



Photo by AFP via Getty Images



Photos by Joseph M Khoury



A blast from the past Restoring Beirut's heritage

The blast that tore through the capital on August 4 continues to ripple across the nation. In addition to the tangible loss of human life and property, a part of Beirut's very soul was torn away on that day.

According to Sarkis Khoury, director of general antiquities at the Ministry of Culture, around 640 historic buildings in the old neighborhoods of Gemmayze and Mar Mikhael have been affected by the blast, 60 of which are now in danger of collapsing utterly. Other culturally significant sites such as museums, art galleries and religious sites were damaged as well. This includes the Sursock Museum, the National Museum and the Archeological Museum of the American University of Beirut. The UN's cultural agency has vowed to lead an international campaign to restore and renovate Beirut's architectural legacy. Ernesto Ottone Ramirez, assistant director-general for culture of UNESCO, declared

that "UNESCO is committed to leading the response in the field of culture." This international goodwill, will help the people of Beirut preserve their heritage in the face of profiteers seeking to buy out damaged property, in order to tear it down and replace it with high rises, a practice that has posed an ever present threat to the capital's historic neighborhoods since the end of the civil war. Lebanese architects, designers and artists are already leading reconstruction efforts, hoping to kickstart the recovery of a priceless past.

They won't have to do it from memory. Photographer Joseph Khoury and architect Gabriela Cardozo spent five years immortalizing the façades of Ottoman and Colonial-era houses in picture form. Now these photographs stand as a testament to the Beirut that was, and could be again.



At the nation's call

A statement by Ramy Boutros

We Lebanese are survivors; nothing is going to destroy our spirit or dash our hopes. We are committed to rebuilding our country from the ashes.

We are going to do so by eliminating the corruption that festers at the highest echelons; those who took our jewel and smashed it for their own narcissistic needs and greed, who have destroyed a part of our heritage. What they cannot destroy is the will of the average man and woman on the street who love our country to its core.

Now a call has gone out to all those who feel love for this great country to do their part. This means that each one of us must, in their own unique way, contribute their talents, their sweat and their resources to return Beirut to its former magnificence and restore its lost architectural history through careful planning.

Sacrifices must be made by all, but the commitment will not waiver nor can it be killed. There is no will greater than that of this people who have suffered inexplicably at the hands of a few. This country, like many in Europe that were obliterated during the Second World War, will find a way to rebuild what was lost.

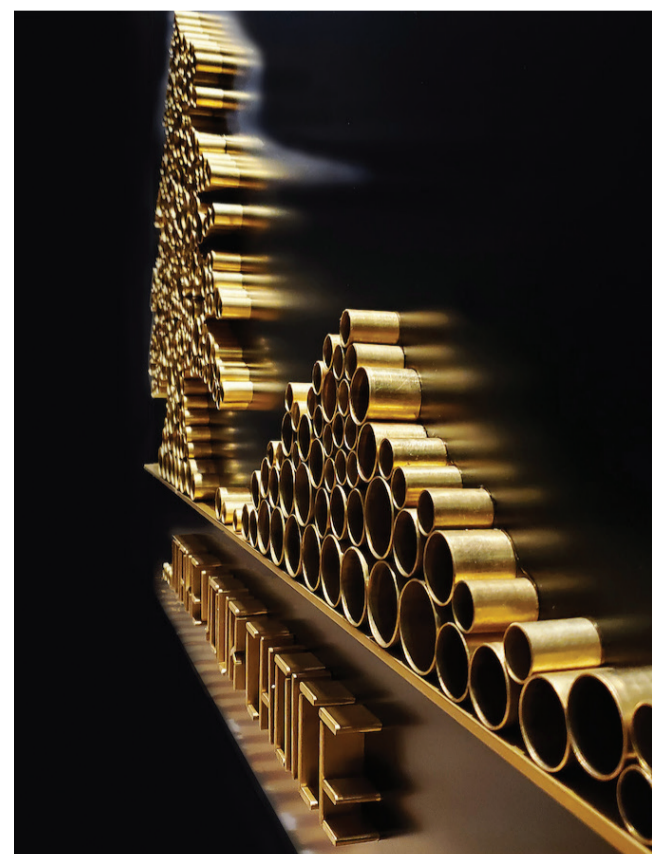
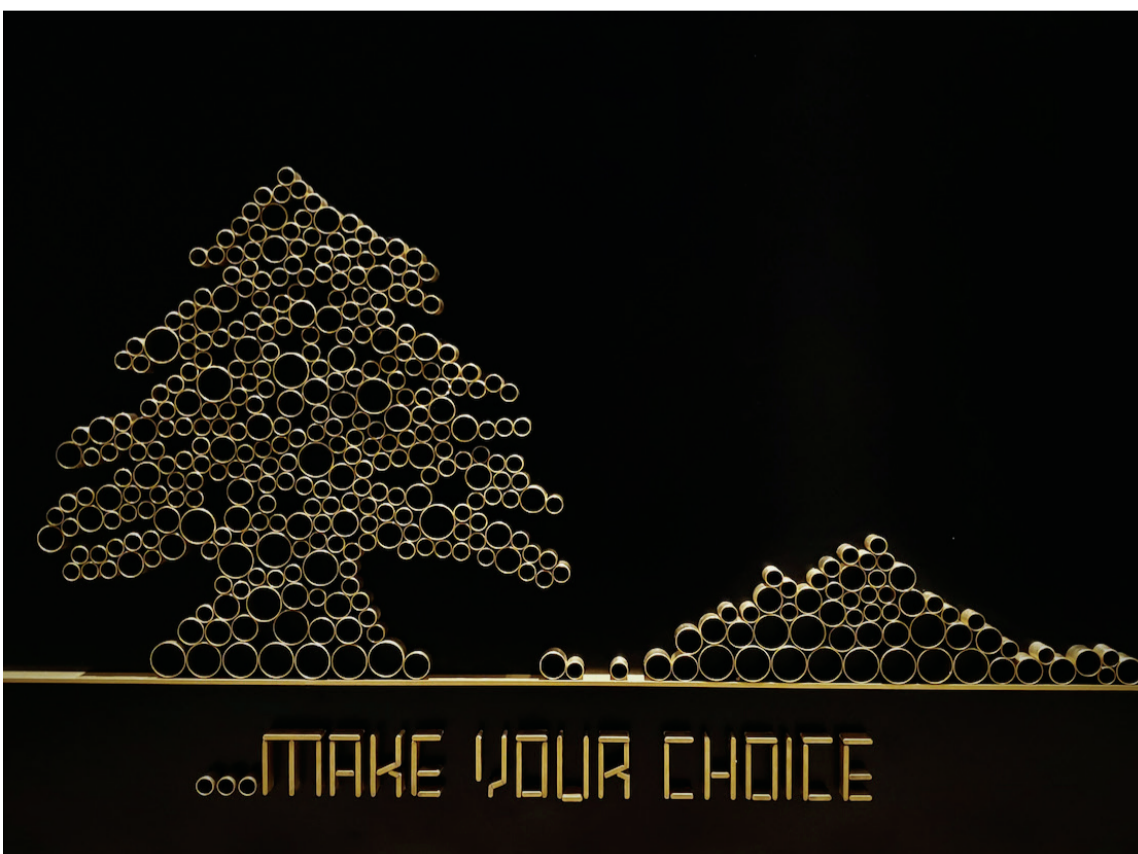


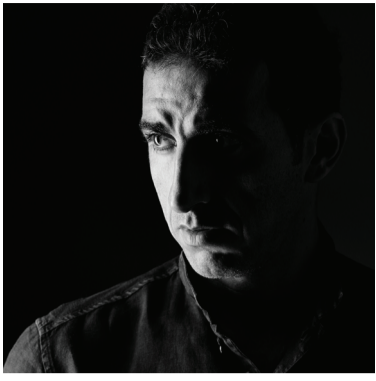
Hail, Cedar!

Joe Farah in the Green Cedars exhibition

The Pine Residence has become the Cedar Residence for the duration of the second edition of the "Dessine-moi un Cèdre" event organized by Green Cedar Lebanon. This initiative brings together works by a variety of Lebanese artists depicting the national symbol of their country in evocative and surprising ways. The first edition helped GCL plant a forest of 1000 cedars in Kfardebian, which they dubbed "the forest of the artists." They hoped to repeat their eco-friendly enterprise this year, yet with recent events the exhibition has also become an expression of the indomitable spirit of the Lebanese people so perfectly embodied by the perennial tree.

With the event coinciding with the 100-year anniversary of the proclamation of the state of Greater Lebanon, the exhibition boasted 100 artworks in various mediums, both traditional and modern. Award winning interior architect Joe Farah submitted an original piece made with brass tubes that illustrates the dichotomy of the country's future as it stands at a crossroads. On one side, a cedar blooms proud and strong on its roots, solidly anchored and built. On the other, nothing but rubble remains. Beneath, the words "...make your choice" put every citizen face to face with the decision that lies before them: which Lebanon do they wish to belong to? The brass tubes are reminiscent of those used in construction, further reinforcing the message that it is up to all Lebanese to build the country they wish to live in.

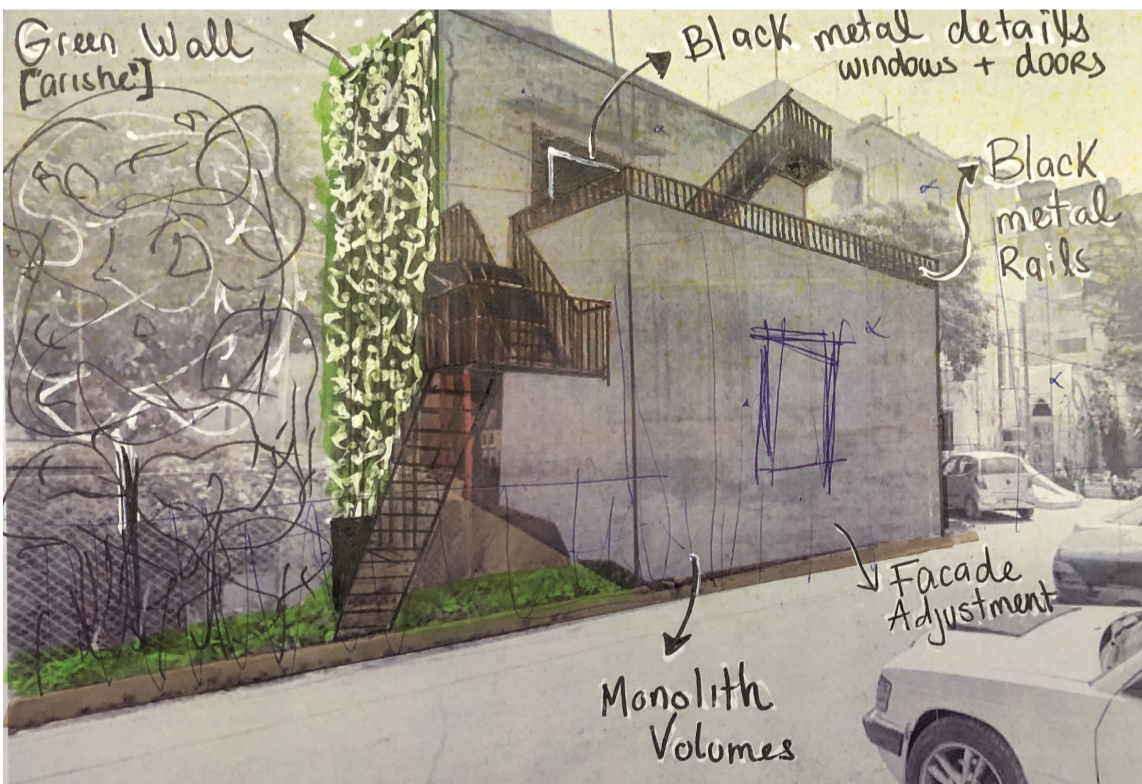
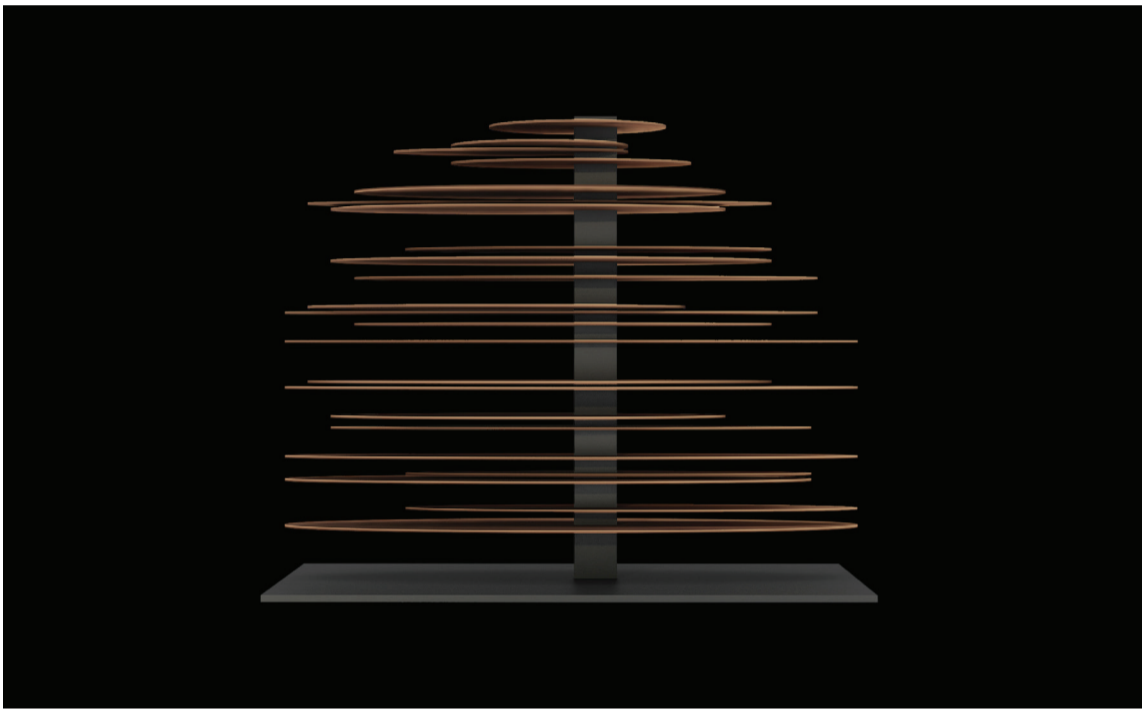




Layers of resilience

Dori Hitti on surviving and rebuilding

Another submission to the “Dessine-moi un Cèdre” event is by award winning architectural designer Dori Hitti, whose interpretation of the national tree is formed by layers of solid metal juxtaposed to form the likeness of a cedar, marked by time but still as solid and strong as ever. The lamellar pieces are bronze colored and show some wear, evoking antiquity and a sense of longevity that harkens back to ancient times. This reflects the ages Lebanon has seen pass; an old, evergreen tree that has weathered countless seasons without bending. Dori Hitti’s piece is a cry of defiance in the face of recent turmoil and tragedy, reminding the country that it has survived countless perils and remained steadfast. But this message is not merely symbolic. Half of the proceeds will be donated to the Lebanese Food Bank and the other half to victims of the Beirut port explosion. Yet even that is not enough for the artist, who has dedicated himself and his firm, Dori Hitti Architects, to another noble goal in the fight for the future of Lebanon: rebuilding.



Medawar street is a part of the Karantina region that was severely hit by the blast on August 4, with 80% of buildings either fully or partially destroyed. In collaboration with Acua Foundation, Dori Hitti has begun drafting a new vision for the streets and homes of the neighborhood, hoping to not only rebuild what was destroyed, but reinvent it. The reimagined Medawar street will feature historically evocative designs and details, more green spaces, and a more distinctive, welcoming visual identity that will foster a sense of belonging in the local community. What are mere lines and squiggles on paper today will become streets, sidewalks and houses tomorrow. Leveraging its network in this time of need, Acua is pooling together the resources of all NGOs dedicated to development in Lebanon. Together, they are slowly pulling the capital out of the rubble. The Beirut of tomorrow is beginning to take shape. The city that has been rebuilt countless times over its history will once again see a new dawn.



Photo by Ralph Khoury



Jean-Marc Bonfils

A tribute

Many were lost to the ammonium nitrate-fueled explosion that savaged Beirut. 190 people who were part of the capital's living fabric, dead. Among them was a man who had played an important part in rebuilding the city once before.

Jean-Marc Bonfils, son of a prominent architect, was born in 1963 and earned degrees from the Paris-Villemin School of Architecture, the École du Louvre, and the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London.

Following in the footsteps of his father, he perfected his craft among the avant-garde of the 1980s and 1990s French architecture, alongside the likes of Christian de Portzamparc, Alain Sarfati and Jean-Marie Charpentier.

His big break came when he and his father were selected to lead the reconstruction of Downtown Beirut after the Lebanese civil war, a massive project that would define his entire career. In the spirit of his dedication to the restoration of Beirut, he was also the architect of the National Library in Lebanon.

He was a member of several orders, including the Order of the Architects and Engineers of Beirut, the Order of the Architects of "Île-de-France", and the National Committee for the Preservation of Old Houses, as well as a founding member of the Heritage and Patrimonial committee, Order of Engineers and Architects of Lebanon. On a personal note, he was

also a member of the Patrimonial National Foundation and the National Museum Committee. His dedication to Lebanon's cultural legacy was equal to that of the greatest of patriots.

Bonfils boasted a stellar career and was behind the groundbreaking designs of many high-profile cultural, residential, and mixed-use projects in Lebanon and the region. One of these, the East Village building, even became his home. Its distinct silhouette with its vertical garden crawling on the façade made it a landmark of the historic Mar Mikhael district.

The concept consisted in revisiting key contextual elements – traditional building material and Lebanese gardens – through a contemporary lens. Conventional wood and dark stone were contrasted with vivid red metal, and a vertical replica of the old Électricité du Liban garden paid homage to the local past in a present where space is limited. The structure's three parallel elongated blocks each boasted a distinctive identity, with a section projecting out onto the street to emphasize the building's partly public function, a contemporary art gallery that occupies the ground floor.

It is in that building that Bonfils was lost to the same tragedy that defaced his work alongside much of the capital, yet the spirit of his work remains. As he once took part in reinventing and rebuilding Beirut, so now others are taking up the torch, joining hands to restore the city to which he dedicated much of his career and personal life.



East Village building / Photo by Kinan Mansour



Lebanese National Library / Courtesy Lebanese National Library

