?The Farsi family confirms the passing of H.E. Dr Mohamed Said Farsi

Thursday 7 March, 2019

The Farsi family confirms the passing of H.E. Dr Mohamed Said Farsi during the early hours of Tuesday morning, 5th March 2019. He died peacefully at his home in Monaco.

Dr Farsi was a visionary civic leader and philanthropist who is widely considered to be the father of modern Jeddah. He presided over a five-fold increase in the city's population, led its transformation, including creating the famous Jeddah corniche – a unique public space and open-air gallery. Dr Farsi, a noted art lover, was also the first mayor to introduce Western art and sculpture to an Arab city. He is survived by his son Hani Farsi and former wife Naglaa Asaad.

Born in Makkah in 1937, Dr M S Farsi qualified as an architect in Alexandria and returned to Saudi Arabia in the early 1960s.

He entered government service in 1963 and rose rapidly. Just two years later he was appointed to the post of Planning Officer for the Western Region of Saudi Arabia. Covering an area larger than the United Kingdom and having within its boundaries the port city of Jeddah and the Holy Cities of Makkah and Medinah, this territory was in effect Saudi Arabia's window to the world and it was under Dr Farsi's aegis that plans for these three cities were drawn up; given the immense significance of this work, Dr Farsi liaised with the very highest levels of government.

In 1972, Dr Farsi became Mayor of Jeddah, a city which had grown from the historic walled city of his childhood to a large modern conurbation of more than 300,000 people. Until the middle of the following decade, Dr Farsi presided over a period of spectacular and unprecedented growth for the city, which saw its population increase five-fold.

That chaos was averted in the face of such a population explosion was due in no small part to Dr Farsi's enlightened leadership. It is remarkable that in the midst of creating much-needed infrastructure, Dr Farsi found time to create a city that was as beautiful as it was functional; with a carefully preserved historic centre, gracious boulevards and charming parks.

A collector of Islamic and Western art, Dr Farsi's vision as a city planner was to integrate important contemporary art into public spaces, thus enriching the lives of the inhabitants and reflecting the on-going cultural significance of the city, and his mayoralty is today remembered for its artistic flowering and for being at the forefront of design. Dr Farsi made use of local artists and materials as well as commissioning works from many great Western masters, including Henry Moore, Victor Vasarely, Alexander Calder, Arnaldo Pomodoro, Joan Miró, Cesar Baldaccini, Sylvestre Monnier, Jean Arp and Jacques Lipchitz, among many other stellar names in the international art world. He was the first mayor to introduce Western art and sculpture to an Arab city, as well as the first to display art that depicted the physical human form. At the time he stepped down, in 1986, Jeddah boasted over 400 pieces of public art.

When he retired in 1986, Dr Farsi returned to one of his primary passions - education. Within just one year he successfully qualified for his doctorate, attaining a PHD from the University of Alexandria.

Dr Farsi was always conscious of the advantages and opportunities that he enjoyed and throughout his life he gave generously to numerous and varied charitable causes, hoping to improve the lives of those less fortunate than him.

Hani Farsi said:

"From childhood, my father taught me the importance of giving back. He was a man who if he read about a train crash would immediately do everything he could to find the names of every family who suffered the loss of a loved one and ensure they would be properly cared for. This was done with no thought of recognition.

"My Dad was an avid collector of art and left a legacy of over 400 public works, which included pieces from Henry Moore and Miro – all paid for either by him or through donations of local businessmen.

"All those who knew my father benefited from his wise counsel, his warmth and his generosity of spirit. To me, he was my idol who instilled in me the desire to go out and change the world through

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philanthropy. He was a lover of Arabic and Western music, funny and enjoyed practical jokes. But more than anything, he was a kind, thoughtful, present and loving father. I will miss him deeply."

The Janaza prayer will take place at London Central Mosque, Regents Park at 12.15pm on Friday 8th March. Followed by the burial at Brookwood Park Cemetery at 3pm. The Farsi family will observe 3 days of Azza between 6pm-8pm on Friday 8th and 5pm-8pm on Saturday 9th and Sunday 10th at The Claridges Hotel, London, W1K.

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