

# Building Scene

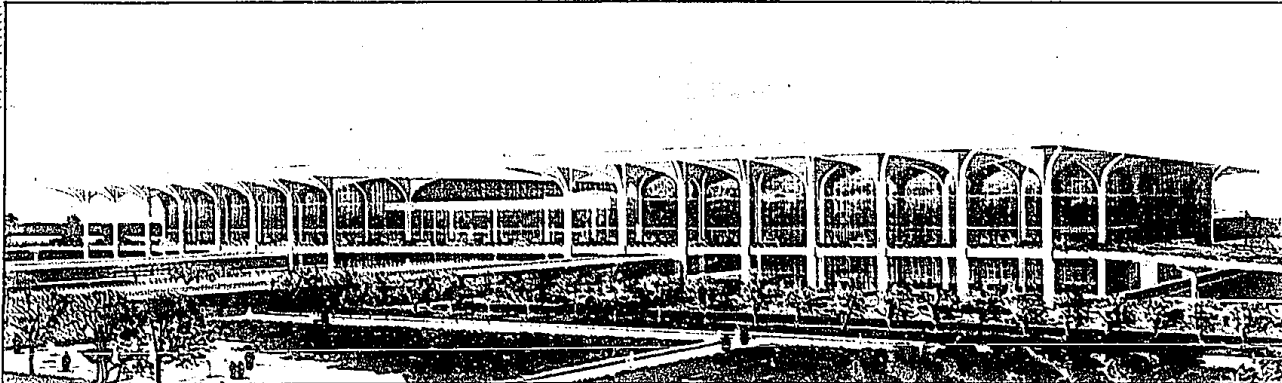
Marilyn Fitchett editor/591-2300

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The King Fahd International Airport, in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, designed by Minoru Yamasaki Associates of Troy, is seen as a gateway into Saudi Arabia and the Middle East.

## Yamasaki designs airport

By Dale Northup  
special writer

The Saudi Arabian peninsula and its neighboring states in past centuries went relatively unnoticed because of geographic isolation — surrounded by water on three sides and rugged terrain on the fourth.

But now it is gaining considerable economic and political attention throughout the world.

With a sense of manifest destiny, the Saudis are embarking on a massive modernization campaign.

DURING THE late 1970s, the Riyadh Development Authority launched a billion dollar project now called the Riyadh Diplomatic Quarter. The city of Riyadh itself has undergone such a dramatic transformation and modernization that it is often referred to as the "largest building site in the world."

New highways cross the Arabian peninsula. The Saudis are aware that their gas and oil resources are depletable. They are exchanging them for others: technology, industry and education for all their citizens.

Projecting into the 21st century, the Saudis are completing the King Fahd International Airport in Dammam. The terminal buildings were designed by the Troy-based architectural firm of Minoru Yamasaki Associates.

WITH A total 4 million square feet, the complex will consist of passenger terminals for national and international carriers. A central area houses a mosque and parking structure in front of the terminal. A control tower and other support buildings are adjacent.

The terminal, now nearing completion, is characterized by a monumental portico on both sides containing the arrival and departure levels with monumental arches in the Islamic tradition. Vast expanses of glass, supported by stanchions and stainless steel clips, lend an airborne weightlessness as well as a dramatic entry much in keeping with Yamasaki's sense of delicacy.

The control tower is a free-standing, 87-meter high structure adjacent to the terminal, providing a vertical accent with ribs that flare out at the top.

THE CENTRAL feature, functioning much like a jewel, is the mosque that symbolizes the influence of Islam on the lives of the people of Saudi Arabia.

It is a cylindrical building, which is a derivative of centrally organized Byzantine structures. Capped by a dome, it is patterned after the Blue Mosque in Jerusalem, spanning more than 1,000 years as a landmark role in Islamic architecture.

Beneath the dome is a shallow drum containing perforated bronze with abstract elements based on Arabic design or the "geometry of the spirit." Overlaid with colored glass, the inside is permeated with dramatically colored light during the day and is noticeable on the outside when lit from within at night.

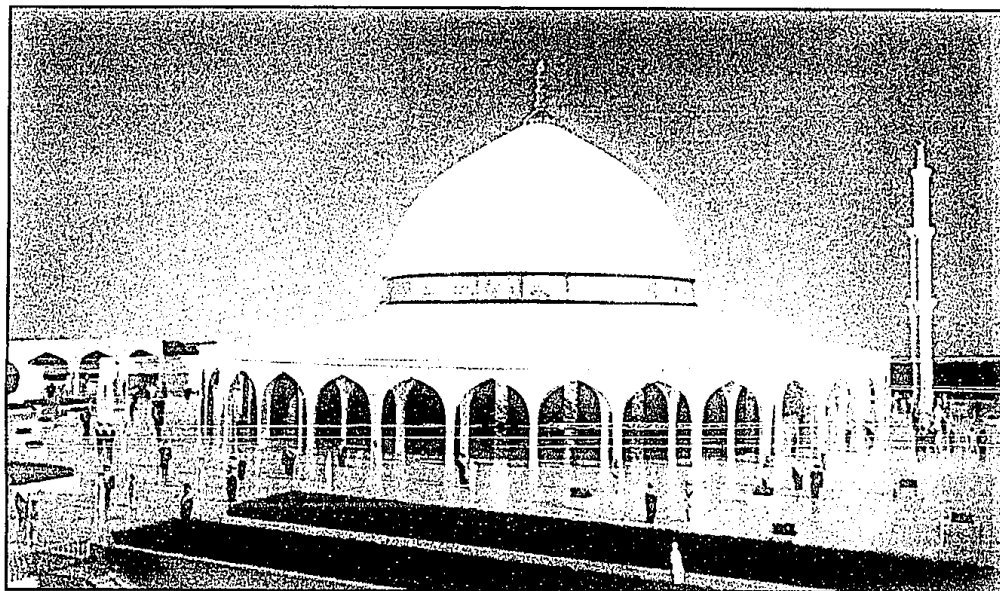
Adjacent to the mosque is a minaret, a tall tower from which the muezzin traditionally calls the worshippers to prayer five times a day.

REMOTE FROM the terminal complex is another terminal — the Royal Pavilion — for the use of the king, his entourage and foreign dignitaries. It is the second one designed by MYA, the other at the King Abdulaziz International Airport.

The terminal consists of three architectural elements that contain five separate zones of activity. The dominant, central pavilion houses the formal reception hall. Like the mosque, it is centrally planned, from which radiate playfully arches. Underneath the arches are vast sheets of glass similarly supported as those in the terminal.

Its architectural orientation serves to underscore the importance of the king in elegant surroundings. On either side are smaller structures housing separate facilities for men and women as guests or members of the royal family, and separate facilities for the king and press corps.

Dale Northup is a college professor and architectural historian.



The mosque is the central feature of the terminal complex and symbolizes the influence of Islam on the lives of people in Saudi Arabia.

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