

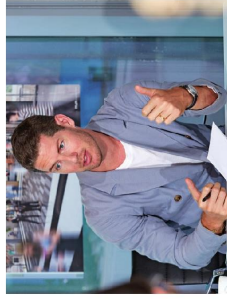


Setting the agenda

Local architects and interior designers come together to discuss topics for the 2017 DesignMENA Summit, reports Aidan Imanova

At a roundtable held by Middle East Architect's sister title designMENA at the RMJM offices in Dubai's Design District, 10 industry experts discussed potential agenda topics for the upcoming designMENA Summit, to be held 5 December in Dubai.

The discussion was attended by a number of the UAE's known architects and designers who spoke of the industry's current conditions and trends, including Sumaya Dabbagh, principal of Dabbagh Architects; Neil van der Veen, principal of RMJM; Salim Hussein, principal architect at Atkins Global; Paul Bishop, owner and man-



"There's a lot more intelligence on the side of the developers and clients."

Others, like Wells, agreed with Daniels, saying that upon entering 2018, the industry is seeing the beginning of



a "new era and the maturing of a new building market". Developers are now looking at risk analysis far more, he explained, with clients understanding the constraints of putting a project together and figuring out how to get the best use out of a building.

"I wouldn't say we've arrived at the new era, but we're definitely arriving," Wells said.

The discussion's other leading topics included managing client expectations, standardisation, residential design and Dubai's changing visual identity.

While many agreed that practicing architecture and design in the UAE is progressing, with issues like becoming less prevalent, the time-squeeze enforced by clients continues. Dufresne noted that architects are the ones to blame. By demonstrating a fast design process to begin with, clients and developers are taught to expect faster and faster delivery, with architects continuing to bend, aware that clients would accept the contract. "It's a vicious cycle," he said. "And we're kind



of shooting ourselves in the foot." According to Ashmore, with greater support from bodies like AIA and RIBA in the region, such vulnerability in the workplace could begin to soften. Representing architects and designers, such organisations can ensure that a particular framework is set in place and that clients are well informed.

"As long as we stick together as an industry, we might be able to find a way to actually avoid these issues," Ashmore said. "We need to ask, 'how do we support each other; and how do we inform the client that to get this type of project with this type of quality, it will take this much time?'"

"It's one of the things we want to make developers aware of," replied Dabbagh. "They see the financial value of the better quality projects. Emaar has been very good with that, but I think there's definitely a gap where developers are still operating in an old-school way. It's still lagging behind."

The issue of non-standardisation was also raised, where a lack of proper client guidelines have given way to unrealistic project expectations.

"Usually, there's a client's guide that you can give out that shows how to engage an architect, and they'll look at the list and say, 'okay they have this many stages of work and it's this amount of insurance and this many responsibilities. We don't have that here,'" said Ashmore.

The topic of conversation shifted to Dubai's changing identity. According to Lessard, the city doesn't have a holistic vision for urban design. "It's so cosmopolitan and diverse," he said.

"Dubai struggles with that and clients always come with different references. Tourism is such a big part of the economy. I think they have tried to cast a big net to appeal to all those sensibilities."

However Dabbagh argued that what appears like a lack of identity is, in fact, simply the fast paced evolution of the country.

"If you talk to someone aged 50 and above, it's different than what it is to the younger generations. It's evolving and we need to keep up with it. It's no longer about wind towers everywhere. No one wants that now," she said. ●

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