

ARCHITECT

MIDDLE EAST

NEWS, DATA, ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIC INSIGHTS FOR ARCHITECTS IN THE GCC



Tower
25

The region's largest
architecture firms

PLUS

ANALYSIS

Adrian Smith delivers keynote
speech at Green Build Congress

CASE STUDY

Leigh & Orange's impressive
Equestrian Academy in Qatar

INTERVIEW

dwp's new design director on
working in 'danger' markets



This year's Power List threw up a few surprises. In addition to the usual suspects - that have long been committed to the region - we found a number of large local practices such as EAS and AEB, that are perhaps less known to a large section of the architectural community.

Just as many lesser-known practices have crept into this year's list, several top international firms - such as SOM and Fosters + Partners - are surprising absentees. Although these firms have helped to change the skylines of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, their regional offices are small-scale and much of the design work is carried

out elsewhere. As our list is based on the number of permanent GCC staff, these global heavyweights could not be included.

Special mention should also go to the strong firms that just missed out on the top 25, including RTKL, Gensler, HDR, DBP, Leigh & Orange, Henning Larson and Beroy.

KEO

2,190 STAFF IN THE GCC
WITH 240 ARCHITECTS

Top spot goes to Kuwait-based firm KEO, with its whopping team of 2,190 staff in the GCC.

The multi-disciplinary practice boasts regional offices in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Al Ain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman.

Key projects include the QP District in Doha (pictured) and the Kuwait Investment Authority's new headquarters in a 200m-tall tower in Abu Dhabi. KEO is working on Nation Towers on the Corniche, and is also behind several school projects for ADEC.

In addition, KEO provided full design and supervision services for 23 Marina in Dubai Marina, which is now recognised as the tallest residential tower in the world at 395m.



ATKINS

1,770 STAFF IN THE GCC
WITH 200 ARCHITECTS

This year's runner up is UK-based Atkins, a company behind some of the Gulf's most postcard-friendly buildings such as the Burj Al Arab (pictured) and the spiky Bahrain World Trade Centre.

The firm has been working in the region for more than 40 years and has 10 offices in the UAE, KSA, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain.

Atkin's yearly revenue for the Middle East, as of March 2011, totalled US\$218.5m.



EAS

550 STAFF IN THE GCC

3

One of the surprise finds this year is local firm Eng Adnan Saffarini (EAS), which boasts 550 staff and an undisclosed number of architects.

The company was formed in 1968 and has offices in Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajman, Al Ain, Ras Al Khaimah and Qatar.

A key project involves the provision of two 400-bed General Education Hospitals for the Ministry of Health in Iraq. The complex covers 10,000m² and construction is underway.

Saffarini adds that it's important to have niche specialisms, in order to gain an edge on competitors. "Everybody can do residential buildings, even office buildings. In 2012 our focus is on sustainable specialised buildings. We are trying to compete in the new market."

A more recent specialism is hospitals, as Saffarini explains: "We recently entered the healthcare market – we did the Saudi German hospital in Dubai, as well as hospitals in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi and Ajman. We got accreditation from HAAD [Health Authority Abu Dhabi]. This was very limited for consultants – it was very difficult to get."

"There is demand for hospitals. If you don't compete and present yourselves as a specialised consultant then you won't get opportunities."

Another new area of focus for the company is Building Information Modelling (BIM). Saffarini explains: "We had the recession and this is the time to rearrange your house, to upgrade. We started using BIM - it involves investment but in the rush you will not be able to do it."

"It is difficult to do use AutoCAD on complicated, signature projects. The second thing is that you find many mistakes in your drawings due to the lack of co-ordination - with BIM the co-ordination is automatic. It also helps a lot with detailing and it speeds up the process. We consider it to be an advanced type of approach for us, especially in complicated buildings."

"Now we are using BIM for the new hospitals and we plan to use BIM for more projects, especially specialised ones. For our branches outside the UAE, we were thinking of training



the staff to use BIM as their software rather than AutoCAD. I think more and more companies will use BIM."

Refreshingly, Saffarini is positively beaming about the UAE market. "From our point of view, the best market is the Emirates. We have good rules and regulations – the infrastructure is almost complete. It is easy to do things and you can bring in any expertise. I contradict anyone that says otherwise."

He continues: "Even with this situation [the recession], this is the best market. We have the best landscape, the best airport, best taxis and an easy way of life."

When asked whether the UAE still offers opportunities for architects, he replied: "For sure, new opportunities are coming up in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. This type of country will

always have opportunities. Until now we have been living off the jobs we got in UAE, not from outside."

Remarkably, the company's huge portfolio was achieved without any promotion, as the firm is "not allowed to do marketing".

So what is the secret to EAS's success? Saffarini believes it is partly down to word of mouth. "Jobs come – everybody knows us. We offer the complete package."

He also states that the firm is competitive. "If people go for us then they don't have to use other consultants, and this saves money. One of the good things we do is trimming the construction cost. Most of our projects are completed without a change in the budget. This is important for clients."

"Secondly, you have to give the client a good product. You have to remember that for the client, the building is their building. If you get the developer's trust, he will recommend you to other people. When you trust something you will believe in it. It's like having a Mercedes Benz car - you know you can trust it." ●

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