

THE



TOUCH

*Spazio Disegnato per le Linee*  
LIVELLO & BOER ARCHITECTS



MATERIALITY

MUSÉE  
YVES SAINT  
LAURENT

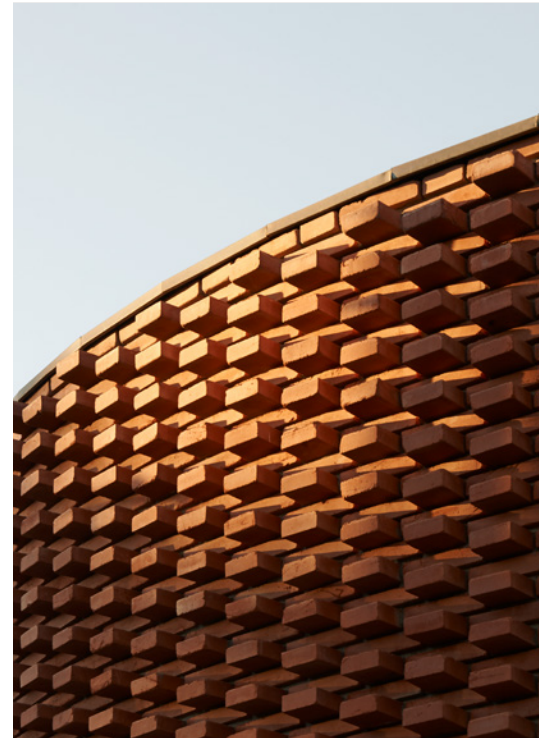
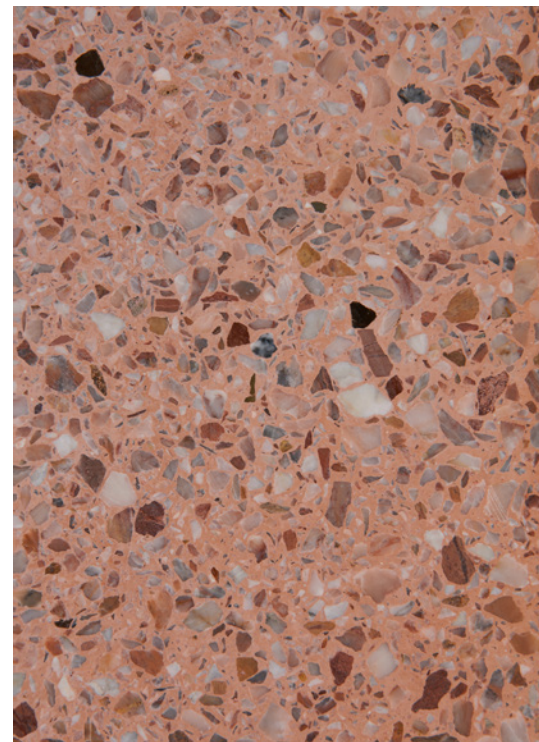
  
*Studio KO*

MUSEUM. MARRAKECH, MOROCCO

2017



**MUSÉE YVES SAINT LAURENT** — This low-slung terracotta museum honors the fashion it was built to exhibit: the building's design echoes the delicate construction of fabric, and its colors celebrate the bright palette that designer Yves Saint Laurent adopted after he fell in love with the city of Marrakech. If walls could talk, these would speak of catwalks and couture.



**FOOTNOTE** — Saint Laurent once said that Marrakech “taught me color.” It was here that he discovered the specific shade of cobalt blue which he used in his celebrated design for the nearby Jardin Majorelle.

The French designer Yves Saint Laurent had a famous love affair with Morocco. From the 1960s onward, he would retire to Marrakech in between collections to find both relaxation and inspiration. His ashes are scattered there, in the lush Jardin Majorelle that surrounds the villa he bought and attentively restored with his partner, Pierre Bergé.

It was Bergé who commissioned the Musée Yves Saint Laurent to be built next door, as both a tribute to the late designer and a parting gift to the city. Completed in 2017, it is said to be the first dedicated fashion museum in Africa and incorporates an auditorium, café, and research library with over 6,000 books. But what distinguishes the site above all is the architecture—an arresting merger of vernacular influences and contemporary minimalist style. It is the first major public building by French architects Olivier Marty and Karl Fournier of Studio KO, who

impressed Bergé with the homes they had built around Morocco that were designed out of their Marrakech office.

Through a clever use of materials, the architects have been able to express that the institution both belongs to its surroundings and stands apart as a place singularly devoted to clothing. The bricks are locally-fired terracotta in the traditional style, while the terrazzo aggregates specks of local stone and marble. From a distance, the building is a symphony of dusty pinks. Most noticeable is the lattice-like brickwork, designed to recall the warp and weft of threads within the exhibited fabric. It contrasts the smooth slabs of the lower facade, like lace meeting silk. The architects were also inspired by another juxtaposition in Saint Laurent’s work: precise tailoring meeting loose draping, and of curves meeting straight lines. The building’s geometries follow suit.



**FOOTNOTE** — Pierre Bergé, the partner of Yves Saint Laurent, also commissioned Studio KO to design his private residence in Tangier, Morocco.

“For integration into the urban fabric of Marrakech, we wanted a relative monochrome or shades and variations of the same color, which is a strong marker of this city,” say the architects. “We wanted to work with only local techniques and materials.”

Up close, it’s the variation in color and texture that holds the gaze. Studio KO’s version of minimalism eschews industrial, uniform finishes. Irregularities in the bricks and the way they’re placed come to the fore, charmingly throwing off the illusion of perfect curves. They also play a hand in shap-

ing light, giving the building a changing character throughout the day. “Their materiality plays with the sun and creates ever-changing shadows,” explains Studio KO.

As visitors move indoors, the local references continue. Like Morocco’s riads, the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech is built around a strong central courtyard. Unlike the traditional examples, the museum’s is circular—a seemingly miraculous void carved out of a solid-feeling mass. It is almost empty, except for a tablet bearing the YSL logo—a place to rest the eye before the rich visual journey to come. —