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SEPT / OCT 2015

€ 9.50 / £ 8 / CHF 14.50 /
DKK 75.00 / KRW 30,000

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Rediscovered typology, Istanbul

Kreatif Architects take inspiration from a bygone era when Turkish apartment blocks were well-designed, high-quality property investments.

TURKEY — TEXT: OMER KANIPAK, PHOTOGRAPHY: CEMAL EMDEN

While Turkey has several distinct regions in terms of climate and terrain, practically the same type of apartment block has become the fundamental component of the built environment of Turkish cities since the 1950s. The abundance of this typology relies on several factors. In the 1930s, during the early republican period of Turkey, the government was engaged in setting up the most urgently needed institutions to run the economy and social structure. Although there was ample land for property development, the newly developing economy was not strong enough to support a government or municipal housing programme. Citizens were left to solve their own housing problems. Prior to the 1950s, only a small group of people – mostly leading merchants or industrialists – could afford to build apartment blocks for investment purposes, primarily in Istanbul and Ankara. Since the owner of the land usually also resided in one of the flats, the quality of these buildings was high.

By the 1950s, migration from rural to urban areas had increased enormously, yet the government was still unable to develop a solid housing programme. The increasing population in major cities caused people to build illegal settlements on their outskirts, on government-owned land. Since the government had no alternative solution to the housing problem, a new regulation was formed in 1954 to enable property ownership to be divided among living units instead of the whole building.

In 1965, a new property law was passed on the basis of this regulation. It meant that the owners of the flats may also maintain ownership of a portion of the land on which the building is constructed. This new law caused the production of apartment blocks to skyrocket, since the return of the investment on an apartment block was extremely quick and profitable. An immense increase in the number of small-scale contractors followed. A major side effect of this new law was the decrease in the quality of the buildings, because the land owners were not in control of the contractor, while the contractors' foremost aim was to build as cheaply as possible in order to sell quickly.

NestOrtaköy apartments, designed by Kreatif Architects for a long, narrow site in Istanbul's Ortaköy neighbourhood, offer a response to this trend and re-enact the memory of the pre-1950s apartment typology, where quality was not sacrificed in favour of quantity. Although the client's requirements and current building codes would have allowed the architects to create a monolithic block, a fragmented block typology was preferred. The entire building capacity permitted by the legal regulations of the site has been distributed into six independent blocks that empower community relationships while maintaining a certain level of privacy. The decision to make several independent blocks enabled the creation of an optimal footprint, ideal height, and a well-proportioned distance between buildings. The blocks are interconnected by underground car parks

and maintenance-free, self-cleaning ceramic tiles, while soil-coloured aluminium panels clad the exterior facades.

Although the site was almost flat, half- to one-and-a-half-metre elevation differences among the blocks were established in order to maintain a separation between ground-floor gardens. These differences form a boundary between gardens without using any walls or fences, helping to sustain personal relationships while preserving privacy and property rights.

The buildings with a larger footprint size, which have four flats on each floor, have been located at the two ends of the site, while blocks with two flats per floor have been distributed between these. The six blocks incorporate 74 independent units, of which sixteen are duplex flats. The main hall that divides the blocks internally includes stairs and elevator, with service areas behind it. On each floor, the hall starts with a large, open niche that can be used by the residents as a meeting and resting space. These common spaces within the circulation areas are designed to foster occasional encounters with neighbours. In dense living environments, the lack of opportunities by which people can interact with each other often decreases tolerance and increases conflicts. In order to overcome this situation, stairs are spatially prioritized as meeting spaces instead of elevators, which tend to isolate neighbours.

While forming the optimum conditions and design strategies that enable the density to appear minimal, the design decisions taken by Kreatif Architects encourage neighbourhood relations and make the NestOrtaköy a 'timeless' place in an urban environment – a gentle reminder of an exemplary apartment block typology in Turkey. ◀

NESTORTAKÖY APARTMENTS, 2012–2015

Architect	Kreatif Architects
Established	1995
Client	Borr-1 Real Estate Development
Address	Mecidiye Mah. Mustafa İzzet Effendi Sokak, Ortaköy, Istanbul
Info	www.kreatifmimarlik.com

FACTS & FIGURES

Apartment blocks built between 1930–1950 in Istanbul and Ankara were usually three to six or seven storeys high and had a concrete frame-work structure.

Kitchens and bathrooms were mostly located adjacent to the building's core, along with the main staircase and sometimes elevators.

Spaces within individual dwellings were connected with a long, narrow corridor, which became a of Turkish apartments.

↓ On each floor is an open area to encourage neighbourly relations.



↑ Section showing distribution among six independent blocks. ↓ A well-proportioned distance between buildings enables plenty of green.

