



KASHAN V. ARCHITECTURE (4) HISTORIC MANSIONS

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(4) Historic Mansions

The city of Kashan boasts at least nineteen historic mansions that are well preserved; they are presented in the first volume of the *Ganjnameh* devoted to these structures. The design and major components of historic mansions follow the general pattern of traditional architecture (see above, 3), but with larger spaces and more detailed architectural craftsmanship and luxurious elements. As typical examples, three buildings known as Borujerdihā Mansion, Bani Kāzemi Mansion, and Mortazavi Mansion are discussed below.

The Borujerdihā Mansion. Constructed in 1875, this house is one of the most famous historic mansions in Kashan. It was commissioned by Ḥājj Sayyed Jaʿfar Naṭanzi, a Kashan merchant who imported goods from Borujerd (explaining his appellation). The construction of the exterior guest house spaces (*biruni*) and the interior private living spaces (*andaruni*) was completed in 1892, 18 years after it was begun, and more than 150 masons, stucco carvers, mirror cutters, and other artisans took part in its construction (Naraqi, 1969, pp. 288-92; see plates [i](#), [ii](#), [iii](#), [iv](#)). The present study describes only the exterior area, which today houses the Cultural Heritage Organization



(CHO; Sāzmān-e mirāt-e farhangi) of Kashan. This part of the mansion, appropriated by the CHO in 1974, is included in the list of the country's historic monuments. It has an elongated courtyard, at the opposite ends of which stand its two important spatial elements. The first space, forming the southwestern front of the courtyard, is the more important part of the building and includes a large, majestic reception hall (*ṭālār*) surrounded on two levels by various rooms and other spaces. In front of the reception hall, an area connects the hall to the veranda overlooking the courtyard (*ivān*; see [AYVĀN](#)). Two large covered spaces flank this area, giving communication between the lateral rooms of the space. Most of the main spaces in this part of the house are lavishly decorated, particularly the main reception hall, which is covered by a dome featuring decorations and alternating light apertures which give a shimmering effect. The external volumes of these light apertures, added to that of the main lantern crowning the dome, give the latter a particularly striking appearance. The walls of the *šāhnešin* (seating for distinguished guests) in the reception hall carry portraits of Qajar kings, executed in a manner so as to make its European influence clear.

All the walls of the reception hall are adorned with fine, colored stucco carvings. With its tall, distinctive facade soaring before the imposing volume of the roof, the *ivān* of this front appears in its full splendor. The assortment of these elements, further enhanced by the two *bādgirs* (air circulating devices) which frame this front, remind the visitor of the importance of this part of the mansion, and the elongated pool lying on the axis of the courtyard, as well as the flowerbeds which flank it, also contribute to the majesty of the view. The large *sardāb* (basement floor) of the house is also located under this area and is accessed from the courtyard through a doorway under the main *ivān*.

At the other end of the courtyard stands another spatial element, which, in comparison with the southwestern one, appears quite unassuming. It comprises a five-window room (*oṭāq-e panj-dari*) hall featuring a *šāhnešin* and fronted by a *mahtābi* (high terrace) and is crowned on its rear facade by a *bādgir*. The interior of the hall is decorated with stucco carvings. Two small three-window rooms (*oṭāq-e seh-dari*) are located on either side of the hall; their modest height, as compared to that of the hall and its adjacent spaces, creating a functional arrangement. In the courtyard, along the southeastern wall, three rooms and service areas are arranged, and the opposite wall contains an arcade, at the center of which a shallow, columned *ivān* is visible. The facade of this front is a symmetrical copy of its opposite side. The entrance



of the mansion includes a gateway arch decorated with stucco carvings, several consecutive spaces of various shapes, and a corridor leading to the courtyard (*Ganjnameh* I, pp. 124-35; see also Narāqi, 1969, pp. 288-92; Farrokyār, pp. 47-51; Ḥā'eri, pp. 108, 130).

Mortazavi Mansion. The main section of the building is comprised of three spatial elements situated on three sides of a square courtyard (see plate v). The house has a courtyard which takes the shape of a narrow, peripheral aisle linking the spaces of the three sides. On the western side, this level of the courtyard is connected to the lower level through two stairways that appear to be later additions.

The spaces of the northwestern front rise two stories above the first floor and are taller than the other sections. This front consists of a centrally located *ivān* and a five-window room (*oṭāq-e panj-dari*) reception hall, with two three-window rooms (*oṭāq-e seh-dari*) flanking the *ivān*. The southeastern front appears as an unbroken space divided by rows of columns into a central reception hall flanked by two three-window rooms (*oṭāq-e seh-dari*).

The repetition of the columns on either side of the two entrances of the reception hall creates the spatial impression of a kind of *kafš-kan* (a small space for taking off shoes at the entrance of a living or guest room). This large space is connected on one side to a room without any lighting, and on the other to the entrance of the building, so that it can be used independently of the house, for instance as a *Ḥosayniya* (mourning space for the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn). The spatial element of the southwestern front is laid out in an unusual manner, with a broad corridor occupying the middle of the facade and two three-window rooms (*oṭāq-e seh-dari*) standing at its extremities. An irregular service yard lies behind the western end of this front, as a result of one of the *seh-dari* rooms having access to open spaces from two sides.

Under the three fronts of the mansion, elaborate *sardābs* are located. The *sardāb* under the northwestern front includes a large space fronted by an *ivān*-like area having full access to the *gowdāl-bāgčā* (a small, lower garden space in the courtyard). Other rooms are also built around these spaces. The southeastern *sardāb* houses a reception hall, a room behind it, and two other rooms on either side. The reception hall is also fully accessible to the courtyard. Each of the rooms flanking the reception hall is faced by a shallow, semi-open space. The basement floor of the southwestern front includes two



rooms, each with an anteroom. The central courtyard is decorated with a rectangular pool surrounded by flowerbeds symmetrically arranged around it.

To the northeast of the main courtyard lies another open space which, although now fully incorporated in the courtyard of the house, appears to be a later addition to the Mortazavi Mansion. This second courtyard is also built on two levels, but it does not follow a regular geometric pattern. In this area, the first and basement floors of the southeastern front both include three simple rooms; those on the first floor have separate entrances and are used independently. At the level of the *gowdāl-bāgča*, the northwestern front of this courtyard has an aisle, whereas the northeastern front displays an arcade (*Ganjnameh* I, pp. 10-15).

Banikāzemi Mansion. One of the oldest edifices in Kashan, the construction of the Banikāzemi Mansion dates back to 1770. The mansion was originally comprised of an exterior guesthouse space (*biruni*) and interior living spaces (*andaruni*), but the present-day house only includes the latter; the guesthouse space is situated on the western side of the courtyard, having been separated from it (see plates vi, vii, viii, ix). The main spaces of the house form two fronts on either side of the courtyard. Baths are built in two stories, while the two other fronts, which merely combine arcades and slightly recessed *ivāns*, are only one storey high. The volumes of the two main floors extend to the corners of the courtyard, so that, although its long sides are only half as high, the vast expanse of the courtyard appears to be built in two stories.

On the southern front of the courtyard, there is a large reception hall faced by a tall *ivān* and served by a backyard, which thus enjoys access to open spaces from both sides. The ceiling of this hall displays decorations. The *ivān*, located at the center of this front, is flanked on both floors by rooms connected to other rooms on either side of the reception hall. The rooms flanking the *ivān* on the lower level bear stucco and mirror decorations. Rising General view of the Mortazavi Mansion. After *Ganjnameh* I, p. 12. above the skyline of the facade of this front, the particularly striking shape and elaborate decorations of the arch of the *ivān* makes it appear as the most important part of the mansion. Two tall *bādgirs* also stand behind this front. The opposite, northern front constitutes a space including several rooms and two *ḥawz-kānas* (enclosed pools). Three-window rooms (*oṭāq-e seh-dari*) are evident around the courtyard so as to accommodate between them two shallow *ivāns*, behind which two *kaf-sardābs* (cellar) have been built. The rooms are therefore accessed through these facilities. The clearly more important *ḥawz-kāna* is



situated behind the central *seh-dari* room of this front, aligned on the main axis of the courtyard, but unconnected to the room standing between the courtyard and the ḥawż-*kāna*s. The ceiling of the ḥawż-*kāna*s displays fine *moqarnas* (a vaulted space decorated with paintings) and fresco works, and the rooms surrounding it on the upper level enjoy a direct view of them. The other ḥawż-*kāna* is located at the western corner of this front, and its ceiling displays decorations of plaster. This space is likewise linked with two three-window rooms (*oṭāq-e seh-dari*) on two floors. These rooms are built over each other on one side of the ḥawż-*kāna*.

Under each of the northern and southern spatial elements, a spacious *sardāb* exists, accessible from the courtyard through a flight of stairs. The elongated pool lies between the two main spaces of the building and is surrounded by four flowerbeds. The walls facing the courtyard are decorated with stucco carvings, as are their pilasters and inscriptions.

The mansion's three entrances are located on the northern facade of the courtyard. The main entrance combines two vestibules (*haštis*) and two corridors leading to the courtyard. The arch crowning the first vestibule of this entrance sits at the upper floor level, so that, once past it, the visitor is gradually led down the sloping corridor to the second vestibule and into the courtyard (*Ganjnameh* I, pp. 118-23; *Ḥā'eri*, pp. 114, 127).

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