

The Design Solution shares the story behind new terminal opening at Abu Dhabi Airport



As shared by The Design Solution, the opening of Terminal A at Abu Dhabi Airport marks a pivotal moment in the evolution of both the airport passenger experience and the travel retail experience

The airport commercial planning story

According to The Design Solution (TDS), Abu Dhabi Airports Company's 2014 request for proposal (RFP) in regards to the planning of the new terminal at Abu Dhabi International Airport (ADA) and its corresponding retail operations was widely perceived as not only an invitation to tender, but also a challenge to "revolutionize the travel industry."

The London-based retail, architecture and design practice says that vision has been delivered and the opening of Terminal A marks a pivotal moment in the evolution of both the airport passenger experience and the travel retail experience. As requested, TDS has helped bring to life "sensorial experiences" across the terminal.

As specialists in airport commercial planning and retail design, TDS played a significant dual role in the terminal's development, providing expertise in commercial planning across the full terminal, including working closely with the terminal's architects, Kohn, Pedersen Fox (KPF). TDS planned the

positioning of the retail structures and created the flowing, rippling design that blends them coherently throughout the terminal.

The company also went on to create the store designs for ARI's retail spaces in three categories: P&C, Jewellery and Sunglasses.

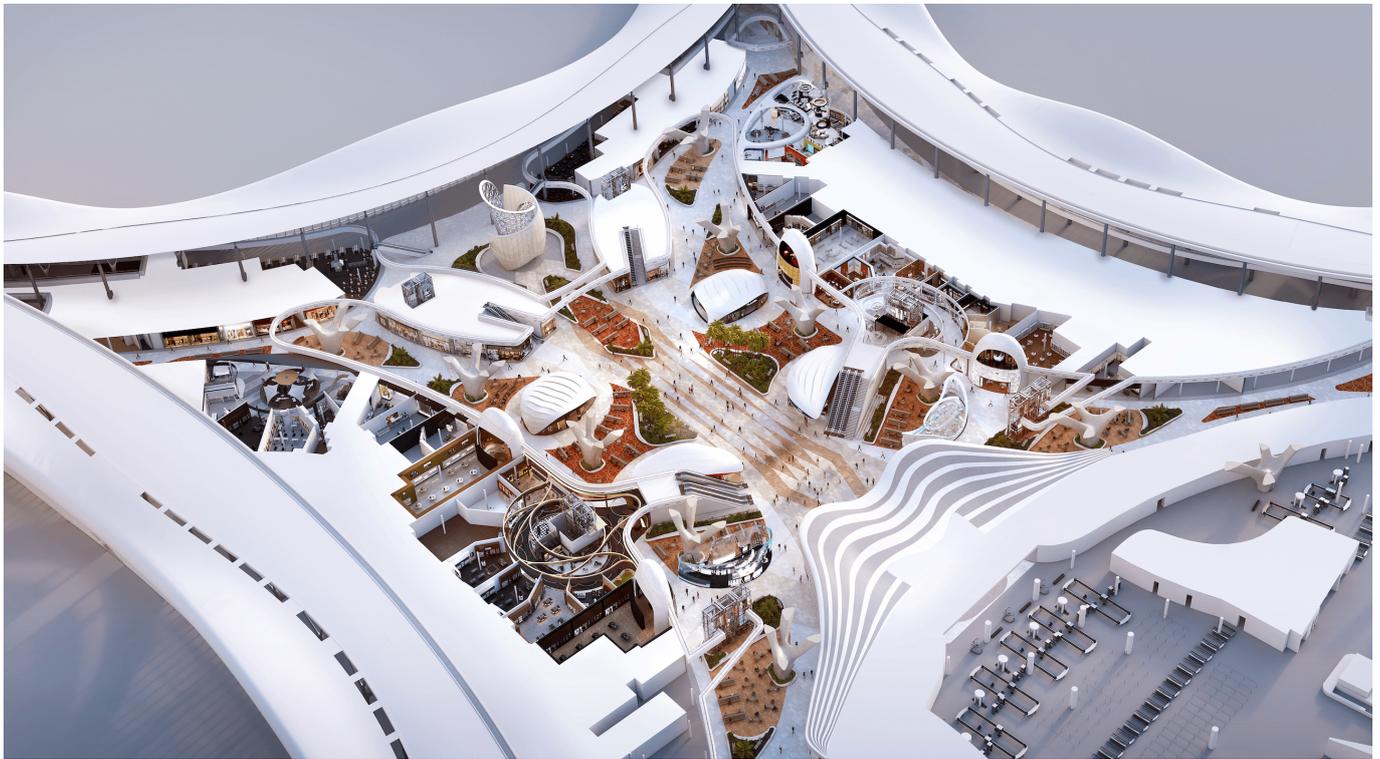


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Key planning challenges

Robbie Gill, Managing Director at The Design Solution, outlined the scale of the project. "The planning and design process covered a total space of over 700,000 square meters of terminal space, including over 26,000 square meters of retail. The scale is almost unprecedented in the travel retail world, but the audacity of ADA's vision also challenged the industry to think differently and work in new ways.

"We worked very closely with ADA and the terminal's brilliant architects - Kohn, Pedersen Fox - in developing a collection of commercial additions inside the whole envelope that could drive a dynamic, multi-paced space but remain in complete harmony with the architecture. This included the main duty free store, four soaring icon stores (350-400 square meters each), a series of retail pods, including four luxury pods strategically positioned across the space, and four category-focused arcades (300-1060 square meters each). We also created a series of concepts for Arrivals, including the Arrivals duty free store and a series of 'pods' in Arrivals for specialist stores," he said.



A design rendering of Terminal A

New space, new designs

Robbie Gill also summarized the project's pioneering design opportunity, "Integrating rather than adding retail elements into the whole terminal space and experience opens up the opportunity to create a far more powerful expression of the retail offer and the categories and brands while delivering a uniquely cohesive and coherent experience for the passenger.

"Our dual role in planning the commercial spaces and designing the ARI retail experiences within that space gave us unique advantages in how we holistically understood, visualised and detailed the passenger experience across every step of their journey through the terminal space.

"In the retail space, the four icon stores rise into the generous space above them and act as major focal points to both balance and navigate the space and prevent the incredible soaring height of the terminal from making the space feel unbalanced.

"Throughout the design concept you can see flowing, curving lines used in the shape of the stores, most notably in the icon stores and the luxury pods. These flowing lines echo the structural arches of the terminal building, but are also designed to evoke the ever-changing flow of desert dunes, shaped by the desert winds.

"The distinctive icon stores act as navigation points, helping the shopper to orientate themselves in the space, and the retail operators at each have added their own adaptation to the core shape we created but the similarity between the core design concept and the finished stores is extraordinary. We also added a playful reference to a navigation theme in the decorative patterns on the sides of the icon store structures, suggestive of maps of the stars used to navigate through the desert.

"ADA's vision demanded a shift in outlook from 'shopping' to 'retail adventures.' From a spirit of hospitality and warm welcome to unique adventures and discoveries across the categories, the design also had to share a full expression of ADA's values within a unique, multi-sensory experience.

“The result of that vision is that the Terminal A experience is about much more than a shopper experience; it is an experience specifically designed to shape and influence the traveller’s whole perception of Abu Dhabi and the UAE.”



According to Robbie Gill, Managing Director at The Design Solution, distinctive icon stores act as navigation points, helping shoppers to orientate themselves within the space

The retail design story & ARI retail adventure

Having completed the planning and flow of the commercial space for ADA, The Design Solution then worked with ARI in joint partnership with local partners operating as Travel Retail Sales and Services (TRSS) in designing the Abu Dhabi Duty Free category experiences in Skincare & P&C, Jewellery and Sunglasses.

Adrian Bradshaw, CEO, TRSS, said, “Seeing this project come to life has been a remarkable experience. We've poured our passion and commitment into creating these world-class stores, and it's incredibly rewarding to see passengers enjoying them over the last few weeks. This venture is more than just a business achievement; it reflects our dedication to excellence and our commitment to providing an exceptional shopping experience in travel retail. The positive feedback we're receiving from our customers is a positive affirmation of our efforts and vision.”

Kevin Patience, Design Director, The Design Solution, shared the design story behind the creation and what the team believes is the most spectacular travel retail environment that the industry has ever seen. “The stunning experience we can see today in Terminal A is founded on the opening line from ADA’s RFP with its emphasis on seeking 'sensational experiences,'" he said.



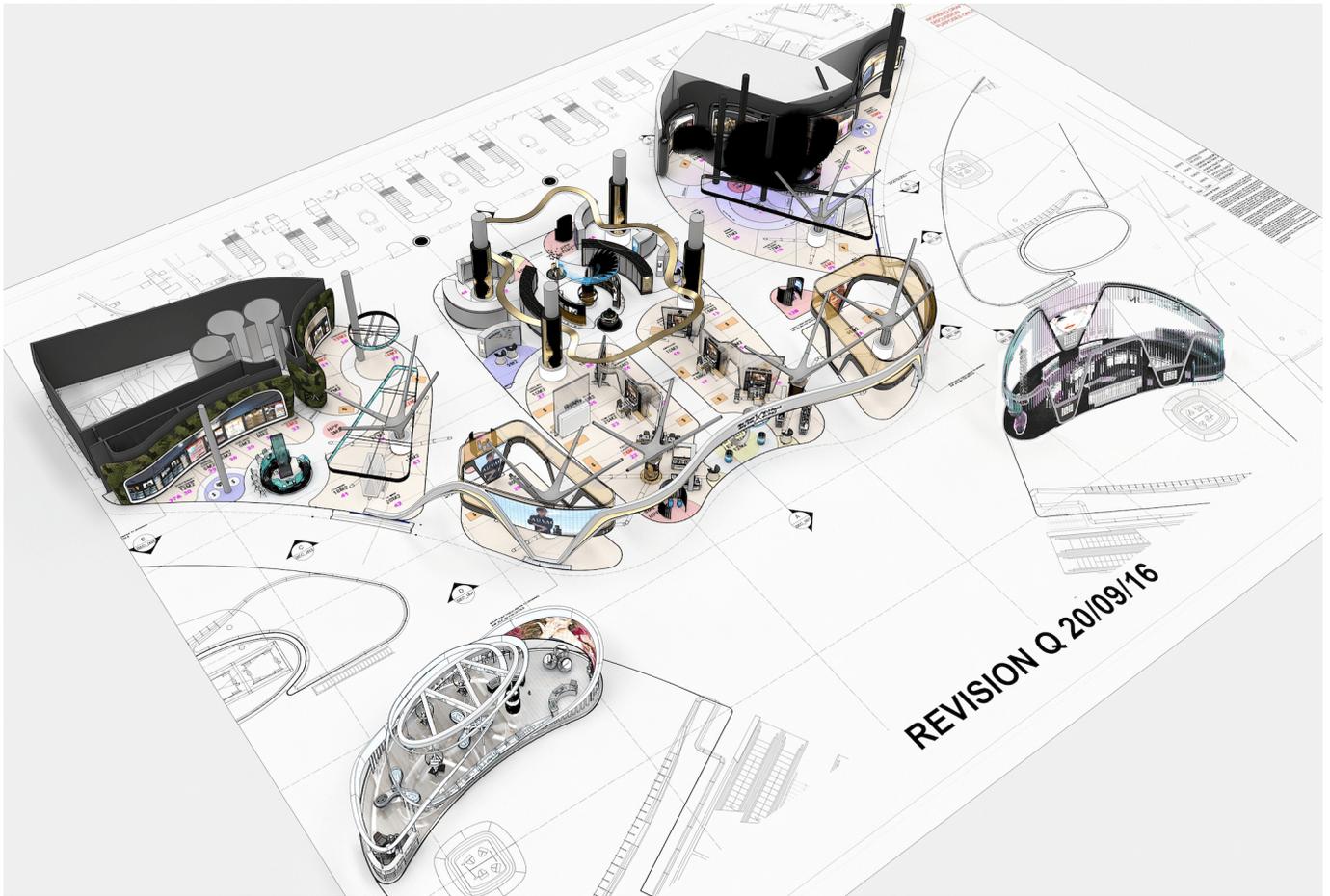
The flowing entrance to Abu Dhabi Duty Free

Patience continued, “In particular, as a retail designer, one of the key factors in making our designs fully effective was the airport’s willingness to commit space for the categories and brands to perform in.

“Our core design strategy for ARI was to create stories within each category, adding multi-sensory elements, hospitality and ‘retail theatre’ to engage with and excite passengers with spectacular and memorable experiences. Of course, each category and store transmits its own unique experience and personality, but we also ensured it works within the cohesive ‘whole space’ experience too.

“As such, each story is linked to the next by a physical element or connective trail – such as the contemporary mashrabiya-style patterned canopies which are adopted across the whole space to form our ceiling ‘veils’ which signal the flow from one sub-category to another.

“When we partnered with ARI to design the P&C & Skincare experience and the concept islands for Jewellery and Sunglasses, there was a real sense of excitement in our London studio and a sense of responsibility that this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create something that truly breaks the mould of traditional shop design. As we look back seven years at the concept visuals and now see the images of the finished ARI stores, it’s hugely satisfying to see the ambition and confidence that ARI expressed in our initial designs.



A design rendering of ARI Duty Free

"The breadth of our role in both commercial planning and retail design enabled us to integrate design into the DNA of the whole space, creating a truly spectacular 'whole space' that is unlike anything ever seen at an airport. However, the stunning vistas across the terminal are not the whole story. Within this picture, we can also zoom in on the details that enable each of the product categories to shine - and we can then zoom in even further to demonstrate how the individual brands achieve standout and celebrate their spaces."



A look at the main P&C space

See more photos here:



