



*The contemporary façade of the INVESTBANK branch on Mecca Street*

# INVESTING IN INTERIORS

FEATURE: ELLE MURRELL. PHOTOGRAPHY: AI-MUKHTAR ZEYAD AND RASEM KAMAL

Trendesign tours the serene INVESTBANK head office and new Abdoun branch styled with class, client comfort and contemporary innovation in mind.



*Khalid Nahhas, principal architect and founder of Symbiosis Designs Ltd*

**A**s you enter the INVESTBANK headquarters and Shmeisani branch building, you find yourself within an unconventional, contemporary haven.

Styled along sweeping parallel lines, openness and minimalist sophistication define a setting, which is more reminiscent of a modern gallery or tranquil spa than a bank branch.

“We wanted to break away from the institutional feel banks typically have,” says Khalid Nahhas, the principal architect and founder of Jordanian architecture firm Symbiosis Designs Ltd.

An intriguing mini-exhibition of light-boxed photography and vibrant evergreen plant life, including white Orchids and Peace Lilies planted in minimalist angular pots lead you through the branch. Here the main service desk is open and welcoming, and eye-catching elevated client relationship offices adjacent appear to float above inlays of loose washed pebbles.

Renowned for landmark projects including the International Academy Amman and



*Offices in the PRIME VIP are elevated above loose washed pebbles*



*Light, refreshing hues dominate the interior spaces*

the Red Sea Institute of Cinematic Arts, Khalid and his team were commissioned by INVESTBANK to reinvent the architecture and architectural interiors of their branches across the capital. This undertaking was distinctive for Symbiosis, a firm that usually manages projects through from start to finish; from architecture concept to the complete fitting and furnishing of interior spaces.

“Interior design and architecture are not distinctly separated; they are part and parcel of the same ideology, that you carry through in alignment for a project,” says Khalid. “Interior design as a distinct profession is disappearing very quickly. I think it is important that interior design stand behind the building; that it is the same,” he adds. He believes the two professions overlap organically and that architects can look at interior design in an enlightened way, paying homage to the complete concept of a building inside and out while possessing the necessary skills to collaborate with furniture and a variety of material suppliers.

The Shmeisani branch and head office of

INVESTBANK presented the constraint of working in a pre-existing structure, the eye-catching building designed by Faris and Faris Architects. “We didn’t have the high ceilings, or natural light that aligned exactly with our concept, we had to retro-fit the space which was a bit of a challenge,” explained Khalid. Although the structure didn’t particularly reflect the envisaged reinvention, Symbiosis was able to work with the contemporary form and the exterior through an ideology of layering boxed spaces within the building through a modularity of translucent materials that enhance and redirect sunlight.

The INVESTBANK interiors are inspired by the feelings that spas and gallery spaces evoke. “These are environments that people enjoy and feel comfortable in,” explains Khalid. “We made use of translucent and transparent elements to enhance the space and overcome the barriers to light and the defensive atmosphere of most banks,” he added.

The vision of the design team stems from a belief that each building typology has its

own calling, subscribing to Phenomenology; a philosophy that all objects should have meaning, presence, a narrative and soul,” says Khalid.

The colour scheme is light and airy, principally white, in sophisticated matte and gloss finishes and simple, sleek furnishings in organic hues complement the tranquil setting. “There is no disruption in the visuals, and objects are kept to a minimum,” says Khalid.

Floor-to-ceiling windows provide ample natural light with minimalist, sand-hued roman blinds to pleasantly diffuse the sunlight throughout the warmer months. Recessed LED lights with silver accents complement the luminescence where required. They are just one of the efficient and sustainable interior solutions employed in the interiors that were devised with an environmental conscience. Branded recycling bins are found in each room and blend seamlessly within the settings.

Though it incorporates the highest security features, the INVESTBANK building does



The PRIME area with sleek black Plexiglas furnishings





*Fascinating fibre layered glass form innovative, light-filtering partitions throughout INVESTBANK's branches partitions*

not feel sterile and the buildings interior creates a surprisingly calming environment. Even in the premium security areas, like the high-tech 24-hour safe deposit box area, aesthetics are not abandoned.

Wall partitions featuring fibre-filled, layered glass are a privacy-providing alternative to standard frosted-glass and “create a softening elegance,” says Khalid. The cubicles promote a trust inspiring atmosphere, and a peaceful place where the important decisions that often arise with organising personal and business finances can be made.

Promotional signage is kept to a minimum, rewarding the clientèle with clarity and adding to the serenity of the building. “INVESTBANK wanted a reinvention and brand redevelopment. Our work was an extension of this, using the contemporary sun logo and carrying this through the interiors design concept,” says Khalid. Stunning images, presented with light-box backing, reminiscent of a contemporary photography exhibition are tastefully arranged throughout. These sun-saturated photo series tie in with the brands “revolve around you” motto and warm approachable ethos.

INVESTBANK recently launched PRIME, the bank's VIP service offering specialised solutions, tailored services and a range of 24/7 access along with premium benefits including the free lifetime signature visa card.

In the PRIME area, designed by local creative solutions agency MINT, the boxed relationship manager offices follow the design concept of the lower Shemisani Branch level but instead of customary carpet they feature rich, dark walnut parquet. In keeping with the sleek PRIME branding, this VIP space incorporates glossy black Plexiglas furnishings and contemporary signage panels, exuding opulence and class.



*Floating, simple staircases add to the pure ambience*

On the fifth floor, the upper management offices lead off a spacious central hall and waiting area. Signatures of serenity, orchids adorn the bench space throughout the building and form a tranquil feature here. A short walk up a pebble edged staircase, the top-level terrace provides stunning panoramas of Amman framed by the Japanese-style teak screens and garden beds.

“It’s beautiful. It has character and surprises people,” says chief executive officer Muntaser Dawwas. He puts this down to the widespread expectation that bank interiors are severe, rigid spaces where functionality concedes to aesthetics and ambience. “Most people don’t wake up in the morning and get excited about going to the bank, it’s often a place that is thought of as having a negative energy, however this building has a fresh feel; the colours used, the light and the layout make you feel more relaxed,” says Muntaser. “Our clients love it. A small minority were more pessimistic at first; thinking that it looked like a spa, but spas have a very positive energy, so this is actually beneficial,” he added.



*Local creative solutions agency MINT designed the branding for the PRIME VIP area*



*Natural light, transparent partitions and a refreshing colour palette creates a tranquil ambience on the fifth floor*



*Gallery-like display light boxes, provide a statement feature*



*INVESTBANK's pioneering 24-hour safe deposit box facility*



*The spacious hall and minimalist frosted glass partitions on the fifth floor*

Muntaser, has led INVESTBANK since August 2011 and is enthusiastic about the financial institutions progress, he confirmed they are focused on continuing to attract a middle-affluent target market and to expand but to not overstretch and compromise on the reputation they have established. He believes INVESTBANK's interiors align with the companies' future path and furthermore exudes a sophistication that is strategically valuable in attracting and maintaining the clientele desired.

"The building helps to make banking here convenient, comfortable, and easy to use, much like the virtual architecture of INVESTBANK's newly developed website and online services," he added

The interior architectural design model is carried through to many of INVESTBANK's other locations including the branches in Mecca Street and the Emmar Towers. The newest of INVESTBANK's braches, in Abdoun, was opened in December last year, and replicates the modern, peaceful ambience of the Head Office. "When you look through the glass façade you see contrasts between solids and transparent forms. It's like a box within a box within another box and is very visually intriguing," says Khalid. The dual-level, ground-floor space makes use of natural light and features minimalist cubicles clean tiled and rich walnut floorings as well as tranquil, loose pebble inlays.

INVESTBANK is redefining the aesthetics of financial institutions in Jordan. No longer are banks simply establishments to be associated with sterile security and negativity. Clients are sure to be impressed by the atypical contemporary surrounds and appreciate the tranquil atmosphere when getting their finances in order.



*The new Abdoun branch's customer service area incorporates sleek white tiling and loose pebble floorings in-line with the other INVESTBANK locations*



*The contemporary façade of the Abdoun branch complete with INVESTBANK's signature logo and sun-saturated imagery*



*The entrance to the Shmeisani branch at INVESTBANK's head office building*