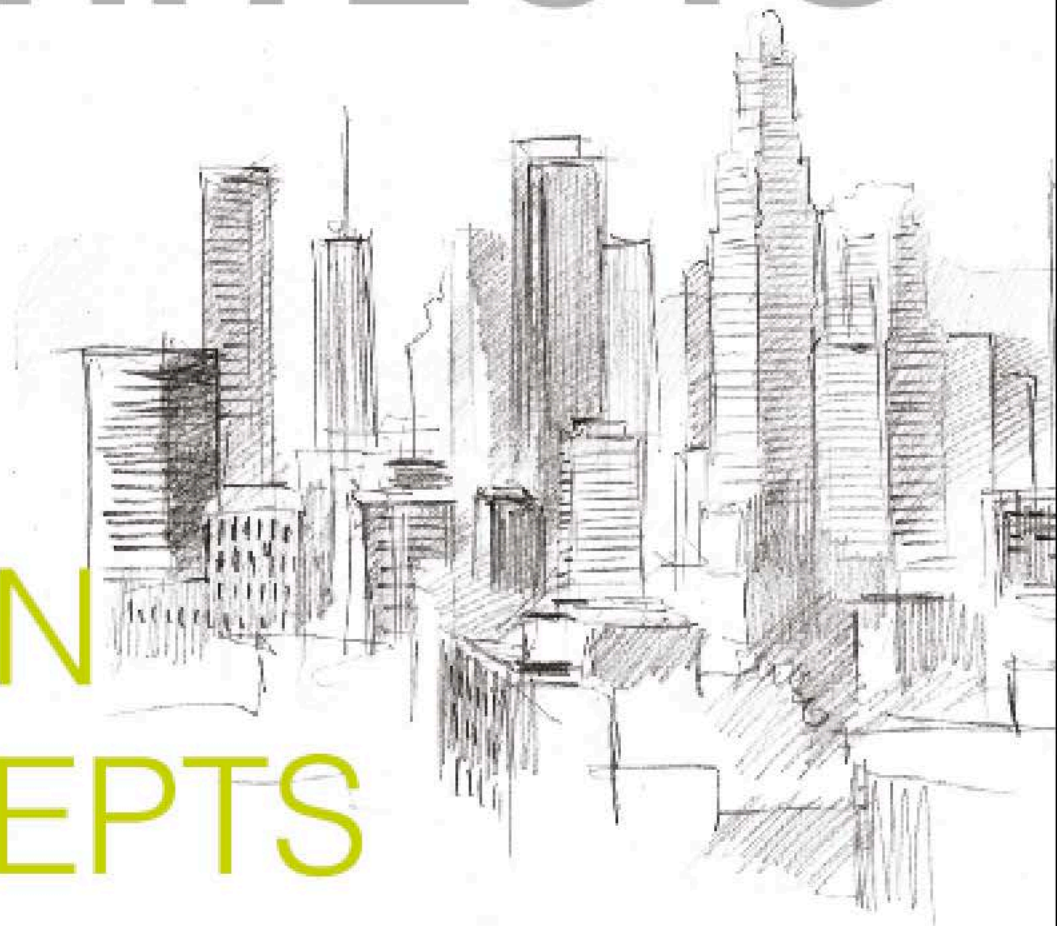


# **TOP** INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTS

## DESIGN CONCEPTS IN ARCHITECTURE



Dr. Jihad Awad  
Foreword by Charles Jencks



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# The Saudi Umran Society

Saudi Umran Society (SUS) is a scientific association founded through a council resolution of King Saud University College of Architecture in 1987. The society focuses on different urban affairs and to date has been able to achieve great strides in this field on a widespread level. SUS objectives are to create a distinctive identity of the Saudi urban environment in line with the environment and the needs of the society. Creating a community where specialists can exchange ideas, scientific production, best practices and urban applications in Saudi Arabia. SUS also serves as a link among local and international institutions relevant to its core values; enabling it to provide advice and conduct studies that raise the level of professional performance. The board of directors is committed in achieving prominence and implements its programs through different developmental activities (seminars, lectures, exhibitions, etc.) to improve the level of urban applications and enhance progress in the professional sector and educational affairs in Saudi Arabia. SUS also released different types of publications (news letter, books, etc.) related to architectural and urban topics, on which some publications are sponsored by the society to be published including these latest endeavor.

Dr. Abdulaziz Aldusari  
Chairman of the Board  
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# Foreword

## By Charles Jencks

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### The Concept - freedom in architecture

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Architecture is the masterly, correct and magnificent play of constraints on form. It satisfies economic forces, serves social desires and tastes, exploits technical possibilities and coerces the designer to follow the money. There is, however, one area where the architect is virtually free, that is, mentally open to develop the concept behind a design, the underlying generative idea. Such freedom is a strong motive for becoming an architect, and remaining one.

Yet there is a paradox. Often the architectural concept is disguised, unmentioned, or only implicitly agreed with society. Or it is half-baked, remaining an inchoate feeling that cannot speak its name. The designer may not think in words but rather in images, in abstractions, and geometrical solutions. Or maybe and by contrast, think in social organisation and spatial distribution; or even ecological ideals. For Le Corbusier, one conceptual motif was "the free plan;" for Rem Koolhaas "the free section;" for Peter Eisenman it was the generative diagram (what he called "Paper Architecture"); for Zaha Hadid it was called, sometimes, "anti-gravity." For Michelangelo, and several Renaissance architects such as Leonardo, a recurrent conceptual motive was the human body. Design concepts seem to be infinitely variable, following the architect's inner desire.

Such free choice of a theme plays a role in this selection by Jihad Awad, of eighty leading architects, and will have provoked them into sending material. Architects are sometimes very good at describing their intentions verbally, or sometimes very bad. They may resort to communicating through photos, or more personally through drawings, paintings, computer models, Three-D Printouts or, with Steven Holl, watercolours. Like a love affair with an idea (this is a Renaissance simile) the designer must protect the first mental kiss, and then nurture it through the birth of a design to completion. In effect, the underlying concept is the secret of architectural desire. Again, to continue the Renaissance metaphor, this passion can be transformed, but never entirely abandoned without betraying the building; and that is because the client (male) and architect (female) must create mutually over a long period of gestation.

To shift the metaphor, there is another argument that architectural concepts are sui generis. They are limited to the field itself, and therefore best expressed either through specific architectural models or diagrams. Indeed, the diagram emerged since the 1980s as the preferred mode of communicating these concepts, and several books and journals on the subject have explicated the trend, those by Peter Eisenman, Mark Garcia, *Architectural Design* and *Architectural Review* (it appears to be mostly an Anglo-Saxon tradition, though the Japanese, Italians, Spanish and Indians are part of the trend).

## The double-bind of publication

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As implied, words describing concepts can be a problem, as indeed can all forms of representation, whatever the media. Some architects cannot think consecutively or systematically and stammer when asked what their architecture means. But then, as a famous Modern poet said, “a poem does not mean, but is.” This is true of all art objects, their ontology is not exhausted by explanation. Like the other arts, architecture is performative and goes beyond concepts, words, style and meaning. It exists as a brute fact and works, like a hammer, to perform some function that transcends the idea. This existential aspect helps justify the architect’s stammer; for instance, Alvar Aalto’s vague gestures or Tadao Ando’s grunts in the direction of primitive non-verbal communication (as Peter Cook has often said, a leading British school of sixties designers was called “The Grunt Group”).

By contrast, over the last fifty years of media production, when architects show a building it has to include a minimum verbal explanation, and justification, a kind of one-page press release. So these descriptions follow the building throughout its publication life, as extended captions that tell you something about the underlying concept. Here we touch on the double-bind facing all designers who explain their work, especially those iconic architects selected herein. A description reduces the building to a verbal paraphrase, perhaps a one-liner that is not evident to anyone else; or else is too obvious to mention. Thus, since at least the 1980s when the media became paramount, the successful architect has been caught between extremes, damned if he publishes and damned if he doesn’t.

This double-bind points to another paradox. Any good building will be full of countless notions, not just the generative concept. It will also have a set of ‘trace-ideas,’ that is, initial generators that, by the end of construction, have virtually disappeared. So, beware the explicit concept, whether written or modelled.

Remember further the truth that an architect thinks through architecture, and that the medium is multi-modal like a Swiss Army knife. The most rounded architectural creator of recent times, Le Corbusier, used various media in which to think through architecture. He painted for it, wrote polemics about his buildings. He drew, sculpted, and lectured on it, and scholars have reconstructed these public events to show the lecture itself inspired some ideas (on his feet, as it were, while trying to figure out what an idea might mean). He used modes of intelligence in order to test the art’s multidimensional space, and thereby produced a rich architecture. It is worth remembering, however, that he also produced unfortunate concepts about how a city works, and stuck to them dogmatically even when they failed. The architectural concept can become an *idée fixe*.

## Types of concept

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The variety of architectural concepts is large and growing, but not infinite, and the corpus is reigned in by several attractors which create identifiable schools of thought. Most obvious (and stemming from the recent past) are those architects whose concepts are diagrammed by functional and social ideas. In general these are the mainstream Classical, Modern, and Late-Modern architects.

Parallel to these are the generative diagrams of geometry and plan-type that characterise architects, from Palladio to Eisenman, from Durand to Bofill. Today, an equal amount of non-linear diagrams and animated studies made possible by the computer create the Digital Baroque and Fractal Formalism. They also support the ecologically-committed and urban-minded. Merging with these groups are the Post-Modernists, and their metaphorical sketches connected with philosophical problems. These lead to the prevalence of the iconic building and are intended to raise issues of varying taste and urban complexity. Typical of these concepts are the painted-ideas of Aldo Rossi; or today the mental analogies of conceptual architects like Peter Zumthor.

Here one might mention in passing that, although the net of Jihad Awad has been cast very wide, and commendably so, and his informed taste is exemplary, there are some schools of thought one could have expected to find. Among the missing persons are some of the Post-Modernists (such as Robert Venturi, Michael Graves, Cesar Pelli, and ARM) or the younger generation (EMBT, FAT and Edouard François), and the British School loosely associated with James Stirling, (that is Michael Wilford, Benson & Forsyth, Michael Hopkins, Ed Cullinan and Dixon-Jones). One could remark on the absence of ecologists, New Urbanists, vernacular regionalists and other competing groups. But any selection of eighty renown architects will be characterised by gaps as well as the inclusions\*. More important is to applaud the range and quality of the included, and note how they have responded to the prospect of showing their underlying concepts to new prospects in the Middle East.

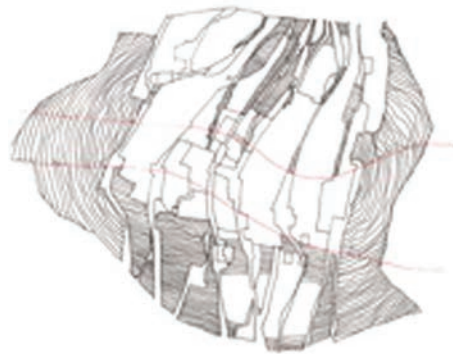
\* (And Robert Venturi and Peter Zumthor declined to be included)

## Where is the freedom?

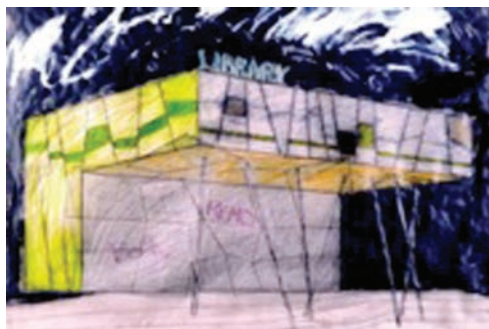
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Underlying the constraints, which I mentioned at the start, is the idea that they can be transformed and combined into a new solution. This last, the creative bisociation (or new combination of previously separated ideas) turns the repressive elements of building into a space of freedom. Or, at the very least, in choosing which constraints to express and then how to style them, the architect creates a fresh attitude towards necessity, one of openness. Freedom as feeling liberated by one's chains seen in a new way; feeling loose in one's saddle.

The concept is a key to this transformational moment and becomes one of the strongest motivations in making powerful buildings. It is a sine qua non, as Stravinsky said about musical sincerity, which can push the designer to excel; although, as he added, it does not guarantee the result. There is also a negative truth to this proposition: without a concept, the architect usually becomes confused and lacks conviction. As several artists said in the 1920s, during the Age of the Machine Metaphor – “the concept is the machine for producing art”. Plato was the source of this role for the generating, or fecund, idea. It played a basic function in directing the arts, and especially good craftsmanship. And Neo-Platonists, above all the painter and theorist Gian Pietro Bellori in the seventeenth century, emphasised the concetto in generating the ideal in art. The classical idea of the ideal, of course. It still is the sine qua non for producing art and architecture; but machines still need more than fuel, many more things, including a poetics, to become beautiful and interesting.



*Eisenman diagrams of design. A landform icon that is generated by five different codes: the coquille shell, the old city grid, ley lines, the medieval alleys and pre-existing hill form.*



*The typical perspective sketch of an architect to exaggerate the colour, dramatic context and contrasts which develop Alsop's idea of a library in a rough part of London.*

# Introduction

The first meeting between the author / editor of this work with Charles Jencks was in Dubai in March 2007, during a symposium organized by Ajman University of Science & Technology. This was probably the real starting point of the story of this book.

The involvement of the author in organizing following annual symposia and workshops provided the opportunity to contact and meet other internationally renowned architects, including Rem Koolhaas, Hans Hollein, Mario Botta, Daniel Libeskind, Manfredi Nicoletti, Hitoshi Abe, Ricardo Bofill, Eric Owen Moss, Will Alsop, Roman Delugan and Elke Delugan – Meissl, Tom Wiscombe, Kim Nielsen (3XN), Axel Schulte, Peter Ebner, Donald Bates (LAB Architecture Studio), and some others. Richard Meier and Peter Eisenman were supposed to be in one of the symposia, but unfortunately they couldn't make it.

After discussion with some of those architects, the idea started with asking each one of them to provide three projects with text explaining the "concept" of each project. At the beginning the expectation was not too high, and the initial plan was to receive material from 10 -15 architects. The response of the first group was very fast and enormously encouraging.

After appreciating the idea from the first group of contributors, the next step was to contact more and more architects in order to cover as much as possible the wide range of various approaches in dealing with "concept", and to cope with the latest projects and architectural developments, taking into consideration the geographic distribution of architects as well as projects to cover, as much as possible, almost all parts of the world, especially in places that witness rapid architectural and construction developments.

Definitely, there are so many other good architects who play an important role in shaping today's architecture especially the young generation of architects. But, to add more architects and more projects is an endless work, and there should be an end point to the list of contributors. There was no intention to exclude any of the well-known architects, and in some cases they were not included either because of some difficulties finding their contacts, or (in two cases only) were not interested and apologized.

All contributors were extremely generous and very cooperative. Only in very few cases there were some difficulties in getting additional material, but this is to be understood due to their busy schedules.

No one can claim that such a mission can be fully accomplished, especially that the author has to do it alone by himself without any assistants team, and due to the speed of releasing new projects almost every day. In addition, after a long period of gathering the material, much of this material has to be updated before publishing. Several projects were still under construction, or were not to start construction yet, and were recently completed. Other new interesting projects were recently released by many contributors, and were to be added to this book.

The selection of projects was based mainly on the concept of the project. In most cases the author suggested the projects to be requested from architects, while in other cases the architects had to suggest projects to be featured. More difficult was to decide which projects to exclude, when many were provided, but the most difficult task was to choose the images and drawings to be included in only four pages per project when a plenty of material was available. The copyright of photos for certain projects was in some cases a minor factor in selecting or excluding some projects.



In general, it can be said that the extremely diverse projects featured in this book cover almost all approaches with different understandings and interpretations to the notion of “concept” and how different architects deal with it in their designs.

The title “Design Concepts in Architecture” came as a response to a long and continuous discussion and sometimes misunderstanding among students of architecture. Throughout the author’s long academic teaching experience at different universities, students of architecture have always asked, and been asked, “What is the Concept”? The lack of explicit and comprehensible references about concepts in architecture was the main reason for this book, which is to be considered as an attempt for answering such a question.

The idea to sort out projects in different categories or groups of concept approaches and put projects following almost same approach in one group, was discussed intensively with several architects, but this needs more time and effort, and thus was decided to keep this book as a base that would help other scholars to conduct such categorization. The basic principle here was to keep the architect’s own words in describing and explaining the concept of each project, thus leaving it for readers to understand, analyze, and compare by themselves. It is believed that the most appropriate way to present the architects is to follow an alphabetical order, according to the last name of the architect, or the name of the firm.

Finally, the author highly appreciates generosity and cooperation of all architects, and is very grateful to all of them, personally as well as all members of their teams for press and communication who were involved and always ready to help and provide all necessary material with a lot of patience.



Dr. Jihad Awad is associate professor of architecture, currently head of architectural engineering department at Ajman University of Science & Technology (AUST) in the United Arab Emirates.

Before joining AUST in 2004, he has taught at different Palestinian universities, and was head of architecture department (1997 – 2000) at An-Najah National University in Nablus, Palestine.

He holds Dr.-Ing. from University of Stuttgart in Germany, M. Arch. from Kansas State University in USA, and B.Sc. from Yarmouk University in Jordan.

During the last few years he was involved in organizing several symposia and workshops, and responsible for inviting many internationally renowned architects to AUST, including: Charles Jencks, Hans Hollein, Rem Koolhaas, Manfredi Nicoletti, Ben van Berkel, Rasem Badran, Michael Sorkin, Eric Owen Moss, Roman Delugan & Elke Delugan-Meissl, Tom Wiscombe, Kim Nielsen, Donald Bates, Axel Schultes, and Will Alsop.

**Universal Publisher & Distributor is pleased to announce the launching of:**

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Dr. **Jihad Awad**, Head of Arch. Eng. Dept. at Ajman University of Science & Technology.

Foreword by: **Charles Jencks**, UK, Architect and writer.

Reviewed by: **James Steele**, USA, Architect and writer.

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The mysterious question of where design ideas come from has plagued architects and those who aspire to join their ranks from time immemorial. What is the origin of the ephemeral design concept, or what Charles Jencks has described in his Introduction here as the "generative idea"? Can it be quantified? Can students be taught how to develop one? And if so, what is the best way to do so? Schools of Architecture would not exist if teachers did not believe it is possible, but there has never been a proposal for systematic method to do so, until now.

**Design Concepts in Architecture** by Dr. Jihad Awad is the first comprehensive, concerted, scholarly attempt to describe what others have previously believed to be indescribable. By doing so he has made an invaluable contribution to the field, which is of enormous value to professionals, researchers, educators and the most of all to students. To achieve his goal of demystifying the design process, Dr. Awad set himself the Herculean task of collecting the best projects from almost 100 of the top architects, as well as asking them describe their design approach in their own words. This provides us with a remarkably privileged insight into the way that the most talented architects in the world approach the seemingly amorphous process of formulating a design concept, and then go about transforming it into reality. In organizing the book, Dr. Awad has avoided the trap of trying to classify or categorize the work of the participants, letting them speak for themselves. This sensible approach allows us to objectively access the work, and the backstory that produced it, on its own merits, and to compare across the wide spectrum of material that the author has provided for us. Total objectivity is difficult, however, because of the high quality and thoroughness of the presentations, which includes plans, sections and elevations in addition to many ravishing color images of each of the projects, as well.

The unprecedented, four volume set of Dr. Jihad Awad's *Design Concepts in Architecture* is a must have acquisition, for anyone interested in understanding how great buildings originate.

**James Steele**

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