

The biggest, yes, but by far the smartest

Esquire's resident design expert **CYRIL ZAMMIT** on EXPO2020's grand plans



As you may have heard, this month marks the long-awaited opening of Expo2020 Dubai. The pandemic-induced postponement, may just turn out to be a blessing in disguise, as it allows for the global event to coincide with the UAE's Golden Jubilee. Every cloud has a silver lining. Or in this case, a golden one.

In terms of milestones, I recently celebrated 12 years of living in the UAE. Over that time I have seen it grow in status to a country that can now rightfully hold court in the international arena. In many ways, the Expo is a catalyst that represents what the UAE is about.

Expo in Dubai will mark the first time it has been held in the Arab world—exactly 170 years after the inaugural event was held in London—and they do not plan on letting it go by quietly. Some constructions like the Al Wasl Plaza is as wide as two Airbus A380s wing-to-wing, and taller than the leaning tower of Pisa. The site spreads over 438 hectares (two times the size of Monaco), and will have 300,000 volunteers working to help build part of the storytelling that they will likely one day tell their children and grand-children.

But while this is the, by quite some distance, the biggest ever Expo, it is also the smartest.

When Dubai won the bid in November 2013 the idea was to deliver one of the visions of HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. That vision was called “Connecting Minds, Creating the Future” a progressive and future-facing vision that has become a fundamental part of the DNA of the UAE.

What the Expo will showcase is a brilliant example of a positive universalism. Not the ugly globalisation which tends to erase individualism, but an ode to a different and distinctive identity of human kind. It will present ideas that will challenge the world,

showing ways that it can be more inclusive, and have a better understanding of cultural differences.

As you would expect, there is a strong focus on new technologies, and Expo2020 Dubai will demonstrate that people should not be afraid of the future, but embrace it. In the past the World Expo was the birthplace of many technologies including the washing machine (1862), typewriter (1876), phonograph (1878), X-ray machine (1904), nylon or even the mobile phone in Osaka in 1971.

As exciting as it is to be starting this month, the true success of an Expo will not be in the next six months of its public activation, it will be in its legacy. A vast majority of the buildings will be reused, making the site both an example to past sites (that were left to become ghost towns) and the future ones like Osaka in 2025 whose theme is ‘Designing Future Societies for Our Lives.’

As you can probably guess, it is not just the here and now that matters. Dubai has also considered how Expo will guide its long-term plans, kicking off the beginning of the UAE's Centennial plans in 2071. Hopefully, we'll all still be around by then, and if not I'm sure our grandchildren will have heard the tales. ☺

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