

# Training Facility, Kuwait Police College

Kuwait City, Kuwait

Designed 1998–2000

Kuwait City is one of the hottest inhabited cities on Earth. The landscape is a desert comprised of harsh sun, intense heat, and very fine beige sand that seems to be suspended in the air.

In the wake of the Gulf War, the need in Kuwait for a symbol of strength was paramount—an important step in rebuilding confidence. In this climate, the government of Kuwait elected to expand its police college. Currently the college is located 7 kilometers from the center of old Kuwait Town, towards the western edge of Kuwait City. The site for the new college is adjacent to their existing campus and will comprise an area of 304,284 square meters. The new complex will serve as the main campus for 1,200 elite officers, with facilities for living, academics, administration, athletics, and training. The police college is a paramilitary facility sited deliberately within the proximity of the central city; its location provides a sense of security for the inhabitants of the city.

The new college is required to be completely enclosed by a perimeter wall. The desert climate, the tradition of pre-Islamic and Islamic architecture, and the rigors and orthodoxies of training guide the design. We divided the site into five quadrants, one for each of the college's core functions described above—living, academics, administration, athletics, and training. We then divided the program of the college into two types of buildings: background buildings (“rope” buildings) that define space and special object buildings (“vessel” buildings) that capture space. The differences between these two types of buildings are expressed in their forms and constructions.

The rope buildings house the repetitive programmatic functions: classrooms, dormitories, and administration modules. They define the edges of spaces in the quadrant-oriented master plan and connect the major courtyard areas. Conceived as three-story modular units, they interlock to form a network of connected inside spaces. Bearing walls of stacked and interlocking precast concrete units 60 centimeters deep are woven into a puzzle-like pattern that allow for window apertures over 10 percent of the façade to minimize infiltration of sunlight and heat. The wall and window surfaces are planar so as not to collect the airborne sand. These concrete units are arranged in three ways to solve a specific window configuration for each building function, letting light into the rooms at different vertical heights to illuminate and support the activities within. The concrete wall assemblies include four basic precast panel shapes: S, C, L, and I. Each shape has a varying percentage of crushed glass to create a shimmering luminous effect and, when combined with the sand in the air, will create the impression of a mirage. Contained within the rope buildings are ten cubic and distinct light chambers. Each chamber is an interior volume within the larger rope building enclosure; the 1.5-meter cavity between the two captures and directs natural light from the sky into each chamber. These chambers form the entrances to each rope building and present the only path of vertical movement. The lighting of the spaces was designed in collaboration with the artist James Turrell. His focus was to create a light threshold (made of fiber optic and neon) in each unique chamber.