

Proposal for the Neutra Cultural Center



About the building

The US Consulate Building was originally conceived as the US Embassy at a time when Karachi was the capital of Pakistan. The famous American architect Richard J. Neutra, who is considered one of the most important Modernist architects, designed this building. He studied under Adolf Loos and worked briefly for Frank Lloyd Wright before accepting an invitation from his close friend and university companion Rudolf Schindler to work and live communally in Schindler's Kings Road House in California. In the early 1930s, Neutra's Los Angeles practice trained several young architects who went on to independent success, including Gregory Ain, Harwell Hamilton Harris and Raphael Soriano. Neutra's early watercolors and drawings showed influence from artists such as Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele etc.

This is one of the few institutional buildings to his credit and the only building designed by him in Asia. Neutra's appointment was part of an ambitious US program of architectural commissions to renowned architects which included embassies by Walter Gropius in Athens, Edward Durrell Stone in New Delhi, Marcel Breuer in The Hague, Josep Luis Sert in Baghdad and Eero Saarinen in London.

Set relatively close to the road and separated only by a low steel picket fence the Embassy was designed as a civic and public presence on Abdullah Haroon Road. In 1960, the capital moved to Islamabad and the Embassy was downgraded to a Consulate that also housed the American Center. Over the years, due to security concerns, the Consulate has been barricaded with high walls that almost entirely block the view of the building from the street.

Many Karachi citizens who grew up in the 60's, 70's and 80's fondly remember the American Center and the many events and facilities hosted there. The Library was a favorite haunt of students, readers and researchers, while the art exhibitions, music concerts and film screenings were equally popular among



Karachi residents. Many a memorable event was organized at the American Center in collaboration with active local cultural and professional organizations including the Institute of Architects, Pakistan.

In January 2011, in a modest ceremony, US Consul General William J. Martin, officially 'decommissioned' the US Consulate Building in Karachi located on Abdullah Haroon Road (the old Victoria Road) in the heart of Karachi.

The decommissioning of the US Consulate building raises questions about the future of this Modern Masterpiece and perhaps presents opportunities for promoting US - Pakistan relations. The building, designed by an indisputable master of the late Modern Movement, is a fine example of the 1950's International Style and is representative of the ferment and debate current at the time, about the nature of architecture.

Neutra Cultural Center

The US State Department is considering putting the property up for sale. If the sale does go through, the new owners will very likely demolish the building and construct a new commercially viable concrete high rise. That would be a sad day indeed and we must endeavor to preserve this architectural heritage at all costs.

The building is a part of world architectural heritage, precious to all, more particularly, architects of the United States and Pakistan. We feel that this building, which is situated in the heart of Karachi, should become a center for arts and culture. It was originally designed and sited to be a public institution; it might finally be able to achieve that in its new role.

Karachi, a city of 18 million people, lacks cultural spaces. We envision the Neutra Cultural Center to become the hub of modern secular Karachi, whereby citizens can enjoy their art and culture in a public space that bridges socio- economic strata, where people from different parts of the city and different backgrounds can be comfortable in each others' presence. Our proposal is for the Neutra Cultural Center to house the Museum of Modern Art, The Living History Museum of Pakistan, Museum of Contemporary Architecture, The International Artists' Residency Program, Contemporary Craft Centre and hosting of musical concerts and literary events.

Each city is unique, and its uniqueness relies both upon the interactions within the city, a place for spectacles and upon interactions with other cities. The question of identity and culture in Karachi has become a central paradigm. Immigration and the plurality of identity pave the way for the image of the city as a fragmented mosaic.

The city is about "the other" and the risks associated with diversity. Karachi comprises of numerous diverse cultures and ethnic groups. Though cultures within the country differ to some extent, more similarities than differences can be found. Karachi would benefit from having a cultural hub such as the Neutra Cultural Center. It is an exciting initiative that aims to ensure that the young generation has access to a full cultural life. At the heart of the idea is a belief that young people of Karachi have the right to be both connoisseurs and creators of culture. By working closely together, the citizens, schools, museums, galleries, theatres and other heritage and arts organizations in Karachi can open up a wealth of new opportunities for young people to experience and create a new and rich diversity of cultural artifacts. A long-term plan to turn an old building into an arts and culture exhibitor and incubator would stimulate cultural activities, develop a stronger sense of unity and help revitalize Karachi.

The value of culture to the community in Karachi includes understanding creative industries as an important and rapidly expanding source of economic growth, employment and wealth creation. Cultural planning is an essential dimension of planning for sustainability alongside social, economic and environmental considerations, valuing culture as a source of community pride, valuing artists and creators as essential sources of new ideas, innovations and technologies, valuing creativity and culture as central to making Karachi a social, economic and cultural hub that it once was.

This proposal is being put forward by The Institute of Architects, Pakistan, representing the professional architectural community of Pakistan, with the support of the American Business Council, a large number of NGOs, professional associations, artists, art and architecture schools and the civil society of Karachi in general.

The proposed name for this cultural center, 'Neutra Cultural Center', we feel will retain the building's affiliation with the United States and prove to be a positive step towards fostering a friendly public perception towards the US-Pakistan relationship that has been strained of late.

US-Pakistan relationship

Since 9/11, the US-Pakistan relationship has undergone many changes. Recent events have once again highlighted the fragility in this relationship and the pitfalls of divergent goals and policies. The relationship has generally remained transactional, marred by mistrust. This is indeed a strategic dysfunction, undercutting the durability and maturity of these relations. Although the US is quick to bail out Pakistan in times of trouble, due to the political climate, it does not have the support of the masses of Pakistan

The US and Pakistan remain allies in the international fight against terrorism but relations on a people to people level have deteriorated. In Pakistan, the people's perception is that the US does not trust Pakistan and has been using Pakistan in its war in Afghanistan. Moreover, there is a feeling that the cost paid by Pakistanis for siding with the US in the war has never been fully appreciated. There has been a long-standing demand from the people of Pakistan to revisit the relationship with the United States.

However, diplomatic relations between the United States and Pakistan are better than the apparent facade. Pakistan is keen to talk about the need for stability in this relationship. Pak-US relations have endured many storms in the past and have survived after every dip.

This proposal and the gift of the 'Neutra Cultural Center' to the citizens of Karachi will provide a generous opportunity to give the Pak-US relationship a lasting context, concrete substance and sustainable direction. It will go a long way in dissolving the misconceptions guiding the anti-American sentiment in Pakistan today. This positive contribution will give Pakistanis a chance to re-think the negative impact the American society has on them today. By gifting them an institution through which meaningful cultural exchanges can occur, the US will be taking a positive step towards more peaceful relations at the level of the masses and removing the existing trust deficit.



Management Plan

Role of the Trust

If the Proposal is accepted, it is proposed to form a trust that will manage the Neutra Cultural Center. Each trust is unique. The level of involvement that an organization has with a trust depends on the needs of the trust and the resources available. Each of the supporting organizations will be independently responsible for generating funds for the day-to-day functioning of their areas.

At its most basic level, the role of the Trust and its trustees is to hold the assets of the historical site in trust and to appoint a Managing Committee for the Center. There is significant scope, however, for organizations involved in trusts to take on a fuller role in supporting the Center and helping to create a culture of innovation and enterprise.

Responsibility for the day-to-day management of the Center, the land and assets, staff employment, etc., remains with the Managing Committee that will comprise of heads of the various organizations that will be housed in the Center. There is no requirement or expectation that Trustees will contribute financially to this cultural center that they will support.

It is proposed that the Trust will comprise of 15 members: three members will be nominated by the American Business Council, three members representing Pakistan's corporate sector will be nominated by the Federation of Chambers of Commerce & Industry, six members representing NGOs and professional bodies sponsoring the Proposal and three eminent citizens of Karachi nominated by the Trustees.

Funding and Sustainability

Collaborative partnerships with multinational companies or local businesses

The Cultural Center will partner with the corporate sector for mutual benefit. An executive committee comprised of Trustees can work on fundraising possibilities. The corporate sector will have the option of sponsoring either the entire Center, or specific activities and events in line with their CSR policy. In return, they will be acknowledged in all promotional material. Other companies will also have the option of joining a corporate circle, which will fund occasional projects and receive recognition at community events.

Membership-based funding

Members of the community will have the option of acquiring membership at the Cultural Center in return for a fee. Members will receive privileges such as front-row seats, behind-the-scenes tours of exhibitions, the opportunity to interact with artists and curators and the option of enrolling themselves or their children in courses and cultural activities.

Young Patrons' Community

Educational establishments will be invited to take advantage of the young patrons' community, which will give them membership to the center for a fee. In return, they will be able to provide students with educational benefits such as discounted entry to performances, exhibition tours and access to the research and library facilities.



Space rentals for cultural performances

The Cultural Center will rent space to individuals and groups, such as musicians, artists, and dance and theatre companies. This arrangement will provide a platform for local and international talent, promote art and culture and simultaneously raise funds for the maintenance of the center.

Fundraising through Friends of Neutra Cultural Center

Friends of Neutra Cultural Center, with members drawn from the community, will plan means for attracting funds for the Cultural Center. This will include organizing and hosting large events, appealing to philanthropists for private donations, collaborating with the corporate sector about sponsorships, etc.

Admission Fees

Members of the general public will be able to purchase passes to access all areas of the center on any day. Discounts will be given to senior citizens and children under the age of 12 years.

ANNEXURE

Organizations which will be part of the Neutra Cultural Center

Institute of Architects Pakistan (IAP)

The Institute of Architects, Pakistan was established in 1957, formally registered in 1968 under the Societies Act and subsequently registered in 1987 under the Companies Ordinance as a not-for-profit, non-commercial entity. Its objectives include but are not limited to: organizing the profession and promoting the cause of architecture in Pakistan, to assist in the setting up of schools of architecture throughout the country, to maintain contact with international professional bodies of architects throughout the world, to conduct research and organize workshops, seminars, conferences for promoting the architectural profession, conducting design competitions for professionals and students, and, organizing local and international architectural exhibitions. IAP is an active member of the International Union of Architects (UIA), and, a founding member of the Architects' Regional Council Asia (ARCASIA) and SAARC Association of Architects

Shahab Ghani Khan - President

<http://www.iap.com.pk>

Foundation for Museum of Modern Art (FOMMA)

Successor organization of FOMMA, the FOMMA Trust is an Independent Charitable Trust, registered as a not-for-profit organization. The objectives of the FOMMA Trust are, among others, "to promote the study and intelligent appreciation of art and architecture, in the contemporary manifestations as well as in a wider historical context". Its aims include the setting up of Museums of Modern and Contemporary Art and Art Libraries, publishing of books on Pakistan's art and artists.

Nighat Mir – Director

<http://www.fomma.info>

The Citizens Archive of Pakistan (CAP)

The Citizens Archive of Pakistan (CAP) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to Cultural and Historic Preservation. CAP seeks to educate the community, foster an awareness of the nation's history and instill pride in Pakistani citizens about their heritage. The organization has three main goals: to preserve and provide access to the archive, to build and support educational programs, and to develop educational products based on the testimonies collected. The vision is to develop CAP as the foremost library and heritage center of Pakistani history, photography, culture, literature and historical documentation demonstrating the strength and spirit of Pakistan from the perspective of a citizen

Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy - President

www.citizensarchive.org

VASL

Vasl (Urdu meaning: meeting point) is a registered not-for-profit space. An international platform for Pakistani artists and contemporary art in Pakistan, Vasl is committed to creating a liberal space for experimentation and exchange. Vasl is part of the Triangle Arts Network and over the past 10 years its ongoing activities have included international workshops, local and international residencies, outreach programs, and talks and other events. Vasl is an artist-led initiative that brings together local and international artists for periods of intense exchange through residencies, workshops, public events and outreach activities. Vasl has contributed immensely to the local art scene, and has hosted teaching residencies, art shares, art studies, providing opportunities for mutual interactions and dialogues between Pakistani and foreign artists and public art projects.

Adeela Suleman – Coordinator

www.vasart.org

All Pakistan Music Conference (APMC)

The All Pakistan Music Conference (APMC) was founded in 1959 in Lahore for the promotion of classical music in Pakistan. Ever since its inception, it has been a constant source of inspiration for thousands of music lovers nationwide. To encourage the classical musicians/vocalists living in obscurity post partition, this organization has rejuvenated interest in classical music in Pakistan. APMC attracts music luminaries and aspiring artists alike to keep the classical music alive in the country. Not only that, both vocalists and instrumentalists abroad have benefited from the regular musical sittings held at APMC over the past forty-five years. APMC Karachi Chapter was established in 2003 and has since consistently and successfully hosted the annual classical music extravaganzas and periodic soirees.

Ayla Raza - Secretary

<http://apmc.info>

The Hunar Foundation (THF)

The Hunar Foundation took root with the objective of finding a solution to the problems of livelihood for the youth through quality vocational training of international standards. They offer one-year courses in various trades followed by internships in industry or commercial organizations. Apart from professional training, they aim to create better human beings by teaching work ethics, social and moral values. They specifically focus on these critical aspects of social conduct so as to produce a high quality, skilled workforce of integrity, and who are readily employable locally and abroad. Their vision is to create a new cadre of skilled Pakistanis with internationally recognized technical qualification opening up a new world of opportunities.

Aslam Khaliq - Chairman

www.hunarpakistan.org

American Business Council

American Business Council (AMCHAM) is the only single country chamber of commerce in Pakistan established 26 years ago. It represents the interests of over 70 members that contribute almost 5% of the total tax collection in the country. ABC mission is to promote business and commerce between USA and Pakistan and to thus contribute to Pakistan's economy, leadership depth, best practices, and employment.



ABC is a keen supporter of this proposal to setup a Neutra Cultural Center in the city of Karachi which is yearning for cultural activity and messages for the soul. The Executive Committee of ABC has approved full support to this initiative in its meeting on April 1, 2011, and will be happy to be part of the Trust and the Board of Trustees to manage this venture, and investment.

Humayun Bashir (Country General Manager, IBM) – President

Proposal for the Neutra Cultural Center has been prepared by:

Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy (CAP)
Ar. Syed Akeel Bilgrami (IAP)
Ar. Arif Belgaumi (IAP)