

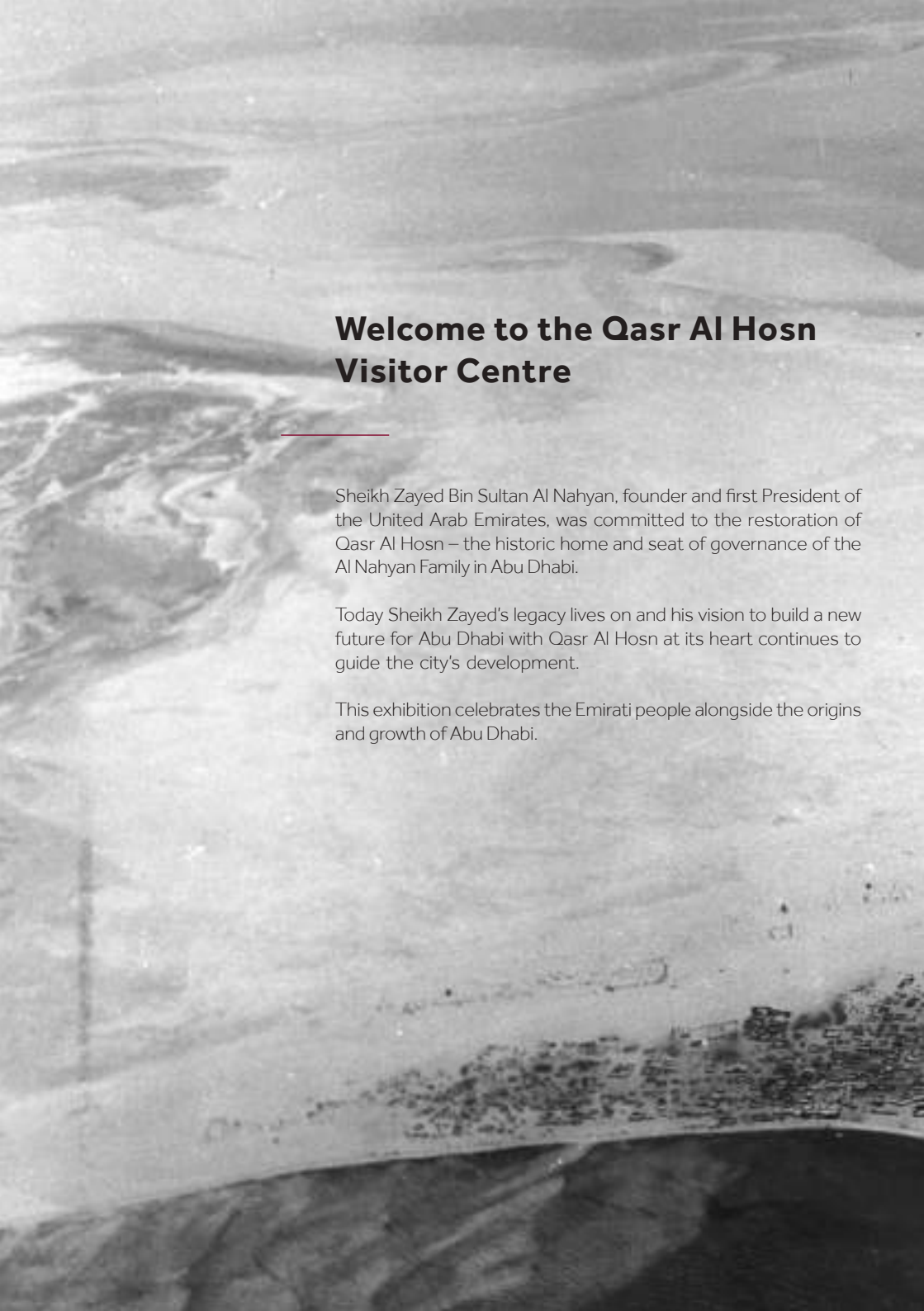


معرض قصر الحصن
QASR AL HOSN EXHIBITION



The Story of Abu Dhabi & Its People



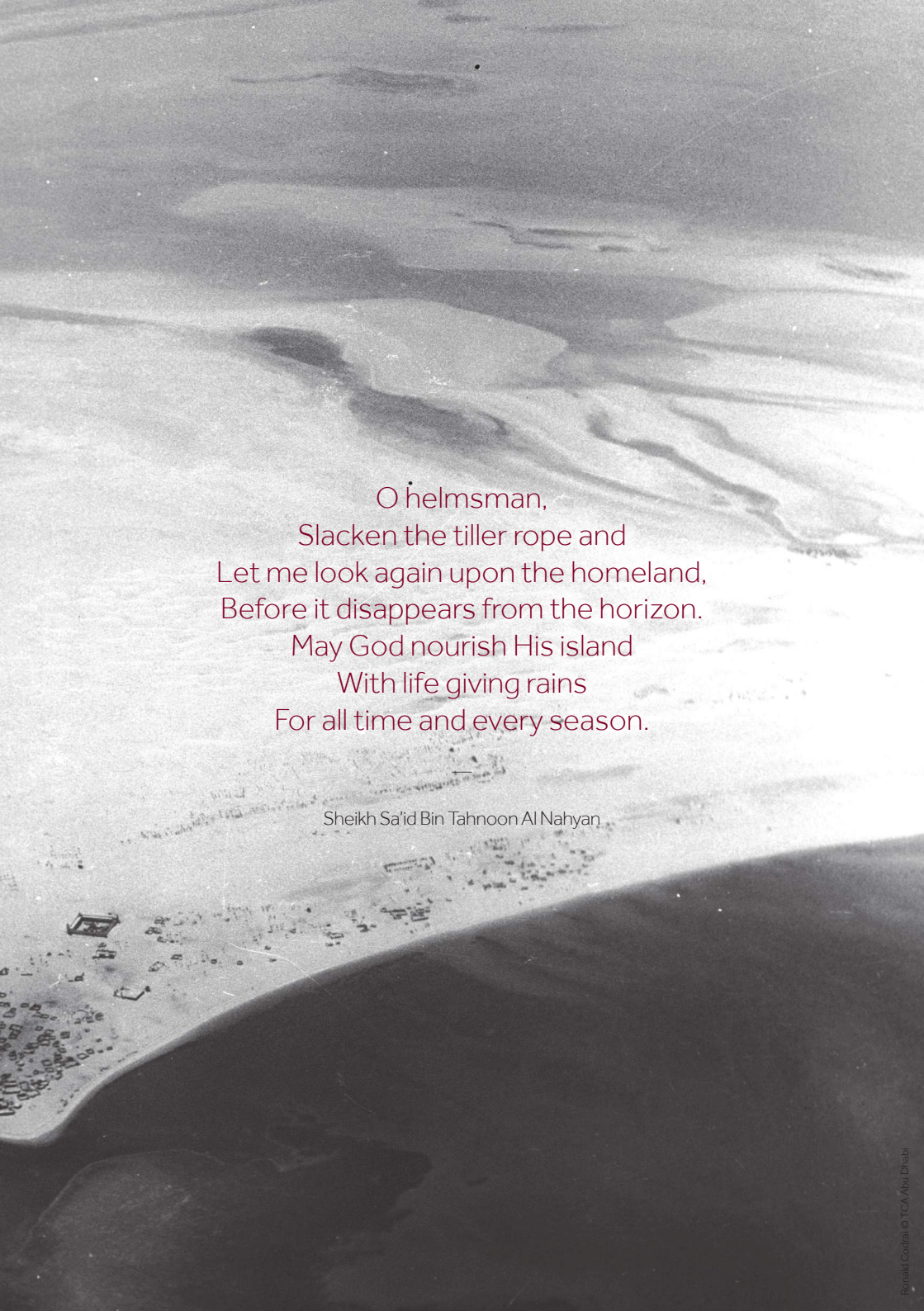
An aerial, black and white photograph of a desert landscape. A prominent feature is a winding, light-colored path, likely a river or canal, that meanders through the darker, textured terrain of the desert. The path starts from the left and curves towards the right, eventually leading towards a cluster of buildings or a settlement in the lower right corner. The overall scene is vast and open, with subtle variations in the shades of gray representing different types of desert vegetation and soil.

Welcome to the Qasr Al Hosn Visitor Centre

Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, founder and first President of the United Arab Emirates, was committed to the restoration of Qasr Al Hosn – the historic home and seat of governance of the Al Nahyan Family in Abu Dhabi.

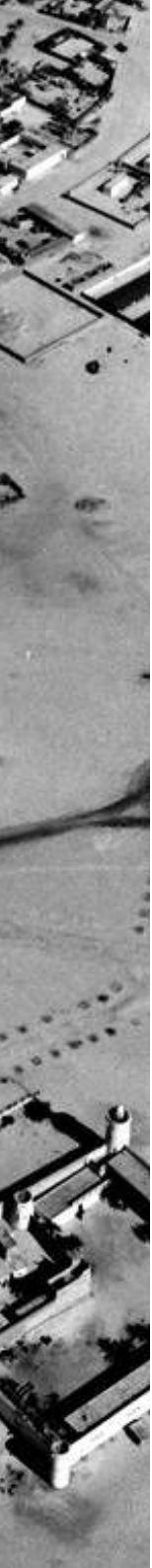
Today Sheikh Zayed's legacy lives on and his vision to build a new future for Abu Dhabi with Qasr Al Hosn at its heart continues to guide the city's development.

This exhibition celebrates the Emirati people alongside the origins and growth of Abu Dhabi.

An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely in the United Arab Emirates, showing a large body of water in the foreground and a cluster of buildings along the shoreline. The sky is overcast and grey.

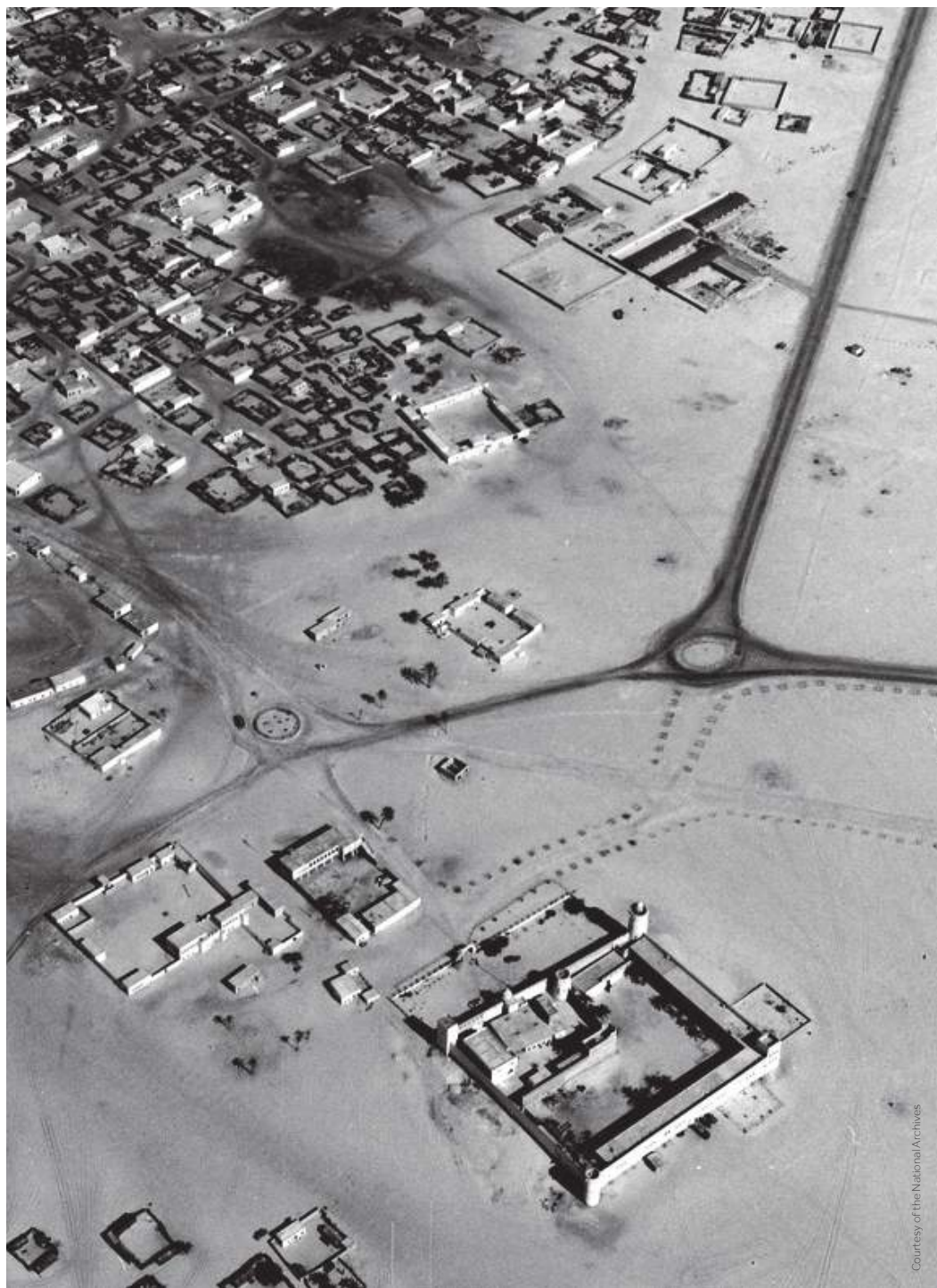
O helmsman,
Slacken the tiller rope and
Let me look again upon the homeland,
Before it disappears from the horizon.
May God nourish His island
With life giving rains
For all time and every season.

Sheikh Sa'id Bin Tahnoon Al Nahyan



The Story of Abu Dhabi & Its People

This exhibition tells the story of a city and the people who have made it their home. Inextricably linked to this story is Qasr Al Hosn, the first permanent building on the island, a witness to the island's origins and evolution and a powerful symbol of the ever developing city: Abu Dhabi.





A Global City

The story of Abu Dhabi reaches back through time immemorial. It is a story of a people and their deep connection to their land.

By the middle of the 17th century, the Bani Yas, the most numerous tribal confederation in the region, already presided over what is today the Emirate of Abu Dhabi and their presence was known throughout the world.

Their reach extended from the inland oases of Liwa, across their traditional grazing lands to the shores of the Arabian Gulf. Here, they established a small coastal community, which grew into a town, and with time became a high-rise modern city, attracting people from all over the world.

Today, the island capital is the very definition of a global city.

"A person who does not know their past cannot make the best of their present or their future."

—

Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, Founder of the United Arab Emirates





The Bani Yas

Our story begins in Liwa, an arc of oases that fringe the northern edge of the Empty Quarter. This is the ancestral home of the Bani Yas.

The Bani Yas moved across their land with the seasons. It was an efficient and sustainable way of living. Spreading out from their heartland of Liwa, they moved in search of fresh waterholes and grazing grounds or to trade the dates harvested in the oases.

Back then, Abu Dhabi Island was known simply as 'Mleih', from the word for salt, a reference to the sabkha, the salt plains that line the Island's coast. The Bani Yas would visit to fish, dive for pearls and collect salt.

It is said of the Bani Yas that they are immeasurable heroes, lion cubs who fear no hardship. They are lions born on horseback, sleeping in the saddle, and trained in handling them.

—
Sheikh Salem bin Hamood Al Siyabi





The Bani Yas

Traditionally, the Bani Yas lived in the desert. Having learned to exist, and even prosper, in this harsh and unforgiving environment, the Bani Yas were a skilled and resourceful people. The ephemeral nature of nomadic life meant they profoundly understood the value of memory and the preservation of tradition. Knowledge and skills were passed down from one generation to the next in the form of stories, songs and poems. The austere life of the Bani Yas was countered by a rich and vibrant culture.

To those who would know,
We are the Bani Yas.
This is our island,
Where we were born and raised.
We are a people of noble origins,
We inherited it from the ancestors.
Our forefathers guarded it with their lives,
Protecting it with sword and spear.
O valiant brothers, you are a proud and strong people,
The nation loves those who serve it faithfully.

Sa'id Mohammed Bin Salem Al Muhairi





The Move

It was clear to the Bani Yas that history would be shaped by those who held power and influence on the Gulf coast. Abu Dhabi Island was an ideal location for a new settlement; the surrounding shallow waters made it hard to attack from the sea, while the Maqta channel was the only access point from the mainland.

So when fresh water was discovered on the island in the early 1760s, the Bani Yas established a strategic base for trade and the burgeoning pearling industry. They built a watchtower, providing protection for the early community.





The First Settlement

Based on Abu Dhabi Island, the Bani Yas built Qasr Al Hosn as an expression of their rule. During the time of Sheikh Shakhbut Bin Dhiyab (Ruler of the Bani Yas, 1793-1816) an impressive square fort was constructed, likely incorporating the original Watchtower built by his father. This new defensive structure was significant enough to provide protection not only for the water source, but also the settlement that was emerging around its walls.

For the next 20 years, the growing Sheikhdom experienced a period of stability. By uniting the tribes, Sheikh Shakhbut strengthened the local economy and while people continued to live the nomadic life of their forefathers, the new settlers felt secure enough to build permanent dwellings. By 1820 the population of Abu Dhabi had swelled to include some 2,000 fishermen and traders.

The first Westerly winds blow,
Snapping and cracking the sail.
When the first Westerly winds blow,
Stay ashore, do not sail.





The Town

Abu Dhabi, now a thriving and prosperous town, became a place for social exchange, celebration and hospitality. People congregated to trade goods and to swap stories. Fishing continued to be an important activity, feeding the settlers, visitors and their camels and other cattle.

The pearling industry boomed during this period, providing both income and employment for the people of the Gulf Coast. An increasing number of traders brought back spices, textiles, minerals and other goods to sell in Abu Dhabi's markets. Trading ships sailed to Basra, India, the East coast of Africa and beyond.

The Al Nahyan family demonstrated great political and diplomatic acumen with Sheikh Sa'id Bin Tahnoon (ruled 1845-1855) fortifying Qasr Al Hosn to defend Abu Dhabi from invaders, whilst Sheikh Zayed Bin Khalifa (ruled 1855-1909) united the tribes of the region and forged partnerships and alliances with peoples from further afield.

Under the reign of Sheikh Zayed Bin Khalifa, who ruled for over half a century, Abu Dhabi became the principal centre in the region. Qasr Al Hosn remained the most important building in the Emirate, the centre of government and a beacon for miles around, as a living part of the community.



A New Chapter

The death of Sheikh Zayed Bin Khalifa in 1909 marked the end of an era. Abu Dhabi had been at the centre of the international pearl trade. However, the World Wars, the stock market crash of 1929 and global economic depression dealt a heavy blow to the region's economy.

Difficulties were worsened by the invention of cultured pearls in Japan. Abu Dhabi needed to find a source of economic revival, for the current of life to continue. Pearls had become less valuable, however new wealth was to be found under the seabed in the form of oil.

Sheikh Shakhbut Bin Sultan (Ruler 1966-1928) granted the oil companies his approval, signing the first concession in 1939. He used some of the proceeds to build a new palace around the old Fort. The work provided employment for those who had suffered when the pearling industry had collapsed. The enlarged Fort became an early symbol of the new economy – and the new confidence – that was developing in Abu Dhabi.





Emerging City

Now the pace of change in Abu Dhabi accelerated. The population grew and a bigger city was needed. Roads reached out across the desert and new buildings sprang up around Qasr Al Hosn. People from all over the world came to live and work in Abu Dhabi, bringing with them their own cultures and adding to the diversity of Emirati life.

In 1966, Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan came to power. An inspirational leader, he built on the early achievements of his brother, Sheikh Shakhbut Bin Sultan, distributing the oil wealth among the people of Abu Dhabi and ensuring that all Emiratis were given ownership of land.





A City Transformed

Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan channelled the new wealth into transforming the life of his people. In 1971, Sheikh Zayed's dream for his country was achieved with the creation of the UAE. A visionary leader, Sheikh Zayed had foreseen the city's new role the capital of the new Nation and during the late 1960s had already begun putting in place the infrastructure needed by a modern state. Priority was given to housing, schools, health services and transport. A road bridge was built to link Abu Dhabi to the mainland, and an airport to connect Abu Dhabi to the rest of the world.

Sheikh Zayed's rule ushered in a new era of peace and prosperity for Abu Dhabi. Rapid change, however, continued to be a fact of Emirati life and affected even Qasr Al Hosn. When Sheikh Zayed built a new royal residence the old Fort became part of the UAE's national inheritance: a historic royal Palace remembering the stories of the Nation.

"Our forefathers played their part in the building of this homeland and now it is our duty to build for future generations, to continue the journey of the ancestors. We must unreservedly make use of all experience and expertise, taking everything we need and can benefit from so long as it conforms to our Arab traditions and ideals."

Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan



The Evolution of a Global City

The development of Abu Dhabi over the last two centuries can be traced through many maps, plans and surveys – some dating as far back as the start of the 19th century – through to the plans for the modern city in 1967. These important documents and images capture the many stages of the city's evolution – from small coastal settlement to global city. They allow us to study the shaping of the city, as it expanded from a small population of just thousands of people to one that could reach three million by 2030.



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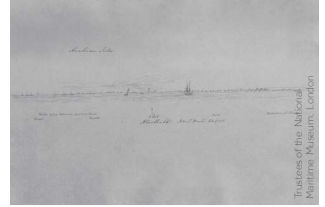
Trigonometric Survey, 1823

This survey from 1823 shows a small cluster of structures on the coastline of Abu Dhabi Island.



Coastal Map, 1833

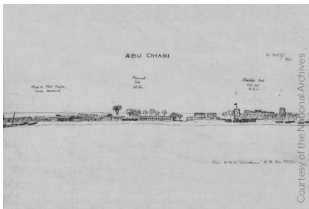
Depicting Abu Dhabi as a small but significant settlement. The Fort is clearly visible as the main historic landmark.



Treasures of the National Maritime Museum, London

Sketch of 'Aboothubbi', c.1859

This important sketch depicts the city as it appeared around 150 years ago, with Qasr Al Hosn at the heart. It shows a network of towers along the coast.



Courtesy of the National Archives

Sketch of Abu Dhabi, 1930s

Abu Dhabi as it appeared to a visitor approaching from the sea in the 1930s, showing a growing settlement.



© John Lloyd

Aerial Photograph, 1970

Taken in the year before the founding of the Nation, this aerial view shows Abu Dhabi as it was on the brink of its transformation into a capital city.



© Defense Intelligence Agency, United States

Satellite image, 2011

This image, taken from space, illustrates the tremendous growth of the city.



The Future

Today Abu Dhabi is a dynamic and diverse city that continues to evolve, expand and reinvent itself.

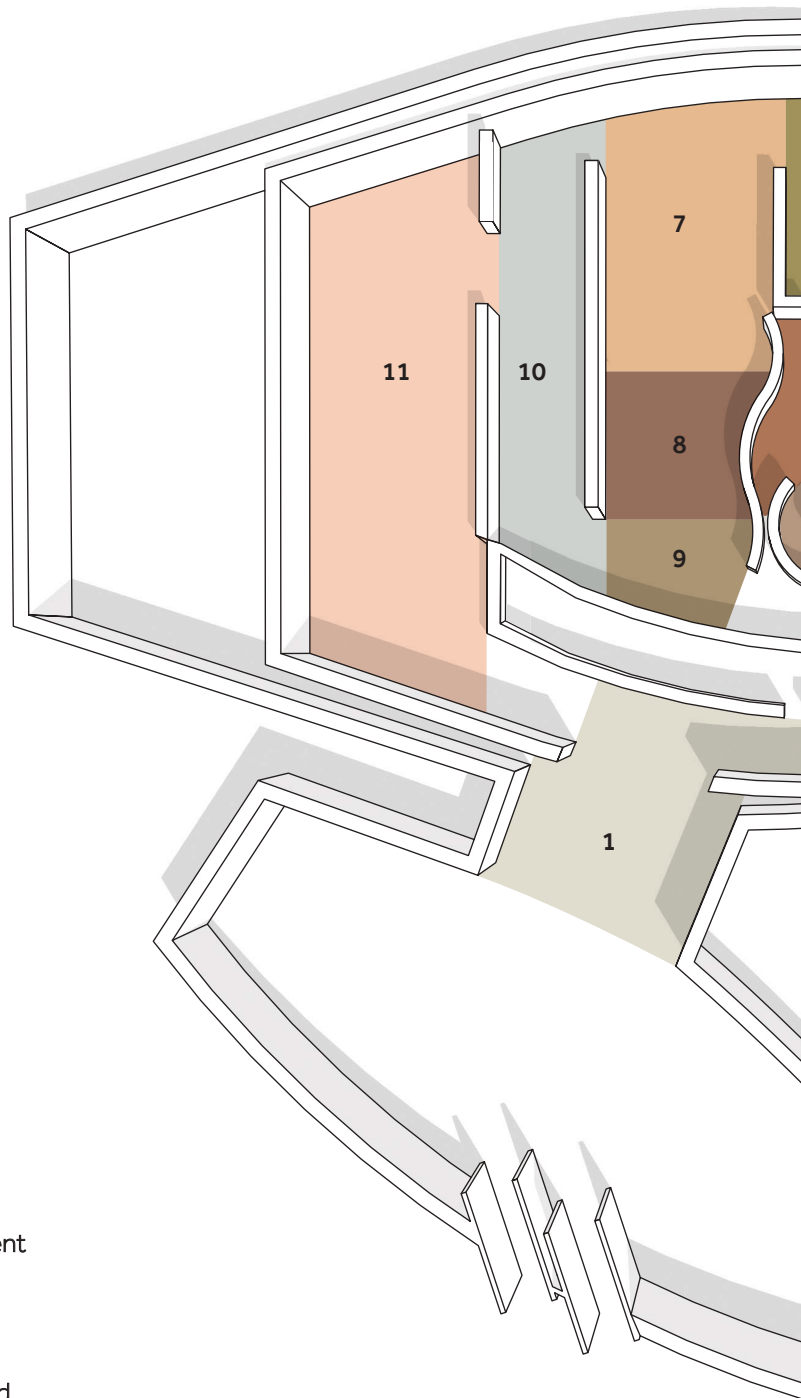
The historic Fort of Qasr Al Hosn is set to become the centre-piece of an exciting transformation. The design concept for the Qasr Al Hosn site looks to the future, yet it draws its inspiration from the rich legacy of Abu Dhabi's past in which the Fort and the Cultural Foundation have played a central role.

Existing buildings will be restored and linked together through the creation of inviting new spaces. A dynamic yet thoughtful interpretation of the indigenous landscape will transform this symbolic city centre into a vibrant new social and cultural destination.

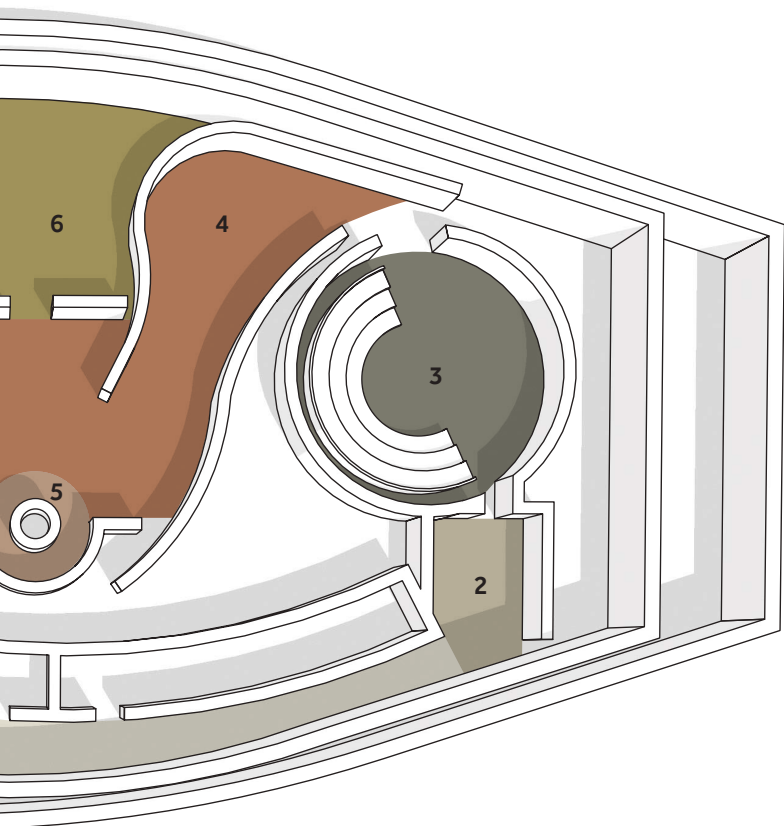
“People are the foundation of any urban development... No matter how many buildings, schools and hospitals we build or how many bridges we lay or beautiful things we create, all of this remains an empty shell, devoid of spirit, and without a future. The spirit is the people, people enabled by their ideas, creativity and skills to shape these institutions and develop and grow with them.”

—

Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan



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