

Ismaili Centre, Toronto:

A new addition to a growing global network

By Faranaaz Alimohamed



Artist's rendering: The Ismaili Centre, Toronto
Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited

On Wynford Drive, an unassuming street in the heart of Toronto, work has begun on a project that will transform the landscape of the city and become a powerful landmark for the Ismaili Muslim community in Canada. In Toronto's Don Mills area, a new Ismaili Centre is being built as a space for contemplation, spiritual search, intellectual discourse, cultural expression and mutual exchange between diverse cultures and communities.

When complete, the Ismaili Centre, Toronto will be part of a growing network of Ismaili Centres, five of which have already been established in cities around the world. Over the past 25 years, these architecturally spectacular, multipurpose buildings have been constructed in London, Burnaby, Lisbon, Dubai and Dushanbe, with plans for others in Houston, Paris and Los Angeles. They are situated in spaces from quiet suburbs to busy metropolitan hubs and represent the enduring presence of the Ismaili Muslim community in the places where they are located.



Photo of the aerial view of the model of the Ismaili Centre
Photo courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited





Artist's rendering of the roof of the prayer hall
Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited

The most prominent feature of the Centre, which is itself located at the highest point of the site, will be a bold, crystalline, frosted glass dome that will sit on top of and illuminate the prayer hall.

– Mawlana Hazar Imam,
May 28, 2010

“The Ismaili Centres are typically located in cities where there is a substantial Ismaili Muslim population, and they reflect the Jamat’s hopes and aspirations for the future,” explains Nazir Mulji, Coordinator, Ismaili Centres at Aiglemont, France. “These are representational buildings that over time will be built in more places.”

Conceived as spaces that enable the search for mutual understanding, the Ismaili Centres endeavour to bring people together in a mood of friendship, courtesy, and harmony. They facilitate the promotion of cultural, educational and social programmes from the broadest, non-denominational perspectives, within the ethical framework of Islam. Serving both religious and ambassadorial functions, each Ismaili Centre incorporates a Jamatkhana—a space of prayer, contemplation and community interaction. They also include spaces for intellectual and social gatherings, meeting rooms, educational facilities, libraries and gardens. The activities that take place in these spaces allow diverse peoples to come together in dialogue and in recognition of a shared responsibility for advancing the common good.

“As you look at the Ismaili Centres, the activities of the Aga Khan Development Network [AKDN] and the Jamat, we are a global Jamat, a global network,” says Mulji. “The Centres give us an opportunity to make connections with global organizations in multiple centres and at multiple sites around the world, to talk about the work of the Aga Khan Development Network, share our experiences and build the kind of strong relationships that we require to improve the quality of life of the people amongst whom we live.”



Artist's rendering of the Social Hall roof
Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited

The Ismaili Centre, Toronto is an ambitious project that will stand adjacent to the first-ever Aga Khan Museum in the Wynford Drive complex. The two buildings will be nestled within a serene park, open to the public, which will link them together. “The Museum and the Park will also provide a lot of space in which to have conversations, to have dialogue with multiple communities in Toronto and to build more of a mutual understanding among cultures,” says Mulji.

The welcoming space of the Park will be a valuable addition to its Toronto neighbourhood, and the architecture of the Centre will be visually dramatic in the context of its surrounding urban environment. The building has been designed by the acclaimed Indian architectural firm Charles Correa Associates in collaboration with the internationally recognized, award winning, Toronto-based firm of Moriyama & Teshima Architects.

Architect Charles Correa describes the design of the Centre as follows: “We knew this Jamatkhana must be pluralistic—expressing on the one hand the age-old heritage of the Ismaili community and on the other their newfound aspirations

as proud citizens of Canada. So, throughout the building, the architectonic language and the materials used are contemporary (exposed concrete, stainless steel and frosted glass), but there are also references to other values, derived from other times.”

The most prominent feature of the Centre, which is itself located at the highest point of the site, will be a bold, crystalline, frosted glass dome that will sit on top of and illuminate the prayer hall. Circular in shape, the prayer hall will be spanned by a double layer of glass which will rise to form the cone-shaped dome. The glass will be supported by elegant steel trusses of various depths and dimensions, and each layer will be pieced together in its own geometry.

The circular wall surrounding the prayer hall will be rimmed with a slanted glass skylight to allow natural light to wash down on its surface. At night, the glass roof of the prayer hall will glow, lit from within.

While it is the most private space in the building, the prayer hall, defined by its distinct crystalline dome, will also be the



Artist's rendering of the Social Hall Lobby
 Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited

feature most visible to the public as it will be easily apparent from Toronto's Don Valley Parkway, a major artery that leads into and out of the city's downtown. In this way, the Ismaili Centre will be a strong and beautiful symbol of the Jamat's presence in Toronto and Canada.

The interior spaces of the Centre are also striking in their design. In approaching the prayer hall through the entrance foyer, a tall glass column will be visible, radiating light. The column pierces through to the terrace above, bringing in natural light and establishing the Qibla axis which aligns with the prayer hall.

The social hall anchors the building opposite the prayer hall. It has a large, slanted glass skylight and irregular faceted geometry on the ceiling. The social hall is surrounded by an atrium library, an entry foyer and classrooms. On the upper level, connected to the social hall, is a large roof terrace that looks down on the garden.

The Centre's outdoor spaces will have an intimate relationship with the setting of the surrounding Park. The design and landscaping of the Park will provide a variety of views, creating opportunities for new experiences at every visit.

Gardens and outdoor spaces play a significant role in other Ismaili Centres around the world as well. The rooftop garden at the Ismaili Centre, London provides an oasis of calm in the midst of a busy urban environment, while in the courtyard of the Ismaili Centre in Burnaby, the sound of moving water, the scent of plants and the interplay of light and shadow stimulate the senses.

The five-domed Ismaili Centre in Dubai also features an idyllic garden, with palms, flower beds and flowing water. The exterior reflects the intent of the building, which Mawlana Hazar Imam describes as "a place for peaceful contemplation, but one that is set in a social context. It is not a place to hide from the world, but rather a place which inspires us to engage our worldly work as a direct extension of our faith."

Since the first Ismaili Centre opened a quarter of a century ago, the landmark Centres have become synonymous with the Ismaili community's approach to the Muslim faith and to modern life. At the opening ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, London in April 1985, Mawlana Hazar Imam said, "This building is more than simply a place of congregation. Through the quality of its design and workmanship, it will be a bridge between the culture of the community's roots and that of its future as well as a symbol of the hopes of people who have lived through change and turbulence and have ultimately found security."

“These Centres serve to reflect, illustrate and represent the community’s intellectual and spiritual understanding of Islam, its social conscience, its organization, its forward outlook and its positive attitude towards the societies in which it lives.”

Around the world, the Ismaili Centres have hosted a variety of events, including policy forums, cultural exhibitions, award presentations and intercultural dialogues. On these occasions, the Centres have welcomed many members of the wider community including government officials, academics, leaders of other communities and the public. These events have allowed visitors to tour the Centres and engage with Jamati members and leaders, thereby enhancing their understanding of the Ismaili community and of Islam more broadly. By building bridges between diverse groups, these events promote democracy, civil society and pluralism, themes that are prevalent in the work of the Imam and the AKDN.

Ultimately, the Ismaili Centres are physical manifestations of the values of Islam. As Mawlana Hazar Imam stated at the Foundation Ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, Dushanbe in August 2003, "These Centres serve to reflect, illustrate and represent the community's intellectual and spiritual understanding of Islam, its social conscience, its organization, its forward outlook and its positive attitude towards the societies in which it lives." And the goal for the Ismaili Centre, Toronto is to be a building block in this rich endeavour. ♦



Artist's rendering of the Entrance to the Centre
Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited

A global network of Ismaili Centres



Photo: AKDN

Ismaili Centre, London
(United Kingdom)

Foundation Ceremony
September 6, 1979

Opening ceremony
April 24, 1985

Architect
Casson Conder Partnership

"It is a splendid contribution to the architecture of London, fitting in easily with the other fine buildings of South Kensington, yet having its own distinctive character too. It is a monument to the determination of your community to play a full part in the life of our society, while at the same time retaining their own identity and independence. As I believe a great Islamic poet of the 19th century, Mohammed Iqbal, said: "For the individual to be bound to society is a blessing: it is in a community that his work is perfected."

– Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher
at the Opening Ceremony

Geometric patterns play an important role in Islamic architecture and can be found throughout the building. In the entrance hall, the fountain pool matches the interweaving of the geometrical floor pattern. A roof garden allows for a quiet space away from the noisy street below.

Ismaili Centre, Burnaby
(Canada)

Foundation Ceremony
July 26, 1982

Opening ceremony
August 23, 1985

Architect
Bruno Freschi

"This building, I toured it a little earlier, makes our senses dance to the music of visual art, a great tribute to the architect and an art which tests not just our appreciation of form and light, but of the intellectual and spiritual messages revealed in the marble, sandstone and glass, brought to this beautiful city from so far away."

– Prime Minister Brian Mulroney
at the Opening Ceremony

The architecture of the Centre is influenced by Islamic traditions of calligraphy, geometry and symmetry, but light and shadows play an important role also. The principle entrance of the Centre takes the form of a niche, emanating a lamp-like light. And, patterned glass windows reflect different colours depending upon the intensity and the direction of light falling upon them.



Photo: AKDN



Photo: AKDN

Ismaili Centre, Lisbon
(Portugal)

Foundation Ceremony
December 18, 1996

Opening ceremony
July 11, 1998

Architects
Raj Rewal and Frederico Valsassina

“By its very concept and design, this Centre will bear witness to the re-encounter of two heritages that moulded the Peninsular civilization, that of the East and that of the West, that of Islam and that of Judaic-Christian tradition. By its inherent vocation the Centre will be a place of diversity, of plurality and tolerance, which constitute the richness of our condition.”
– **President Jorge Sampaio at the Opening Ceremony**

The architects incorporated into the design, a Manueline inspiration from Jeronimos Monastery and a diversity of Islamic architectural influences from Andalusia to Persia and Mughal India to Turkey.

Located in the prime location of Palma de Baixo, the Centre is set amidst a landscaped park and is in close proximity to prominent universities and principal hospitals in central Lisbon.

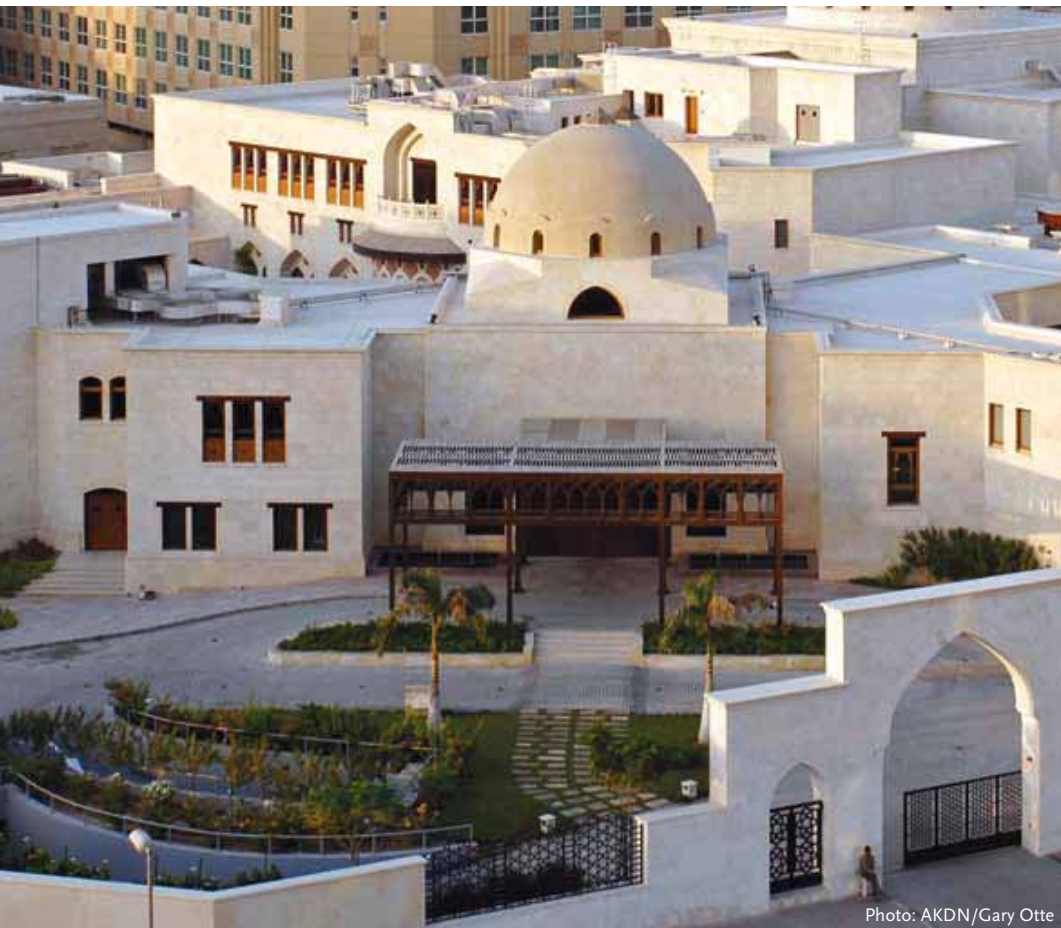


Photo: AKDN/Gary Otte

Ismaili Centre, Dubai
(United Arab Emirates)

Foundation Ceremony
December 13, 2003

Opening ceremony
March 26, 2008

Architects
Rami El-Dahan and Soheir Farid

“As its architects have so effectively realized, this building exists fundamentally as a place for peaceful contemplation, but one that is set in a social context. It is not a place to hide from the world, but rather a place which inspires us to engage our worldly work as a direct extension of our faith.”
– **Mawlana Hazar Imam at the Opening Ceremony**

Water is used as a key feature in the architecture of the Ismaili Centre, Dubai. In the Takhtabosh Courtyard it flows from fountains and courses through channels inlaid in the ground, creating a calm and peaceful environment at day or dusk. In addition, a unique water feature is used as the centrepiece of the Morning Prayer Hall Courtyard.



Photo: AKDN/Gary Otte

Ismaili Centre, Dushanbe (Tajikistan)

Foundation Ceremony
August 30, 2003

Opening ceremony
October 12, 2009

Architect
Farouk Noormohamed

"I would like to express with confidence that this Centre, as a place of promoting humility, friendship, dialogue, openness, generosity, kindness and charity in society, will uphold high standards of activities with the aim of bringing together cultures, advocating moral and social values, and serving as a symbol of friendship and patriotism."

**– President Emomali Rahmon
at the Opening Ceremony**

The site of the Ismaili Centre Dushanbe is located on Ismoili Somoni Avenue, named after the founder of the Samanid dynasty (early 10th century) and considered Tajikistan's national hero.

The carved wooden beams on the ceiling were designed by artisans from Khorog, the decorative plaster work on the walls was fashioned by craftsmen from Dushanbe and local suzanis and carpets adorning the walls were handmade across Central Asia.



Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited

Ismaili Centre, Toronto (Canada)

Foundation Ceremony
May 28, 2010

Opening Ceremony
Anticipated in 2013

Architect
Charles Correa

"The Museum will complement the activities of the Global Centre for Pluralism in Ottawa, a partnership of the Aga Khan Development Network and the Government of Canada, which is dedicated to the promotion of ethnic, cultural and religious interchange, education and harmony. And the Ismaili Centre here, is a symbol of how the Canadian Ismaili community has integrated into Canadian society, a mark of Canadian pluralism at its best."

**– Prime Minister Stephen Harper
at the Foundation Ceremony**

The Wynford Drive complex, future home of the Ismaili Centre Toronto, the Aga Khan Museum and their Park, is located in the area of Don Mills. The neighbourhood is known as one of the most diverse in Canada with people from a range of ethnic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds living and working there. ♦



The art of shared heritage

By Tasleen Adatia

“[The Aga Khan’s] goal is also, undoubtedly, quite simply to bring people together so that they may speak and understand each other, to build bridges between worlds.”

—Philip Jodidio, *Under the Eaves of Architecture*



Artist's rendering of the Courtyard of the Museum
Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited

Museums are more than simply buildings filled with ancient artefacts. They are places where culture, history, and heritage converge, revealing a common language among disparate peoples. It was with this view that Mawlana Hazar Imam decided to build a museum dedicated to the preservation of Muslim art and culture—to create common understanding, divulge shared heritage, and disperse ignorances that plague relations between East and West.

The Museum's intent is to be an educational institution. While a collaborative endeavour, the Museum is being spearheaded by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC). "Although it will be using collections of objects and works of art with a cultural dimension," says Luis Monreal, General Manager of the AKTC, "its purpose will be to educate the public on the plurality of Muslim civilizations over time."

The development of this Museum, which aims to open its doors in Toronto, Ontario in three years' time, should be seen in the context of Mawlana Hazar Imam's vision as a necessary component of a larger strategy to increase awareness and knowledge of Islam's rich diversity in interpretation, cultures and traditions. As Mawlana Hazar Imam noted at the Foundation Ceremony on May 28, 2010, the Museum will be a place for seminars, lectures, discussion, and research. Plans for collaborative programs with educational institutions and other museums are also in place. Museums in particular, notes Monreal, are influential because they are neutral institutions. They appeal to the emotional intelligence of people, through beauty, sophistication, and intellectual representation of the objects in their trust.

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Benoit Junod, Director of Museums and Exhibitions at the AKTC, is responsible for those objects. While famed Japanese architect Fumihiko Maki exercises his skill in the design of the Museum's physical structure and its aesthetic vision inspired by the concept of light, Junod is concerned with the Museum's focal point: the art it will house.

His work includes presenting highlights of the Museum's collection, housed in Geneva, in key European venues. Exhibitions have taken place at the Palazzo della Pilotta in Parma, the Ismaili Centre in London, the Louvre in Paris, the

Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon, the Caixa Forum in Madrid, and the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin. Art aficionados in Europe have an opportunity to revel in the exquisite pieces before they travel to North America permanently to become part of fulfilling Mawlana Hazar Imam's vision of a museum devoted to Islamic art, located in a country that reflects the pluralistic nature of the message he would like to convey.

Examples include a page from the Blue Qur'an, an indigo-dyed parchment with gold kufic script, likely created for the Fatimid Caliphate in the 9th century.

A large part of the collection comprises of 500 manuscripts, ceramics and miniatures collected since the 1950s by Hazar Imam's uncle, the late Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, and his wife, Princess Catherine. Some of the Museum's greatest works on paper are drawn from this part of the collection. Examples include a page from the Blue Qur'an, an indigo-dyed parchment with gold kufic script, likely created for the Fatimid Caliphate in the 9th century, and the oldest known copy of Avicenna's Cannon of Medicine, dated 1052—one of the most famous books in the history of medicine and a reminder that modern medicine has its roots in the scholarship of Muslims.

Prince Sadruddin was able to acquire many other fine items when the Cartier, Rothschild and the Minassian collections were sold in the 1960s and 1970s, which complement the earlier pieces. Prince Sadrudin and Princess Catherine showcased these in their beautiful Salon Persan, which was at the heart of their home, Chateau de Bellerive, near Geneva. Princess Catherine has generously donated their collections to the Museum, within which a replica of the Salon will be created.

The Museum's collection now stands at approximately 1,000 items, in part due to the generous acquisition of new pieces by Mawlana Hazar Imam. While this number may be small compared with the masterpiece collections of long-established museums such as the Louvre (which houses about 15,000 pieces), the quality of the collection ensures more masterpieces than are seen in much larger museums.

Visitors to the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto can expect the pleasure of experiencing the beauty of a Mughal jade cup, made for a member of the French royal family in the time of Shah Jahan and exquisitely mounted by the British silversmith Benjamin Vuillamy nearly 200 years later.



Artist's rendering of the Museum gallery
Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited



Artist's rendering of the Museum Auditorium
Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited

They will also be able to encounter a Chinese-Ming period ablutions dish, with a central medallion inscription reading, *“Blessed is he who purifies his hand of all evil,”* and on the back, *“Purification upon purification is light upon light.”* This example of a “hybrid” piece, demonstrating cross-cultural influences, highlights what can result from the meeting of two civilizations. “Each object is not only a pretty thing,” Junod emphasizes, “but usually has many layers of meaning from a historical point of view.”

In his address given at the Louvre on October 17th, 2007, in conjunction with the exhibition of objects from the Aga Khan Museum collection, Mawlana Hazar Imam spoke about the museum project in Toronto and the “significance of [the] exhibition and the role museums might play in improving understanding between the East and the West.” The history of Islam spans continents and millennia; as a result, religious, ethnic and cultural groups that encountered one another, in their art forms especially, have elements shared between them. Acknowledging humankind’s common heritage fosters mutual understanding and tolerance—works of art are a medium through which to do so, and museums are a wonderful environment in which to disseminate information and explain their significance. Objects can be placed in such a way as to capture attention, create associations, and generate discussion. The great Swiss curator and art historian Harald Szeeman was once asked how he organized art for an exhibition; he replied, “I do it in the way I place guests at a dinner table—I put people together who have things to say to each other.”

“what happens on that continent, culturally, economically, and politically cannot fail to have worldwide repercussions—which is why we thought it important that an institution capable of promoting understanding and tolerance should exist there.”

Choosing Canada as the site of this historic endeavour was a careful decision. Although the collections have mainly been housed in Europe for the past several years, North America was chosen as the permanent home because, in Mawlana Hazar Imam’s words, “what happens on that continent, culturally, economically, and politically cannot fail to have worldwide repercussions—which is why we thought it important that an institution capable of promoting understanding and tolerance should exist there.” Canada in particular has a wonderful tradition of tolerance, one that has “permitted diversity to flourish.” The proximity of the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Royal Ontario Museum, both major players in the worldwide arts community that bring major exhibitions to the city,



Artist's rendering of the Museum gallery
Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited



Artist's rendering of the Museum gallery
Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited

will further the attraction of the Aga Khan Museum and enhance its impact for the wider community.

Despite the fixed address, however, the Museum will not address a fixed audience. Part of the Museum's strategy is to create a series of temporary exhibitions, equal in size to the permanent collection, which will reflect upon numerous subjects relating to Muslim history and cultures. Further, this Museum aims to attract people living on both sides of the Canada-US border, as well as an international audience. "There is a large reservoir of potential public," says Luis Monreal, who notes that millions of people live within a one-hour flight to Toronto, making it a strategic location for maximum exposure.

The Aga Khan Museum in Toronto will be the first institution in North America dedicated to the art of the Islamic world. As Mawlana Hazar Imam said in 2007 in Paris, "The 1,428 years of the Ummah embrace many civilizations and are therefore characterized by an astonishing pluralism. In particular, this geographic, ethnic, linguistic, and religious pluralism has manifested itself at the most defining moments in the history of the Ummah."

The Aga Khan Museum in Toronto will be the first institution in North America dedicated to the art of the Islamic world.

For the Canadian Jamat, as well as the Muslim Ummah, this is a chance to connect the East and the West, to learn from the past and contextualize the present, and to create a tangible construction from a long history of abstract ideology. The search for truth and beauty is an integral part of the Muslim experience and is exemplified in the vision and philosophy underlying the Museum project. At the Foundation Ceremony of the Wynford Drive complex, Mawlana Hazar Imam poignantly reminded the audience that the Museum "will illuminate the inspiration which Muslim artists have drawn from faith, and from a diverse array of epics, from human stories of separation and loss, of love and joy—themes which we know reverberate eloquently across the diverse cultures of humanity." ♦



Depictions of diversity: The Aga Khan Museum Collection

Compiled by Uzma Rajan and Mehnaz Thawer

“We hope and trust it will contribute to a deeper understanding among cultures - to the strengthening of true cultural pluralism - which is increasingly essential to peace, and to progress, in our world.”

Mawlana Hazar Imam, at the 2007 *Spirit and Life* Exhibition in London, United Kingdom

Some 1,000 unique pieces make up the Aga Khan Museum Collection. The masterpieces represent 1,000 years of Muslim history, spanning vast geographical origins including, Afghanistan, China, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, North Africa, Spain, Syria, Turkey and Yemen. The artefacts tell the story of Islam's many accomplishments, from art and faith to science and literature.

Before finding its permanent home in Toronto on Wynford Drive, the Collection has been travelling across Europe since 2007, carrying with it knowledge and ideas about different peoples, cultures and faith traditions. A succession of exhibits has appeared at renowned museums and exhibition spaces in Parma, London, Paris, Lisbon, Toledo, Madrid and Barcelona. Currently, pieces of the Collection are on display at Berlin's Martin-Gropius-Bau. The exhibition is set to travel to Istanbul, Turkey, where it will be showcased in the Fall of 2010.

The following pages contain a small sample of the pieces which will be housed in the first-ever Aga Khan Museum.

A robe originating in Iran or Central Asia
13th - 14th century CE
See page 58

Splendori a Corte – Arti del Mondo Islamico nelle Collezioni del Museo Aga Khan

March – May 2007, Palazzo della Pilotta, Parma, Italy

This exhibition contained 168 items including rare art and manuscripts. It was held in collaboration with the Teatro Regio di Parma and Parma Capitale della Musica. The first part of the exhibition focused on Qur'ans, Qur'anic inscriptions, and on objects relating to prayer, pilgrimage and mysticism, while the second part focused on the theme of the education of Princes. Over 8,000 visitors toured the exhibition during its run. The program included a series of five concerts, which presented a panoramic view of Central Asia's musical traditions.

Vase

Central Iran, 13th century

Ceramic; fritware, decorated with a turquoise glaze - Height: 71 cm

This monumental vase demonstrates the technical expertise of Iranian potters and belongs to a small group of comparable pieces, all distinguished by their great size, plain opaque turquoise glaze, and combination of moulded and incised decoration. The decoration of the vase is organized into horizontal registers and includes benedictory wishes in a moulded band of Arabic *naskh* script around the neck and a moulded frieze of running animals on a vine scroll ground around the shoulder. Incised bands of bevelled motifs and scale-like motifs complete the exterior decoration.



Rabab

Central Asia, 19th century

Wood, bone, mother-of-pearl, skin – L: 98 cm

A string instrument which probably originated in Afghanistan, the *rabab* was the lute of the ancient royal courts. With the neck and body carved from wood, *rababs* have an odd form best described as 'boat-like'. The body is usually covered with stretched goatskin while the reverse and neck are often intricately inlaid with mother-of-pearl and bone, decorated with colourful beads and tassels. The *rabab* has three or four strings, made from tied-on gut or nylon, which are attached to flower-shaped pegs set in the pegbox. Most *rababs* have a number of sympathetic strings (9 to 12) which are tuned by pegs set along the base of the neck.



Spirit & Life – Masterpieces of Islamic Art from the Aga Khan Museum Collection

July – August 2007, The Ismaili Centre – South Kensington, London, England

Spirit & Life brought over 165 rare manuscripts and objects to London, including one of the finest illustrated manuscripts ever produced, the Persian epic *Shahnama* (The Book of Kings). The Exhibition was divided into two sections, “The Word of God” and “The Power of the Sovereign”. It covered a geographical area stretching from India in the East to Morocco in the West, spanning over a thousand years from the ninth to the 19th century. Over 28,000 visitors attended the exhibition.



Carved beam with Qur'anic inscription

Possibly North Africa: 10th–11th century

Wood - 16.7 x 427 cm

A rare, intact survival from the Umayyad period (756–1031), this long, carved wooden beam is a work of austere beauty, which would most likely have been fitted in a mosque. It is inscribed with parts of the “Light Verse” from the Qur’an (*Ayat al-Nur*, 24:35–36): “*God is the Light of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp, the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star kindled from a Blessed Tree, an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West whose oil wellnigh would shine, even if no fire touched it; Light upon Light; God guides to His Light whom He will. And God strikes similitudes for men, and God has knowledge of everything. In houses God has allowed to be raised up and His name to be commemorated therein.*” This famous verse from the Qur’an is often inscribed on mosque lamps, which thus become symbols of divine light. One can imagine the present wooden beam in a mosque, its monumental kufic inscription softly illuminated by a nearby hanging lamp, both objects symbolizing the presence of God.



Manuscript of the *Qanun fi'l-tibb* of Ibn Sina, vol. 5

Iran or Mesopotamia, dated 444 H/1052 CE

Ink on paper - 21.2 x 16.4 cm

Ibn Sina's *Qanun fi'l-tibb* (Canon of Medicine) is the most important encyclopaedic corpus of mediaeval medical knowledge in the Islamic world. With the transfer of knowledge to the Latin West in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it became the most used of all mediaeval references in the medical schools of Europe, almost until the beginning of modern times. The *Qanun* is organized into five books. The present manuscript is a copy of the fifth book, on compound drugs and pharmacopoeia. The other books cover topics including anatomy, the humours, the temperament, the effects of environment on health and disease, specific pathology and diseases of various parts of the body, general pathology, fevers, leprosy, surgery, dislocations and fractures. Born near Bukhara in 980 CE, Ibn Sina received a formal education and was, at 18, a talented physician who had mastered all the sciences and made a great number of medical discoveries and observations that remain relevant today.

Chefs-d'oeuvre islamiques de l'Aga Khan Museum

October 2007 – January 2008, The Louvre, Paris, France

Chefs-d'oeuvre islamiques de l'Aga Khan Museum presented nearly 80 works from the Aga Khan Museum collection and had over 168,000 visitors. The exhibition was divided into four main parts: exchanges between the Islamic world, Europe and the Far East; from figuration to narrative; architectural elements; and from the Qur'an to the aesthetics of calligraphy, including a section on the Shia tradition.

Calligraphic composition on a sweet chestnut leaf

Ottoman Turkey, 19th century CE

H: 13.5 cm; L: 28 cm

Qur'an verses were applied to objects using an astonishingly wide variety of techniques. One of the most beautiful and unusual examples is the gilded leaf, popular in nineteenth-century Ottoman Turkey. This example features a verse from *Surat al-Isra'* (The Night Journey, 17:80): "And say, 'Lord grant me a good entrance and a goodly exit, and sustain me with Your power.'" The calligrapher has made masterful use of his elegant *thuluth murakkab* script to create a calligraphic composition resembling a boat filled with a crew, their long oars dipping into the water that is the skeleton of the leaf. Related visually to Ottoman cut-out work or *découpage*, the technique for leaf gilding was actually quite distinct. The inscription was either written or stencilled and sealed on both sides with a wax barrier. The leaf would be soaked in an alkaline solution long enough to yield only its skeleton and the inscription. The virtuosity of the present example is further highlighted since its foundation is a sweet, or Spanish, chestnut leaf (*Castanea sativa*), a leaf more fragile than many of those employed for such compositions.



Standard ('Alam)

Iran, 16th century CE

Steel; H: 81.5 cm; W: 32.5;

This standard was made from a pear-shaped sheet of steel ending in two divergent outgrowths alluding to the two tips of the *Dhu'l-fiqar* sword. The inscription is engraved on a stylized foliated background repeated symmetrically in relation to the central axis. The following text can be read from top to bottom: "Ya Allah, ya Muhammad, ya 'Ali" ("O God, O Muhammad, O 'Ali"). The two invocations of 'Ali meet on the axis to form a stylized face, perhaps of a lion, which is symbolic of the first imam. The *lam* and the *ya* of 'Ali outline the contours, the *'ayn* (the name of the letter but which also means "eye" in Arabic) form the eyes and the two vocative particles *ya* are joined to form a muzzle. Several related elements are nailed to this openwork sheet of metal, ornate with stylized dragon heads. This animal motif is repeated three times.

The Path of Princes – Masterpieces from the Aga Khan Museum Collection

March – July 2008, Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon, Portugal

The Path of Princes contained some of the world's most important masterpieces of Islamic art, including items from the collection of miniatures and manuscripts formed by the late Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan. The exhibition was organized along two main themes: "The Word of God" and "The Power of the Sovereign", showing the accomplishments of Muslim civilizations from the Iberian Peninsula to China and from the eighth to the 18th centuries.



Dish

Egypt, 10th-11th century

Rock Crystal; Length: 9.3 cm

Precious objects fashioned from rock crystal were highly prized in Egypt. Valued throughout the centuries, Fatimid rock crystal objects are found today in European royal and church treasuries to which they were brought by Crusaders and travellers to the Holy Land. An extraordinary ewer is kept in the Astorga cathedral museum (León). Another, in the San Marco church treasury, Venice, features an inscription with the name of the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-'Aziz (r. 975-96 CE). This rectangular dish contains two circular compartments and is decorated with palmettes and scrolls in the familiar "bevelled" style, which ultimately originates in the stucco decoration of Abbasid Samarra (Iraq). The vessel's shape is unusual. It may have been used as a cosmetics dish or, more likely, as a double inkwell, though there are no extant contemporary rock crystal inkwells in single or double format.



Three gold filigree rings

Egypt, 10th-11th century CE

Gold - H: 3.4 cm, 2.5 cm, 3.1 cm, respectively

Gold jewellery, including necklaces of biconical and spherical beads, pendants, and a variety of rings, all made from gold filigree work and embellished with gold granulation, were produced in Fatimid Egypt and Greater Syria. These rings reflect the superb craftsmanship of the goldsmiths who made them. They exhibit typical Fatimid filigree arabesques and S-shapes with granulation. This filigree work was called *mushhabbak* (latticework) in twelfth-century trousseau lists from the Cairo Geniza documents, which are an important source for the study of mediaeval Mediterranean history (Jenkins-Madina 1997, pp. 419-20, citing Goitein 1967-83, vol. 4, pp. 211-12).

Geographies of Islam

October 2008 – January 2009, Real Fundación de Toledo, Toledo, Spain

Geographies of Islam departed from the previous exhibitions in concept and design. Housed in a single room, a special linoleum world map extending from Portugal to China was placed along the whole length of the room, like a carpet. Twenty-eight objects from the Aga Khan Museum collection were displayed along the wall in glass showcases, with numbers indicating their provenance in the map. The exhibit drew over 40,000 visitors.



Qur'an folio in gold Kufic script on blue parchment

North Africa, 9th–10th century CE

Ink, gold, and silver (now oxidized) on blue-dyed parchment - 28.6 x 35 cm

This extraordinary bifolium of gold kufic calligraphy on indigo-dyed parchment comes from the celebrated “Blue Qur'an,” one of the most lavish Qur'an manuscripts ever created. Careful attention to detail was devoted to every aspect of the manuscript, including the complex and costly technique of chrysography. Silver rosettes (now oxidized) were also used to indicate the divisions between the verses. The virtual simplicity of decoration and illumination using the finest materials indigo-dyed parchment, silver, and gold combined with the angular kufic script results in an overwhelming effect on the viewer regardless of his or her level of literacy. Although the two folios are attached, they do not represent sequential pages in the manuscript. A section of the manuscript is currently housed in the National Institute of Art and Archaeology in Tunis and detached leaves or fragments are in the National Library, Tunis, the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, and in other public and private collections.



Silver-inlaid brass planispheric astrolabe

Al-Andalus, probably Toledo, 14th century CE

Engraved copper alloy inlaid with silver - 13.5 cm

Everything about this astrolabe indicates that it came from Spain: the rete (*ankabut*, or “spider”), representing part of the celestial coordinate system; the fixed stars form a network ornamented with openwork, the line of which is characteristic of Maghribin and Andalusian instruments. Indeed, on the ecliptic circle, which bears the names of the zodiacal constellations in Latin and Arabic, the cut-outs are in the form of half quatrefoils; they end in three openwork rings and a long curved point. The point indicates the exact position of the star whose name is engraved on the base in Arabic and Latin; other star names are inscribed on the outer circle and the segment of the median circle (equator). There are four tympani, each bearing a projection of the celestial coordinates onto the given terrestrial coordinates. Three of them, which date back to the first phase of the instrument's history, are for latitudes ranging from Jerusalem to the north of Paris.

Los Mundos del Islam en las colecciones del Aga Khan Museum

June – September 2009; October – January 2010, Caixa Forum, Madrid & Barcelona, Spain

This exhibit contained 190 artefacts representing 14 centuries of history and extending from the Iberian Peninsula to the Far East. The displays were divided into three large sections. The central section was titled “The Qur’anic Faith” while the other two sections guided visitors through various Islamic courts using journeys as a metaphor in two stages: “From Cordoba to Damascus” and “From Baghdad to Delhi”.



Chao jin tu ji by Ma Fuchu
China, 1861

Woodblock on rice paper - 15 x 26,5 cm

The *Chao Jin Tu Ji* is the travelogue of Ma Fuchu (Ma Dexin, 1794-1874 CE), considered the most eminent Chinese Hui scholar of Islam and Sino-Muslim philosophy during the Qing dynasty. Originally from the Yunnan, his travels covered distances from China to Mecca and Cairo as well as the Ottoman Empire; this book recounts his pilgrimage to Mecca from China. Ma Fuchu left China with a group of Muslim merchants, travelling overland and by riverboat to Rangoon, where he boarded a steamship to take him to the Arabian Peninsula. After performing the pilgrimage, he spent two years in Cairo, where he studied at Al-Azhar University, and thereafter travelled throughout the Ottoman Empire before returning to Yunnan. Ma Fuchu is also well-known for his five-volume Chinese translation of the Qur’an and for writing over 35 works on metaphysics and history in both Chinese and Arabic. This scholar’s work attests to the cultural networks existing between China and the Islamic world.

Group of scribal implements
Turkey, 18th–19th century CE

Various materials and dimensions

Calligraphy is the highest form of Islamic art and is thought to bring one closer to God. Although the primary criteria for a calligrapher’s tools are quality and usefulness, it was felt that beautiful tools contributed to the creation of beautiful writing. Lavishly decorated with precious metal inlays or painted designs under varnish, these tools are beautiful objects in their own right. This group of Ottoman scribal implements is no exception. It includes three pairs of steel scissors and a steel rule all inlaid with gold; a silver and gilt pen box and inkwell; two pen rests, one in ivory and the other of gold inlaid steel; a gold inlaid steel pen; a cylindrical implement holder painted with floral sprays; two further inkwells, one in brass and the other in silver with a turquoise stud; and a lobed silver and gilt pot. The handles on one pair of scissors have been appropriately formed in an openwork inscription which reads as an invocation to God, “*O the Opener!*”



Schätze des Aga Khan Museum – Meisterwerke der islamischen Kunst

March – June 2010, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, Germany

This exhibit showcased over 200 masterpieces of the Muslim world, spanning over 1,000 years of history, making it the largest exhibition to date until the pieces reach their permanent home in Toronto. It was organized along two main themes: “The Word of God” and “The Route of the Travelers” and comprised of works of art in stone, wood, ivory and glass, jewelry and metalwork, ceramics and rare works on paper and parchment.

Manuscript of Rumi's Mathnavi Iran, Shiraz, dated 1602 CE

Ink and opaque watercolour on paper; red Moroccan leather binding
- 29.5 x 16.3 x 4.5 cm; each page 29.5 x 16.3 cm

The Mathnavi-i Ma'navi is a poetic masterpiece of around 25,000 couplets, written by Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi (d. 1273 CE) and concerned with the main theoretical issues and themes of Sufi doctrine. Although his nationality is debated among Iranians, Turks, and Central Asians, Rumi is one of the most celebrated mystical poets in Sufi and Persian literature and the originator and ultimate *pir*, or spiritual master, of the *Mawlawi* (Turkish Mevlevi) dervish order. While illuminated manuscripts of Rumi's writings, sometimes enclosed in elaborate bindings, are not unusual, illustrated manuscripts of this text are rare. The image on the right-hand folio shown here illustrates the tale of the lover who had spent many years searching for his beloved in vain. One night, however, as the lover was running from a night-watch, he accidentally ended up in an unfamiliar garden where, to his great surprise and delight, he found his beloved.



Robe

Iran or Central Asia, 13th – 14th century CE

Silk brocade or lampas - H: 140 cm

This robe, with its fitted waist, but also the flared hips and tiny-button closure is a remarkable example of luxury clothing of the mid-Islamic period. Its long sleeves and fastening on the right evoke numerous comparisons with drawings on the scattered pages of Mongol-period manuscripts. The sleeves extend beyond the length of the arms and, thus, were worn pleated. This detail invariably appears on the pages of Il-Khanid manuscripts, whether from the pages of the great Mongol *Shahnama*, now dismembered, or from the “Albums Diez” or illustrations from the Universal History by Rashid al-Din, among others. This long-sleeved robe is an undergarment, always worn beneath a coat with sleeves covering the shoulders only, knotted on the right with ribbons. The model is likely to have its roots in China. ♦

An urban oasis: The Park on Wynford Drive

By Mehnaz Thawer



Artist's rendering of the reflecting pools in the formal garden
Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited

Artist's rendering of the Park
Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited



In the busy, cosmopolitan city of Toronto, there is a promise of an urban oasis that will capture the serenity of nature's grace and beauty, combined with awe-inspiring architectural excellence. A new Park, one of three projects taking shape on Wynford Drive, will be the unifying feature on a site that includes both the Ismaili Centre, Toronto and the first-ever Aga Khan Museum.

Lebanon-based landscape architect, Vladimir Djurovic was chosen following an international competition to create a plan for the Park. He was tasked with designing the 6.8 hectare space, while addressing the challenges of the North American climate, and of city living, to create an ideal outdoor environment. The Park will be a key feature of the Wynford Drive complex, providing continuity and integrating the Ismaili Centre and Aga Khan Museum to create a cohesive vision of man-made and natural beauty. It will serve as a gathering place for those living in Don Mills and visitors from other communities.



Artist's rendering of trees and walkways in the Formal Garden
Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited

Prior to the start of the project, Mawlana Hazar Imam asked Djurovic to tour the world's most beautiful Islamic gardens; this inspired Djurovic to create a design that draws on the idea of the *char bagh*—a traditional Persian four-part configuration, often thought to depict the gardens of paradise. In an interview conducted at the Foundation Ceremony of the Wynford Drive projects in May 2010, Djurovic stated that the main challenge of the project was discovering what the essence of the space should be and translating that into physical form. He spoke of the importance of “the symmetry, the geometry and the sensations” that a visitor should experience in the space. Drawing from the creative energies of gardens such as the Alhambra in Spain and Humayun's Tomb in India, the Park is an interpretation that takes inspiration from history and yet allows for a modern functional design, using contemporary materials to merge essence and form.

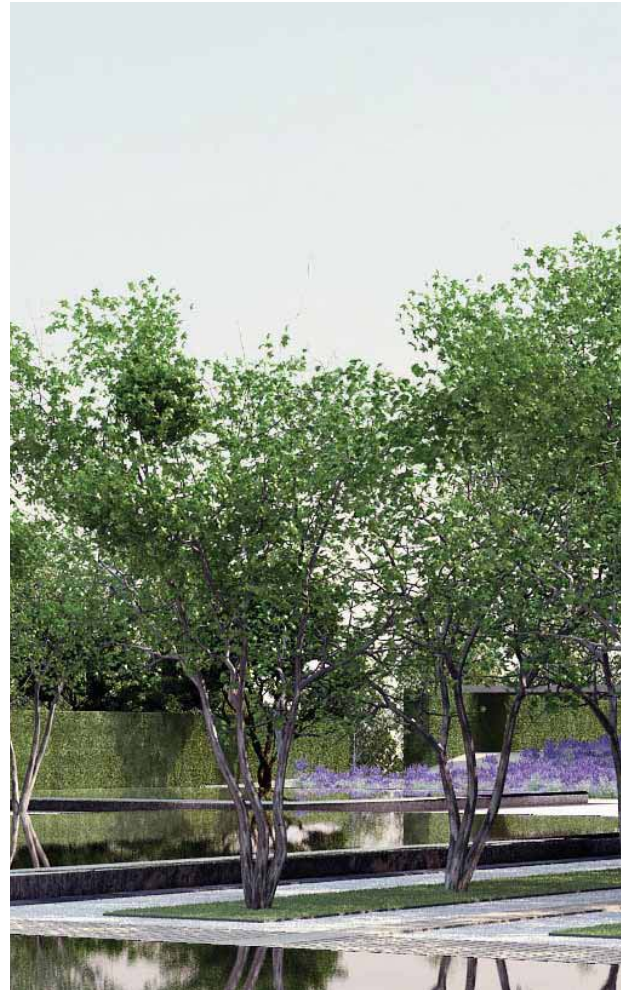
The main features of the Park include reflecting pools, walkways and a formal garden, as well as several informal

spaces. Djurovic recalls that during the initial planning stages, part of his research was focused on determining which plants and trees would best suit the local climate and would attract an array of birds and animals through the spring and summer months. The space is designed to transform in the winter, utilizing and integrating snow and ice to create a unique “visual experience,” says Djurovic. Unlike other Islamic gardens that historically have been located in warmer climates, the design of this Park will take into consideration the city's hot summers as well as the cold winters, making the simple and ephemeral beauty of the space enjoyable all year round. The Park's many features work as a cohesive unit, explains Djurovic. “It's not just the water, or the trees. It's the relationship of everything. It's what you will feel when everything is right and everything is working together. Hopefully this place should feel special and will have a meaning.”

Djurovic notes that the Park's gardens are also a response to programmatic activities such as temporary exhibits of the



Artist's rendering of the trees in the Formal Garden in the Spring
Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited



Artist's rendering of the trees in the Formal Garden in the Summer
Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited

“One of the issues in the Islamic World is the relationship between an ability to create and what we see of that creation. Nature is one of the evidences of God’s creation.”

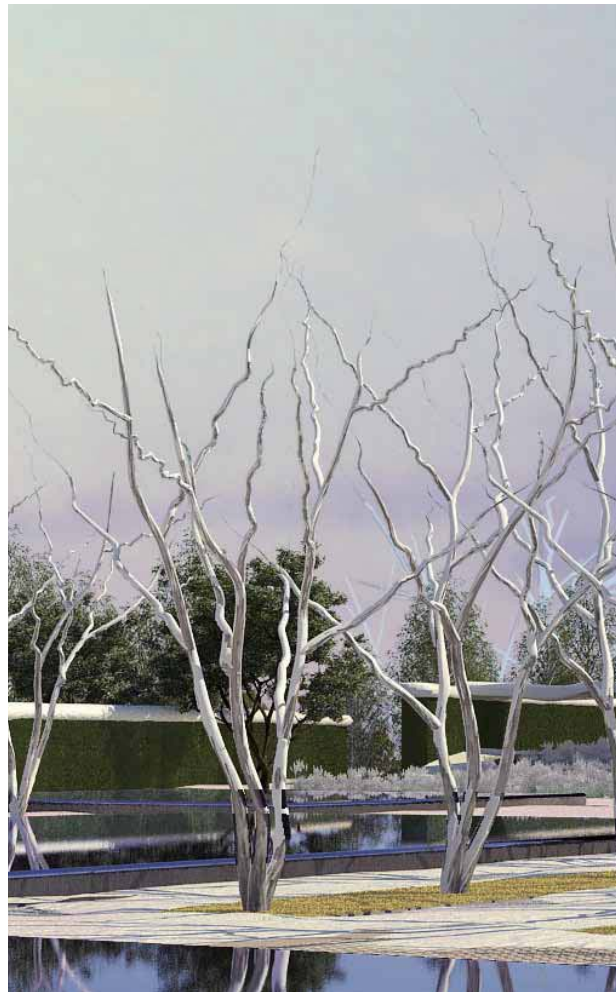
Aga Khan Museum, classes, public gatherings and weddings. The gardens will serve as areas of extension to bring the activities of the indoor spaces outside and will also create a sense of continuity between the two very different man-made structures of the complex.

Green spaces, such as those created by the Park, are important at many levels, not only providing a meeting space for the community, but also embodying a spiritual dimension, allowing individuals to experience and be immersed in the beauty of God’s creation. In an interview by Philip Jodidio in 2007, Mawlana Hazar Imam emphasized the importance of such spaces, explaining, “One of the issues in the Islamic World is the relationship between an ability to create and what we see of that creation. Nature is one of the evidences of God’s creation.” Having a park in the midst of a dynamic and modern metropolis will serve as a reminder of the abundance we are graced with, being witness to nature’s ever-changing and everlasting beauty.

The Park is an invitation to visitors from all walks of life to meet, talk and reflect, creating a common area in which dialogue and activity can occur. It recalls important periods in Islamic and world history, during which people from different religions and cultures co-existed in harmony. The Park will reflect that feeling, providing an environment for bringing to life the values of inclusivity and pluralism.



Artist's rendering of the trees in the Formal Garden in the Fall
Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited



Artist's rendering of the trees in the Formal Garden in winter
Image courtesy of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited

The Park on Wynford Drive will be one of three in Canada initiated by Mawlana Hazar Imam—two future gardens will be created in Edmonton and Vancouver—and it is one of several gardens around the world including the Al-Azhar Park in Cairo, Forodhani Park in Zanzibar, and the Khorog City Park in Tajikistan. Created for long-term use, the Park will become a permanent part of the cultural and social landscape of Toronto, and of Canada as a whole. When asked about how it might be viewed by future generations, Djurovic noted, “We’re growing, everything is changing... but the fundamentals are the same. Hopefully then [the Park] will be read as a continuation in history.”

Combining contemporary needs with a rich historical background is not an easy task but is one that will yield significant social and cultural relevance for this and future generations. In his speech at the Foundation Ceremony, Mawlana Hazar Imam said, “As we look ahead, we can anticipate with some confidence that the Wynford Drive project will be a beautiful part of the future—a proud gift from our generation to future generations—even as it celebrates so fittingly what past generations have given to us.” ♦

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