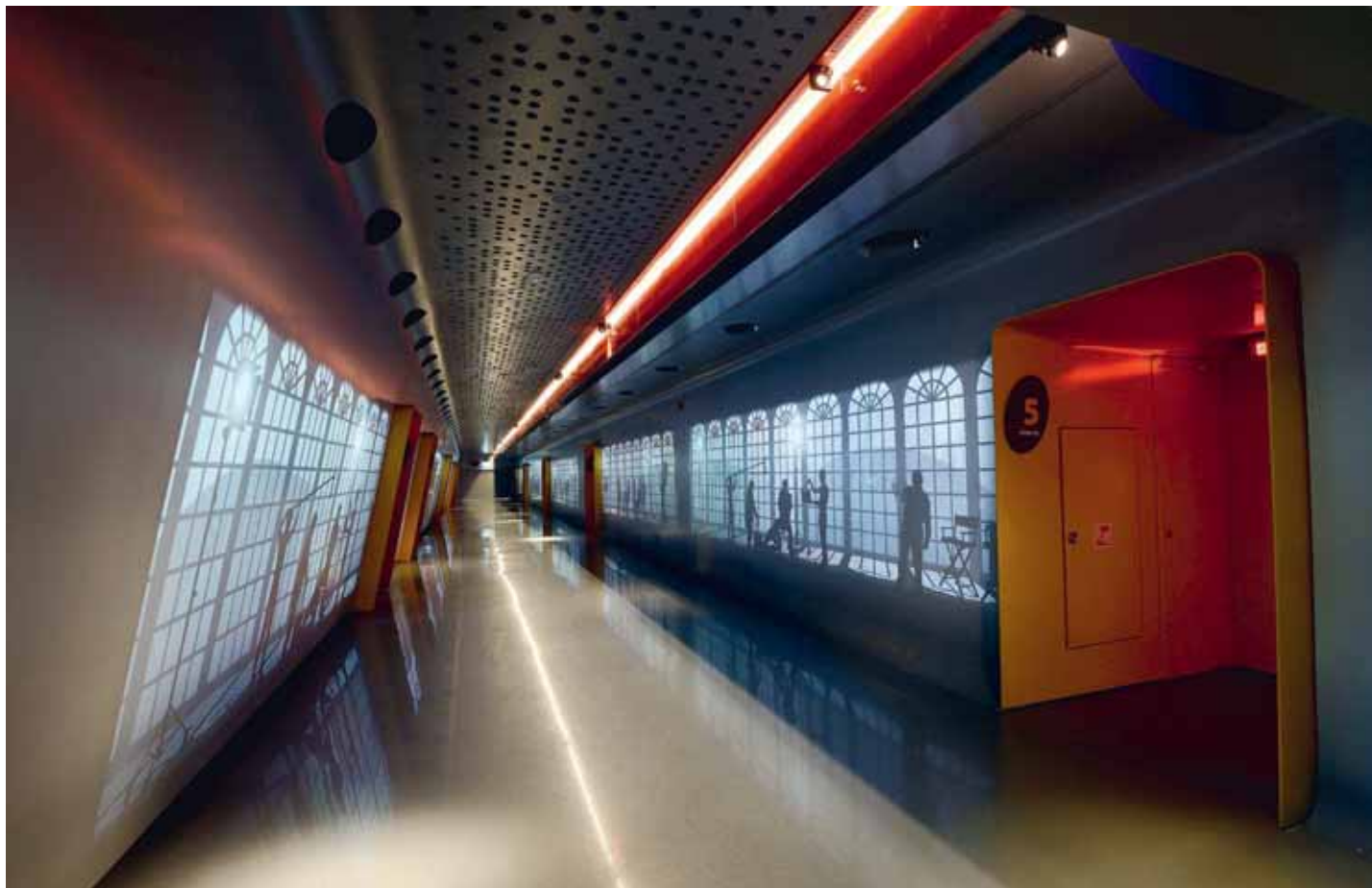


Grand designs

By Pip Usher

This page Inside CinemaCity's animated hallway



Nabil Dada applies his aesthetic to Lebanon

After Britain's parliamentary buildings were demolished in the Second World War, Winston Churchill rallied support for their restoration by claiming, "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us." It's an interesting proposition. Can bricks and mortar, whether used for public worship or as a private refuge, create an indelible imprint upon the society in which they sit?

If you asked Nabil Dada, he'd be too modest to answer truthfully. After all, when asked how he'd like his decades of work as an interior architect to be remembered, he pauses before joking, "I would like it to be remembered at all!" But there's no doubt that Dada believes in the power of design, crafting his own vision of Lebanon through projects

key to the capital's skyline, whether it's the imposing thrust of the Al Amin Mosque in Martyrs' Square or the Ottoman elegance of the Grand Serail, the prime minister's personal residence. Driven by a love for "pure, well-studied design," Dada established an office in Beirut in 1991 and has been the mastermind for high-profile public and private projects across the region ever since.

But while Dada may advocate simplicity (he describes his own home as a timeless, modern creation that he periodically updates with artwork or new furniture pieces), he can wreak riotous havoc with color. CinemaCity, a 14-screen cinema complex that burst upon the Beirut Souks in December 2013, provides a playful punch to an area that takes itself all

This Page CinemaCity's glass elevator
Next Page A view of CinemaCity's interior
(top) and the Lady Blue yacht (bottom)





too seriously. A wacked-out concoction with glass cage elevators that disappear into a cloud of bespoke animation and a neon-lit basement that leers like the morning hours of a rave, Dada describes his vision as an “energetic, dynamic atmosphere – the kind of place where people can have fun before the movie starts.”

Dada may prefer the challenges of public spaces but Lady in Blue, the 40-meter yacht that he recently revamped for one very lucky Lebanese businessman, is a terrific testament to seclusion. Described as a “floating boutique hotel,” the sleek blend of plump white leather sofas, gleaming wood and highly polished stainless steel has created a space that is as “serene and comfortable and relaxed” as the sea on which it floats. With every aspect of the boat tailored to meet the client’s needs – from the discreet spotlights studded into the ceiling to the tasteful marriage of modern and art deco pieces – Lady Blue exudes the kind of quiet confidence that outshines brasher boats. In other words, she’d sit amongst the society pages of *Vogue* rather than on *The Daily Mail*’s salacious sidebar.

As a kid playing in the old souk of downtown Beirut, Dada could be found, drawing pencil in one hand and notepad in the other, scribbling down the latest shop window adornments. Could that little boy have imagined his doodles would change his city’s landscape? Probably not; but his ideas are sculpting Beirut’s skyline for future generations.

