A Brief History of ARCHNET
1979 Establishment of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT and Harvard (AKPIA)

- Established through a gift provided by His Highness the Aga Khan to each institution.
- Documentation Centers created at Harvard and MIT to develop specialized library collections and to disseminate information about the history of Islamic architecture and contemporary design in the Islamic world
  - Publications, conferences, seminars, research travel grants, etc.
  - At MIT grantees had to provide copies of images to the Documentation Center
  - Aga Khan Visual Archive – Currently available on MIT DOME, with selections on Archnet

https://dome.mit.edu/handle/1721.3/45936
1985 Laser Disc
1998 HH Aga Khan Expresses expresses a desire for the work of AKPIA to have a greater impact in Muslim societies, both in academia and in practice.

- SA+P Dean Bill Mitchell proposes to build an online tool that responds to those concerns.

1999 Work begins on ArchNet

2001 Beta Launch

2003 ArchNet made publicly accessible
  - Virtual Community & Digital Library
ArchNet serves the same ends as the AKPIA Program, the Documentation Centers, the Award for Architecture, and the Historic Cities Programme:

- To facilitate the advanced study of Islamic architectural history in all its diversity
- To encourage and enable the application of best practices in contemporary design and construction
- Dissemination of knowledge and resources to encourage excellence in scholarship, teaching, and professional practice

Archnet leverages the power of the WWW to do those things more effectively and on a broader scale.

One component of the site, ArchNet’s Digital Library, could literally be a library for communities unable to develop their own collections.
ARCHNET.ORG (v. 2.0) went live in January 2013

• A collaboration between the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the Aga Khan Documentation Center at MIT (AKDC@MIT)

• Brings the technologies that power the ARCHNET up to date.

• AKDC@MIT becomes responsible for the curation/intellectual oversight, both in terms of subject matter and metadata standards.
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• All components beyond the digital library are removed.

• Replaces hyperlinked click through structure with a more powerful, precise search.
Full disclosure: Egypt and Turkey were removed from the search so I could fit both periods in the results screenshot.
• Brings the technologies that power the ARCHNET up to date.

• AKDC@MIT becomes responsible for the curation/intellectual oversight, both in terms of subject matter and metadata standards.

• All components beyond the digital library are removed.

• Replaces hyperlinked click through structure with a search.

• Introduces new visual learning components.
Published records (as of May 18, 2021)

- 8,510 Sites
- 9,561 Publications or Files (PDF, CAD, etc.)
- 1,115 Authorities (persons, companies, cities)
- 124,835 Images
- 594 Media (video and audio)
- Files in 22 languages
  - 7848 in English
  - 1585 in Arabic

(By default, the collections page shows all major collections in random order. Clicking the category shows an alphabetized list for that category only.)
Archnet is

- The largest freely accessible library of its kind
- Visited by users from virtually every country or territory in the world on a monthly basis

So why rebuild?
Why rebuild?

• Address a technology deficit. Some of backend software was reaching End of Life
• Database and its associated assets had become too large to be delivered efficiently by the current configuration of backend software and hosting servers
• Upgrades and changes to the design were becoming increasingly costly and time-consuming, due to factors above
• Most importantly…. 
ACCESSIBILITY

• Closer, if not total, compliance with W3C Accessibility Guidelines
• Friendlier to slower connections
• Friendlier to mobile devices
• Friendlier to users for whom English is not a first language
ARCHNET 3.0 CATALOGING INTERFACE COMPLETE

Except for

- Minor tweaks
- Aesthetic adjustments
ARCHNET 3.0 ENHANCEMENTS (in no particular order)

• Brings the platform up to date with latest technology
  • No significant changes to data structure
  • Significant changes to navigation, largely in response to user feedback
ARCHNET

3.0 ENHANCEMENTS (in no particular order)

• Mobile first development
ARCHNET

3.0 ENHANCEMENTS (in no particular order)

• Faster response time
  • Less wait time
  • Fewer failed searches
  • Responsive even on slower connections
    • Important, because our largest user groups are in places with poor connections
• Easier to navigate, easier to search
• Multilingual search
• Mobile-friendly (location-based capabilities may launch with 3.0 or in 3.x)
• Closer compliance with W3C Accessibility Guidelines
**ARCHNET**

**3.0 SCHEDULE**

- **This summer** - Soft Launch. Testers needed!

- Two months during which both sites will be live, but new content added only to the new platform.

- **3.0 Live** by the start of the academic year!

- No significant interruption in cataloging or content development!
Future Developments (Development of Phase 2 and beyond)

- Integration of APIs and capacity for Machine to Machine interaction
  - Vocabularies of existing authorities: Library of Congress, Getty Institute, VIAF, etc.
- A number of enhancements to the interface, including the possibility of multi-lingual interfaces, integration of authorities in other languages
- Automation of processes like image standardization, captioning of videos, etc.
- Various tools to facilitate cataloging with less training
- Enhanced ability to display 3D models, virtual reality representations, etc.
- Etc.
ARCHNET

3.0

HELP NEEDED!

• Sign up to be a Archnet 3.0 tester: https://akdc-mit.typeform.com/to/geLYpu6f

• Share syllabi or other teaching material for our Pedagogy Collection: archnet-submission@mit.edu

• Propose an exhibition of content development project: archnet-submission@mit.edu

  • NOTE: Exclusive permissions are NOT required for Archnet. Contributors can donate their material to AKDC, but they can also simply grant a content sharing agreement.

• Request an Archnet workshop for your class (online or in-person): archnet@mit.edu