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Shaping Spaces with Purpose

We interview Tariq Hajj, Founder of Saudi Arabia-based Tariq Hajj Architects (THA) on the firm's 35th anniversary

WORDS – ANEESHA RAI

Early on in his career, Tariq Hajj had worked with renowned architectural firms where he gained hands-on experience in a diverse range of projects, from residential spaces to large commercial developments. “These early opportunities allowed me to develop a strong foundation in design thinking, creative process, project management, and client relations,” shared Hajj. He soon founded his own practice where design innovation, functional excellence and user experience converged. “Founding the firm was driven by a desire to not just design buildings but craft spaces that resonate with people and stand the test of time,” shares the architect.

With a design philosophy rooted in the belief that architecture has the potential for creating meaningful connections between people, place and purpose, THA grew quickly, securing its first major residential project within its first year of inception. “We approach each project with a deep understanding of the site context, client needs, and environmental im-

pact. This allows us to design solutions that harmoniously blend innovation with practicality,” shares Hajj. “At the core of our practice is a human-centered approach: architecture that enhances the user experience, promotes well-being, and fosters a sense of belonging. Ultimately, we believe that thoughtful design can transform spaces and leave a lasting positive legacy for future generations.”

Among some of the projects that best represent the firm's approach include Alturki Business Park (*designed in collaboration with Pei Architects – New York*) – a cylindrical building with a 38m diameter, incorporating sustainable features, including variable sun shading devices and the use of a “sun shelf” to reduce solar glare and increase user comfort; a comprehensive Nesaj Residential Compound in Al-Khobar complete with staff facilities and a clubhouse in addition to apartments and townhouses as well as a GCC ETL – Main Admin Complex Building in Dammam. Within five years, the firm also diversified into large-scale

commercial spaces and continues to partner with international firms in addition to winning several local and national prestigious architectural design competitions and awards.

Sustainability and technology have been instrumental in THA's progress. Hajj emphasises passive design techniques, utilising natural ventilation, daylighting, and building orientation to optimise energy efficiency. Incorporating green materials like recycled steel and bamboo flooring has reduced the firm's carbon footprint. Additionally, solar panels and high-performance insulation have significantly minimised energy consumption. On the technology front, Building Information Modelling (BIM) has streamlined THA's design and construction process, enhancing accuracy and collaboration. The integration of smart building systems has also improved energy efficiency and user experience, reinforcing the firm's reputation for designing forward-thinking, high-performance spaces. Reflecting on Saudi Arabia's transformation, Hajj says “Early on, much of the development was focused on traditional structures and functional urban planning. However, over the years, the country has embraced ambitious modernisation efforts, driven by Vision 2030 and a growing emphasis on sustainability, innovation, and cultural preservation.” He acknowledges the dramatic shift from traditional structures to ambitious, sustainability-driven mega-projects like NEOM and The Red Sea Development.

As the firm expands its footprint to Dubai and other Gulf States and embraces future challenges, its mission remains steadfast: to craft spaces that inspire, endure, and elevate the human experience.