



Blackwork Journey Inspirations

Sheik Zayid Grand Mosque



Abu Dhabi

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THE SHEIK ZAYED GRAND MOSQUE, ABU DHABI

Inspiration comes from many sources and one of the most impressive modern buildings I have visited is the Sheik Zayid Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi which opened in March 2008. It is one of 2289 mosques in Abu Dhabi and covers the size of five football pitches.

I attended the official opening and spent hours walking around this amazing building, admiring the craftsmanship and the detailed Islamic ornamentation. The impact the building made on me has influenced many of my designs and reinforced my love of Islamic architecture and design.

The Mosque exterior

There are 82 domes in total. The outer shell of the main dome is 32.8m in diameter and 70m high - the largest of its kind in the world.

Natural materials were used for the construction along with marble, stone, gold, semi-precious stones, crystals and ceramics from Italy, Germany, Morocco, India, Turkey, Iran, China, Greece and the United Arab Emirates.

The final details were still being added by the craftsmen when I visited, so I was able to admire their skills and see how they inlaid some of the floors and columns using traditional techniques.



Reflecting pools, white columns, palm trees and formal gardens surround the mosque creating an oasis of tranquillity.

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White marble was the basic material to which arabesque, geometric and Islamic designs had been added. Columns were inlaid with semi-precious stones - lapis lazuli, agate, amethyst, mother of pearl and jasper to name a few!



Wood inlaid with abalone shell, handmade Itznik tiles and floors inlaid by hand create a building where attention to detail is paramount.



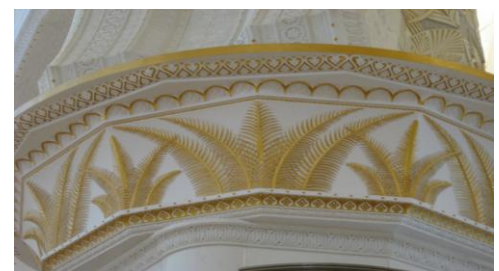
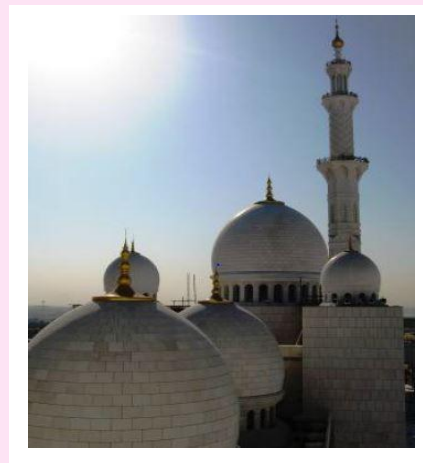
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There are 1096 columns in the outer areas of the mosque and 96 columns in the main prayer hall. Over 20,000 hand-made panels using semi precious stones are used in the columns.



The inside decoration of every dome is different. This one is

surrounded by arabesque decoration both inside and outside the dome



Columns decorated with palm leaves in 24carat gold leaf, calligraphy in gold and leather tooled Quoran's lying on a patterned carpet completed the prayer hall.

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Islam is founded on five principles - Declaring that there is no God but Allah, praying five times a day, charity, making a pilgrimage to Mecca (the Ka'bah) and fasting during Ramadan.

The prayer times are in accordance with the position of the sun starting with Al Fajr, pre-dawn, Al Thuhur, between noon and mid-afternoon, Al Asr, between mid-afternoon and sunset, Al Maghrib, between sunset and darkness and Al Isha, evening.

Before performing prayers the worshippers must wash (wadhu) their hands and feet so that they are in a pure state of mind. There are separate ablutions for men and women made out of marble



Performing wadhu

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Once the wadhu has been completed, the men and women travel up escalators to the prayer hall, the heart of the mosque. This is a spectacular area dominated by an enormous carpet and seven German made Swarovski chandeliers, produced with 28 different types of marble and 24-carat gold.



The Prayer Hall

The story of the carpet

The carpet was made by the Iran Carpet Company at a cost of Dh31 million and involved some 1,400 weavers, technicians, designers, dyers and other workers over 21 months. The design work took six months, the weaving a year and the finishing work a further three months.

The carpet covers an area of more than 6,000 sq m and originally weighed more than 40 tonnes, although trimming and cleaning it reduced the size to 5,625 sq m and 30 tonnes. It is made of wool and cotton in 25 different colours and these include 20 natural dyes and five fast synthetic colours. The carpet's design features Islamic and traditional Iranian floral art.

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Tooled leather Qurans' lay on the carpet between the marble columns

Qibla Wall

All Muslims pray in the direction of the Ka'aba in Mecca, which is clearly indicated by the mihrab, a decorated niche in the wall.

The Qibla Wall is 23m high and 50m wide. The decorations are subtle in colour and designed so that the worshippers are not distracted. The 99 names of Allah are features on this wall using Kufi style calligraphy. The translucent marble is back-lit with fibre-optic lighting.

The pulpit (member) is always to the right of the mehrab. From here, the weekly sermon (khutba) is delivered. *The mehrab (the niche found in the middle of the qibla wall) is decorated in 24 carat gold leaf.*

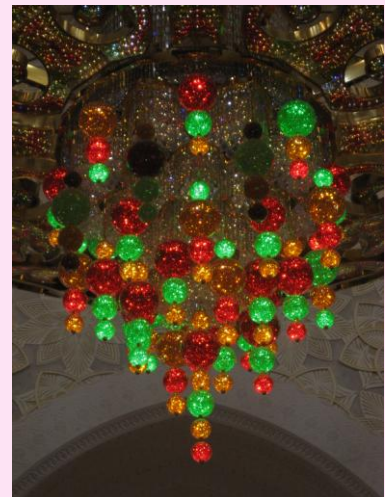
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The member (pulpit), mehrab and largest of the chandeliers in the prayer hall.

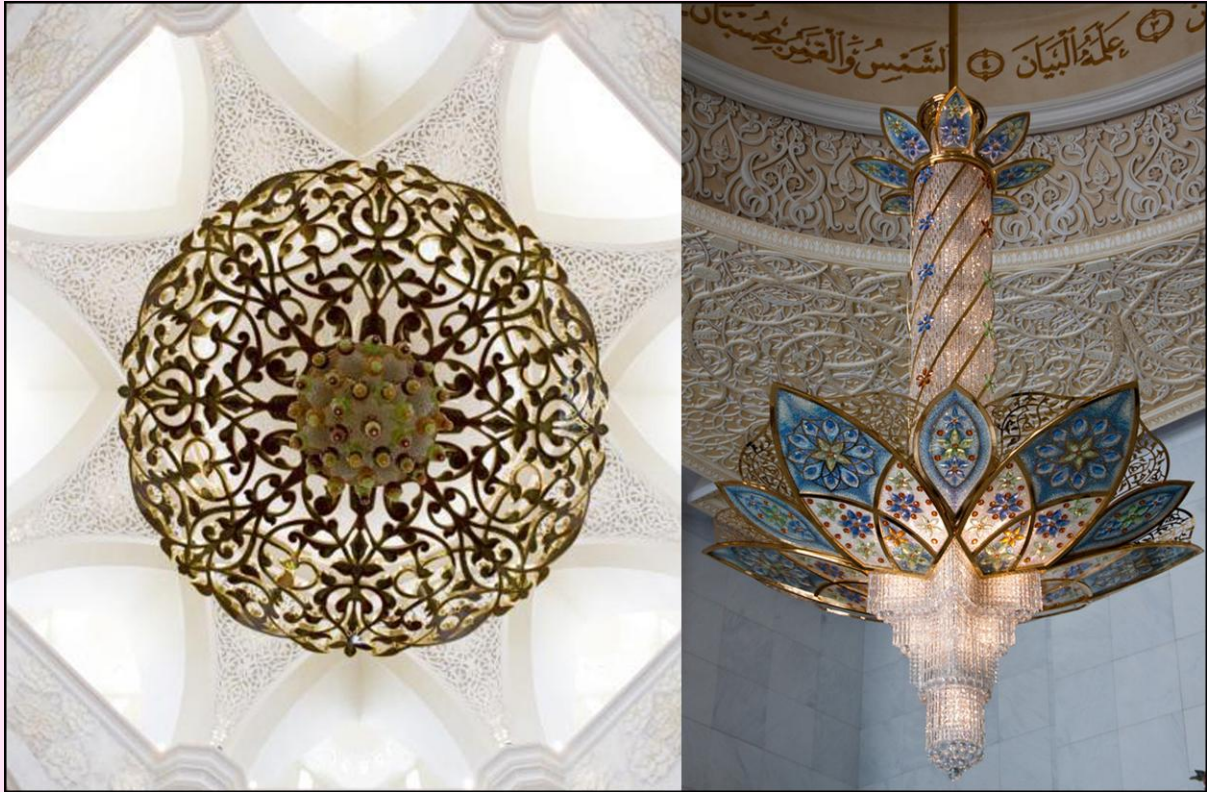
Chandeliers

There are seven crystal chandeliers made by Faustig in Munich, Germany situated in the halls and foyers. The largest is located in the main prayer hall and weighs twelve tons, one of the world's largest. Two smaller versions of the same design also located in the main prayer hall weigh eight tons each. Four blue coloured chandeliers of similar design and size are located in the foyer entrances to the mosque.



All the chandeliers are made from gilded stainless steel and brass (approx. 40kg of 24 carat galvanised gold was used). Glass panels studded with Swarovski crystals were installed in all of them.

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Calligraphy

The Arabic alphabet consists of 28 basic letters and 18 different forms of writing. There are two styles of calligraphy used, Naskhi and Kufi. In the Iznik panels traditional blue and white calligraphy can be seen in circular windows.



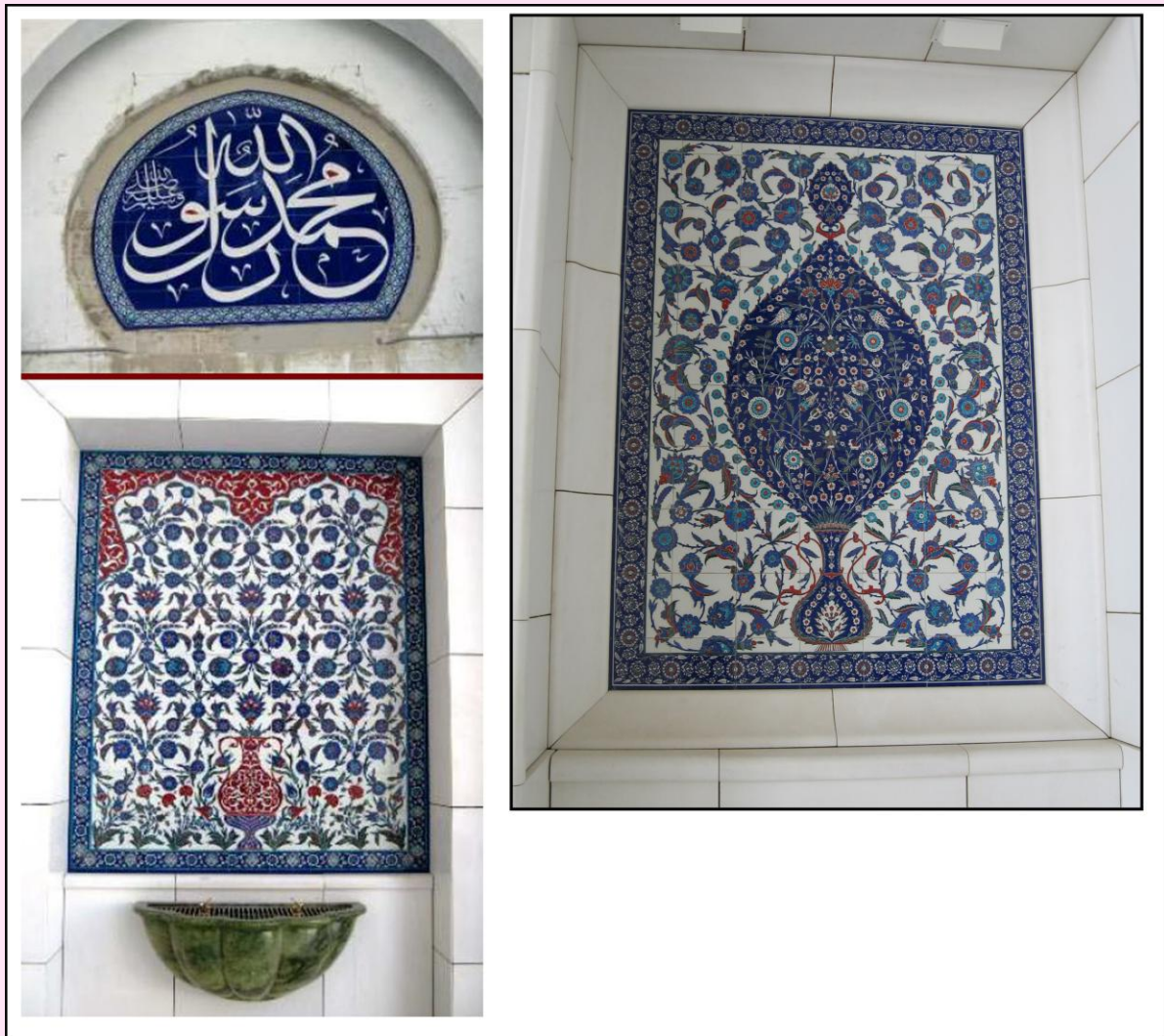
Kufi calligraphy is found on the Qibla Wall. Verses from the Qur'an are carved into the the white marble above the entrances to the courtyard.

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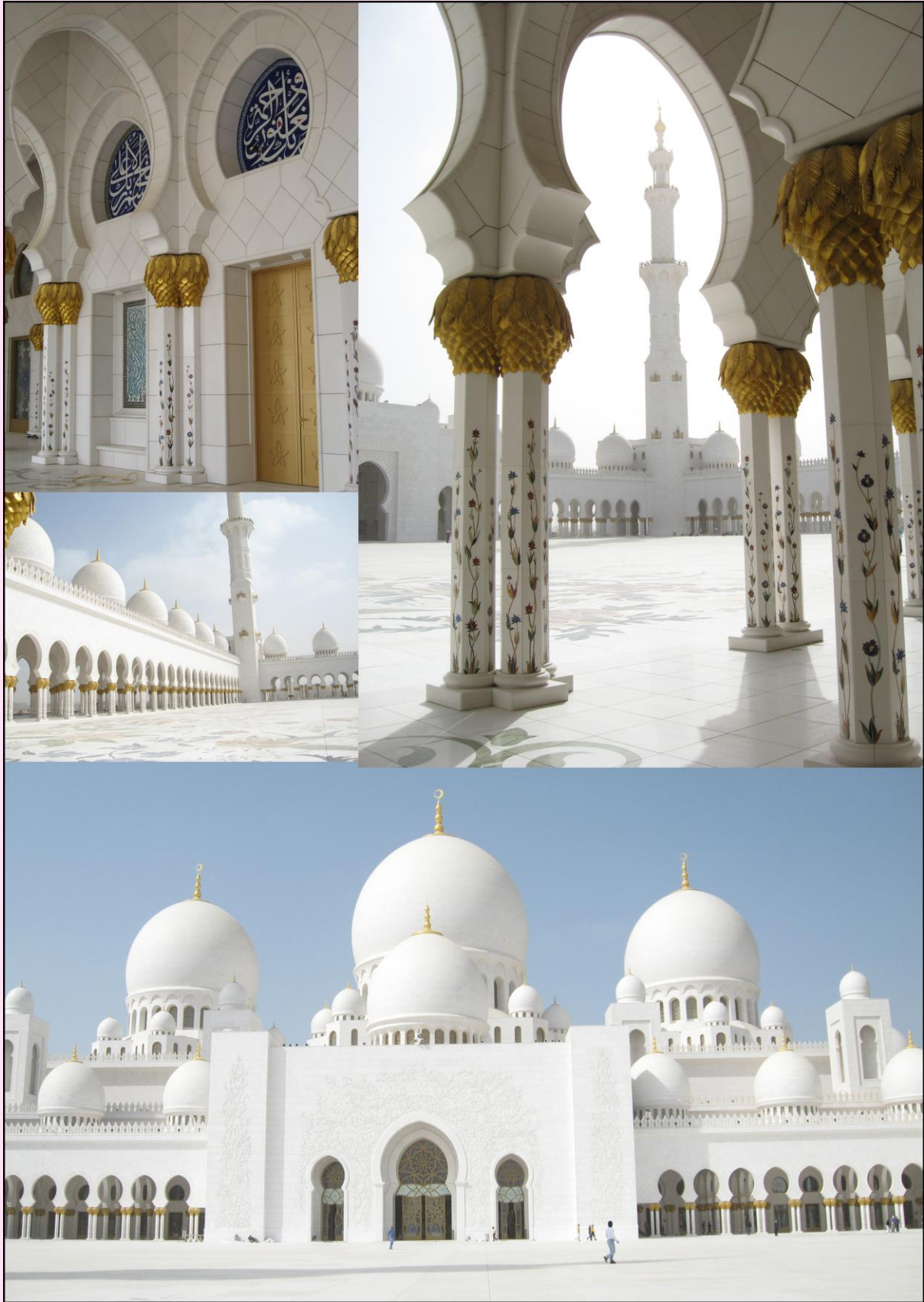
Itznik Panels

Named after the town in Anatolia in Turkey, these 80 hand crafted panels feature two designs involving calligraphy and floral patterns.



Itznik panels in calligraphy and floral styles decorate the walls of the mosque

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The courtyard forms an important part of the mosque. Over 22,000 worshippers can pray in the open Sahan area.

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The dedication and expertise of the craftsmen who created this masterpiece should not be underestimated!

Facts and Figures

Facts and Figures	Total number
Worshippers that can be accommodated in peak times	40960
Worshippers in main prayer hall	7126
Worshippers in open prayer hall	1960
Female worshippers in open prayer hall	980
Worshippers in open Sahan Area	22,729
Worshippers in main prayer hall entrance	682
Worshippers in mosque main hall entrances	784
Minarets	106.3 m ht 4 total
Mosque entrances	5
Domes	82
Chandeliers	7
Reflective pools	7874m ²

Of the many impressive buildings I have visited throughout the world, The Sheik Zayid Grand Mosque made the most impact on me personally. It changed the way I design and reinforced my love of Islamic architecture. To be there on the day it was revealed to the world, was a real privilege and honour.

Liz

www.blackworkjourney.co.uk