

Drawing Faya

Privacy and natural beauty merge at Al Faya Lodge & Spa, an eco-retreat in Sharjah's historic Mleiha desert designed by Anarchitect.

Words: Phil Roberts / Photography: Fernando Guerra



Drive down the UAE's Al Batayeh-Al Faya Road fast enough and you might miss the five-room Al Faya Lodge & Spa, set at the foot of Sharjah's Mount Alvaah. Opened in early 2019, the lodge is actually three buildings: a lodge and spa on one side of the road, with a restaurant on the other side next to one of the country's first petroleum pumps. The existing buildings were built in the 1960s, as a clinic and a grocery store, but are now modern outgrowths of their former selves.

"The architecture and interior interventions purposely contrast the original fabric of the existing buildings," explains Jonathan Ashmore, Founder and Director of Anarchitect, the Dubai and London-based architecture firm behind the project. "Corten steel emphasises the new additional layers that have been introduced to repurpose and extend the spaces to accommodate a new series of programmes." Each building has materials in common, which Ashmore says creates "clearly defined thresholds and the juxtaposition between what is old and what is new."

Catering to visitors who appreciate nature and heritage, the eco-lodge is oriented to maximize the desert vistas, and to feel the natural light throughout the day with skylights. For Ashmore, that exposure is very important. "The ensemble of buildings is a voyeur to the landscape and the changing weather and desert light conditions."

"The spa building takes in the full skyscape and encourages you to look up. The restaurant, perpendicular to the lodge, frames views towards the mountain range and carefully filters direct sunlight from the South with strong light and shadow play throughout the day that creates a dynamically lit interior dining space."

The subtlety of the buildings in its landscape is partially inherited from the existing structures, but also enhanced by the architects and their landscape team from Desert Ink. This was achieved by adding "orthogonal nodes at key transition points along the more organic, undulating paths between each building," explains Ashmore. "The Spa is almost the same length as the Lodge at 35 metres so that the perceived proportions of the two structures side-by-side feel balanced."

Replete with a roof terrace for stargazing, an open-air saltwater pool and offering variety of spa treatments, the remote lodge must be booked in its entirety, opening up a whole realm of possibilities. ©

