

Somethin' different lifestyle



By H el ene Dauschy

It's barely 6:00 am and Alfred is already busy milking cows. But when his chores on the farm are done, he won't be going home – he'll be returning to his prison cell. In Sweden, which prioritises rehabilitation over long prison sentences, Alfred is one of 60 inmates preparing to reintegrate into society at a minimum security "open prison" functioning as a farm in the town of Mariestad, about 300 kilometres (185 miles) southwest of Stockholm. Imprisoned since April for illegally possessing a gun, Alfred, a grandfather in his 50s who is due to be released in November, can't hide the joy he gets from spending time with the animals. "I like them... they calm me down," he says with a sigh, wearing a cap, his arm covered in tattoos. In this agricultural prison called Rodjan – the biggest of the Swedish penitentiary system's three farms – his routines are the same every day. He meets up with his work assignment partner Sofian (both names have been

changed to protect their identities) in the morning for two and a half hours of work and then once again in the evening. "I clean (the udder) to avoid the bacteria, then I disinfect it" before pulling the teats, Alfred says enthusiastically. Other inmates work on the farm watering the plants, repainting the gates, and

mowing the lawn. And a dozen of them are in charge of the livestock. Sweden is among the countries with the fewest prisoners in the world: there are 0.5 inmates per 1,000 inhabitants, which is half of that in France (one per 1,000), Swedish and French prison data show. The Scandinavian nation spends twice as much as France on each detainee, including those placed under surveillance, and works hard to avoid confinement. Instead, it prefers to put people on probation, favours widespread use of ankle monitors, sentences people to community service, and releases prisoners after two-thirds of time served. Sweden also invests heavily in reintegration through language classes and vocational training. "It's our system for bringing people out into society in a good way, so they don't come back to prison again," Britt-Marie Johansson, head of the Rodjan institution, tells AFP. In Sweden, just under a third of prison-

ers re-offend after leaving jail or serving their term, which is half of that in France, according to the Swedish and French prison statistics. As in all penitentiaries across Sweden, inmates have their own cells. At Rodjan, they're unlocked. There are no security cameras, no gates, no barbed wire, and inmates are allowed to move about freely. Sweden has more than a dozen open prisons across the country. Inmates at Rodjan are serving sentences for all types of convictions, ranging from driving without a licence to tax crimes or assault, but prisoners placed there are all considered to not pose a threat to society. "We count the prisoners in the morning, during the day and in the evening, and we know where they are all the time," assures Johansson. "If they do something wrong, they go to a higher security level" facility, she adds. Closing the fence to the meadow after he finishes milking the cows, Alfred jokes that the cows are more locked up than the prisoners. (AFP)

Kuwait



Souq Sharq's Fish Market at night. (Nooraddin Abdulkareem – KUNA)

New Look

Young Hamad's favorite pastime art and design

Hamad 'calls' to preserve Kuwait's historical buildings

By Lidia Qattan

Special to the Arab Times

This is the second and the last in a series of articles on Hamad Jassem Al Fawaz an open-minded, highly educated, dynamic young architect, owner of his own company and a passionate about his family history. — Editor

Hamad Al Fawaz was born on March 8th 1982, in many ways he is a reminder of the old enterprising Kuwaiti spirit that made the country prosperous and renowned throughout the Gulf region long before the oil entered the equation and transformed the life and spirit of the country!

In the eighties, at the time Hamad was growing up, Kuwait was undergoing radical changes triggered by the Iran-Iraq war and its deleterious effects on the Gulf region. Kuwait in particular suffered more than any other of the GCC countries because of its closeness to the war-zone and because of its sympathizing with Iraq in the conflict. Hence it was made to suffer heavy retaliation from Iran, beginning the so called Tankers' war that prompted Kuwait to reflag its ships under the USA and Russia protection; it also suffered from terrorists attacks that rocked the country.

Soon after the Iran-Iraq war ended with the humiliation of Iraq, which was reduced to near bankruptcy, the Iraqi regime invaded Kuwait on the 2nd of August 1990, to get at its riches. The Iraqi invasion and the aftermath of that painful episode in the history of Kuwait disintegrated the feeling of community that sparked among its people during the invasion, but faded away soon after the liberation, when people wrapped in their own priorities became more materialistic. The spreading of corruption triggered a state of quasi apathy that affected the whole tenor of life. In spite of the deterioration in the method of teaching in government schools, Hamad and his siblings were never sent to private ones, because according to his father's belief "A student is smart wherever he goes to private or government schools".

Spurred by his parents to study hard Hamad was an "A" student throughout his school days, but the effect of the education he had in Kuwait was felt later-on when he went to the USA to continue his higher education. Hamad was still in high school when he made up his mind to study architecture, since he was a little boy art and design were his favor-

ite pastime, in growing up architecture took his interest. At graduation with a high GPA, he got a scholarship to study abroad. He was a seventeen years old teenager when he went to the USA; his first shock in attending University was discovering that no one informed him about the schedule of enrollment at the College of Architecture in Pennsylvania. To avoid losing one year and his scholarship Hamad took the advice of his cousin studying at the Oklahoma State University, to send his application, he was accepted.

Life in the States was radically different from the one Hamad experienced at home. Coming from a very strict family surrounding, the contrast was for him an open mind experience, a fresh-air breath of intellectual and personal freedom that took him by storm, spurring him to try everything within the limits of his religious and cultural upbringing of which he felt proud.

His knowledge of the English language was poor, so his first year abroad was not of his standard as a student, especially when he became involved in the Arab Students organization. In discovering the corruption and hypocrisies in that organization, he left it and formed his own group of congenial friends, but realizing that his involvement with the group was affecting his study, he left it. The time Hamad spent in the States was for him an open-mind experience that engendered new feeling of commitments and understanding of the true values he had always taken for granted and made him to look at life in a broader perspective and dimension.

At graduation in 2006 with a BS degree in Architectural Engineering, Hamad didn't attend the graduation ceremony in protest, because George Bush was the guest of honor and he was contrary to his policy in the Middle East. At his return home with soaring dreams and expectations, as every fresh graduate feels when coming home from abroad, Hamad thought to apply for a job in the private sector to gain first-hand experience, but in choosing one of the top firms in the country he was let down.

When he confided with his uncle, Fawaz

about the incident, his uncle advised him to apply for a job in a middle-sized company where he would gain a wider experience, than working in a big firm that only gave him a routine job.

Taking his uncle's advice Hamad applied at the Integrated Project Management & Consultancy Company, in which one of his cousins was a silent partner. Working with him as a Junior Designer-Architect Hamad got engaged in designing buildings for the KOC (Kuwait Oil Company) as well as private villas and chalets.

Firm

A quick learner and focused in everything he was doing Hamad soon became a team member in design for the ABK (Ahli Bank of Kuwait) and for the NBK (the National Bank of Kuwait). In the meantime while accompanying his cousin, he mastered new concepts in following-up and obtaining needed permits from the Kuwait Municipality and from the Fire Brigade Department. He also became skilled in preparing and rewriting contracts and construction specifications according to client and firm requirements, and he gained firsthand experience working as a site engineer in the Desman International School extension and at the NBK (National Bank of Kuwait) branch in Rumaitheya.

Hamad's total salary in his first year as a junior architect amounted to KD 740; he was getting KD 500 from the company he was working with and an additional KD 240 from the government, to encourage privatization. His salary jumped to KD 1,100 plus the extra KD from the government, when he moved to the Joun Real Estate Company in 2008, as an Assistant Manager at the Asset Management Department.

There he was dealing with business consultation for massive real estate development projects and buildings maintenance. Working well under pressure Hamad soon became experienced in syndications and getting loans from international Banks for his company's projects.

Appreciated for his good leadership qualities and hard work Hamad became a team leader in the company's main projects in Fujairah, UAE and a team Committee Leader and Coordinator for saving company assets in Fujairah, in Syria and in Egypt. He also became a team member in the legal committee to bypass all legal obligations in securing asset income and ownership.



Hamad Al Fawaz

In 2008, the economic crisis affecting banks on a global scale also affected Kuwait and that affected the real estate companies needing loans from banks. In itself the 2008 crisis was a waking call that disclosed the corruption and bad management in the system, upon which the Kuwait government had to act.

Trust

While still working at the Joun Real Estate Company gaining expertise, Hamad thought to make good use of his off-duty time in creating his own business in partnership with a friend from school days, who studied with him in the States. This friend was out of job, so he thought to give him a chance and through training and experience he would manage the company, but after more than one year, during which Hamad was paying from his salary to cover the losses to allow the company to get established, discovering that his friend was betraying his trust, he dissolved the partnership.

For Hamad every experience positive or negative offers a good learning opportunity. The fundamental rule he quickly learned in establishing any lasting partnership is mutual trust; without it the partnership will fail. Hence for his next partner he chose a young man with the same integrity and honesty in business as himself.

In 2008 Hamad founded the Signature Design Company with Anwar, his new part-

ner, since then his enterprise has been gaining a good reputation in the market and is getting stronger.

Besides running his company in 2012, Hamad started working at the Kuwait Dynamics Limited for Contracting and Logistics as Technical and Business Development Manager, and became involved in a multitude of projects both in public and private sectors that broadened his field of understanding and expertise. He also became Member of the Architectural and Design team and Head of the Committee of Construction Management and Financial probability of various projects.

Hamad's growing knowledge and expertise gained him the position of Head Committee Management Guidance and Direction of other project engineers, which ensures that clients and their projects receive personal attention and the best quality delivery.

Besides working at the Kuwait Dynamic Limited and in his own company, Hamad became a consultant at the Youth Ministry for Engineering, Design offices. Besides his growing engagements he also writes in his electronic block, expressing his ideas and opinions on social, political and religious issues.

Recently, in his concern to preserve for posterity buildings worthy of preservation because of their historical or architectural values, he started writing a book on "Architecture and Politics" in which he discloses the indifference of local authorities in the Middle East in preserving the past. Incidentally in his concern for the preservation of the historical past of his country Hamad Al Fawaz echoes the struggle of other young architects in the mid-fifties in Kuwait when they were warning through their writings and lectures of the loss of its cultural heritage posterity would suffer when the old Kuwaiti City was being systematically destroyed to make way for a new modern one.

Too late old timers realized the loss of the Firig they used to live in and the places they used to play and gather. Recently an attempt has been made to bring back the memory in creating the "Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Village", for holiday makers, to give them a glimpse of what used to be a typical Kuwaiti Ferij. Obviously it is only an attempt in giving an idea of what in structure it used to be, but devoid of the strong spirit of community that pervaded the original.

Concluded