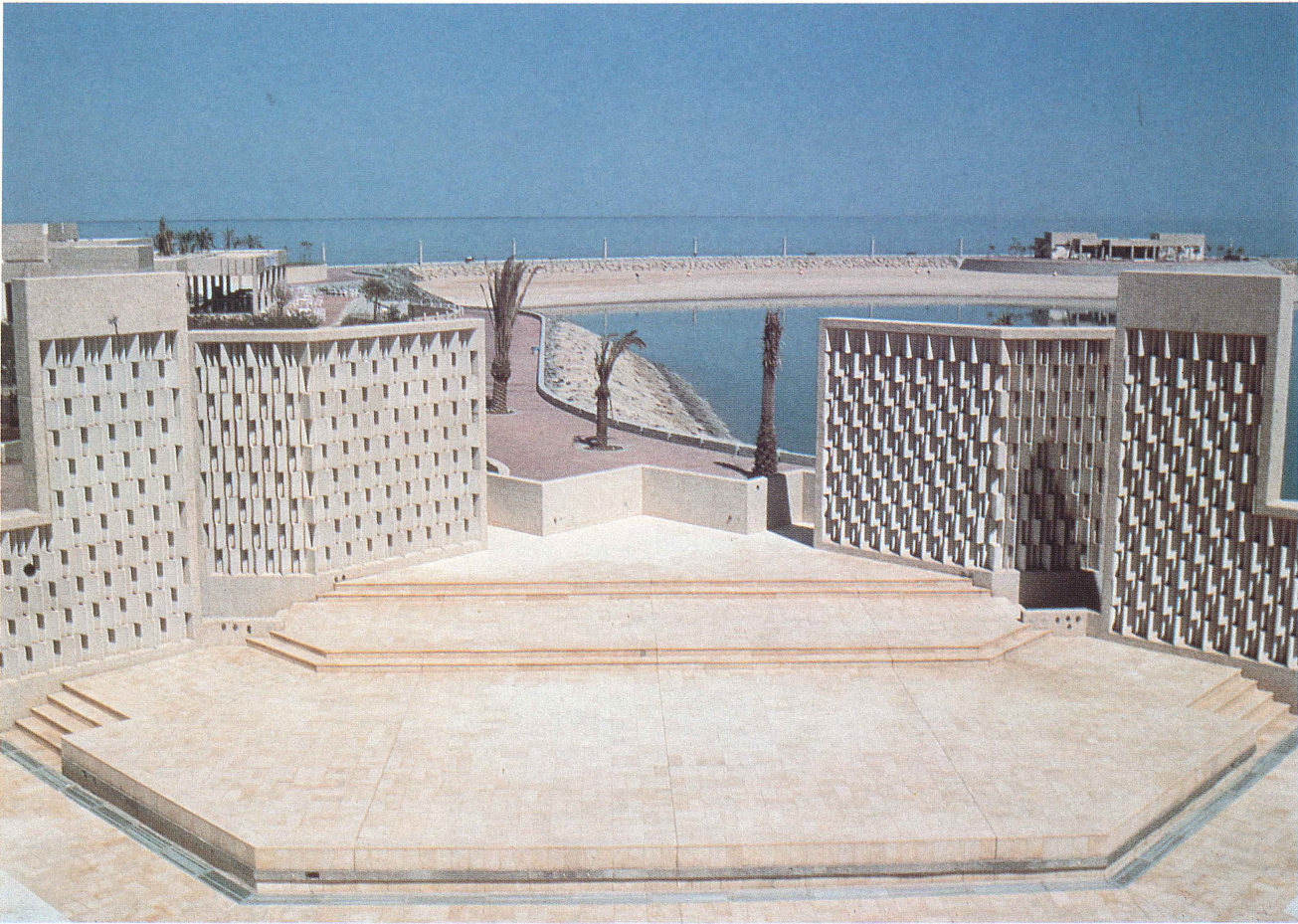
Although the partnership Sultan/Sasaki/KEO worked well together, each bringing considerable experience in their own right, the results of Phases I and II reflect the special concerns of individual members, Sasaki Associates for the landscaping and all that this involves, and Ghazi Sultan particularly for the architecture. Educated professionally in the United States (and thus aware of the

Top: A ziggurat ramp leading to a lookout is one of the physical phenomena created on Green Island. Seen here from atop the tower, it stands at one end of the bridge linking the island with the shoreline and city (background).

Above: The amphitheatre on Green Island is one of numerous recreational and cultural facilities on the waterfront. Seating 400 persons, the installation has a projection booth and equipment for evening performances.

Opposite page, top: People seated in the amphitheatre have a wonderful view of the man-made lagoon and the sea beyond the stage.

Right: The artificial island with steps leading down to the water's edge and covered by a geodesic dome offers isolation from the crowded beaches.





Left: A geodesic dome on an artificial island sitting in the lagoon has plants beneath it and a fountain in the centre.

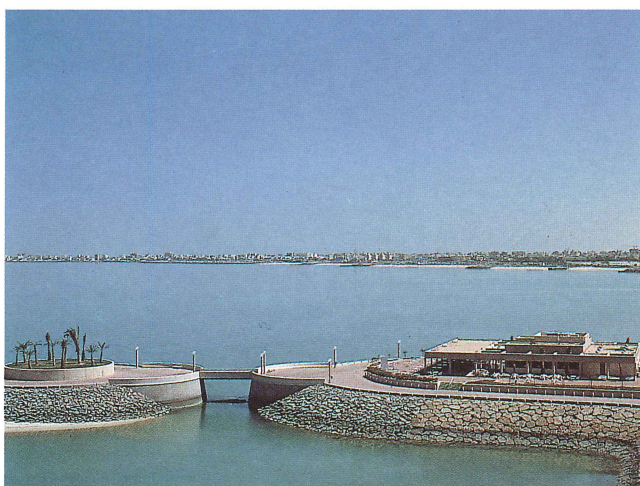
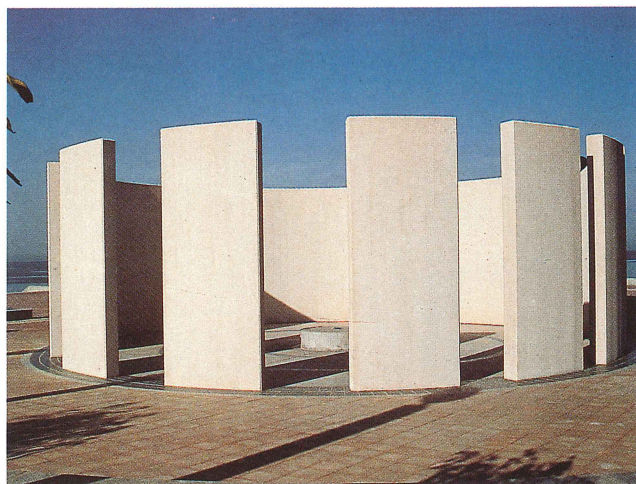
Below left: Swimming pools for males and families have been built along the waterfront and are extremely popular recreational points.

Below right: Originally conceived by Sasaki Associates as a 'water gun' or fountain shooting jets of water outwards from the centre, this semi-enclosed space is now used as a leisure area.

Bottom left: A restaurant on Green Island, linked to the breakwater, faces both the lagoon and the bay where a series of sandy beaches for swimming have also been made. (Distant background)

Bottom right: The small, pre-cast concrete structure on the breakwater enclosing Green Island lagoon.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRIAN BRACE TAYLOR
UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED



methods and expectations of his American counterparts), Ghazi Sultan has nevertheless become renowned since his return to his own country for a number of buildings and private houses employing exposed brick construction, similar in some ways to the early works of Chadirji and Makiya in Iraq. For the Waterfront project, however, the proposed uses and scale of the facilities (amphitheatre, sports and entertainment buildings) as well as their exposure to the sea dictated more resistant, durable materials. The result is a series of structures of reinforced concrete, the exterior surfaces of which have a warm colouring, and which "fit in" comfortably with the overall conception. None of them attempt to make an extravagant architectural gesture; they are striking (compared to the Kuwait Towers) by their sobriety and their careful siting or individual detailing. Future buildings, by Sultan or by other designers, may diverge from the "style" of the first structures but fortunately there is now a solid context, a framework so necessary in a vast project, that has been provided.

Sasaki Associates, on the other hand, brought to the design project not only a wealth of experience in the technical analysis of the development potential for

various natural environments but also in the delicate mix of natural and man-made features. Their Summary Master Plan (1978) is replete with information on the measures to be taken to reinforce and protect the coastline against tidal fluctuations, the wind-wave forces and the armoring required; yet these were subsequently tied in very sensitively to the proposed design responses (open spaces, recreational facilities, types of planting recommended, etc.) all of which was completely normal, given the brief; however, the achievement of Phases I and II reflect both competence and creativity on Sasaki's part.

Green Island, a totally man-made island 1,300 feet in diameter and joined to the mainland by a 820-foot causeway, is perhaps the single most striking example of their collaborative design efforts. It offers a new, landscaped focal point offshore, a kind of 'counterpoint' to the basic linearity of the project as a whole, and has a large scale recreational park. While the 100-foot high water tower and observation deck lacks any architectural significance, other features such as the ziggurat ramp which leads to another lookout, the open-air theatre, and the geodesic dome do work well together as forms. With proper encouragement, the

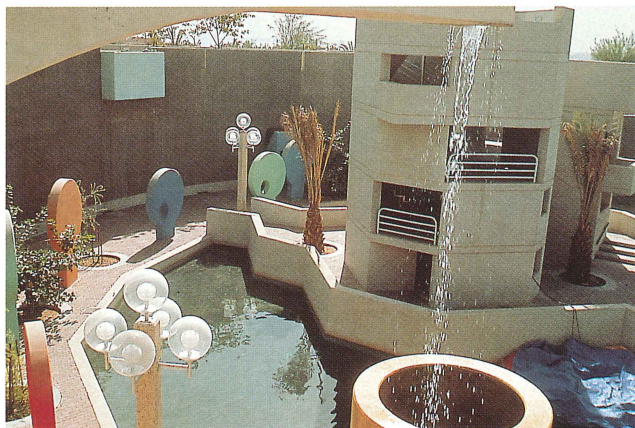
plants, vines and flowers will enhance the overall image effect and provide outstanding backdrops for human activity.

It is rare to discover an entirely new, natural as well as designed environment of this scale which is not founded on monumental sculptures or buildings and which has been so well conceived and implemented (even more so in that the consultants Sasaki/Sultan/KEO did not have supervision responsibilities!). Creation of a setting for social intercourse and cultural activities for Muslims of both historically nomadic and sea-faring backgrounds, for those who have immigrated from afar, and those with time to spend and few places to go for recreation, was certainly not an easy task. Nonetheless, it would seem that Kuwait now has the sound beginnings of such a setting.

Top left: Palms planted along the seashore create a wind-break and shade. The famous Kuwait towers in the background.

Top right: A small children's playground and pond within the waterfront complex.

Bottom: The lagoon and bay at night.



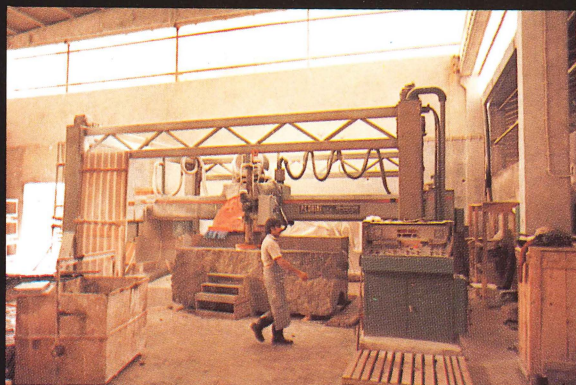
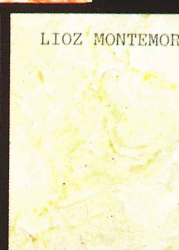
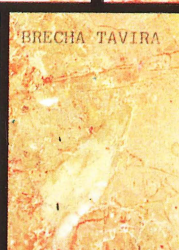
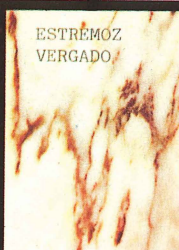
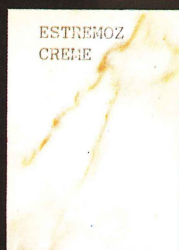
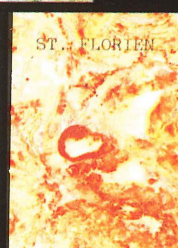
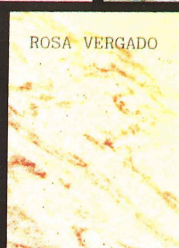
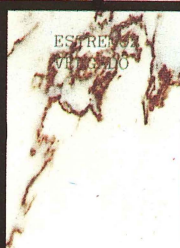
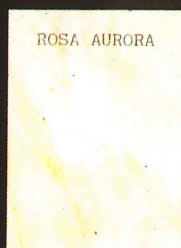
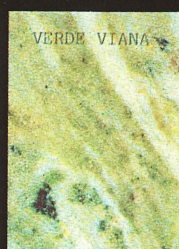
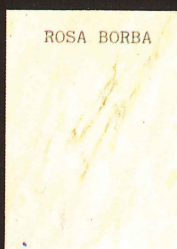
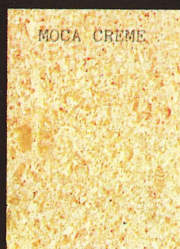
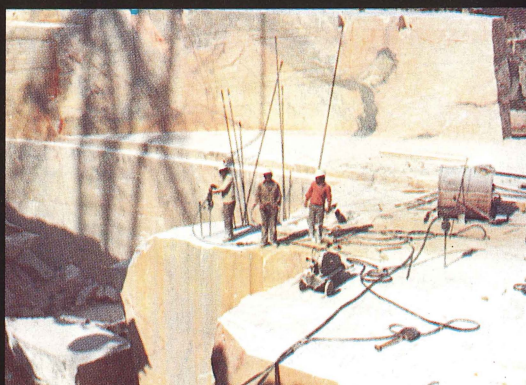
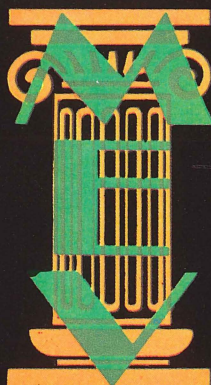
Right: A three-dimensional frame structure with canvas covers a children's playground that includes a giant fish to crawl through.

Centre left: One of several gardens with trees which is protected by a surrounding wall provides a quiet place for relaxation and picnics.

Centre right: Open esplanades along the edge of the bay offer places to stroll or to congregate. Plants and trees have been recently introduced.

Below: Planters with flowers surround the children's playground, which is covered with a three-dimensional space frame and canvas for shade.





Manoel Esteves Vitor, Lda.

Apartado 8 — 2716 PÊRO PINHEIRO Codex — Portugal — Telef. (01) 927 00 46/927 95 51 — Fax (01) 927 02 62 — Telex 15756 MEVMAR P