

From fuel station to museum

Story of
Darvazeh Dowlat Gas Station

By Sadeq Dehqan
and Leila Imani
Staff writers

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE

The emergence of gas stations, as places that supply fuel and lubricants for vehicles, has a long history in many countries. Today, gas station museums are a staple of the cultural and heritage centers in most of these countries.

Interestingly, the initial supply of gasoline was done in certain parts of the world by pharmacies. For instance, Bertha Benz, the business partner and wife of Karl Benz, the German inventor of the automobile, filled her car's tank for the first time in 1888 at the first gasoline seller, a pharmacy in the city of Wiesloch, Germany. She

was the first person to drive a motor vehicle with an internal combustion engine over a long distance. Later, the first fuel station in the world was built in 1905 in St. Louis, Missouri, USA.

The Darvazeh Dowlat Gas Station Museum is the first such museum in Tehran, located at the entrance of Sa'di Street. The original building of this facility was constructed in 1938 and it began operations in 1940. This site was active until 1995, after which it was closed due to the passage of the metro line beneath it.

The gas station museum is situated right behind the entrance of a metro station, on a dead-end alley named Fiat, which remains memorable due to its unusual name. Fuel Station No. 6, or the Darvazeh

Dowlat Gas Station, was built in the late 1930s by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company for the distribution of petroleum products such as kerosene, gasoline, and oils. This historical complex retains its traditional architecture, arched vaults, and colorful tiles from ancient times. In August 2014, it was registered as a national heritage site by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts.

The building of this gas station, which had been abandoned for years, has been utilized as a museum since 2019.

In an interview with Iran Daily, Maryam Esmaili, the director of the Darvazeh Dowlat Gas Station Museum, discussed the history of fuel stations in Tehran and the establishment of the museum.

History

Esmaili said that this gas station is, in fact, the third oldest fueling facility in Tehran and the only remaining one from that generation of old gas stations, dating back to the rule of first Pahlavi government.

She continued, stating that in 1937, the land of this establishment was purchased from the son of Arbab Keykhosrow, whose father was a well-known contemporary political figure. Just a year later, the energy station was built and opened. It was constructed near the site of the former Darvazeh Dowlat (Dowlat Gate). In 1930, in an effort to expand Tehran, several of the city's old gates were demolished, including the historic Darvazeh Dowlat.

She mentioned that in a section of a book published by Armed Forces Geographical Organization in 1951, for the first time, 13 old fueling facilities in Tehran were in-

troduced as gas sales shops. In this list, although Darvazeh Dowlat Gas Station is considered the third built in Tehran, it is referred to as the sixth gas sales shop.

She added that the first gas station in the capital was established in Amirieh neighborhood, located at the Gomrok Square. The second one was situated on Enghelab Street at the intersection with Vusal Shirazi Street.

Esmaili said that the structures of all the old gas stations of Tehran mentioned in the book have been destroyed, and only the one at Darvazeh Dowlat neighborhood remains. However, the structure of the fourth gas station of Tehran, located on 15 Khordad Street, is also intact, but since it has not been well restored, its structure has deviated from its original form.

She pointed out that since 2014,

the oil industry museums and documentation centers have gradually been established. At that time, it was decided in the Oil Ministry to utilize places and structures related to the oil industry in various cities for this purpose. One of these places is the current location of the Darvazeh Dowlat Gas Station Museum.

"When the idea of establishing the museum took shape, I personally began working as its executive supervisor. My colleagues and I wrote various content scenarios regarding the restoration of the structure, its layout, lighting, and so on. The original building was preserved as it was, and only some of the tiles on the façade of the building were restored. Ultimately, the museum was inaugurated in July 2019, and I continued to work as the museum director," she continued.



Sections

The museum features both open-air and covered areas. Given that the museum was built on the site of a gas station, the open space served as the location for vehicles waiting to refuel, while the covered area housed the administrative and auditing offices of the gas station.

Currently, the open space is dedicated to interesting museum sections, showcasing nostalgic stories and environments, including the oil distribution system from years past, classic cars, and a treasure trove of products that provided warmth to many homes until just a few

decades ago, illuminating areas without electricity. In one part of the museum, a line of statues stands alongside containers, reminiscent of the old days when people had to wait in long queues for subsidized oil to heat their homes during the cold winter days and nights.