

Celebrating the past

One of the great monuments in Cairo has been restored to its past glory. *Arab Banker* reports

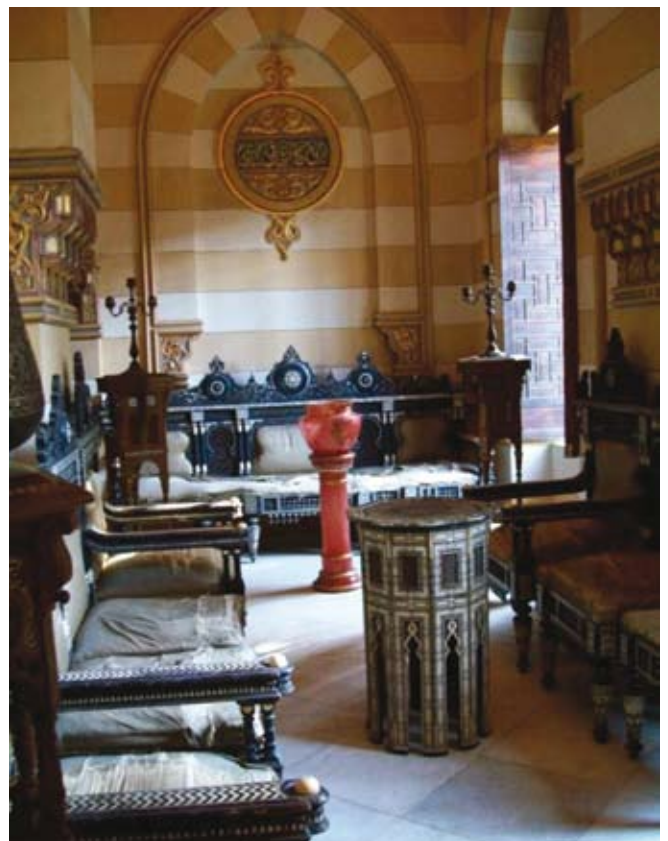
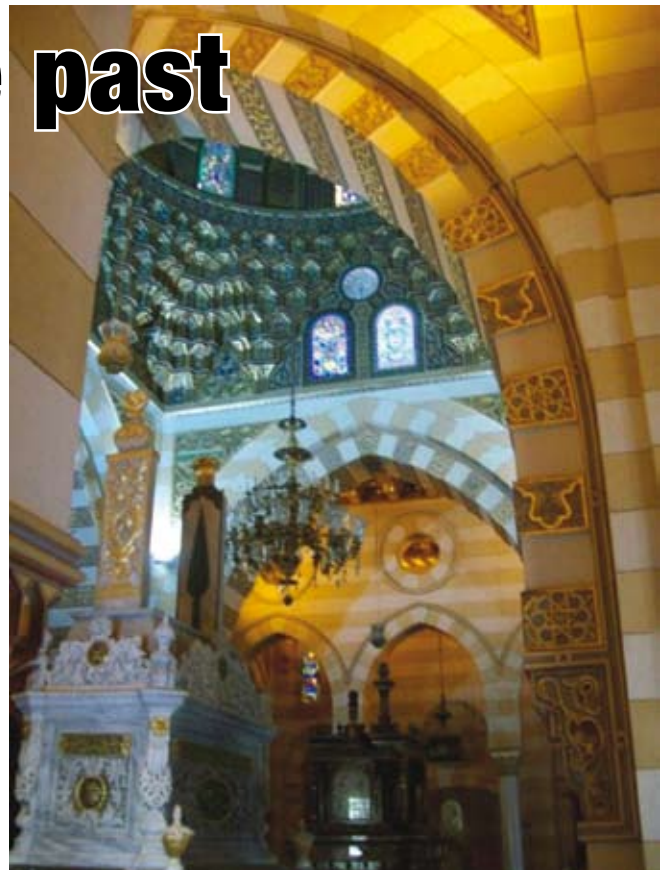
CAIRO, not unlike Istanbul, is a *pot pourri* of architectural abundance that sometimes hints at and at other times shouts out for the glories of times long past. The many years of military and revolutionary preoccupations and the resulting drain of resources took its toll on Cairo's culture. For years the city's vestiges of history were neglected and lay covered in dust unless exigent demands of tourism required perfunctory window-dressing. With the new economic climate has come a growing awareness of the city's cultural heritage and multiple public and private initiatives to claw it back and restore its rightful place in popular conscious.

The opening of Qubbat Afandina, the mausoleum of the Egyptian royal family, was a major event. Brought back (almost) to its full glory through a

conservation programme led by Agnieszka Dobrowolska, the Mamluk monument opened to general acclaim and is now a *must do* item on tourist itineraries, as well as a magnet for historians and scholars.

Restoration work on the domed building in the City of the Dead, a Mamluk cemetery in Old Cairo, dotted with numerous lesser examples of similar medieval design, is still a work in progress but the first phase already has produced stunning results.

The mausoleum was designed by Dimitri Fabricius Bey, chief architect of the royal court, and was completed in 1894 to commemorate Prince Mohammed Ali Tewfik (1875-1955, pictured), who had hoped to become king and even had a throne room built in his palace in preparation for kingship. But the closest he came to power was as chief regent for the teenaged Farouk until he became king. Prince Tewfik's hopes for becoming king were dashed by the birth of King Farouk's son Ahmed Fouad in 1952 and the following year Egypt became a republic. Tewfik went into exile and died in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1955, but was buried at the Afandina. Prince Tewfik's other claim to fame was as the President of the Mohammed Ali Club, a social watering hole for the rich and famous of Egypt at the time. It was named after the founder of the ruling dynasty of Egypt and Sudan, former Turkish army officer Muhammad Ali Pasha (1769-1848). **SR**



The exterior (top left) and interiors of Qubbat Afandina, after restoration with help from the Ministry of Awqaf (pious trusts) and Prince Abbas Hilmi, Tewfik's great grandson. The project was affiliated with the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo