

# Shahrestanak, where history still breathes

## Iranica Desk

Shahrestanak Palace, a magnificent relic of the Qajar era, lies in a scenic valley in the Alborz Mountains near Karaj and tells a story of architectural taste, summer retreat life, and the rise and fall of Iran's historical heritage. Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, escaping Tehran's unbearable heat and polluted air, would seek refuge in the cool highlands around the capital during the summer months. Eventually, in Shahrestanak village, he ordered the construction of a summer palace. The palace was meant to serve as a place of comfort for the king and his courtiers during the hot season, and today it preserves not only the remains of stone and brick, but also a living memory of Qajar culture and art. Construction of the palace began in 1878, and Agha Mohammad Ebrahim Khan, the master architect of the court, was entrusted with the project. Within three years, a building emerged that is regarded as one of the most important examples of Qajar architecture.

Yet, like many historical monuments, the fate of the palace became tied to neglect and deterioration. After the end of the Qajar dynasty, Shahrestanak Palace suffered from the harsh climate of the Alborz region and from vandalism, gradually falling into ruin. Even its temporary use as a mountaineers' shelter in 1969 did not halt the damage. However, a new hope for the revival of this historic site emerged in 2016, when the building was

handed over to the Fund for the Development of Handicrafts and Handwoven Carpets, and later in 2022, its operation was transferred to the private sector, according to [chtn.ir](http://chtn.ir).

Shahrestanak Palace consists of two main parts, the inner quarters and the outer quarters, each reflecting the hierarchical and class-based structure of the Qajar court. The main semicircular entrance led the Shah and distinguished guests into the courtyard, while a secondary entrance was reserved for servants and attendants.

The outer section, with a rectangular courtyard and four terraces, included a two-story structure known as the Divan Khaneh and Naser al-Din Shah's private bathhouse. The inner section also contained two sepa-



● [kojara.ir](http://kojara.ir)



rate courtyards, one for the Shah and another for the servants, along with 19 rooms arranged on the northern and eastern sides of the building, reflecting the order and discipline of the courtly setting. These sections,

buried for years under soil and rubble, were revealed again in the 1990s through archaeological excavations. One of the palace's most important features is its harmony with the surrounding

natural environment. The terraces, courtyards, and sweeping views over the valley and the Alborz Mountains make the structure an outstanding example of intelligent Iranian architecture, one that combines grandeur with climatic adaptation. Naser al-Din Shah also decorated the palace with European wallpaper and colored glass in the wooden orosi windows, and he held the annual cooks' ceremony there. Although none of those decorations remain today, photographs by Antoin Sevruguin and paintings by Kamal-ol-Molk provide a vivid image of the palace's former splendor.

The current restoration project

of Shahrestanak Palace, based on historical documents and images, is progressing, with reconstruction of parts of the walls, towers, and infrastructure continuing. Today, the palace stands as a symbol of the connection between past and present, art and nature, and a reminder of the importance of preserving Iran's cultural heritage.

Shahrestanak Palace, in the heart of the Alborz mountains, is not merely a historic building; it is a living account of Iran's culture, power, art, and collective memory. Built as a summer refuge for a ruler who sought escape from Tehran's heat and the turmoil of urban life, the palace was designed with a

clear purpose from the very beginning. Yet its significance goes beyond that of a seasonal residence. Shahrestanak is a symbol of intelligent architecture, constructive interaction between humans and nature, and a form of splendor that still remains visible in the layers of its history.

Its registration on Iran's National Heritage List in 1998 showed that Shahrestanak is not simply an old ruin, but part of the country's historical and cultural identity and must be preserved for future generations. What makes the site even more valuable is not only its royal past, but the enduring message it carries: history, if protected with care, respect, and responsibility, can be brought back to life and continue to play a role in the present. A visit to the palace conveys exactly this feeling, as though history is still breathing through its walls, terraces, and mountain views, speaking to those who come to see it.

Shahrestanak is a clear example of the link between architecture and nature. The structure was built in harmony with the region's climate and geography, showing that Iranian architects were concerned not only with visual beauty, but also with function, comfort, and environmental suitability. This feature has made Shahrestanak, as a historical monument, valuable not only in artistic terms, but also as a source of knowledge about the lifestyle, tastes, and worldview of Iranians during the Qajar period.

## Varsho Sazi preserves shining legacy in Iranian handicrafts

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The art of Varsho Sazi (nickel silver crafting), while rooted in Europe, underwent a profound transformation upon reaching Iran. Infused with the creativity of artisans in Borujerd and Dezful, it evolved into a distinctly Iranian craft and one of the country's most prominent metalworking traditions. Varsho Sazi refers to the art of creating intricate ornaments and utensils from a specific metal alloy known as nickel silver. Generally, this alloy is composed of 20% nickel, 35% zinc, and 45% copper. The craft takes its name from Warsaw, the capital of Poland, which is pronounced "Varsho" in Persian, where the alloy originated before making its way to Iran, according to IRNA.

The history of Varsho Sazi in Iran dates back to the Safavid era. However, the art reached its zenith during the late Qajar and Pahlavi periods, particularly in the cities of Borujerd and Dezful.

According to veteran artisans, the industry received a significant boost during the premiership of Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir. He dispatched a group of skilled copper-smiths — already experts in metalwork — to Russia to master the techniques of working with nickel silver. These craftsmen, hailing from



● [IRNA](http://IRNA)

Borujerd, Dezful, and Isfahan, returned to their hometowns to establish the first Iranian Varsho workshops. Due to the sheer variety of its products and the exceptional skill of its masters, Borujerd earned a nationwide reputation in this field. Handcrafted

items from Borujerd were not only used in the households of the elite and high-ranking officials, but were also exported directly to international markets. While the rise of stainless steel — which is cheaper and easier to shape — eventually

challenged the dominance of Varsho for everyday use, the craft remains Borujerd's most iconic handicraft.

Artisans soften the alloy to forge a wide array of items, including water vessels, trays, incense burners, mirrors, candlesticks, and the famous Iranian samovars. Today, modern masters have elevated the craft by combining it with Qalam-Zani (metal engraving), creating exquisite works of art that are highly prized by collectors. Varsho Sazi is closely related to copper-smithing, samovar-making, and Davat-Gari (the making of inkwells and traditional containers). The primary difference lies in the material: copper-smithing uses pure copper, while Varsho Sazi utilizes the nickel silver alloy.

The "Skill and Technique of Varsho Work" was added to Iran's National Intangible Cultural Heritage list in July 2012, followed by "Engraving on Varsho in Borujerd" in March 2018. In 2019, Borujerd was officially designated as the "National City of Varsho." Furthermore, a dossier for Borujerd's global registration as the world center of Varsho Sazi has been submitted to UNESCO.

Since the raw alloy is an imported material, fluctuations in imports currently pose a major hurdle to the industry's growth. Nevertheless, experts believe that with targeted support and better international promotion, Varsho Sazi can be revitalized as a vital cultural and economic asset, ensuring this shimmering legacy is passed down to future generations.

## Oqab Mountain near Taft welcomes visitors

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Oqab Mountain is one of the most scenic and popular tourist attractions in Yazd Province, drawing visitors from across the country every year, especially during the Nowruz holidays.

According to IRNA, the mountain, which from a distance resembles a seated eagle, is located along the Yazd-Shiraz highway, 35 kilometers west of Yazd, in Taft.

Oqab Mountain captures the attention of everyone passing by, and its calm and beautiful natural setting brings a sense of joy and wonder to visitors.

Shaped like a giant eagle resting on the ground, the mountain stands in a pristine natural landscape that offers a peaceful space for people to enjoy.

Due to its proximity to the historic village of Eslamieh in Taft and its location along the Yazd-Shiraz road, visitors can find nearby services such as restaurants, food stores, drinking water, and vehicle repair facilities.

Oqab Mountain is a natural and attractive destination for all people, especially tourists, and is visited each year by many domestic and foreign travelers. Rising to nearly 2,000 meters above sea level, the mountain stands alone with striking beau-



ty, like an eagle in the middle of the desert, giving it a majestic presence in the region. Located near the villages of Farashah and Eslamieh, the natural landscape of Oqab Mountain has been registered as a National Heritage Site in Iran.

Tamehr Spring, located 13 kilometers east of Oqab Mountain, and the Eslamieh Cave, about 30 kilometers away, are among the nearby attractions.

The origins of Oqab Mountain are said to date back to the early Second Geological Period. Toward the end of that era, the structure of other parts of the mountain changed, and it gained greater height.

During the Fourth Geological Period, the limestone body of Oqab Mountain in Farashah was heavily eroded by the drop in temperature, severe frost, and the thaw that followed, resulting in significant chemical and mechanical weathering. The center of Taft is located 20 kilometers from the city of Yazd.