

Unit 7 Lesson 9: Buildings

Traditional permanent houses in the Emirates were usually built close together so there was shade in the alleys between them. Building materials varied depending on the location of the house and included stone, mud brick, wood and palm reeds, although some houses nearer the coast were built of coral stone.

Almost all traditional houses were built around a central courtyard and veranda, which provided a private space for family activities, especially for the women of the household. This was a place for cooking, playing and during the summer could be used for eating and sleeping. In some houses they had a well dug to provide drinking water. Rooms were arranged around the courtyard with the most important room being the meeting room where the family received guests. More elaborate houses had a wind tower or barjeel installed to keep the rooms cool. This simple way of bringing air into the rooms and improving ventilation has become a symbol of architecture throughout the Arabian Gulf.

The house of Sheik Saeed Al Maktoum in Dubai is a perfect example of a house built in the traditional style of the region. He got builders to use local materials such as coral, stone and lime as they were easy to obtain. The house has two storeys, three courtyards and twenty verandas, and like many houses of its time, Sheik Saeed had the house divided into six independent living areas. It also has four wind towers which rise 5–8 metres above the roof. Although much grander than most houses, the Sheik Saeed House is a reminder of the rich heritage, culture and architecture of the Emirates.

Contemporary architecture in the Emirates is very different. Nowadays architects get builders to use concrete and glass to produce the wide range of housing and offices that can be seen throughout

the region. The variety of modern architecture ranges from two-storey villas, with gardens and swimming pools, to amazing skyscrapers which tower above the waterfront. In between are the apartment blocks that house most of the population.

Some of these modern buildings are designed to retain a link with the past. For example, the owners of Burj Al Arab got the designers to produce an iconic design which looks like the sail of a traditional dhow boat. Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, is another building inspired by traditional architecture. The architect was inspired by a range of local influences including sand dunes and minarets, which can be seen in the way the building grows more slender as it rises from the ground.

Like builders of the past, modern-day architects have to find ways to keep the buildings cool during the hot summer months. The architect of Burj Khalifa had thousands of glass panels placed on the outside of the building to reflect the sun. He also used its great height to pull cooler air down from the top to ventilate the lower levels in the same way that wind towers were used centuries ago.

Is Burj Khalifa the future of architecture? The 160 storeys in this skyscraper include a hotel, apartments, sports facilities and an outdoor observation deck for spectacular views of the city. It is really a 'mini city' and according to architects, these super tall buildings are better for the environment. Each one can be built on a fairly small plot of land and can accommodate a large number of people. This means that skyscrapers can be constructed closer together and cities could become more 'walkable', both vertically and horizontally, and the need for more roads and the pollution caused by traffic could be reduced.

1. How did the alleys help people in the heat?
 - a. They allowed wind to flow through the alleys offering a cool breeze.
 - b. They created shade as the houses are built close together.
2. Why were homes made of a variety of different building materials in the past?
 - a. They wanted each building to be different.
 - b. The builders used whatever materials found in local area.
3. How did wealthy home owners keep their houses cool?
 - a. They built wind towers.
 - b. They used AC.
4. What is the main building material used today?
 - a. The main building materials used nowadays is plastic.
 - b. The main building materials used nowadays are concrete and glass.
5. What did the designers of the Burj Al Arab and the Burj Khalifa try to do?
 - a. They tried to design buildings inspired by architecture of the past.
 - b. They tried to design buildings inspired by western architecture.

6. What do architects believe are the advantages to skyscrapers?

- a. They are better for the environment.
- b. They look more impressive.

7. What does 'walkable' mean in this article?

- a. It means that people like to walk.
- b. It means that people will be able to walk to all the important places they need to visit rather than depending on cars or other means of transport.