



CERAMIC, CLIMATE AND CONTINUITY: THE URBAN RENAISSANCE OF LALLA YEDDOUNA

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Fez, Morocco – The regeneration of Place Lalla Yeddouna in the heart of the Fez medina—a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the world's most intricate historic urban fabrics—has been shortlisted for the 2025 Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

Selected from over 800 submissions to an international design competition launched in 2011, the winning proposal by Mossessian Architecture, in collaboration with Yassir Khalil, stood out for its culturally sensitive and community-oriented approach. The design reconnected the square to the riverbank with a pedestrian-friendly route, threading through the dense medina and integrating spaces for artisan workshops, retail, dining, educational programs, a nursery, and a women's center.

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Massing © Mossessian Architecture

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Site plan ©Massing © Mossessian Architecture

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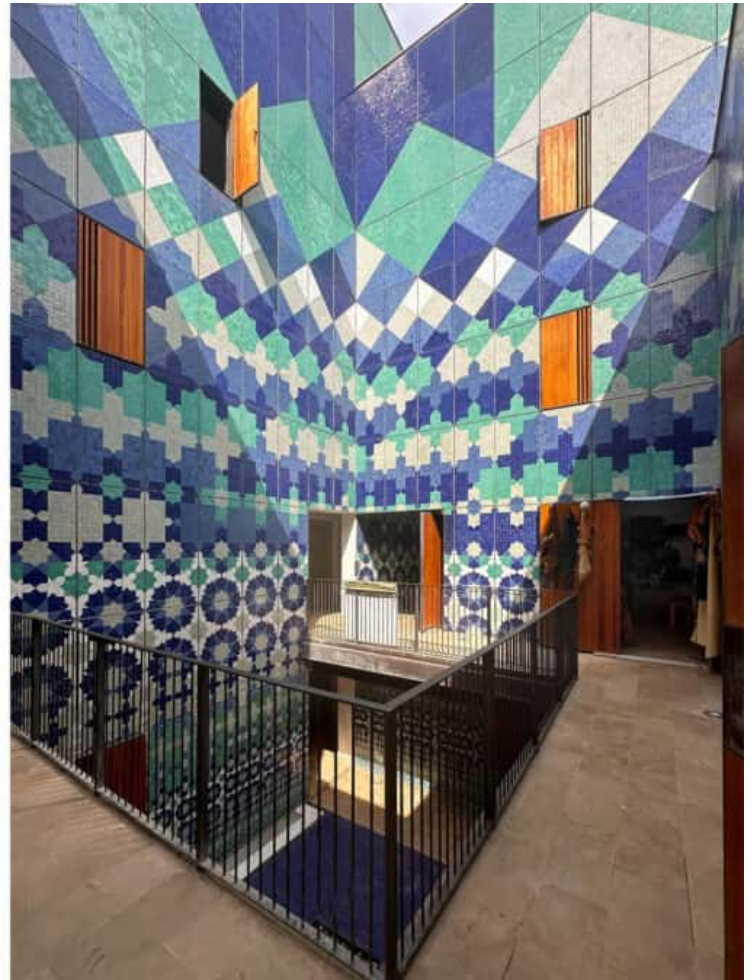


A hybrid of restoration and contemporary intervention, the project rehabilitated a historic bridge and 11 existing buildings while introducing nine new structures. A critical element was the reconnection of the two riverbanks, achieved through new pedestrian bridges and improved access to the river, once obscured and used for waste disposal. The riverbed was reengineered to mitigate flooding risks and enhance ecological function during the rainy season.

The architectural strategy harmonized historical sensitivity with sustainable innovation. Passive

design principles—including natural shading, optimized airflow, and thermal mass—minimized energy use while ensuring year-round comfort. Courtyard layouts and carefully scaled massing promoted cross-ventilation and microclimate regulation throughout the site.

A notable highlight is the vibrant ceramic tilework developed by artist Michael Pinsky in collaboration with Michel Mossessian and local craftsmen. Drawing on Fez's 1,500-year-old zellige tradition, the tile motifs evolve from classical Moroccan forms to Spanish inflections and contemporary abstractions. These ceramic surfaces not only provide climatic benefits but also serve as intuitive wayfinding elements for the various artisan workshops.





Conceived as a cohesive “urban room,” the regenerated square balances civic life with intimate, everyday use. Repetition of local geometric patterns reinforces spatial continuity, while subtle variations enrich the architectural language. The result is a welcoming, legible, and inclusive environment that feels both grounded in tradition and open to the future.

Sustainability and local engagement informed every stage of the project. The use of native materials and traditional techniques reduced environmental impact and strengthened cultural identity. Local artisans played a central role not only in construction but also in shaping the site’s long-term stewardship and authenticity.

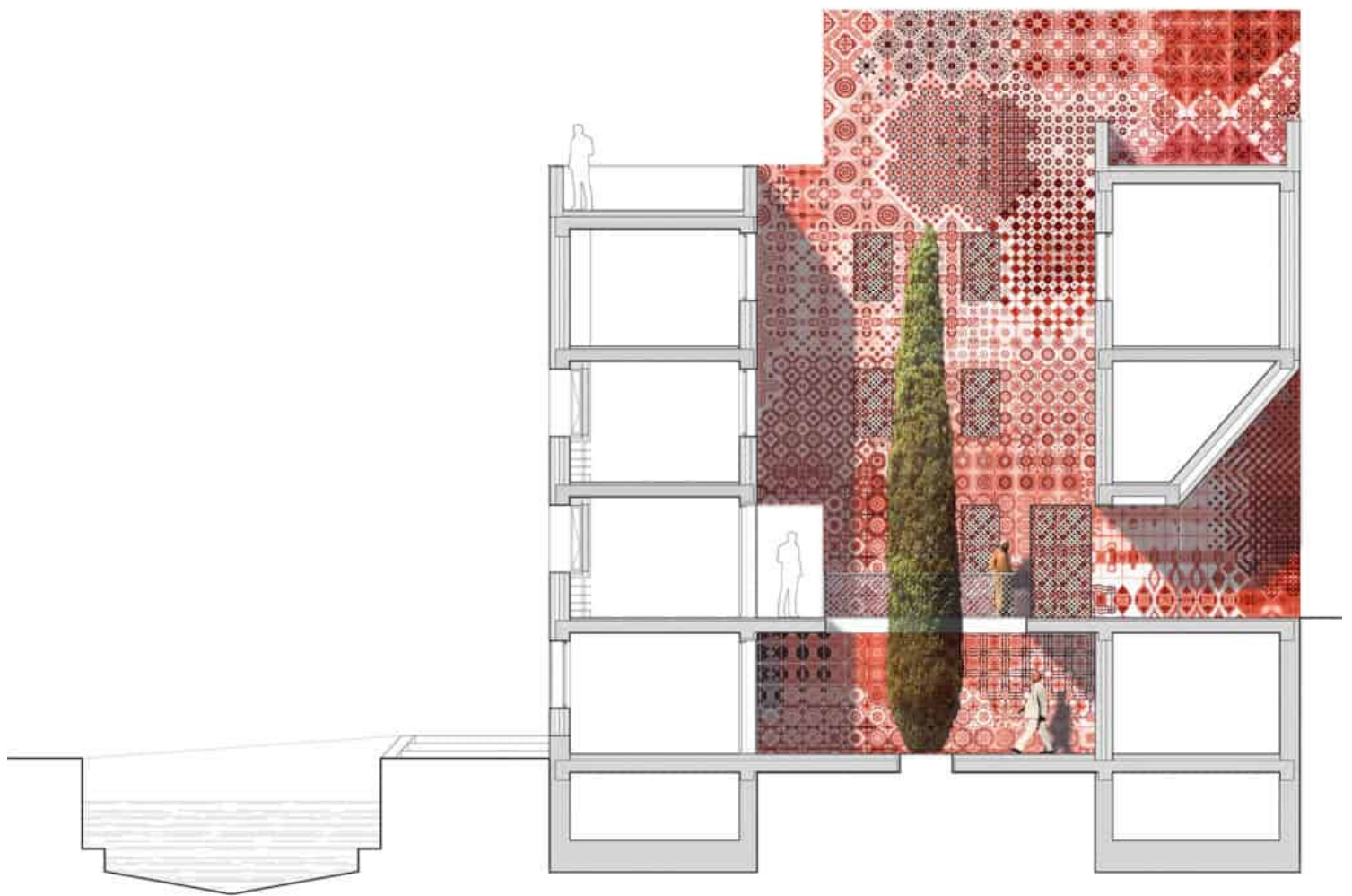
Preservation efforts adhered to key conservation ethics: minimal intervention, reversibility, and the

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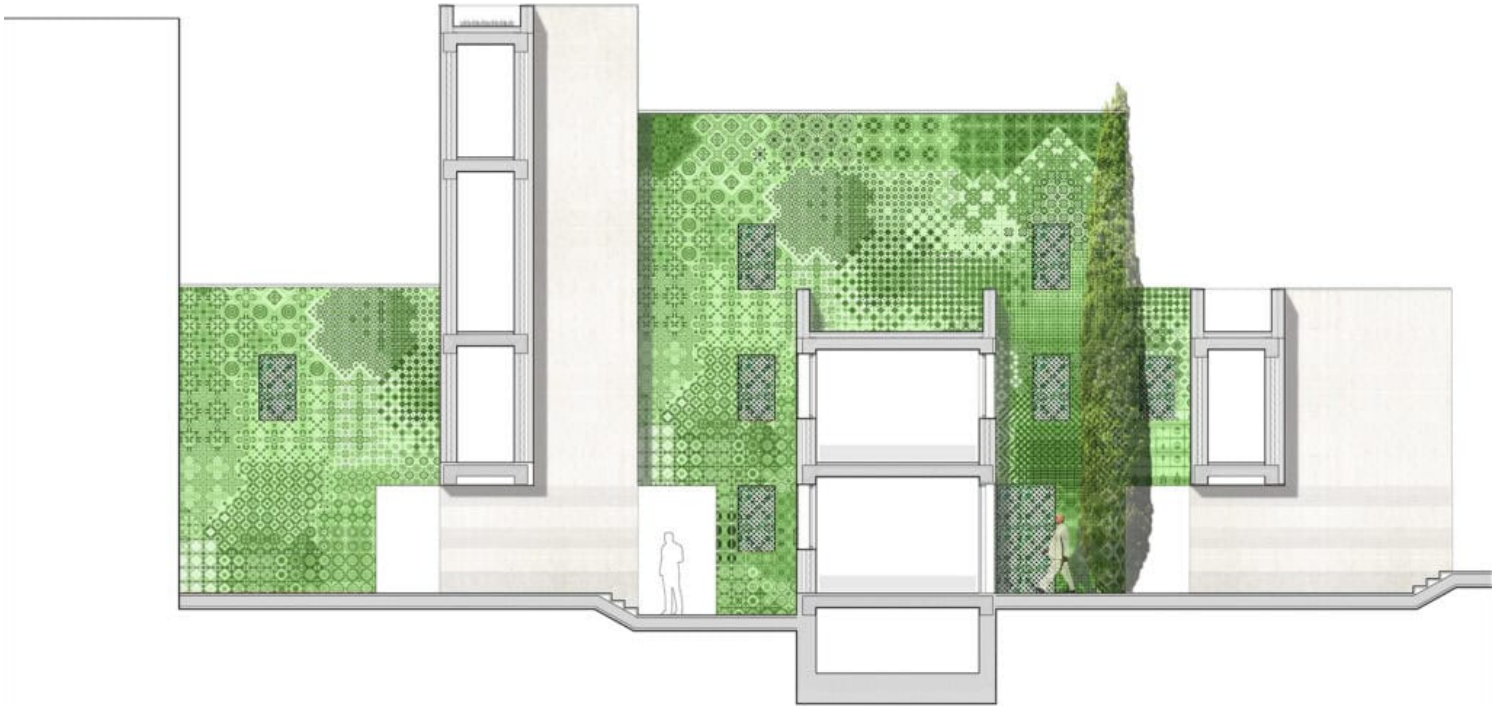
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exclusive use of traditional materials. Through its synthesis of historical reverence, community involvement, environmental responsiveness, and contemporary design, Place Lalla Yeddouna has reinvigorated a vital part of Fez's medina—offering a globally significant model for heritage-led urban regeneration.



Lalla Yeddouna Typical Block Section © Mossessian Architecture

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Lalla Yeddouna Typical Block Section © Mossessian Architecture

