



# Iraq's New Beginning



## Baghdad Rebuilding Keeps History in Mind

By Karen Fanning

August 2004—When Hisham Ashkouri signed on to create a master plan to reconstruct the heart of Baghdad, he wasn't just another American architect eager to develop the Iraqi capital.

"I was born in Baghdad 55 years ago," says Ashkouri, who heads the Boston architectural firm ARCADD. "I was raised and educated there. My brother and sister still live in Baghdad. The change in the government in Baghdad has created a wonderful opportunity for me to go back and begin working in the city I was born in."

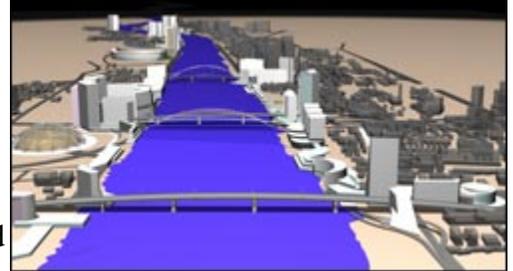
Under Ashkouri's plan, a prized piece of undeveloped land in central Baghdad will be transformed into a vibrant hub of hotels, office buildings, shopping malls, cultural centers, medical facilities, residential housing, and parks. The 3 1/2-mile-long complex will stretch along both sides of the Tigris River.

While Ashkouri is eager to revitalize Iraq's war-torn capital, he is just as anxious to preserve Baghdad's architectural gems. Many of the area's homes and landmarks were built as many as 800 years ago and are still standing.

"One reason I undertook this mission is that a lot of developers walked into Baghdad in the past and wiped out city blocks of historical homes," says Ashkouri. "We want to make sure these buildings are protected from being demolished."

While saving Baghdad's historical buildings from being bulldozed is a top priority, Ashkouri has also taken on the task of breathing new life into the ancient capital. That new life, he says, will be uniquely Iraqi.

"Baghdad is a very rich city historically," he told Scholastic News Online. "It was built in the 8th century. It's critical that new construction be respectful of the local Iraqi culture and architecture as well as 21st-century design. It's not taking New York- or San Francisco-style buildings and implementing them in Baghdad. It's about



Panoramic model of downtown Baghdad reconstruction showing three bridges. (Photo: © 2004 Dr. Hisham N. Askkouri, ARCADD, Inc.)

bringing local culture into the design of new buildings."

The total cost of the project, which could take 20 years to complete, is estimated at \$13 billion. More than 360,000 construction-related jobs will be created, and when the project is finished, some 500,000 people are expected to occupy its buildings. In the end, 10 percent of the profits from the businesses there will go toward restoring Baghdad's historic neighborhoods.

As principal architect of the Baghdad Renaissance Plan, Ashkouri returned to his homeland in January. It was his first visit in 32 years. He now sees a bright future for his native country.

"It is my hope that these buildings will enhance the local economy and generate new income and bring the families and children of Baghdad into the 21st-century environment," he says.

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