



Opportunities and challenges of doing business in Saudi Arabia for Architects

As part of the [Department for Business and Trade \(DBT\) International Trade Week](#), 6 to 10 November, the RIBA is hosting an online seminar regarding Opportunities and challenges of doing business in Saudi Arabia.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a high-income country. It has a large population, significant purchasing power and a growing reputation as an important destination for many foreign brands and companies in many different sectors.

As Saudi Arabia moves towards economic diversification and a non-oil future, the country is investing billions in various mega-projects, such as the high-tech city Neom and a megacity for culture, sports and entertainment in Qiddiya. There are also development projects on the Red Sea coast including hotels, high-end residential properties and a luxury tourist and wellbeing resort called Amaala. The mega-projects demand the full range of creative services and expertise to service the growing hospitality, leisure and commercial property sectors.

The creative industries sector, which includes architecture, is witnessing a massive growth and transformation in the region, driven by the urgent need to construct, design, and fit-out.

In this session, attendees will receive an insight into building relationships, doing business, exploring opportunities and dealing with challenges, and hear from architects who are already working in the country.

Wednesday 8 November; 11:30-12:30

Speakers and Agenda

- **Diba Salam, Founder & Principal, StudioDS** – Residential project and events space; experience journeying through the prequalification process; 15 minutes
- **Richard Coutts, Director, Baca Architects** – Projects in KSA; 15 minutes
- **Graham Ellis, Middle East Business Specialist, Services & Skills, DBT and Safwan Syed, Trade Advisor, Creative Cluster, British Consulate General Jeddah** – Wider opportunities and challenges of doing business in Saudi; 15 minutes
- **Q&A**

Diba Salam, Founder & Principal, StudioDS

Diba Salam is the Founder and Principal of StudioDS, a dynamic London based creative agency, specialising in architecture and ESG Consulting. As signatories to the UN 'Race to Zero' campaign, StudioDS core values are routed in promoting UN SDGs through designing efficient, adaptive, and effective communities.

Diba is an active voice in promoting sustainable innovation and diversity in the built environment through her current and past roles as UK Built Environment Ambassador during COP 26 for UK Green Building Council, Woman in Construction Ambassador, RIBA International Committee member and UK Export Champion for the Department for Business & Trade.



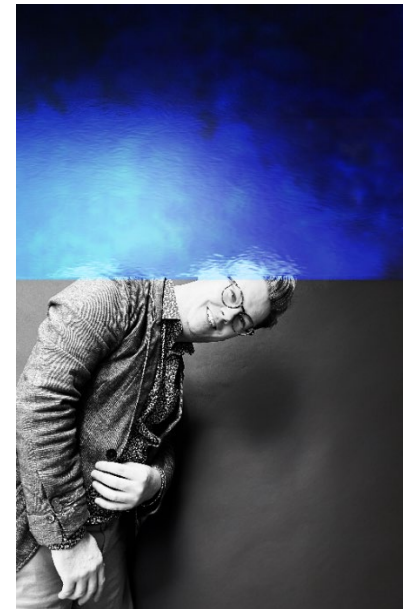
Diba Salam

Richard Coutts, Director, Baca Architects

Richard is an international thought leader in Waterfront Design and Regeneration.

As Founder and Director of Baca, Richard has extensive practical experience assisting private developers, landowners and government organisations, turn financial and socio-economic objectives into deliverable projects, policies and solutions.

Richard was inaugurated as a RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) Lifetime Fellow in 2019 for his Services to Architecture.



Richard Coutts

Graham Ellis, Middle East Business Specialist, Services & Skills, DBT

Graham works the Department for Business and Trade, as the Middle East Business Specialist.

He is focused on identifying and supporting UK creative companies access the large-scale projects across the Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia.



Graham Ellis

**Safwan Syed, Trade Advisor, Creative Cluster, British Consulate General
Jeddah**

Safwan is a Trade Advisor for the Department for Business & Trade based at the British Consulate in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Safwan's focus is on supporting and advising UK Creative companies in various sectors, including Architecture & Design, Tourism, Entertainment, Culture, Film and Sports. He helps companies compete effectively and win business in Saudi Arabia.



Safwan Syed

Projects

- Geometries Found in Nature and Islam: The Garden Mosque



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Studio DS have drawn on the rich history of geometric patterns that are contained within Islamic art and are prevalent within the region. Geometries found in nature inspire our design language, where religious symbolism and nature creates seamless patterns. The main form uses multiples of domes along a centralised square plan to create an elegant floral form, whilst having significant presence using uniquely designed arches, evoking traditional grandeur in a contemporary form.

- Nature Based Solutions for the Desert: The Tent



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The importance of community in Middle Eastern culture and Islam is well documented in scriptures, art, and literature. Inspired by regional art and materials, the geometry focuses on creating a communal space, which sensitively organises the space to provide inclusive environments for all demographics.

The reinterpretation of historic forms, from tents to earth buildings, and locally sourced materials aims to celebrate local craftsmanship and nature-based solutions in design and construction.