

OPTIMISM AND ARCHITECTURE

EDITED BY
LESLEY LOKKO

AGA KHAN AWARD
FOR ARCHITECTURE



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"Inspiring younger generations to build with environmental care, knowledge, and empathy is among the greatest aims of this Award. Architecture today must engage with the climate crisis, enhance education, and nourish our shared humanity. Through it, we plant seeds of optimism – quiet acts of resilience that grow into spaces of belonging, where the future may thrive in dignity and hope."

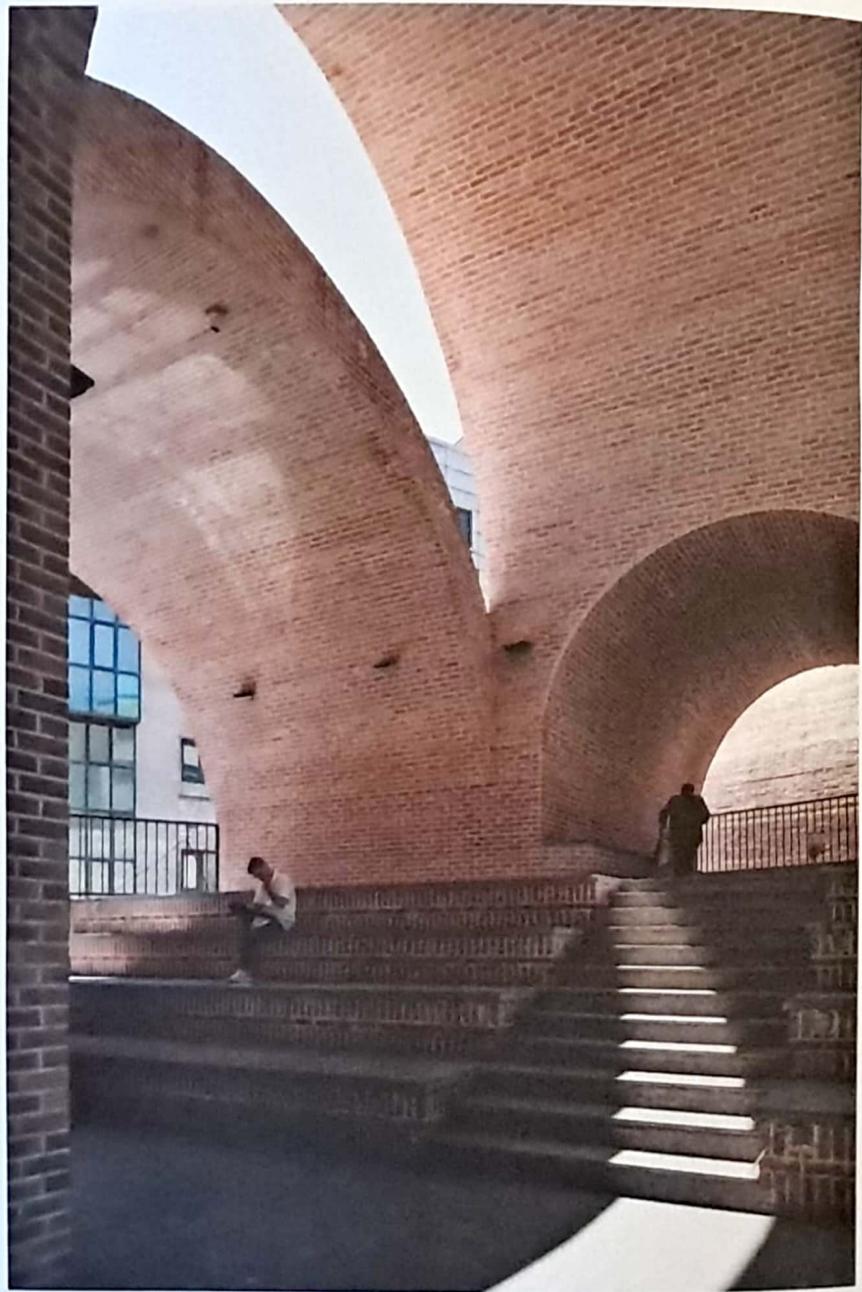
His Highness Prince Rahim Aga Khan V



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AWARD RECIPIENT
JAHAD METRO PLAZA

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JAHAD METRO PLAZA

TEHRAN, IRAN

Unchecked, car-oriented urban expansion in the four decades since the Iranian Revolution had seriously diminished Tehran's liveability, and the role that public spaces have played in past political demonstrations had fed the authorities' reluctance to invest in them. Aiming to foster a "pedestrian-oriented city" through multiple small-scale interventions, a group of urban specialists, together with members of the previous municipal administration, embarked on a project titled "Meydangah" to identify and activate underused spaces that could be made into vibrant urban nodes. One of the 100 sites that they pinpointed was Jahad Metro Plaza. They sought out young architecture practices for the commissions – in this case KA Architecture Studio, led by Mohammad Khavarian.

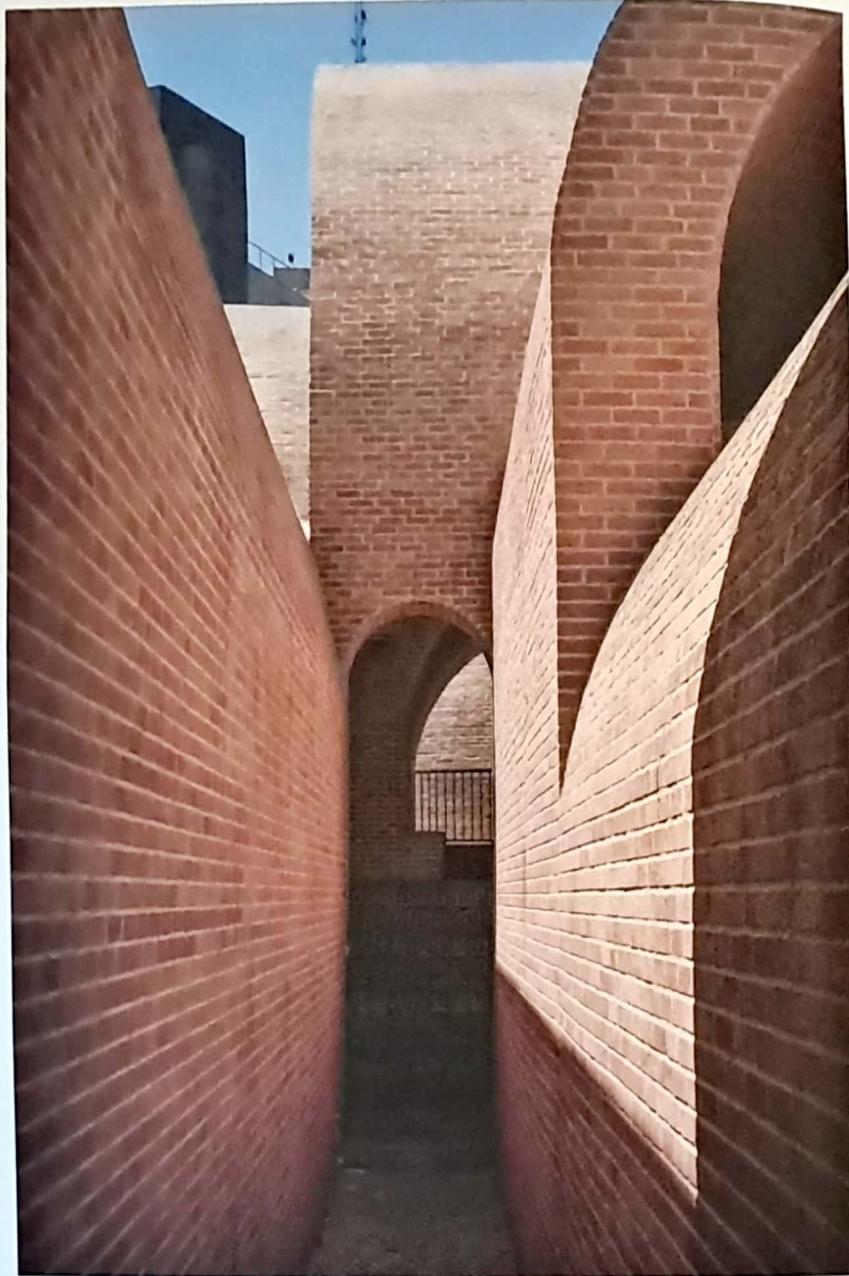
The original idea was simply to redesign the pavement in front of the metro entrance, but the architects successfully argued the case for a more impactful intervention that also involved replacing the entrance building. The triangular site – located at the intersection of Valiasr Street (the longest street in the Middle East, running north–south for 19 kilometres), Dr Fatemi Street, and Ghazali Alley – offered a prime location for a structure that would resonate with its cultural and urban setting. Most of the buildings on the site date back to 1980s urban-planning initiatives.

An assembly of interlocking barrel vaults, both monumental and welcoming, has transformed the metro entrance into an all-weather social hub that buffers traffic noise. In a series of indoor or outdoor spaces that offer varying levels of intimacy, people can take a restful pause, gather to chat, or listen to street musicians. Differences in vault heights make the building permeable to both air and light, while establishing strong visual and functional connections across the site levels.

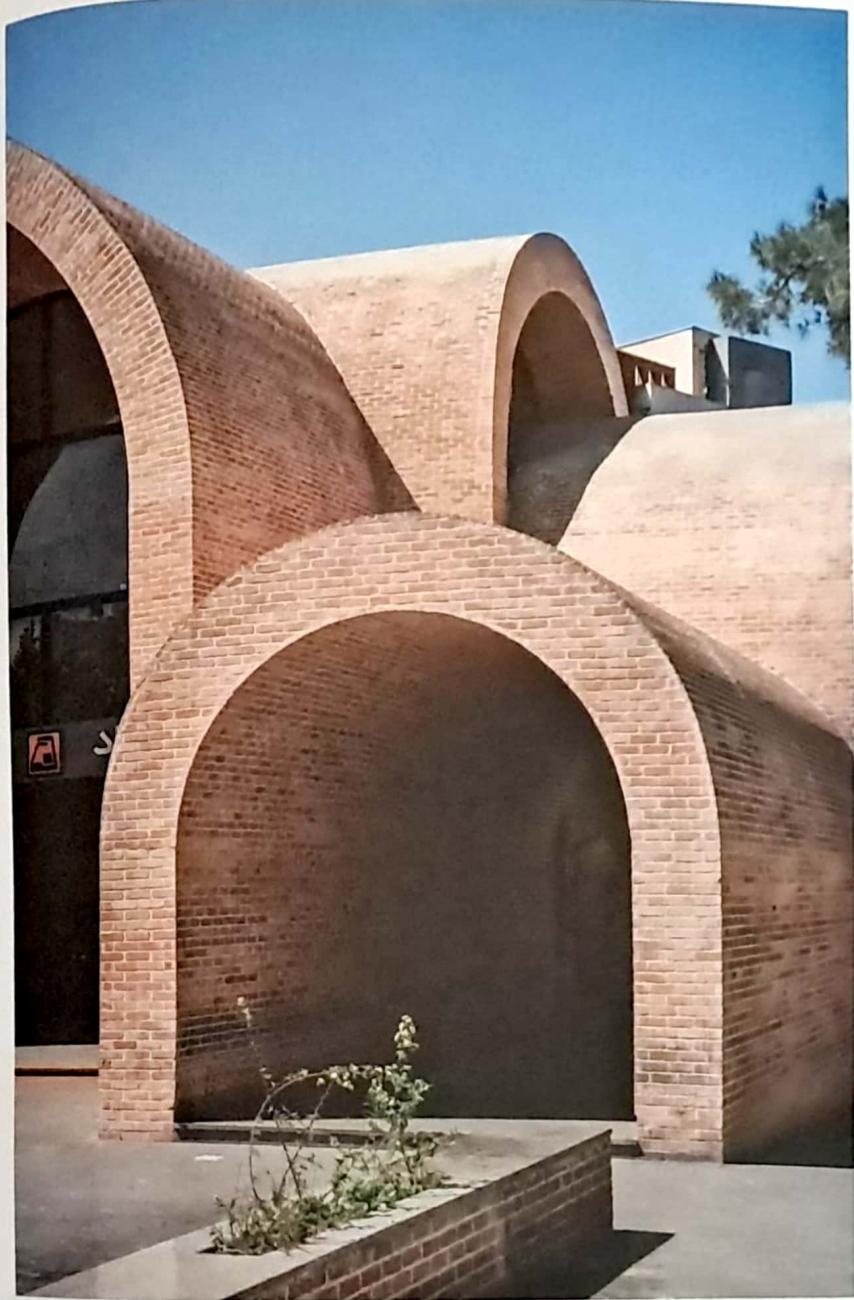
Construction was completed economically in just seven months, using a modular steel-mesh framework on which traditional bricks, handmade in the primary contractor's local workshop, were applied – a familiar technique requiring no specialist skills. Subtle variations in the brickwork reference Iran's history of geometric brick patterning. For resistance to vandalism, there are no loose furnishings, and lighting is embedded in ceilings and walls.

The plaza in front is organised for street vendors, including Afghan immigrants who previously operated illegally and can now continue to work in a safe, officially approved setting.

AWARD RECIPIENT
JAHAD METRO PLAZA



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AWARD RECIPIENT
JAHAD METRO PLAZA

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With 159 stations and a length of over 250 kilometres, the Tehran Metro is one of the most extensive in the world, carrying millions of passengers every day. As critical urban infrastructure, the functionality and appeal of the Metro are central concerns for the municipality, the client for this project.

The redevelopment of the station entrance transformed a once conventional and modest access point into an open public space: a plaza that encourages passage, encounters, and events. Unlike the former structure, which closed off stairways at ground level, the new design opens the station to the sky and neighbourhood, converting former stair areas into a pedestrian zone with direct street access and thus improving accessibility.

The wide facade enhances ventilation and provides a welcoming space for public interaction, informal commerce, and urban life, acknowledging the need of metro passengers for space beyond transit.

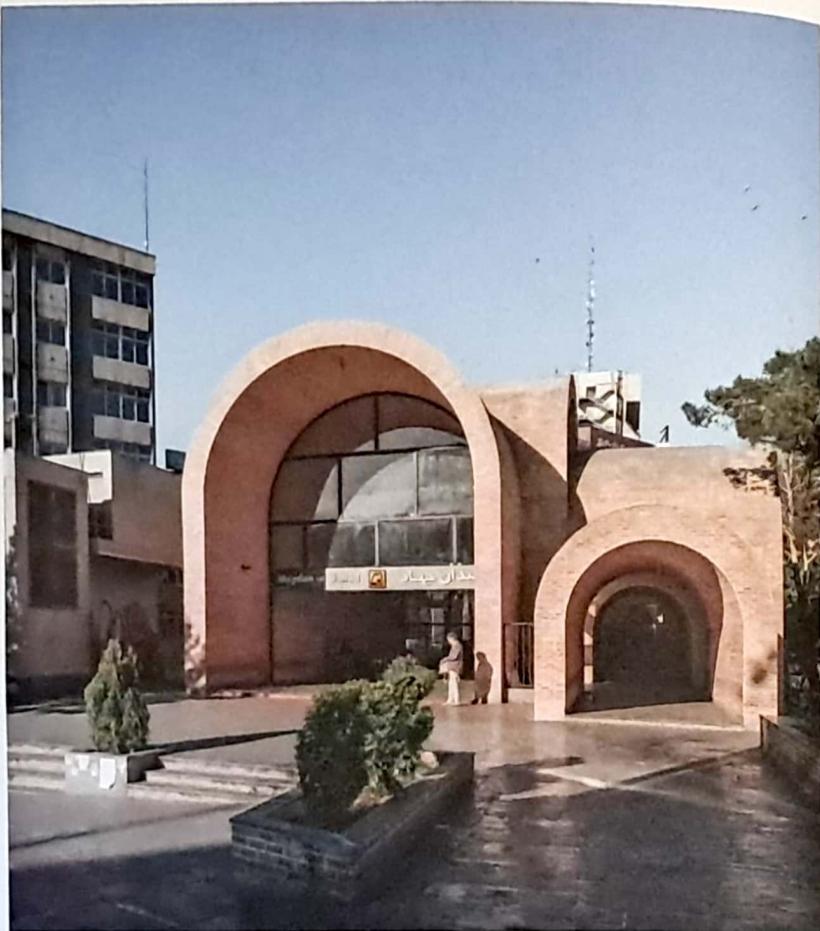
The project's architecture is characterised by its striking volume and integration of vaults, arches, and circular forms, which reference Iran's rich civilisational heritage. The use of brick further strengthens this historical connection, and its warm, subtle texture emphasises the station's status as a new urban monument. At the same time, the station blends in with its contemporary surroundings, standing out among the newer buildings that frame the site.

This renewed identity imbues the metro station with energy and distinction, establishing it as a landmark within the neighbourhood and the wider city. The strategic location further enhances its potential to become embedded in the collective memory of Tehran's residents and visitors.

Aesthetically, the design draws upon Iranian architectural traditions. Daylight penetrates through large openings in the ceiling, illuminating the interior and improving the station's environmental quality. The widened entrance brings in light and air, creating a sense of openness and flow.

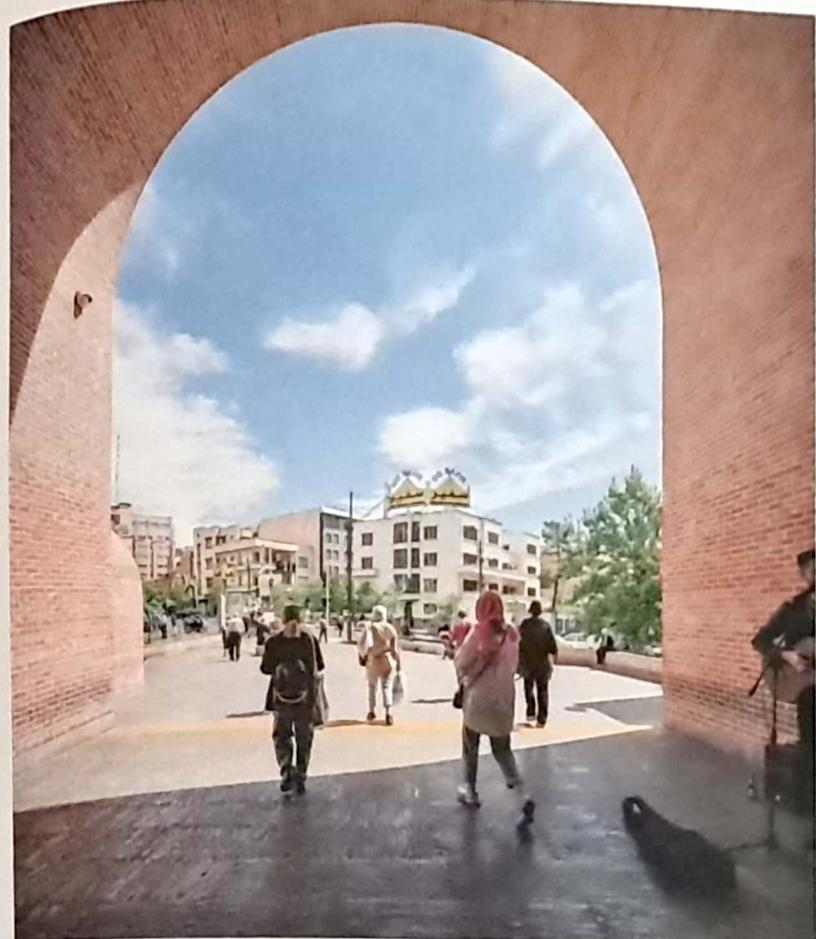
Through its subtle strength, attention to heritage and craft, and its aim to revive pedestrian space and social interaction, the project exemplifies the role of architecture in shaping public spaces as living dialogues between history, people, and ideas.





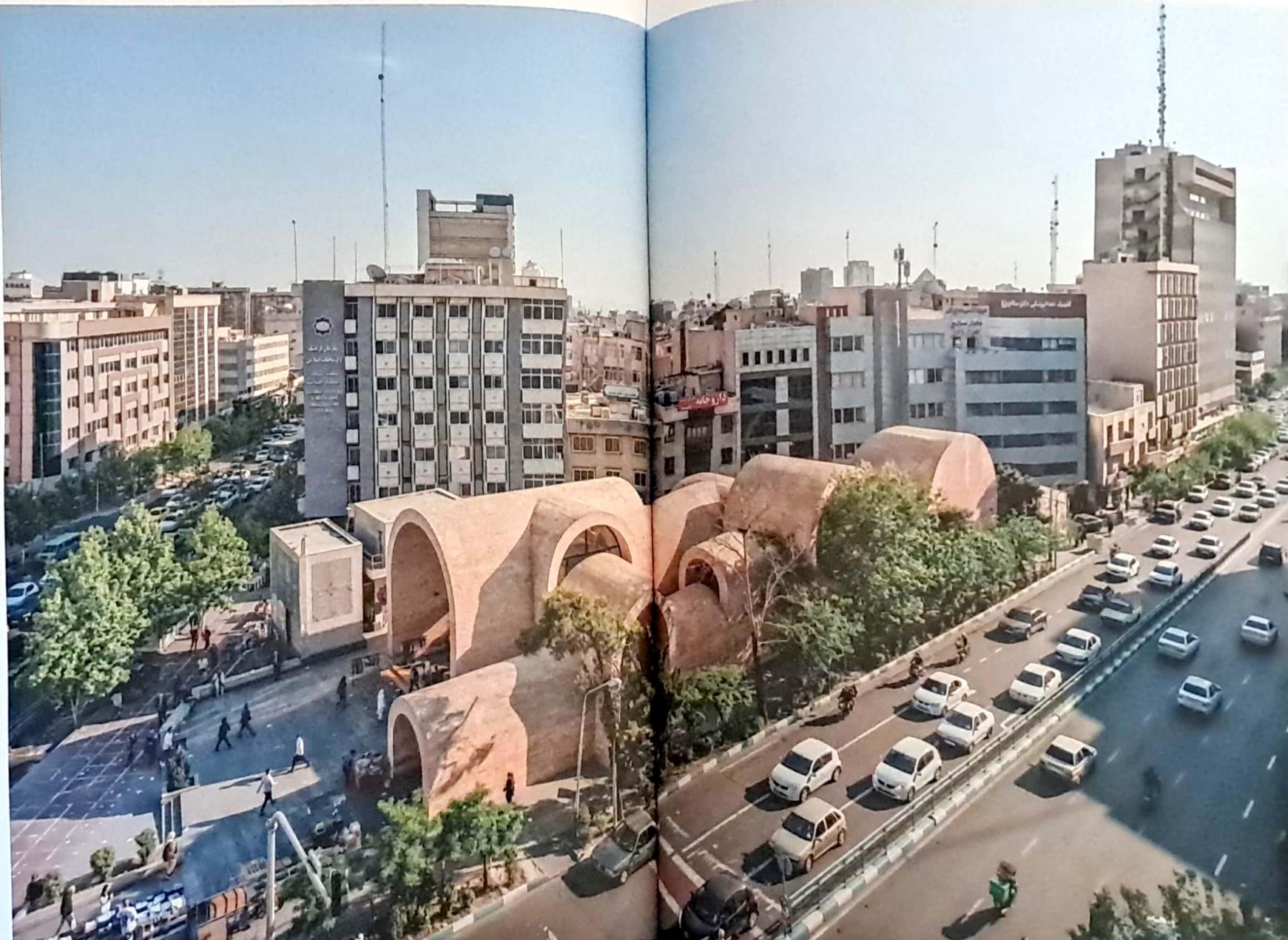
FORMER ENTRANCE TO THE STATION

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AWARD RECIPIENT
JAHAD METRO PLAZA

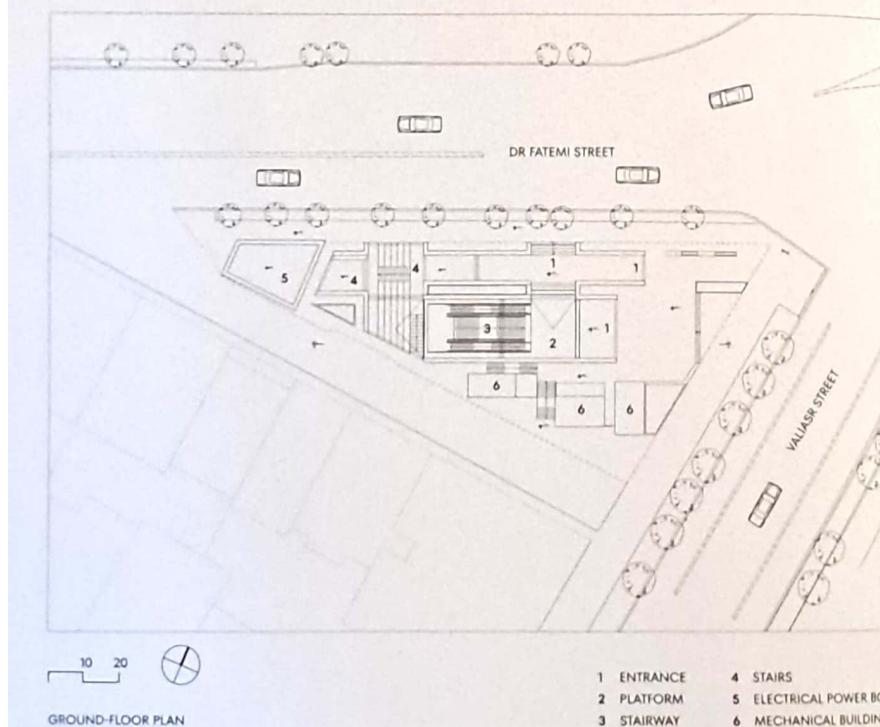
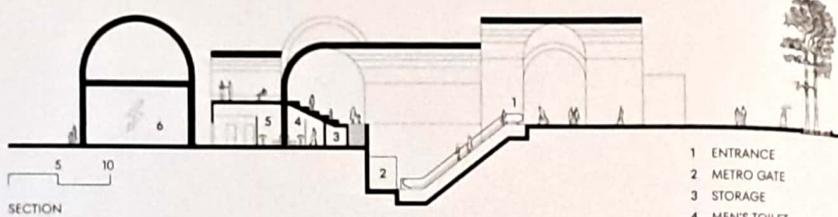
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JAHAD METRO PLAZA

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CLIENT

Municipality of Tehran, Iran:
Seyed Javad Mirhosseini, design representative
Hadi Haghbin, construction representative
Majid Amani, site representative

ARCHITECTS

KA Architecture Studio, Tehran, Iran:
Mohammad Khavarian, lead architect
Mehrasa Nikookar, project manager
Mohammad Ali Panahi, structure designer
Meghdad Amiri, lighting designer

CONTRACTORS

Mehdi Firouzi, construction manager
Behnood Goharbin, Masoud Goharbin,
brick constructors

PROJECT DATA

Site area: 1,500 m²
Ground floor area: 800 m²
Total built area: 1,500 m²
Cost: 200,000 US\$

SCHEDULE

Commission: March 2020
Design: February to October 2019
Construction: November 2022 to June 2023
Occupancy: June 2023

KA ARCHITECTURE STUDIO

Mohammad Khavarian is an Iranian architect and the founder of KA Architecture Studio, an independent architectural firm established in 2013. KA Architecture Studio focuses on creating spaces that engage with context, function, and human experience, while offering a platform for experimentation, inquiry, and the development of contemporary architectural prototypes.

The studio's design approach is rooted in a spirit of experimentation and analytical exploration. By investigating spatial patterns and constructing new prototypes, KA Architecture Studio rethinks conventional models and seeks to generate architecture as an ongoing, research-driven process rather than a fixed end-product.

Mohammad Khavarian emphasises a reflective design methodology where drawing, building, and prototyping are seen as tools for questioning and reimagining spatial narratives. His work explores the intersection between everyday life, urban textures, and material presence – often aiming to challenge expectations through experiential, site-aware interventions.

KA Architecture Studio has completed a range of projects, from small-scale buildings to urban-scale proposals, with a consistent focus on architecture as an evolving practice grounded in curiosity, dialogue, and innovation.

WEBSITE

<https://khavarianarchitects.com>

BOOK+



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JAHAD METRO PLAZA