



EARTH USA 2011

Sep 30, Oct 1 & 2, 2011 – Albuquerque, New Mexico

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Title:

Mud Buildings in Saudi Arabia
A Personal Experience

Abstract:

Building materials and techniques usually play a major role in shaping the built environment. In this paper we are introducing the traditional architecture and culture of Saudi Arabia in order to understand and to know more about how the traditional houses were built. Our personal feelings usually differ from one building to another because of the material, buildings are made from. In our country many building techniques were known, however, mud construction was the most known one. It was found in almost all the regions particularly in the central, eastern, and northern parts of Arabia. What matters is that mud construction, as a know-how and technology disappeared from Saudi cities and villages since 1960s after the introduction of the new building materials and technology in the Kingdom. Now, we are trying to revive this technology by starting a project that can be considered as the laboratory for mud construction technology: that is al- Udhaibat, a farmhouse, located in Wadi Hanifia in the old city of Dir'iyyah near Riyadh. The farm was bought in the late 1980's and a renovation of the existing mud buildings was started with the help of world known experts, but was later re-built completely, for the safety reason, by using the same old techniques. Al- Udhaibat became an ongoing mud construction experiment centre and is opened for the community and visitors from abroad. We still practice with new mud buildings and lately we started to produce adobe with improved technology that is compressed mud bricks, which is a strong and sustainable building material and will be suitable for the Saudi Environment. This long experience led to the establishment of a "mud construction institute" in collaboration between King Saud University, Al-Turath Foundation and the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities.

Our main goal is to introduce the community with revived mud construction technology because we believe it is humane and very suitable to the harsh environment of Saudi Arabia. This paper aims to present the main characteristics of mud construction technique in the Kingdom and its contribution in the traditional Saudi architecture. Also, the paper will illustrate Al- Udhaibat experience as one of the methods that can be used in the future to revive mud techniques. The goal is to maintain the know-how of mud construction and search for ways to connect it with contemporary practice.