



KASHAN V. ARCHITECTURE (3) TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

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In line with the trend towards modernization in Iran's recent history, most residential houses built by the middle classes in Kashan since 1950 comprise all or some of the following units: entrance, courtyard, living room, reception room, kitchen, lavatory, bath, bedroom, storage, staircase, and hall. A typical house usually lacks a courtyard in the traditional sense of the term (see below); and in cases where there is a courtyard-like area, it is either used for parking motor vehicles or as a driveway between the parking space and the street. Various parts of the house may be connected directly or through hallways. This new arrangement sharply contrasts with the traditional design that prevailed in the city until the 1950s.

Traditional domestic architecture. When a visitor enters a historic house of Kashan through a high gateway that attracts the attention of a passerby, the immediate impression is the diversity in the design of the floors and the height of the ceilings, as well as the various ways in which light is used and closed and open spaces are presented. This variety may lead to the conclusion that many such structures are less the result of careful planning than of



improvisation during construction or afterwards.

A house built in Kashan before 1920, like all pre-modern houses of the upper and middle classes, was composed of two major spaces: a public space for male guests known as the exterior (*biruni*), and living spaces for all close (*maḥram*) relatives, who are allowed to see female members unveiled, known as the interior (*andarun* or *andaruni*).

Exterior public spaces. The exterior public spaces included the portico, a large room with five windows, and the parlor. The parlor could be used for occasions that attracted crowds, such as festivities, mourning sessions, and parties. It was also used as an educational space for the children under the supervision of visiting teachers for teaching Persian and Arabic languages, calligraphy, painting, and traditional knowledge (*olum-e qadima*).

Interior living spaces. After entering the gateway and passing through a low, vaulted vestibule (*hašti*; [plate i](#)), a visitor steps into the corridor and platform leading first to the exterior public spaces near the entrance of the house, and then to the interior living spaces. At this point, one enters the courtyard, a main element of the interior living spaces of the house, with a small veranda and a raised terrace with a balustrade. Based on their size, main rooms are made with two, three, or five door-windows that open onto the courtyard, known as *dow-dari*, *seh-dari* ([plate ii](#)), or *panj-dari*. Other defined spaces include: storage rooms (*anbāris*), parlor, rear room, a private area with a pool (*ḥawẓ-kāna*; [plate iii](#)), basement, rear basement, a retreat (*zāwia*), upper chamber, rooms located on the two corners of the top floor (*gušvār*), roof, the privy (*keryās*), garden, kitchen, pantry, lavatory, pool, walk-in closets (*pastus*). The three different types of spaces—open, covered (e.g., arcaded), and enclosed—all can provide areas assigned to either the exterior or the interior domains. No space in such houses can be said to be self-contained and isolated. Two complete rooms, such as a three-window room and a rear one, can be used in combination to accommodate a greater number of people. Likewise, a number of individual spaces such as a two-window room, balcony, and side rooms used together can provide a very large area. The rooms, the courtyard, and the balcony together provide the largest useable space afforded by the house. The interior doors or corridors that connect one room with another are called *harim*. With the use of curtains covering the entire facade of a room and by opening the windows, one could combine the private part of the house with its publicly used section.



To illustrate the space arrangement in the complex structure of a Kashan house, one may envision a perpendicular axis and a horizontal one. A space such as the courtyard or the balcony, which has the most potential for co-use, holds the position as the center of the whole structure. The areas from the entrance to the courtyard can then be shown on the horizontal axis and the space levels of the building up to the rooftop on the perpendicular axis. The levels immediately surrounding the courtyard on the horizontal axis are called the home front (*jelow-sarā*), and those on the vertical axis, the lower house (*pā'in-kāna*). The farthest level on the horizontal axis is called the rear house (*'aqab-sarā*), and the uppermost space on the perpendicular axis is referred to as the roof (*bām*). The extent of these levels depends on the size of the courtyard and the financial resources of the owner.

The combination of spaces that will be appropriate for a given occasion involves consideration of both axes, as well as the dimensions needed. The view to the courtyard and the lighting also are important factors. Working together with the features of the architecture and the interior furnishings, these are decisive in creating the final effect that the space will have. (See Ḥā'eri, pp. 89-140; Naraqī, 1969, pp. 284-88.)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See [section 4](#).