

Ethics in the Architectural Practice

in Lebanon



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Forward

Based on the AIA Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct and following the Royal Institute of British Architects's publication, senior students in Architecture at the Lebanese American University in Byblos undertook three case studies, which look at the idea of 'ethical practice' within the architectural profession.

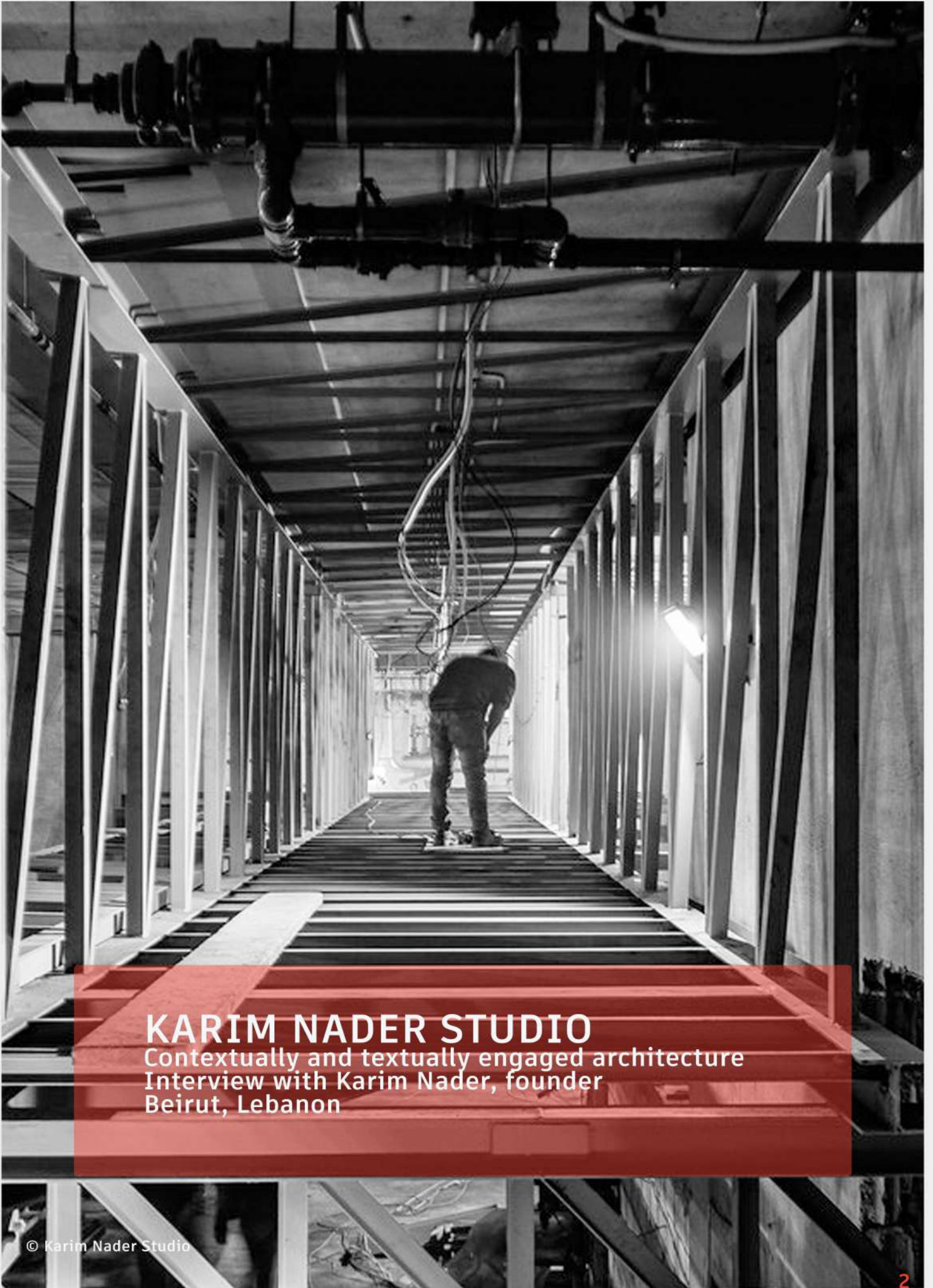
The aim of conducting these case studies is not only to analyze the ethical aspect within architecture practices in Lebanon but also to highlight some of the ethical issues that face the architectural profession and to provoke debate.



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KARIM NADER STUDIO

Contextually and textually engaged architecture
Interview with Karim Nader, founder
Beirut, Lebanon

ABOUT KARIM NADER STUDIO

The studio collaborates with architects, engineers and contractors of affiliated firms to produce work of the highest quality and craft. From residential developments, resorts, to villas and interior design projects, from the architectural scale to interior, furniture design and selection, all projects are given the same attention and passion. The quality of the design and its execution is the result of years of experience in the local market where personal ties were built with designers, suppliers, craftspeople and fabricators.

RESEARCHING NEW SKILLS AND TECHNOLOGIES TO ADVANCE PROFESSIONAL OUTPUT

The past four years were truly moving, constantly updating their work through the involved collaborations of numerous designers and contractors which sincerely inspired the renewal of architecture as a total work of art.

COLLABORATING ON DIFFERENT SCALES IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN

Projects of different scales are all treated with the same level of competence and care, customizing work “from the landscape to the door-knob.” It’s about all scales since the final result is seen as a whole including every intricate detail in the project.

ABOUT THE REASONS AND REVERBERATIONS BEHIND SPLITTING WITH PREVIOUS PARTNERS

After independent professional beginnings, Karim Nader collaborated with Blankpage from 2008 until 2016. In 2016, Nader decided to return to independent practice and founded Karim Nader Studio. This allowed him to add more to his experience and exposure to different kinds of architecture through various collaborations with a number of designers and contractors.

TRANSPARENT AND INFLUENCED CLIENT DECISIONS

Whenever part of a design or materials need to be altered in a project, the client’s consent is of importance. Going back to the client is key in trying to consult with the client in seeing the designer’s perspective on the project. Ultimately, the client is an important stakeholder.

MAINTAINING PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY

The studio’s environment is an open space where people interact in a friendly way with each other. It is amicable and employees treat each other with mutual respect. Karim Nader Studio is a family environment that allows employees to perform the humbling act of building.

OBLIGATIONS TO THE ENVIRONMENT

The role of the architect is to systematically understand the initial conditions of a site. However uninspiring they might be, at the human, urban or a depleted natural level, architects need to see those initial constraints as potential rather than obstacle. At the embryonic level of any concept, any limiting element is a possibility. Rather than some foreign idea projected on the site, the concept needs to be a celebration and expansion of what was already there. In an ethical approach to the built-environment, the natural ecology of the place needs to be recognized. The reconstitution of the local fauna and flora is sought after as a purpose in itself that becomes the foundation of any project. Eventually, this natural environment becomes the basis upon which the architectural concept is developed. This can be seen in the project “On the Rocks” in Faqra.



ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF PROJECT DECISIONS

“ON THE ROCKS” is an ongoing project by Karim Nader Studio that seeks a total immersion in nature, where the existing grey canvas is expanded into man-made fair-faced concrete volumes that contain the intimate functions of the house. The intimacy of enclosure is opposed to the openness of an extreme transparency. The intimate size of the project helps decrease the created footprint. The aim was not to dominate over nature but rather live with and within it. Made out of spaces that open up to small patios with a tree, and rooms fully clad in wood, remain sustainable alternatives.

ETHICAL ISSUES IN THE SOCIAL AND LEGAL ASPECT

When it comes to making decisions, taking initiatives and collaborating with other partners, drawing the line between what is right and what is wrong is essential.

When designing a project, many factors play a role in the process, but the most important issue to keep in mind is the effect a project has on society in all its different aspects. This means that during the process, all decisions and actions should be transparent and involve all concerned parties. It also means that the outcome of a project should not harm its users or the environment in which the project is set. Ethics should always be the guiding compass.

CONCLUSION

No matter how big or small a firm is, being credible and gaining the trust of the employees and clients forms a strong working environment. In Karim Nader’s studio, ambition and wide exposure are the main reasons for the successful continuity. Despite some obstacles and system corruption, integrity is the path to take regardless.



LESSONS LEARNED

- **Logically reacting to conflicts**

Best outcomes are reached through compromise. This results into collaborating and not holding grudges against anyone.

- **Keep transparency with client**

Building the foundation of the work on trust reflects the integrity and authenticity of a company.

- **Being ethical is essential**

All decisions should be transparent and involve corresponding parties. Being ethical on the social and legal level, yields a cleaner working environment.

- **Importance of diverse collaboration**

Collaborating with different and numerous designers and contractors could really be an inspiration to look into architecture from different and diverse perspectives.

- **Importance of nature and the environment on architecture**

Nature can sometimes avert architects from conceiving a certain design and sometimes can be an obstacle to achieving a certain vision, the lesson learned is how to extract beauty from nature in all of its conditions.



GEORGES KFOURY ARCHITECTS

A small Lebanese-based regional architectural practice
Interview with Georges Kfoury, Head architect
Broumanna, El-Metn, Lebanon

ABOUT GEORGES KFOURY ARCHITECTS

Georges Kfoury Architects is one of the main architectural firms in Lebanon. Based In Broummana in the Metn district, the firm was established 17 years ago by its head architect Georges Kfoury. The firm and its team tackle a variety of projects of different scales ranging from residential units to industrial factories, maintaining in parallel a respect to the local context, culture, and heritage in a modern approach.

EMBEDDING ETHICAL POLICIES IN DAILY PRACTICE

Ethics is one of the most significant elements and foundational cores of proper office conduct. It ensures and maintains proper interaction, cooperation and communication between employees in their day to day interactions. Two canons of ethics that the company seeks to abide to the most are transparency and respect. Integrity in dealing with clients is amplified in the context of delivering professional and transparent meetings with clients who are well integrated into the design process from the early phases till completion. Discrimination is rare to find in the office. Regardless of their level of expertise, employees are encouraged

ETHICAL SITE SAFETY

In regards to the overall wellbeing of their employees, Georges Kfoury Architects stresses the importance of safety in the workplace. Safety stems from the office and manifests itself into site work where employees are exposed to high risk activities specifically during site visits.

MODES OF COMMUNICATING

The office places great importance on its means of communication. Drawings ensure that the design process is properly understood and communicated to the client guiding him through every single detail of the project. 3 dimensional renderings help tremendously especially when clients have difficulty reading 2D drawings and do not generally have an architectural background. Changes and unforeseen risks during construction phases are communicated to the client. Clients' complaints and needs are directly accounted for and taken into consideration.

JOB ROTATION

No architect does one particular job. Employees rotate from site to computer, to model making, and even to public administration. This rotation gives the employee the opportunity to develop skills in a variety of areas and gives them a broader understanding of how their company works.



GIVING BACK TO COMMUNITIES

Architecture is seen as a means to address the concerns of the people and society. The focus is on transferring welfare in terms of preservation of culture and heritage. Operating mainly in the Metn area, the firm's architecture is respectful to local identity and complementing the context in which the project is situated. This has been achieved through maintaining traditional aesthetics built with modern technology. Community based projects have also been amplified with the recent pairing of the office with the local municipality of Broumana, aimed at improving public welfare through the maintenance of public squares.

ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS DESIGN

The office takes initiatives to ensure that their delivered designs are ecologically responsible. This is accomplished through communication, choice of materials and site analysis. In terms of communication, environmentally friendly and ecological-based conversations are held with the client, who is briefed of the impact his/her building would have on the environment and offering means to reduce the effect on the environment. In terms of materials, nature-derived cladding such as stone and wood are specified and sourced from the site. In terms of site analysis, once a topography study is done, the team understands the site fully and designs to minimize environment disturbance. A recent project in Dhour el Shweir altered the villa's terrace to go around a tree rather than impose itself on it. The office also follows a concept of 10:1, where each tree cut down during construction is compensated by 10 other trees.

EFFICIENT WORKPLACE LAYOUT

The layout of a workplace has a huge effect on productivity, even in a small practice such as this office. The layout is effectively one big space, therefore enhancing the idea of equality among employees. This space of interaction and dynamic collaboration, amplifies the teams' commitment and removes any dimensions of hierarchy.

NEXT STEPS

Georges Kfoury Architects recognizes the transitions occurring in the field of architecture in Lebanon; the uncontrolled urban development of cities in Lebanon and the resilience to maintain local culture and heritage. They seek to maintain the values and ethics that they follow. But retaining this approach to design will be a challenge in the future. The ideal would be to combine traditional architecture with a modern aesthetic and deliver projects that are humble and respectful to their context. The office, furthermore, strives towards a stern approach regarding legitimizing innovative codes and laws related to ecologically friendly, and environmentally conscious design and wishes to see these laws applied and well-valued in the goal of transforming Lebanon into a healthy and appropriate environment.



LESSONS LEARNED

- **The Pillars of Ethics: Transparency and Respect**

The most important factors to take into account are transparency and respect, avoiding bribes that are common in our culture.

- **Facilitating Client Employee Bond through engagement**

George Kfoury Architects rely on many ways to engage their clients: Constantly inviting them to meetings and presenting the project in 3-dimensionality.

This results in facilitating the client's understanding of the project.

- **The Open Door policy**

An open door policy means that the manager's door is open to every employee. This communication policy encourages openness and transparency between the manager and the company's employees. Discussions about any matter of importance to an employee becomes easier.

- **Giving Back to Communities**

Architecture entities should always give back to the community. Respect should be given to local codes and laws, as well as culture and heritage.

- **Environmentally Conscious Designs**

An important aspect of design and construction is respecting the site's environmental conditions. One of these aspects includes using local materials.

Another aspect would be the existing nature of the site that should be taken into consideration and respected throughout the entire design process.





L'ART-QUI-TECTE

Designing spaces based on self-expression
Interview with Mohamad Ali Beydoun, Founder/CEO
Beirut, Lebanon



www.lartquitecte.com

ABOUT L'ART-QUI-TECTE

L'Art-qui-tecte is a concept creation organization founded in 2012 commonly designing in the commercial, residential and hospitality sectors in Beirut and abroad. Focusing heavily on social media marketing, branding and advertising through their other branch NationalL'ART. One of their main principle is to bring communication to life through effectively focused ideas in order to deliver transformative outcomes, unlock opportunities and improve businesses. Their other purpose is to change the world and make it sustainable.

THE ETHICAL PLATFORM FOR CLIENT FIRM INTERACTION

L'Art-qui-tecte used to do both, design and execution. Focusing on both hindered the final quality of the work, so they decided to only work on the design part and leave the execution to the contractor. This enhanced their trust relationship with their clients saying that financial income and design expenses are independent from that of the contractor's.

ETHICAL POLICIES IN FOCUS

Transparency and trustworthy relationship with the client is a main priority. Not only with clients but within company members; working together in a collaborative manner.

SUSTAINING ITSELF IN REGIONAL CHALLENGES

L'Art-qui-tecte believes that the business side of architecture is very different than the creative side.



On the business side, they state that the profit margin in the design field in Lebanon is not high and that is why they have opted to expand regionally and internationally. Another way of sustaining themselves is transforming their firm into a brand via their Art-qui-Shop, a shopping online platform for art pieces and furniture. Among these future goals, they also work on prioritizing sustainability in their vision.

INVOLVING THE YOUNG CREATIVE COMMUNITY

Since L'Art-qui-tecte was founded directly after M. Beydoun graduated from university, Beydoun has a lot of faith in the youth of today. Accordingly, L'Art-qui-tecte provides extensive workshops and internships for university students. In their hiring process, the most important aspect is creativity and a passion for design. Those two criteria are somehow favored over experience since the company is a creative agency that provides creative concept solutions that tell a story.



LESSONS LEARNED

- **Client firm ethical platform**

Relationships based on transparency and trustworthiness with various clients from the beginning. Important emphasis is given on creating a unique story or concept for each and every client ensuring a satisfying outcome for both parties.

- **Maintaining ethical practice**

High ethical standards are the firm's priority for building a strong reputation and they are maintained throughout the design process that is based on honesty and integrity.

- **Enabling the profession to grow**

Aiming for higher in serving the public by transforming L'Art-qui-tes into a brand, creating teaching programs and internship opportunities and maintaining the best reputation in its quality of work.

- **Sustaining Formal Policies**

Employees have to work ethically with the clients and the other team mates at all times. There should be a collaborative design process that will guarantee a positive balance between all employees.



