



Richness in Architecture as Defined by Contemporary Iranian Television Series

S. Yahya Islami^{1*}, Mina Tafakkor² and Forough Rezvani Zadeh³

¹Assistant Professor of Architecture, School of Architecture, College of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

²M.A. in Interior Architecture, School of Architecture, College of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

³M.A. in Interior Architecture, School of Architecture, College of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

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ABSTRACT: Today, mass media act like a magic mirror, not only reflecting the reality of societies, but also projecting a variety of images onto people's thoughts. Because of this great ability to produce, reproduce and disperse images, mass media have acquired considerable influence on people's lives. Among the different media, the television in particular has become an inseparable part of most Iranian households. Within the various programs offered, television series stand out from the rest because they are presented incrementally and over a longer period of time, and therefore, attracting large, faithful audiences who continuously absorb their visual communication. This paper traces people's conception of richness, luxury and quality in architecture by examining its representation in recent Iranian TV series. It uses a qualitative research methodology based on theoretical cross-examination, critical analysis and thematic comparison of Iranian homes, particularly houses belonging to the wealthy with enough financial means to facilitate quality and creativity in architecture. By analyzing the architectural characteristics of these buildings, this paper concludes that a particularly superficial definition of richness in architecture is gaining popularity, which results in architectural characteristics that are entirely foreign to the rich cultural and architectural traditions of Iran. The consequence is a loss of identity in which everyone is responsible for: from the wealthy clients who desire such imported opulence, to the architects who succumb to such desire, and finally the public that accepts it all. In this context, the media acts like a mirror, reflecting and therefore doubling the effect of these events.

Keywords: Contemporary Architecture, Interior Architecture, Mass Media, TV Series, Luxury.

INTRODUCTION

It is almost seven thousand years since the beginning of the Iranian civilization. Over the centuries, Iran has undergone many evolutions, revolutions, wars and other transformations that few areas in the world have had to deal with. Inevitably the different facets of this civilization have also undergone numerous transformations, of which architecture is one of the most prominent.

There is still no consensus amongst experts about the date that would mark the beginning of contemporary Iranian architecture. For some, the beginning of Pahlavi I dynasty¹ marks this date, that is to say around 1925, which coincides with the modernist reforms of Reza Shah². Others however, believe that contemporary

Iranian architecture began as early as the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, which instigated many social and political transformations in Iran. However, perhaps the earliest date marking the beginning of transformations is in the early nineteenth century when Naser al Din Shah³ travelled to the West and decided that Iran and Iranians should benefit from Western culture and modernity.

The history of Iran's preoccupation with modernity, especially in architecture, is a story with many twists and turns, amongst which the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran and the war with Iraq from 1980-1988 shared the most major influences. The revolution created a rupture in architectural movements towards modernity, not only because of the social, political and financial upheaval it

* Corresponding author email: y.islami@ut.ac.ir



brought, but also because the characters behind pre-revolution movements began to leave Iran, or were stripped of their official positions. Later, the war with Iraq brought major destruction and devastation during its eight-year span, and when it was over, it necessitated rapid reconstruction on a massive scale, which began to shape attitudes towards architecture and construction during many years after the war. These factors, together with other transformations in Iranian politics and society, and the speed with which these transformations occurred,⁴ created a particular kind of modernity which includes a very uneasy relationship with tradition (Pakzad, 2003, p. 57).

In such transformations, the role of mass media cannot be overlooked. In Iran, much like other countries in the world, the national broadcasting institution (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting – IRIB in short) is a highly influential organization, which keeps people informed and updated about latest news, trends and cultural developments. The role of this institution in creating role models, identities and reinforcing social, cultural and political agendas is of great significance. Many Iranians have accepted the significant influence of mass media over the people, but have also highlighted the ease with which it can fall victim to cultural, political, commercial and advertising misuse, and how presenting misleading programs can turn human culture towards obscurity (Aghapur, 2004, p. 12).

Today, it seems that the television exerts a greater influence when compared to other mass media, precisely because of its critical presence in culture (Imamjome Zadeh & Mahmud Oghli, 2011, p. 135). Amongst the many programs offered by different channels, TV series have the potential to make a more lasting impression, because they can take up more of a user's time and over a longer period. This rhythmic engagement with the viewer allows TV series to feed conscious and subconscious images over a longer period of time, thus creating a more effective and lasting impression.

With this in mind, this research follows the hypothesis that the analysis of imagery used in contemporary TV series can be a window to analyzing public opinion and imagination, and also an effective means of deciphering future trends. The aim of this paper is not a criticism of contemporary Iranian TV series, but rather a careful scrutiny of the portrayal of architecture in such TV programs, which is considered a good reflection of recent shifts in the general public's conception of good, rich or luxurious architecture.

Of course, there is much debate about the way mass media affect public opinion and taste, and to what

extent this influence is effective. However, according to the theory of "Agenda Setting" mass media cannot tell people how to think about a particular issue, but they can tell people what to think about. In other words, that which is portrayed by the media becomes that which the people think about. Thus, media seldom change people's point of view, but rather they tell people which issues are more important. In this context, it is argued that the mass media change people's thinking by adjusting the significance of different issues through communication, presentation and representation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on a qualitative research that cross-examines architectural features of houses portrayed in the most recent and popular TV series in Iran. The research carefully isolates particular scenes in long clips of film and subjects them to critical analysis and thematic comparison. The goal has been the examination of architectural features in order to trace their cultural and stylistic roots and their influence on contemporary Iranian understanding of richness in architecture.

In order to realize this ambition, six of the most popular Iranian TV series of the past decade - from (2003-2013) - were chosen.⁵ The TV series used for this research were:

1. "A Traveler from India" (2004)
2. "Endless Journey" (2007)
3. "Where to with this Hurry?" (2009)
4. "Shams-ol-Emareh" (2009)
5. "Heavenly Kingdom" (2010)
6. "Motherly" (2013)

In these TV series, prominent characters belonging to the rich echelons of the society were present, whose homes and interior décor became a setting for different events throughout the story line. This research has focused on these segments of recorded film and by analyzing the characteristics of design (architectural and interior design) in these homes, has highlighted similarities between them and certain architectural precedents. In the end, the paper discusses the roots of these foreign features and their effects on ordinary people's understanding of good architecture in Iran.



WHY THIS SUBJECT MATTER?

What we are witnessing today in different cities of Iran is a chaotic juxtaposition of different architectural styles and the resulting disordered urban scenery. Like in other societies, Iranians' expectation of good architecture relies heavily on the images they receive from their surrounding and from the mass media. In recent times, the separation of construction strategies from architectural principles and the dominance of public taste over educated tastes have resulted in the popularity of certain misinformed styles and approaches towards architecture. If the architect (and the architectural profession) had a stronger role in determining architectural styles in the past, now the authority is shifting in favor of the clients, who dictate their personal tastes with greater vigor and determination. In this context, in which architectural projects are dominated by financial considerations, many architects have no choice but to comply, since there are plenty of others who are willing to do so.

The question that gains significance here is that what do clients define as good quality architecture? In other words, how does society (and the potential clients within it) define richness, quality and novelty in architecture? This research approaches this question through mass media, particularly the television, as both a reflective device and a powerful manipulator of public opinion. The question is whether in their definition of good architecture, the wealthy clients who instigate large architectural projects, place any significance on Iranian identity and traditional concepts, or whether, in fact, recent architectural developments are a reflection of a desire to surpass what is considered to be old and outdated styles and models of thought?



Fig. 1. An image of a good style for architecture, chosen by contemporary Iranian people.
(Sadegh Zadeh, 2013, p. 48)

RICHNESS IN ARCHITECTURE AS BROADCAST BY IRANIAN TV SERIES

A careful analysis of the characteristics of houses portrayed in Iranian TV series reveals considerable similarities in style and approach within the different images of architecture and interior design projected back towards society. All of the houses in this study belong to wealthy clients who have had very little limitation in creating their desired homes. Thus, their architecture is not only responsible for communicating wealth, but it also attempts to evoke a certain level of quality which would make their building stand out amongst others. This paper focuses on these two factors and how many contemporary Iranians define richness in architecture as the presence of both wealth and great value.⁷

Exterior Appearances

In contemporary Iranian TV series, architecture is either used as a scenic divider to introduce a new section of the plot, or as a setting in which the story unfolds. The exterior of the building is often used for the former and the interior of the building for the latter. The architectural imagery used for both of these scenes is dissected below, starting with the exterior appearance of the buildings, which defines the architectural style and the spatial strategy of the structure within its context.

Composition and Proportion

Perhaps the most noticeable characteristic in the exterior design of the houses portrayed in the aforementioned TV series is their symmetry. After further inspection, one notices that in all of the buildings, the main façade is composed of three parts: the middle section, highlighted by a protrusion or a concavity that marks the entrance, and the side wings that are regimented by regularly spaced windows.

Most of the houses portrayed are two storey high. There is only one three storey building, but like the others, it is a freestanding structure within a large garden. None of the houses are a block of flats and they are owned by one person or a family. Thus, the private owner has complete autonomy and living occurs on different levels and within many rooms - a clear sign of luxury.

The two storey houses have a pavilion-like arrangement in that they sit in the middle of a private garden. This allows them direct access to their own piece of the landscape. However, the building is elevated above this natural setting by way of a plinth, which is accessed via a grand staircase. Thus, the house of the wealthy owner is above the rest.



The grand staircase not only highlights this fact, but it also defines the entrance and provides the necessary connection for the hierarchical separation that was instigated by the plinth.

These characteristics define an architecture that acts like a freestanding sculpture and a grand stage that faces the visitor square on and presents itself without modesty. This disconnection with the context and the

outward performance of such homes is a result of the desire that craves attention without willing to sacrifice any independence, and an architectural style that wants to break away from contextual and cultural norms. Thus, in a rebellious gesture, such buildings take inspirations from foreign styles and models of thought, e.g. the opulent architecture of Renaissance palaces in Europe.



Fig. 2. The building façades used in Iranian TV series. All structures are symmetrical and divided into three sections: the middle entrance and side wings regulated by windows. Notice the presence of pediments, columns and a grand staircase that highlight the entrance. Images are still captures from TV series. From left to right: residential house from TV Series “A Traveler from India (1381- 82) (2004)”, office building from “A Traveler from India (1381-82) (2004)”, house from TV Series “Motherly (1392) (2013)”.

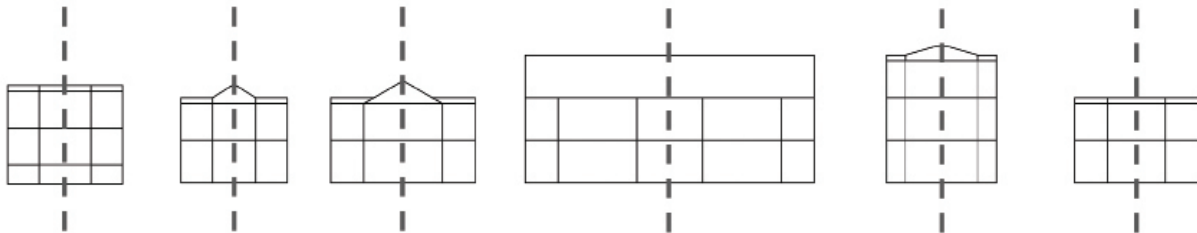


Fig. 3. The composition of building facades showing the symmetry, the division into three sections and the emphasis on the middle section. Only the building portrayed in the “Shams-ol-Emareh” TV series is divided into five sections.



Fig. 4. Building portrayed in “A Traveler from India”



Fig. 5. Villa Rotunda, Andrea Palladio, Italy (Pile & Gura, 2013, p. 140)



Fig. 6. Building portrayed in “Sham- ol- Emareh”



Fig. 7. Chateau d’Ancy-le-Franc
(www.bienpublic.com)

Figs 4-7. Possible sources of inspiration for architectural style. The buildings on the left are the houses portrayed in the TV Series and the ones on the right are possible precedents. Notice the columns and the pediment of Neoclassical Architecture and the high-pitched roofs of French Renaissance Architecture used as stylistic guides.

The Color White

Unlike the traditional architecture of Iran, in which the natural materials used in making a building determined its color, or buildings were covered with colorful ornamental tiles, many luxury houses today are covered only in white paint; an artificial color that acts as a modern suit for the building.⁸ The roots, the meaning and the symbolic role of color white in the modernist movement are elaborate topics, which fall outwith the scope of this paper. Suffice to say that the white walls of the International Style⁹ that replaced the ornamental surfaces of their predecessors were not naked, nor were there any different in their ornamental operation. This is because the thin layers of white paint clad architecture much like their ornamental predecessors, the only difference being that the “modern outfit” was much easier to put on.¹⁰

The simplicity of the modernist outfit was not only a refashioning of an architectural style, but also a response to practical necessities. The greater need for mass housing after the world wars necessitated a rapid construction in which ornamentation was regarded as costly and slow. If buildings were to be mass-produced on an industrial scale, they would need to have simpler surface effects. Therefore, the lack of ornament indicated efficiency and economy.¹¹

With such arguments, the modernists promoted a new style for architecture using the white suit that was easily mass produced and brought uniformity and a sense of modernization for the masses. However, in many architectural projects in Iran, the theoretical and socio-political foundations of the modernist movement have become irrelevant and the color white has become a sign of progress and even grandeur and luxury.

Perhaps this is because white has evolved to symbolize newness and the financial ability that can keep it pristine against the environmental conditions that continuously act against it. Or, perhaps in the eye of the less informed, the color white is harmonious with neo-classical forms that remind one of the richness and grandeur of the temples and palaces of ancient Greece and Rome. This is despite the fact that, it has long since been proven by theorists, such as Gottfried Semper, that the Neo-classicists’ image of ancient architecture was not accurate and those classical buildings were in fact polychrome. More interestingly, Semper argued that the colorful ornaments, painted on classical buildings, were most likely inspired by Persian carpets and textiles.¹² In other words, what the Neo-classicists called the “high” art of ancient Greek monuments in their pristine whiteness, were not only originally polychrome, but they were also inspired by what his contemporaries would call “low” decorative arts of other ancient civilizations.¹³

Yet, despite these revelations and the significance of color in traditional Iranian and Persian architecture, the fascination with white, as a sign of progress and grandeur, continues and it is simply used to create a contrast against the context in many projects. Such attitudes towards the color white are clearly evident in the houses portrayed by recent Iranian TV series.

If, in traditional Iranian architecture, ornaments were applied to both the exterior and interior surfaces of buildings, today’s luxury houses however, seem to refrain from such techniques. The decorations in these buildings are often stuccowork, which has been applied only to the exterior of the building. Moreover, the ornamental language is often foreign to the traditional styles of the region.



For example, in the TV series “A Traveler from India,” the ornament on the main façade is a Greek pattern and the Corinthian order has inspired the columns. The front façade is dominated by a large pediment, which has its roots in classical Greek temples, renaissance or neo-classical architecture.

It is evident that the application of these ornamental and architectural features is indicative of a desire to break free from the cultural context. This desire to escape the familiar and become the other has in fact been a distinctive feature of Iranian high society since early nineteenth century, when travelling to the West became popular amongst the upper class, for whom the modernity existed only in the West and it had to be imported into Iran as soon as possible.

Ivan (Terrace)

Ivan is one of the important spaces in Iranian architecture, which can be found in most traditional houses, and some forms of it can even be found in houses

and palaces of the Achaemenid period (Mahmoudi, 2005, p. 55). Yet, in many modern buildings, Ivans have been reduced to tiny protrusions in the façade that are no places to sit and enjoy a family gathering. Instead, these spaces are for standing and watching over the garden, even perhaps to acknowledge the people standing down below. While in traditional architecture, the Ivan was an internal component of the house, looking towards the private interior courtyard, which defined the heart of the extended family, this new terrace is an external component of architecture that looks towards the outside landscape or even the street.

Because of this external nature, the terrace in modern Iranian houses is seldom used by the occupants and has become a mere device for embellishing the façade or highlighting the entrance of the building. The occasional non-structural columns below such terraces, that only act to frame the entrance, highlight the superficial aspect of these architectural devices further more. Such decoration of architecture using architectural features goes so far as to hinder function: in the TV series entitled “Endless



Fig. 8. “Greek Key” used in the house in “A Traveler from India”



Fig. 9. Greek ornamental detail. This pattern is called the Greek Key and the more complex variants is known as Greek Fret, and was executed in Mosaic Tiles as a frequent feature of Greek interiors (Pile & Gura, 2013, p. 35).



Fig. 10. Corinthian columns used in the house portrayed in “Where to with this hurry?” and “Endless Journey”

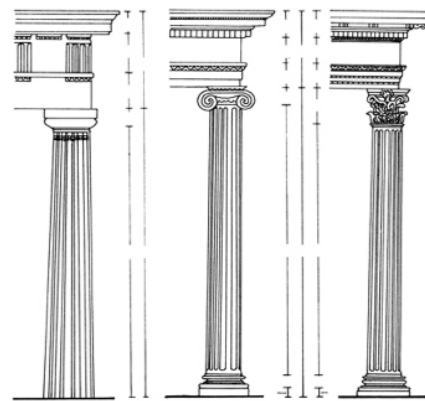


Fig. 11. Greek Classical Orders: left to right: Doric, Ionic and Corinthian (Pile & Gura, 2013, p. 33)

Figs 8-11. The Decoration used in Such Pseudo-neo-classical Architecture Clearly does not have any Roots in Iranian Architectural Traditions.



Journey” and “Where to with this hurry?” one of these columns sits right in front of the main entrance, thus obstructing direct access to the doorway.

Interior Appearances

In the TV series studied for this research, the interior spaces of homes provide the different settings in which the story unfolds. The interior décor of these spaces are carefully pieced together and reflect the tastes and aspirations of the owners. Once again, a careful analysis of the characteristics of these spaces reveals the popular definition of richness in architecture and interior design in the eye of Iranian general public.

Color

Perhaps the most immediately noticeable characteristic of a home is the color used for its wall surfaces. These colors set the mood of the interior space and express the owners’ tastes and personality. In half of the houses studied in this research¹⁴ the color gold is deliberately used in different interior spaces, not only to evoke a sense of luxury and wealth, but also to distinguish the spaces from

their counterparts. However, this shiny, reflective color is not limited to the surfaces of the building, as it appears on various bas-reliefs, furniture and other household items too.

The color golden has throughout history, been associated with the wealthy and the powerful. Being derived from a rare and precious metal, gold has been associated with Kings, royalties, the Sun, and jewelries. The color gold is light, but not bright, and it is warm, making it a suitable choice for interior spaces. In the past, using this color was only possible by using gold itself, which meant that owners had to afford the great costs of such a commodity. Buildings such as San Marco Basilica in Venice or Versailles Palace in Paris are good example of the extensive use of this precious metal to decorate grand interior spaces (Pile & Gura, 2013, pp. 48,173).

In many homes in modern Iran, the color gold is a direct translation of a desire to show off wealth and power, even though the owners cannot afford the real metal itself. The resultant effect is a superficial representation of gold, which has become quite widespread due to its availability. Unfortunately this golden make-up has so far seemed adequate for all people involved.



Fig. 12. Golden decorations of the house in “Endless Journey TV Series”



Fig. 13. Gold decorations in the Palace of Versailles, near Paris, France, 1762, (Pile & Gura, 2013, p. 180)

Figs 12-13. Golden wall decorations reminiscent of eighteenth century European palatial decoration that used actual gold

Furniture

In most modern interior spaces, furniture plays a critical role in defining different zones of activity, while also adding color and texture to the interior. Throughout history, furniture has helped human beings carry out their daily activities with greater ease. In interior spaces that strive to express a certain level of luxury, furniture becomes more than a mere functional device and takes on

ornamental characteristics that express the owners’ tastes, aspirations and lifestyle. In a similar way, the furniture used for the homes portrayed in Iranian TV series are also highly ornamental, with the difference that they expresses styles and modes of living that are quite foreign to those prevalent in Iranian culture.

In fact, until recently, Iranians did not use furniture at all. Life occurred upon the ground plane, which was



decorated and made more comfortable by way of different forms of carpets. Eating, sleeping, socializing, working, and even worship occurred on the ground plane, which, from a symbolic point of view, is the surface that nurtures all life on Earth. This intimate relationship with the terrestrial plane as that which God has created for Man, was a reminder of Man's humility in relationship to his creator and other creatures on Earth.

In this mode of living, the carpet took on a central role in the interior spaces. The occupants gathered around the carpet for different activities and the dimensions and the proportions of the carpet were synchronized with the dimensions and proportions of the building. The ornamental and colorful patterns symbolized a lush heavenly garden, which not only added color and ornament to an otherwise plain interior space, but also reinforced a sense of togetherness. This is because the patterns followed the principle of horizontality¹⁵ meaning that every detail possessed the same value and could be read in the same way from every direction.



Fig. 14. Traditional gathering on the Iranian carpet (www.jamejamonline.ir)

However, most of these principles and concepts faded away when the use of furniture became popular in Iran. From a practical point of view, furniture offered a certain level of comfort that was irresistible to the user. However, from a cultural and symbolic point of view, many of the social principles that existed prior to this change began to be replaced with new ones that had roots in a completely different model of thought.

For example, a small and cozy interior space, which could be used for a variety of different activities changed into a series of interior spaces that were designed for specific activities. Later, these spaces were replaced by a large interior space that was divided into different activities using furniture. Thus, furniture began to have a more prominent role and its design began to influence the interior architecture of homes. Within these transformations, the carpet lost its role as the central, horizontal surface that brought everyone together. Instead it became a decorative piece that was placed in relation to the furniture. Thus, the Iranian carpet became marginalized and eventually lost within other ornamental elements of interior space (Figs. 14 and 15).



Fig. 15. Dinnertime in modern times. From "Where to with this Hurry?"

Figs 14-15. Contrast between the horizontality of life around the carpet, and the verticality of life on furniture. Notice on the left, only a temporary cover ("Sofreh") protects the carpet, which remains the primary feature around which life occurs. In the right image however, furniture is placed permanently on top of the carpet, thus making it a secondary item in the house.

These fundamental changes are clearly evident in the interior spaces depicted in contemporary mass media. Instead of the carpet and the ground plane being the most important elements of the house, it is the furniture and ornaments on the walls that have taken center stage. Abstract geometric patterns give way to realistic depictions and sculptural figures that adorn different corners of the interior space. These features can only be viewed upright, thus clearly displaying a shift from horizontality to verticality. In a very telling scene from the TV series "Where to with this hurry?" we can see that the Persian carpet, that was once the center piece of the Iranian house, is trampled by the furniture and by the occupants who are almost unaware of it now.

Statuettes and Figurines

In other scenes, there are side tables, mirror, lamps, clocks and other decorations that are sculptural and vertical in their operation. These ornamental pieces are quite graphic in their representation of human form and quite unapologetic in expressing their stylistic allegiance to foreign culture. Nude angels, female forms in loose gowns and sculptures of symbolic animals are all clues towards a completely different culture and mode of thought.



Many contemporary Iranian artists and critics are aware of this rapid change, which takes its inspiration from neo-classical art.¹⁶ However, no one seems to have any control over the tastes of the masses who seem to have forgotten both the pre-Islamic and Islamic traditions of Iran. For example, the presence of nude human figures is in spite of the fact that in the six categories of Islamic teachings about sculpture, five speak of its prohibition and nude forms are very rare indeed in the long history of Iranian art and architecture (Talayi & Hatam, 2011, p. 18).

Perhaps the public and the experts ignore these forms and references as personal preferences. But, it seems more likely that they have come to accept them as symbols of wealth, power and even cultural progress. In either way, such interior spaces, commissioned by the wealthy and produced by many contemporary Iranian designers, are being popularized by the mass media and are rapidly altering the Iranians' conception of nobility, quality and richness in architecture.



Fig. 16. Golden clock and decorations from "Motherly TV series"



Fig. 17. Musical clock, France, 1756, (Gura & Pile, 2013, p. 178)



Fig. 18. Eagle sculpture from "Endless Journey"

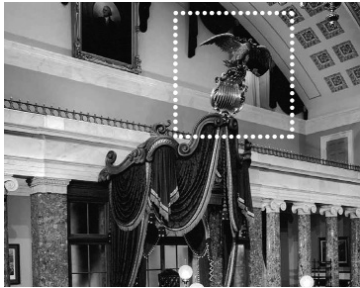


Fig. 19. Eagle Sculpture in the old senate room, Congress Building, Washington, 1803-11 (Gura & Pile, 2013, p. 226)



Fig. 20. Nude statuettes from "Where to with this Hurry?"



Fig. 21. Nude statues, Hall of Mirrors, Palace of Versailles, France. (Google Virtual Tour)

Figs. 16-21. Comparison of furniture, statuettes and interior features used in Iranian interior décor and those originally used in foreign contexts. The depiction of any figure, including the human body (whether clothed or nude) has long been abandoned in traditional Iranian Art. Nonetheless, the interior spaces of houses depicted in many Iranian TV programs, possess many of these life-like figurines.



Windows and Lighting

The images that the mass media offers the viewer are both a reflection of public taste and also a powerful force in directing them. In such a setting, minor details can have major effects. For example, most of the scenes used to depict the home in contemporary Iranian TV series, are composed of shots taken at night and with artificial lighting. This is perhaps because nighttime is when most of the members of the family are together at home. However, another reason could be the image of luxury produced by artificial lighting. Thus, in modern homes, artificial lighting acts as another layer of embellishment, furthering the expression of luxuriousness: anyone who can afford this much artificial lighting for the inside and outside of his house must be a very important person indeed!



Fig. 22. Frosted glass windows from “Where to with this Hurry” is reminiscent of frosted glass panes of windows in Christmas Carol Stories popularized by Western mass media.

The Sacred Ground

As was mentioned before, the carpet has for centuries been the centerpiece of the Iranian home, around which the family gathered for different activities. Because of the significance of the ground plane in both Pre-Islamic and Islamic Iran, and because of the artistic value of the carpet with its colorful geometric patterns and its labor-intensive production, Iranians treated this ground surface with respect and did not enter their homes with their shoes. In contemporary homes however, things have changed considerably. Not only has the widespread use of furniture undermined the special connection with the

In this manner, artificial light begins to replace natural light even though none of these buildings have any restrictions in accessing natural light. The result is a series of spaces that are dark, despite the artificial lighting, and inward looking, despite the many opportunities to engage with the natural space outside. Even the windows are reminiscent of climates and architectural traditions in which the home protects its occupants from the harsh weather outside. For example, in one scene, we witness windows with glass panes that are frosted around the edges, with flowers etched into the center. This is reminiscent of windows of houses in colder climates, when around Christmas, frost builds up on the window seals and the occupants hang flowers on the door to celebrate the festive season. Perhaps these windows have been etched into the Iranian psyche via images of Christmas Carol stories disseminated by the mass media.



Fig. 23. Scrooge leaving his office on Christmas eve. Notice the frosted glass windows. Image by Dean Morrissey, (1843) (www.swoyersart.com)

ground, but also is furniture being placed permanently on top of the carpet, almost stamping it out of Iranian culture. Moreover, with the diminishing significance of the ground plane, increasingly people enter their dwellings with shoes and this has resulted in new floor coverings such as the parquet. This change has encouraged the continuation of outside into the inside and a more relaxed attitude towards the teachings of Islam regarding purity and cleanliness. Thus, it seems in modern Iranian homes, only certain areas of the house are available for Islamic prayer and perhaps in other homes, there is no need to cater for such a function at all.



CONCLUSION

It has long been established that we live in a world in which mass media and the images they disseminate have become a powerful force in shaping our tastes and aspirations. We live in a context in which cultural exchange occurs on a global scale and different modes of thought are transmitted via carefully constructed images that traverse the globe in seconds.

Like many other developing nations, Iran seems to be somewhere between tradition and modernity. While most Iranians are proud of their historical and cultural traditions, they nonetheless find it difficult to translate traditional principles into practical guidelines for contemporary times. However, there are always those who want progress quickly and easily, almost like a formula or a commodity that they can just import from wherever it is available. Such a mode of thought looks around for successful instances of progress (whether cultural, social or technological) and attempts to import it directly in order to enjoy the same success at home, often without considering the context in which those examples flourished, i.e. the roots that supported the tree that has now bore the fruits of success. The result is either blind imitation, or a superficial application of completely foreign strategies, that only lead to a rupture in real development and inevitably a loss of identity.

Unfortunately, this short-sighted model of thought is becoming pop culture in Iran. Financed by many wealthy clients and broadcast by Iranian television and other media, a particularly superficial definition of richness in architecture is gaining popularity, which is hindering real endogenous progress. Although no one accepts responsibility for this, almost everyone has a hand in it: from the clients who desire such opulent projects, to the architects and designers who succumb to such a desire, and finally the public that accepts it all. A study of the images dispersed in Iranian mass media is a testament to this fact.

The result of this superficiality is a popular architectural style that takes inspiration from neo-classical opulence and abandons the indigenous and ideological traditions of Iranian culture. Because the open expression of wealth and power is at odds with Iranian traditions, many attempt to break free from it altogether. The consequence is an architectural approach that wants to forget its past and adhere to a completely new, more liberal system that allows it to freely express all its desires.

In this context, the media acts like a mirror, reflecting and therefore doubling the effect of these events. The widespread broadcasting of pop architectural imagery and the absence of critical thought, develop a condition in which anything that appears eventually finds legitimacy. The worst symptom of this condition is public silence, either born out of polite caution, or in most cases indifference, which threatens the very foundations of Iranian architecture.



ENDNOTES

1. According to Rezayi Ashtiyani, S, Shamshirband, M. (2012). the beginning of modern architecture coincides with the beginning of the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran (p. 15). Pahlavi Dynasty ruled Persia from 1925 to 1979.
2. Reza Shah Pahlavi I, King of Iran from 1925 to 1941.
3. Naser al Din Shah was King of Persia from 1210-1275 (1831-1896). He was the third longest reigning monarch in the history of Persian, being the sovereign power for over 50 years.
4. According to Hooshang Seyhoun, after WWII, a few architects returned from Europe to Iran and simultaneous with their return, relations between Iran and other countries improved, thus, causing a transformation in Iranian architecture. This transformation caused new problems for architecture in Iran and Inevitably, the speed with which transformations took place, meant that society could not properly absorb the new and the unfamiliar (Kiani, 2007, p. 167).
5. All the TV series have been broadcast by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting and therefore have enjoyed maximum exposure to the viewers.
6. In other words, the mass production of buildings by developers instead of architects.
7. "Richness" in the English dictionary evokes "wealth", "abundance" and the presence of "great value" or "elaborate elegance" within something. See Oxford English Dictionary.
8. See Wigley, M. *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*.
9. The term "International style" usually refers to the architectural style of the formative decades of Modernism. The origins of the term can be traced back to Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson's book written to record the International Exhibition of Modern Architecture held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1932 (which identified the common characteristics of modernist architecture). See also Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style*, W.W. Norton, Pennsylvania, USA, 1966.
10. See Wigley, M. *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, p. 156.
11. In support of abandoning colorful ornament Adolf Loos writes: "The producer of ornament must work for twenty hours to obtain the same income of a modern laborer who works for eight hours. The lack of ornament results in reduced working hours and an increased wage." (Loos, 1908)
12. Almost a century ago, Gottfried Semper posited a radical theory that Greek polychromy found its historical genesis in the primal act of carpet making: the art of the "wall fitter". Thus, for Semper, the perfection of the wall as an element (idea or motive) of architecture, took place in ancient Assyria and Persia, cultures that were famed for their colorful tapestries. (Semper, 1989, p.258)
13. Semper writes: "The most significant result of these latest conquests in art history is the collapse of an outdated scholarly theory that has been impeding the understanding of the antique world to no end, according to which Hellenic art was considered a native growth of the soil of Greece – although it was simply the magnificent bloom, the culminating goal, the end result of an ancient formative principle whose roots, so to speak, were widespread and deeply planted in the soil of all lands that had been the seats of the social system in antiquity." (Semper, 1989, p.247)
14. From TV series: "Motherly", "Where to with this Hurry?" and "Endless Journey".
15. For a more expansive elaboration of the principle of horizontality in Islamic Art, see Islami, G, Shahinrad, M. (1391). *Recognizing the Principle of Horizontality in Islamic Architecture*, KIMIAY-E-HONAR (pp. 41-64).
16. For example, Sheykhlohokamayi describes how paintings (and not ornamental tiles) have begun to adorn the walls and now sculptures are acting as "three-dimensional paintings" in interior spaces and all this has its roots in temples, churches and palaces of Greece and Rome (Sheykhlohokamayi, 2013, p. 68).

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