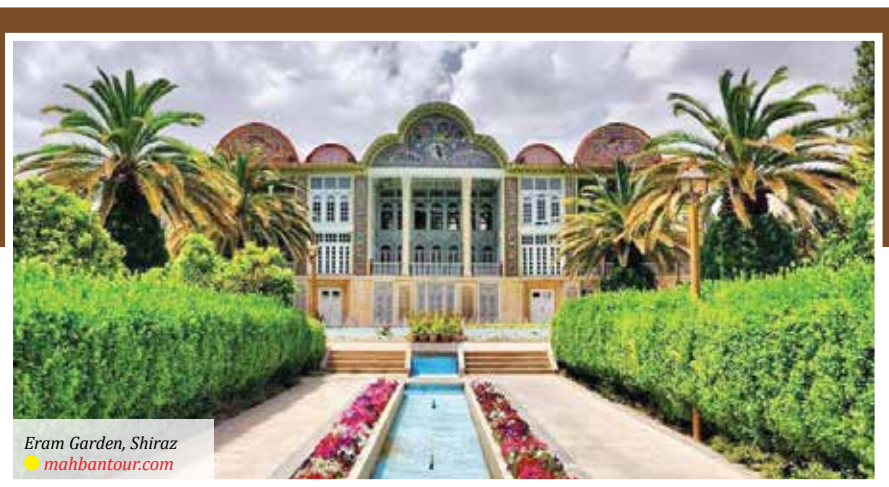
Persian gardens evolved while preserving tradition



Eram Garden, Shiraz
● mahbantour.com

Iranica Desk

Persian gardens have long been an integral part of Iran's cultural and architectural identity, reflecting a distinctive vision of harmony between nature, architecture and human life.
In an article, Hossein Mahmoudi, Director General of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization of Markazi Province, examines how this centuries-old tradition entered a new phase during the Qajar era (1789-1925), as established principles of garden design encountered changing artistic tastes and growing European influences.
While traditional features such as geometric layouts, symmetry and elaborate water systems remained central, new approaches to architecture and landscape design gradually found their way into garden complexes. These developments make Qajar-era gardens particularly valuable for understanding the evolution of Iranian landscape architecture and the relationship between cultural continuity and artistic change, according to chtn.ir.
One of the defining characteristics of Persian gardens during the Qajar period was the preservation of the fundamental principles of traditional garden design, including geometric order, axial planning, symmetry, the presence of water and the carefully considered use of vegetation. Water, as one of the principal elements organizing the space, flowed through the gardens via channels, pools and fountains. In addition to creating a sense of freshness and providing climatic comfort, it played an essential role in shaping the landscape and enhancing the visual appeal of the garden complex.



Fin Garden, Kashan
● mahbantour.com

Shade trees, pathways, surrounding walls and garden pavilions worked together to create a coherent spatial arrangement that met functional requirements while embodying aesthetic and cultural values.
During the Qajar era, gardens also held considerable functional and social significance. Royal, governmental and aristocratic gardens served not only as places for relaxation, recreation and seasonal residence, but also as venues for official ceremonies, entertaining guests and displaying the political power and social standing of their owners. In Tehran, as the capital gradually expanded and government complexes and residences associated with the royal court took shape, numerous gardens were established or developed, becoming part of the city's spatial structure and historical identity. The Golestan Palace complex stands out as a notable example of the relationship between Persian garden design, royal architecture and the artistic developments of the period.
Another notable aspect of Qajar-era garden design was its gradual adoption of European architectural and artistic influences. In certain complexes, these influences became apparent in pavilion design, decorative details, spatial arrangements and the relationship between buildings and their surrounding grounds. However, these developments did not mean the complete abandonment of traditional Persian garden principles. Rather, in many cases, new elements were introduced alongside established structures, creating a synthesis of indigenous characteristics and emerging design trends. Qajar gardens should therefore be understood as part of the historical evolution of the Persian garden, reflecting the simultaneous continuation of tradition and acceptance of change.
From the perspective of cultural heritage conservation and restoration, Qajar gardens are far more than collections of trees, pathways and historic buildings. They are interconnected systems comprising architectural, natural, historical and cultural elements. Their significance lies in the relationships between their various components, including pavilions, perimeter walls, water-supply networks, vegetation, circulation routes and designed vistas. Accordingly, any conservation or restoration intervention in these gardens must be based on a thorough understanding of their historical background, examination of archival documents and historical photographs, field studies and an assessment of their current condition.
One of the major challenges in preserving historic Qajar gardens is the change of land use, inappropriate construction, gradual deterioration of architectural features, disruption of traditional water-supply systems and loss of original vegetation.
Urban expansion and climate change can also undermine the integrity of historic landscapes and weaken the relationship between gardens and their natural and urban settings. Under such circumstances, effective conservation requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond the restoration of buildings and the improvement of green spaces. It must also prioritize the preservation of historic layouts, the rehabilitation of water systems, the protection of plant species consistent with each garden's historical character and the regulation of new interventions.
Ultimately, Persian gardens of the Qajar era can be regarded as living records of Iran's landscape architecture, embodying the cultural, social and artistic values of an important historical period. Their systematic preservation and restoration would not only prevent the loss of an important part of the country's architectural heritage, but also help transmit traditional garden-design knowledge and reinforce the historical identity of cities. Achieving this objective requires thorough documentation, the application of scientific conservation and restoration methods, the involvement of specialists and greater recognition of the cultural and social potential of these historic complexes. Such an approach can help ensure that historic gardens continue to thrive while responding to the needs of contemporary society.

Handicraft houses offer new opportunities for artisans in Kerman

Iranica Desk

Kerman is stepping up efforts to preserve its traditional arts and turn handicrafts into a driver of employment and tourism growth through the expansion of dedicated handicraft houses.
Moving beyond the conventional model of production workshops and handicraft shops, these centers are intended to serve as multifunctional spaces for production, training, direct sales and interaction between artisans and younger generations. More than 10 handicraft houses have so far been established across the province, with plans to increase the number to between 30 and 40 high-quality centers in the provincial capital.
Under the emerging model, handicraft houses are more than places where traditional products are made or displayed. They are multifunctional centers designed to safeguard traditional crafts, pass on the skills of master artisans, support local craftspeople and create markets for locally made products. Visitors can observe the creative process firsthand and learn about the techniques and cultural heritage behind the region's traditional arts.
These centers are expected to bring together live production workshops, galleries, direct-sale outlets, training facilities and supplies of raw materials. Visitors, for instance, can watch the transformation of clay into pottery, follow the process of spinning and dyeing wool before it is woven into carpets, or observe the making of Pateh, a traditional form of embroidery distinctive to Kerman. They may also take part in practical workshops and training courses.
Direct sales and the elimination of intermediaries are among the key functions of these centres. This approach can help ensure the authenticity of products, offer them at fair prices and allow artisans and producers to retain a greater share of the proceeds. Organizing access to high-quality, standardized raw materials at affordable prices is another important need of local craftspeople that handicraft houses could help address.
Beyond their economic and educational roles, these centres can become cultural meeting places for artists, young people and enthusiasts. Specialist discussions, artistic gatherings and forums addressing the challenges facing the handicrafts sector, alongside café-style spaces, can encourage younger generations to reconnect with their cultural and artistic heritage.
Despite their potential, the expansion of handicraft houses faces several challenges, including weak marketing and branding, an overreliance on face-to-face sales, limited access to online and export markets, and the need for product standardization and quality grading. Addressing these shortcomings could improve the competitiveness of locally made handicrafts and strengthen the sector's value chain.



● yjc.ir



● hamshahrionline.ir

Speaking to ISNA, Gholamreza Farrokhi, deputy director of handicrafts at Kerman Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, said that completing the handicrafts value chain and developing the necessary infrastructure were essential to unlocking the province's considerable potential in traditional arts and tourism.
He said Kerman, with its remarkable diversity of handicraft disciplines, ancient cultural heritage and exceptional natural attractions, had the potential to become one of Iran's leading tourism hubs.
However, he added, achieving this goal would require completing the handicrafts value chain, expanding transport infrastructure and establishing specialized handicraft houses and museums. These objectives, he said, would depend on national commitment and the participation of government agencies and the private sector.
Farrokhi described handicrafts as a bridge between a community's past and present, adding that innovation, provided it does not compromise authenticity, could bring traditional products into everyday household consumption, generate employment and stimulate economic growth.
Referring to recent efforts to establish privately run handicraft houses across the province, he said significant steps had been taken in recent months to develop centres that would go beyond basic production workshops and become cultural gathering places for artisans, young people and those interested in traditional arts.
He identified engaging younger generations and introducing new attractions while preserving artistic authenticity as key strategies for developing the handicrafts sector.
Combining production workshops and retail displays with café-style spaces and cultural gatherings, he said, could provide an effective setting for young people to become more familiar with the arts and traditions of their ancestors.
Farrokhi said more than 10 handicraft houses had so far been established across Kerman Province, most of them in the provincial capital, Rafsanjan and southern parts of the province.
In addition to selling artisans' products directly, these centres play an important role in skills training, providing affordable raw materials and familiarizing schoolchildren with the production process, he said.
He added that the province's target was to establish between 30 and 40 high-quality handicraft houses in different neighborhoods and streets across Kerman city.
Turning to the province's tourism infrastructure, Farrokhi stressed that developing tourism in Kerman could not be the responsibility of a single government department and required coordinated efforts across multiple agencies, including the departments responsible for roads and urban development and road, rail and air transport.
Road conditions, roadside service facilities, flight connections, hotels and the cost of services all have a direct impact on how long visitors stay in the province, he said.
Improving the culture of hospitality and ensuring that visitors are treated with respect by local residents could also help strengthen the local economy and create lasting memories for tourists visiting Kerman throughout the year, he added.
Farrokhi also highlighted the potential contribution of the province's industrial sector and mineral resources to the development of cultural infrastructure.
He said industries and mining companies could play a significant role in establishing specialized stone and mining museums as part of their corporate social responsibility programs.
The expansion of anthropology and regional museums, he noted, would not only strengthen younger generations' sense of historical identity but could also create independent tourist attractions and provide additional cultural and recreational opportunities.