GAJ is one of the largest and longest-established UK architectural and design practices in the UAE. Throughout our history, which spans 30 years, we have created some of Dubai’s most iconic buildings and have helped define the emirate as we know it today.

An award-winning and multi-disciplinary architecture practice, we have specific expertise in hotel and hospitality, residential and commercial, education, sport and leisure design.

GAJ originally started in the UK in 1989 as Godwin Austen Johnson. However our lineage of partnerships harks back to 1847 with a corporate archive of landmark British architecture throughout the industrial and modern ages.

In 1981 Principal and Managing Partner Brian Johnson opened the GAJ headquarters in Dubai. He had been practising in the emirate since 1975 and saw exciting opportunities to contribute to the development of a new world city.

With nearly 40 years of regional experience to his name Brian’s influence on modern Middle Eastern architecture has been pervasive. GAJ’s body of work comprises some of Dubai’s most recognisable and prized buildings.

The Dubai Creek Golf Clubhouse was the first building in Dubai whose physical status is matched by its status as a local emblem - so much so it features on the 20 dirham note.

Arguably, it was GAJ who set in motion a countrywide trend in the UAE to incorporate traditional Islamic themes into modern architecture. Bab Al Shams and the Arabian Courtyard Residence and Spa at The One&Only Royal Mirage Hotel remain a testament to this.

Brian’s approach to design is still embraced by the team at GAJ today and continues to attract new business opportunities from across the region. It stems from a fundamental belief that architecture should not only be contextually relevant but also rooted firmly in principles of sustainability.

GAJ is committed to the belief that the quality of the built environment is an essential part of the economic and cultural fabric of society in which the very best architecture plays a central and intrinsic role.

As a fully integrated design practice we provide expertise in the associated disciplines of architecture, interior design, specialist lighting, and MEP.
WHAT WE DO

- HOSPITALITY
- EDUCATION
- RESIDENTIAL
- COMMERCIAL
- SPORTS AND LEISURE
- MASTERPLANNING
We create experiences, not just buildings.

Headquartered in Dubai since 1991, we have been responsible for creating some of the Emirates’ most iconic buildings and spaces. Over the years we have attracted an international team from 22 countries, made up of more than 160 architects, designers, technicians and business support, all of who work towards achieving our ethos.

We work closely with our clients to achieve a detailed and thorough understanding of key areas such as history, society, culture, technology and functionality of the projects. We also pride ourselves on forming and maintaining strong and respectful relationships with subcontractors, all of whom have a common goal to meet, exceed and deliver on our client’s vision.

An award winning and multi-disciplinary firm, GAJ has particular expertise in hotel and resort, residential and commercial, education, sport and leisure design as well as master planning, mixed use, public-sector, institutional and cultural projects.

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02
PROJECT EXPERIENCE - COMPLETED
Located along the shores of Dubai’s iconic Creek the development of Al Seef is an exciting new cultural tourism space that merges the city’s past with its present.

GAJ were responsible for the design of the overall master plan, along with the design and construction supervision of the eastern section (phases 2 and 3) which follows a more traditional style.

For this unique project it was essential that we first appreciated the extent and requirement of preserving and showcasing traditional Emirati architecture and local trades. The challenge was to design the buildings as if they had always been there withstanding the test of time through aging techniques and carefully calculated degradation percentages. Water marks, caulking and bulges in the edges all contribute to achieve this.

The eastern section includes a number of heritage style cluster buildings recreating the memory of old Dubai along the banks of the Dubai Creek and extending the existing historical district of Bastakiya.

The result is a beautifully transformed area that brings to life an important era in Dubai’s fascinating history providing an authentic heritage experience and a stunning leisure, retail and dining location.
Located within the Al Seef area along the banks of the Dubai Creek, the Al Seef Heritage Hotel embodies Dubai’s traditions embracing the past through experiences deeply rooted in Emirati culture and heritage.

The sense of location was the inspiration behind the interior design concept. A muted background canvas of simple pure shapes with gypsum carving, hand-wrought metalwork, concrete floors, barasti ceilings and rough worked timber reflect Dubai’s bygone traditions of pearl diving, fishing and basket weaving. Furniture and fittings are in dark contrasting woods and woven fabrics exhibit the local natural dye colours and landscapes.

Dubai’s rich historical legacy provided a wealth of material for the hotel interiors and the 190 guest rooms, public areas and dining outlets combine a modern lifestyle with traditional influences to seamlessly showcase the country’s proud past.
The project aims to link Sharjah’s heritage areas together, reflecting what Sharjah was like during the 1960s, and to transform it into a tourist and trade destination with modern contemporary artistic touches. In addition, it will be focused on completing the economic structure in accordance with the principles of sustainable development and environmental principles, in line with the latest international standards.

In view of its ambitious strategies, Shurooq seeks, through its landmark “Heart of Sharjah” project, to develop ancient houses and to transform these into hotels, restaurants, art galleries and markets, while preserving the local historical character of the Emirate.

Thus, the project will concentrate on archaeological sites and museums, the renovation of old and ancient houses, and the removal of current buildings and streets in the area to build a number of hotels and tourist facilities in line with the Emirate’s plans to safeguard its national historical character.
Deep within the desert landscape of Abu Dhabi, Jumeirah Al Wathba Desert Resort & Spa is an intimate retreat set against a panoramic backdrop of the desert. Inspired by classical dwellings, the boutique resort’s 103 guest rooms and villas feature timeless local details, traditional artwork, and Arabesque accessories.

The resort draws inspiration from a historic desert village with meandering walkways, discreet courtyards and soothing water features. This quintessential Arabian-style property sprawls over 22,000 sq m of tranquil desert and comprises a destination Spa, villas with private pools, Arabian-style rooms, a 1000 sqm pool, six restaurants and bars including Al Mabeet, a traditional desert dining experience.

*Photos courtesey of Jumeirah Hotels and Resorts*
Bab Al Shams Hotel is situated in the heart of the desert and nestles peacefully among the dunes on the outskirts of Dubai. The hotel was designed with 115 rooms and related facilities of restaurants, desert camp, a traditional outside restaurant, swimming pools, bars and a small spa.

Its design is that of a traditional Arabic village with courtyards, narrow streets and alleyways, covered passages and falaj’s that provide a unique ambience in a secluded area.

Ornamentation has been kept to a minimum, with the use of timber being restricted to pergolas and chandral poles on the facades. A rough self-coloured render has been used for the exterior facades, which picks up the colours and textures of the surrounding desert.

Thick walls and relatively small openings help with the thermal efficiency of the design, as do the narrow streets and alleys which run between the two storey buildings, ensuring maximum overshadowing.
The proposals include a polo field and practice field, with club house and equestrian centre, a five star hotel and spa, and up to 80 residential villas surrounding these facilities.

The villas, club house and hotel are elevated above the level of the polo field to allow a view on to this green oasis. The club house occupies a location close to the central edge of the polo field, with wide terraces stepping down towards the playing area.

The hotel is elevated at the southern end of the site, overlooking the polo field and with the wide vista of the dramatic Atlas Mountains beyond. Arranged as a series of terraces, all public spaces open out towards the central terraces of the hotel, converging and stepping down towards the field. Guest rooms are accessed via private courtyards.
The concept behind this project was to try to design the undesignable, and to recreate that uniquely random and natural growth that sets apart the normal definition of architecture from architecture without architects by incorporating a range of different spatial experiences in a way that most modern architectural planning seeks to regularise or, worse, to avoid, by imposing an idea of a formal structure or logic.

It was therefore necessary to avoid the more formal planning that, whilst present in Ottoman and Moghul architecture, is more often balanced by an organic approach in old Arab cities (and indeed in old cities throughout the world). The response of all who have experienced the spaces reinforces the view that the reason why The One&Only Royal Mirage is a success is because it fulfills a genuine need in all people to experience a building which unfolds its secrets to them.
The proposed Four Points by Sheraton Hotel & Resort, Unaizah, KSA comprises 80 Standard Rooms, 20 two-bedroom chalets, 10 three-bedroom chalets and 10 four-bedroom villas.

The main hotel is accessed off of the arrival courtyard which is a pedestrian only courtyard separating the vehicular drop-off area from the hotel entrance. Once through this courtyard the main lobby is accessed via a small vestibule. The arrival lobby is a double storey space with an internal atrium connecting the ground floor to the first floor bedroom corridors.

The hotel is arranged in a U-shape with a central courtyard separating the all-day dining and the specialty restaurant. This space is intended as an informal dining area with a fire pit and casual seating as well. Palm trees will provide shade whilst removable screens will be used for privacy when required.
As with any museum or art gallery, the exhibition spaces are introverted, offering spaces for contemplation and reflection. The exterior of the individual galleries buildings have been kept relatively blank externally maintaining an impassive dominance over the streets. This reinforces the boundaries of the buildings and thus directs circulation through the site while external courtyard spaces are woven through the streets and buildings providing gathering and breakout spaces. Carefully framed views and openings create glimpses of the open spaces, courtyards and galleries beyond.

The development is comprised of six galleries varying in scale and height capable of catering for different display requirements and flexibility within the exhibition spaces. The majority of the buildings are single storey with higher internal spaces in places creating a varied external skyline. Hidden roof lights bring natural lighting into the deeper spaces, and borrowed light from horizontal openings light the smaller galleries. Public roof terraces and connecting bridges provide an upper level of circulation offering views through the lower streetscape, courtyards and surrounding heritage.
CityStars’ Sharm El Sheikh is a landmark destination in the city of Sharm El Sheikh. CityStars is located on an elevated coastal zone between the Sinai Mountains and the Red Sea, with breathtaking views of the Island of Tiran. GAJ were commissioned by CityStars as Lead Consultant for both design and construction phases. Initially, we were requested to develop an concept master plan identifying the best suitable locations for a 5-star golf resort, supported by a number of public and commercial amenities, creating a unique new downtown mixed use alternative, providing multi-family residential opportunities and internationally certified education facilities.

The concept, in keeping with the crystalline waters of the Red Sea, but without any impact on the marine protected coral reefs, was to create a number of inland lagoons, providing spectacular views for residential properties and an additional 23 km beach zone.
UNBUILT PROJECTS
In less than a century the economy of the region has rapidly evolved from small scale enterprises such as pearl fishing, date farming and regional trading into a globally connected, financially sophisticated, multi-cultural economic dynamo. Its swift growth, peace and prosperity have been achieved through the visionary guidance of the nation’s leaders, whose political philosophy is to respect and respond to the needs of its citizens.

The architecture of the Federal National Council’s new home will communicate its increasingly vital role in the lives of all United Arab Emirates citizens. The new Federal National Council building will symbolize the unique identity of the United Arab Emirates: a modern society moving boldly into the future while retaining a strong connection to its history and traditions. The Dome structure is a soaring flower-of-the-desert, becoming a proud landmark for public gatherings as well as a model for conservation of the region’s precious resources.

The design of the new Federal National Council building springs from the ideals which have characterized the United Arab Emirates since the Federation was founded in 1971.
Situated on the northern fringe of the town of Khorfakkan, the development is located in a unique and pristine setting at the base of the mountains, within a secluded sandy bay overlooking the ocean.

The Chedi Khorfakkan Resort surrounds a small scenic bay providing scenic views out to sea and back towards Shark Island. The orientation of the bay and beach allows it to be secluded from the external environment.

The hotel encompasses the existing beach and comprises a series of terraced elements connected across the length of the development with landscaped promenades. The hotel suites on the lower levels are designed to have direct access to the beach and the lower promenade whilst the higher level suites are provided with access to the upper promenade via communal lobbies with further stair access to the lower promenade and beach. All suites have sea views with entry to them from the rear.
The Anantara Tozeur Resort – which was originally designed by GAJ - boasts 93 keys, including suites, villas and two VIP villas as well as health and spa facilities, sports facilities, function rooms and a cultural village comprising retail and F&B units.

The resort offers a luxurious new haven in the magnificent southwest of the city of Tozeur, known for being a centre of desert adventure, architecture and vast palm fields overlooking the Chott El Djerid salt lake - making it the choice of the original Star Wars film producers to film the scenes.