

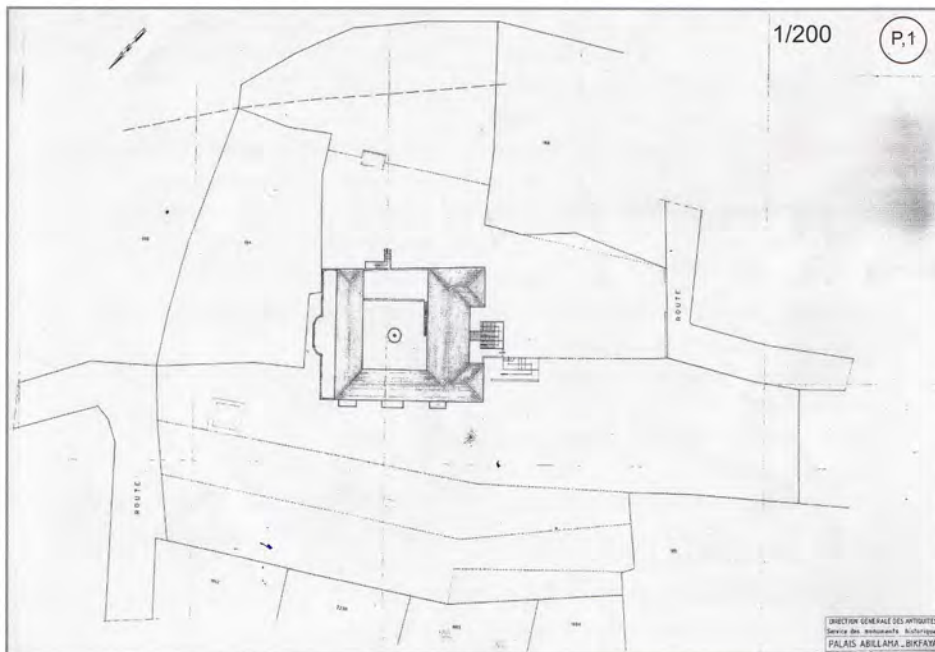


The village of Bikfaya lies at an altitude of 850 m, 30 km from Beirut, in the Metn district of Mount Lebanon¹. Situated on a steep hill, the village overlooks the Dog River valley with a clear uninterrupted view to the Mediterranean sea. The village boasts a selective group of traditional Lebanese habitations, each one crowned with uniformly picturesque red roof-tiles in a style long-ago imported from Marseille. Centrally located in the village is the imposing 19th century Grand Palace, the former residence of the Emir Haidar Abillama (plan n° 1).

History of the Palace

The history of the palace dates back to the 19th Century at a time when the Lebanon was divided into two "caïmacamat", (governorships); one Christian, one Druze. The Christian governorship with its headquarters in Bikfaya became the preserve of the

Abillama Emirs between 1842 and 1864. The Bikfaya Palace is the larger of the Abillama possessions, the others being situated in Salima and Mtein, also in the Metn district. The building was designed in 1843 by the architect Jounassinat, a Jesuit priest, and construction was completed in 1848. The official governor's residence was later transferred from Bikfaya to Broumana in 1854 but the palace was expropriated in the 20th century by the municipality of Bikfaya to serve as its central headquar-



DIRECTION GENERALE DES APPROPRIETES
Service des monuments historiques
PALAIS ABILLAMA - BIKFAYA

1 Main façade, stairway in front of ground floor arcade leading up to first floor, marble slab of Roman sarcophagus incorporated in front wall of the landing.



2 Marble slab, detail of sarcophagus.

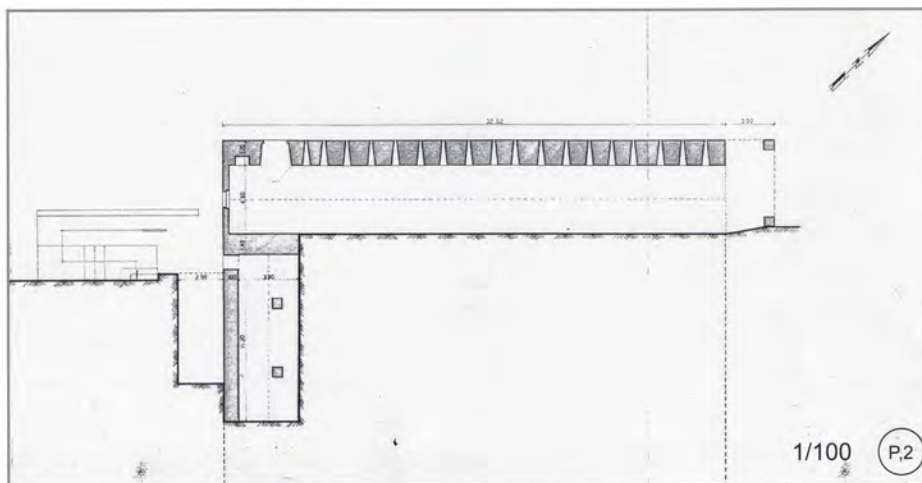


ters. Upon the election to the Lebanese Presidency in 1982 of his Excellence Sheikh Amine Gemayel, a native of Bikfaya, the municipality of the town financed the restoration of the palace and offered it to the president as his official summer residence for the duration of his mandate.

Constructed with large dressed stones, the palace is laid out in the traditional Lebanese rectangular design and is divided into three sections; Basement, Ground floor, and First floor.

Leading into the first floor of the palace is an exterior central stairway with a façade endowed with the imbedded panel of a Graeco-Roman sarcophagus (fig. 1-2, plan n° 2).

The Basement:



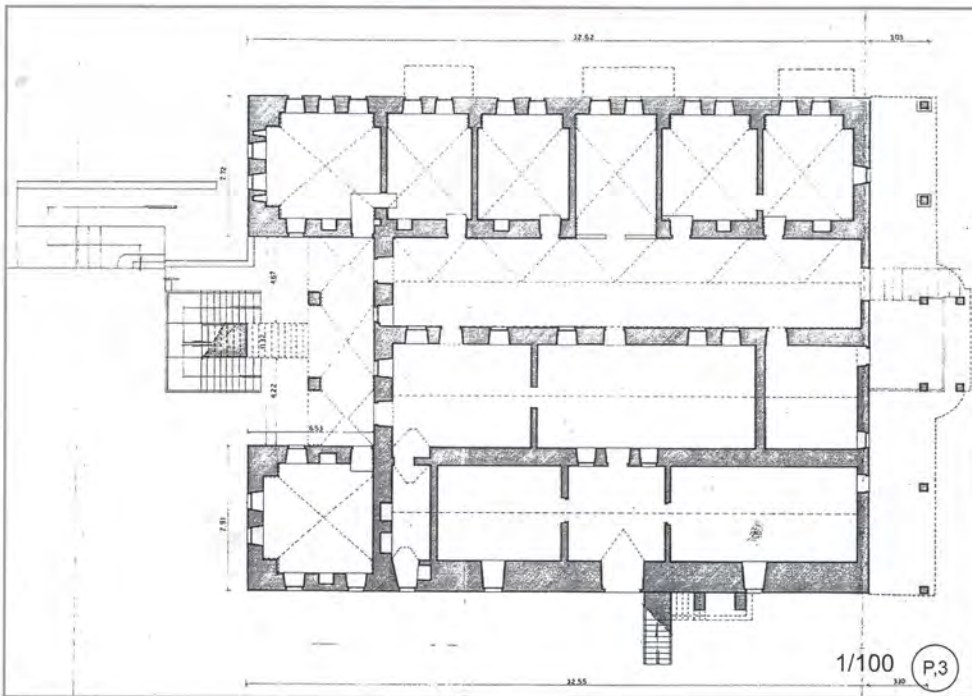
The basement comprises one room on the western side of the building which was originally the stable area of the palace. This room, measuring 32.62 m x 4.60 m, is covered with a barrel vault. The thickness of the walls varies between 1.70 m to 1.40 m. Loophole (*meurtières*) windows are located on the

West wall of the basement.

Another room on the southern side is a windowless room, also covered with a barrel vault, measuring 11.20 x 3.90 m and has a door on the south

wall which opens directly to the outside. Two pillars inside this room support the pillars on the ground floor above it. The area was used as storage space for the palace stables. After restoration the basement provided housing for the Presidential Guard and extra storage for general utilities.

The Ground floor (plan n° 3)



The west side comprises six rooms, each one covered with a groined vault. The first room, beside the entrance, is a south-west corner room. It has three windows on the western side, two windows on the southern side plus a door and window which open on the eastern side under an arcade.

The remaining five rooms are 5.70 m wide with a length that varies between 4.20 m and 5 m with two windows opening to the outside

on the western side of the rooms. All exterior windows in these rooms are rectangular, each with its own relieving arch. All five doors open onto a large interior hall. This hall is covered by a barrel groined vault.

The hall is a large, un-partitioned room measuring 24.50m long by 4.75m wide. Entrance into this hall is through a door in the southern wall. There is a small window to the right of this door. At the northern extreme of the room a window gives out onto the outside of the building.

To the right of the hall are three rooms running north-south the length of the hall. Access to these rooms from the inside is gained through three separate interior doors. These rooms possess interior windows which also open onto the hall. There are two additional windows at the northern end of the third room. Access to the first room is through a door in its south wall with a window to the right of this door.

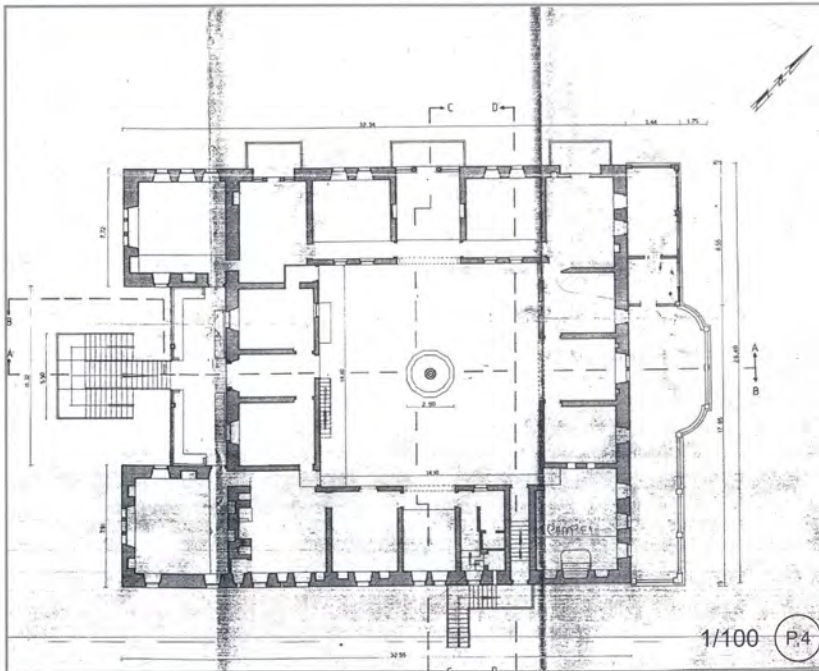
The remaining four rooms, each one a different size, are also covered with a barrel vault. They have three windows and one door which open externally onto the east face of the building as well as two doors and two windows which open internally onto the first and second rooms. There is an additional south-east corner room beside the entrance, of similar dimensions as its counterpart on the opposite south-west side. This corner room has two windows which open onto the east face of the building, two windows on the south face with a door and window which open to the west, under the arcade. It is covered with a groined vault.

The ground floor main arcade is covered with groined vaults supported on square piers.



The First floor (plan n° 4)

At the top of this main stairway to the first floor, one arrives at an entrance formed by three stone arcades supported on two columns with their capitals and bases resting on consoles set into the side walls. These arcades serve as protection against bad weather owing to a mosaic of glass panes surrounding a central door and windows, the panes themselves being separated by wooden pieces in a geometric design, in keeping with traditional Lebanese construction (fig. 3). This arcade gives access to two corner rooms, one to the south-east and one to the south-west (plan n° 4), each one with its own entrance decorated with marble paving leading to its own slightly raised living rooms. Each one of these two rooms has a door and a window opening onto the arcade. Just inside under the arcade, the doorway itself is framed by two small columns incorporated into the wall and which support the arc of the main entrance. A small rose window (fig. 5) with cornice and two small side windows rise above this arc.

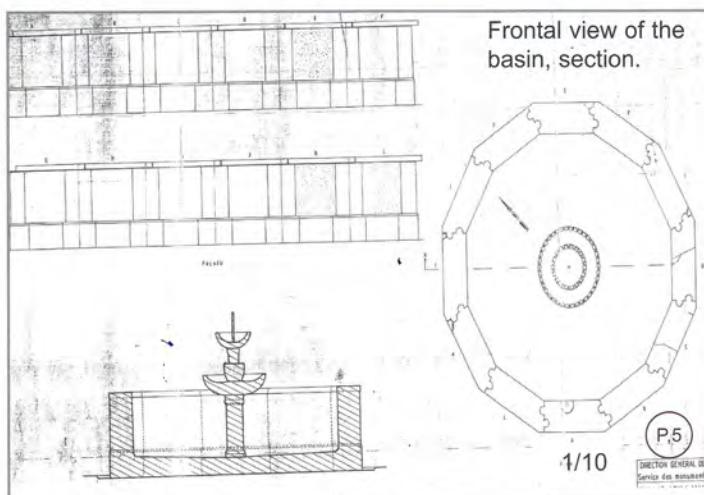


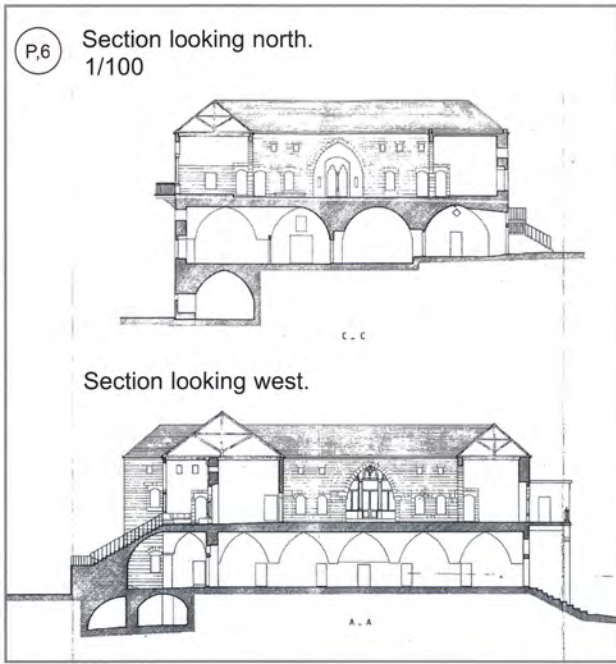
This entrance leads to a central hallway which in turn opens onto two side rooms, right and left, with a central door leading onto a full sized courtyard with a picturesque twelve-sided (dodecadon) ornamental basin in the centre (plan n° 5). Various rooms are distributed along the four sides of the courtyard with three "liwans" (open lounge) cut into the center of each wall. The "liwans" (plan n° 6 to 9) on the west, east and south sides have

3 Woodwork enclosing first floor arcade.

4 South-west façade.

5 Detail above entrance door leading to central courtyard on first floor.





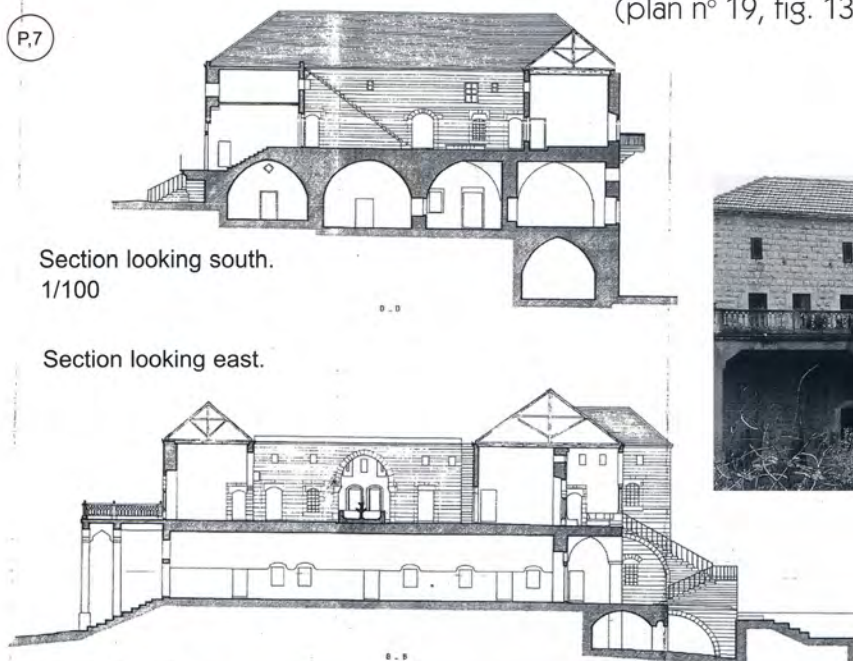
large, interior arcs.

The north "liwan's" interior arc was enclosed against bad weather by a door and windows decorated with multi-coloured glass (plan n° 8) in traditional geometric patterns.

A chapel is located in the north-east corner of the courtyard. Its wooden altar has a painted floral motif on the front panels (fig. 10). A marble step with a geometric composition (fig. 11-12) separates the altar from the lower marble platform (apse), and is also decorated with geometric patterns (plan n° 10).

The ladies who wished to attend religious ceremonies used the two windows in the north room beside the chapel.

A stone stairway, leading up to the roof rises from the south wall end of the courtyard (plan n° 19, fig. 13).

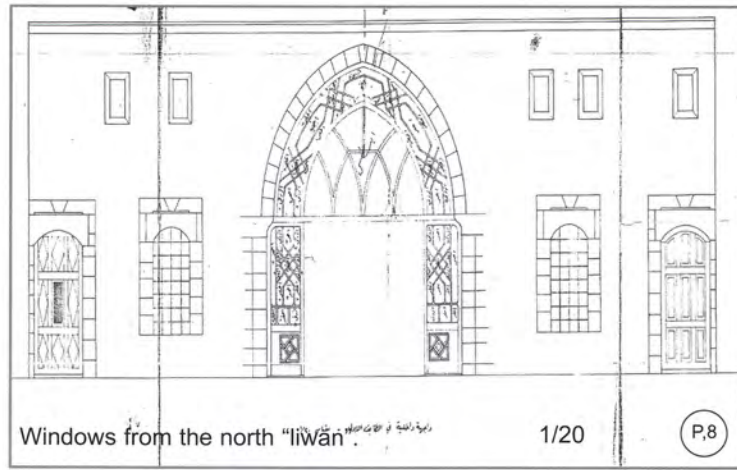


6 North façade.

7 Interior view of great hall, ground floor during restoration

8 Central courtyard, first floor, view of west liwan with three arcaded windows, fountains, and four segmented arched windows with four smaller upper windows.

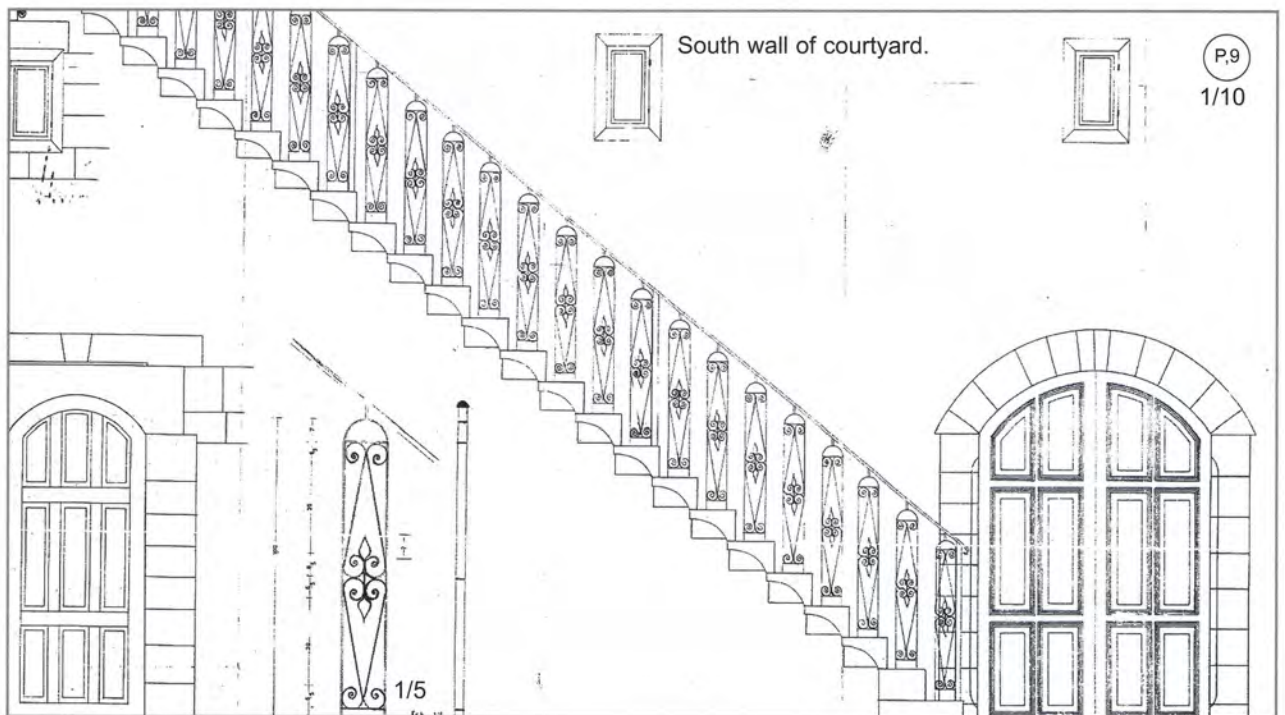




Windows from the north "liwān" نوافذ من الجناح الشمالي

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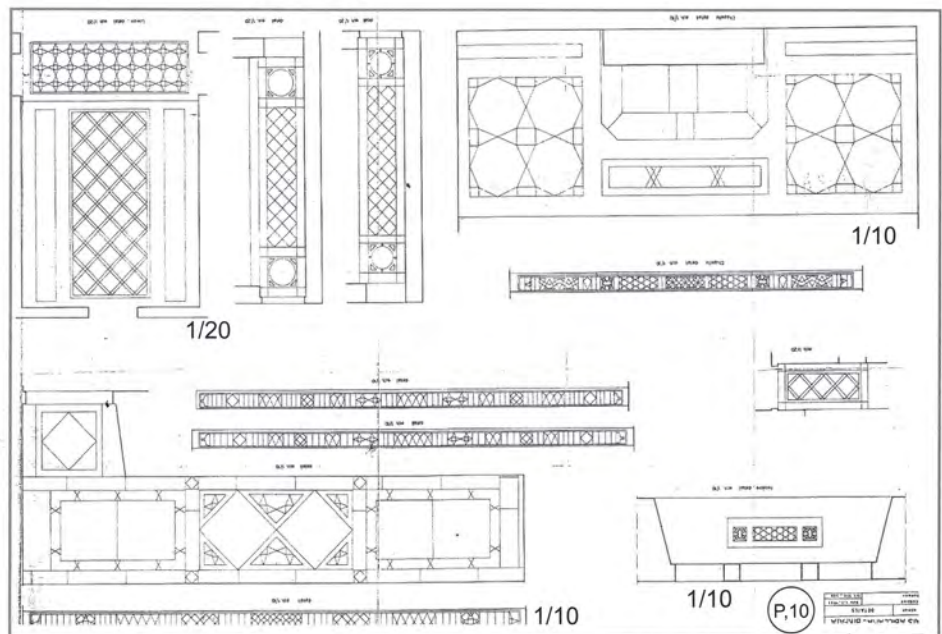


South wall of courtyard.

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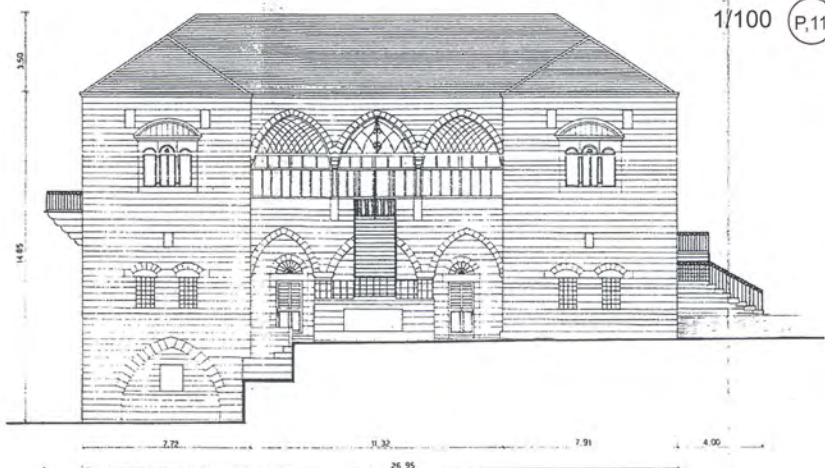
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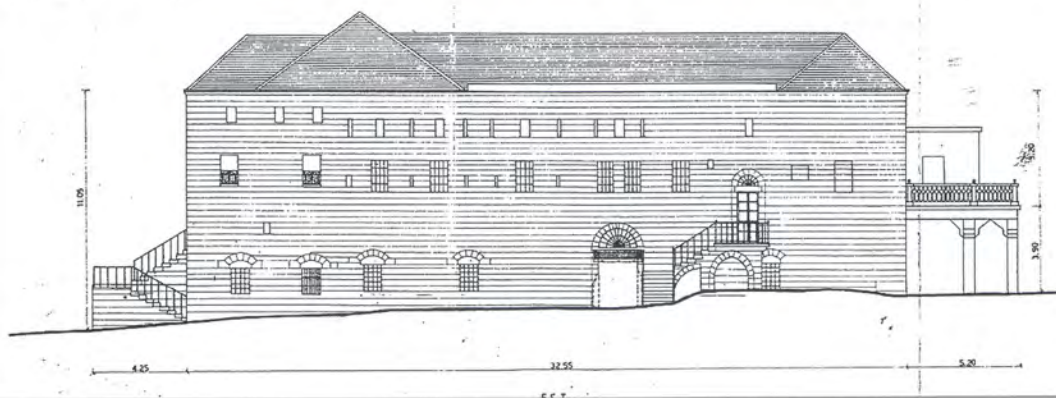
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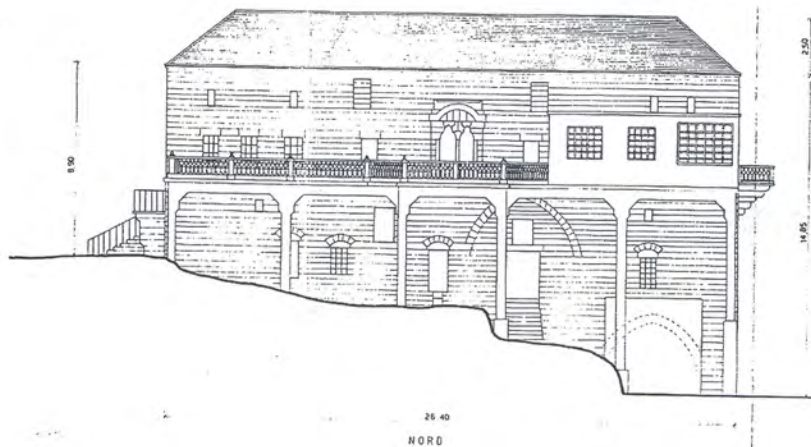
South façade.



East façade.



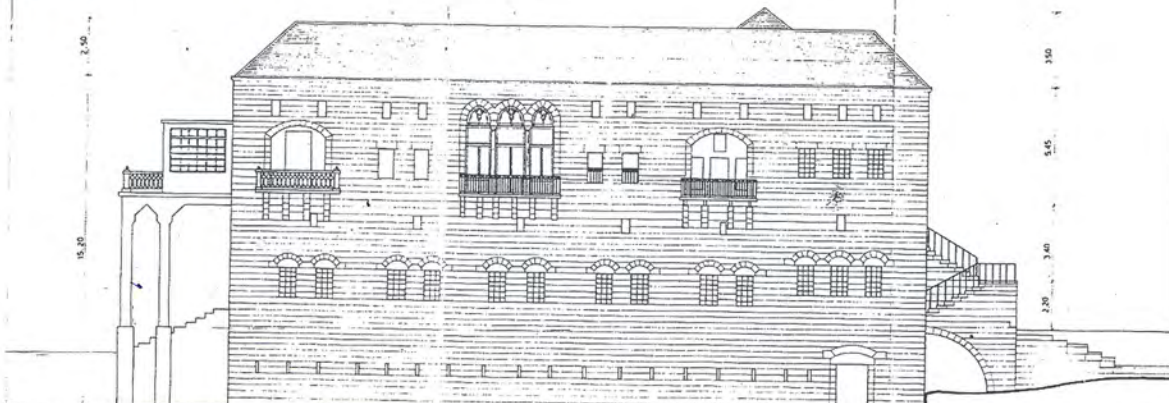
North façade.



ARCH. C. ASHAR
TOP ABRAH GEURJAH
DOK. ELIAS SARAHNA

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West façade.

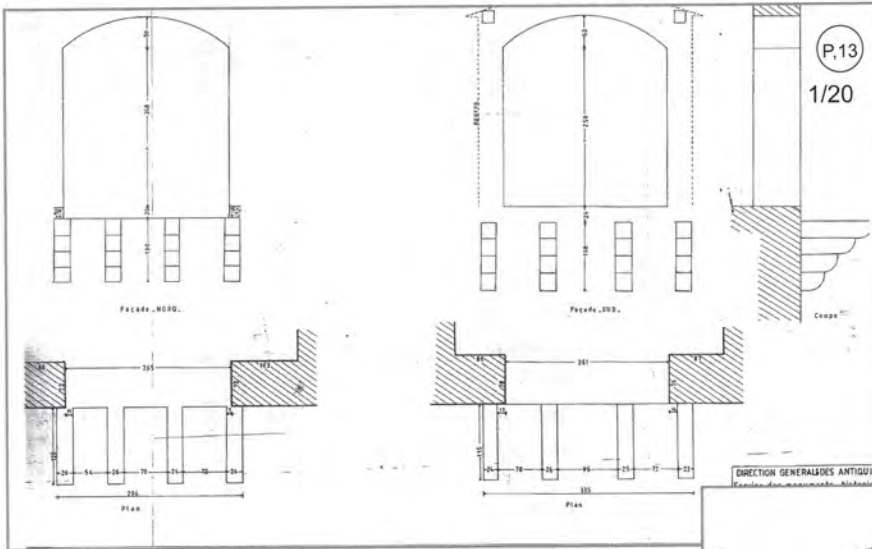


The Ground Floor Façades (plans n° 11 and 12)

The east façade of the ground floor presents a previously mentioned external staircase of reduced proportions leading up to the first floor through a semi-circular arched doorway, plus a large semi-circular doorway on the ground floor level as a secondary entrance. Additionally, it presents four rectangular windows with a relieving arch each.

The west façade of the ground floor also presents with four rectangular windows again with a relieving arch each.

The north façade of the ground floor had concrete pillars supporting a large terrace from a later period which we removed, along with the terrace to give the façade its original look.

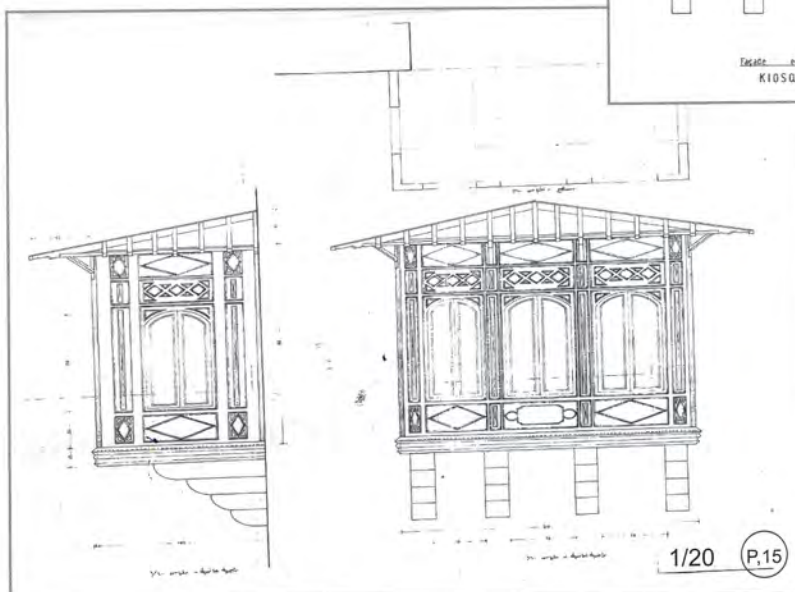
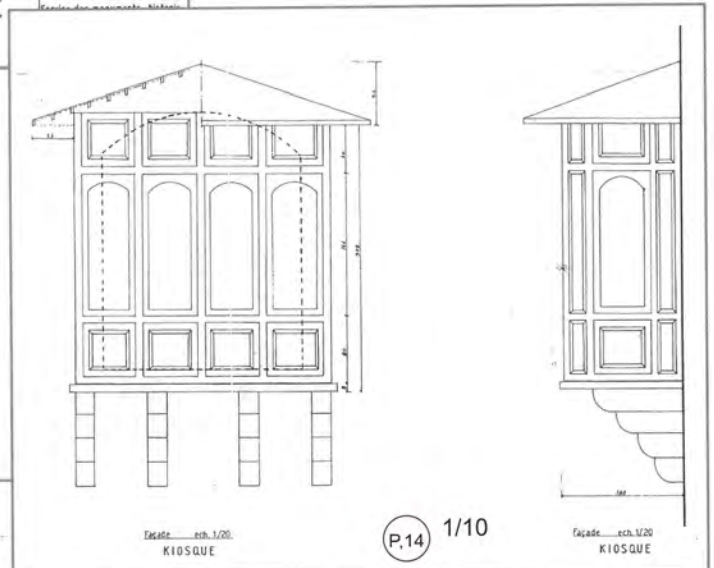


The First Floor Façades (plans n° 12 and 13)

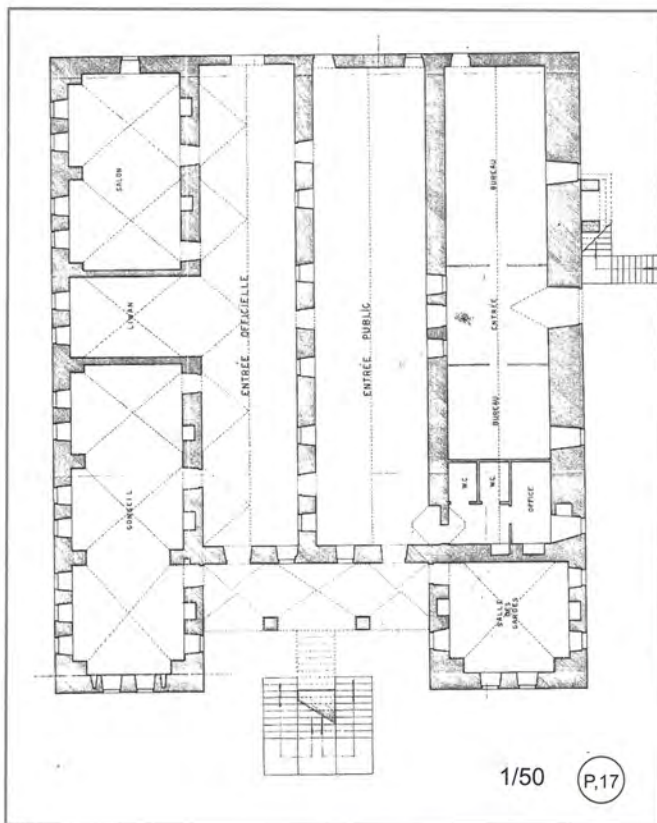
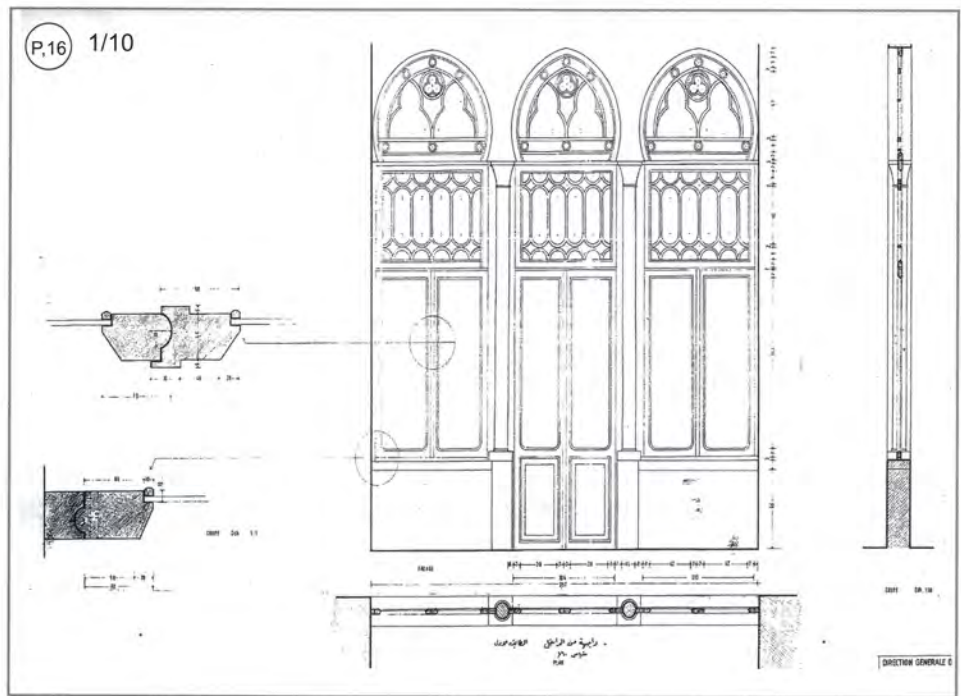
The south façade of the first floor presents the following elements: The main stairway and arcade previously described.

The southern façade of each corner room has a triple window with two columns and cornices.

The west façade of the corner room is cut with three rectangular windows.



This façade beyond the corner room contains the following: The first room and last north-west corner room each have a large arc with a balcony supported on consoles and enclosed wood with wood bay windows, similar to the "kiosks", in Turkish architecture (plans n° 13-15). The west "liwan" has a three windowed traditional arcade (plan n° 16) with a balcony supported on



consoles. The remaining windows are all rectangular.

The north façade's (plan n° 12) principal element is the "liwan" which presents two windows with two trefoil arches with its central colonnette. The remaining windows are all rectangular.

The east façade of the corner room is cut with two rectangular windows (plan n° 11).

The east "liwan" presents two rectangular windows. The remaining windows of the east façade are all rectangular. A stairway rises from the ground floor to the first floor on the east face with a semi-circular arched doorway at the top.

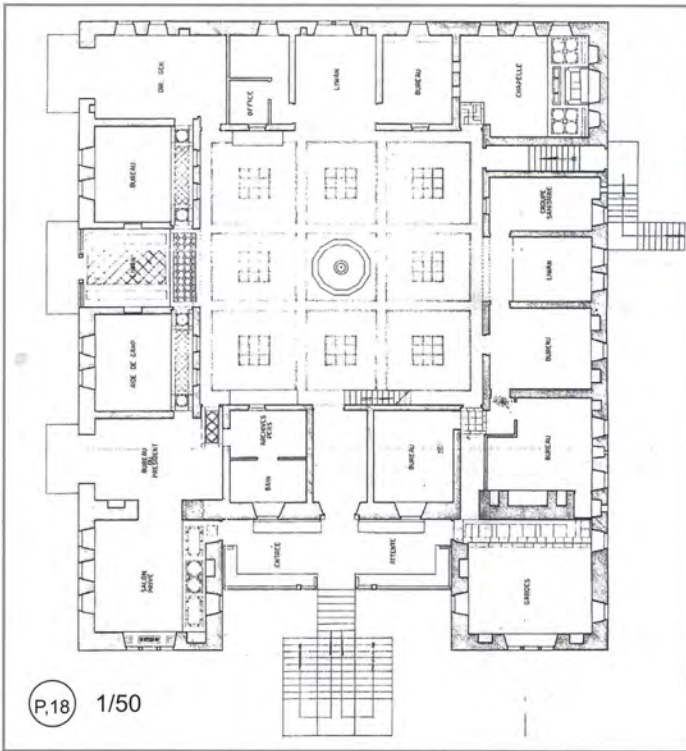
Restoration of the Ground Floor (plan n° 17)

With respect to the restoration and development of the ground floor, the work consisted of the following:

The first three rooms on the west side, including the first south-west corner room, were converted into one large single Cabinet Meeting room. The fourth room was refurbished as a "liwan" (open lounge) and the remaining two rooms were converted into public reception rooms.

The hall was redesigned as a large official private entrance while the three large rooms were also opened up to serve as an additional public vestibule when the need arose.

The four rooms on the east side of the building were converted respectively to a cafeteria, offices, one of which possesses a door which opens to the



outside, a washroom block and the south-east corner room into a guard room.

Restoration of the First Floor (plan n° 18) 191

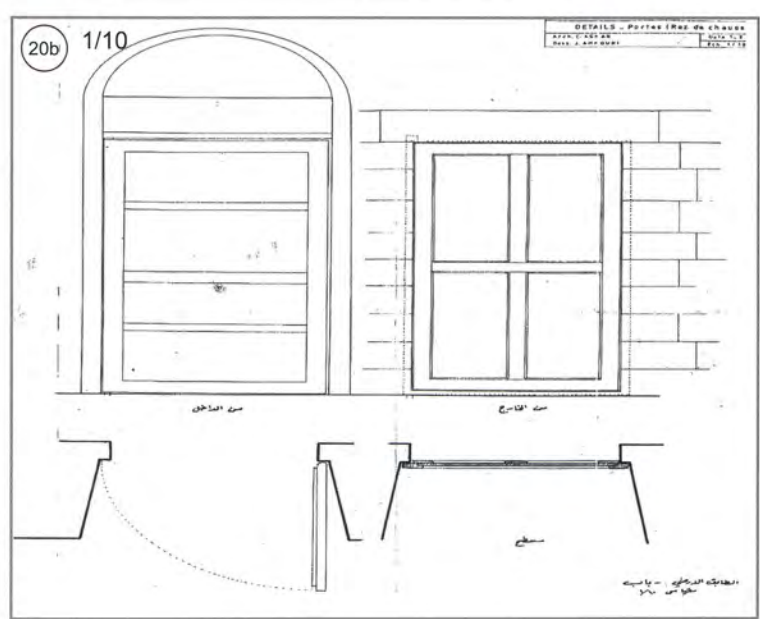
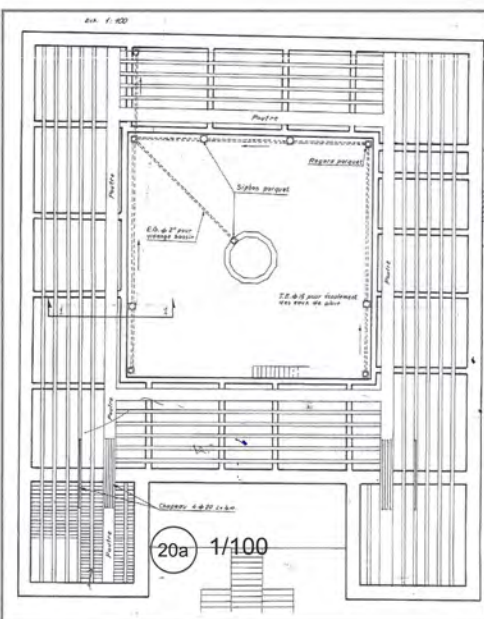
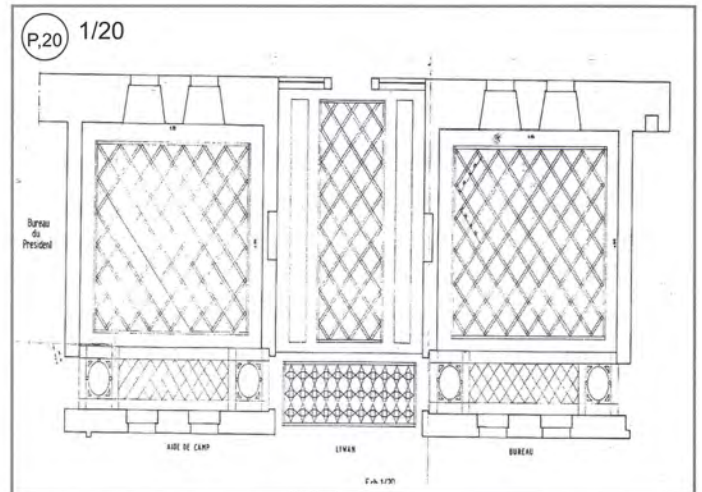
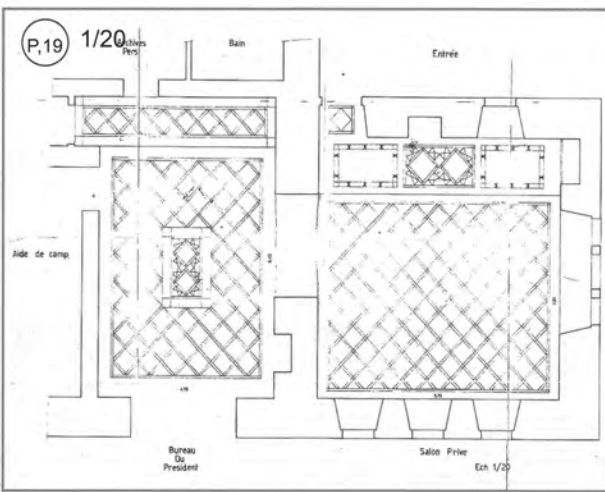
The restoration and organization of the first floor re-used the existing rooms in the following manner.

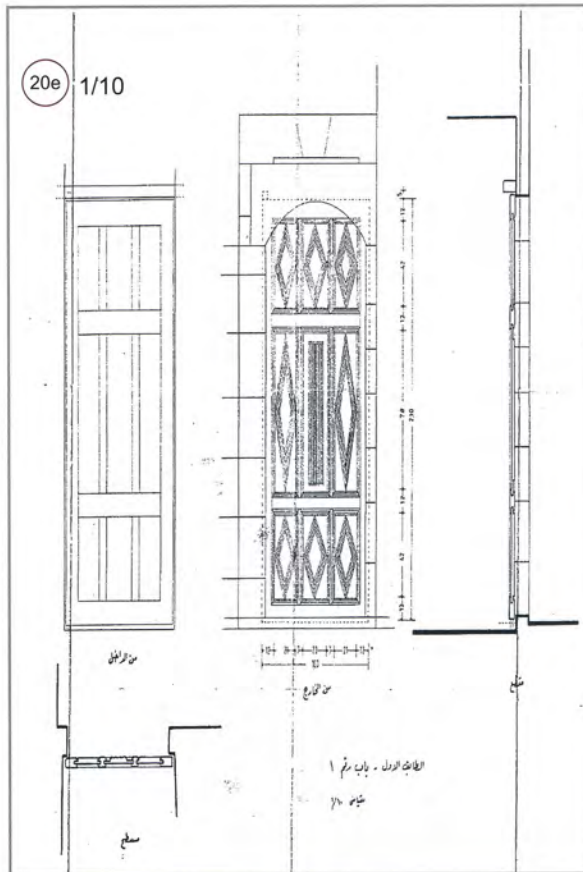
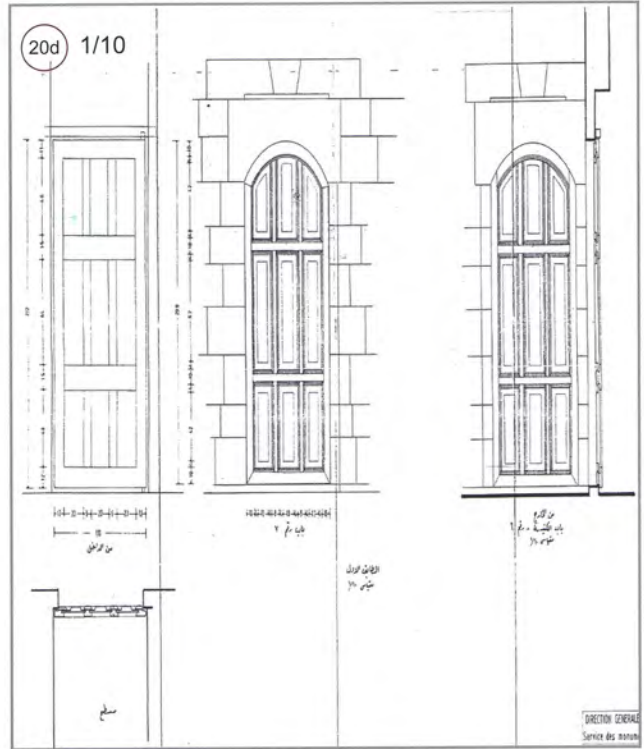
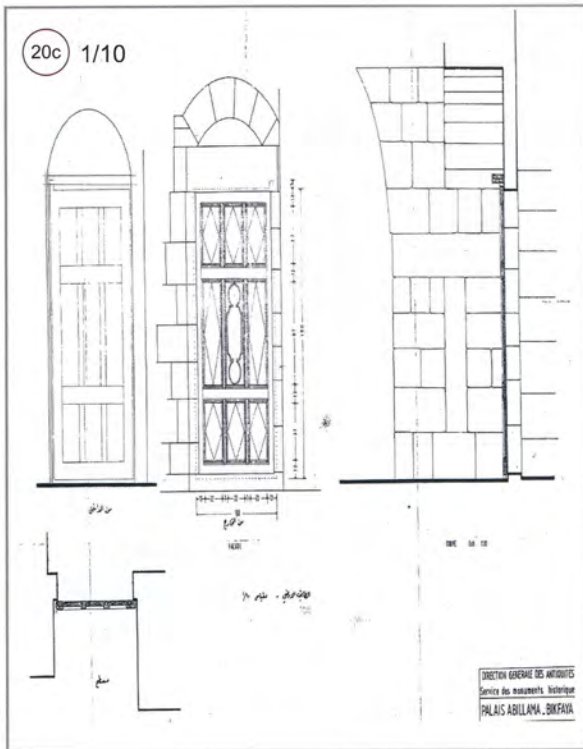
The west side:

The first south-west corner room functioned as a private lounge, the second as the Presidential Office.

The third room became an official guard room, the fourth a "liwan", the fifth a general office and the sixth, in the north-west corner, the General Director's office.

The kiosks on the west façade were restored as much as possible but mostly reconstructed as very little trace of the originals remained.





The work was inspired by the kiosks in the Baz family palace in Deir el Kamar. After restoration, the three windowed traditional arcade on the west façade were restored in the original style with wood and glass.

The north side (fig 9):

The second room beyond the General Director's office is now also an office, the third a "liwan", the fourth yet another office and the fifth, in the north east corner, functions as a chapel.



9 Central courtyard. Closed north *liwan* with woodwork, fountain, two segmented arched windows and a chapel door on the right.

10 Detail of panel on chapel wall.



The east side:

The first room was converted into a washroom area, the second a liwan, the third and fourth respectively into offices and the fifth, on the south-east corner, into a guard room.

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The south side:

The first area is a corridor, the second an office, the third access to the main entrance and the fourth is divided between a public washroom and a section for public records. The decorated marble paving on the first floor as well as the wooden doors and windows (plans n° 20 c-d-e) in the rooms, were completely restored. The roof timbers and red roof tiles from Marseille were also restored.



11- 12 Marble mosaic on the facing of step up to the altar.

Conclusion

The Bikfaya Grand Palace admirably combines the traditional Lebanese architectural expressions of habitation.

The main plan with "liwan" and central courtyard, the openings in the exterior walls, the triple arcade, the double window with central column and relieving arch, the elegance of the groined and barrel vaults, the charming simplicity of the decorated painted doors and windows, the paved marble floors (plans n° 19-20) and wooden ceilings (plans n° 20 a-20 b), all blend Lebanese tradition harmoniously with elements of a western character.



13 Central courtyard, south view. Stone stairway incorporated in the courtyard's south wall leading up to the roof.

The Grand Palace, as an ensemble, is an excellent example of Lebanese architecture from the nineteenth century combining Arab and European influences.