



Committed to the preservation of the country's historical and architectural heritage, Attijariwafa bank is rehabilitating the emblematic «Essaouira Istiqlal» building and giving it back its former splendor

Casablanca, June 10, 2021 - Since 2018, the Attijariwafa bank group has been committed, as part of its CSR policy, to preserving the heritage value of several buildings that have become emblematic and architectural symbols in different cities in the kingdom.

Heir to a century-old banking history, Attijariwafa bank is, in fact, the owner of an exceptional architectural heritage, partly classified or registered in the inventory of Historical Monuments and bearing witness to the extraordinary modern architectural adventure of the 20th century in Morocco. Buildings that have in turn seen important figures come and go, have been the seat of historical and economic events, and have been milestones in the architectural history of cities. Even today, their ancient stones continue to tell us the story of a country and the history of a people. From generation to generation, from family to family, merchants, industrialists, craftsmen, have been able to create their business, to make it grow within these jewel cases full of history. In the course of the renovations undertaken, aiming at offering a better ergonomics to the clients and to the employees, many rehabilitated sites let emerge precious testimonies on the rich human, social and commercial adventure of the Attijariwafa bank group.

The scheme, developed with the help of an architectural firm specializing in heritage, has targeted a dozen buildings and is based on the establishment of rules and principles of preservation or upgrading of historic sites and their structuring, while adapting it to contemporary uses.

Delivered in June 2019, the first batch concerned buildings constructed between 1921 and the 1950s, such as Marrakech Medina (1921), Sidi Slimane Centre (1945), Tangier Rue de Belgique (1948) and Tangier Pasteur (1950).

Today, it is the turn of the building located in Essaouira Avenue de l'Istiqlal, initially the headquarters of the Compagnie Algérienne, to undergo a total rehabilitation after 26 months of complex construction. Located on one of the main roads of the medina, historically known as Souk El Haddada, the old blacksmiths' market, the building, designed by Jean-René Fougère in the 1920s, is part of the first generation of banks built in Morocco and reflects a remarkable period in the economic and architectural history of Mogador city. Its vocabulary is part of the «neo-Moorish» architectural trend, which is characterized by a fusion of volumes and classical compositions of the European type, and a decoration drawing its forms from local traditional architecture or more broadly from Arab-Andalusian ornamental references.



Like the patio, a key element of traditional Souiri houses, this device adapts well to the agency's location on the ground floor. The presence of a basement is specific to this building and probably unique in the medina of Essaouira and meets the requirement to create secure safes: a new solution, adapted to the specific needs of a bank. Another example is the main facade, which is punctuated by relief frames and enriched with sculpted plaster motifs, embodying the neo-Moorish character of the building. In the central part is the most significant element of the facade: a loggia corbelled on consoles decorated with muqqarnas and volutes. Ten paired columns decorate the loggia. Their stone capitals bear a sculpted motif of stylized acanthus leaves in meanders. This motif was inspired by Arab-Andalusian architecture, such as the Alhambra palace in Granada and certain Moroccan buildings from the Marinid period. The wooden railing represents the traditional motif known as qaim or naim, literally «standing and lying down». The loggia is topped by a green tile canopy (qarmoua) surmounted by a balcony. This ensemble underlines the noble floors occupied by the official apartments.

In order to preserve and transmit this ancestral memory, Attijariwafa bank has carried out an audacious project, with important technical stakes, which has made it possible to save the Istiqlal agency and its rehabilitation. A singular intervention that also allowed to restore the façade to its initial emblematic aspect. The use of local materials and traditional craft techniques was placed at the heart of the project, in order to respect the spirit of the building. Numerous craftsmen and maâlems, mainly from Essaouira and Marrakech, were involved in the work of realization, allowing the success of the project which has undoubtedly recovered its place in the heritage of the city and its former glory.

Making the stone that houses this capital both tangible and intangible speak for itself is another way for the Attijariwafa bank group to keep alive the value of memory between generations.

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