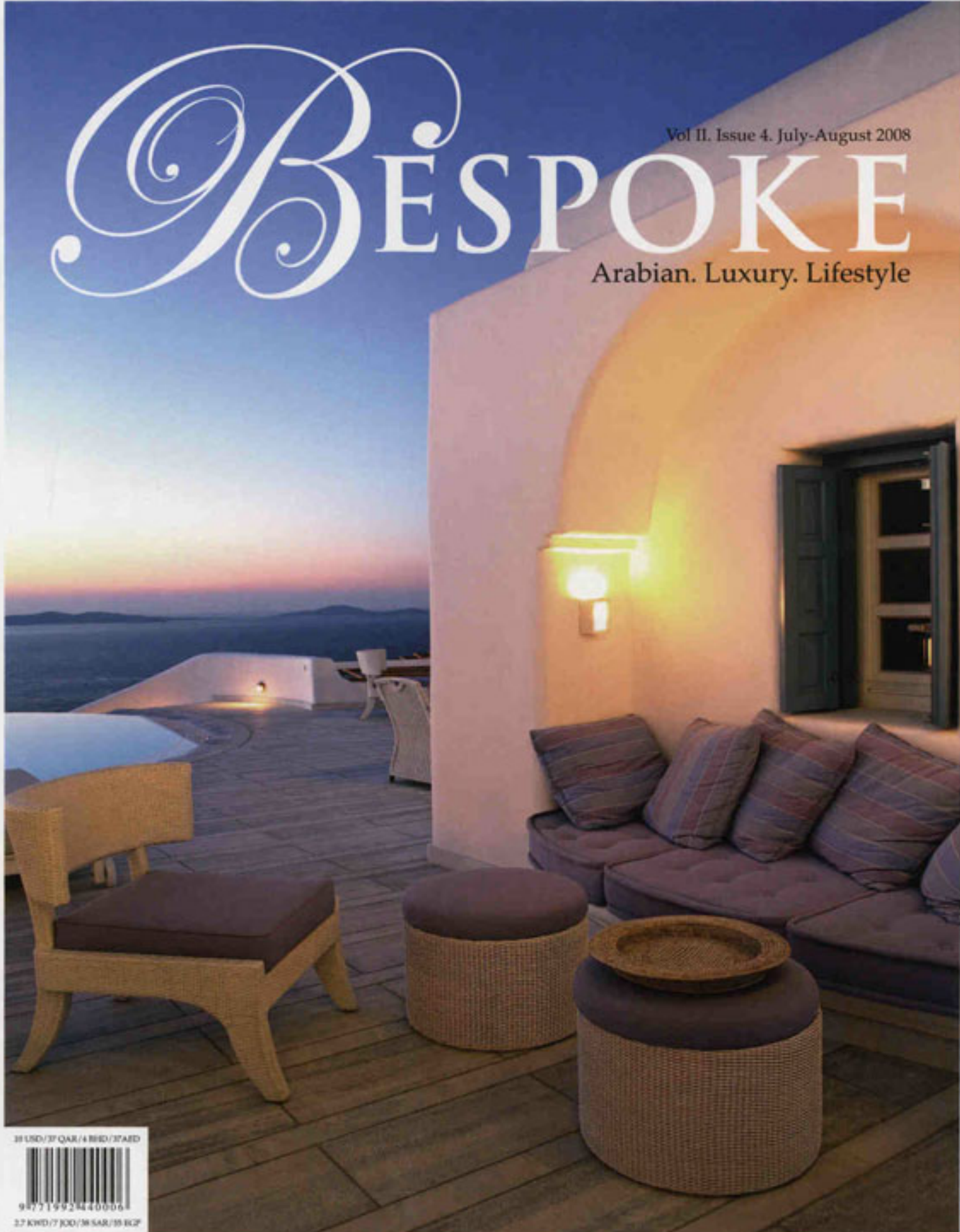


BESPOKE

Vol II. Issue 4. July-August 2008

Arabian. Luxury. Lifestyle



38 USD/37 QAR/4 BHD/37 AED



9 771992 440006

3.7 KWD/7 JOD/36 SAR/16 EGP

RECREATIONAL ISSUE

Exclusive: Samih Sawiris

Saudis fly to Space

Top Bicycles

Supersizing in the ME

Sculpting Space

As both an architect and an interior designer, Galal Mahmoud has a distinct edge over his competition. **Sara Hamzeh** meets with head of **GM Architects**, to acquire some insight into his world of blueprints.







Simple floral arrangements adorn the calm interior setting.

Situated in an upscale area of Beirut, the serene offices of Galal Mahmoud are a sanctuary of calm, starkly at odds with the chaotic norm of the city. A vaguely perceptible chatter starts to become louder the further I walk in. Noticeably French, the chit chat is coming from a creative department deep in the midst of a brainstorm. I glance about trying to understand just how the subtly sophisticated design has been achieved here. Perhaps I should have been feeling a little anxious yet an overwhelming calm came over me as I started scribbling down my notes; high-rise ceilings, white walls, and an impression of endless space.

Startled suddenly by the secretary informing me of the mastermind's pending arrival, I quickly positioned myself in anticipation. Tall, tanned and with piercing blue eyes, in walked the architect and designer behind most of the region's beach resorts.

Although Galal Mahmoud is of Egyptian decent, he made Lebanon his home some time ago. "I can't imagine living anywhere else but here. I grew up by the sea, the sea is my inspiration," he says pensively.

Mahmoud is blessed with much charisma and he



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answers my questions with modesty and wisdom. “What satisfies me the most is when the client claims the idea was their’s; it’s an odd way of letting me know they loved the result,” he discloses. What Mahmoud really admires the most is a project that manages to achieve spaciousness.

Driven by a deep belief in the power of design and its effect in the well-being of individuals, Mahmoud made his first steps in the world of professional architecture back in 1987 in the city that blends character with style, Paris. Deciding to broaden his horizons, it was not till 1997 that he decided to launch his own company in Beirut, GM Architects. He started with Circus then Bamboo Bay and the highest profile was of course Edde Sands.

“At GM Architects, we constantly strive towards Faulkner’s vision, creating an everlasting sculpture of life,” he clarifies. Regardless of the location, GM Architects have always found a stimulating challenge in defining the original designs for the interior and exterior. Mahmoud has a penchant for concrete space but the bottom-line is that “luxury is space.” A



distinguishable aspect in all of his projects.

Mahmoud also indulges in the notion of escapism. “People go to resorts and spas to escape from their everyday lives; the point is to make them experience a different world.” I immediately take another look around his office trying to understand just how he goes about achieving the escapist ambience.

Nowadays, GM Architects has successfully reached a broad and diversified reach, operating in Lebanon, the region, Europe, the United States and Latin America. “Architecture goes beyond the conventional margins of a profession, it takes us through a timeless journey where everyday is a



The notion of escapism is evident in these computer-animated designs of upcoming projects.






The dark reds fused in this design further compliment the serenity of this retreat.

chance to delve into new cultures and lifestyles, dive deeper into the secrets of art and history and blend them with the expectations of our clientele," explains Mahmoud.

Bearing testament to his words is his extensive resume of projects. Some of the latest ones undertaken include the Rotana Hotel in Sharm El-Sheikh, residences in Mykonos, Greece and a resort in Salalah in the Sultanate of Oman. Then there are the latest designs for the Amber Valley resort in the Dead Sea, the Amber Retreat in Amman and the Moulay Yaacoub project in Morocco.

Yet the joy of his success is short-lived when he glances around at the country from which he operates. "It's the instability of the country," he pauses, hinting that the hospitality sector in Lebanon is neglected "Water resorts and hotels require a big turn-over and that cannot be the case in the country now. Hopefully in the future."

With such a full agenda on his hands, it was time to end my interview. I thanked my host and was about to get on my way when it dawned on me that I now had to leave my new found sanctuary of calm. Begrudgingly, off I trundled into the chaotic world outside, trying to stay, at least mentally, in the world of Galal Mahmoud. 

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