

# Explore the enigmatic charms of Koozeh Kanani House



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Mashhad, in Khorasan Razavi Province, is a major Iranian city and the second-largest in terms of population. Renowned for its historical and natural attractions, the city is a favored destination for travelers. Notable among its landmarks is the Koozeh Kanani House, situated on Shirazi Street, at the intersection of Chahar Bagh Alley and Panjeh Alley. The house's distinctive architecture adds to the allure of the surrounding alleyway.

Constructed during the 19th century in the Qajar period, the Koozeh Kanani House has a rich history. It served as the Russian Consulate and later as the American Consulate before being acquired by Haj Kazem Koozeh Kanani, a prosperous merchant. Following his tenure, a committee of Khomeini Shahr took ownership of the property. Plans to demolish the house to make way for a new building led to its removal from the Iran's National Heritage List.

Today, the Koozeh Kanani House functions as the headquarters of the Cultural Heritage De-

partment of Khorasan Razavi Province and hosts a museum dedicated to the Persian Constitutional Revolution. Designated as a cultural and historical site, the municipality prohibits further construction on the property. Despite this, part of the original structure has been demolished, leaving only one of the two original buildings intact.

## Qajar architectural characteristics

Covering an area of over a thousand square meters, the Koozeh Kanani House is divided into two distinct sections, north and south. An exquisite wooden door, slightly below street level, greets visitors at the entrance. Stepping inside, guests encounter a brick-floored vestibule adorned with plasterwork decoration, leading into the rectangular courtyard.

The courtyard features a two-story building with a main door positioned in the southwest corner. The entrance hall, or *ivan*, boasts four plain round columns coated in white plaster. Beyond this area lies a short corridor leading to



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the main sections of the Koozeh Kanani House.

## Main sections

The house comprises northern and southern structures, detailed as follows:

**Southern section:** The southern portion of the Koozeh Kanani House consists of a single-story building with a basement. Characterized by a symmetrical layout, the structure showcases staircases on either side of the

porch leading to the upper level. The porch is supported by four simple round columns and two engaged columns.

On the ground floor, five rooms are present, with the *shahneshin* (elegant room) occupying the central position. Spanning approximately 5.7 x 10 square meters, this room features a wooden sash window adorned with colored glass, dividing the space into two smaller sections. Additional rooms can be found on the

eastern and western sides of the shahneshin, with a north-facing room boasting three windows overlooking the courtyard.

Moreover, the basement of the southern building comprises five rooms and three entrances, corresponding directly to those on the ground floor. A central staircase, located beneath the porch, provides access to the underground level.

**North section:** The northern building of the Koozeh Kanani House boasts three floors, divided into two symmetrical and independent sections: east and west. Each floor of this building comprises small rooms of equal size, with four rooms on the ground and second floors, and two rooms on the first floor.

The ground floor features a fountain house adorned with captivating decorations in vibrant colors, flanked by two rooms on either side. Accessible via a corridor and staircase, the second floor leads to vaulted areas designed as cellars to maintain a cool environment within the home.

## Historical facts

Initially a private residence, the Koozeh Kanani House later served as a consulate and Hosseiniyeh. Notably, Ayatollah Boroujerdi, a leading Iranian Shia Marja, stayed at this house during his trips to Mashhad. Figures of the Persian Constitutional Revolution era, such as Sattar Khan and Baqer Khan, reportedly visited the house during the Qajar period. Despite facing the threat of demolition, the Koozeh Kanani House remains a flagship tourist attraction in Mashhad's Chahar Bagh neighborhood, captivating visitors with its grandeur.

Mashhad, hosting the holy shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH), the eighth Imam of Shia Muslims, is home to numerous historical tourist attractions, with the Koozeh Kanani House ranking among the most prominent. Its unique splendor transcends mere description in writing; a visit is essential to fully appreciate its magnificence. Don't overlook other historically significant tourist sites in Mashhad during your visit.

## Hungarian views on Persian art in 19th century

Nobody in Hungary or Austria at the past time seems to have had a realistic image of Persian art: instead, the image which was still awaiting crystallisation in international scholarship until the 1900s, suffered a premature but long-lasting distortion by the preconceptions of 19th-century Magyar nationalism.

Ármin Vámbéry (1832–1913), for example, as late as 1895, championed the idea of a Persianised substratum of the early Hungarians in line with the romantic patriotism of his early 19th century compatriots, despite his extensive travels and language skills.

He claimed that the Huns, and especially their ruler, Attila, himself—far from being nomadic barbarians—had adopted Sassanid principles of kingship, a practice followed by the Timurids, Shaybanids, and other later Turkic dynasties the Iranian acculturation of which he presented as an analogy for early Hungarian state organisation.

It was this assimilative model, he claimed, that the Huns and the Hungarians did follow; both having established a Sassanid-influenced legal and social system in their newly conquered land. In support of this argument, the leading Hungarian

archaeologists of the late 1800s strove to reveal the Sassanid essence of many archaeological finds which they claimed to be Hunnic or Hungarian.

Perso-Islamic art was not collected or examined by Hungarians in a systematic way during these years. Nearly all discussions about this topic were generated by the nationalist fervour which was running high by 1896, the year of the Millennial Exposition (celebrating the Magyar conquest of Hungary). This approach also prevailed in the Oriental Academy of Commerce (Keleti Kereskedelmi Akadémia), a school of economics, originating in 1891 (and formally existing between 1899 and 1919). Turkish and Arabic—as opposed to Persian—were regularly taught at the Academy apart from the major European languages, and a particularly strong emphasis was laid on South Slavic languages.

Oriental anthropology and ethnography also bore a lot of weight in the curriculum, reflecting the demands of the founder and first president Ignác Kúnos (1860–1945), himself a noted Turkic ethnographer.

Apparently, the academy did not consider the art and architecture of



▲ Mihrab of Ferhadija Mosque in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

the subject areas worthy of study, as it regarded the craftsmanship of these areas to stagnate on an ethnographic level or inseparably bound to religion. Yet popular art was highly valued as a precondition for the creation of applied (or industrial) arts which represented the progress towards civilisation. It was believed that the study of Bosnian ethnography would yield a better

understanding of the local working ethos and market conditions, both of which were eagerly exploited by economists.

(Bosnia and Herzegovina fell under Austro-Hungarian rule in 1878, when the Congress of Berlin approved the occupation of the Bosnia Vilayet, which officially remained part of the Ottoman Empire. Three decades later, in 1908, Austria-Hun-

gary provoked the Bosnian Crisis by formally annexing the occupied zone, establishing the Condominium of Bosnia and Herzegovina under the joint control of Austria and Hungary.) Those who denied the existence of a fully-developed Bosnian national style within the general artistic horizon of the Balkans, emphasised that the task of creating such a style was part of the civilising mission of the occupational power.

Whereas traditional Bosnian art was downplayed throughout the 1880s and 1890s, the arts of Persia were firmly recognised as the highest achievements of Muslim artistic creativity. European scholarship went on to construct a hierarchy for the various "schools" of "Muhammadan" art, and Persia, especially its carpets, received the highest place, taking precedence over the arts of the Arabs and Turks. But the almost desperate attempts of western scholars at strictly defining and categorising the essentials of Persian, Arab and Turkish national arts in formal terms were ultimately failed, and this led to the establishment of the notion of Islamic art as the ultimate framework which would accommodate the artistic production of every Muslim land.