

Abu Dhabi Megaprojects Prepare for Liftoff

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Aileen Cho and Angela Shah



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KPF

New Abu Dhabi airport terminal is designed for minimal connection distances, despite its huge size.

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The on-and-off pace of development in Abu Dhabi has picked up momentum this year, following the announcement of which marquee projects are priorities in the current economic climate. One of those marquee projects is the planned midfield terminal at Abu Dhabi International Airport; the construction team will be officially confirmed soon.

The $6.8-billion, 700,000-sq-meter building is expected to open in 2017. The project is part of an overall airport expansion, which includes additional gates, expansion of a security screening area for connecting passengers in Terminal 3 and a new arrivals terminal in Terminal 1.

A consortium led by Dubai's Arabtec Holding and including Turkey-based TAV Insaat and Greece-based Consolidated Contractors Co. is the apparent winner out of four teams bidding for the $3-billion airport contract, according to media reports. A spokeswoman told ENR the airport would not comment until the contract is made public, which will be soon.

Anthony Mosellie, a principal with architect Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates, says KPF finished the terminal's design in 2011. "As one of the largest single-roof terminals ever to be constructed, the overall volume and the geometry of the terminal make things a bit more challenging for the contractor," he says. "Major arches are the primary roof members for the terminal and main processor. The erection of the arches, as well as the roof and ceiling finishes, will require careful coordination, given the geometry and height above grade."

The cast-in-place concrete building will feature lightweight, long-span steel frames for the arrivals and roof levels. Although there will be a significant amount of glazed curtain wall, the amount of glazing is reduced by "draping" the roof over the facades in the concourse areas. This tactic creates a series of repetitive arches that evoke traditional Arabic architecture, Moselli adds.

"The client insisted on a highly efficient master plan, given the land constraints," he says. "The design takes advantage of the runway configuration and results in an X-shaped terminal complex, which balances the efficiency of aircraft movement with shorter walking distances and minimum connect time for passengers."

"The government is very committed to investing in national infrastructure, but with a keen eye on making sure that there is something to be gained from [its] investment," Mosellie adds.

That is why the project, along with many others, was subjected to constant schedule pushbacks since the 2008

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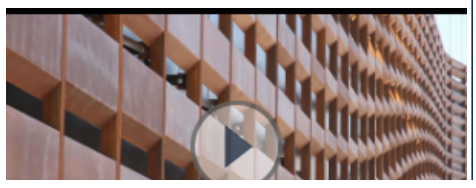

recession as the emirate re-assessed its financial situation. Despite being the world's fourth-largest oil producer and holder of a sovereign wealth fund estimated to be worth $500 billion, Abu Dhabi conducted a series of efforts to scale back and review priorities. This state of affairs forced construction and design firms to cope with planning and even payment delays.

"We've gone through, maybe, the Middle Eastern version of austerity measures," said Ross Ensor, a vice president with Leo A Daly, which opened an office there in 2010. "They really did put the brakes on and re-assess."

Now, Ensor is expecting approval soon of a health-care-complex design on which his firm has been working. "Two other health- care-related projects for which we had seen inertia on" seem to be showing signs of life, he adds.

The projects kicking back into gear include the $27-billion Saadiyat Island development, including the Abu Dhabi branches of the Louvre and Guggenheim museums. The Abu Dhabi Tourism Development and Investment Co. (TDIC) has begun the process of tendering the main contracts for the Louvre museum, says Mahra Al Qassimi, a TDIC spokeswoman. She said the contract is expected to be awarded by the fourth quarter of this year and that the museum is now scheduled to open in 2015.

That official expectation attracted the attention of Khaldoun Tabari, the chief executive of regional construction giant Drake & Scull. "We are trying to prequalify at the moment, and we will be bidding," he told a local magazine, Arabian Business. "With the recent announcement in Abu Dhabi, things are back on track. Not as it used to be, but a lot of projects are back."

Al Qassimi of the TDIC declined to provide a schedule for bids or a construction timeline for other museum projects, saying they "will be announced in due course."

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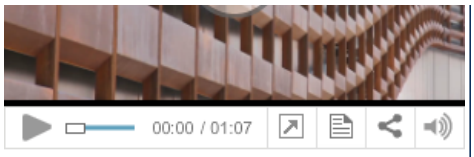

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