WHAT MAKES RUQ’AH

A space made through design, material and encounter

Ruq’ah is an independent space for art, design, books, food, performance and public conversation in Brussels.

Rather than treating design as something simply displayed inside the space, Ruq’ah approaches the space itself as an ongoing design project.

Architecture, furniture, lighting, graphic identity and artistic interventions have been developed through reuse, craftsmanship and collaboration. Materials left over from construction sites coexist with second-hand furniture, handmade architectural elements, artworks and objects carrying traces of previous lives.

The result is not a finished interior, but a space that continues to be made and remade by the artists, designers, craftspeople and communities who inhabit it.

Why a design and maker-driven space?

Design at Ruq’ah is understood as a practice of making, adapting and imagining.

The project brings the public into direct contact with artists, designers and craftspeople, not only through finished objects but through the processes behind them.

This can take the form of exhibitions, open studios, installations, workshops, conversations, demonstrations and collective making.

From furniture and lighting to architecture, ceramics, textiles, jewellery, graphic design, upcycling and fabrication, the aim is to create encounters between disciplines and between the people who make things and the people who use them.

Ruq’ah is therefore both a cultural venue and a working environment, a place where design can be experienced as something alive.

THE SPACE AS A DESIGN PROJECT

EARTH: Mud Wall by Joy Sfeir

One of the central interventions in the space is a wall made from natural earth, drawing inspiration from traditional earthen construction techniques found in Yemen and elsewhere across the Arab region.

The intervention brings an elemental material into the urban interior. It references vernacular architecture and ideas of home, while also exploring the relationship between natural materials, atmosphere and temperature.

Light is incorporated directly into the wall, transforming it from a surface into an architectural object.

The work is developed by **Joy Sfeir**, an artist, architect and gardener whose practice also involves cultivating and drying particular flowers for use in spatial and decorative interventions.

Earth, flowers and light come together as a contemporary interpretation of techniques and materials associated with domestic space and memory.

REUSE: Upcycled Wood and Furniture

Much of Ruq'ah has been built from materials that already had another life.

Wood recovered from construction projects around Brussels is transformed into furniture and architectural elements, including through collaboration with **In Limbo**.

Rather than hiding the previous histories of these materials, the design allows those histories to remain visible.

The same principle extends to the furniture.

Kitchen cabinets, bathroom elements, the cashier and other functional objects are largely second-hand. One kitchen cabinet, for example, comes from Antwerp and is approximately twenty years old.

These objects introduce what we think of as **distributed memory**, different objects, originating from different places and moments, brought together to form a new interior.

Reuse here is therefore not only an ecological decision. It becomes an aesthetic and narrative principle.

CRAFTSMANSHIP: The Mezzanine

The mezzanine is one of the defining architectural elements of Ruq'ah.

Rather than separating the venue into conventional rooms, it creates different heights, perspectives and degrees of intimacy while keeping the spaces visually connected.

Its construction foregrounds craftsmanship and the act of making itself.

The mezzanine, bridge, stairs, furniture and other interventions allow the architecture to remain legible as something that has been assembled by people, rather than appearing as an anonymous finished interior.

ARTIST ATELIER: Mohammad Zaza

Visual artist, curator and 2D animator **Mohammad Zaza** has his studio within Ruq'ah.

His presence introduces another dimension to the project, the relationship between the private artist studio and the public cultural space.

The studio creates a balance between **isolation and encounter**.

An artist can withdraw to work independently while remaining physically connected to the conversations, visitors, events and everyday life happening around them.

This deliberately challenges the idea of the isolated artist.

People become part of the creative environment. Unexpected encounters can influence the work, while visitors can experience artistic practice as something happening around them rather than something encountered only after it has been completed.

The ambition is to create a home for creativity without reinforcing the distance that can sometimes exist between artists and their audiences.

DESIGN, IMAGE AND PUBLIC SPACE

Feras Abo Dabboseh

Ruq'ah co-founder **Feras Abo Dabboseh** works across graphic design and video.

His approach to the space connects graphic identity, spatial design and reuse.

Rather than beginning with expensive or pristine materials, the question is how existing materials can be reorganised, recontextualised and given a strong visual identity.

This thinking extends beyond the physical interior.

Ruq'ah functions simultaneously as an art and design shop, artist atelier and cultural venue, hosting exhibitions, screenings, theatre, music, debates, workshops and public conversations.

Design therefore becomes a way of connecting all these activities rather than simply giving them a visual wrapper.

WHAT DOES RUQ’AH MEAN?

The Arabic word **Ruq’ah,** رقعة, carries several meanings.

It can refer to:

a piece or patch of land

a square or field within a board, such as a chessboard

a geographical area or territory

a patch or piece of fabric

and it is also associated with **Ruqʿah calligraphy**, one of the most widely used styles of Arabic handwriting.

These overlapping meanings became part of the identity of the space.

A Ruq’ah can be a territory, a fragment, a surface, a patch, or a field upon which something happens.

The name therefore reflects the architecture and philosophy of the project, different pieces brought together to create a shared territory.

AN IDENTITY THAT CAN CHANGE

The possibility of changing the name was present from the beginning.

Rather than treating a visual identity as something permanent and untouchable, Ruq’ah considers identity itself part of the design process.

The space can change, and therefore its graphic language can change with it.

One reference is **Tetris**.

Individual elements have their own identities, but their meaning changes according to how they are positioned in relation to one another.

The same logic can be seen physically in Ruq’ah.

The mezzanine, kitchen, studio, bookshop, café, furniture and gathering spaces behave almost like stackable elements. Together they create a larger composition, but they can also be rearranged as the needs of the space evolve.

The graphic system can follow the same principle, modular rather than fixed.

MEMORY ALREADY PRESENT

Not everything in Ruq’ah begins with Ruq’ah.

Some traces of the building's previous life remain, including elements connected to offices that once belonged to a Dutch writer.

Rather than erasing everything and beginning from zero, the project is interested in what can be retained.

Existing architecture, reused furniture, recovered construction materials and new artistic interventions create different layers of time within the same space.

This approach treats the interior less as a blank canvas and more as an accumulation of stories.

DESIGN AS ENCOUNTER

For Brussels Design September, Ruq’ah proposes to open these processes to the public.

Rather than presenting design only as finished products, visitors encounter the people, materials, experiments and decisions through which the space is continuously being made.

The programme can bring together:

Open Atelier
Designers and artists open their working spaces and show works in progress.

Material Stories
A guided tour through the mud wall, reused wood, second-hand furniture, mezzanine, lighting and other architectural interventions.

Making Ruq’ah
A conversation with the artists, architects, designers and craftspeople who contributed to the space.

Hands-on Workshops
Sessions around earth, wood, flowers, textiles, upcycling, graphic design or other practices represented within the project.

Design Exhibition
Furniture, objects, prototypes, artworks and experiments presented throughout the venue rather than isolated in a conventional exhibition room.

Cheek to Cheek × Ruq'ah
A collaborative programme bringing designers and makers into direct conversation with the space and its communities.

A LIVING DESIGN SPACE

Ruq'ah does not aim to present itself as a perfectly completed design project.

Its character comes precisely from the opposite.

It is a space assembled from different materials, people, histories and practices, and one that remains open to transformation.

A piece of land.
A patch.
A field.
A studio.
A gathering place.
A space continuously being made.