

## SAUDI ARABIA

### Merchant Mansions in the Historic Centre of Jeddah

The old town of Jeddah used to be an important harbour in the Red Sea, a crossroad of cultures as part of the trade routes between India, Arabia and Africa, and a harbour for pilgrims to the holy city of Mecca. The urban structure with its typical pattern of streets, squares and *souks* dates back to the 16th century. The special character of Jeddah's cityscape has to do with the residential houses erected in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They usually consist of three to four storeys and are built in the special style of the region, i. e. of stone walls and horizontal wooden structures with lattice work to screen the windows. These merchant mansions are impressive testimonies of a late phase of prosperity after the opening of the Suez Canal.

In the last decades, in spite of various conservation and rehabilitation programmes, many old houses have collapsed or have been torn down and replaced by modern structures. Some of the pictures presented here (photos taken by Dr. Elke Maria Deubzer in 2008) show a serious lack of maintenance. Also in the case of Jeddah instead of a total renewal a programme of repair by craftsmen specialised in local materials and traditional techniques would be necessary to preserve the authentic traces of the historic urban landscape.

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Jeddah, views of the historic centre, merchant mansions  
(photos: E. M. Deubzer, 2008)

