

On site Castor and Pollux



Castor and **Pollux** are Greek mythology's heroic twins. It's fitting then that their namesake buildings are intended to save Beirut's residents from themselves and each other.

On an irregular site in Saifi, architects at SOMA devised a pair of angular residential buildings whose independent identities are shaped by their locations and relationship. Both are constructed in three distinct layers: an interior core referencing traditional Lebanese architecture; a metallic exoskeleton; and a green layer that thrives on a thin outer skin.

'The buildings emerge from a dense urban fabric, and it's quite an introverted project,' says Michel Abboud, Principal Architect at SOMA. That feeling is reflected in an interior, semi-public courtyard that both buildings overlook, which is also a response to the city's lack of public space. 'Other cities have parks, sidewalks and places where people can breathe. Here it's up to architects and developers to infuse a project with greenery.'

While glazed balconies are increasingly popular, Abboud stands firm that in a climate such as this people should spend time outside. 'When you make vegetation an inherent part of the project, it forces people to use the exterior,' he

explains. 'It becomes a common feature that people can share, rather than a few potted plants on a balcony.'

He also argues the cost effectiveness of natural material, its shading properties and privacy benefits – and not just for the buildings' residents. 'We don't want these balconies to become storage dumps or places to hang a bunch of underwear on the line,' Abboud says of their appearance from the street. 'So we're also protecting the city from the inhabitants. We want to improve the quality of life for people inside and outside the buildings.'



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