For the 10 million citizens of Azerbaijan, the architectural symbolism couldn’t be more poignant or blinding. There, gleaming in defiant contrast to the dull architectural dreaminess of capital city Baku’s Soviet-era buildings, rises the sweeping, twisting, and parasitic joy of the Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center. The building’s fluidity and playful form openly mocks its rigid, monolithic neighbors, a break from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Few structures display as much architectural symbolism as the Heydar Aliyev Center. The building’s fluidity and playful form openly mocks its rigid, monolithic neighbors, a break from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center

The design, engineering, and construction team rallied around the $250 million neo-futuristic ZHA vision was high in spite of one big challenge: the five-year project. All credit to them for thinking and ambitious. The building's fluidity and playful form openly mocks its rigid, monolithic neighbors, a break from the Soviet Union in 1991.

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CONSTRUCTION CHALLENGE

The client really wanted something different and ambitious. All credit to them for thinking so boldly,” says Sara Sharif-Akbari, senior ZHA associate and a key member of the design team throughout the five-year project.

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CLADDING PANELS

Another concern was the cladding panels. The design team considered many requirements—environmental, structural, maintenance, color, and texture—for starters. What should they be made of? What composition offered the least risk with the most aesthetic reward? “Everyone was involved in that process very, very deeply from early on,” recalls Akbari. “There are so many considerations in our investigations. Could we even manufacture whatever we selected at scale, for example? How would we transition the panels that seamlessly link the plaza with the structure? What are the joint requirements? UV radiation? Temperature extremes? What about cleaning? The city of Baku has large oil refineries and other unexpected forms.

SPACE FRAME SUPPORT

A decade before the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran was a major oil exporter. As the world’s largest exporter of crude oil and the second largest oil producer. In 1979, Iran produced 8.2 million barrels per day. By 2018, Iran’s oil output had declined to 2.5 million barrels per day due to international sanctions. Today, Iran remains the world’s fourth largest oil producer, exporting about 4.5 million barrels per day.

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