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Redesigning the
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TIME

SPECIAL ENVIRONMENT ISSUE

Vanishing Act

How
Climate Change
Is Causing
A New Age
Of Extinction

BY BRYAN WALSH

Sumatran Tiger
Populations:
Fewer than 600

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Floating Mosque

LOCATION: Dubai, U.A.E.
ARCHITECT: Waterstudio.NL

Due to be completed in 2011, the mosque will have seawater pumped through its roof, walls and floors, helping to keep the faithful cool



Waterstudio.NL

Arts

MOVIES MUSIC BOOKS EXHIBITIONS FASHION ARCHITECTURE

Assyfaah Mosque

LOCATION: Singapore
ARCHITECT: Forum Architects

(Previous page) The sleek, open design is intended to make both Malay and Chinese Muslims, who often don't mix, comfortable as they pray

Islamic Forum

LOCATION: Penzberg, Germany
ARCHITECT: Alen Jasarevic

This award-winning building encourages greater understanding of Islam by allowing passersby to look in through floor-to-ceiling windows



Rebuilding the Faith. With new mosques, young Muslims are getting creative—and stirring controversy

TIME April 13, 2009

BY CARLA POWER

THE WHOLE WORLD IS A MOSQUE, THE Prophet Muhammad once said. With pious intent, a faithful Muslim can conjure a mosque almost anywhere, transforming a desert sand dune, airport departure lounge or city pavement into a sacred space simply by stopping to pray. The first mosque was Muhammad's mud-brick house in Medina, where a portico of palm-tree branches provided shade for prayer and theological discussion. As the young religion spread, Arabs—and later Asians and Africans—developed their own ideas of what made a building a mosque. But that innovative spirit has slowed in recent decades, leaving most Islamic skylines dominated by the dome and minaret design that first appeared centuries ago.

That's now changing. A new generation of Muslim builders and designers, as well as non-Muslims designing for Muslim groups, often in Europe or North America, are updating the mosque for the 21st century, sparking not just a hugely creative period in Islamic design, but one riven by controversy. The disputes over modern mosques echo larger debates taking place

in the Islamic world today about gender, power and, particularly in immigrant communities, Islam's place in Western societies. Even the simplest design decision can reflect questions that are crucial to Islam and its adherents: Should women be allowed in a mosque's main hall or confined to separate quarters? Are minarets necessary in the West, where laws on noise levels mean they are rarely used for the call to prayer? What should a mosque attended by Muslims from different parts of the world look like? The boldest of the new mosques try to answer such questions but are also powerful statements of intent. "Islam wants to proclaim itself," says Hasan-Uddin Khan, an architecture professor at Roger Williams University in Rhode Island. "These new mosques are saying, 'We are here, and we want it to be known that we are here.'"

Designs for Life

AS THE NUMBER OF EUROPEAN MUSLIMS grows—from 12 million a decade ago to 20 million today—so does the need for mosques. A 2007 report by the Italian Department for Security Information found the number of mosques in the country

had grown from 351 to 735 in a mere seven years. Mosque numbers in France and Germany have also exploded. While Europe's churches sit empty or are converted into luxury lofts and schools, Muslims are building mosques in old nightclubs and supermarkets, in former sauerkraut and pharmaceutical factories and, yes, abandoned churches. As Muslims get wealthier, more confident and more geographically diffuse—almost a third of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims live in non-Muslim-majority states—their mosques are no longer just monuments to the rulers whose names they bear. Increasingly, they symbolize the struggle to marry tradition with modernity and to set down roots in the West. The most daring buildings are dreamt up by second- and third-generation Muslim immigrants, who have the confidence and cash to build stone and glass symbols of Islam's growing strength in places like Europe. Simply importing traditional mosque architecture "doesn't express loyalty to your current surroundings," says Zulfiqar Husain, honorary secretary of an innovative new eco-mosque in Manchester, England. "It almost expresses that you want to be separate from the society you live in."

Debate is playing out within Western Muslim communities, too. "The immigrant Muslims often want [a minaret], because for them it symbolizes a mosque," says Omar Khalidi, an architect at the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "But they cost a lot, and there are others who argue that [economically] they're a luxury mosque can't afford."

For Paul Böhm, a German architect behind a new mosque planned for Cologne, minarets are a crucial part of designing a proud and honest building. "We believe this building should show its intent, and the minarets can help it do that," he says. "The Muslims of Germany have, over the last 40 or 50 years, been hiding in basements and [abandoned] manufacturing areas to pray. [Many Germans] have never recognized that they are part of society. Giving them a building which brings them up to the same status [as other faith groups] can help us understand and accept them."

But some Cologne residents disagree. Members of the right-wing Pro Cologne group have protested the \$20 million mosque, arguing that the two 166-ft. (51 m) minarets will spoil the skyline, now dominated by the city's famous Gothic cathedral. Construction is going ahead, and Böhm hopes his design will foster

The designers behind the best of the mosques take the opposite view: they may be making statements but they are also sensitive to local concerns and aesthetics. The mosque that Husain helps administer, in a gritty working-class Manchester neighborhood, uses reclaimed wood and solar panels on the roof to power its under-floor heating. Inside, peach carpeting and plasma TVs give the air of a prosperous suburban English home, while the prayer hall has carvings inspired by the 10th century North African Fatimid dynasty.

In Singapore, the architects of the Assyfaah Mosque, which was finished in 2004, cater to the country's multicultural population by creating an aesthetically neutral space, sleek and futuristic, where the island's Malay and Chinese Muslims can both feel comfortable.

Innovation also blooms in unlikely places such as southern Bavaria. In the town of Penzberg, the Islamic Forum, built in 2005, last year won a Wessobrunner Architekturpreis, an award granted every five years for outstanding Bavarian architecture. A simple block of glass and pearly stone, the Forum beckons Muslims and non-Muslims alike to enter through two doors built to

Sakirin Mosque

LOCATION: Istanbul, Turkey
ARCHITECT: Zeynep Fadilloglu

Most mosques keep women hidden from male worshippers, but Fadilloglu's design will let them pray on an airy balcony with delicate, crisscrossed railings

resemble an open book. "It's a place of communication," explains its Bosnian-born architect, Alen Jasarevic, in an e-mail. "Vast windows and openings in the facade, even in the prayer room, invite the citizens of Penzberg to become acquainted with Islam and its people." The delicate minaret, lace-like from a distance, is a calligraphic representation of the words of the call to prayer, punched out of steel plates. "It doesn't call for prayer five times a day, but 24 hours a day," observes Jasarevic. "Without disturbing the neighbors."

Shaping the Skyline

BUT MOSQUES, AND THEIR NEIGHBORS, aren't always so quiet. Particularly in Europe, mosques have become the visible signs of Islam's presence and thus sites for tension between Muslims and non-Muslim tradi-

tionalists. A recent report from the London-based Institute of Race Relations chronicles scores of campaigns against plans to build mosques across Europe. In 2007, a petition posted on British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's website calling for the government to scrap plans to build a mega-mosque on an 18-acre (7 ha) plot near the site of London's 2012 Olympics drew over 275,000 signatures. That same year, members of Italy's anti-immigrant Northern League party "blessed," as they called it, a site reserved for a mosque in Padua by parading on it with a pig, an animal deemed unclean by Muslims. A 2004 Dutch opinion poll found that mosques, which in the 1990s had been lauded as "enrichments to the urban landscape," were now derided as "unimaginative," "ugly" and "cheap imitations."

One aspect of mosque design provokes more anger than most: the minaret. Across Europe, minarets on city skylines have become a political issue. In the Netherlands, Filip Dewinter, a leader of the right-wing Vlaams Belang party, decried a new Rotterdam mosque because its minarets were higher than the lights of the city's soccer stadium. "These kinds of symbols have to stop," he told Radio Netherlands Worldwide. In 2007, Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel warned that minarets shouldn't be "ostentatiously higher than church steeples."

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that the building is "not a sports hall, a concert hall or a museum, but a mosque."

Respect Tradition, Embrace Today LIKE MANY ARCHITECTS DESIGNING mosques, Böhm grappled with how much access women should have to the most important parts of the building. Traditional mosques tend to keep women hidden by walls or curtains. In newer, more progressive buildings, prayer areas for men and women often remain separate—but equal. After much debate, the Cologne mosque committee agreed that women and men should pray in the same room, but with women confined to a balcony. Böhm's design is flexible enough that one day both sexes could end up on the same level. "I'm

an architect, not a politician," he says. "But I've included little details—like allowing men and women to come through the same doors—that allow for evolution. It's a process that'll take time, just as in the Catholic Church. My father could remember women sitting on the upper level in the church, and men downstairs."

Unsurprisingly, it's immigrant Muslim communities that are pushing the biggest changes. "The Western mosque is fast becoming the site of contestation between the kind of Muslims who espouse the traditional mosque, and those who want to win proportionate space for women," says

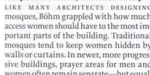
designers in Muslim nations as well. Sometimes the change is simply a return to the religion's roots. Architect Zeynep Fadilloglu drew on her own experiences praying in mosques when designing the ultramodern Sakirin Mosque in Istanbul. "In the Prophet's time, men and women prayed next to each other," she says. "Lately, with the rise of political Islam everywhere, the women's sections have started to be covered up and boxed off. I've been in mosques like that, and I felt very uncomfortable."

Fadilloglu's women's section is an expansive balcony overlooking the central hall and divided only by crisscrossed railings. An airy and luxurious sensibility pervades the building. The facilities for preprayer ablution have blond wood and Plexiglas lockers. In the main hall hangs a bronze chandelier, dangling with hand-blown glass raindrops—a visual allusion to the Koranic verse that says Allah's light should fall on believers like drops of rain. The mihrab, which indicates the direction of prayer, is tulip-shaped and turquoise—"an opening to God," says Fadilloglu.

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Back in Europe, a group of young Dutch architects led by Ergün Erkoçu wanted their concept for the Polder Mosque to achieve a similar level of cool. Riffing on the Dutch idea of seeking consensus, their design features not minarets but windmills. Inside, they planned space for a hammam (or bathroom) and a row of shops. The mosque was never meant to exist but to generate discussion. Mission accomplished: elders have sniffed that it isn't traditional enough and Dutch-born Muslims eager to see the mosque's role expand beyond prayer have applauded it.

The design also earned Erkoçu a commission for the An-Nasr Mosque in Rotterdam, where again he is tweaking tradition. An-Nasr's minaret will be glass—a transparent and subtle, rather than dominating the skyline. The call to prayer will be broadcast in lights, pulsating to the rhythm of the muezzin's voice. Once the mosque is built, Erkoçu hopes Rotterdam's citizens will see the call to prayer beamed across the sky. Muslims will be able to look up and, no matter where they are in the city, turn their thoughts to prayer.—WITH REPORTING BY FELIN TURGUT/ISTANBUL



Floating Mosque

LOCATION: Dubai, U.A.E.
ARCHITECT: Waterstudio.NL

Due to be completed in 2011, the mosque will have seawater pumped through its roof, walls and floors, helping to keep the faithful cool

Polder Mosque

LOCATION: Netherlands
ARCHITECT: Ergün Erkoçu

This concept boasts windmills, shops, a basketball court and a bathhouse, creating a building that can be enjoyed by Muslims and non-Muslims alike

MIT's Khalidi. "The second generation are the ones demanding, and often getting, that kind of space." Architectural historian Khan estimates that until recently, North American mosques gave only about 15% of their space to women. Over the past five years or so, the space women have access to has increased to at least 50%.

The new architecture and the break with traditions are beginning to influence