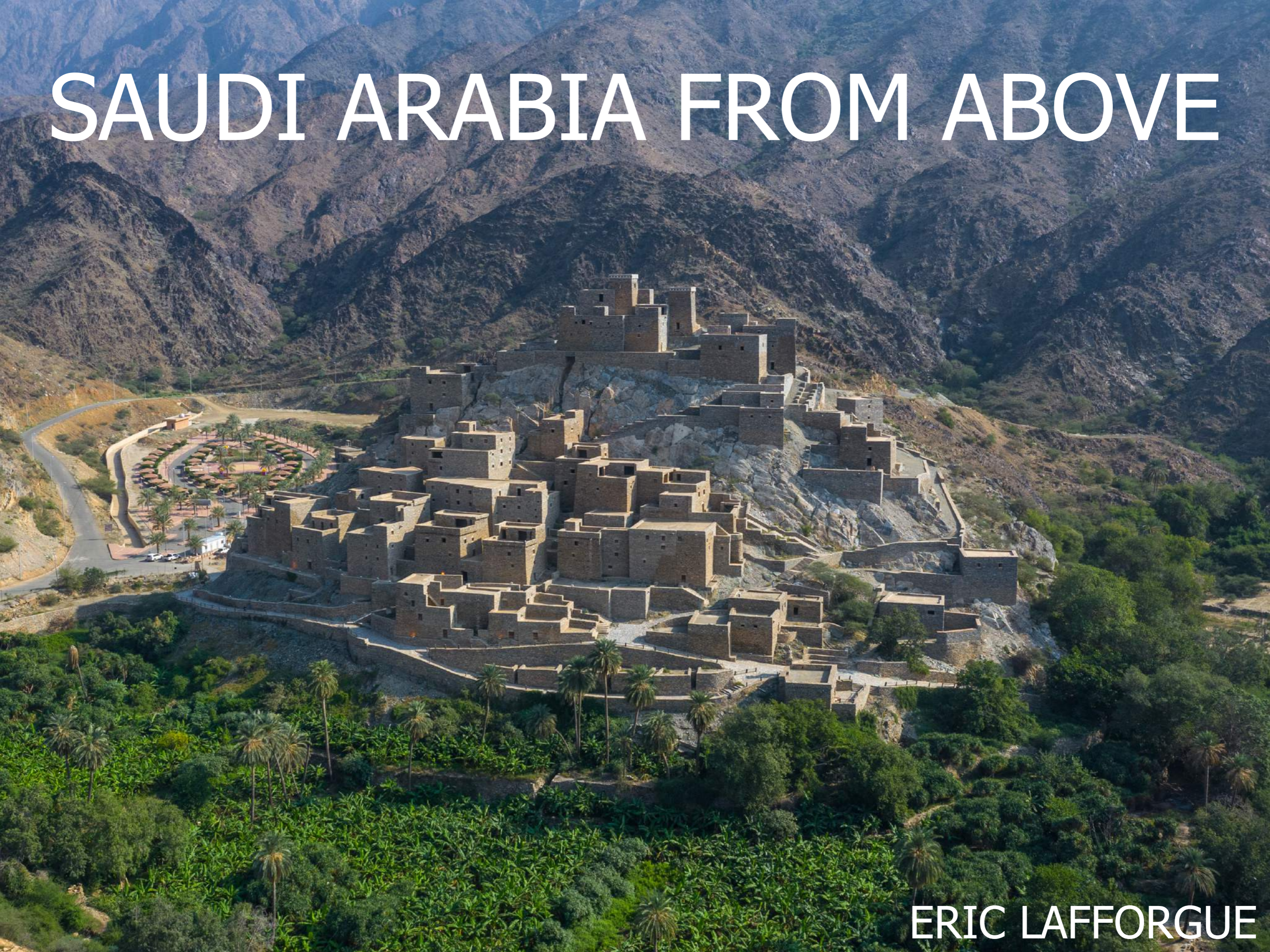


# SAUDI ARABIA FROM ABOVE



ERIC LAFFORGUE



View of an old village with traditional mud houses and gardens on the outskirts of the southern city of Dhahran Al Janub. The architecture bears a similarity to the famous Yemeni city of Shibam, which is called the Manhattan of the Desert. Yemen is only 10 kilometers away. Dhahran Al Janub is not located in the desert but it also deserves such a nickname. The gardens remain well-kept and were used to offer a means of escape in case of tribal raids and defeat.



A stone and mud watchtower made of slates standing in the Asir province of Saudi Arabia. These watchtowers had two purposes: to monitor neighboring enemies and to keep harvests safe in this arid area. Nowadays, they have become the symbol of Asir province and can be seen all along major roads.



An ancient village with traditional mud houses near the southwestern city of Najran. An increasing number of these mud houses have been abandoned in favor of modern ones, but Saudi families like keeping them for weekend getaways or social events such as weddings or Ramadan gatherings. This frequent use means that these 200-year-old houses remain well-maintained. Many Saudis also like building a modern house close to their old family one.



Many people assume that the Saudi Kingdom abounds with luxury buildings and signs of wealth, but outside of the main cities, the country remains very rural. This old village with mud houses is located in the Asir province. These houses are called midmakh and they may have up to seven floors. The huge walls are the best way to keep temperatures cool during the summer. There are rooftop terraces that allow people to enjoy fresher air.



Black stone and mud houses built with slates in the village of Sarat Abidah. While many assume that Saudi Arabia is just a desert, the area is sometimes hit by heavy rain. The angled slates on these buildings help prevent water from getting inside and damaging the walls. The white metallic roofs indicate those houses that have been renovated and are lived in.



A view of traditional stone houses in the village of Al Olayan. This area is located high up in the mountains and fog is common here. People from the lowlands (Riyadh for instance) enjoy coming here for the rain and the fog during the holidays as the heat becomes suffocating in the cities, with temperatures above 40 degrees and of course, not one drop of rain.



Dhee Ayn village is a 400-year-old stone settlement built on top of a hill in the Al-Bahah region and abandoned about 30 years ago. The village houses themselves are not made of marble but stone. However, the village is known as the "Marble Village" for the rocky outcrop it is built upon.





Old houses in the al-Balad quarter in Jeddah. This district is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and there is ongoing conservation work led by the Ministry of Culture. It is extremely reminiscent of the Tales from the 1001 Nights: tall buildings topped by mashrabiya, wooden balconies that allowed women to see without being seen. Saudis have fled the old city and now, only workers or refugees from Somalia, Pakistan and Yemen live here in precarious conditions.



This village is located in the Asir province and features houses made of a unique mix of red mud and stone. Although the properties are now crumbling, there are still colorful drawings decorating the interior walls. The ground floor of these houses was intended for livestock. The first floor was for human accommodation and included small windows to keep out the heat as well as intruders. As you go up the building, the windows become larger to let more light in as well as cooler air.



Traditional stone watchtowers standing tall in Addayer village, Jizan province. The terraced land around the buildings allows locals to grow coffee in this remote mountainous area. Saudi people are very protective of their privacy, but when shown these drone pictures, they were excited to see their land from above for the first time.



A traditional mud house on a farming complex near the city of Najran. The farm buildings in this area resemble small castles with crenellations. This defensive architectural element indicates that people lived in continuous fear of being attacked. Nowadays, the farmers are always happy to invite you to their homes and share dates dipped in hot ghee.



A view of the abandoned Abdullah al-Suleiman Palace in Taif, Mecca province. Many old palaces in the area that combine Ottoman, Arabic and Art Nouveau styles are awaiting cash injections from benefactors in order to be renovated. But help never comes and many are left in ruins living under the threat of real estate speculation.



A bird's eye view of Rijal Almaa, in the Asir region. Around 30 years ago, this village was abandoned by the locals in favor of modern houses with electricity and running water. But in a bid to save the ancient buildings, the village has now been turned into a wonderful giant museum. The architecture of the buildings is unique, with stone slabs that were sourced locally. This place will become a major tourist attraction with many hotels opening around it.



It only takes a few minutes to get from Najran to the golden sands of the Rub Al Khali, the "Empty Quarter" Desert. This is one of the places that the late British explorer Wilfred Thesiger visited. A local Saudi rabbit hunter who lost his greyhound used the drone pictures to locate his dog.

eric lafforgue

+32473957007

[lafforgue@mac.com](mailto:lafforgue@mac.com)

[www.ericlafforgue.com](http://www.ericlafforgue.com)