

2019 Honorable Mention

# Ayla Golf Academy and Clubhouse

By Beat Huesler



*Fig. 1: The building's rolling, dune-like form evokes the beauty of the surrounding desert and mountains*  
(Photo courtesy of Rory Gardiner)

**F**or the Ayla Golf Academy and Clubhouse in Aqaba, Jordan, Oppenheim Architecture took inspiration from the surrounding landscape and Bedouin tradition to deliver a distinctive building that evokes the elemental beauty of the desert and mountains. The design makes innovative use of shotcrete to create a continuous

shell that emerges from the sand as a set of rolling, dune-like forms. The 13,000ft<sup>2</sup> (1200 m<sup>2</sup>) building is a new landmark for the region and the architectural centerpiece of Ayla Oasis, a 19 mi<sup>2</sup> (49 km<sup>2</sup>) leisure development currently under construction.



*Fig. 2: A continuous shotcrete shell emerges from the sand, enveloping the volumes and defining the various program areas*  
(Photo courtesy of Rory Gardiner)

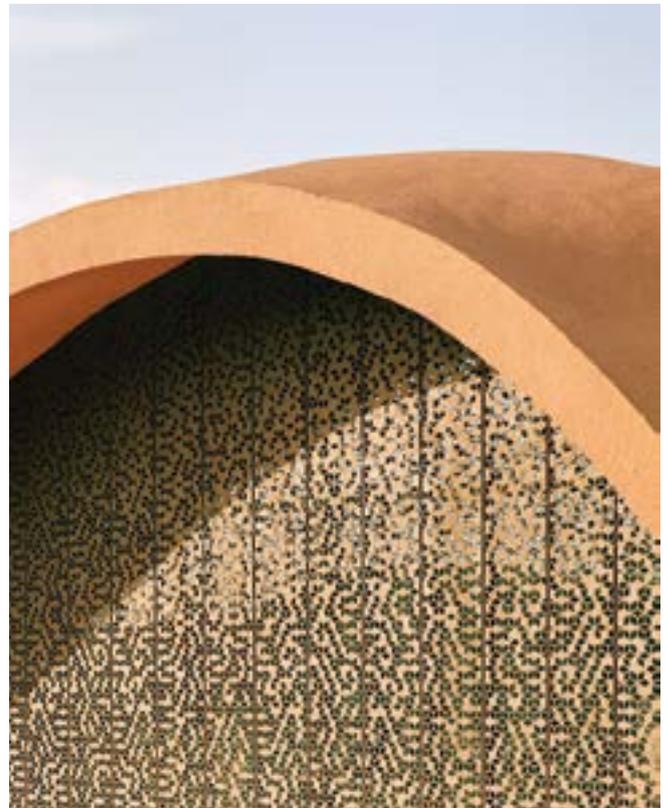
## INTERIOR

Rather than traditional wall and roof structures, interior spaces are defined by undulations in the shotcreted concrete shell. The Clubhouse arrays retail areas, banquet halls, lounges, spa, and wellness components, while the Golf Academy includes retail, dining, and an indoor/outdoor swing analysis studio.

The design of the interiors takes its cues from Bedouin heritage. Sunlight filters through perforated corten steel screens that evoke Arabic mashrabiya, traditional window screens that introduce natural light to spaces without compromising privacy. Jordanian patterns inspired the triangular openings of the screens, while the colors of the surrounding mountains are echoed in the tones of the shotcrete and rustic metals. Throughout the building, curved openings frame glimpses of the golf course and the Aqaba Mountains. The interiors are finished in the same shotcrete as the exterior, creating a unified and aesthetically cohesive building.

## SHOTCRETE ADVANTAGES

Shotcrete was crucial to achieving the building's complex, flowing geometries. Using it, Oppenheim was able to build the structure using native materials and local construction labor. The resulting building achieves its distinctive shape economically while retaining all the advantages of traditional concrete construction, including its strength, durability, and low permeability. Further, shotcrete made for a highly



*Fig. 3: Perforated corten screens, inspired by traditional Arabic mashrabiya, introduce filtered sunlight to the interiors (Photo courtesy of Rory Gardiner)*



*Fig. 4: The shotcrete was mixed with local materials and dyed with a pigment sourced from the nearby hills, further linking the building with the landscape (Photo courtesy of Rory Gardiner)*

sustainable building process by reducing construction time and minimizing the amount of formwork required.

## CONSTRUCTION

A knowledge exchange program between Oppenheim Architecture's European office and the local workforce facilitated construction. Working closely with the Switzerland-based contractor Greuter AG, Oppenheim recruited and trained local Bedouin laborers in shotcrete construction. Taking into account the challenges that arise when using only locally available materials and a newly trained workforce, the design includes large shadow gaps in the windows to mitigate construction imperfections and centimeters of tolerance for the ceiling height.

To construct the building, individual section cuts were first taken from Oppenheim's computer-generated model and built on site with flexible thin-gauge steel ribbons. Then, the structure was reinforced with steel bars and an outer steel mesh. An adjustable blanket mesh and a layer of insulation were laid over the top of this structure, enveloping each of the volumes. Finally, concrete mixed with native materials and dyed with a pigment sourced from nearby hills was sprayed onto the structure. The resulting building—raw, unadorned, and monolithic—engages the surrounding landscape and pays homage to the region's architectural heritage.

The building was completed as part of Phase 1 of the Ayla Oasis development. The overall development will include residences, hotels, and commercial spaces, all centered around Jordan's first USPG tournament-rated golf course, designed by Greg Norman. Ayla Oasis is set to redefine Jordan as one of the world's most prestigious golf and leisure destinations.

## About Oppenheim Architecture

Founded in 1999, Oppenheim Architecture is an architecture, planning, and interior design firm with an international portfolio of hospitality, commercial mixed-use, retail, and residential buildings. Each of Oppenheim's designs

is fundamentally site-specific and deeply rooted in the spirit and traditions of its place. The firm's projects are crafted to establish the perfect balance between artistry and economics—timeless architecture that is as aesthetically pleasing as it is functional. With projects spanning over 25 countries, Oppenheim designs with sensitivity toward man and nature, harmonizing with the surroundings of each context. The firm's work has been published internationally in over 1000 publications including *The New York Times* and *Architectural Record*. The firm and its work has received over 70 distinctions, including more than 45 AIA Awards. Oppenheim Architecture is headquartered in Miami, FL, and has offices in New York and Basel, Switzerland.



**Beat Huesler**, Director of European Operations for Oppenheim Architecture, is a licensed architect with over 26 years of experience. Huesler has been integral in realizing several of the firm's projects, including the Ayla Golf Academy & Clubhouse and Comfort Stations, which received the Leisure Led Development

Future Projects category award at the 2016 World Architecture Festival in Berlin, Germany. With his expertise in designing contemporary and sensitive interventions in historic structures, he received the Gutes Bauen in Kanton Baselstadt and Baselland Award 2002. Huesler is the European partner of Chad Oppenheim. Together, the two founded Oppenheim Architecture Europe in 2009. Huesler's relationship with Oppenheim extends back to their joint studies at Cornell University in New York, where Huesler received his Bachelor's and Master's of Architecture.

## 2019 HONORABLE MENTION

*Project Name*  
**Ayla Golf Academy & Clubhouse**

*Location*  
**Aqaba, Jordan**

*Shotcrete Contractor*  
**Greuter AG**

*Architect/Engineer*  
**Oppenheim Architecture**

*Equipment Manufacturer*  
**Nino Construction Engineers**

*General Contractor*  
**Modern Tech Construction**

*Project Owner*  
**Ayla Oasis Development Company**

\*Corporate Member of the American Shotcrete Association