



Adaptive Reuse of Historic Dwellings into Cafés: Design Challenges and Planning Issues in Hebron

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Abstract

This research examines a phenomenon that has emerged recently: the trend of young people frequenting cafes and restaurants as a social practice that became prominent in the early 21st century in the city of Hebron. It has been observed that some historically significant old dwellings have been chosen as subjects for redesigning and transforming them into cafes and restaurants. The research problem revolves around the design challenges and issues that may arise in redesigning historical dwellings, the success of the transformation process, and the design principles necessary to preserve cultural property and protect it from damage and alterations to its historical features, cultural heritage, and identity. It delves into preserving such properties through reuse, especially for dwellings that have been redesigned. The study included analyzing several models in the old city of Hebron. This region was chosen due to the rapid transformation in social thoughts and customs and the presence of the old town, along with historically significant dwellings utilized in the process of reuse and redesign. This research follows a scientific analytical and documentary methodology, involving the review of several dwelling models, literature, materials, books, and scientific research. Information was gathered through interviews and surveys to collect sufficient data for analysis and result extraction. The study concluded by emphasizing the value of integrating traditional architectural features into interior design when adapting old dwellings into cultural cafés. It demonstrated that adaptive reuse enhances both aesthetics and functionality, especially when using local materials and sustainable solutions. The reuse of existing elements—such as niches and cabinets—combined with thoughtful interventions addressed common issues like humidity and outdated infrastructure, while preserving cultural identity and reducing costs.

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Keywords

Heritage preservation; Reuse; Redesign; Old Town Hebron; Old Town Bethlehem; Interior design; Architectural rehabilitation

1. Introduction

People today increasingly acknowledge the shared value of historical sites, recognizing them not merely as relics of the past but as a collective human heritage. This sense of shared responsibility for preserving cultural landmarks has been firmly endorsed by the Venice Charter of 1964, which emphasizes the importance of maintaining historical monuments as living records of human civilization and tradition (Feilden, 2003, p. 361). Preserving such sites is vital for strengthening community identity, fostering a tangible link between past and present, and ensuring that cultural authenticity is transmitted to future generations (Ahmed, 2022).

As urban environments continue to evolve and the need for modern workspaces and specialized functions increases, heritage conservation has undergone a significant conceptual shift. Preservation today is not solely about protecting old buildings but also about maintaining the dynamic relationship between architectural heritage, the community, and cultural continuity (Briney, 2020).

A compelling example of this dynamic is found in Nidal Katiba's field study, which documented the traditional quarters of Hebron between 1967 and 1987. His research demonstrates how the architectural design of residential buildings was intricately tied to the social practices of the families living within them. Spatial arrangements were not arbitrary; they directly reflected cultural values, daily routines, and intergenerational interactions, embodying a living heritage that responded to the city's social and physical context (Katiba, 2018, p. 47). In response to contemporary needs, the concept of architectural rehabilitation has emerged. It refers to the process of adapting historical buildings for new, relevant uses while retaining their cultural and architectural significance. This approach allows heritage structures to remain functional and integrated within the fabric of modern life (Al-Hanish & Al-Mih, 2017).

Architectural rehabilitation encompasses several key aspects. Physical rehabilitation involves procedures aimed at reinforcing and stabilizing deteriorated structural elements, sometimes replacing damaged components with modern materials to ensure the safety of both the building and its occupants (Atmeh, 2007, p. 82). Another important aspect is **adaptive reuse**, which entails modifying the building or site for new functions, thereby extending its lifespan by adapting it to current practical requirements (Abu-alfudl, H. F. 1998).

This approach has also been effectively applied internationally. For example, Ryńska (2008, p. 12) explores the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of historic buildings in Poland, highlighting the critical role of integrating environmental sustainability principles with heritage conservation. The study demonstrates how the use of sustainable materials and modern techniques can be carefully balanced with preserving the architectural and cultural integrity of historic structures—an approach that aligns closely with the objectives of the Al-Zaru House project.

In this regard, Awad (2008, p. 45) emphasizes the delicate balance required in preserving the architectural heritage in Palestine, highlighting the need to maintain the authenticity of original features while integrating modern uses that respond to contemporary social and commercial needs. This balance is further supported by employing sustainable materials and techniques that preserve cultural integrity, and the concept of **environmentally sustainable rehabilitation** has emerged, emphasizing the use of sustainable resources while enhancing occupant comfort and health by addressing environmental factors (Basir, 2004). Recent studies have emphasized that successful rehabilitation of heritage buildings must also adhere to comprehensive design standards that balance heritage conservation with sustainability goals. For example, Mohsen (2019) highlights the case of the Al-Ghuri Complex in Cairo, illustrating how adapting historical buildings to modern uses requires careful consideration of spatial organization, environmental responsiveness, and energy efficiency to maintain their cultural identity while meeting contemporary needs (Mohsen, 2019, p. 94).

Two main approaches exist regarding the preservation of the civilizational heritage surrounding historical architecture: one advocates maintaining continuous occupancy of the areas around heritage buildings, while the other supports vacating these surrounding spaces to better protect the monument itself (Raba' 2004, p. 19). These approaches are influenced by various factors, including the historical building's location and its representation of a specific era within the city's development. Heritage buildings evolve alongside successive historical periods, and their external forms and relationships with people and nature reflect an accumulated cultural identity unique to their region (Pasha, 2021). Therefore, it is essential to preserve historical buildings within their original urban context, maintaining their spatial relationships with surrounding structures and spaces to reveal their aesthetic and cultural value as they have been experienced since their inception (Raba', 2004, p. 19).

1.1. Planning for the Preservation of Heritage Buildings

Effective planning for the preservation of traditional architectural styles is a fundamental step in conserving heritage buildings (Briney, A., 2020, January 22). In today's globalized world, facilitated by advanced communication technologies, expertise can be shared across borders more easily than ever. However, designing a successful maintenance and rehabilitation plan requires a deep understanding of the specific architectural character of each historical building. These buildings possess unique features, such as doors, windows, roofs, and decorative details, that provide valuable insights into their era of construction, original purpose, and sometimes even their designers and

original owners. The loss or alteration of these distinctive elements compromises the building's architectural and historical integrity (Babor & Plian, 2008).

The rehabilitation process generally involves several essential stages. It begins with comprehensive research and documentation, gathering information from historical texts, government archives, photographs, and original plans to assess the building's historical and architectural significance. In this context, the use of 3D digital modeling based on archival documentation has been identified as a powerful method for reconstructing and visualizing lost or damaged elements, enhancing authenticity and guiding restoration efforts (Shams El-Din, 2021, p. 70). This is followed by a thorough evaluation of the building's current structural condition, noting weaknesses such as cracks or material deterioration. The final phase includes preparing detailed rehabilitation plans and their implementation (Stationery Office, Dublin, 2004).

Furthermore, the rehabilitation plan must comply with local laws and municipal regulations. It should identify and preserve key architectural elements, remove incongruous additions that detract from the building's authenticity, and address reconstruction needs. Interior redesign efforts may involve removing inappropriate partitions or restoring historically significant features like internal staircases. The plan also considers functional requirements by incorporating missing spaces such as bathrooms and maintenance rooms to meet modern standards while respecting the building's heritage (Atmeh, 2007, p. 23).

1.2. Research Hypothesis

Re-purposing heritage buildings ensures their continuity and achieves sustainability principles. Additionally, reusing the interior spaces of heritage buildings in ways that align with their internal spaces, location, and cultural character, without compromising their value and uniqueness, guarantees increased awareness, adherence, and preservation for future generations.

1.3. Research Objectives

Understand the necessity of rehabilitating heritage buildings and protecting them from deterioration factors.

highlight experiences with buildings that have been repurposed and analyze the positive and negative outcomes of the methodologies applied in these buildings.

1.4. Research Problem

Many heritage buildings of historical value in Palestine, particularly in the city of Hebron, are deteriorating, being vandalized, or demolished, leading to the disappearance of some sites and the alteration of their identity. Some sites experience partial demolition yet are preserved due to urban encroachment, causing them to lose their original architectural features. Additionally, some sites exist but are in a state of neglect or deterioration due to environmental factors and various structural issues. Therefore, it is necessary to find design and functional solutions in the process of redesigning some residential buildings that have been repurposed into restaurants and cafes.

1.5. Research Methodology and Tools

This research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach by gathering information from available sources and references. It includes analyzing several traditional houses through field studies of multiple café models in the city of Hebron. The methodology involves interviews with experts and engineers, documenting and photographing observations, and creating maps with proposed solutions to develop a plan for converting a heritage house into a café and restaurant.

The selected houses were analyzed through direct site visits, during which architectural elements, spatial organization, structural condition, and historical value were recorded. Documentation included high-resolution photographs, schematic architectural drawings, and field notes addressing materials, decorative details, and usage patterns. Interviews were conducted with property owners, local architects, and municipal engineers to gather historical background, identify renovation challenges, and understand applied design strategies. In addition, maps were produced using Google Earth and GIS tools to locate each house within the urban fabric, supporting analysis of

accessibility, surrounding functions, and visual prominence—critical factors in café design. The collected data was then comparatively analyzed to identify shared challenges and successful interventions, which informed the proposed adaptive reuse model.

2. Hebron City and the Phases of Historical Building Rehabilitation

Hebron, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, holds a rich architectural and cultural heritage. In recognition of its outstanding universal value, the Old Town of Hebron was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2017 under criteria (ii), (iv), and (vi), and was simultaneously classified as a World Heritage Site in Danger (Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2021). Figure 1 provides an aerial image showing the location of Hebron City in Palestine and its proximity to Jerusalem. A second image offers an aerial view of Ein Sarah Street, highlighting several cafés that animate the street's character (Source: Google Maps).

The city is composed of multiple neighborhoods, each reflecting distinct historical periods based on their development timelines (Al-Ja'ba et al., 2007). During the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, Hebron began expanding gradually northward toward Ain Sara and westward toward Wadi Al-Tuffah, with further extensions along Beersheba Street reaching the Al-Hawooz district (Al-Ju'beh et al., 2007, p. 30).

This phase of urban expansion was accompanied by the relocation of affluent residents and business owners from the densely populated Old Town to these newer neighborhoods, where they built remarkable homes showcasing distinctive architectural styles (Abu Hilal, 2009, p. 44). However, as housing demand increased over time, many of these buildings were demolished and replaced by modern, multi-story constructions that often lacked architectural identity or heritage protection (Bshara, K. 2015, May 10).



Figure 1: Aerial views of Hebron City's location near Jerusalem and Ein Sarah Street, highlighting cafés along the street. (Source: Google Maps)

While the Old Town is protected under specific heritage conservation regulations, the neighborhoods developed at the turn of the 20th century—such as Bab Al-Zawiya, Ain Sara, and others—remain largely outside these preservation frameworks (Bshara, K. 2015, May 10). A number of houses from these areas have been monitored, documented, and studied to analyze the strategies applied in their adaptive reuse, particularly in converting residential buildings into restaurants, cafés, and other commercial venues (Al-Ja'ba et al., 2007).

This article highlights four examples of repurposed houses in Hebron, particularly within the Ain Sara neighborhood, that have been successfully transformed into hospitality venues. Additionally, it presents the Al-Zaru House as a case study for adaptive reuse, proposing its conversion into a restaurant and café. The study aims to assess the area's developmental context, evaluate the impact of such transformations on architectural preservation, and ensure that any interventions adhere to established heritage conservation principles.

Building on this, Badran (2017, p. 85) emphasizes the vital role of architectural space design and tectonics in Palestinian heritage as expressions of cultural resistance within contested environments. His research demonstrates that preserving and adapting historic buildings goes beyond safeguarding their physical form—it also strengthens cultural identity and fosters community resilience. This perspective closely aligns with the objectives of rehabilitating heritage sites in Hebron, where maintaining architectural authenticity is crucial for preserving collective memory and reinforcing national identity.

2.1 Case Study 1 Zekra Café

Zekra Cafe is in the Ain Sara area of Hebron, opposite Sara Al-Janidi, owned by Mr. Zaid Al-Rajabi. The building was constructed about 90 years ago, and the land area is one dunam. Discussions with the owner revealed three main rooms, an external garden, sanitary units, and a kitchen. The building, which had been abandoned for a very long time, faced several issues during the renovation, primarily dampness. The owner decided to utilize the building to create a profitable project and concluded that a cafe would succeed due to its excellent location, ease of access, and the scarcity of similar projects. The cafe can accommodate 50 customers at a time. Figure 2 represents the location of Zikra Café, with a Google Maps aerial view indicating its position relative to Ein Sarah Street in Hebron



Figure 2 represents the location of Zikra Café, with a Google Maps aerial view indicating its position relative to Ein Sarah Street in Hebron (Author, 2024)

The renovation faced challenges with the installation of electricity, water, and sewage systems, as the old building was susceptible to collapse if not handled properly. The owner preserved the character and features of the place, maintaining its spirit. Electrical heating was installed inside the building, and an outdoor wood stove was added. During the day, the large windows provide enough sunlight and air, while at night, the cafe is illuminated with electric outdoor lighting, old-style lamps, soft lighting, and decorative lights, making the ambiance cozy and pleasant for the eyes. Another major issue was the dampness and water seepage since the building is situated at the base of a mountain, causing all the mountain water to collect in the cafe due to inadequate sewage drainage. Regarding furniture, the building, being abandoned, lacked any, so the owner furnished it with antique and old wooden Arabic furniture, reflecting the old place and authentic Palestinian heritage.

The owner expressed the beauty and tranquility of the place, enhancing the atmosphere with many trees and plants, giving the impression of entering a public garden with an old design and authentic stonework. An analysis of the design and renovation elements is summarized in Table 1

Table 1: Analysis of Design and Renovation Elements in Zekra Café Project (Author, 2024)

Renovation Aspect	Description	Image
Renovation Challenges (Basic Systems)	Difficulties with the installation of electricity, water, and sewage systems due to the fragility of the old structure and the risk of collapse	
Preservation of Historical Character	The original features and identity of the place were preserved, maintaining its authentic spirit	
Heating and Cooling Systems	Electrical heating is installed inside, and a wood-burning stove is placed outside	
Natural Ventilation and Lighting	Large windows allow natural sunlight and airflow during the day	
Night Lighting	Use of electric outdoor lights, vintage-style lamps, soft ambient lighting, and decorative fixtures that create a cozy atmosphere	
Humidity and Water Seepage	Water seepage due to the café's location at the base of a mountain, with poor sewage drainage	
Furniture	Furnished with antique and old wooden Arabic furniture that reflects the heritage of Palestine	
Environmental and Garden Character	Many trees and plants were added, giving the place the feel of a public garden	
Overall Atmosphere	The combination of the old design and authentic stonework creates a beautiful and tranquil setting	

2.2 Case Study 2: Fairuz Café

Fairuz Cafe is in the city of Hebron, near the first Ain Sarah and next to the Hebron Municipality building. Built in 1932 during the British mandate, it was originally a family home. In 2016, the building was converted into a modern cafe. The building features old natural stone walls and architectural openings with arches. The interior has a vaulted ceiling made up of several arches. The total area of the site is approximately 125 square meters, consisting of a single floor divided into eight spaces: three seating areas for visitors, a kitchen, a room for hookahs, two bathrooms, and a storage room.

The decision to convert the building into a café was made by the heirs, who wanted to preserve the identity, history, and rich character of the place, especially since they lived abroad. The café officially opened on 20/9/2016. About 40 years ago, a new seating area was added to the house, which is now the third visitor seating space. Partial maintenance and restoration were carried out when it was decided to convert the building into a café. This included cleaning the stone walls and reinforcing them with white cement between the stones. Two bathrooms were also added during this period.



Figure 3 represents the location according to Google, including the front facade of Fairouz Café, Author, 2024

The current condition of the café, detailed in Table 2, reveals several challenges and features: it suffers from insufficient electrical capacity, limited balcony load-bearing, and minor maintenance needs in furniture and finishes. Despite storage limitations and its sensitive proximity to the municipality, the café maintains strong architectural integrity and provides a comfortable layout for 64 visitors.

Table 2: Analysis Current Condition challenges and features of Fairuz Café






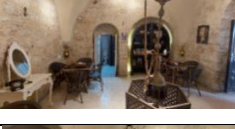








Design and Renovation Element	Description	Image
Electricity Issues	The café requires more than one phase of electricity, but the municipality has not approved the upgrade, causing power limitations in some areas.	
Balcony Condition	The balcony cannot bear the weight of glass; it has been covered with reinforced plastic for safety.	
Furniture and Maintenance Needs	Some furniture elements, such as the counter and wood ceiling color, require refurbishment; certain walls need repainting.	
Storage Limitations	The storage room cannot include drainage or ventilation openings to avoid moisture-related damage.	
Proximity to Municipality	Proximity to the municipal building makes the café accessible but sometimes creates conflict with neighboring administrative functions.	
Architectural Integrity	Maintains original design elements that give the space both strength and beauty, making it historically and aesthetically valuable.	
Visitor Capacity and Comfort	The café includes 16 tables with four seats each, accommodating 64 guests. The layout allows for good circulation and comfort.	

Table 3 highlights the café’s rich artistic and heritage elements, including antique furniture, musical instruments, old household tools, and decorative paintings that reflect the building’s historical identity and personal stories of its past residents. These features transform the café into a culturally immersive and nostalgic space.

Table 3: Artistic Elements and Heritage Contents in Fairuz Café

Cultural or Architectural Element	Description	Image
Artistic Paintings	The café features many artistic and cultural paintings that attract attention and reflect various stages in the life of the place.	
Childhood Home	The house belonged to one of the heirs during their childhood. It still retains the same layout with an interior section and a service section.	
Modern Bathrooms	When the house was converted into a café, modern bathrooms were added using standard gray ceramic tiles with a traditional local character and modern Chinese basins.	
Kitchen	The kitchen needs rearrangement and reorganization in terms of flooring, storage, and workspaces.	
Heritage Furniture Pieces	The café includes old heritage furniture pieces that enhance the site's historical value, such as an old piano, a large vintage radio, a wooden television cabinet, a gramophone, and a manual sewing machine.	
Antique Devices and Utensils	The space retains items like a coffee grinder, meat mincer, and bread mill, enriching the place with inherited objects from the past.	
Books and Personal Belongings	The café displays old medical and Iraqi books, notebooks, and traditional household items, turning it into a living museum that tells the stories of past inhabitants.	

2.3. Case Study 3: Bouvardio Café

This project involves the adaptive reuse of a 95-year-old building (originally built in 1350 AH) located in Al-Haras, Hebron. Over its history, the building has served multiple purposes: initially as a residence, later converted into an office, then an institution, and now transformed into a café. The café occupies the upper floor only, covering approximately 100 square meters, with plans for future expansion. The ground floor, part of the original structure, is currently unused. The layout includes a reception area, two seating sections separated by a partition wall, two bathrooms, and an outdoor courtyard with designated parking. After several unsuccessful attempts to revive the neglected building, the owners, Mona Abu Senineh and Yasser Dweik, decided to convert it into a public space welcoming both residents and tourists. This led to a comprehensive renovation aimed at restoring the building’s historical value while adapting it to contemporary needs. Figure 4 illustrates the main façade of the Bouvardio Café, with its location verified through Google Maps.



Figure 4 shows the main façade of the Bouvardio Café, with its location confirmed via Google Maps (Author, 2024).

Table 4 summarizes the renovation and design features, highlighting the project’s goal to transform the historic building into a vibrant, functional space. Traditional elements were preserved and enhanced—for example, original geometric tiles were replaced with new ones that replicate traditional patterns. The ceiling was structurally reinforced and finished with plaster for both aesthetic appeal and moisture resistance. Exterior walls were treated for dampness with insulating layers and finished using classical plaster designs, elevating the building’s visual charm.

Modern comfort was introduced through contemporary furniture carefully selected for style and ergonomics. The café, currently in excellent condition, serves Italian cuisine and accommodates approximately 50 guests. The interior design features a thoughtful color palette: green to evoke calm and nature, yellow to inspire joy and spontaneity, and brown to add warmth and comfort. These colors together create a welcoming atmosphere that harmonizes heritage with modern café culture. A comparative summary of three case studies, aimed at supporting analysis and result integration, is presented in Table 5.

Table 4: Cultural and Architectural Elements of the Renovated Bouvardio Café Project








Cultural or Architectural Element	Description	Image
Geometric floor tiles	Renovated with traditional geometric patterns to match the original design style.	
Reinforced ceiling	Supported and plastered to enhance structure and aesthetics while preventing dampness.	
Exterior wall treatment	Treated with insulation and finished using classic plaster motifs to revive historic charm.	
Natural lighting	Emphasized to enhance user comfort and sustainability, supplemented with artificial light.	
Modern furniture	Fully updated to provide comfort for long sitting periods, yet chosen to harmonize with the theme.	
Color scheme: green, yellow, brown	Green evokes nature, yellow stimulates happiness, and brown provides warmth and earthiness.	
Italian culinary theme	The café serves Italian food, reflecting the name and providing a cultural dining experience.	

Table 5 Comparative Summary of Three Case Studies to Support Analysis and Result Integration

Item	Zekra Café	Fairuz Café	Bouvardio Café
Location	Ain Sara, Hebron	Hebron – Next to Hebron Municipality	Hebron – Al-Haras area
Owner(s)	Zaid Al-Rajabi	Heirs living abroad	Mona Abu Senineh and Yasser Dweik
Approximate Building Age	90 years	Built in 1932 (over 90 years old)	Built in 1350 AH (approximately 95 years old)
Previous Uses	Abandoned for a long period	Family house	House > Office > Institution > Café
Area	1 dunam (building accommodates 50 customers)	125 m ²	100 m ² (with future expansion plans)
Current Function	Café serving 50 customers	Modern café since 2016	Café offering Italian cuisine for 50 guests
Spatial Layout	3 rooms, kitchen, sanitary units, outdoor garden	3 seating areas, kitchen, shisha room, 2 bathrooms, storage	Reception, 2 seating areas, 2 bathrooms, outdoor courtyard
Condition Before Renovation	Abandoned, severe dampness, drainage issues	Needed maintenance, weak electrical load	Abandoned, dampness, the roof, and the walls required strengthening
Renovation Works	Installed electricity, drainage, heating, and traditional furniture	Stone wall cleaning and reinforcement with white cement	Ceiling reinforcement, damp-proofing, traditional tiling
Design Identity	Old Arabic furniture, trees, and plants	Preserved stones and arches, partial restoration	Modern comfort blended with historical character
Aesthetic Considerations	Soft lighting, natural, and relaxing scenery	Vaulted ceilings, old stone	Coordinated color palette (green, yellow, brown)
Cultural/Heritage Value	Focus on the old Palestinian character	Preserving building identity and history	Merging heritage with a modern café experience
Challenges	Dampness, drainage, weak structure	Limited electrical capacity, balcony load issues	Complete restoration needed, adapting for new function

3. Practical Application of the Research: Adaptive Reuse Proposal for Al-Zaru House as a Café

Project Phases Overview: Al-Zaru House Adaptive Reuse Study

The process of studying and redesigning Al-Zaru House for its adaptive reuse as a heritage café was conducted through a series of structured and interrelated phases. Each phase was designed to ensure that the intervention respects the historical, architectural, and cultural value of the house, while also responding to the functional and aesthetic needs of its new use. The methodology followed in this study allowed for a systematic approach to documentation, analysis, problem identification, and design implementation. The project unfolded in three main phases. Together, these phases created a clear framework for a heritage-conscious design intervention that blends authenticity with adaptive reuse principles

3.1. Historical and Contextual Background

The Al-Zaru House was selected for this adaptive reuse project due to its prime location and its distinct architectural character, particularly evident on its façades. Originally built during the British Mandate period, the house first served as the residence of the district commissioner, who lived there with his family for several years. It was later inhabited

by Mr. Al-Zaru—the grandfather of the current owners—who made it his family home. Over time, the building witnessed various phases of occupation and use, including serving as a plastic factory before being abandoned in 2015. The heirs of the Al-Zaru family now seek to benefit from the property’s location and historical value by converting it into a heritage café. At the beginning of the process, the owners lacked the necessary knowledge regarding the design systems and regulatory steps required for such a transformation. As a result, a design team was consulted to explore creative ways to repurpose the house while preserving its architectural and aesthetic integrity. The ultimate goal is to create a rich cultural space that attracts visitors through its unique atmosphere, Figure 7.











Figure 5 presents key images highlighting the architectural and historical significance of Al-Zaru House, including its current façade, a 1960 archival photo featuring Abu Talib Al-Zaru, an aerial view from Google Maps, and a portrait of Talib Al-Zaru, the second grandfather. (Sources: Author documentation and Google Maps, 2024)

3.2 Aesthetic and Architectural Character Assessment

The Al-Zaru House is a prominent example of Palestinian domestic architecture, representing a fusion of local craftsmanship, structural innovation, and aesthetic sophistication. The house was built in several stages, and this is evident in its exterior appearance, the type of stone used, and the varying construction techniques. This two-story structure includes a basement, with each floor approximately 226 square meters in area. The architectural differences in the building's exterior highlight its gradual construction, showcasing a blend of materials and styles that reflect the evolution of the house over time. Constructed during the British Mandate period, the Al-Zaru House reflects the preferences of the upper-middle class at the time. The overall design is elegant and spacious, with features such as arched doorways, twin windows, and recessed frames, offering a unique aesthetic value to the structure. The central hall, corridors, and rooms are adorned with patterned stone tiles, each one reflecting intricate craftsmanship and geometric arrangements. However, due to age and wear, the flooring has suffered damage and needs to be replaced with custom-made tiles that mirror the original design. A detailed assessment of the existing floors and the proposed interventions is provided in Table 6.

The house also features a rich diversity of architectural openings, including arched doors, twin windows, and recessed frames, each with a distinct visual impact and material quality. Over time, many of these openings have deteriorated or been altered, requiring rehabilitation to restore the spatial flow and symmetry of the building. Table 6 offers an overview of the types of openings and the recommended preservation strategies. This architectural assessment divides the evaluation into six key areas: internal walls, ceilings, flooring, historical furniture, architectural openings, and other structural elements, such as the façade, kitchen, and bathrooms. The proposed design strategies for each category prioritize the preservation of the house's historical integrity while adapting it to function as a modern café. Each table outlines the aesthetic, historical, and physical condition of the respective features and presents thoughtful interventions to ensure a functional and respectful transformation of space.

Table 6 provides a structured overview of the architectural features of Al-Zaru House. (Source: Author, 2024.)

Category	Element	Description	Image
1. Internal Spaces	Basement Floor	Large room with a flat concrete ceiling, currently used for family storage. Accessed by internal staircase.	
	First Floor	Dates back to the British Mandate period (1930). Includes several rooms, a bathroom, a kitchen, and a spacious central hall.	
	Second Floor	Added in 1963 using concrete. Mirrors the first floor but renovated into two separate apartments (3 bedrooms each, with kitchen and bathroom).	
	Central Hall (Salon)	Main interior space connecting rooms. Features colorful patterned floor tiles in a "carpet" style, reflecting upper-middle-class Mandate-era homes.	
2. External and Structural Elements	Courtyard / Garden	Outdoor area suitable for seating, enhancing the café experience with privacy and natural ambiance.	
	Front Façade	Built in the "Riwaq House" style. Features an arched arcade, twin arched windows, decorative columns, and cross-vaulted ceilings. Shows classical influence, rare in Palestinian homes.	
3. Materials & Aesthetic Features	Stonework	Walls were built with a mix of white and pink local stones. Includes floral and geometric stone carvings.	
	Flooring	The central hall is distinguished by vividly colored tiles arranged in an intricate "carpet-style" pattern, highlighting its decorative and cultural significance. In contrast, the kitchens and bathrooms are finished with minimalist black-and-white tiles, reflecting a more functional and understated design approach.	

3.3 Project Implementation Phases

3.3.1 Phase One: Documentation, Analysis, and Surveying:

The initial stage of the project focused on gathering historical data and conducting a comprehensive survey of the Al-Zaru House. This began with an interview session with Mr. Taleb Mohammad Taleb Al-Zaru, aged 76, who was born and raised in the house. His detailed recollections provided valuable insight into the history and evolution of the building. He noted that the ground floor was once inhabited by the British military governor in the 1930s and remained in family use until 1995. After that, it served as a plastic factory for two decades before being abandoned in 2015.

To assess the physical condition of the structure, several engineering consultations were held with the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee. A 3D laser scan of the building was carried out using the Tx5 Laser Scanner in collaboration with the Palestine Polytechnic University lab. The data collected was processed into two-dimensional and three-dimensional digital plans. These analyses revealed the architectural layout and condition of all interior and exterior spaces, providing a detailed understanding necessary for rehabilitation planning. Figure 6 represents the stages of taking measurements, documenting, and drawing plans of the Zaroo House



Figure 6 represents the stages of taking measurements, documenting, and drawing plans of the Zaroo House.
(Author, 2024)

3.3.2 Phase Two: Identifying Challenges and Restoration Strategy

This phase focuses on assessing the current architectural and aesthetic conditions of the Al-Zaru House, identifying key challenges, and proposing strategies to transform the house into a café while preserving its heritage value. The building was originally constructed during the British Mandate period and is characterized by a villa-like layout, a central hall, arched openings, decorative stonework, and a distinctive front façade inspired by traditional “Riwaq” architecture. Over the years, it underwent several modifications, including the addition of a second floor in 1963, which was later divided into two apartments, according to Mr. Taleb Al-Zaru. The assessment revealed several issues that require immediate attention to ensure the building’s continued use and adaptation for its new function:

- **Cracked and Missing Floor Tiles**

Cause: Deterioration due to age and prolonged use.

Solution: Replace damaged tiles with custom-designed flooring that reflects traditional “carpet-style” patterns to preserve the original aesthetic.

- **Deteriorated Plaster on Walls and Ceilings**

Cause: Moisture and water seepage.

Solution: Restore walls using recessed mortar techniques that respect the historic texture of the building. Ceilings should be treated with breathable lime plaster or, where possible, the original stonework should be re-exposed.

- **Humidity Damage**

Primarily affecting lower walls and flooring.

Solution: Address the source of water infiltration, improve ventilation, and use moisture-resistant materials that are compatible with traditional construction.

- **Outdated Utility Systems (Electrical and Plumbing)**

Cause: Obsolescence and failure to meet modern standards.

Solution: Integrate modern systems discreetly (e.g., hidden wiring) in a way that does not interfere with the building’s heritage character.

- **Traditional Built-In Features (e.g., wall niches and wardrobes)**

Cultural and functional significance.

Solution: Preserve and adapt these elements for use in the café, maintaining their heritage value and practical function. The structural and aesthetic evaluation of the Zaroo House ceilings is summarized in Table 7.

The analysis confirms that certain pieces retained both structural integrity and symbolic value, supporting the reuse proposals presented in Table 8.

Table 7 presents Ceilings – Structural and Aesthetic Assessment of the Zaroo House. Source: Author, 2024






Feature	Current Condition	Preservation and Rehabilitation Methods	image
Arched Stone Ceiling	Built with intersecting arches and layered stone (“reesh”), plaster peeling, and moisture damage	Reinforce based on structural assessment; treat moisture; clean and restore original materials	
Plaster Finish	White plaster is damaged in several areas: disorganized electrical wiring	Either expose “reesh” for aesthetic and ventilation, or renew lime plaster; organize and conceal wiring	
Electrical Integration	Unsafe visible wiring across the ceiling	Organize and embed wiring in concealed channels to preserve visual coherence and safety	

Table 8: Historical Furniture and Wardrobes – Documentation and Adaptive Reuse in the Zaroo House. Source: Author, 2024

Feature	Current Condition / Description	Preservation and Redesign Solutions	Image
Built-in Wardrobes	Traditional storage units used for clothing, bedding, and utensils	Retain historical structure; repurpose as seating benches or decorative shelves	
Historical Craftsmanship	Represents Palestinian and Armenian joinery traditions. Solid wood cabinet, early 20th century, likely made by Armenian carpenter in Jerusalem	Document and integrate into the interior to reflect the home’s cultural identity. Repurposed as café seating area; maintains original craftsmanship and aesthetic	

3.3.3 Phase Three: Implementation, Restoration, and Interior Integration

This final phase focuses on the execution of the proposed interventions and preparing the space for its new function as a heritage café. Restoration work begins with the careful removal of damaged elements and the selection of materials that are compatible with the original architecture. Flooring will be replaced with newly designed tiles reflecting historical patterns. Stone walls will be stabilized and repointed, while ceilings will be structurally reinforced and treated to resolve moisture issues and support hidden electrical systems.

During the implementation, built-in furniture will be adapted creatively, such as turning storage niches into display units or seating areas. The overall interior design will maintain harmony with the original aesthetics while meeting the functional requirements of a modern café. The outdoor courtyard will be transformed into a landscaped seating area that connects the building’s heritage with contemporary leisure use.

By the end of this phase, the house will be fully restored and adapted, ready to welcome visitors while narrating its rich history through every architectural detail. The transformation will serve as a model for integrating heritage conservation with adaptive reuse in the context of Palestinian architecture.

The design process for converting the Al-Zaru House into Zaru Café followed a systematic and research-based approach grounded in both historical respect and contemporary needs. The methodology combined architectural documentation, conceptual development, functional planning, and aesthetic integration.

3.4 Concept Selection and Design Identity

Based on the cultural and architectural value of the site, a concept was chosen that harmonizes Andalusian and Ottoman influences, reflecting the rich historical character of Hebron’s heritage buildings. This stage also included: Choosing a fitting name for the project: "Zaru Café". Designing a logo that visually communicates the identity of the

space using warm, traditional tones (beige and brown). Developing a mood board to guide material, color, and texture choices in the later stages. Figure 7 represents Concept Selection and Design Identity in the Zaroo House.

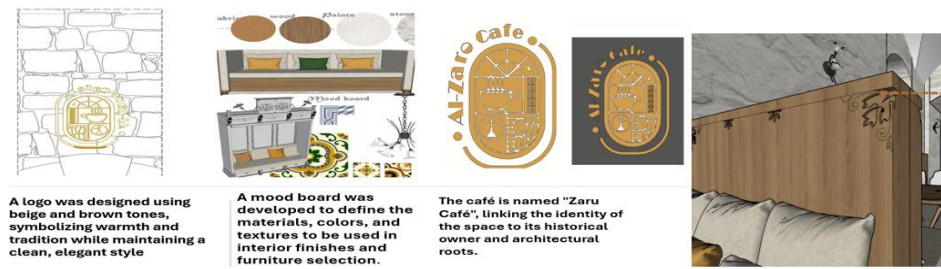


Figure 7 represents Concept Selection and Design Identity in the Zaroo House. Source: Author, 2024

3.5 Space Planning and Functional Analysis

A thorough analysis of the house’s original floor plan was carried out, followed by:

Drawing and analyzing plans

The spatial planning of Al-Zaroo House involved a comprehensive analysis of interior functions and circulation patterns. The design process began with zoning the main components of the space, allocating dedicated areas for the reception, kitchen, restrooms, and various seating zones. Careful attention was given to the flow of movement, ensuring smooth and intuitive circulation paths for both customers and staff, including clearly defined entry and exit routes. The layout was developed to foster a seamless interaction between indoor and outdoor areas. Seating configurations—such as individual tables, group arrangements, and window-facing seats—were designed with a focus on comfort, accessibility, and visual coherence. Figure 8 presents two drawings: the first is a colored zoning layout plan illustrating the functional distribution of space, while the second shows the furniture layout plan, reflecting the proposed arrangement of seating and service elements.

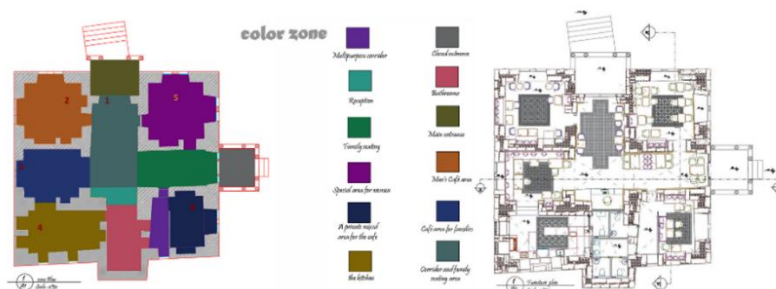


Figure 8. The first diagram illustrates the colored zoning layout plan, while the second presents the furniture arrangement plan. Source: Author, 2024.

3.6 .Design Considerations for Furniture and Material

Furniture was custom-designed to suit the space and theme, with an emphasis on: Traditional forms and **durable upholstery fabrics** in coordinating colors. Selecting wood, stone, and tile materials that complement the house’s historical identity. Creating adaptable furniture suitable for both indoor and courtyard use.

Description: An old cabinet, likely from the early 20th century, made of solid wood.

Craftsmanship: This cabinet, along with several similar pieces, was likely crafted by an Armenian carpenter in Jerusalem, renowned for this style.






















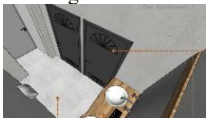



Repurposing: The old cabinet has been redesigned for use as a seating area within the café, integrating its historical value into the new setting.





Furniture and material selection in renovation and adaptive reuse projects plays a central role in preserving the identity of historic buildings. In the transformation of the Al-Zaru House into a cultural café, the interior spaces were handled with sensitivity, aiming to strike a balance between contemporary function and the preservation of architectural and

structural heritage values. Therefore, furniture and material choices were made to reflect the spirit of the place—through the reuse of original historic elements and the design of new furniture that integrates with the architectural character—while serving the functional needs of the space without compromising its cultural and visual essence. Historical Furniture: Preserve the documented old cabinet and other similar pieces.

Usage: Thoughtfully incorporate these historical pieces into the café’s design, emphasizing their historical significance and enhancing the café’s unique character. Table 9 presents the proposed interior design solutions for the Al-Zaru House Café within the Zaru House.

Table 9 Proposed Interior Design Solutions for Al-Zaru House Café in the Zaru House. Source: Author, 2024

Design Element	Existing Condition	Proposed Solution	Design	Material Selection	Functional & Aesthetic Goal
1. Built-in Cabinet Historical	The traditional wooden cabinet deteriorated but is structurally intact. 	Reinforced and reused as a seating area with internal support and cushions. 		Reinforced solid wood, heritage fabric cushions 	Preserve historical value while adding cozy café seating. 
2. Walls Niches and Arched Openings	Architectural niches and arches along interior walls. 	Transformed into built-in seating or shelving with indirect lighting to enhance visual depth. 		Natural stone ledges, lime-washed plaster, integrated LED lighting 	Celebrate architectural heritage while creating functional spaces for seating and display. 
3. Kitchen Design and Storage	Small space with limited storage, existing openings in walls. 	Designed custom cabinets that adapt to wall recesses; used openings as deep storage shelves. 		Painted MDF, wood veneer, metal pulls, ceramic backsplash 	Maximize storage while keeping the kitchen discreet and historically sympathetic. 
4. Bathroom and Wash Basins	Lacked functionality; finishes incompatible with café standards. 	New layout preserving existing wall lines; installed modern, easy-to-clean materials; designed freestanding basins in harmony with the house's texture. 		Microcement, stone basins, copper or brass fixtures, anti-slip tiles 	Ensure hygiene and function while maintaining material authenticity and stylistic coherence. 
5. Interior Doors	Existing doors damaged or missing; uncoordinated with the original design. 	Designed new doors reflecting the "Al-Zaru" concept, with wood carvings inspired by columnal decorative motifs found in the original house 		Solid wood, hand-carved detailing, traditional hinges, and latches 	Strengthen identity through symbolic decorative elements; unify spatial language. 

<p>6. Furniture for Café Zones</p>		<p>Designed modular furniture that adapts to multiple areas; reflects traditional forms yet easy to move or stack.</p> 	<p>Wood, durable fabrics, metal bases</p> 	<p>Accommodate varied usage while reflecting historical aesthetics.</p> 
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3.7. Interior Architecture and Ornamentation Analysis

The design process incorporated: **Analysis of decorative elements**, such as arches and domed ceilings, integrating them into the interior layout. Designing the ceiling plan about plaster details and hidden infrastructure like electrical wiring. Creating **interior elevations and vertical sections** to demonstrate spatial relationships, furniture placement, and decorative treatments. Figure 9 presents a detailed study of the Zaroo House’s interior architecture and ornamentation, focusing on the ceiling plan, interior elevations, and vertical sections.

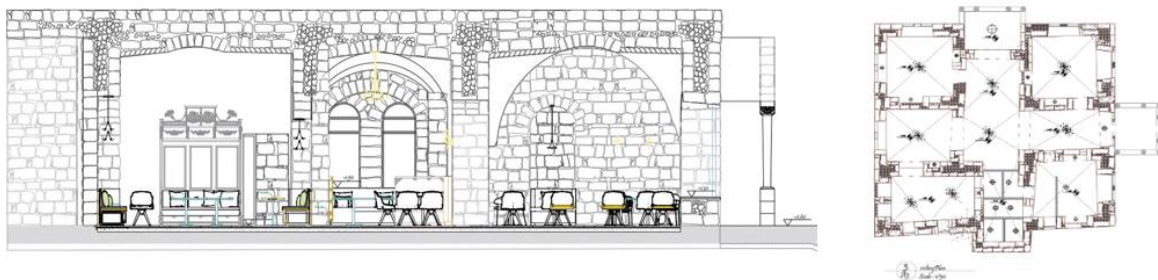


Figure 9 Interior Architecture and Ornamentation Analysis: the ceiling plan, interior elevations, and vertical sections in the Zaroo House. Source: (Author, 2024)

3.8. Flooring and Surface Treatments

The floors were addressed through a study and mapping of the original flooring to assess possibilities for restoration, as well as designing new flooring patterns that echo the original aesthetic in modern formats, particularly for bathrooms and the kitchen. This process was documented in the floor plan number (5), which also includes material suggestions. Figure 10 represents the tile plan and its types in the Zaroo House (Source: Author, 2024). Additionally, Table 10 provides an analysis of the aesthetic and architectural features of the Al-Zaru residential building within the Zaroo House.

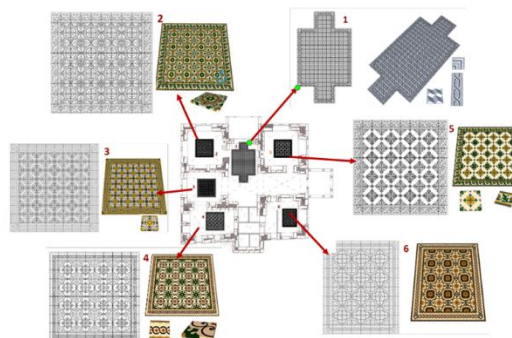
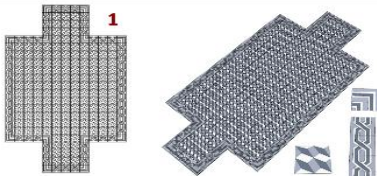

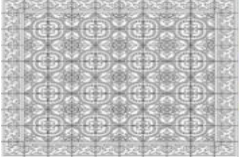


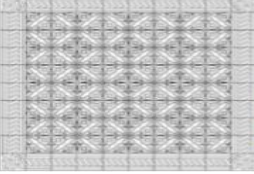


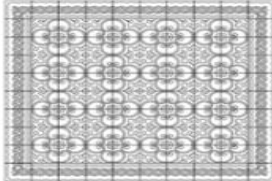


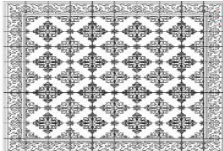


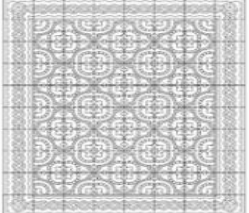




Figure 10 represents the tile plan and its types in the Zaroo House. Source: (Author, 2024)

Table 10: Analysis of the Aesthetic and Architectural Features of the Al-Zaru Residential Building in the Zaroo House. Source: Author, 2024

Redesign proposals	Photos of the original flooring documentation
<p>Corridor 1 at the front entrance.</p> 	
  <p>room 2</p>	
  <p>room3</p>	
  <p>room4</p>	
  <p>room5</p>	
  <p>room6</p>	

3.9. Elevations and Visual Expression

Detailed interior and exterior elevations were developed to illustrate the placement of arches, openings, furniture, and décor elements. Facade drawings were used to emphasize how the design maintains the historical feel while introducing café functionality. Figure 11 shows the cross-section and front elevation views of the proposed Al-Zaru Café design.

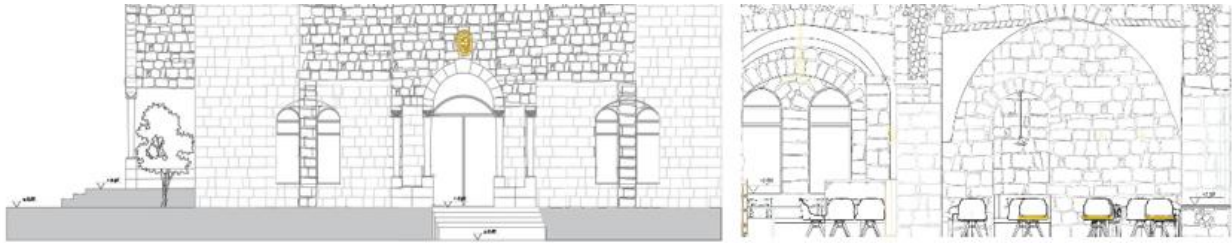


Figure 11 represents a cross-section and front elevation of the proposed design for Al-Zaru Café. Source: Author, 2024

3.10. Challenges, Redesign Strategies, and Adaptive Reuse for the Highlighted Project

The conversion of the historic Al-Zaru House into a heritage café presented various architectural, functional, and environmental challenges, revealed through comprehensive site analysis. These challenges highlight the delicate balance between preserving the building’s original character and adapting it for modern commercial and social uses. Table 11 summarizes the key issues encountered, alongside the proposed redesign strategies and adaptive reuse solutions, organized by architectural aspects. Complementing this, Figure 12 illustrates models of the proposed design for the Al-Zaru Café, showcasing both before and after views of the transformation.

Table 11 challenges, redesign strategies, and adaptive reuse for the highlighted project of transforming an old house into a café: in the Zaroo House. Source: Author, 2024

Category	Challenges and Issues	Redesign Approaches	Adaptive Reuse Strategies
Architectural Features	Maintaining thick walls without weakening them.	Emphasize traditional aesthetics such as arches and central halls.	Use the central hall as a welcoming area or art exhibition space.
Humidity and Insulation	Dealing with traditional elements like arches and domes.	Improve visual distribution while preserving authenticity.	Integrate traditional features into the café’s visual identity.
Infrastructure	Cracks and damage caused by water seepage and humidity.	Apply engineering insulation solutions to protect walls and floors.	Enhance indoor comfort for customers while preserving the building's appearance.
Decoration and Lighting	Problems in sewage and electrical networks.	Treat humidity without concealing architectural character.	Ensure a safe and healthy environment for visitors without compromising historical value.
Space and Design Needs	Difficulty updating systems without damaging old walls.	Redistribute installations in a concealed and efficient way.	Create a visually appealing environment that enhances customer experience.
Future Expansion	Ineffective or outdated lighting.	Use non-invasive modern techniques.	Meet customer needs for comfort, privacy, and functionality (e.g., reading or internet zones).
Cost and Maintenance	The decor is unsuitable for the new function.	Distribute lighting effectively to create a welcoming ambiance.	Enable multifunctional use without harming the historic structure.
Identity and Authenticity	Limited space.	Blend modern décor with historic elements.	Reduce operational costs and improve long-term project sustainability.

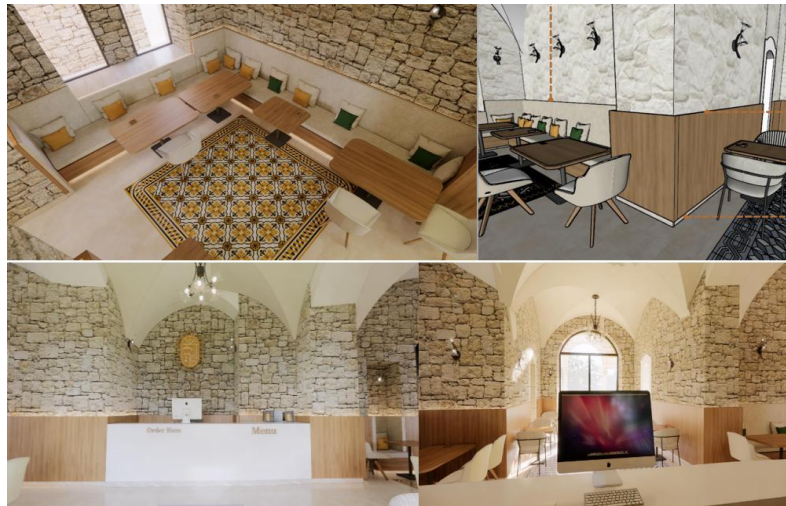


Figure 12 represents models of the proposed designs for the Al-Zaru Café, before and after. Source: Author, 2024

4. Results

The study revealed key insights into the significance of preserving and incorporating the architectural elements of traditional houses within interior design, especially when adapting these spaces into cultural cafés. The approach strongly emphasized sustainability alongside the conservation of both architectural character and material authenticity.

By creatively repurposing historical features—such as transforming an old cabinet into seating and utilizing architectural niches as built-in storage or benches—the project exemplifies practical adaptive reuse. The integration of modern cabinetry designed to fit existing wall openings, combined with the use of locally sourced materials that blend traditional aesthetics with contemporary functionality, reflects a thoughtful design approach that respects both environmental and economic considerations. These strategies not only address functional needs but also uphold cultural heritage, reducing costs and resource consumption while enriching the space’s authenticity.

Key Findings:

- Architectural features like thick walls, internal courtyards, and arches provide substantial aesthetic and practical value when thoughtfully reused.
- Traditional houses often face challenges such as humidity, aging infrastructure, and outdated lighting systems, which demand carefully crafted design solutions.
- Custom-designed furniture plays a crucial role in maintaining the identity of the space, with old cabinets being repurposed and wall niches converted into integrated seating.

Sustainability was woven throughout the design by prioritizing local, recyclable, and low-maintenance materials to minimize environmental impact and enhance durability.

Table 12 presents design and practical recommendations derived from the study’s findings. Figure 13 represents the proposed designs for the Al-Zaru Café before and after the redesign. (Source: Author, 2024)

Table 12 Design and Practical Recommendations Source: Author, 2024

Area	Recommendations
Architectural Features	Preserve original elements (arches, domes, thick walls) and integrate them aesthetically and functionally.
Furniture	Employ adaptive reuse of historical furniture (e.g., transforming cabinets into seating or display units); design new furniture that harmonizes with the architectural context.
Materials	Use natural, local materials (wood, stone, traditional tiles) that ensure durability, easy maintenance, and support heritage continuity.
Sustainability	Integrate sustainable design principles: minimize waste, utilize existing wall openings for storage or lighting, and strengthen rather than replace old elements.
Sanitary Facilities	Design modern, easy-to-clean bathrooms and washbasins that provide user comfort while blending with the overall style.
Doors and Decorative Elements	Create wooden doors inspired by the home’s identity (Bayt Al-Zaru) and its column ornamentation, reinforcing visual and cultural identity.
Challenges	Plan and estimate costs carefully, comply with local regulations, and implement structural reinforcements to ensure building safety.
Area	Recommendations
Architectural Features	Preserve original elements (arches, domes, thick walls) and integrate them aesthetically and functionally.
Furniture	Employ adaptive reuse of historical furniture (e.g., transforming cabinets into seating or display units); design new furniture that harmonizes with the architectural context.



Figure 13 represents the proposed designs for the Al-Zaru Café before and after the redesign. Source: Author, 2024

5. Recommendations:

A. General Strategic Recommendations

- **Preserve Heritage Identity:** Emphasize the preservation of the building’s original features, forms, and character to reinforce the Palestinian cultural identity.
- **Enhance Cultural Value:** Integrate traditional aesthetics and promote local cuisine and crafts to reinforce cultural authenticity and attract tourism.
- **Community Involvement:** Engage local artisans and the wider community through events and programs that connect people to the cultural significance of the place.

- Promote Sustainability: Apply principles of adaptive reuse, selecting durable, low-maintenance, and locally sourced materials to reduce environmental impact.

B. Architectural and Technical Recommendations

- Address Humidity Issues: Install moisture barriers and use breathable, water-resistant plasters and finishes to protect against water infiltration and mold.
- Upgrade Infrastructure: Modernize electrical and sewage systems to meet current safety and functionality standards.
- Structural Reinforcement: Ensure the structural integrity of walls, ceilings, and roofs through targeted reinforcement while maintaining historical authenticity.
- Optimize Lighting and Layout: Redistribute lighting and seating to improve spatial efficiency, ambiance, and customer comfort.

C. Interior Design and Functional Recommendations

- Maintain Design Consistency: Adopt a coherent interior design theme inspired by the house's historical features, including reused furniture and decorative elements.
- Furniture Adaptation: Repurpose historical furniture (such as the old cabinet) into seating or display units, combining function with heritage preservation.
- Custom Cabinetry: Design new storage units that integrate with existing architectural features, such as wall niches or recesses.
- Improve Ventilation and Comfort: Ensure natural airflow where possible, and include modern ventilation systems to enhance user experience.
- Routine Maintenance Plan: Establish regular schedules for inspecting and maintaining building elements, furniture, and finishes to ensure long-term sustainability.
- Cost-Efficient Material Use: Choose high-quality, affordable materials for flooring, finishes, and built-ins, ensuring both durability and visual harmony.
- Plan for Expansion: Strategically utilize underused areas to allow for future additions (e.g., kitchens, service zones, or multipurpose spaces).
- Consult Experts: Involve conservation architects, structural engineers, and heritage specialists to maintain authenticity and ensure the success of the project.

6. Conclusion and Broader Implications

This study highlights the potential of adaptive reuse as a strategic tool in preserving cultural identity while revitalizing historic urban areas. By integrating traditional architectural and decorative elements into contemporary interior functions—such as transforming historical dwellings into cafés—this research demonstrates a viable path for sustainable development that respects heritage. The findings underscore how thoughtful reuse strategies can mitigate environmental impact, reduce renovation costs, and promote economic opportunities through tourism and local engagement.

At a broader level, the outcomes of this case study support urban policy directions that prioritize heritage conservation within development frameworks. Policymakers are encouraged to adopt flexible regulations that facilitate the adaptive reuse of historic buildings while ensuring structural safety and cultural authenticity. Moreover, the study advocates for community-based heritage planning that actively involves local artisans, residents, and institutions in shaping the future of historic neighborhoods. Such inclusive approaches not only safeguard physical structures but also reinforce collective memory and social cohesion, ensuring that heritage remains a living, dynamic component of the urban fabric.

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Ethics approval.

This study was conducted independently and did not involve any procedures requiring formal institutional ethics approval. All participants were informed about the nature of the research and participated voluntarily. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all data were gathered anonymously. The research was carried out by recognized ethical standards and posed no risk to participants.

Conflict of interest.

The author(s) declare that there is no competing interest.

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- Mr. and Mrs. Mona Abu Asneina - Yasser Duweik, Owners of Café Bouvardio, February 2024
- Engineer Hatem Al-Muhtasib, Project Engineer, February 2024.