

With its dramatic architecture, precise engineering and top-speed construction, the Formula One-themed Yas Hotel has outlapped most of Abu Dhabi's other buildings. **Roxane McMeeken** gave it a spin

# THE RIGHT FORMULA



If you go for a night drive along the new expressway from Dubai to Abu Dhabi, you'll probably notice the Yas Hotel. Actually, what you'll see are 5,389 glowing lights, patches of which slide meltingly down the visible light spectrum from red and orange to indigo and violet. And if you don't happen to know it's the Yas Hotel, you could be forgiven for concluding that you're looking at the shell of a vast alien chrysalis.

Once you've overcome your paranoia, however, you may well recognise a building with a claim to be Abu Dhabi's first true icon. The luxury hotel is part of a £39bn project taking shape on an island just offshore from the city, where the Ferrari World theme park is being developed, and

it outclasses everything else Abu Dhabi has built so far. This includes the headquarters of its own developer, Aldar, whose office down the road looks gimmicky by comparison. Actually it looks like an enormous Smartie, but that hardly affects the point.

Yas Hotel could have been gimmicky, too. It is, after all, a Formula One-themed hotel and it sits right in the middle of a race track. It opens this weekend for Abu Dhabi's inaugural F1 Grand Prix.

By day the building is bright, white and baffled by three layers of gypsum and 60mm of Rockwool insulation to keep the track noise to a bearable level. Over it is a steel grid shell clad with glass, which recalls

motorsport, from the cars to their driver's leathers and helmets.


This grid shell, built by Austrian specialist Waagner-Biro, is thought to be the world's largest, with an area of 17,000m<sup>2</sup>. It comprises 2,100 tonnes of support steel and 5,096 lozenges of differently sized glass. The building is conceived as two blocks on either side of a bridge, linked by the shell, which also acts as a vast brise-soleil.

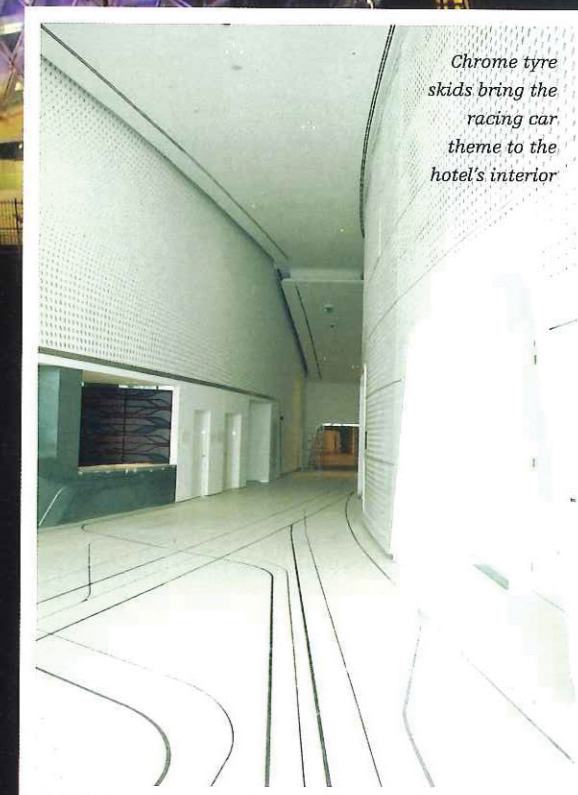
Yas is a feat of fast paced construction as well as elegant engineering: Al-Futtaim Carillion built the £380m, 499-room hotel in 18 months, working 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The racing theme continues inside the

hotel, where the corridor floors and the white leather walls of the ballroom are shot through with chrome tyre-tracks.

If there is a criticism to be made of the design, it is that this ballroom is the only public area that is generous with space. On the other hand, there are cosy and stylish bars, each with their own character, that make up for that. And like the rest of the building, they have a sophistication that stands out a mile in Abu Dhabi.

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Chrome tyre skids bring the racing car theme to the hotel's interior

#### Project team

**client** Aldar Properties

**contractor** Al Futtaim Carillion

**lead architect** Asymptote  
**structural engineers** Arup, Dewan Architects & Engineers

**grid-shell engineers** Waagner-Biro, Schlaich Bergermann und Partner

**M&E engineer** Red Engineering Middle East

**grid-shell lighting**

**consultant** Arup Lighting, New York

**QS** Currie & Brown