

Craftsmanship, artistry turning heads at Aqazadeh Mansion of Abarkuh

Iranica Desk

Among the narrow alleys of Abarkuh in Yazd Province, an old house with a striking windcatcher stands out, known as the Aqazadeh Mansion. This historic residence is considered one of the notable attractions of Abarkuh, housing the most beautiful two-story windcatcher in Iran and regarded as the largest windcatcher in the country. Built during the Qajar era, the Aqazadeh Mansion is registered as a national heritage site of Iran, celebrated for its architectural integrity and the masterful use of traditional architectural elements. Next, you can explore more about this magnificent historic building.

The Aqazadeh Mansion is located in Imam Hossein Square, within the Darvazeh Meydan neighborhood of Abarkuh. It lies approximately 150 kilometers from the center of Yazd and is only a ten-minute drive from the heart of Abarkuh.

Several historic houses are situated along a street in Abarkuh named Mousavi, Gabri, Hosseini Doost, Seyyed Ali Aqa, and Aqazadeh. The Seyyed Ali Aqa House is adjacent to the Aqazadeh House and is connected to it via a Sabeg, an old covered corridor, highlighting the close relationships or kinship among the inhabitants of these houses, IRNA wrote.

Perhaps the most prominent feature of this mansion is its impressive two-story windcatcher. Notably, the United Arab Emirates once attempted to register windcatchers under their country's name with UNESCO — a move that was opposed by Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization at the time. The structure underwent restoration beginning in 2006, which spanned over a decade.

Since Yazd is a desert area with extremely hot summers, it is advisable to visit the mansion during spring — especially until April-May — or in autumn and winter until December-January. If visiting in summer, it's best to go early in the morning when the temperature is cooler.

The Aqazadeh Manion was built around 1772 CE through the efforts of Haj Hossein Abarqui, a wealthy local figure dedicated to urban development and agriculture. Covering an area of approximately 820 square meters, it was registered as a national heritage site in 1996-1997 CE.

Entrance to the Aqazadeh Mansion is via a corridor leading into a spacious, beautiful courtyard centered around a rectangular stone pool. As you walk through the courtyard, you will notice a two-story house with stained glass and colored glass windows, alongside the eye-catching windcatcher. The rooms and various sections are arranged around three sides of the courtyard, designed for use during different seasons. The eastern and western rooms are constructed as three- and five-door rooms.

The two-story Aqazadeh Mansion, typical of Iranian desert architecture, is built with indigenous materials such as adobe and brick. Extensive woodwork is used for doors and windows, and decorative plasterwork (gachbori) embellishes many parts of the structure.

The entrance to the mansion is positioned on its northwest side and features an arch-shaped top. Upon passing through the door, you enter a vestibule and then a corridor leading into the courtyard. In the center is a stone pool, with rooms built along three sides. The courtyard floor is paved with cobblestones.

Rooms

Aqazadeh Mansion comprises five- and three-door rooms across two floors. The five-door rooms served as main reception areas, while the three-door rooms functioned as bedrooms, positioned on the sides of the larger rooms.

Summer room: This room was used during the hot summer months to provide relief from direct sunlight. Located in the southern part of the courtyard, it features a semi-open porch with a visible windcatcher above the roof. This porch has fewer decorations compared to the rest of the house because its open nature exposes it to dust. Adjacent to this room is a private chamber with a skylight ceiling, shaded with curtains or awnings, where water sprinkling helped cool the space.

Five-door rooms: Also known as Shahneshin, these rooms boast five stained glass doors (oriel windows) that face the large central pool.

Three-door rooms: These are decorated with stained glass windows, and their name reflects the number of oriel windows they contain.

These rooms are also decorated with stained glass windows, and their name reflects the number of oriel windows they contain. Like the other spaces in the mansion, these rooms are designed to provide comfort and aesthetic appeal, with intricate stained glass work that allows natural light to filter through while maintaining privacy. Their placement and decoration emphasize the house's emphasis on creating comfortable living and reception areas that are both functional and beautiful.

Sections

Kolah Farangi: The decorative turret, known as Kolah Farangi, is situated immediately next to the windcatcher on the roof of the main hall of Aqazadeh Mansion. This section of the house has an octagonal shape, with a colored glass window on each side. The purpose of these windows is to maximize natural light into the interior of the main hall while also enhancing aesthetic appeal. The Kolah Farangi not only contributes to the house's beauty but also plays a strategic role in its cooling and lighting system. The distinctive combination of the windcatcher and the Kolah Farangi significantly improves ventilation and illumination within the lower spaces and the hall of the house, making it a masterpiece of traditional Iranian architecture.

Basement: The basement of the mansion is carved directly into the rock, much like the architecture seen in Meymand village. It was formed by painstakingly digging through the stones, demonstrating the ingenuity and craftsmanship of traditional builders. This carved basement served as a cool, secure space, often used for storage or other functional purposes, revealing the sophisticated use of natural landscape features to adapt to the hot desert climate.

Decorations

Decorative elements are considered fundamental components of architecture in old mansions, and the Aqazadeh Mansion is no exception. Among these decorations are the muqarnas (inlay carvings), which adorn the lower part of the Kolah Farangi, as well as the vaulted muqarnas ceiling of the main hall. These intricate, illuminated carvings exemplify the refined craftsmanship and artistry characteristic of Persian architecture.

The mansion's aesthetic appeal is further enhanced by rectangular lattice windows decorated with colored glass and wooden frames featuring intricate latticework. These windows add

a stunning visual depth and charm to the building's overall architecture, especially when combined with the ornamental plasterwork at the edges of windows and doors. Another decorative element used extensively around the exterior spaces is Qatarbandi, a specialized type of plasterwork that adds texture and visual interest.

Decorative plasterwork is also found at the top of both the upper and lower windcatchers. These feature various geometric shapes and arches, inserted in a seemingly random yet artistically unified pattern. Such decorations do not follow a specific repetitive pattern but are considered signatures of the architect's unique style, reflecting his craftsmanship and artistic vision.

Windcatcher

The two-story windcatcher of Aqazadeh Mansion is designed in the Yazdi style and sits prominently atop the main hall. This impressive structure stands out from other desert houses because of its ability to effectively receive and direct wind from all four directions into the channels, classifying it as a four-sided windcatcher.

Remarkably, the engineering of the mansion's windcatcher allows it to provide effective ventilation even when there is no wind, thanks to its sophisticated design. It is a well-known landmark visible from all sides of the city and has become a symbol of traditional Iranian architecture. The windcatcher itself stands approximately 18 meters high from the floor of the courtyard, with the upper and lower sections perfectly coordinated. Its total area covers roughly 18 square meters. The second-floor windcatcher is slightly smaller than the first, and both feature rectangular plans.

The distinctive design and meticulous construction showcase the unmatched artistry and finesse of traditional Iranian architecture. The windcatcher comprises a total of 19 openings — its design includes both functional and ornamental features. These openings are engineered to be adjustable, allowing them to be opened or closed during strong winds or cold weather in winter, providing optimal control over air-flow and temperature.

Finally, the dimensions and materials utilized in constructing the windcatcher serve as indicators of the owner's status and wealth. Wealthy individuals, such as the owner of Aqazadeh Mansion, preferred a two-story, four-sided windcatcher made from a blend of adobe, clay, bricks, and plaster, often decorated with delicate ornamental details. This blend of practical engineering and decorative finesse exemplifies the sophistication of traditional Persian domestic architecture.

