

" SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPE DESIGN
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NATURAL RESOURCES. THIS APPLIES
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MANAGEMENT AND THE APPLICATION
OF DESIGN CRITERIA. "

GARDENS IN THE DESERT: A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Saudi Arabia is the size of Central Europe. By comparison, its area would reach from Copenhagen to Palermo, from Paris to Budapest. In the middle of this huge desert area lies Riyadh, at the crossing point of the most important trade routes. Thanks to the abundance of water in the dry valley, the *Wadi Hanifah*, an oasis could develop here.

Desert and oasis - these two terms belong together. The one cannot be imagined without the other. The Semitic word *Arab* describes the barren desert. An Arab is therefore a person who does not live in a city, but roams the desert. The desert is a habitat for humans only where there are oases within sufficient distances. It is of strategic importance for survival in the desert to protect and extend the water sources. Sustainable landscape design in dry climates must consider natural resources. This applies to both a balanced water management and the application of design criteria, and especially to the selection of the right plants which should be adapted to the natural plant community as far as possible. The landscaping for the Diplomatic Quarter in Riyadh and other projects in and around Saudi Arabia's capital have established themselves as good examples of these practices.

TUWAIQ PALACE IN RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA RECEIVED THE AGA KHAN AWARD FOR ARCHITECTURE IN 1998. IT WAS PRAISED FOR COMBINING BOTH ARCHITECTURAL QUALITIES AND INNOVATIVE LANDSCAPING.

Trees, water, and the colour green in Islam

All three great monotheistic religions originated in the Middle East and the scriptures of each of them reflect the landscape of this region. But none of these scriptures contains as many references to trees, gardens, and splashing water as does the Koran. Green was the colour of Mohammed the Prophet's warriors as more than a thousand years ago they conquered half of the world and finally built gardens representing their idea of paradise from Andalusia to India.



A RICHLY LANDSCAPED
ENVIRONMENT SURROUNDS
THE DIPLOMATIC QUARTER IN
SAUDI ARABIA.

Oil wealth suddenly catapulted Saudi Arabia, known to the Romans as *Arabia deserta*, from centuries of being a Bedouin state with an archaic social structure, into the modern world. In a country where nature is considerably more sensitive than it is in Central Europe, rapid development brings with it the disadvantage of a progressive expansion of the desert. The palm tree and the colour green are a symbol of the state, and it is not surprising that trees and gardens are attributed a very different value to that which they have in Germany.

My first visit to Saudi Arabia was in 1974 and resulted in the conviction, which remains unchanged, that this country needs trees and gardens more than anything else. A series of simple principles have served to make our client increasingly sympathetic to the ideas of landscape and environment, including the idea that trees should be planted before houses were built in the Diplomatic Quarter and the fact that recycling water could mean each person provided sufficient for six trees. In the Diplomatic Quarter and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Staff Housing, these principles have been consistently applied to the extent that now, every weekend, some 5,000 car-loads of people from the city of Riyadh come to the gardens of the Diplomatic Quarter and spend their leisure time in the extensive landscape in order to seek closer contact with nature. This is something which we never foresaw during the planning stage, but is a gratifying testimony to the success of our work.