



FACTVM FOUNDATION

FOR DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY
IN CONSERVATION



The difference between history and mystery is evidence

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This was said to us by Ahmed, the son of Sami Angawi (great architect and heritage preserver) who he was quoting - as he showed us around his vaulting, open and multi levelled house created using artisanal traditions - in Jeddah. We were in Jeddah to talk about the possibility of preserving the record of what is now left of the old town, Al-Balad - a marvellous maze of stone houses that are all that remains of the walled city - the ancient crossroads of South, East and West and port of entry to Medina and Mecca. As you walk through the maze, spaces open - seemingly at random - but they aren't random they are carefully positioned to catch the breeze and pass it on down the streets, like water carriers. The houses are all dressed with an intricate filigree of woodwork - designed to let in breezes but exclude the fierce sun - which makes the town's spaces delicate, complicated and mysterious.

Ahmed is working with a very forward thinking foundation, Community Jameel, in the Kingdom with whom we might also work - to do what we can to help preserve this history - he is running a workshop where children and adults can learn something of the stories the woodwork tells - through working directly with the designs and the cutting tools. The history is told in the narrative of shapes and geometric patterns - the ones that tell the story so eloquently in the Arab world. The way the wood fits together in puzzles that please, the way the latticed patterns allow the sun to pierce but not heat, these are the evidence of years of history and skill and experience.

The streets seem mysterious with their shaded, covered, windows and balconies and darkened interiors - they tell a story that is now at risk of disappearing as the Kingdom changes. But we were invited to come because that neglect is being replaced with a desire to preserve, to record, to understand. Change is palpable everywhere and one of the changes is the recognition that these things must be remembered. The history must be written, the skills must be passed on, the evidence must be recorded so that the mystery can be enjoyed. This is why we were there - to record the historical evidence and preserve past - so that the mystery of the shadows can live on.

Community Jameel