

## The Aesthetic of the Interior Design in the Traditional Residential Buildings in the UAE; Between the Individual Interest and Heritage

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#### Abstract:

The current research aims at introducing the architectural values of interior design features in the traditional residential architecture in the UAE along with their relationships with the socio-economic and ecological issues. Such norms have helped crystallize character transforming it into a distinctive expressive identity reflecting the interests of both, individual & community. Given the rapid economic and cultural development, and intending to cope with the contemporary demands, new features of interior design in the residential architecture have appeared and gradually detached themselves from the inherited conventions with less absorbency of the old traditions and even less self-esteem. Although such features occasionally attempted to (only pretentiously) assume the inherited identity, these attempts were confined to the superficial decorative style with no real attention to its psychological and spiritual effects or the real interaction with the needs and interests of individuals. Such needs were genuinely met through the traditional interior design features and characteristics of the residential architecture, which have reflected various facts throughout history.

#### Keywords:

**Aesthetic  
Interior Design  
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#### Introduction:

This study highlights the aesthetical elements in the traditional residential buildings in the UAE since most aesthetical features, which disclose heritage features, have historical and socio-economic roots and interests and genuinely reflect an economical reality, which has preserved characteristics or identity for ages, expressing the individual or community interests in coincidence with the nature of the ecological circumstances together with the availability of natural items in the region and reflecting cultural and intellectual characteristics through rendering such concepts into the features of the executed interior designs in the residential buildings.

Our study provides a theoretical analysis of the individual interests in the UAE along with the individual method of utilization of the local patterns in the interior design of the residential building, which indicates to knowledge, skills as well as professionalism in developing such patterns together with the traditional character based on an approach which proves a distinguished attitude, reflecting confidence in, and admiration of, the ancient cultures through such patterns and means which crystallize the

cultural features of the UAE and render them as a material manifestation of the conclusions and interactions with the ecology as well as its requirements.

Hence, this research addresses such aesthetic characteristics aiming at highlighting and sustaining them as well as disclosing them to the interested persons, scholars and the public to increase the awareness of such inherited features along with their luminous and expressive aspects.

#### Research Problem:

Nowadays we are witnessing a notable transformation in the use of the design elements as well as the inherited characteristics in the modern residential buildings in the UAE. This is obvious through the limited usage of the local inherited figures and ornaments as well as the Arabic calligraphy patterns. Even if such artistic items are used, they are rendered void of the notions and fundamentals they were created for. Separation from the inherited concepts, or confining its representation to merely decorative symbols, have changed them and altered our relationship with such concepts, which are closely related to the old traditions and are deemed an honest crystallization of the prevalent ecology and beliefs (Figure "1").



Figure "1": A Villa in Al Furjan, Dubai

<http://centerhousegroup.com/property/al-furjan-villa-dubai-style-w-ms-sale/>

**Research Objective:**

This research aims at preserving the spirit of the features and concepts of the decorative patterns and inherited design elements in the traditional residential building in the UAE as well as rendering them through modern instruments and technologies to cope with the contemporary requirements and meet the needs and interests of both, the individual and the community.

Therefore, it is noteworthy that we should reconsider the modern concepts of design and decorative components in the interior spaces as well as the exterior patterns of the modern residential buildings, which have gradually separated themselves from the inherited characteristics, while their influences have been confined to the vision and aesthetic and decorative aspects aiming to only complement the final

design layout of the modern design work (Figure "2").

**Research Components:**

- 1- Concept of aesthetic elements in the interior designs of the traditional residential buildings in the UAE.
- 2- Relationship between the economic situation and the design formations.
- 3- Analysis of formative elements of interior designs together with the extent to which they are related to social interests and backgrounds and the heritage.
- 4- The most significant variations which have influenced the design and components of modern Emirati house.
- 5- Conclusions.
- 6- Recommendations.



Figure "2": A villa of a modern nature (Source: The Author)

**1. Concept of aesthetic Elements in the Interior Designs of Traditional Residential Buildings in the UAE:**

Interior design, together with its various formations, honestly express the individual and

community concerns, interests and beliefs of different ages. Therefore, the relevant formations and variations have assumed various approaches in accordance with the concept, methods of preparation and execution and the utilized

materials together with the engagement thereof and the other significant factor i.e. the economic factor or the financial ability of the relevant individual or beneficiary. It is due to that the explanation of such decorative or design formation has been mixed with the extent of the beneficiary individual or community absorbing of such facts. Moreover, such formation embodied an expressive vision of the ego as well as the internal concerns, which get along with the individual interests and beliefs. There have been multiple approaches and patterns depending on depicting nature as well as the plant ornaments, the engineering drawings and the utilization of the Arabic letters. Hence, artistic decorative deliverables have appeared in mosques, houses, palaces, kitchen utensils, arms and furniture (Figure "3").

## 2. Relationship between the Socio-Economic Situation & the Design Formations:

Societies, in general, and the Gulf society, in particular, assume a variable character and whereas change itself is a natural phenomenon

which governs various aspects of life and is unfolded in social life as a key factor, encompassing the individual adaptation and harmony taking into consideration the requirements of change, the transformation of the societal type and the availability of diversified economic resources in the society, enabling the individuals to assume distinctive social positions (Mohamed Abdulaal Ibrahim, P. 89-92). Among the distinguished aspects of such variation was the traditional architectural design together with its interior characteristics. Accordingly, interior designs of traditional residential buildings commenced being deemed mirrors which reflect the socio-economic backgrounds of the individuals. For instance, a given house, fitted with decorative elements and patterns, definitely needs financial resources to recourse to the relevant qualified persons for rendering such formations and laying out the relevant influencing decorative formation (Mohamed Ali Abdulla, P. 23) (Figure "4").



Figure "3": Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum's House, Dubai

(Source: <https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/middle-east/dubai/things-miss/>)



Figure "4": Traditional Architectural Decorations in Dubai

(Source: <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/united-arab-emirates/dubai/attractions/sheikh-saeed-al-maktoum-house/a/poi-sig/397295/361166>)

Such applications were historically utilized for the | various desert residential formations in the models

and patterns, disclosing information on the socio-economic life through their elements represented in using various threads and textures in addition to the basic component, namely the type and specifications of the hair threads used in making desert tents (Mohamed Medhat Jaber Abduljaleel, P. 88).

The features of the local residential architecture representing the socio-economic position have persisted through the interior components of houses, such as the courtyards and majlises, the extent of technological contrast regarding the belongings and furnishing, the features of architectural facades, the usage of balconies and

apertures, the existence of decorations and partitions in the room and majlises walls and the usage of various elements in the architectural formation of houses. Furthermore, among the denotations to the socio-economic position of the individual or community are the doors and windows, their various sizes and numbers, the distinctive wood out of which they are made, the decorative patterns they are fitted with which bestow aesthetic features upon their harmony and formation and which are mostly imported from abroad and the utilization of the wind towers as an architectural element, which refreshes the environment within the house (Figure: "5").



Figure "5": Wind Towers (Al Barajeel)

(<https://austria->

[forum.org/af/Geography/Asia/United\\_Arab\\_Emirates/Pictures/Dubai\\_Creek/Sheikh\\_Saeed\\_Al\\_Maktoum\\_House\\_7](https://austria-forum.org/af/Geography/Asia/United_Arab_Emirates/Pictures/Dubai_Creek/Sheikh_Saeed_Al_Maktoum_House_7))

### 3. Analysis of Formative Elements of the Interior Designs & the Extent of their being Related to the Social Interests & Backgrounds & the Heritage:

Taking into consideration the social parameters and the geographical and environmental nature, which interact with the prevalent beliefs, interests, and needs, was one of the efficient factors in setting the traditional architectural formative plans together with their interior design. Hence, such requirements, together with the conformity thereto, rendered through various formative features and forms and, accordingly, the requirements of the social position as well as the conformity with the traditions are rendered among the applicable basics for setting the architectural formative plans of the traditional residential buildings together with their interior designs. Such basics are evident in allocating the spaces as well as the contrast in their sizes, forms, and functions) Dubai Municipality, 2005, pp. 12-13), the

decorative forms therein and the differences in the building materials and their uses. In this respect, attention paid to meeting the needs of the numerical increase of the family members, harmonizing the privacy of the family with various social events and coping with the ecological and environmental requirements (Mohamed Medhat Jaber Abduljaleel, P. 115-116). Therefore, the house with an open courtyard was the most prevalent traditional type.

Considering the Heritage House, Al Ras, Deira, Dubai, which did Matar Bin Saeed Bin Meziana build in 1890, it comprises of two bedrooms overlooking the courtyard (Al Hawsh) and it enlarged by adding several small rooms, which built of palm branches. Then, over time, the property owner extended the house by building more rooms to the northern and western sides. In 1935, the house redesigned and its components and different parts altered as better materials, decorative elements and gypsum patterns used.

Thus, the Heritage House considered an example of the UAE family's traditional house, which conforms to family privacy and Islamic traditions (Mohsen, Al Bayan, 2014) (Figure "6").

### The Most Prominent Elements of Emirati Traditional House:

#### Al Majlis (the Guest Room):

Al majlis or the guest room (Figure "7") deemed one of the most significant elements of the UAE house. It allocated for receiving guests and visitors and usually situated at the main entrance. Moreover, it often overlooks the outside of the house to maintain the privacy of the family members. Al majlis almost separated from the remaining parts of the house since the only link is a small door, which used for hospitality

purposes (Mohsen, Al Bayan, 2014). The floor covered with Persian rugs and all the mattresses and cushions is embroidered and ornamented. Besides mats and divans, al majlis also encompasses Al Menkal (the brazier) for the Arabic coffee together with the tray of the Dallahs (the coffee pots), the cups and some sorts of the local date's confectionery. As is customary, one of the majlis corners allocated for preparing coffee and maintaining pots. As for the walls, they ornamented with gypsum patterns and some arms of certain types, such as rifles, swords, and daggers hung thereon. Besides, the walls, above windows, in particular, ornamented with plant patterns engraved on gypsum.



Figure "6": Heritage House, Dubai

[https://ar.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D9%85%D9%84%D9%81:Heritage\\_House2.JPG](https://ar.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D9%85%D9%84%D9%81:Heritage_House2.JPG)



Figure "7": Al Majlis in Heritage House, Dubai

<http://dinodxbdino.blogspot.com/2011/10/dubai-museum-majlis-heritage-house-al.html>

#### The Courtyard (Al Hawsh):

The courtyard (Al Hawsh) (Figure "8") regarded

as one of the architectural features of the Arab Gulf region as it is evident in the Heritage House.

It deemed a central and crucial element since it is overlooked by all the rooms and is considered a source for lightening and ventilating the rooms through letting the wind in the house, providing it with the best possible living environment.

The influence of the Islamic culture is evident in the design and, particularly, in securing privacy and simplicity through the courtyard, which provides the house with an internal overlook. Hence, all the rooms have openings overlooking such courtyard, which distinguished with its spaciousness, openness together with the plants grown therein. It also noted that the courtyard provides the family members with a proper place for gathering, especially, in warm weather.

**Al Liwan (the Hall):**

Al Iwan, or the hall, (Figure "9"), is an opened, but roofed, part of the house at the front of the rooms directly overlooking the courtyard. The ceiling of al Al Iwan is made of wood and gypsum. As for its façade overlooking the courtyard, it comprises columns decorated with flower and natural patterns as well as various types of geometric

shapes. Al Al Iwan aimed at securing an open shaded area, protecting the rooms from the direct sunshine and providing an expansive view and direct connection with the courtyard.

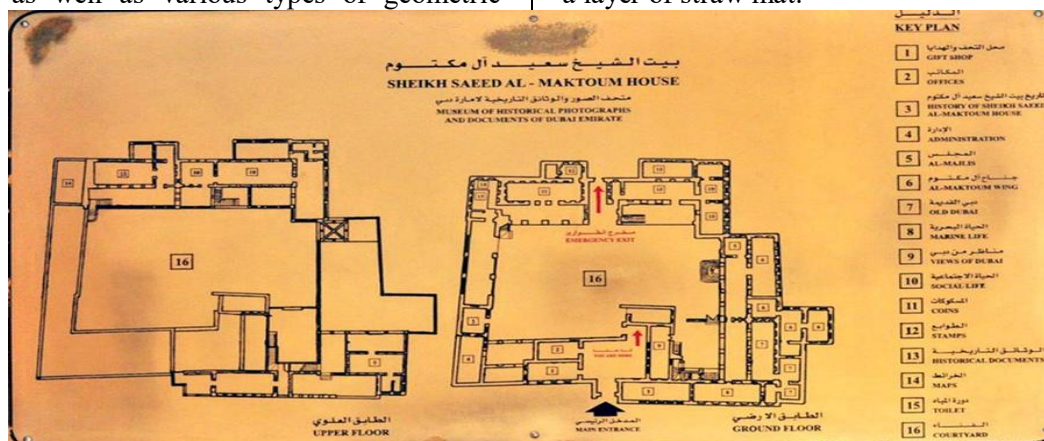
Al Iwan used as a living room for the family, particularly, in the spring and winter. The floor covered with carpet, or the so-called Zulia, and al Al Iwan is often fitted with seats.

**Main Sitting Room:**

The main sitting room (Figure "10") comprises of multiple windows, which are associated with the next room, namely the bride's room (Al Hajlah).

The first thing to note upon entering into the room is the lighting since the light goes into the room through a number of the windows. Besides, all the windows overlook the courtyard. As for the other wall, note niches designed of gypsum. They also used to decorate the corners. Moreover, niches used for maintaining small boxes or for hanging pictures on the wall.

The walls of this room are fitted with embroidered cushions and its floor covered with Persian rug on a layer of straw mat.



<http://architecturalmoleskine.blogspot.com/2010/01/other-side-of-dubai-wind-towers.html>  
 Carlos Zeballos: THE OTHER SIDE OF DUBAI: WIND TOWERS, Saturday, January 23, 2010,  
<http://architecturalmoleskine.blogspot.com/2010/01/other-side-of-dubai-wind-towers.html>



[https://www.tripadvisor.ie/Attraction\\_Review-g295424-d581216-Reviews-Sheikh\\_Saeed\\_al\\_Maktoum\\_s\\_House-Dubai\\_Emirate\\_of\\_Dubai.html#photos;aggregationId=101&albumid=101&filter=7&ff=238428818](https://www.tripadvisor.ie/Attraction_Review-g295424-d581216-Reviews-Sheikh_Saeed_al_Maktoum_s_House-Dubai_Emirate_of_Dubai.html#photos;aggregationId=101&albumid=101&filter=7&ff=238428818)  
 Figure "8": Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum's Heritage House, Dubai



Figure "9": Al Liwan (the Hall) Sheikh Khalifa Bin Saeed Al Maktoum's House, Dubai  
[https://www.tripadvisor.ie/Attraction\\_Review-g295424-d581216-Reviews-Sheikh\\_Saeed\\_al\\_Maktoum\\_s\\_House-](https://www.tripadvisor.ie/Attraction_Review-g295424-d581216-Reviews-Sheikh_Saeed_al_Maktoum_s_House-Dubai_Emirate_of_Dubai.html#photos;aggregationId=101&albumid=101&filter=7&ff=252165634)

[Dubai\\_Emirate\\_of\\_Dubai.html#photos;aggregationId=101&albumid=101&filter=7&ff=252165634](https://www.tripadvisor.ie/Attraction_Review-g295424-d581216-Reviews-Sheikh_Saeed_al_Maktoum_s_House-Dubai_Emirate_of_Dubai.html#photos;aggregationId=101&albumid=101&filter=7&ff=252165634)



Figure "10": Main Sitting Room

<http://www.wenstourism.com/dubai-museum-121212/>

#### Women's Majlis:

Women's Majlis (Figure "11") is situated in one of the house's corners and it is distinguished with its special entrance as well as its being allocated for women only and its being overlooking the courtyard. The women's majlis door is finely designed and the room contains several wooden boxes and mirrors in addition to pictures hung on the walls. Moreover, this majlis is distinguished with a special corner full of pictures and ornamental pieces. The floor is covered with Persian rugs, mats, and cushions. However, the most important characteristic of this room is the wind tower (Albarjeel) which lets the wind in the room.

#### The Kitchen:

The kitchen is located at one of the house corners

separated from the sitting room to prevent any food odors. Besides, wind scoop is used for ventilating the kitchen and expelling any odors resulting from cooking. The walls contain recesses for maintaining the utensils and appliances (Figure "12"). As for any other utensils, they are kept on the tables and kitchen cabinets. The kitchen is distinguished with its tables and the boards hanged down on the walls.

#### Furniture in the Heritage House:

The notion of the interior design in furnishing was aimed at highlighting the models and patterns and disclosing obvious information about social life. Furthermore, such a notion played the role of a documentary spatial and temporal evidence of the events and social customs since it was utilized on the basis that its specifications must cope with the

geographical and environmental requirements and embody the beneficiary's socio-economic and spiritual virtues.

Similar to the other traditional buildings, seats were used in Al Iwan and near the courtyard (Figure "9") while rifles and swords were used in Al Majlis. As for the bedrooms and the sitting room, small mirrors and decorated boxes are used therein.

Persian carpets are utilized to cover most of the house flooring. Besides, carpets and mattresses are used for sitting down instead of the couches.

**Lightening System:**

In traditional houses, such as the Heritage House, two types of lightening are noticed- natural

lightening, derived from the daylight, and artificial lightening as shown in (Figure "6"). The courtyard provides natural lightening to the house and better living ecology to the inhabitants of these types of houses(Figure "8"). Several windows enabled the sunlight to go into the rooms. Hence, each single formation element, along with its interior complementary elements, including the various contents, were subject to temporal, spatial and socio-economic evaluation as they are deemed parts of the local character along with its uniqueness and identity, which have been deeply rooted throughout ages and become the constituent element of the characteristics of the region and its residents



Figure "11": Women's Majlis

<https://www.shutterstock.com/video/clip-19506607-dubai-uae---circa-013-mcu-life-size>



Figure "12": Traditional Cooking Utensils

<http://arabiczeal.com/tag/heritage-house/>

**4. The Most Significant Variations Influencing the Design & Components of the Modern Emirati House:**

- The changes in the type and size of the modern family and the lifestyles have led to building relatively smaller houses than the

traditional ones since families have become smaller in number and they became more biased for living in separated houses. Hence, the extended family type was gradually abandoned, whereas previously children moved to live in rooms added to the house



after they got married. Moreover, the small size of the house, besides other factors, such as the house being oriented towards the outside and surrounded with a garden all around the house and the abandonment of the notion of the courtyard due to laws of recoil and building, has led to increasing the spaces separating houses from each other.

- The modern transport means (cars) and allocating special lots attached to the house for them led to adding elements, which became basic and taken into consideration when designing modern houses.
- Full dependence on artificial air conditioning led to abandoning traditional cooling methods together with the relevant elements, such as the wind towers (Al Barajeel).
- Increasing dependence on workers (servants, babysitters, and drivers) and adding annexes allocated for them, which become basic elements of house designs.
- Increasing concentration on the external appearance mostly due to the willingness to show off and boast of wealth or to simulation only.
- The building materials, construction methods, and modern technology have exercised a great influence on the patterns and designs of houses, as wide openings and the areas allocated for glazing became more prevalent.
- Besides, various uses of modern furniture elements have also impacted the interior components of the house.

##### 5. Conclusion:

UAE traditional residential architecture and its interior components together with its various features reflect specific conditions strictly related to the geographical reality as well as ecological and environmental factors, which imparted a distinctive nature thereto. Such nature expressed through the formation of components, the features of the layout, the methods adopted for applying technologies in execution through utilizing local materials and methods distinguished with their ability to solve the ecological problems and conform to, and reflect, the social interests and beliefs.

Given the rapid developments resulted from the economic conditions, as well as, the diversity and plurality of needs, the external origins, identity, and philosophy. The extent of their influence and conformity with reality, the changes in the individual and community interests. Endeavor to keep up with developments and the use of modern vocabulary, to prove being developed. It is evident that although several inherited elements

and their features utilized in the interior architectural design, they mostly used within limited frames. Confined to superficial decorative aspects and rather separated from their previous pivotal influence, which extended to all aspects of life and reflected a real interest in the ecology, the society, the customs, and the traditions.

Therefore, we must determine the nature of the development and concentrate on the concepts of architectural residential design together with its traditional and contemporary components.

Paying attention to the development in the formations of modern architecture to meet the requirements of reality.

diversify, and develop require interaction with the ecological facts., The cultural heritage and the proper willingness, which combines renovation with originality within impressive and elaborate development to allow the technological developments, along with their various elements, to interact with the heritage to constitute designs and features of forms distinguished with being modern and unique. Hence, elements must be developed and utilized based on certain functions rather than used as decorations void of essence merely due to simulation. Architecture to be developed must reflect its age and must, simultaneously, related to the place it belongs to and fit therein.

##### 6. Recommendations:

- The researchers recommend focusing on the scientific and technological aspects of the studies and methodologies related to the social ecology as well as a heritage to enrich the specialists and persons interested in architectural interior design with information.
- The researchers recommend constituting a common structure among specialists and researchers within the sphere of (interior and exterior) architectural design to achieve a practical structure for developing elements of inherited nature in the interior architectural formations in conformity with the modern requirements and interests.
- The researchers recommend that the corporations concerned with inherited trades together with their professional cadres must be urged to adopt modern technology in formation and layout.
- The researchers recommend specialists in the spheres of architectural interior design to adhere to scientific and practical studies to identify the heritage features and innovate the proper means to utilize such heritage as per the modern requirements to maintain its ability to keep up with any new developments.

- The researchers recommend recourse to specialized designers, scholars and persons interested in heritage in case of being willing to utilize the inherited elements in the interior design to identify the characteristics of such elements together with the extent to which they conform to the heritage and identity.

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