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TRANQUILITY DESIGN CONCEPT FOR RECTORY BUILDING GRAND ARCHWAY AND THE SHAS MOSQUE UPPER COURTYARD

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ABSTRACT

This project intends to rejuvenate the grand archway of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), which encompasses the main staircase, the rectory building, and the mosque courtyard. These places are interconnected and meant for transitional pathways between the rectory building and other parts of IIUM. In this project, processes to harmonise the exterior and interior design of the sites were explored. The process bridged the gap between the characteristics of Islamic architecture and holistic human experiences. The main design characters of the site are preserved but give a new breath to the overall appeal and versatility of operation in the areas. First, the current conditions of the sites were analysed. Then, a design concept that would increase accessibility, functionality, aesthetic appeal, cost-efficiency, historical preservation, productivity, security and safety, and sustainability was envisioned.

Keywords: Archway, courtyard, plaza, staircase

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INTRODUCTION

The Muhammad Abdul-Rauf Building, formerly known as the Rectory Building, holds a significant position within the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). It was named in honour of the esteemed first rector of IIUM, the late Allahyarham Tan Sri Prof. Dr. Muhammad M. Abdul Rauf. The building encompasses the Rector's Office as well as workspaces for prominent university staff members. Serving as a vital nerve centre, it plays a crucial role in supporting students' personal and professional growth in alignment with IIUM's philosophy and objectives. The dedicated staff members within the building handle various aspects of student affairs, including holistic development, welfare, and community engagement initiatives. Furthermore, the building houses units that provide counselling and guidance for students' extracurricular activities, coordinate formal and informal training sessions, organize recreational events, and ensure that the university's facilities cater to the needs of its diverse population.



Figure 1: The front view of Muhammad Abdul Rauf or IIUM Rectory Building

The Muhammad Abdul Rauf building exhibits unique Islamic architectural features, including calligraphy, geometric patterns, and interlaced ornaments, as depicted in Figure 1. The building showcases a harmonious combination of sky-blue roofs and sandy-beige walls, seamlessly blending with the overall aesthetic of IIUM. While visually striking, the building's primary function is to serve as an entry point, with a prominent gateway arch leading to the courtyard of the Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah Mosque, or known as SHAS Mosque, a central hub for spiritual activities within IIUM.

The pursuit of sensory beauty, whether expressed through magnificent architectural marvels or exquisite calligraphy, has been deeply ingrained in the rich Islamic architectural heritage throughout history (Muslim Heritage, n.d.), even though defining Islamic architecture is bounded by civilization timeframe (Nasser Rabbat, 2004). Despite mere aesthetics, Islamic architecture is an interwoven thread of faith systems, principles, teachings, and values of Islam and the function of spaces. An optimal Islamic architecture brings the occupants a rich sensory experience and a pure intention of life. Islamic Architecture is attributable to the benefits in this world and hereafter (Omer, 2020).

CONCEPTUAL PROCESS, PROCEDURE AND SCHEMATIC

Design Concept : Tranquillity Concord

Drawing inspiration from the concept of 'The Tranquillity Concord,' our vision for the grand archway encompasses a serene sanctuary for the IIUM community and a versatile space accommodating various activities, with the SHAS Mosque as the focal point. We have meticulously integrated the essence of tranquility into the buildings and surrounding landscapes. Additionally, we have prioritised openness and comfort within the design concept.

By incorporating larger openings, the courtyard and other spaces will benefit from improved ventilation and increased exposure to natural sunlight. To create a lasting impression on visitors, we have employed abstract shapes, contrasting materials, dramatic lighting effects, and the potential incorporation of natural sounds, such as the soothing rustle of the wind. These elements collectively evoke a sense of relaxation and tranquility, enhancing the overall experience for those who encounter the space.

METHOD / PROCEDURE

Analysis of several case studies was conducted prior to the designing process. Attributes reviewed in this case studies are :

Functionality	Ornaments
Materials	Colour Scheme
Construction Techniques / Installation	Circulation

CASE STUDIES

The following figures show examples of images that were used as the sources of references or ideas for design development.



Figure 2: Planter box along a grand staircase evokes the feeling of harmony (Source: Spanish Steps -Internet)

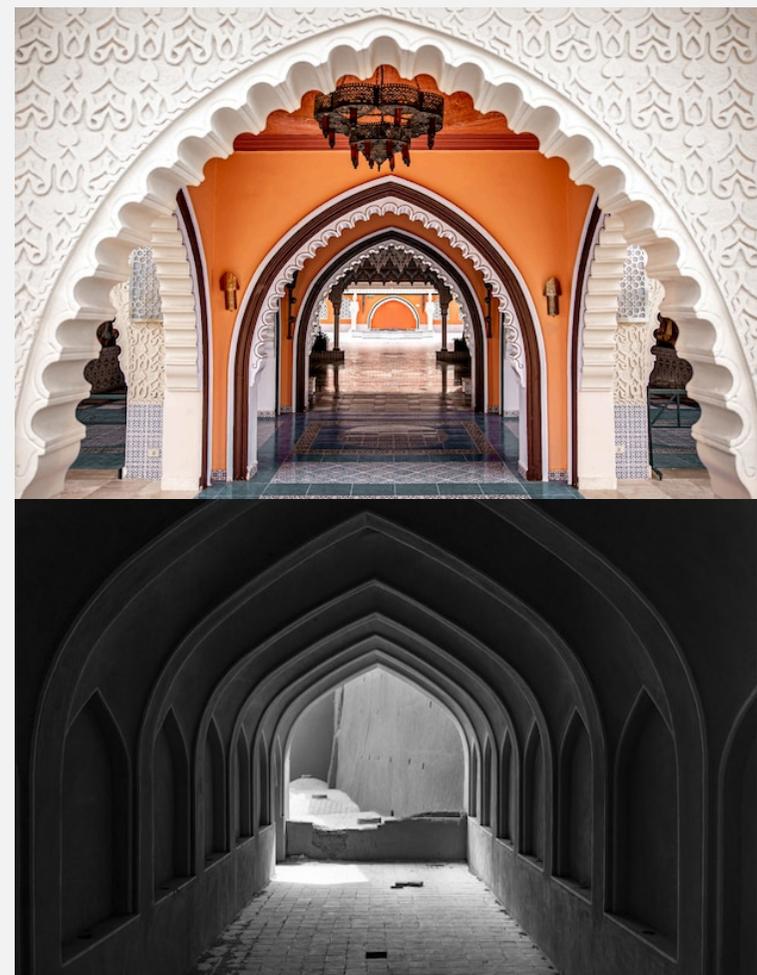


Figure 3: Bold arches as the frame of pathways (Source: Freepik.com)

Based on extensive case studies, key architectural elements to integrate into the proposed design were identified. One crucial aspect is ensuring the colours harmoniously blend with the surrounding buildings, creating a seamless aesthetic. Additionally, the archway can feature intricately carved motifs with the selected ayahs from the Quran, infusing the design with cultural significance and spiritual depth. Arabic script is one of the main themes in Islamic visual culture (Blair, 2020). To enhance the grandeur of the archway, the strategic placement of spotlights will illuminate the carvings, creating a magnificent nighttime view. Furthermore, the walkway that leads to the entrance will be adorned with serene-looking greenery, providing a lush and textured environment that evokes a sense of tranquility. This careful selection of plants will contribute to the overall calming ambience of the space.

MASTER PLAN

The following figures show the master plan of the proposed design.



Figure 4: Master plan of the design showing the extent of the project area.

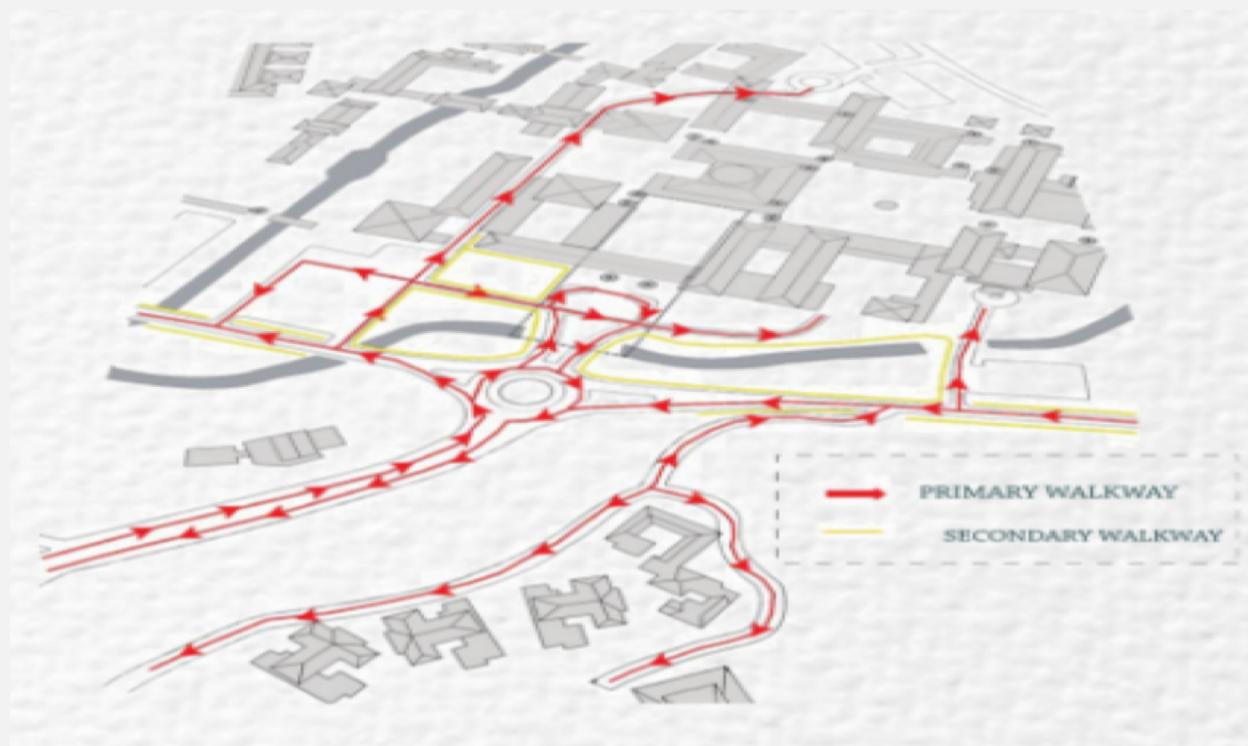


Figure 5: Primary and secondary walkway of the master plan

PROPOSED DESIGN

The overall design of the site exemplifies the Tranquility Concord concept. It portrays a serene and harmonious atmosphere by incorporating exquisite vegetation ornaments at the main entrance. The vegetation serves as embellishments that complement the architectural features of the site, thus creating a seamless integration with the natural surroundings. Their graceful forms, colours, and textures evoke a sense of harmony, connecting the built environment with the beauty of nature.

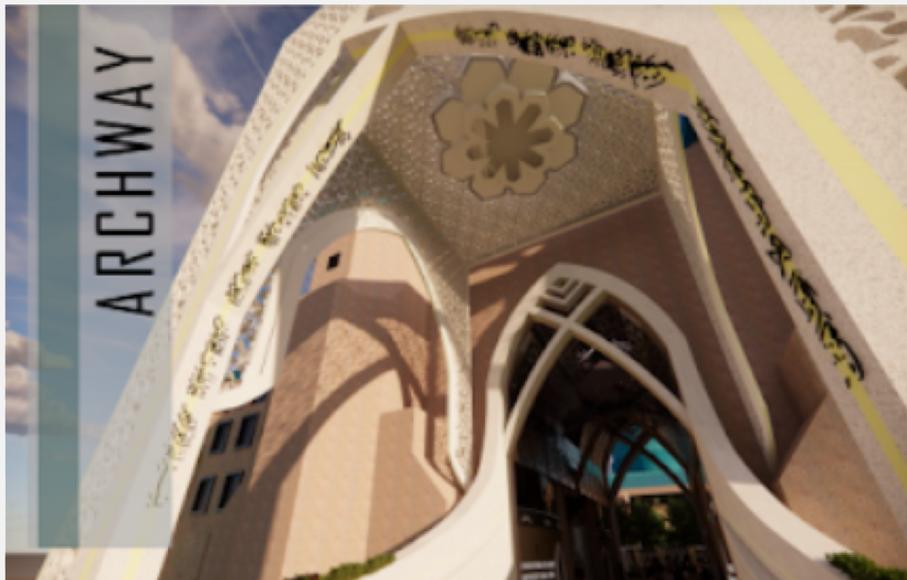


Figure 6: The Main Archway

The interior design of the Muhammad Abdul-Rauf Building has been carefully curated to create designated "meeting points" that encourage and facilitate Muhibbah interaction among the IIUM community. These designated areas serve as spaces where individuals from diverse backgrounds can come together, fostering a sense of unity and harmony. The layout of these meeting points is strategically planned to promote social interaction, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas.

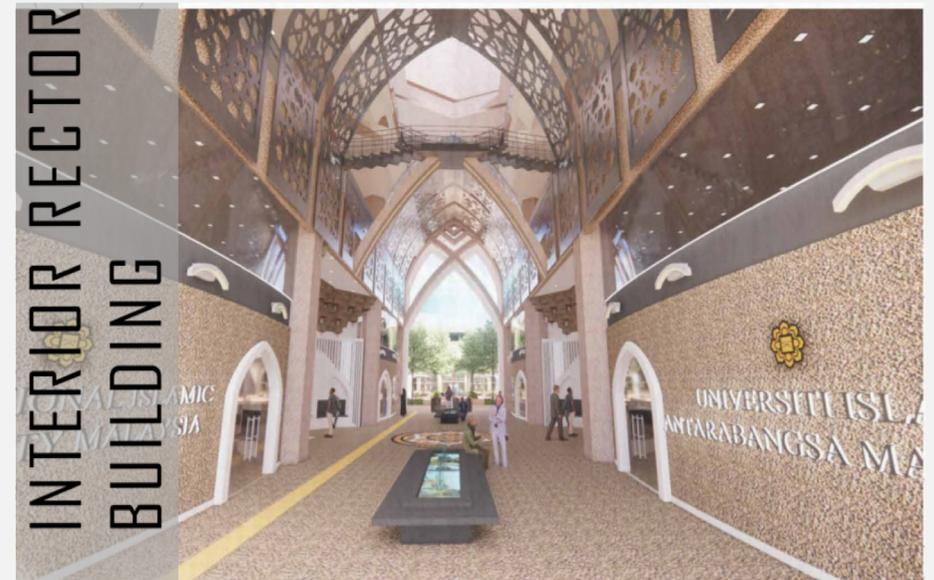


Figure 8: The Interior of the Muhammad Abdul-Rauf Building

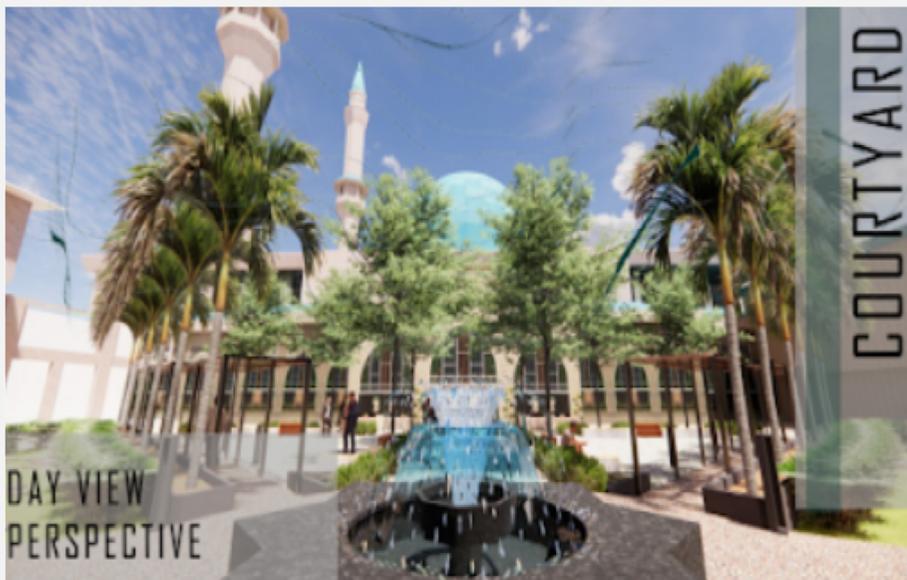


Figure 7: The SHAS Mosque Courtyard



Figure 9: Information Area at the Muhammad Abdul-Rauf Building with intricate ceiling ornaments.

The following figures show the details of the proposed design embodying the Tranquility Concord concept.



Figure 10: Ornaments and hardscapes of the proposed design.

PROTOTYPE

The following figures show the scaled model of the proposed design.

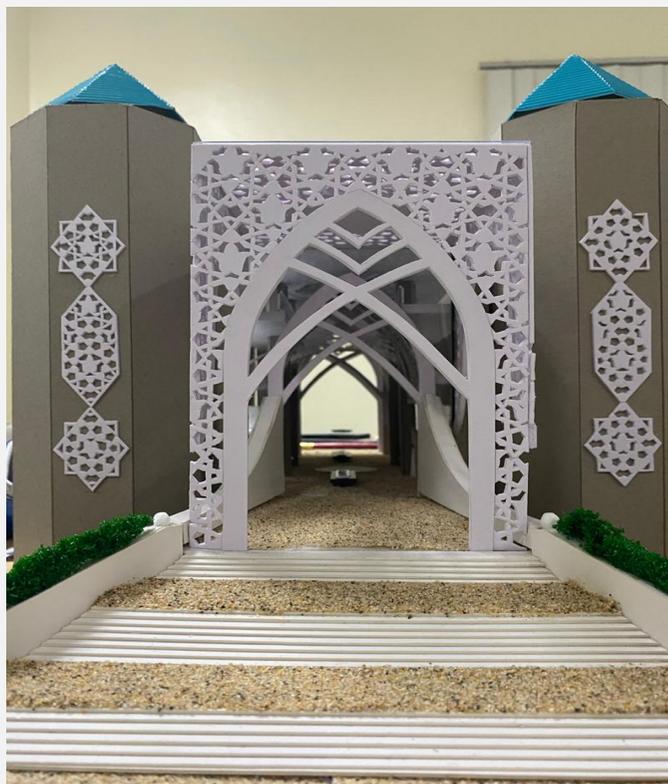
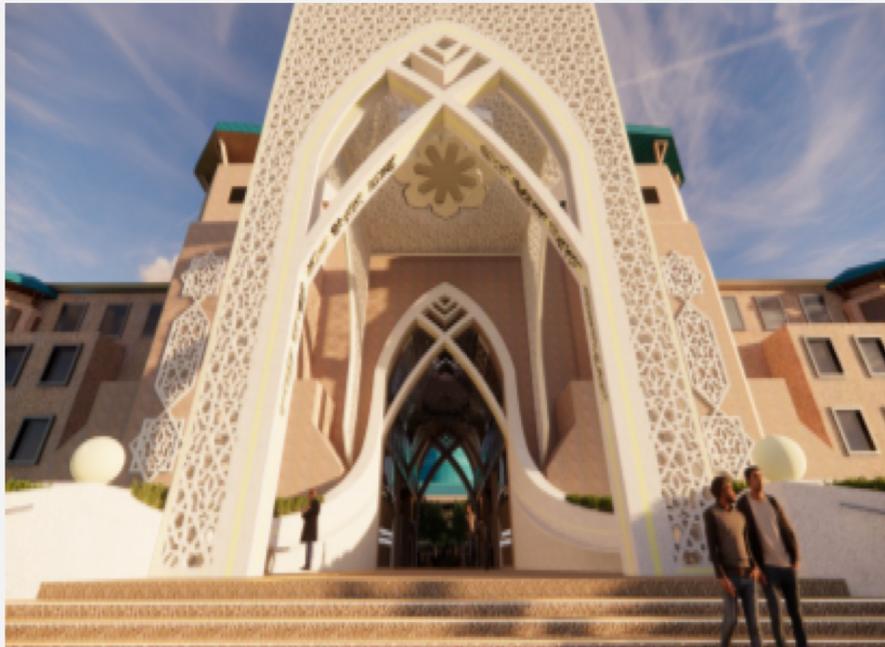


Figure 11: Proposed elements and scaled model of the design.

CONCLUSION

The design concept of Tranquil Concord places a strong emphasis on openness and a seamless integration between the interior and exterior spaces, including the courtyard. The primary objective is to make a compelling initial impression and leave a lasting impact on visitors.

The design incorporates multiple touchpoints strategically positioned throughout the building. These touch points are carefully curated to ensure a gradual and immersive user experience. As visitors navigate through the space, they will encounter unexpected elements and unique moments that enhance their overall journey. This intentional approach captures their attention, creating a sense of intrigue and fascination.

By meticulously considering the initial impressions of the design, the project aims to provide a secure, comfortable, and efficient atmosphere. The design concept strives beyond traditional expectations, offering surprises and delight at every turn. The ultimate goal is to leave visitors with a profound and memorable experience that resonates long after they have left the building.

In essence, the Tranquil Concord design concept combines elements of security, comfort, efficiency, captivation, and surprise. It aims to create an environment that fosters a meaningful and lasting impression on visitors of the Muhammad Abdul Rauf Building and SHAS Mosque.

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Nasser Rabbat, 'Islamic Architecture as a Field of Historical Inquiry', AD Architectural Design (special issue Islam+Architecture), 74(6), 2004, 18-23

Blair, S. S. (2020). *Islamic calligraphy*. Edinburgh University Press.