

Raising the scale

The contemporary concrete curves of the Beikta fish market mean it is an architectural



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The old bazaar could not compete with new shopping centres, so we redesigned from scratch

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The concrete curve that swoops across Beşiktaş fish market forms an unlikely harmony with this traditional Istanbul suburb. A thousand candescent light bulbs drip from the modern ceiling to light up the fishmongers below. Red mullet and octopus are displayed on cement swooshes inlaid with mosaic disks – a look that wouldn't look out of place in the spa of a boutique hotel. Shoppers plan their evening meals after scanning the entire catch from a central viewing circle, an easy task as not a single column supports this unique structure. But they had better be quick. Waiters from the 50 restaurants that surround the market pluck out seafood choices as fast as their patrons order them.

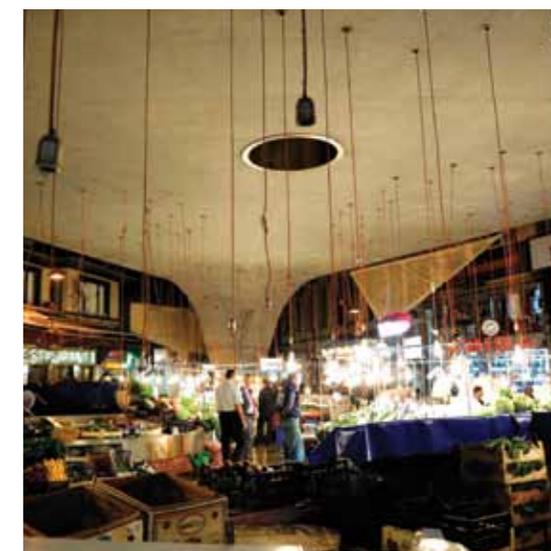
It is into one of these restaurants that we now head with Gökhan Avcıoğlu, whose architecture firm Global Architectural Development (GAD) designed the fish market. Needless to say, we receive a warm welcome. An unfeasibly large mezze selection is laid before us, to my host's obvious delight; there's marinated seabass, dolma vine leaves, labne-style garlic yoghurt, octopus carpaccio, grilled squid, feta cheese, walnut paste, fried mussels, anchovies and a melon so sweet it tastes like candy.

As dinner continues, Avcıoğlu tells us that although at first people were sceptical of his designs, saying it looked like something from a science fiction movie or even a sea monster; he was now receiving praise from at home and abroad. 'The surprise for us is that we got so many emails from the US, South Africa, Germany and China,' he explains. 'People want to see this kind of fish market in their own city.'

He goes on to detail the history behind Beşiktaş fish market. A century ago the suburbs that now line the Bosphorus formed a chain of waterside villages, each with their own distinct identity. Nearby Arnavutköy, for example, was a village populated primarily by ethnic Albanians who arrived as the Ottoman Empire declined, while distant Sarıyer was home to Istanbul's Black Sea fishing fleet. Beşiktaş boasts similar maritime roots, as evidenced by the mausoleum of Khair ad-Din Barbarossa, the fearsome Turkish admiral who scoured the Mediterranean from his bases of Alexandria, Djerba and Algiers. Accordingly to our host, a rough fish market must have existed in this sea-going spot for a millennium or more.

'But in the last few years,' he explains, 'the fisherman realised the old bazaar could not easily compete with the new shopping centres.' Customers desired more hygienic conditions. They also 'liked to see all the fresh fish on display at once, so we took notes and redesigned the market from scratch,' he says.

It was something of a communal event – Avcıoğlu gathered



01 A local man with over 50 pairs of skis and snowboards for rent in the small town of Merzouga

02 The sand slopes on the edge of the Sahara are possibly the most unusual skiing location in Africa

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feedback from the 25 or so fishermen who share the display area in order to reach a consensus and the best results. 'My company [GAD] also collected the findings from local restaurants,' he explains. And thus the open triangular structure was devised, to give both parties and indoor/outdoor relationship. The stalls too are now refrigerated day and night.

Crucially, GAD had the wholehearted support of Beşiktaş Municipality. The fee for the design was covered by GAD's in-house "Good Deeds Department" Other gifts of electronics and materials from local industry made this plan an inexpensive commission. The fish market lies at testament that a successful community-minded project can be completed for under €400,000.

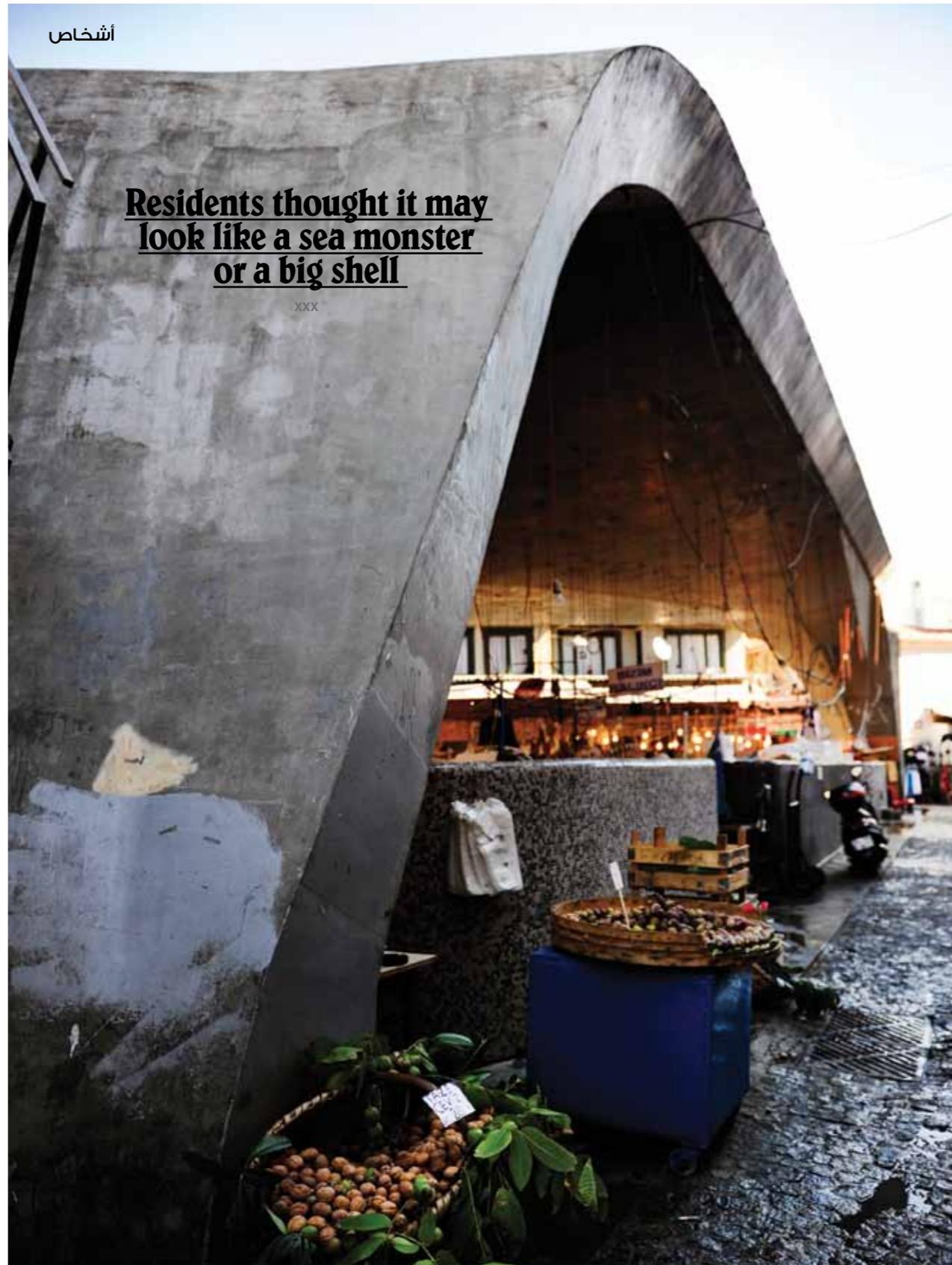
However, some in the Beşiktaş community was a little taken aback by such modern designs. 'Residents thought it may look like a sea monster,' laughs Avcıoğlu, 'or a very big shell!' But he believes that people were ultimately ready to see these simple, giant structures because of science fiction novels and movies.

Everyone certainly seems at home under its presence now, he tells us. 'I think it works because the fishermen sell more than before. And Beşiktaş people are happy because they see all the Bosphorus fish every day.'

Since its completion in 2009 the fish market project has gone viral, with images of the build pasted on architectural blogs the world over. Directors at GAD found this strange, because the firm was hitherto known for much larger, more commercial projects in Turkey, Libya, the US and the Russian province of Tatarstan. Recent builds include the modern Borusan Music House, a public auditorium set inside a 19th century townhouse in central Istanbul.

Most breathtaking of GAD's forthcoming openings is Autopia Europia, the world's largest automobile mall. 'It is a giant compared with the fish market,' he says and it is slated for completion in 2013. Its five floors with 6m high ceilings will stretch to 216,000 square meters of mostly open plan space - all of which can be driven through by car. Buyers can road test a vehicle on a speedy rooftop test track before they confirm their purchase.

So are there any opportunities for aspiring creative to get involved in any of Avcıoğlu's big plans? I ask about the careers link on his website. It seems that GAD are very keen on collaborating with up-and-coming designers, and are very proactive when it comes to mentoring the next generation of Turkish architects. 'That's our mission,' he confirms. And what about carrying it his social architectural mission from the shores of the Mediterranean into the Gulf? Avcıoğlu laughs, 'nobody has called me'. At least not yet.



The bountiful Bosphorus

The Bosphorus Straits has been dishing up fish to Istanbuli kitchens for millennia. This mighty waterway divides Europe and the Middle East and runs deep, up to 124m to be exact. In a bizarre maritime anomaly, its currents flow in two directions too, sweeping up a carousel of nutrients into the waiting jaws of schools of fish. As recently as the 1950s, when tremendous blooms would appear on autumn evenings, local residents used everything from umbrellas to buckets to scoop up an easy catch.

Fish stocks may have declined since then, but levrek, çinekop and uskumru (seabass, bluefish and mackerel) still course through straits. The thousands of fisherman who swing poles from the Bosphorus banks make up a microcosm of Istanbul society. Young, old, male, female, they are catered for in typically Turkish fashion by a mercantile array of tea sellers, bagel makers, bait vendors and mobile barbeque grillers.

Istanbul's modern day fish markets are colourful affairs. Each has a wave of surrounding restaurants offering visitors a chance to sample the wares. Beşiktaş Fish Market is alluringly vibrant, with local favourite Beikta Balık Lokantası (literally Beikta Fish Restaurant) a recommended pick. More upscale is the open-air Balık Pazarı (Fish Market) on stiklal Caddesi, the city's main shopping boulevard - Istanbul's top sushi chefs all shop here, and the surrounding restaurants are divine. To dine with the locals, shop at Karaköy Balık Pazarı by the Galata Bridge, then carry your catch to the grill at one of the three waterside alfresco restaurants to the rear.

