



Adib Dada founder of The Other Dada

Not his father, and not a lesser-known art movement, The Other Dada architecture firm founder ditches "greenwashing" for deep sustainability.

It's little wonder Adib Dada is an architect, following the path set by his father. But when he opened his architecture firm theOtherDada in 2010, there was one issue which was non-negotiable when taking on projects: sustainability. "I've always loved being in nature, and ever since I was little, I would turn my balcony, using planters, into a garden," he says. "So for example, my graduate degree which was in design and technology, I ended up taking most of the courses that had to do with living systems, recycling and bio-remediation. I always ended up in an area that had to do with sustainability in the broadest sense of the term."

One of the first projects he has taken on using the principles of deep sustainability is building a weekend house above Batroun called Garlic House. "It's a very small weekend house - about 80 square meters. Many Lebanese ask me, 'Why are you building an 80 square meter house when the plot of land is 7000 square meters?'" he says laughing. "The reason is we don't need more than that. It's optimizing the functions rather than just having a huge villa just because you have a huge tract of land. You don't necessarily need to build just because you can."

Garlic House will be completed by the summer of 2013, however it's already become a learning experience not only for Dada and his team, but also for academics in Lebanon. The Other Dada teamed up with Ibsar - the Nature Conservation Center for Sustainable Futures - an interfaculty center at AUB created in 2002 to promote nature conservation. "For Garlic House, Ibsar did a biodiversity report for the land. They went and listed all the types of shrubs, trees and plants along with everything that exists there. They gave their recommendations on the important characteristics of the land. We looked at ways on how to increase that biodiversity."

When discussing the topic of sustainability with large scale projects in Lebanon, Dada confesses that most people have been subjected to "greenwashing." "When we talk about projects here and explain all of this to clients, the challenge is that in Lebanon we don't have the notion of what sustainability means. For them it's, 'yes I bought an LED lamp,' or they may use recycle paper, and for them that's being green."

In order to preserve the ethos of his company and develop deep sustainability to its fullest, he makes sure to hire companies or consultants with a background in environmental sustainability; and he is not afraid to turn down clients who don't follow his vision. He credits this to having a small team: "I can develop these skills, because at the moment we are a small team of three people. So we can allow ourselves to have less projects and work on more quality projects at the moment."

Dada's definition of sustainability isn't limited to the environment; his definition branches out to supporting local art and culture as well. He's a strong believer in public art, and especially large scale installations. If you've ever walked in downtown Beirut and passed by the large red wooden structure - which is now in almost every Lebanon tourism commercial - it was all due to Dada.

In 2010 he co-founded Karaj, Beirut's first non-profit media lab for experimental arts, architecture and technology, "It's a community space about sharing: sharing ideas, sharing cross disciplines."

He was also recently approached by Le Yacht Club in Zaitunay Bay to help develop specifically commissioned art for their space. "It was very clear from the beginning that it would be about promoting the Lebanese art scene. I'll be building a team which involves an art advisor and a curator. This is what I studied, but it's not what I do. I don't pretend to be a curator or an art consultant."

So where is he heading now? "The next step for me is to graduate from my program in the States," he says with nervous laughter, as his flight to the U.S was delayed due to Hurricane Sandy. Dada recently finished a program in biomimicry from the Biomimicry Institute in Arizona. "It's really about going back to the basics and looking at how nature has found solutions for all these challenges that we face," he explains. "It's how organisms, whether they are plants, animals, or insects, have found solutions to problems. And there are examples in the architectural industry and product design that have looked at nature. Think velcro: It was inspired by the feet of the Geko. There are ventilation systems for buildings inspired by termite mounds."

When we come to the topic of why he came back to Lebanon, and why he didn't follow in the footsteps of many young Lebanese going abroad to seek a more stable life, he adds, "For me coming to Lebanon was something I've always wanted to do, and I think it's a great place to start. You have these opportunities that you don't necessarily have anywhere else. We don't have a perfect system, but we can take advantage of that. You have far fewer restrictions; you can be more innovative. It is much easier to do a sustainable project somewhere else, but here you're pushing those boundaries, you have an impact. And that for me is much more meaningful, because it's in my own country."

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