

Emirates Today

emiratestodayonline.com

BRINGING YOUR WORLD INTO FOCUS

Free local credit worth AED 65* with every new Wasel connection

Offer extended till 10th December 2007. *Terms and conditions apply.



This article's big reveal outlines the exciting new concept.

The Palm Jumeirah will be home to four of the floating structures.

FLOATING MOSQUES FOR PALM

Dutch architect reveals plans for four structures ■ To be tethered to floating poem by Sheikh Mohammed

JAMES REIN,
FEATURES EDITOR
jre@emiratestoday.com

Dubai is set to have four floating mosques tethered to the Palm Jumeirah, a plan that would be perhaps the single greatest departure yet from traditional Islamic architecture.

Plans for the buildings have been drawn up by Dutch architect Koen Olthuis and are being considered by palm developer Nakheel.

Olthuis has already designed a floating church for the city of Amsterdam among a host of other buoyant structures.

"The design of mosques has been changing over the centuries and this is just the latest development," he said. "Dubai is a very exciting city and we just wanted to contribute with what we think is a very exciting design."

The plan is for the flat-roofed floating mosques to have minarets, traditional

Islamic arches and two rows of 12-metre-high transparent plastic columns that channel light through the prayer hall.

They would be kept afloat by giant slabs of a mixture of concrete and foam and receive electricity and water supplies from the island.

The mosques would be tethered to a vast floating poem penned by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President

and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai.

The poem will bob between the friends and the palm's outer rim. It has won plaudits from literary circles around the world and reads: "Take wisdom from the wise. Not everyone who rides a horse is a jockey. It takes a man of vision to write on water. Great men rise to great challenges."

Olthuis, creative director of Dutch Docklands, said Nakheel executives were

"very excited" about the floating mosque project.

But a company spokesman remained tight-lipped, saying only that "concept plans have been submitted but not yet finalised".

It is not clear how the Muslim faithful would react to a floating prayer hall. But Islamic law graduate Tariq Rajwanan gave the plan the thumbs-up.

"I would certainly be happy to use a floating mosque," he said. "The only

condition for it being a mosque is that it is clean and really pure.

"You can pray at the side of the road or in the middle of a desert - so why not pray in a floating mosque?"

The mosques could be built as workshops in January 2010 - the provisional date for the completion of the palm.

MODERN WORSHIP
TURN TO P19

Focus Today

MODERN MARVELS» Architectural developments mean a new approach to mosque building, with innovative materials



Floating structures are increasingly being regarded as ideal for the 21st century living, for when global warming causes the anticipated rise in sea levels, buoyant buildings will be able to go with the flow.

This flat-roofed architect Olthuis - who has already designed a floating church in Amsterdam, among a host of structures to use water-lifted slabs of foam and concrete - to be nominated for the 2008 Singapore Best of The Year People Who Shape Our World.

While being environmentally wary, the floating mosques are also circumstantially timely, paying heed from the Arabian Gulf through a glazing system that cools the building down by 15 degrees Celsius, slashing air conditioning costs by as much as 40 per cent.

Although the floating buildings mark a departure from the typical yellow stone and concrete structures found across the UAE, they still feature the minarets and arches that appear occasionally in Islamic architecture.

Olthuis referenced other norms of Muslim holy buildings, abandoning the typical domed roof and instead supporting a flat ceiling with two rows of transparent blue composite plastic columns.

"The idea is to create a mosque in a large open space where the view is not interrupted by columns - that is why mosques traditionally used domed roofs, so you do not need any columns," he says.

"For this reason, the columns in the floating mosque are transparent. For me, it was quite an exciting way of creating the large open space that has traditionally been preferred in Muslim holy buildings."

Likewise, award-winning Arab architect Jafar Tutan decided to avoid domes on his design for Sheikh Salama Mosque in Al Ain's town centre and the Central Market Mosque in Abu Dhabi.

The 3,800-capacity mosque in Al Ain will be completed in 2009 and feature a futuristic "archive" of flat roofs that second is the director of Nakheel, set to become the biggest developer in the UAE's market, city, sitting upon a 36,000sqm site beside the central coast.

Tutan's contribution to the

Creating a modern place to worship

From mosques that float on water, to those that have flat roofs and bounce light across their rafters, there is a sea change in Islamic architecture. James Rein reports

They are made of concrete yet float on water, drawing light liquid from the Arabian Gulf through a vein-like system that keeps them cool inside the levitating, 12-metre high transparent plastic columns support flat ceilings.

In fact, the buoyant structures set in the deep alongside Palm Jumeirah are unlike any mosque you have seen before.

Representing a sea change in Islamic architecture, planners say Dubai's first floating mosques are part of a new wave of religious construction that is shaking over the Emirates.

The avant-garde architects behind the structures say it is time to ditch the standard domed, arch-filled buildings that have worshippers from Mecca to Dubai.

The country will soon have a range of futuristic holy buildings that draw on traditional Islamic architectural styles while also reflecting the city's new face of the rapidly modernising Gulf.

"If you look at mosques you may think they have always looked the same - but this is far from the truth," says floating mosque architect Koen

Olthuis, creative director of Dutch Docklands.

"Look at the history of Islamic architecture and you will see it has been changing for the past 1,500 years, and mosques are still changing."

"Even the mosques of 500 years ago are very different to the ones we find today. They have similar elements, such as the minarets, but are always changing. Now, in the UAE, we have a new environment, so we thought when designing the mosque it was time to take a new step," Olthuis says.

21ST CENTURY THINKING

While developer Nakheel has set to finalise plans for Palm Jumeirah, the four floating mosques are set to be tethered to a vast floating poem that bobs between the friends and the palm's outer rim. The Arabic verse was famously penned by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai.

It reads: "Take wisdom from the wise. Not everyone who rides a horse is a jockey. It takes a man of vision to write on water. Great men rise to great challenges."