

Take a walk with me, and see Beirut like it's going to be

BEIRUT'S NEW MARINA IS SET TO GIVE THE LIKES OF PUERTO BANÚS AND ST. TROPEZ A RUN FOR THEIR MONEY

In Dubai, each and every new development is touted as the latest "heart of the city." Now UAE's most glittering city may be many things – a model of modernity, a business center, an airline hub, the mother of all hubris – but no one in their right minds, at least no one who wasn't in the pay of the Leo Burnetts or the Fleishman-Hillards of the world, would accuse it of having a heart. Let alone several.

Over the years, the fervor with which this designation is appended has grown in vehemence as it has become clear that while nice, even interesting in a "look Mummy, it's the circus" kind of way, none of Dubai's new "cit(ies) within a city" (gated community, anyone?) are going to cure its Tin Man status anytime soon.

Until very recently, Lebanon-über-alles snobs, sorry writers, such as myself could sow such snittery to the winds secure in the knowledge that our gorgeous capital had a heart, however broken and even if its beat was sometimes erratic and its fidelity contested, no one needed a flashy ad campaign or a T-shirt to tell them where to find Beirut's pulse.

Of course, this does make life a little more complicated if you are a

developer – say Solidere – wishing to draw attention to some specific part of your project – say the Minet el Hosn marina on the westernmost edge of Downtown Beirut.

Recognizing the futility of designating it a "heart within a heart," do you refer to it instead as a ventricle or a bright new artery? Or do you eschew the cardiac metaphor altogether? Because let's face it, Beirut may be many things – a gateway, a frontline, a model of unpredictability, the mother of all quibbling – but it is definitely Dorothy, not Tin Man. Some other fleshy figure of speech, then? Beirut's lung or its brand new cerebellum?

Now Solidere, like Dubai, may also have been accused in its time of a deficiency in the cardiac department but unlike the developers behind Las Vegas, it displays a marked indifference to hyperbole, perhaps because it is saddled with the infinitely more complicated task of rebuilding an existing city, as opposed to building castles made of sand.

So when they were faced recently with how best to describe the *très* upscale development roughly encompassing the St. Georges hotel





(*allah yaharso*), the (future) Four Seasons and the Suleiman Franjeh boulevard, the wags at the Petit Serail decided, perhaps with an ironic and irreverent nod to the alarmist rumblings emanating from the scion of the Hashemite dynasty about "Shiites" and "crescents," to call it L'Arc d'Or or golden arch.

Reminiscent of phrases involving the words *jeunesse*, *triomphe* and perhaps less felicitously *pain*, the emphasis in this arc is firmly on the *or* (gold). Between the already completed (and by the way, MIPIM award-winning) Beirut Marina, the half-finished Beirut Tower, the rapidly rising Ricardo Bofil/Nabil Gholam-designed Platinum Tower (which will considerably up the city's architectural ante once completed) and the extravagantly expensive Ivana Trump Residence (Damac), this sliver of Brand New Beirut will boast some of the most expensive real estate in the region.

If this is beginning to make the area sound like one of Dubai's "cities within the city" developments and conjures images of watchmen, barriers and resident-only streets, take heart. Regardless of whether you can actually afford (or even wish) to live there, the Arc – we'll stick to its French appellation, the golden arch sounds a little too Fast Food Nation – is designed with everyone in mind.

Solidere is hoping that multimillion-dollar residences aside, the Arc will attract Beirutis of all means and motivations. To the east, the district gives on to what will be Beirut's only seafront park, a badly needed breathing space in a city with so few public spaces. The park itself will be fringed in part by the new central Corniche, a 3.5-kilometer-long walkway blessed with an expansive view of the city, Sannine mountain and the sea. Completed several years ago, the opening of the corniche has been postponed several times due to the delays in starting work on the park, itself a hostage to Beirut's tempestuous political climate. At its western end, the Corniche ends at one of two marinas in Downtown Beirut.

Originally run by the St. Georges hotel, the Western Marina as it is now called, was taken over by Solidere several years ago after a long-running and rather acrimonious battle with St. Georges owner Fadi Khoury. Until last summer's war, the marina was doing good business and was able to attract several megayachts, many over 60 meters in length and the kind you normally only see moored in places like Cannes or Monaco.

Imad Dana, project manager for the Arc d'Or area, says the new waterfront will make Beirut an important destination on the international yachting map.

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