

SAUDI NATIONAL DAY
SPECIAL COVERAGE

ALL THE KING'S MEN PAGE 3
AT-TURAIIF – A GIFT FROM THE PAST PAGES 4-5
BORN IN BROOKLYN, HEART IN DIRIYAH PAGE 7
FORTRESS SYMBOL OF SAUDI UNITY PAGE 10
PRINCESS WHO INSPIRED A KING PAGE 11
FRONTIERS OF THE POSSIBLE PAGE 12

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HERITAGE

Shaping the future, preserving the past

On Saudi National Day, Arab News celebrates Diriyah — the priceless cultural treasure that was the birthplace of the Kingdom

NOOR NUGALI
ASSISTANT EDITOR IN CHIEF

When we at Arab News decided that Diriyah — the Kingdom's birthplace — would be the center of our special coverage to mark the 91st Saudi National Day, little did we know that it would be like entering a time machine, allowing us to travel between the past, the present and the future.



Our efforts took us back centuries, to the defining moments that shaped our present; we revisited the epic sacrifices of our kings and the heroes who fought beside them. The journey has also taken us forward, to the dawn of a new era and an exciting new role for Diriyah, soon to become a world-class destination.

Through the pages of this souvenir issue, and through the interactive Deep Dive on our website, you will discover that Diriyah has always been central to the story of Saudi Arabia.

It was here, on the banks of the



Many parts of Salwa Palace remain intact, showcasing traditional Najdi architectural techniques. Supplied

Wadi Hanifah, that the forebears of King Abdulaziz settled in the 15th century. It was here that the flower of the First Saudi State blossomed in the 18th century, and that peace, security and unity first spread across the Arabian Peninsula. Here, too, the Najdi masterbuilders created the imposing palaces of At-Turaiif, which in

2010 was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

And in 1819, it was here that the great disaster of the siege of Diriyah befell the embryonic Saudi state. The destruction and persecution that followed might have finished another people. But out of that calamity grew a fresh — and ultimately successful

— determination to forge a bright future of self-governance.

Last but not least, I need to say that for the past three months I have been working with an enthusiastic team at Arab News to bring to life this great story, and I owe them a huge thank you for making this project a success.

The coverage we present to you

Our efforts took us back centuries, to the defining moments that shaped our present; we revisited the epic sacrifices of our kings and the heroes who fought beside them.

today has also been made possible by the unprecedented access and support we got from the "rock star team" at DGDA. But most importantly, I want to thank both my Editor in Chief Faisal J. Abbas and DGDA's Group CEO Jerry Inzerillo, for without their combined passion, persistence and punctuality, this project would have not seen the light of day.

A final note for both our readers at home and abroad: A Saudi historian once told me that, throughout history, Arabia had been united only twice. The first was during the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the subsequent caliphates, and the second during the rule of Al-Sauds.

It is remarkable to think that had this country not been unified a mere century ago by King

Abdulaziz, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia today would most likely be a broken country ruled by a dozen different tribes.

Researching elements of our National Day coverage took me back to a world I had all but forgotten, to when I was a student. Then, I had heard of Diriyah, had learned about it and memorized the key dates and glorious moments in its history, but had never actually seen it.

Three years ago, when I visited the project for the first time, I was spellbound, not only by the wonder and beauty that is the UNESCO site of At-Turaiif, but by the bold ambition for the entire Diriyah area.

A nation's past is a fragile thing, to be cared for, protected and built upon.

Have a joyful National Day!

Twitter: @NoorNugali

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Spotlight

Diriyah Past, Present and Future

THE HEROES

All the king's men

Led by King Abdulaziz, they changed the course of history in the Arabian Peninsula with their courage and heroism

Jonathan Gemall London

"Hero" is a word all too easily bandied about. But on a simple metal plaque at Masmak fortress in Riyadh are recorded the names of 63 men to whose heroism the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia owes its very existence.

After their defeat by the rival Rashidi dynasty at the Battle of Mulyda in 1891, the Al-Saud were driven out of Riyadh and into 11 long years of exile.

That ended on Jan. 15, 1902, when Abdulaziz ibn Abdul Rahman Al-Saud and a small force stormed Riyadh's Masmak fortress, ousting the Rashidis for good in the single most important founding event in the story of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Unable to stomach exile any longer, Abdulaziz and his volunteers set out from Kuwait in late September 1901. Abdulaziz decided to surprise Riyadh's defenders by attacking from an unexpected direction, and at first led his men southwest, keeping the Gulf coast to their left.

Surviving on little more than butter, dates and the water in their goatskins, at night they laid up in desert hollows, careful not to be seen by wandering tribesmen.

Unknown to them, waiting to be discovered beneath the desert sands where they lay their heads each night, was the world's largest oilfield. Within a generation it would transform the fortunes of the state whose very existence they were fighting for.

By November the small force was camped in the vicinity of the modern town of Haradh, on the northern edge of the Empty Quarter and some 250 km from Riyadh. It was there that a messenger from Kuwait caught up with the party, bearing bad news — the Turks were said to be coming to the aid of the Rasheed in Riyadh.



As Robert Lacey wrote, under the guidance of King Abdulaziz Al-Saud (inset below) 'the Al-Sauds were masters in their own home again.' Getty Images



The fate of all 63 of the men who accompanied King Abdulaziz Al-Saud to Riyadh in 1902 is lost to history. What is certain is that all earned the epithet 'hero.'

In Kuwait, it was assumed that Abdulaziz would give up. Instead, goes the legend, he gathered his men about him and invited those who wished to return to Kuwait to do so, without shame.

As for himself, he said, he would prefer to die at the gates of Riyadh, and those of a like mind were welcome to join him.

All stood by him, crying out "To the death!", and only the messenger returned to Kuwait, carrying a message from Abdulaziz to his father: "Tell him we shall meet again, God willing, in Riyadh."

Abdulaziz may have been courageous, but he was not foolhardy.

He took his men further south into the Empty Quarter, where they lay up unseen for almost 50 days near the oasis of Yabrin, hoping to lull Riyadh's garrison into a false sense of security.

The plan worked. They were seven days' ride from Riyadh and Abdulaziz timed his party's arrival to coincide with the thin moon and dark nights at the end of Ramadan. As the city's defenders slept late after the Eid Al-Fitr celebrations of the night before, Abdulaziz and

his men gathered on the plateau overlooking the city.

At sunset the assault party moved silently forward, climbing the walls of the city and taking up position in a house opposite the gates of Masmak fortress.

The next morning, as the Rasheedi governor, Ajan, and a handful of guards emerged from the fortress, Abdulaziz and his men rushed forward. There are various accounts of what happened

next, but most agree on the following dramatic narrative.

As Ajan and his guards turned back for the safety of the fortress, the governor was tackled to the ground by Abdulaziz himself. As the future King fought with Ajan, Abdulaziz's life was saved by his cousin, Abdullah ibn Jalawi ibn Turki Al-Saud, who slew a guard who was about to strike his cousin from behind.

As defenders on the battlements opened fire, a spear thrown by Fahad ibn Jalawi ibn Turki Al-Saud, another cousin of Abdulaziz, missed Ajan and became embedded in the woodwork of the gate, where the tip of the weapon can still be seen today.

Wounded, Ajan managed to slip inside the fortress through the small opening within the gate, but Abdullah plunged in after him and slew him.

It was all over. The garrison surrendered and later that day thousands of Riyadh's citizens gathered to pledge allegiance to Abdulaziz. In the words of author Robert Lacey's 1981 book "The Kingdom", "the Al-Sauds were masters in their own home again — and they have remained the masters ever since."

The fate of all 63 of the men who accompanied Abdulaziz to Riyadh is lost to history. What is certain is that all earned the epithet "hero."

On that fateful day in January 1902, Abdulaziz ordered 23 men to remain in reserve, guarding the camels, and assaulted Masmak fortress with the remaining 40.

Among them were 10 members of Abdulaziz's own family, all of whom played a key part that day in the restoration of the Al-Saud.

Abdullah ibn Jalawi fought in many of the subsequent battles that led to the unification of the Nejd and the Hijaz. He would later serve as governor of Al-Qasim and Al-Ahsa and lived long enough to witness the foundation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Sept. 23, 1932. He died in 1935.

Saud the Great and Mohammed the future

DR. BADRAN ALHONAIHEN

In the folds of the rich history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, there have been a number of necessary pivotal transformations. None of them would have happened without the wisdom and sound judgement of the rulers of this great country since Prince Mana' Al-Muraid, the thirteenth grandfather of King Salman, set foot in Diriyah nearly 600 years ago and established his emirate there.

The first Saudi state was founded by Imam Mohammed ibn Saud, King Salman's fifth grandfather, in 1727, followed by the success of Imam Turki ibn Abdullah, King Salman's third grandfather, in reviving the dream state project through the establishment of the second Saudi state in 1824.

Despite the difficulties and challenges, the great hope lived on. King Abdulaziz led another attempt to realize the dream of his ancestors when he entered Riyadh in 1902, marking the start of the great unity project for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that bore fruit in 1932.

Each stage had its imam who dealt with its requirements with skill and anticipated the construction of an exceptional future. The sons of that royal Saudi family kept on giving the land of their fathers and grandfathers the knight necessary for each stage.

The imams — Mohammed ibn Saud, Turki ibn Abdullah, Faisal ibn Turki and King

Abdulaziz — were visionaries who planned with insight and a hope for success despite the difficulties and multiple challenges.

The land of Arabia has blessed us with a great figure whose influence has extended from Diriyah to the rest of the region since the mid-18th century — an influence that we still discern to this day — in Imam Saud ibn Abdulaziz Al-Kabeer, the third imam of the first Saudi state.

Imam Saud showed great leadership qualities at an early age. He was the commander of Saudi forces in the era of his father, who achieved many resounding victories over the enemies of the state. His imamate was reckoned as the golden period of the first Saudi state at the height of the greatness of the state.

For this, he was rightly called "Al-Kabeer" or "the Great," given the greatness and expansion of the Kingdom's reach under his reign. The state's influence extended to 95 percent of the Arabian Peninsula, from the Arabian Gulf to the Red Sea, where all the citizens enjoyed security, stability and well-being. Moreover, the state's resources grew substantially under that great unity and economic diversity while the leadership made the most of all its riches for the first time in the history of the Arabian Peninsula.

It is no mystery that for more than 1,000 years, the people of the Arabian Peninsula



Dr. Badran Alhonihi is the Research & Historical Studies Associate Director at the Diriyah Gate Development Authority. Twitter @balhonihi

have missed the unity and the peace that the region has witnessed during the Saudi era. Imam Saud was a man of vision, exploring the depths of a reality that has not yet been discovered in the Arabian Peninsula over the past centuries. He took it upon himself to secure the means of Hajj and Umrah, which certainly contributed to the increase in the numbers of pilgrims to Makkah and Madinah after they were annexed from the Ottoman empire, and went ahead with the implementation of his vision and dream, despite tendentious attempts to dissuade him from his endeavor by the Ottoman and Persian states.

He was the first in Saudi history to cover the Kaaba with a Kiswa made of textile brought from the peninsula, and specifically from Al-Ahsa, part of his efforts to invest in the outstanding textile industry in eastern Arabia.

Imam Saud valiantly confronted all the external campaigns against his great state. He fiercely defended his country and repelled threats, frustrating the perpetrators who grew angry with every great success he achieved for his Kingdom thanks to his strategic planning, savvy and foresight.

He was called "Abu Shawareb," which means the man with a moustache. According to Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, he was given this nickname because he had a beard and moustache longer than what had been normal for the Saudi royal family in the past.

Imam Saud's vision expanded to include all aspects of life, most notably the cultural aspects, as evidenced by the towering clay palaces built in Diriyah, as well as the great architectural development witnessed during his reign. Another proof of the greatness of that period is the aesthetics of Saudi manuscripts written during his reign through decorations and engravings, showcasing his interest in Arabic calligraphy and its development and dissemination. He paid attention to the finest details and followed up on the students learning this art and encouraged them by providing financial rewards to the most promising young calligraphers.

This royal family continues to fulfill its promises by giving to the nation its knight at this stage, and God has granted us the man of the present and the bright future, the owner of Vision 2030, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the brilliant architect of the strategic plan that will invest the state's resources to consolidate its strengths through a pioneering vision, a careful understanding of reality and the passion and ambition it generates in every Saudi man and woman.

Today, with the anniversary of Saudi National Day, our thoughts sail back through the paths of our rich Saudi history, to recall the similarities between yesterday and today through its events and personalities, revealing that today perfectly mirrors yesterday.

DIRIYAH GATE

A gift from the past

The historic city of At-Turaif is the very foundation stone of modern Saudi Arabia, and the inspiration for the next chapter in the Kingdom's story

Jonathan Gornall London

The imposing 18th-century mudbrick city, an archaeological treasure trove of royal palaces, mosques, homes and defensive towers, stands just 10 km west of the Kingdom Tower in Saudi Arabia's modern capital, Riyadh.

Here, on the site of the capital of the First Saudi State in what today is revered as the birthplace of the Kingdom, protected since 2010 as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the first chapters in the story of Saudi Arabia were written.

Today, as one of the most ambitious of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 giga-projects begins to take shape around it, the carefully restored national treasure that is At-Turaif is inspiring the next chapters in a story that goes back hundreds of years.

Launched in 2017, Diriyah Gate project will create a global cultural and heritage destination expected to attract over 27 million visitors a year. When complete, it will be home to museums, galleries and academies offering insights into Saudi history, art and culture, beautiful public spaces, parks and walks and numerous restaurants, hotels, shops and homes.

Binding them all together, in a tribute to both the sustainability of the original Najdi architecture that created At-Turaif and Saudi Arabia's determination to develop its economy beyond reliance upon fossil fuels, will be the humble mud brick.

The true wonder of At-Turaif, concluded the nomination document that secured the listing of At-Turaif by UNESCO in 2010, was that such a city built from mud, purposely destroyed and then long abandoned, was "still standing," with its "imposing facades and towers challenging time."

The buildings' survival was "certainly favored by the extreme dryness of central Arabia, but is also due to extraordinary quality of the buildings, to the quality of the building material and to the skill and know-how of the Najdi master builders who created it."

The mud-brick buildings of At-Turaif "have been there for more than 250 years and have survived erosion, brutal invasion by the Ottoman empire and many other problems," said Dr Badran

Al-Honaihen, director of research for the Diriyah Gate Development Authority and the site's culture and heritage manager.

This, he added, was an object lesson in sustainability reliant on materials taken from the local environment, and one that is being learnt by the craftsmen being trained "to work with mud bricks and focusing on sustainability, whether by using the stones and soil from the wadi or by using the local plants and trees that were used to create such tall buildings as Salwa palace."

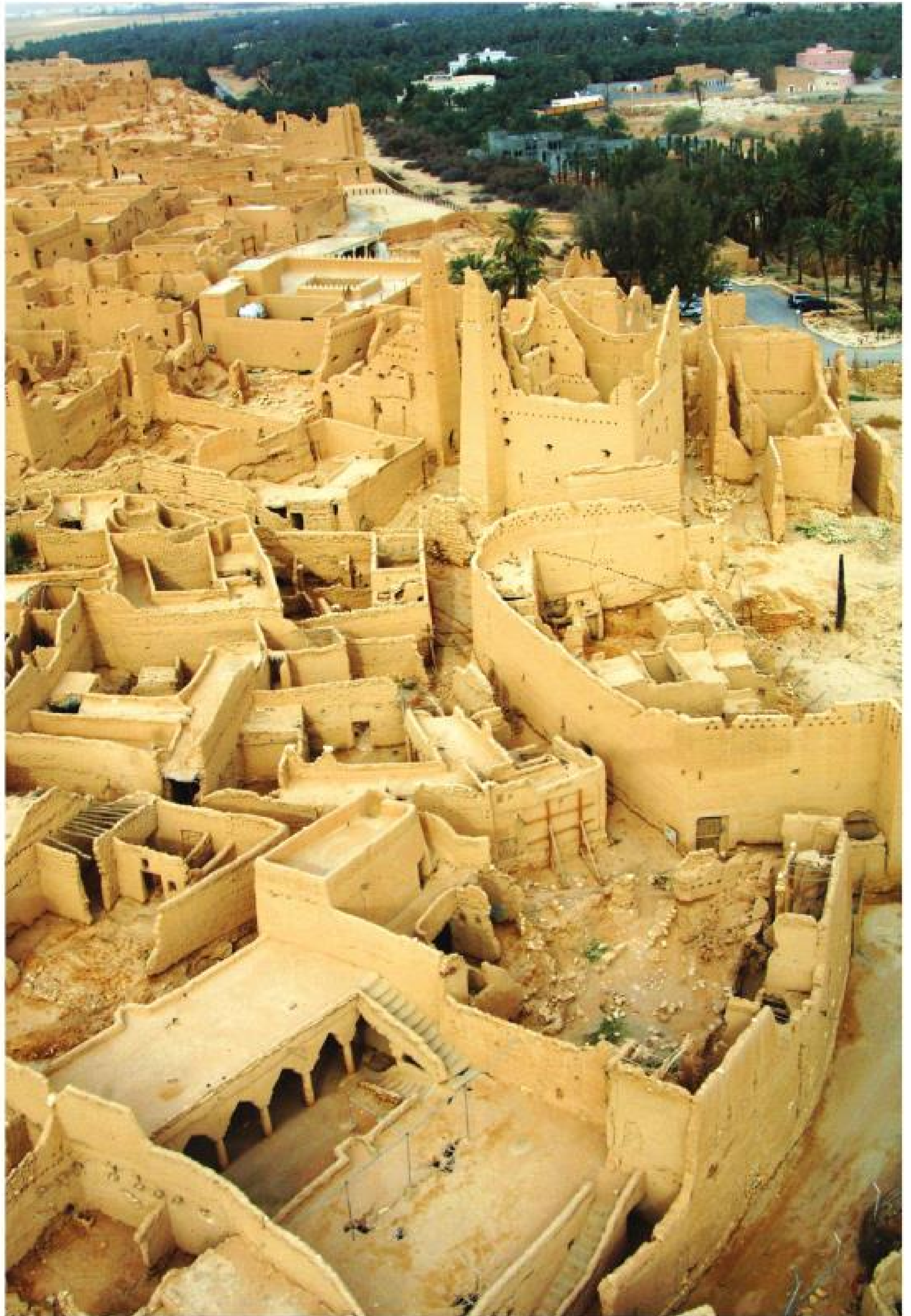
The buildings and layout of Diriyah will echo the look and the substance of At-Turaif, recognized as the outstanding surviving example of a unique Najdi architectural style that evolved over the centuries in central Arabia, in response to the harsh conditions and the few naturally available materials: Sun-fired adobe bricks, limestone quarried from the banks of the wadi, and timber harvested from the hardy tamarisk tree.

During the restoration of At-Turaif, which began in 1998, many of the old skills had to be remastered and craftsmen trained afresh. Now, in the construction of Diriyah Gate, those skills are once again coming into their own — millions of mud bricks, a blend of wadi mud, straw and water, are being manufactured in the traditional way to supply the key building material for the new city that is growing up around the old.

That city, designed in part as a living museum, will tell the story of the Kingdom and of the first settlement along the banks of the Wadi Hanifah, where visitors will soon be able to stroll or ride on horseback through the verdant park that will follow the course of the waterway.

It was that lifegiving waterway and the fertile soil it generated that gave birth to Diriyah, an oasis settlement founded along its banks in the 15th century.

It was in 1446 that the first steps were taken on the long road toward the foundation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, exactly 486 years later. They were taken, said Al-Honaihen, by Mana' Al-Muraide, leader of the Marada clan of the Al-Duru tribe of Bani



Historians date the foundation of the First Saudi State to 1727, when Saud's son Mohammed expelled the last of the Al-Watban to Mesopotamia.

Hanifah, "the father of the Saudi Royal Family."

The clan had originated in central Arabia, but generations earlier had travelled east and established a settlement at Qatif on the shore of the Gulf. They named it Diriyah, after their tribal name, Al-Duru — and they carried the name back with them when they returned to the Arabian heartland in the 15th century.

They came at the invitation of Mana'a's cousin, Ibn Dera', the ruler of Hajr, a town on the site

of modern-day Riyadh. Ibn Dera' was keen to see unused fertile land he owned populated and put to good use by a friendly people, and suggested Mana'a and his clan should return from the coast to settle along the banks of the wadi.

They did, and in 1446 Mana'a and his clan migrated 400 km from old Diriyah to the center of the peninsula, where they established the new Diriyah.

The clan set about transforming their land into a secure, comfortable, and productive oasis, nourished by the water of the Wadi Hanifah and the fertile soils along its banks. It was perfectly positioned at the crossroads of trading routes connecting the Red Sea cities of Makkah and Madinah in the west to Mesopotamia in the north and the Arabian Gulf in the east.

At the time, none could have foreseen the great destiny that lay in store for the settlement — and, indeed, 300 years would pass before the path would become clear.

Nevertheless, said Al-Honaihen, "these events were among the most prominent to take place in the Arabian Peninsula. Mana'a's arrival laid the building blocks for the establishment of the greatest state in the history of the Arabian Peninsula after the Prophetic State and the Rashidun Caliphate."

Over the years,

divisions among the Marada occurred, with the Al-Muqrin and Al-Watban the two main rival groups, but in about 1720, Saud ibn Mohammed of Al-Muqrin assumed the leadership and, with this momentous transfer of power, the House of Saud was founded.

Historians date the foundation of the First Saudi State to 1727, when Saud's son Mohammed expelled the last of the Al-Watban to Mesopotamia. Imam Mohammed ibn Saud, said Al-Honaihen, was the fifth grandfather of King Salman, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the sixth grandfather of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and "one of the most important figures" in the story of Saudi Arabia.

After he became emir in 1727, Mohammed "focused his efforts on stabilizing the region and securing routes for commerce and pilgrimage. Under his rule, the emirate of Diriyah became one of the strongest independent emirates in Najd and was free of the dominance of regional powers."

Imam Mohammed passed away in 1765, "after successfully paving the way for the unification of all regions of the Arabian Peninsula under the First Saudi State. As the person who founded the Saudi state and strengthened its influence, he remains to this day a major symbol of Saudi unity."

That unity was built upon by his successor, Imam Abdulaziz, and it was during his reign, in about



King Salman pictured laying the foundation stone to mark the launch of the Diriyah Gate development project.

Diriyah

Past, Present and Future

Like father, like son

King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman during the opening ceremony of Diriyah, Nov 20, 2019

Bander Al-Galoud



1766, that the royal district of At-Turaif was founded and work began on Salwa Palace, one of the most spectacular of the buildings that can be seen at the UNESCO site today.

In 1803, Abdulaziz was succeeded by his son, Saud ibn Abdulaziz ibn Mohammed ibn Saud. He was known as Saud the Great "due to the greatness the Saudi state had achieved under his reign, stretching from the edges of the Euphrates and the Levant in the north to Sanaa and Muscat in the south, and from the coast of the Arabian Gulf in the east to the Red Sea in the west.

"During Imam Saud's rule, the state was rich, proud, and powerful," extending to Makkah and Madinah and covering an area larger than today's Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

But the Ottomans could ignore the challenge to their authority no more.

In 1811, forces under the command of Ibrahim Pasha, the son of Mohammed Ali Pasha, the Ottoman governor of Egypt, landed at Yanbu. It was the start of a bloody six-year campaign that would end with the destruction of Diriyah and the abandonment of At-Turaif.

After a series of one-sided but valiantly fought battles, the Saudis were slowly but surely driven back until, by March 1818, they had their backs to the walls of Diriyah.

A simple cannonball, unearthed recently during restoration work at At-Turaif, tells the story of what happened next.

It was workmen who found it, discovered during routine preservation work on one of the historic buildings at At-Turaif.

"We were doing some repairs to a foundation," said Adam Wilkinson, chief of heritage and culture at Diriyah Gate Development Authority.

"Mad foundations get worn away quite quickly, and the practise is to replace them with a bit of stone. You dig down to the bedrock and put your stone there.

"At At-Turaif the bedrock is literally only a few centimeters below the ground and, upon digging down to that, one of the workmen came across this object and immediately called for our in-house archaeologist to come and have

THE FOUNDATIONS OF A STATE

<p>1446 Manaa Al-Muraide, leader of the Marada clan of the Al-Duru' tribe of Bani Hanifah, leads his people inland from a town near Qatif on the Gulf coast to settle on the banks of the Wadi Hanifah. They name their new settlement after the home they have left behind — Diriyah.</p>	<p>1720 Saud ibn Mohammed of the Al-Muqrin branch of the Marada becomes ruler of Diriyah. The Saudi Royal Family is named after him.</p>	<p>1727 Imam Mohammed ibn Saud succeeds his father as ruler of Diriyah and founds the First Saudi State.</p>
<p>1765 Imam Mohammed dies and is succeeded by his son, Imam Abdulaziz ibn Mohammed ibn Saud.</p>	<p>1766 Work begins on Salwa Palace, signaling an expansion of the district of At-Turaif.</p>	<p>1805 At the height of its power, the First Saudi State rules most of the Arabian Peninsula, challenging the authority of the Ottoman empire.</p>
<p>1818 Diriyah is attacked and destroyed after a six-month siege by an Ottoman army led by Ibrahim Pasha. At-Turaif is abandoned and Diriyah's ruler, Imam Abdullah ibn Saud, is taken to Istanbul and executed.</p>	<p>1821 Partially rebuilt, Diriyah is once again attacked and destroyed by an Ottoman army under commander Husayn Bey, who embarks on a brutal campaign of terror.</p>	<p>1824 Imam Turki ibn Abdullah ibn Mohammed ibn Saud, a hero in the defence of Diriyah in 1818, founds the Second Saudi State in Riyadh.</p>
<p>1891 The Second Saudi State is toppled due to Ottoman aggression and conflict between the sons of Imam Faisal ibn Turki, Abdullah and Saud. Its last ruler, Abdul Rahman ibn Faisal Al-Saud — father of Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al-Saud, future founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia — finds refuge for his family in Kuwait.</p>	<p>1902 Abdulaziz ibn Abdul Rahman Al-Saud, better known to the wider world as Ibn Saud, recaptures Riyadh with a small body of men and proclaims the Third Saudi State.</p>	<p>1932 Sept. 23 After a long but ultimately successful campaign, King Abdulaziz formally unites his twin realms of Nejd and the Hijaz to form the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.</p>
<p>1998 As governor of Riyadh province, future king Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, son of King Abdulaziz, initiates the Historical Diriyah Development Program.</p>	<p>2010 At-Turaif becomes a UNESCO World Heritage Site.</p>	<p>2019 King Salman lays the foundation stone at Diriyah Gate, a \$50 billion project to create a global heritage and cultural destination centered on the historic site of At-Turaif.</p>

a look."

The cannonball "was very carefully removed and we recorded exactly where it was found," in what the team called Area A. "It's behind Salwa Palace, so for the cannonball to have got there it must have been fired over, or through, quite a few buildings."

Or men. A little over 200 years ago that ball erupted from the mouth of a cannon, fired with lethal intent by an Ottoman artilleryman, part of the vast army laying siege to At-Turaif, and to the very idea of a nascent,

independent Arab state.

The 5,000-or-so defenders of Diriyah, outnumbered six to one, held out for six months. They sold their lives dearly — by some estimates, for each of the 1,200 defenders who fell, 10 of Ibrahim Pasha's men breathed their last in the shadow of the walls of Diriyah.

Many gave their lives in the heroic last-stand defense of 1818. When the city finally fell, hundreds were tortured and executed on the orders of Ibrahim Pasha, whose army throughout the merciless campaign had sent the severed heads or ears of their victims back to Cairo to earn a bloody bounty. Others were driven into exile or captivity.

Martyrdom awaited Abdullah ibn Saud, the last ruler of the First Saudi State who

had led his people throughout the siege. He was taken in chains to Constantinople, the seat of Ottoman power. There, after refusing to forsake his religious convictions or swear allegiance to the Turkish dynasty, he was beheaded in public, his head crushed in a mortar and his body strung up as a warning to anyone else who might dare to challenge the authority of the Ottoman empire. As a final insult, his death warrant was pinned to his body with a dagger thrust into his chest.

Diriyah was destroyed, and then destroyed again in 1821 by another Ottoman army after a brief Saudi revival. It was the end of Diriyah as the seat of Saudi power and the royal district of At-Turaif would never be occupied again.

Undeterred, however, the Saudis rose yet again, this time under the leadership of Imam Turki ibn Abdullah Al-Saud who finally drove out the Ottomans for good in 1823 and, with Diriyah and At-Turaif in ruins, chose the nearby intact garrison town of Riyadh as the capital of the Second Saudi State.

This, too, would fall when in 1891 the Saudis were overthrown by the rival Rashidi dynasty but, as every Saudi schoolchild knows, that was not destined to be the end of the story. The tale of the heroic recapture of Riyadh in 1902 by Abdulaziz ibn Abdul Rahman ibn Faisal Al-Saud, the son of Abdulrahman ibn Faisal Al-Saud, the exiled ruler of Riyadh, is engraved in the heart of every Saudi.

Fittingly, it would be his son, Prince Salman ibn Abdulaziz Al-Saud, the future King Salman, who during his 50-year tenure as governor of Riyadh recognized the value of At-Turaif as a heritage asset and inspired its restoration and the rehabilitation of the Wadi Hanifah.

The decade-long restoration of the neglected buildings began in earnest after the launch of the Historic Diriyah Development Program in 1998, under the auspices of the Royal Commission for Riyadh City. With the work all but complete, in 2010 At-Turaif won recognition as a

UNESCO World Heritage site of "outstanding universal value" and in 2017 the site was handed over to the newly formed Diriyah Gate Development Authority.

On Nov. 20, 2019, King Salman laid the foundation stone at Diriyah Gate, a \$20 billion project to create a global heritage and cultural destination centered on the historic site of At-Turaif, the birthplace of the Saudi state.

When Diriyah opens fully, visitors from around the globe will be able to immerse themselves in the history and culture of a Kingdom that in less than 300 years has grown from an idea born in a small desert community to become the largest and most prosperous nation in the Arab world.

It will, said

Talal Kensara, head strategy management at DGDA, "be one of the most amazing cultural gathering places in the world."

The entire project "will be rolled out over a number of years but by 2030 the whole site will be fully activated."

For a project so closely associated with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 plan — doing its part, in the words of the Crown Prince in his foreword to the vision document, to "strengthen the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's position as a great nation in which we should all feel an immense pride" — it is a fitting target date.

Kensara freely admits that Diriyah Gate is the biggest challenge he has ever faced — and he is no stranger to major roles in big organizations. With more than 16 years' experience in strategy and business development, before joining the Diriyah Gate Development Authority he was vice-deputy minister for shared services at the Ministry of Economy and Planning.

"Yes, it is a huge challenge," he said, "but we are all very excited, because it's not only about the assignment but we also feel responsible, even if only in a very small way, for shaping the future of Saudi Arabia.

"We have a great organization and a team of very talented people, and we cannot wait to see the dream of Diriyah Gate come true."



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Diriyah hosted many events such as G20 and Formula E races in the UNESCO world heritage site. Getty Images



Diriyah



Past, Present and Future

JERRY INZERILLO
CEO, DIRIYAH GATE DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Born in Brooklyn, but his heart is in Diriyah

‘This is the mother city,’ says the CEO giving the Kingdom’s birthplace a \$50bn makeover

Frank Kane Dubai
Illustration by Luis Grafena

Jerry Inzerillo might just be walking proof of the adage: “You can take the boy out of Brooklyn, but you can’t take Brooklyn out of the boy.”

Everything about Inzerillo — accent, demeanor, sartorial style, flashing grin and deadpan delivery — screams of his origins in the borough just across the East River from Manhattan.

He is proud of the place that gave him his first taste of the glamor and glitz of the global hotel industry, even if he had to cross the bridge to sample it as a lowly teenage “busboy” in New York’s Gotham Hotel.

He has a lifetime of achievement in the hospitality industry, as was recently recognized by Hotels Magazine which awarded him the title of “corporate hotelier of the year, 2021.”

After a star-studded career across the global hospitality business, Saudi Arabia seems to have given 67-year old Inzerillo a dynamic new chapter.

As CEO of the Diriyah Gate Development Authority, he is in charge of a \$50.6 billion project to transform the historic site of the Kingdom’s foundation into a global tourism attraction, on a par with the Parthenon in Athens or the Colosseum in Rome.

He has taken to that challenge with infectious enthusiasm. He sings the project’s praises at every opportunity in forums, interviews and media events, never wasting an opportunity to deliver his mantra: “There’s only one Diriyah.”

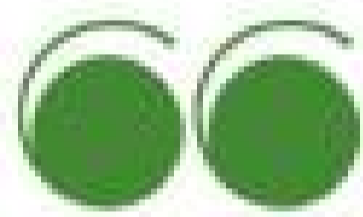
In a recent interview, Inzerillo encapsulated the essence of the Diriyah project. “It is the mother city, the principal city, and the birthplace of the Kingdom in the Arabian Peninsula and of the House of Al-Saud,” he said.

But if Diriyah is a uniquely Saudi project, combining heritage and tradition with modern tourism tastes, Inzerillo has given it a global flavor befitting the Kingdom’s ambitions to open up to the world in the Vision 2030 strategy.

His CV is unashamedly cosmopolitan. From Gotham in Manhattan he went to hotelier training in Las Vegas, then back to New York in one of a series of moves that took him higher up the ladder of the US hotel business.

Jobs in Houston, Dallas and Miami came and went, and he found himself back in New York at a “pivotal moment” in his career in 1990 when he was asked by the mayor to help organize the visit of Nelson Mandela, just out of prison in South Africa.

Inzerillo became a close personal friend of the African leader, and still likes to show family pictures with Mandela from his contact-rich mobile. He helped



As CEO of the Diriyah Gate Development Authority, he is tasked with transforming the historic site of the Kingdom’s foundation into a tourism destination.

As a part of DGDA’s masterplan, Inzerillo aims to transform Diriyah into a global attraction for retail, hospitality, and culture. Supplied

plan the new South African president’s inauguration, and moved full time to the country to work with legendary hotelier Sol Kerzner in the extravagant Sun City development.

Ever aware of the links between the hotels business and the world of entertainment and media, Inzerillo followed the Kerzner job with stints at IMG Artists and at the Forbes Travel Guide, where he remains vice chairman, before he was approached by Saudi Arabia for the Diriyah role.

Inzerillo is well aware that the ambitious project is close to the heart of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who has kept it on track and even upped its budget amid the pandemic.

He speaks with gratitude and admiration of the crown prince, “He’s the smartest guy in the room,” Inzerillo said recently, comparing him to the master-planners who laid out Paris and Manhattan in the accelerated strategy to implement Vision 2030.

However, Inzerillo is not blind to the challenges of creating a global tourism destination in a country that is home to the Two Holy Mosques, and which prides itself on traditional Islamic culture and mores. He recently related how, in the early days of the Diriyah project, respondents to international sampling would ask some “strange” questions, such as: “Am I allowed to stay in the same hotel room as my wife?”

He believes this naivety will evaporate once tourists start coming to Diriyah. Early visitors have been “astounded at the beauty of the Kingdom, and astonished at the warmth of the Saudi people and how much fun they had.”

Issues such as availability of alcohol or dress codes will pale into insignificance, he believes.

“Now you can go out to restaurants. The same beautiful restaurants you have everywhere, you have in Saudi now, with music, boys, girls, everybody having a good time. You have everything there,” he recently told an interviewer.

Though a favored project, Diriyah is only one of the “giga-projects” underway in the Kingdom, and has to contend for resources with others, such as NEOM, the Red Sea development and AIUA.

But Inzerillo insists: “They are not in competition. They’re very intelligently crafted to complement each other,” though he does seem to regard Diriyah as the gateway to the rest of the Kingdom’s leisure and cultural attractions. “We’re the first born, we’re the favorite son. The other projects are great, we love them, but there’s only one Diriyah,” he says, in that Brooklyn twang.



Diriyah Past, Present and Future



Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Russian President Vladimir Putin tour Al-Turaif district in October 2019. DGDA

The COVID-19 pandemic's main lesson: Value the partnership

No single country, no matter how well-developed or powerful, can successfully defeat the virus on its own

Russian President Vladimir Putin's tour of Diriyah, Saudi Arabia's ancient capital and cradle of the Saudi state, in October 2019 has become a symbol of the strengthening partnership between Russia and the Kingdom. The rapid rapprochement between the world's two biggest oil producers, which started after the first historic meeting between Putin and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in 2015, was a major new positive geopolitical factor in the pre-pandemic world.

From the very start, the Russian Direct Investment Fund and our partner the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia were the champions of this new alliance, which presented numerous opportunities to invest in sectors ranging from oil to tourism. This partnership led to a rise in joint investments by the two sovereign funds from zero to more than \$2.5 billion in five years.

It should not be forgotten that the alliance between Russia and Saudi Arabia pulled the world from the brink of economic collapse after oil prices dived in the early months of the pandemic in spring 2020. If our two nations had not acted responsibly and swiftly then, bringing stability back to oil markets,

the economic consequences of the pandemic would have been harder to predict, let alone cope with. This was an example of the leadership needed in turbulent times.

The mud-brick walls of Diriyah, which I visited on many occasions before the pandemic struck, provide an excellent setting for reflections on which values have stayed unchanged throughout human history, despite wars, pandemics and natural disasters. During the 18 months of our new shocking reality, with national lockdowns and restricted travel, humankind has learned an important lesson.

The value of international partnerships in the face of a common threat such as COVID-19 has grown exponentially. No single country, no matter how well-developed or powerful, can successfully defeat the virus on its own. History teaches us that human health is the natural sphere for international partnerships, regardless of ideological and other differences. Even at the height of the Cold War, Soviet and US scientists worked together to develop vaccines against the deadly polio disease and to eradicate smallpox from the face of the Earth.

In the RDIF, we place partnership at the core of what we do. Early in the pandemic, we started working with our partners both at home and internationally to develop the

KIRILL DMITRIEV



Kirill Dmitriev is CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund.

most effective strategy to deal with the new threat. This resulted in the development of high-speed testing systems, an anti-COVID-19 drug and the world's first vaccine against the coronavirus disease, Sputnik V, which is now authorized in 70 countries, home to more than 50 percent of the world's population. There are only three vaccines in the world with proven efficacy against COVID-19 above 90 percent, and Sputnik V is one of them.

The Sputnik V vaccine, developed by the Gamaleya National Research Center, was registered at an unprecedented speed because the goal of providing the vaccine to the global community was more important than slow, risk-averse, careful progression down a bureaucracy-ridden path.

Contrary to practices accepted in the global pharmaceutical industry, the RDIF shared the Sputnik V vaccine technology with 25 partners in 14 countries. Local producers in India — including the world's biggest vaccine manufacturer the Serum Institute — in Argentina, China, Mexico, South Korea, Serbia and other countries have become part of this cooperation, previously unheard of in the industry.

The Sputnik V international partnership will supply the world with 700 million vaccine doses per year. We are building a global

network of Sputnik V manufacturers who will coordinate rather than compete with each other, and we will continue to share vaccine-production technology with them.

The RDIF was also the first to offer other vaccine producers the opportunity to use the first component of Sputnik V — aka Sputnik Light — as a booster in vaccine cocktails as the world battles emerging variants.

The unipolar "my home is my fortress" approach is still common. Attempts to monopolize markets, build barriers to entry and destroy competition using red tape and bureaucracy are still ubiquitous. Working to supply the Sputnik V vaccine to various regions of the world, our team faced attacks from the unipolar world's partisans.

Examples of productive, constructive, and sustainable partnerships such as that between Russia and Saudi Arabia, or an international effort to produce the Sputnik V vaccine, should serve as models for the post-pandemic world as it strives to revive economic growth. The closer the path of partnership is followed, the sooner we will once again be able to see crowds of international visitors, from Russia and elsewhere, at Saudi Arabia's amazing heritage sites such as Diriyah, AlUla and many others.

Looking after the environment in 18th-century Najd

Environmental sustainability has been hardwired into the structure of the Diriyah Gate Development Authority (DGDA) from the very beginning, making it a true blend of historic tradition, high technology and modern investment theory.

The mission statement of the \$40 billion project is: "To create a world-class destination for visitors and locals within Saudi Arabia that is renowned for being resilient to climate change, promotes cultural heritage, ensures thriving vibrant and healthy communities, provides a high quality of life, and promotes equity."

ESG — environmental, social and governance factors — have been adopted across the Vision 2030 range of projects, of which Diriyah is one of the most prominent.

But the task of accommodating millions of visitors wanting modern comfort and convenience in a setting faithful to its roots in



FRANK KANE

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18th-century Najd was a challenge the designers of Diriyah took into account from the outset.

"Drawing on the Kingdom's rich past, the masterplan will reflect the Najdi architecture of 300 years ago, newly adapted for 21st-century living. With its mud brick walls, locally sourced materials, historic palm groves and farms coupled with world-class cultural, entertainment, retail, hospitality, educational, office and residential areas, this is the perfect amalgamation and a powerhouse of Saudi culture and commerce," the DGDA told Arab News.

Among the measures incorporated into designs are the extensive use of native plant species, "drip irrigation" techniques to reduce water consumption, and the use of recycled waste water. There is also a state-of-the-art sewage plant and stormwater infrastructure to avoid flooding during extreme weather.

There will be an abundance of greenery in the project, with parks and open areas set

among the environmentally sound buildings and facilities, giving what the experts call "improved outdoor thermal comfort," even at the height of the Riyadh summer.

"Through the application of the vernacular architectural style across the development, the community will embody a contextualized approach to both social and environmental sustainability, resonating with the anthropological history of the site while passively responding to local climatic conditions," the DGDA said.

The site and plans for the development were inspected and approved in 2020 by the National Center for Environmental Compliance, the Kingdom's environmental watchdog. "The environmental authority recognized and praised the DGDA for environmental compliance and applying best standards to all our projects," the center said.

In addition to the appointment of an environmental monitoring consultant,

environmental impact assessments have been conducted on the projects and on the associated Wadi Safar master plans, and have been approved as complying with the highest environmental standards.

The whole project has been designed with environmental standards at the top of the agenda, while seeking to preserve the best of traditional design.

"Through the inward-looking design (around central courtyards, the extreme climate is tempered by a cooler, shaded and enclosed internal environment," the DGDA said.

"Our initiatives surpass environmental compliance by embedding international best practices, innovative technologies, and sustainability certification targets in all our projects. We aim to enhance our environmental performance and sustainability credentials at the community and building levels," it added.



If King Abdulaziz had been captured or killed in that battle, there would not be a Saudi Arabia in the form it is today.



The recapture of the Masmak Fortress in Riyadh by the future King Abdulaziz and his 63 men was integral to the evolution of Saudi Arabia.

TOWER OF POWER

Masmak Fortress: An important historical symbol of Saudi unification

Masmak Fortress, the battle location that changed history forever, restoring power to the Al-Saud family and paving the way for modern Saudi Arabia

Lama Alhamawi Riyadh

It is easy to overlook the historical importance of Masmak Fortress and the role it played in the unification of the provinces that became the nation of Saudi Arabia in 1932. But three decades earlier, the recapture of the towering citadel in Riyadh by the future King Abdulaziz and 63 men was integral to the evolution of the Kingdom.

"King Abdulaziz almost died in this battle, but he won and when he won he started the unification," Saleh S. Binsalif, the director of Al-Masmak Museum, told Arab News.

"If he had been captured or killed in that battle there would be no Saudi Arabia, or at least there would not be a Saudi Arabia in the form it is today. I think it would be a completely different form."

A symbol of the unification of Saudi Arabia, Masmak Fortress was the site of the historic battle that turned the tide of the struggle for control in favor of the House of Saud and paved the way for modern-day Saudi Arabia.

Built in 1865 during the Second Saudi State, the fortress was given the name Masmak, the Arabic word for a tall, strong building with thick walls. It was the main base for the defense of Riyadh, housing the garrisons that protected the city



and their ammunition stores.

The House of Saud's rule over the second Saudi state lasted only 16 years. When it collapsed in 1881, and the Al-Rasheed family

(Left) Khokha was the location where Ajan was being pulled into the window by his men and King Abdulaziz was attempting to pull him out. (Right) Prince Fahad ibn Jalawi's spearhead can be seen still embedded into the fortress gate today.

took control, the former ruling family was forced to flee into exile in Kuwait.

There they remained until, in the early hours of Jan. 15, 1902, Abdulaziz ibn Abdul Rahman Al-Saud arrived in Riyadh accompanied by 63 men. He told 23 of them to wait at the border in case the mission failed, then entered the capital with the rest in an attempt to recapture the fortress — and with it the city.

Their chance came when the Rasheedi governor Ajan, who occupied the fortress at the time, left the safety of its walls to check on his horses outside. As Abdulaziz launched his attack, Ajan's guards emerged and attempted to get him back inside.

During the fighting Fahad ibn Jalawi ibn Turki, cousin of Abdulaziz, threw a spear at Ajan, but it missed and became embedded in the gate of the fortress. The tip of the spear remains there to this day and is a famous symbol of the battle.

As the fighting continued, Abdulaziz's men breached the gate and the battle moved inside the fortress. Ajan was killed and his men surrendered.

While the battle itself could be

considered brutal and bloody, Abdulaziz knew many of the soldiers guarding the fortress as they had previously served his family. It was simply their duty to serve Ajan after his family took control, but once Abdulaziz recaptured the fortress they immediately surrendered and returned to serving the House of Saud.

One of Abdulaziz's men then climbed to the top of the fortress and announced to the people of Riyadh that Abdulaziz had returned and was now Emir of Riyadh.

It marked that start of his unification movement in the Arabian peninsula which, 30 years later, resulted in the founding of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

HERITAGE

Walking in the footsteps of the Saudi founding fathers at Salwa Palace

Lama Alhamawi Riyadh

If the walls of Salwa Palace could speak, what a thrilling tale of secrets, integrity and valor they could tell.

Exploring the narrow hallways of what was once home to the Kingdom's early leaders, who paved the way for modern-day Saudi Arabia, is like wandering through a maze of historic wonders.

The palace is not only a part of the historic Al-Turaif UNESCO World Heritage site in Diriyah, it is also a symbol of the enduring spirit and culture of the people of Saudi Arabia.

Part of the defenses that protected the first Saudi state from a 193-day attack by the Ottoman army in 1818, the palace continues to stand tall. While the walls were

battered by the assault, many parts remained intact and their resilience came to be seen as a reflection of the spirit of the Saudi people.

The Arabic word "salwa" translates as "joy and comfort." Visitors get a sense of why this is such an appropriate name for the palace as they are engulfed with a sense of peace and serenity as they walk through its different sections.

Salwa was the home of Mohammed ibn Saud, considered the founder of the first Saudi state. It was referred to as the ruling palace because it is where state leaders gathered to discuss business, politics, and social events — essentially the administrative hub of the time.

Built in 1776 by Imam Abdulaziz ibn Mohammed ibn Saud, the palace remains the largest standing structure in Diriyah. It

Salwa Palace is a symbol of the enduring spirit and culture of the people of Saudi Arabia.



covers an area of 10,000 square meters and includes seven sections, including a reception area, majlis, administrative units, a school, a mosque and a public meeting space.

During the palace's heyday, guests were greeted in the reception area before being taken to the majlis or the mukhtasar, depending on the nature of the meeting. A very exclusive part of

the palace, the mukhtasar is where private issues were addressed by the leaders of the Kingdom. Only the imam and his councilors were permitted to enter this room to discuss and resolve the important matters that arose.

The private school within the palace is where the members of the royal family were tutored in Islamic subjects, mathematics and the Qur'an. When Diriyah opens

to the public, visitors will be able to see the remains of the original pillars, which are all that remain of the school building.

However, many historical treasures and artifacts have survived that offer insights into the daily lives of Saudis hundreds of years ago. A well, for example, where people could drink and perform ablutions before prayer, is almost untouched.

The palace was built from stone, mud-brick and straw. Wood from tamarisk trees served as the foundations to support doors and walls. The mud bricks were made from a mixture of mud and silt that was poured into a 20cm-by-40cm wooden frame, pressed and then laid out in the sun to dry. The bricks were layered, one by one, to create the walls of the palace.

History is etched in every detail

of its construction. The personal touches of the workers who built the structures, including unique variations in the alignment of the mud bricks, transport visitors back in time to the days of the forebears of modern-day Saudis. As such it is an enduring representation of the heart and soul of the Kingdom through the ages.

Salwa Palace serves as an important symbol of the country's history, heritage and culture. Walking through its narrow pathways in the footsteps of leaders from centuries ago, visitors cannot help but feel a sense of empowerment, pride and honor, knowing that this was where the fates aligned, and decisions and achievements were made that paved the way for the modern nation the world knows today.

Diriyah

Past, Present and Future

THE UNIFIER

Princess Nourah: The woman who had 'the brain of 40 men'

'I am the brother of Nourah!' – the Princess who gracefully inspired and supported a King

Lojien Ben Gassem Riyadh

The tale of the heroism of the small band of brothers who fought alongside Abdulaziz ibn Abdul Rahman, the founder of Saudi Arabia, in his epic battle to recapture Riyadh in 1902 is a key part of the story of the creation of the Kingdom.

But what should not be forgotten is the role played in those turbulent times by his older sister, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman Al-Saud.

One year his senior, Princess Nourah was Abdulaziz ibn Abdul Rahman's childhood playmate and was by his side during the family's exile in Riyadh after the defeat of their father's forces by the rival Rashidi dynasty at the battle of Al-Mulaid in 1891.

When destiny beckoned, wrote Saudi historian Dr. Dalal Mukhlid Al-Harbi in her book "Prominent Women from Central Arabia," Nourah was "a great inspiration behind Abdulaziz's quest to regain his forefathers' seat of authority in Riyadh."

The Princess "nourished his will to recapture Riyadh after his first failed attempt. When he completed his preparations for his second attempt to regain the city, his mother cried long and hard and tried to dissuade him, but Nourah encouraged him to complete the mission, which he did successfully. This was part of her supportive role for her brother while the family was in Kuwait."

That role became still more important to her brother after the recapture of Riyadh and the return of the Al-Saud family to their heartland, as Abdulaziz set out on the testing road that would eventually lead to the foundation of the Kingdom.

The bond between the siblings grew strong as the future King took on the burdens of statehood, wrote Al-Harbi, going on to highlight "the close relationship Nourah had with her brother, a relationship in which the natural bonds of family were mixed with friendship and all that entails: Consultation, asking for opinions and giving advice."

As King, "Abdulaziz would visit her every day, keen that a day should not pass without seeing her."

When the telephone was introduced to

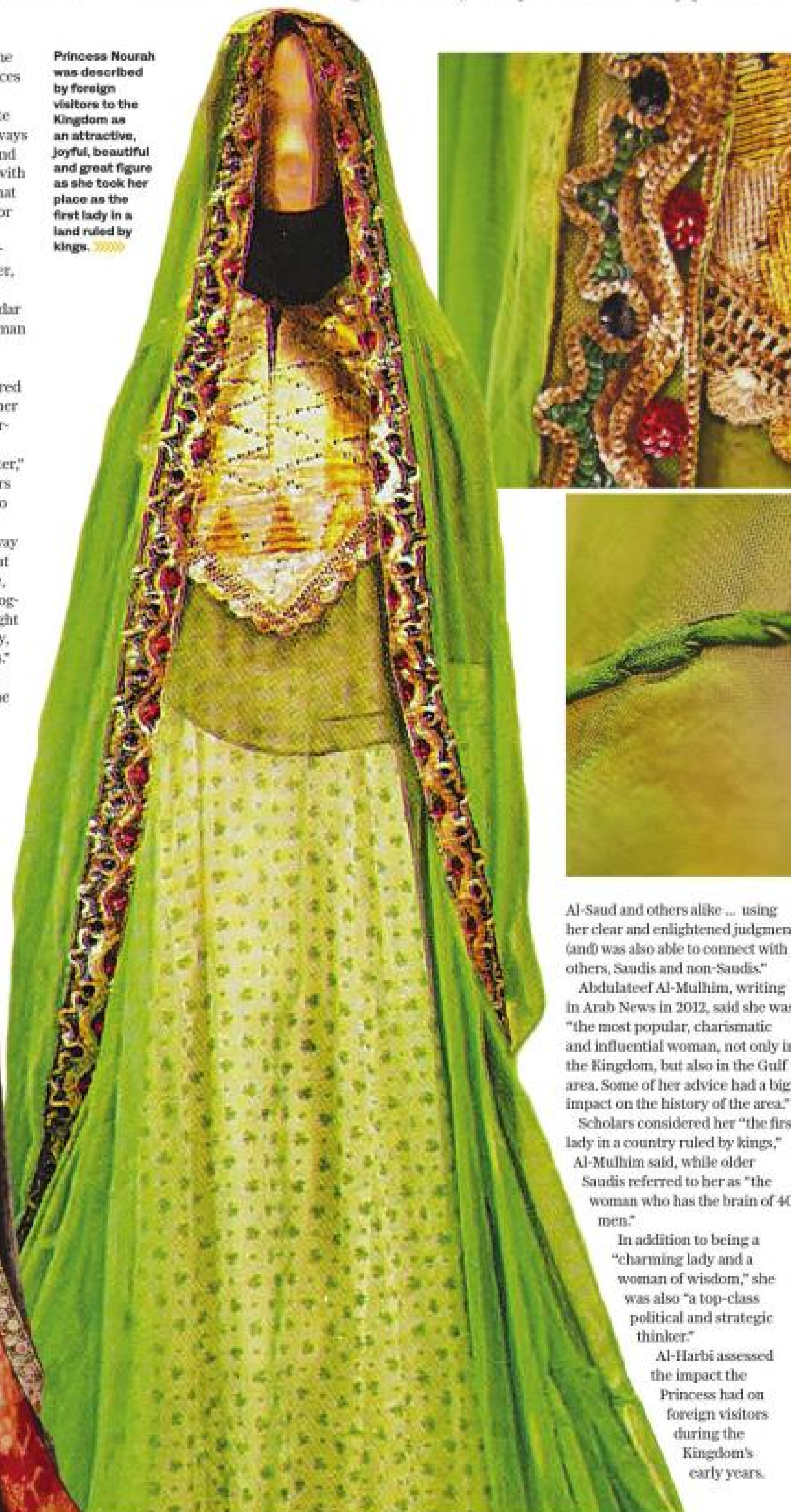
Riyadh in the 1930s, the first line to be laid ran between the palaces of the King and his sister.

The Princess was a confidante upon whom the King could always depend for a straight answer and sound advice. She was "frank with King Abdulaziz, telling him what was on her mind without fear or hesitation," Al-Harbi wrote.

In his biography of his father – King Abdulaziz's half-brother, Prince Mohammed ibn Abdulrahman Al-Saud – Prince Bandar ibn Mohammed ibn Abdulrahman Al-Saud wrote that Princess Nourah was "one of the few women of her time who mastered reading and writing," making her "a woman of the deepest understanding, proper judgment." Possessing the "best of character," she was "adored by all members of Al-Saud family" and "close to people's hearts and minds."

Prince Bandar, who passed away in January 2020 at 95, added that Nourah became a popular name, with parents choosing it "in recognition of her noble character, right judgment, good faith, generosity, proper tongue, and humbleness." He added that the Princess "had an amazing ability for solving the problems of those around her,

Princess Nourah was described by foreign visitors to the Kingdom as an attractive, joyful, beautiful and great figure as she took her place as the first lady in a land ruled by kings. 🌟🌟🌟



The wife of a British political agent described her as not only "one of the most attractive and joyful women I have ever met ... one of the most beautiful, great and famous girls of all times," but also "one of the most important personalities in the Arabian Peninsula."

The Princess, wrote Al-Harbi, "played an influential role in many aspects of political and social life," and perhaps never more so than in the critical healing of a breach in the Al-Saud family.

Her marriage in the early 1900s to Saud ibn Abdulaziz ibn Saud ibn Faisal ibn Turki, from a branch of the family that had fallen out

with her brother, was the "outward symbol of the process of reconciliation between Abdulaziz and his cousins." Although the dispute continued for some time, "by 1912 the matter was settled and Saud became one of Abdulaziz's staunchest supporters."

Al-Harbi added: "I would suggest that some credit for this change of heart must be given to Nourah, for Saud loved her dearly. This action shows her wisdom, soundness of mind and eagerness to heal the rift between him and her brother."

Right up to her death in July 1950 aged

75, Princess Nourah remained a source of advice for her brother, who died three years later. Many sources recall that, whenever faced with challenging situations that demanded boldness and wisdom, King Abdulaziz would reach a decision with the declaration "I am the brother of Nourah!"

Princess Nourah's name and spirit has lived on. In 2006, the first university for women was established in Riyadh. While laying a foundation stone at the campus in 2008, King Abdullah ibn Abdulaziz Al-Saud renamed what has become the world's largest all-female educational institution the Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University — known today as simply PNU.

"Women carry a responsibility that is more than a duty, to maintain the stability of society and contribute to building the economy of the nation, and to represent the community and the nation to the highest standards, outside and inside the country," the King said at the ceremony,

Al-Saud and others alike ... using her clear and enlightened judgment (and) was also able to connect with others, Saudis and non-Saudis."

Abdulateef Al-Mulhim, writing in Arab News in 2012, said she was "the most popular, charismatic and influential woman, not only in the Kingdom, but also in the Gulf area. Some of her advice had a big impact on the history of the area." Scholars considered her "the first lady in a country ruled by kings," Al-Mulhim said, while older Saudis referred to her as "the woman who has the brain of 40 men."

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In Diriyah, I am enchanted by the majestic site of At-Turaif

LUDOVIC POUILLE

On this national occasion, I would like to wish all Saudis a very happy national day. I hope that this celebration will represent a renewed momentum with serenity in light of the resilience of all the countries that have fought the virus until today, after the painful ordeals during the former months caused by the health crisis. In Saudi Arabia, this momentum is that of the Vision 2030, supported by the Franco-Saudi strategic partnership, serving the development of our relationships, our economies and our societies.

France is pragmatically standing by Saudi Arabia in many areas and is delighted to contribute, with the commitment of its companies, to long-term structuring partnerships in emerging sectors in particular, such as energy,

digital, space or tourism. Since my arrival to Saudi Arabia as French Ambassador, I have been delighted by the many visits I have made and meetings I have held, all over the country, in Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam, and AlUla of course, the Kingdom's jewel. I am very proud of the progress made by the partnership between the Royal Commission of AlUla and the French Agency for AlUla, with all the French companies and experts involved in the field of territorial development and hospitality, training, heritage, culture and many more.

Culture and heritage are the sectors of the future in Saudi Arabia, perhaps more than anywhere else in the world. This is proven by the Ministry of Culture and its teams' various and increasing cultural initiatives in recent years on one hand and of the MISK Foundation and Ithra's Red Sea International Film Festival



Ludovic Pouille is the French Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Twitter: @Ludovic_Pouille

on the other. Not to mention, the dozens of archaeological sites that are the subject of studies and development projects, for which France is proud to be one of Saudi Arabia's first partners for over 20 years.

Stuck between the origins and the future, Diriyah is also undoubtedly one of the icons of this national holiday. During my visit to the site, I was fascinated by the link between the historical cradle of the Kingdom and the ambitious urban development projects, including the objective of making Riyadh one of the most livable cities in the world. In Diriyah, I was first enchanted by the majestic site of At-Turaif, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2010, and by the conservation of the palaces that illuminate Wadi Hanifah with their heights and offer a magical site, especially in the evening. I was also impressed

with the Diriyah Gate Development Authority's development plan, in light of the explanations given by its CEO Jerry Inzerillo. This project is both marked by the historical character of the site, with the influence of the Najdi style and founded by the development of important districts which will concentrate a recreational, cultural and artistic offer, highlighted in particular by the organization of a next biennial. These neighborhoods have already been marked by resounding international events, whether it is the first editions of Formula E or the Diriyah Season, which I look forward to discovering at its upcoming edition. Diriyah embodies, without a doubt, the roots and ambition of the Kingdom and I am delighted that many French people will soon be able to visit the site and, even more, contribute to its development.

THE RESILIENT ARCHITECTURE

Diriyah: An 'enduring reminder of the frontiers of the possible'

The addition of the historic site to the UNESCO World Heritage List is a recognition of its universal importance

Ephrem Kossaily New York

Architect May Shaer marvels at the fact that Diriyah has endured for 250 years. Could this be because for centuries the ruins remained tucked away in the narrow Wadi Hanifah valley and so were spared the destructive effects of human interference?

Perhaps the harsh climate treated this oasis of mud-brick houses and ramparts a little more kindly than other historic heritage sites in the desert? Or are the ancient mud-brick building methods — that caused little or no harm to the environment and worked in harmony with the natural capacities of local ecology — more resilient than modern architectural technologies?

"It is not that often that you find a remaining example of a complete homogeneous urban settlement that prospered in a desert environment. In that sense, Diriyah is extremely rare," said Shaer, who is the head of the Arab States Unit at the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's World Heritage Center.

The ruins of the old city, which consist almost entirely of adobe, or mud-brick, structures, lie on either side of Wadi Hanifah, a narrow valley that runs south toward Riyadh and beyond. After their city was destroyed by the invading Ottoman army in 1818, the inhabitants of Diriyah moved to Riyadh, leaving behind the remnants of their former capital.

British author Robert Lacey likened Diriyah to "a sand-blown Pompeii," describing it as "an enduring reminder of the frontiers of the possible." It is divided into three districts, built atop the hills overlooking the valley. At-Turaif, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is the highest promontory of the three and the lower reaches are easily accessible on foot.

The city lay abandoned for more than a century before families began to trickle back in in the mid-1900s and build new mud-brick homes.

"Despite it being originally built with adobe, a very delicate material that needs constant maintenance and protection, the whole ensemble has retained more or less its original urban form, its structural integrity," said Shaer.

To earn a place on the World Heritage List, she explained, sites must include enough remains to illustrate their history and



Many parts of Salwa Palace remain intact, showcasing the traditional Najdi architectural techniques dating back more than 300 years. Getty Images

WELCOMING THE WORLD

 <p>Diriyah Gate is a global heritage and cultural destination that is expected to attract up to 30 million visitors a year. Since 2018 it has hosted a wide range of events, from high-profile sporting contests and musical performances, to state visits and even a virtual gathering of world leaders.</p>	 <p>In 2019 At-Turaif, a UNESCO World Heritage site, provided the backdrop for a stunning ceremony to celebrate the official launch of the \$50bn Diriyah Gate project, during which King Salman laid the foundation stone.</p>	 <p>In Dec. 2019, British boxer Anthony Joshua successfully reclaimed his world heavyweight titles from American fighter Andy Ruiz Jr. during their "Clash on The Dunes" at the spectacular 15,000-seater Diriyah Arena. The venue beat Madison Square Garden in New York and the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, Wales.</p>
 <p>Diriyah hosted its first all-electric E-Prix in 2018. The international race, symbolic of Saudi Arabia's own journey toward sustainability, has since become one of Diriyah's most popular annual events. In 2021, the racing was dominated by the Mercedes-EQ Formula E Team.</p>	 <p>During a two-day state visit to Riyadh in October 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin met King Salman and was given a guided tour of the historic At-Turaif district of Diriyah by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.</p>	 <p>In Nov. 2020, when Saudi Arabia hosted the virtual G20 Riyadh Summit, a group photograph of the leaders of G20 member states was projected onto Salwa Palace in At-Turaif.</p>

ARAB NEWS

"physically be able to explain their importance."

"With most of Diriyah's components still in place, you can read the plan," she said. "You can understand how people lived here; how they interacted with, and built for, their environment. Diriyah tells the whole story."

The addition of a site to the World Heritage List is recognition of its outstanding universal importance and value to the world. So what exactly does At-Turaif offer humanity at large? What can the rest of the world learn from its story?

"First, the citadel of At-Turaif represents a diversified and fortified urban ensemble, comprising many palaces within an oasis," explains Shaer. "It is an outstanding example of the Najdi architectural and decorative style, which only developed in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula."

"Along with its remarkable sense of geometrical decoration, At-Turaif bears witness to a building method that adapted to its environment, using adobe in major palatial complexes."

It is the story, then, of a people constantly at odds with hostile forces of nature, who made use of one of the few readily available resources, mud, in an original and innovative way to cope with the extreme desert climate and create comfortable living conditions. This ingenious tradition of building with mud bricks also utilized other local natural resources that were easy to find, including limestone for foundations, and wood from palm trees. The Najdi architects also made use of clay-mud rendering, stone columns and wooden lintels painted with geometric motifs.

The traditional characteristics of Najdi towns include a dense urban fabric, narrow streets, and buildings that feature an inner courtyard and thick walls to naturally regulate temperature.

"This whole, complete structure of Diriyah reflects life in a desert environment, one that has managed to exist because of the natural aspect of the land, which allowed people to settle in the area," said Shaer.

Now, more than a decade after At-Turaif was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, this birthplace of what became, almost two centuries later, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is an increasingly popular major tourist attraction.

Visitors can stroll among the remains of the old mud-brick buildings, families can picnic under date palms as children play on the paths that snake between modern conveniences such as restaurants and coffee shops. The admirably ambitious goal of the Diriyah Gate Development Authority is to transform this historic attraction into "one of the world's lifestyle destinations for culture and heritage, hospitality, retail and education."

"It is good to see Diriyah open up for tourists," said Shaer. "Visitors come here to learn and understand history, our past. Culture can bring people together. Diriyah reminds us of all the things we humans have in common."

But in a world where many sites of historical importance are exposed to potential hazards, whether accidental, deliberate or as a result of natural disasters, tourists have a crucial role to play in ensuring that Diriyah survives and thrives for future generations to admire and enjoy, Shaer said. "In the end, these sites are fragile," she added. "Diriyah is fragile and we need to take care of it — all of us."

Diriyah is a beacon of the Saudi transformation

FUMIO IWAI

On behalf of the Japanese citizens, I would love to extend my sincere congratulations on Saudi Arabia's 91st National Day to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the Saudi people.

Since assuming the ambassadorship to the Kingdom in February 2021, I have been moved by Saudi's economic drive and cultural refinement. I did not anticipate what would happen in such a quick manner when I served as deputy chief of the mission in Riyadh. Transformation of the Saudi people's behavior is also worth mentioning. I am confident that the Saudi people have become more active in their civic lives and energetic in business, while working toward the highest economic and cultural aspirations of the Middle East.

I have witnessed the Kingdom's multifaceted transformation through government efforts embodied by Saudi Vision 2030. The Kingdom's uncompromising efforts will ensure that Saudi Arabia achieves a diversified and sustainable economy, refines itself as a cultural lighthouse of the Arab and Islamic world, and becomes a reliable and stable architect in the region's peace and stability.

Japan stands by Vision 2030 without hesitation for the Kingdom to become an economic and cultural powerhouse of the region. Since Japan and Saudi Arabia have launched Japan-Saudi Vision 2030, both governments have committed to implementing various future-oriented projects, which include some infrastructure projects. In addition, Japan, as a token of the heart-to-heart friendship, remains supportive of the Kingdom's cultural enhancement on the global stage. For example, the movie "Journey" depicts the ancient history of



Fumio Iwai is Japan's ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

the Arabs using Japanese anime-style animation and is an excellent embodiment of the blooming Japanese-Saudi cultural ties.

On the holy national day, I would like to congratulate again Saudi Arabia's incredible efforts for hosting the G20 summit last year and becoming the first Arab country to do so despite the tumultuous COVID-19 pandemic. As a Japanese ambassador who has witnessed the Kingdom combating this unprecedented struggle of humankind, I feel confident that Saudi's comprehensive and digitally driven strategy to overcome the pandemic will create a positive ripple effect for international health cooperation. It will also bolster the public health system of the country to deal with future infectious diseases.

The Riyadh G20 summit was held in exceptional circumstances last year while the historical memory of Diriyah brought Saudi Arabia a silver lining to represent the cultural aspiration

of the country. The Kingdom maintains a growing number of national heritages entailing architectural styles in ancient times, while preserving the environment and geological features of Saudi's state-of-the-art technology.

My visit to Diriyah was an inspiring cultural experience. I encountered the memories of the glorious days of the first Saudi dynasty, such as heritage-rich sites and the district's buildings, traditional crafts and calligraphy. Diriyah is a cultural destination that tells the Kingdom's history and also aims to become a global lifestyle hub through hospitality, retail and education. I hope that the refinement of Diriyah, as a beacon of Saudi transformation, will lead the unprecedented journey of the Kingdom. Japan always stands with the Saudi people and spares no effort to support Vision 2030.

I wish the government and the people of Saudi Arabia success and prosperity for today and for years to come. Happy National Day.

Diriyah



Past, Present and Future

I am impressed by the new rhythm created by Saudi Vision 2030

CHEN WEIQING



of the two countries have developed comprehensively and rapidly, with frequent high-level exchanges and the continuous deepening of cooperation in various fields. China and Saudi Arabia are close partners in the joint construction of the Belt and Road, and we also reached a broad consensus on the concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind.

For 20 consecutive years, Saudi Arabia has been China's largest trading partner in West Asia and Africa. For seven consecutive years, China has been Saudi Arabia's largest trading country. In 2020, Saudi Arabia was China's largest crude oil supplier.

The world will be more harmonious and prosperous only when different countries, nations and civilizations respect each other, and engage in exchange and mutual learning. China and Saudi Arabia are models of practicing civilizational exchange and dialogue. Thanks to the personal efforts of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Chinese language education in Saudi Arabia has developed rapidly and made obvious achievements.

An Arabic proverb says to choose a companion before the road. China is willing to continue to move forward side by side with Saudi Arabia and be a good partner to maintain world peace, strengthen dialogue and cooperation, and promote common development.

Hereby, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to King Salman, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and the government and people of Saudi Arabia. I wish the people of Saudi Arabia prosperity and progress, happiness and health, and wish the relations of our two countries greater development.

Chen Weiqing is China's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia.



Chinese Ambassador Chen Weiqing at Diriyah. Supplied 2020

This year is the third time I am joining my Saudi friends to celebrate their National Day. The national days for Saudi Arabia and China are only a week apart, which doubles my joy every year.

To understand a country, one must understand its history and culture. I have paid many visits to Diriyah, and participated in the opening ceremony of Diriyah Gate, where I was attracted by the long-lasting history and splendid civilization of Saudi Arabia, and witnessed the brand new changes that took place in this ancient land with Saudi friends. In my opinion, Diriyah represents world cultural heritage, the origin of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the cornerstone of the bright future of this country.

This year marks the fifth anniversary of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. In the past five years, Saudi Arabia has been marching forward to a brighter future, and embracing the world with an open heart.

After I arrived in Saudi Arabia as the new Chinese ambassador, I visited several great development projects, such as NEOM and the Al-Soudah project. I also participated in the G20 series of events which were held here in Saudi Arabia, as well as the Future Investment Initiative Forum and Global AI Summit. At the same time, I have personally experienced the excellent job Saudi Arabia has done in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and her active role in promoting international cooperation against the pandemic and enhancing the green and sustainable development of the Kingdom and the region. I have been engaged with this new rhythm created by Vision 2030.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Saudi Arabia, the friendly and cooperative relations

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G20
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Diriyah

Past, Present and Future

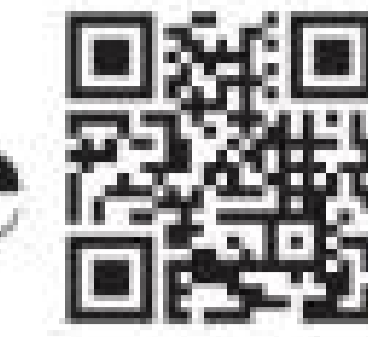
To mark Saudi Arabia's 91st National Day, we shed light on how the birthplace of the Kingdom is continuing to make history.



Special commemorative issue in partnership with the Diriyah Gate Development Authority.

Diriyah Past, Present and Future


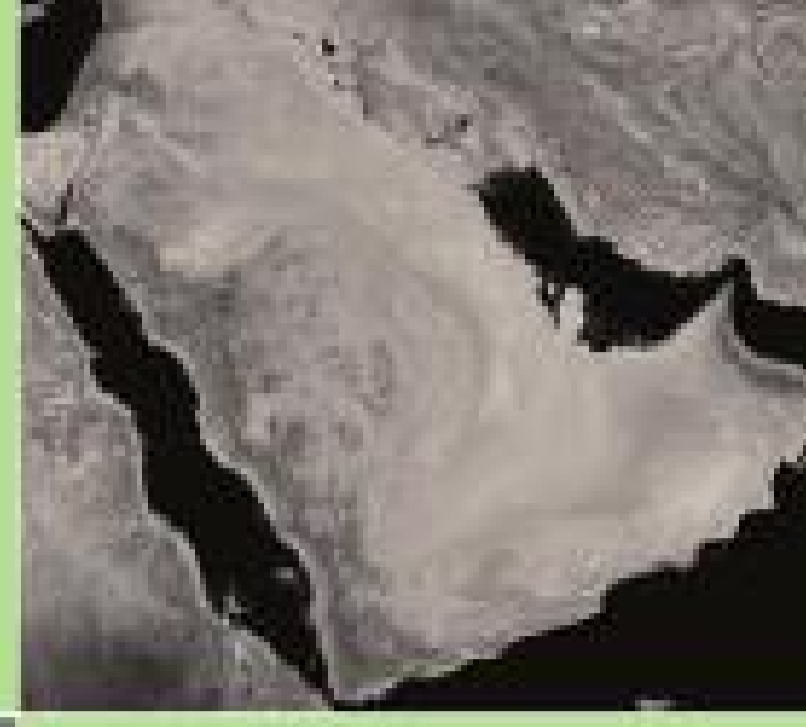



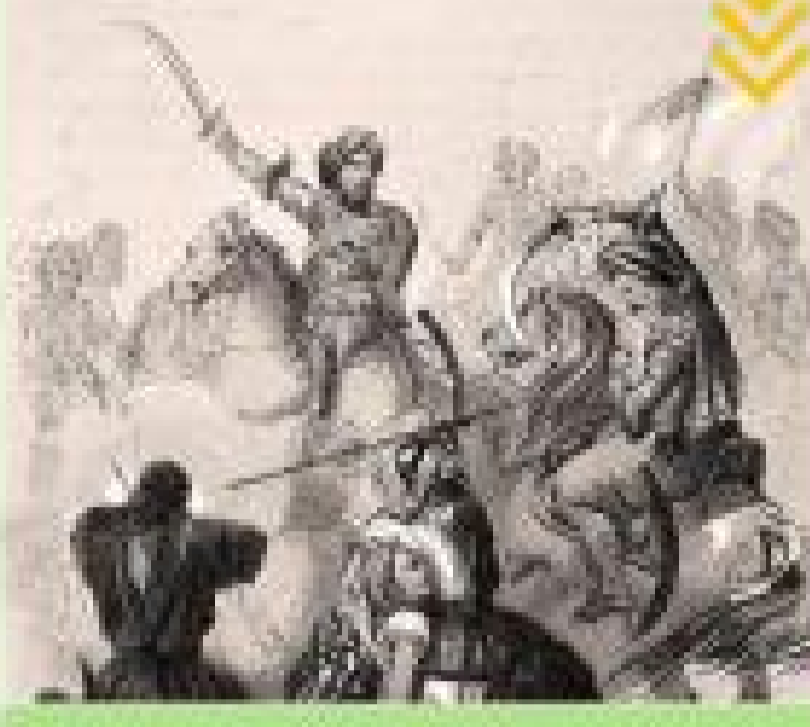



Diriyah Past, Present and Future



Scan this code and join us on a journey through time to explore the Kingdom's birthplace, Diriyah — Past, Present and Future. <https://arab.news/nd91>

THE ROAD TO GLORY

This National Day, Arab News partners with Diriyah Gate, the SR190 billion (\$50.6 billion) cultural giga-development on the outskirts of Riyadh to showcase the history of Saudi Arabia's birthplace and help pave the way to the Kingdom's future.

 1446 Manaa' Al-Muraide, leader of the Marada clan of the Al-Duru tribe of Bari Hanifah, leads his people inland from a town near Qatif on the Gulf coast to settle on the banks of Wadi Hanifah. They name their new settlement after the home they left behind: Diriyah.	 1727 Imam Mohammed bin Saud succeeds his father as ruler of Diriyah and founds the First Saudi State.	 1821 After being partially rebuilt, Diriyah is again attacked and destroyed by the Ottoman army under the command of Husayn Bey, who embarks on a brutal campaign of terror.
 1720 Saud bin Mohammed of the Al-Muqrin branch of the Marada becomes ruler of Diriyah. The Saudi Royal Family is named after him.	 1765 Imam Mohammed dies and is succeeded by his son, Imam Abdulaziz bin Mohammed bin Saud.	 1805 At the height of its power, the First Saudi State rules most of the Arabian Peninsula, challenging the authority of the Ottoman Empire.
 1766 Construction work begins on Salwa Palace, signaling an expansion of the district of At-Turaif, birthplace of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.	 1818 Diriyah is attacked and largely destroyed after a six-month siege by an Ottoman army led by Ibrahim Pasha. At-Turaif is abandoned and Diriyah's ruler, Imam Abdulah bin Saud, is taken to Istanbul and executed.	 1824 Turki ibn Abdullah ibn Mohammed bin Saud, a hero during the defense of Diriyah in 1818, founds the Second Saudi State in Riyadh.
		1891 The Second Saudi State is toppled by the rival Rashidi dynasty after defeat at the Battle of Al-Mulayda. Its last ruler, Abdul Rahman bin Faisal Al-Saud — the father of Abdulaziz, the future founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia — takes refuge with his family in Kuwait.
		1902 Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al-Saud, who would become better known to the wider world as Ibn Saud, recaptures Riyadh with a force of just 63 men.

 2020 Nov. 21: As Saudi Arabia hosts the virtual G20 Summit in Riyadh, a group photograph of the leaders of G20 member states is projected onto the walls of Salwa Palace in At-Turaif.	 2019 Oct. 14-16: During a two-day state visit to Riyadh, Russian President Vladimir Putin meets King Salman and is given a guided tour of the Historic At-Turaif district of Diriyah by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.	 2010 At-Turaif, the centuries-old city of mud-brick homes, mosques and palaces built in the classic Najdi architectural style, is recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site of "outstanding universal value."
 2021 As work on the first parts of the Diriyah Gate project nears completion, the Diriyah Gate Development Authority announces that the historic city of At-Turaif is to reopen to the public.	 2019 Dec. 8: British boxer Anthony Joshua successfully reclaims his world heavyweight titles from American Andy Ruiz Jr. during the "Clash on the Dunes" at the 15,000-seater Diriyah Arena, which beat bids from major stadia around the world to host the fight.	 2017 At-Turaif is handed over to the newly formed Diriyah Gate Development Authority. The historic site will be the jewel in the crown of Diriyah Gate, a megaproject that will transform Diriyah into a historical and cultural destination for the world.
 2019 Nov. 20: King Salman lays the foundation stone at Diriyah Gate, the SR190 billion project to create a global heritage and cultural destination centered on the historic site of At-Turaif, birthplace of the Saudi state.	 2018 Saudi Arabia hosts the inaugural Diriyah ePrix, a Formula-E championship race. It is one of the first international events staged at Diriyah. The race, symbolic of Saudi Arabia's journey toward sustainability, is one of Diriyah's most popular annual events.	 1998 While governor of Riyadh province, the future King Salman, the son of King Abdulaziz, initiates the Historical Diriyah Development Program. The restoration of historic At-Turaif begins.
 2030		

 Diriyah Gate The planned completion date for the entire 7-square-kilometer Diriyah Gate site, one of the megaprojects closely linked to Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 plan to transform the economy and open up the Kingdom to the world.	 At-Turaif At the heart of the project is the At-Turaif UNESCO World Heritage site, the birthplace of the Kingdom, built on the banks of the Wadi Hanifah 300 years ago. Key sections of Diriyah Gate are being built, set for completion by 2030. The buildings will echo Najdi architectural style with traditional mud bricks.	 King Salman Square King Salman Square, in the northern district, will be the largest of five iconic public gathering spaces. These include Heroes Memorial Plaza, by the Diriyah Square lifestyle retail district, which will bridge east and west Diriyah.	 Bujairi Terrace The first part of Diriyah Gate to be opened to the public, Bujairi Terrace is an upscale dining destination, with 20 food and beverage outlets providing everything from pit-stop coffees to leisurely fine-dining experiences.	 King Salman Grand Mosque King Salman Grand Mosque, the third largest in the region, will house an Islamic library and an Islamic history exhibition. A mosque square will provide a space for prayers.	 Escarpment Walk The three-kilometer Escarpment Walk, complete with viewing platforms, shaded seating areas and historic information points, follows the course of the Wadi Hanifah past the At-Turaif World Heritage Site.	 Samhan Heritage Hotel The 141-room Samhan Heritage Hotel, created in traditional Najdi architectural style, echoes Saudi Arabia's unique historic culture.	 Diriyah Square In addition to office spaces created for entrepreneurs and innovators and six ultra-luxury hotels and resorts, all designed in traditional Najdi style, the Diriyah Square district will also be a lifestyle retail destination.	 Art District The Art District will be a vibrant home to creative retail outlets, studios, workshops and boutique offices catering for young Saudi brands and businesses, and six cultural academies teaching subjects including creative writing, theatre, music, traditional cuisine and Najdi architecture.	 Period village At the Period Village visitors will be able to experience what life was like in Diriyah 300 years ago, with the opportunity to learn traditional skills, including shoemaking, Bedouin tent-building and date harvesting.
 Diriyah Gate	 At-Turaif	 King Salman Square	 Bujairi Terrace	 King Salman Grand Mosque	 Escarpment Walk	 Samhan Heritage Hotel	 Diriyah Square	 Art District	 Period village