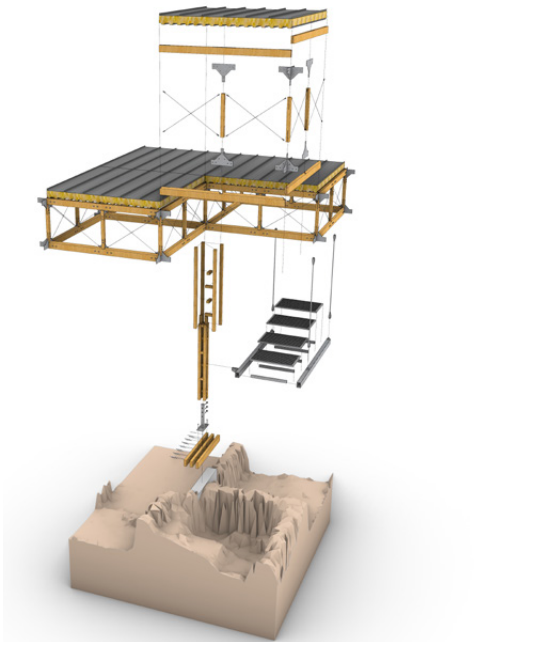
Nea Paphos Mosaics Shelter Prototype

Location: Nea Paphos Archaeological Park, Cyprus
Client: Getty Conservation Institute / Department of Antiquities, Cyprus
Competition dates: 2022 - 2023



The kit-of-parts system can easily be adapted to suit the particular climatic and protective requirements of any specific archaeological site.

Listed as a World Heritage Site since 1980, the Paphos Archaeological Park in Nea Paphos, Cyprus stands on the site of an ancient city and hosts a wealth of treasures of exceptional architectural and historical value, many still under excavation. These include four large Roman villas with superb mosaic floors, recognised as some of the most beautiful in the world.

Working closely with engineers Buro Happold, we sought to answer the twin challenges of creating a shelter for the mosaics (technical, following the science), and enhancing the visitor experience (visual, dynamic, story-telling). Our solution comes together in our prototype shelter, fittingly based on the Ancient Roman builders' 'kit-of-parts' approach. To design their domestic and civic architecture the Romans would start with standard elements – column, architrave, cornice, pediment, arch, portico, frieze etc – and then customise them for particular sites by subtly adding detail from a template of options; for example, column shafts could be smooth or fluted.

Our contemporary kit-of-parts system has similarly been designed with elegance and simplicity in mind, from materials that are universally available. It is adaptable, flexible, easy to build and cost-effective. And it directly addresses the specific challenges faced by archaeological sites.

Our structure is designed to protect, shelter and curate each mosaic at under stable conditions. Roof lanterns are configured to deliver soft, indirect daylight to illuminate key mosaics, while a sealed and insulated roof system overhangs the façade, sheltering it from weather and direct sunlight. Air is drawn in passively to stabilise the internal environment by promoting moisture evaporation and air movement. Balconies and hanging walkways give visitors clear views of the mosaics from multiple angles and perspectives.