

Evaluation of Adopting Traditional Saudi Architecture Elements in Designing contemporary Cafes.

تقييم تبني عناصر التراث المعماري السعودي في تصميم المقاهي المعاصرة

DOI 10.57194 / 2351 - 005 - 002 - 008

Alaa Mohammed Shatwan

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6887-341X>

ashatwan@u.j.edu.sa

(Associate Professor), Interior Design Department, College of Art and Design, University of Jeddah, Jeddah City, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

الاء محمد شطوان

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6887-341X>

ashatwan@u.j.edu.sa

(أستاذ مشارك)، قسم التصميم الداخلي، كلية التصميم والفنون، جامعة جدة، جدة، المملكة العربية السعودية.

Article No رقم البحث

2025 - 40

Received الاستقبال

10 September 2025

Accepted القبول

1 November 2025

Published النشر

December 2025

Abstract

In the face of rapid urbanization, architecture is following global design trends, often at the expense of local cultural and architectural heritage. Despite the rich traditions and distinct identities embedded in vernacular and historical architecture, there remains a significant lack of scholarly and practical investigation into how traditional Saudi architecture elements can be meaningfully reflected in contemporary cafes or restaurant. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how the vocabulary of traditional Saudi Arabia is applied in contemporary cafés and restaurants in Saudi Arabia to root heritage and country identity. This study applied a descriptive analytical method. Eight cafes and restaurants were selected in four major cities from four regions of Saudi Arabia, which are Riyadh, Jeddah, Aba, and Khobar. Interviews with six experts were conducted to discuss their points of view concerning the level of success in reflecting Saudi traditional architecture elements in contemporary space. The findings strongly reveal that reflecting traditional Saudi architecture in contemporary cafés and restaurants is not majorly considered as only a few contemporary cafés were found to do so. The results also show that some cafés succeeded at reflecting traditional architecture, while others relied mainly on placing traditional elements without studying the overall space design and concept. The study recommends that more attention be given to the importance of reflecting traditional design elements in contemporary commercial and tourist spaces to help root heritage by providing guidebook for this.

Keywords

Traditional Architecture Vocabulary, Shape, Pattern, contemporary café design, abstraction.

المخلص

في ظل التسارع الكبير في وتيرة التوسع العمراني، أصبحت العمارة تتبع الاتجاهات العالمية في التصميم، وغالبًا ما يكون ذلك على حساب التراث الثقافي والمعماري المحلي. وعلى الرغم من أن التراث العمراني يحمل في طياته هوية ثقافية غنية ومتميزة، إلا أن هناك نقضا ملحوظا في الدراسات الأكاديمية والعملية التي تبحث في كيفية تطبيق عناصر التراث المعماري السعودي بشكل هادف في تصميم المقاهي والمطاعم المعاصرة. لذلك تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف كيفية تطبيق مفردات التراث المعماري السعودي في المقاهي والمطاعم المعاصرة في المملكة العربية السعودية لترسيخ التراث والهوية الوطنية. استخدم البحث المنهج الوصفي التحليلي. حيث تم اختيار ثمانية مقاهي ومطاعم في أربع مدن رئيسية في المملكة العربية السعودية، وهي الرياض، جدة، أبها والخبر، وأجريت مقابلات مع ستة خبراء لمناقشة وجهات نظرهم لقياس مستوى النجاح في تطبيق عناصر التراث المعماري السعودي في المباني المعاصرة. استنتج البحث أن تطبيق عناصر التراث المعماري السعودي في المقاهي والمطاعم المعاصرة لا يحظى بالاهتمام الكبير، حيث وُجد عدد قليل فقط من المقاهي المعاصرة التي تعكس في تصميمها التراث المعماري السعودي بطرق بتصاميم معاصرة. كما تُظهر النتائج أن بعض المقاهي نجحت في عكس التراث المعماري السعودي، بينما اعتمد البعض الآخر بشكل أساسي على وضع العناصر التراثية دون دراسة التصميم العام للفرغ الداخلي. بذلك توصي الدراسة بضرورة الاهتمام بأهمية عكس عناصر التراث المعماري السعودي في المساحات التجارية والسياحية المعاصرة للمساعدة في تجذير التراث من خلال توفير دليل إرشادي لذلك.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

مفردات التراث المعماري السعودي، الشكل، النقوش، تصميم المقاهي المعاصرة، التجريد

Introduction

One of the axes of Saudi Vision is “Vibrant community,” which includes “Building a vibrant society is one of the pillars of Saudi Vision 2030, which seeks to provide well-being and prosperity for citizens, and increase their pride in their extended history and heritage, their strong, established roots, and their unique cultural identity” (Vision, 2025). This comprehensive urban framework (Architecture 2025) aims to recognize and preserve the Kingdom’s unique architectural diversity, enhancing it through design regulations and guidelines. The goal is to strike a balance between authenticity and modernity, guiding the architectural and urban design process towards contemporary solutions that reflect the Kingdom’s cultural and aesthetic heritage. This approach ultimately fosters the creation of a modern urban environment that remains deeply connected to the local identity. Additionally, Commission (2025) has many projects to save heritage, and one of these aims to promote and preserve Saudi heritage. This initiative focuses on systematically documenting and classifying traditional decorative elements to publish and disseminate them in line with the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030. Some literature reviews the importance of cultural identity in contemporary buildings in Saudi Arabia, such as those that investigated the reflection of cultural identity in a two-football stadium in Saudi Arabia. He found that. The replication of heritage combined with the introduction of contemporary elements can, over time, undermine its authenticity and compromise its distinct identity. However, when approached with thoughtful balance, such inspiration can enhance the longevity of heritage while preserving its cultural integrity and significance Also, a recent study highlights the importance of purple economic for saving culture identity in Saudi Arabia as purple economy strategic assets focuses mainly on cultural, this help countries to use their cultural heritage in the global markets to achieve competitive excellence (Alkhozaim, 2025). However, the purple economy focuses mainly on Arts, Local creative skills, and traditional dance to attract tourism. This shows the significant importance of reflecting traditional architectural elements in contemporary buildings, especially those who is visited by tourists. Little research has investigated the current situation of traditional architecture’s implementation in contemporary café



or restaurant buildings. Therefore, the followings demonstrate the research objectives:

- Illustrate the selected group of contemporary cafés and restaurants that reflect traditional Saudi architecture and motifs in their interior space and exterior facade.
- Analyzing the most common vocabulary of traditional Saudi applied in contemporary cafés, such as (Colour, Shapes, Pattern, Material, and Architecture Elements).
- Analyse experts' evaluation level of success regarding the vocabulary of traditional Saudis in contemporary cafés.
- Investigate the experts' perspectives regarding the abstraction of this vocabulary and elaborate on whether space succeeds in drawing inspiration from tradition.
- Discuss experts' comments and recommendations regarding the adoption of traditional Saudi architecture vocabulary in selected cafés.

Research Questions

Main Question

- How is the vocabulary of traditional Saudi applied in contemporary cafés?

Sub-Questions

- What is the most common vocabulary of traditional Saudi applied in contemporary cafés?
- How do experts evaluate the level of success regarding the vocabulary of traditional Saudis in contemporary cafés?
- What are experts' perspectives regarding the abstraction of this vocabulary?
- What are experts' comments and recommendations regarding the adoption of traditional Saudi architecture vocabulary in contemporary cafés?

Research Significance

- Highlights the importance of reflecting the vocabulary of traditional Saudi in contemporary commonly used spaces.
- Contributes to evaluating the level of success of reflecting traditional Saudi design elements in contemporary spaces

Research Hypothesis

- There are significant differences in the level of success of applying the Saudi traditional elements in contemporary cafes.
- The more use of different traditional elements in one café, the lower the level of success in abstraction.

Research Limitation

- Geographical Location:

The study is limited to 4 major cities in Saudi Arabia: Riyadh, Khobar, Jeddah, and Abha.

- Case study Limitations:

Although the number of cafes and restaurants is very high in Saudi Arabia, only eight were selected for the study because the aim is to analyze the reflection of traditional vocabulary in contemporary cafes and restaurants. This does not mean that these are the only available cafes, but others may not be at the level of the investigation needed in this study, as shown in Fig.1.



Fig. 1 Location of selected cafes in Saudi map, Source: (Architecture, 2025).



Literature Review

Traditional Architecture

Heritage has several definitions. For instance, it is defined as something handed down from the past, such as an art tradition. In other words, heritage encompasses customs, traditions, literature, values, culture, and knowledge inherited from previous generations (Abouelela, 2019). Similarly, El-Meligy (2014) those who state that heritage contains books and buildings, which are considered the most valuable legacy left to generations. The author asserts that architecture is “the mother of the arts,” meaning it is a mirror of society, culture, and traditions. Also, other studies claim that Architectural heritage is widely recognized as a vital aspect in shaping and representing a community’s identity (Al-Talbi & Al-Zaidi, 2019; Alzahrani, 2022). Alzahrani (2022) goes on to assert that architecture is part of identity and conveys messages. These messages depend on various factors, such as traditions and societal knowledge. This makes architecture, façade design, and interior design evident expressions of culture in each country.

Contemporary Architecture and Regional Identity

The famous book “Architecture, Power and National Identity” argued that modern architecture in Arab countries clearly and directly reflects Western influence, as large projects were assigned to international firms to design and execute without local participation (Vale, 2014). Also, studies across different countries have discussed the lack of national heritage identity in modern architecture, driven by technological developments and by inspiration from Western architecture. For instance, in Cairo, new buildings lack an association with the city (Ibrheem, 2019). Another study in Egypt also claimed that globalisation was the reason for the lack of identity in some building architecture in the late 20th century (Salamah, 2022). This is in agreement with what was noted: in some Arab countries, architects were influenced by Western architecture, with little attention given to the architectural heritage of a specific period, until a new focus emerged: returning to vernacular architecture and reflecting it in new buildings. In Saudi Arabia, contemporary architecture became a trend in the 1980s

(Alzahrani, 2022). In 2021, the King Salman Urban Charter was published by the Ministry of Culture to encourage architects to apply the charter's six values in their new designs (ADC, 2021; Alobailan, 2022). The six values are originality, continuity, human centrality, liveability, innovation, and sustainability (ADC, 2021).

Adoption of Traditional Architecture in Contemporary Buildings

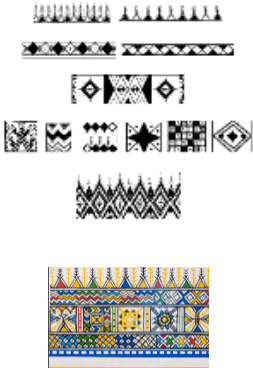
To achieve the aim of reflecting traditional architectural design elements in new buildings in Saudi Arabia, it is important to highlight the importance of this when teaching new architecture and interior design students who are graduating, so that they care about reflecting tradition in new designs. The King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals has begun developing students' skills to enhance vernacular architecture. Students are now able to study courses focused on the architecture of Saudi Arabia (Al-Qawasmi, 2015). Dr. AL-Qawasmi investigated students' awareness of vernacular architecture through a questionnaire administered during the period 2013 - 2014. He found a significant improvement in the students' understanding of this point. He also found that the students had started to adapt traditional designs into contemporary spaces. It is essential to note that festivals such as Alejandria, national day, and establishment day also have major rules and further enhance the value of traditional architecture through media coverage. In the education field, other studies have investigated the importance of incorporating traditional arts and architectural vocabulary to root Saudi identity. For instance, Alghamdi (2017) discussed the need to teach art students ways to reflect their country's identity through artwork. The author found that this contributes to the production of new paintings that highlight the traditional architectural vocabulary of Al-Baha city, such as Alqatt.

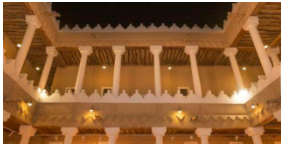
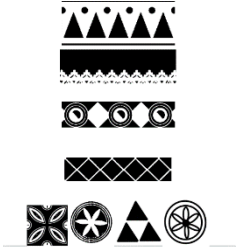
When using traditional decoration elements in contemporary interior design, the focus is mainly on absorbing their essence. It also helps in transferring the historical imprint to new building decorations. However, it is essential to note that when implementing traditional decorative designs in new buildings, designers must adapt to new conditions to enhance comfort and beauty. A previous study discusses how

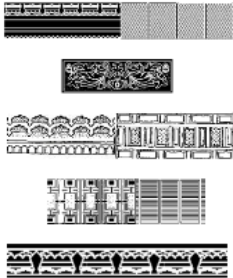
to incorporate traditional decorative elements into contemporary interior design to achieve this. The study clarifies that traditional, beautiful humanistic meaning should be reflected in buildings, helping to ensure their appreciation and value (Zhang, 2021). This can be reflected either directly or by abstracting the traditional architectural vocabulary into new designs (Abdelrahman, 2012). Rooting architecture in heritage is essential, as it shows that the country cares about preserving its heritage for future generations to learn from (Albahnasi, 2003). A study by Othman (2019) investigated how traditional artistic treatments in Farasan can be used as a source of modern designs in tourist buildings. The study found that traditional elements of Farasan architecture help to enhance architectural facades. It can also be used for furnishing fabrics. Similarly, another study discussed the importance of analysing the aesthetic aspects of vernacular architecture to root it in contemporary architecture in Yaman. The author goes on to assert that achieving this can be done by analysing art symbols. This can link the new with its roots (Ishaq, 2010). Other studies, such as those by Ibrheem (2019) and, suggest that the use of vocabulary from traditional architecture and the implementation of traditional architectural shapes, ornaments, patterns, and forms in new buildings will contribute to preserving the country's identity and heritage.

Regarding the value of Saudi heritage ornaments, the study by Abu Elkeir (2023) investigated the idea of reflecting traditional design elements in contemporary buildings through the use of the laser drilling technique to print on glass to decorate building facades. A study by examined the architectural identity in the design of two stadiums in Saudi Arabia by analysing "five main areas: design concept, shape and form, construction technology, the materials used, and relationship with the surrounding". The study found that the design of King Fahd International Stadium was better at expressing architectural identity across five main areas, despite being built in 1985.

Table. 1 The Saudi Architecture elements and Interior patterns.

Region	Name and Image of Architecture Element	Name and Image of Art and Pattern
North Region	 Source: (Architecture, 2025)	Sadu  (Alajaji & Alfulaij, 2019)
South Region Asir	 (MOCHeritage, 2023)	Al Qatt  (alghammas, 2022) (MOCHeritage, 2023)

Region	Name and Image of Architecture Element	Name and Image of Art and Pattern
Central Region Najd	Alzaraneeq” and “Alsharf	
		
	(Alobailan, 2022)	
		
	(MOCHeritage, 2023)	
	Tringle Shape	
		
	Najd Door	
		
	Source: (Architecture, 2025)	
		Najdi Doors
		
		(alghammas, 2022)

Region	Name and Image of Architecture Element	Name and Image of Art and Pattern
Western Region Hijaz	 (MOCHeritage, 2023)	 Roshan (alghammas, 2022)
Eastern Region Al-chsa	 Kamar (MOCHeritage, 2023)  (alghammas, 2022)	 Stucco Motifs in Al- Ahsa(alghammas, 2022)

Traditional Architecture Identity

Aboueleta (2019) suggests that interior design has a vital role in preserving heritage by creating new designs inspired by Saudi heritage. Decorative elements are a combination of many elements such as patterns, shapes, and colours. This is an agreement with Al-Assadi and Al-Dewachi (2020) those who state that architectural identity can be expressed in several features, such as architectural elements, materials, moulding, and decorative elements. In Saudi Arabia, these elements vary from one region to another, as shown in Table 1. It indicates that Sadu is a common form of art in the interior design of the North region of Saudi Arabia. It is wool knitting that contains specific shapes such as triangles and lines (Alajaji & Alfulaij, 2019). In Asir, a famous pattern is called Al-qatt, a colourful geometric pattern on the middle of interior walls.

UNESCO (The National World Heritage) recognised it in 2017. Many studies have investigated Alqatt. Abouelela (2019) Studied the idea of implementing Al-qatt in residential interior design. She found that, to apply Al-qatt, it is essential to analyze its modules, drawing details, and colours. This will help when creating new designs for the interior design of a residence. Table 1 also shows that in Najd, one of the famous wall designs involves Alzaraneeq and Alsharf, referring to a belt above the roof jacket. It involves graduated triangles, with the base pointing downwards. The tringles are painted with stucco motifs (Ali, 2024; Alobailan, 2022). In Hijaz, Roshan is the most common architectural element: a wooden window with a geometric pattern. Indeed, this shows that Saudi Arabia has a vibrant, unique architectural tradition that should be reflected in contemporary design to ensure its sustainability. Many international studies argue that new buildings should draw on the timeless lessons of traditional architecture by reflecting its principles across cultural, craft, and built environments (Xeumei & Manteghi, 2024). Analysing Saudi traditional designs reveals four major design elements: shape, pattern, colour, and material. These elements can be summarized as the vocabulary to be used in this study to investigate the adoption of Saudi Traditional architecture in contemporary cafés, to achieve the study's results. This vocabulary enhances traditional architecture's identity, as shown in Fig. 2.

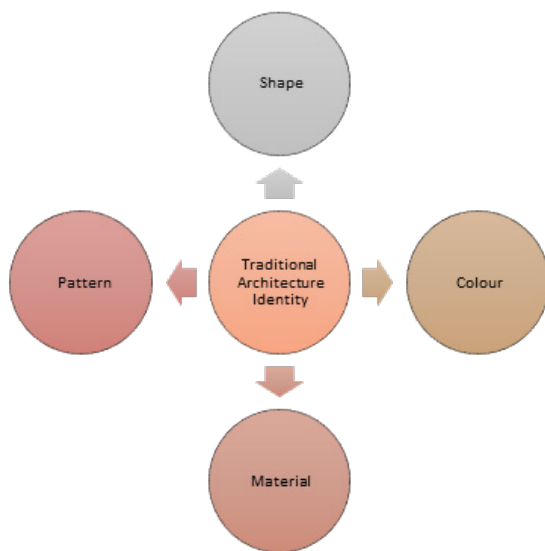


Fig. 2 The vocabulary of Saudi traditional architectural elements, source:
(Author, 2025)

Methodology

The study conducted 5 stages in order to achieve the study aim as shown in Figure.3.

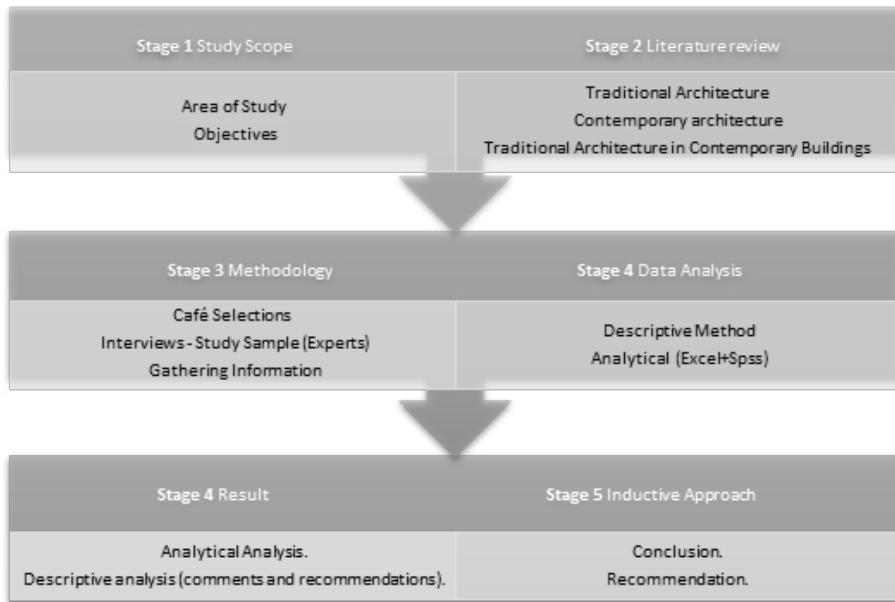


Fig.3 Study Stages. Source: Author (2025).

The study focuses on contemporary cafés, which have become a social attraction in Saudi Arabia. People from different nationalities visit cafes in Saudi Arabia as an important attraction (Maspul & Almalki, 2023). It is important to note that in Saudi Arabia, coffee shops were commonplace for social gatherings. In the past, it was called “Qahwa”, which means coffee (Maspul, 2023). Recently, the Coffee business expanded in Saudi Arabia, becoming a platform for entrepreneurship (Maspul & Almalki, 2023).

A case study was used because it is considered a viable tool for collecting data in a descriptive-analytical method. To select the sample, a survey was conducted of cafés in the four major cities of the four regions of Saudi Arabia. The cities were Riyadh,

Jeddah, Aba, and Khobar. These cities were selected for many reasons. First, they are major cities in the country. Second, they contain a high population. Third, they have a high number of contemporary cafés. The selected cafes were chosen after a pilot trip to visit different cafes and identify those that blend traditional architecture with modern design. Cafés or restaurants that reflect traditional architecture but do not incorporate contemporary design were eliminated. Therefore, only eight cafés and restaurants were selected as the final sample. It is important to note that the researcher took the photos in the paper, and some were from Google Maps, since the pictures by the author cannot be published. There were many people in the café during the visits, and they preferred no photos be taken. The images will be analysed to determine whether traditional designs are reflected and, if so, how. Interviews with six academics who were professionals in the field of Saudi architectural heritage or Heritage specialists in Museums. They were interviewed to discuss their points of view as experts, rating the level of success in reflecting Saudi traditional designs in contemporary restaurants and cafés by analysing the vocabulary discussed above. Interviews were conducted online. Each interview took one hour. Interview questions were divided into two types: structured and open-ended.

Study Sample

A total of 8 cafés and restaurants were selected for the study, forming the study sample. The interview sample was chosen from six academics and specialists in Saudi traditional Heritage who work at Saudi Universities and Museums. Studies show that data saturation in qualitative research can be achieved with as few as 6–12 participants to obtain in-depth insight (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Guest et al., 2006). Studies show that data saturation in qualitative research can be achieved with as few as 6–12 participants to obtain in-depth insight (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Guest et al., 2006).

Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study used Excel. Excel helped the researcher to categorise, count, and organise the number of cafés that discussed specific designs or gave similar answers. The analysis was performed in five steps, as follows:

- First: To illustrate the number of cafés and restaurants that reflect traditional designs in a contemporary setting.
- Second: To investigate the most common traditional designs reflected in modern contemporary cafés.
- Third: To discuss experts' evaluation for the level of success regarding implementation of traditional Saudi architecture vocabulary, such as patterns, shape, colours, rhythm, and material, and how they are abstracted in contemporary cafés and restaurants to root heritage and country identity.
- Fourth: To analyse experts' comments and recommendations regarding methods used in reflecting traditional designs in interior or exterior, and whether space design succeeds in this adoption.

Data were analysed in two stages; the first stage involved analysing the direct 5-chart questions given to experts. Then, the second stage analyzes data descriptively from in-depth interviews with experts to get more insight into their comments and recommendations on eight cafes.

Findings and discussion

The study found that the number of contemporary cafés or restaurants reflecting traditional designs was small, which was where the study was applied. Only one or two reflected the tradition of a specific region without mixing. This shows that no specific traditional region is commonly used. It is important to note that the Najd and Asir traditional design elements were used more often than others, as shown in Table 2. To answer the research question about the most common vocabulary of traditional Saudi applied in contemporary cafés, Table 2 shows that colour is the most common vocabulary adopted in 8 out of 8 selected cafes, followed by shape in 7 cafes. Then, the pattern, material, and architectural elements in 5 cafes. The table shows that two



cafés in Riyadh and one in Jeddah reflect Najd shapes and architectural elements in their design. Alqatt pattern from Asir was reflected in two cafés, one in Abaha and one in Jeddah. The wooden Hijaz window was reflected in two cafes in Jeddah. However, traditional architecture in the north region and in Al-ehsa was less adopted in the case studies. Also, it is realised that only the café in Jeddah adopts the traditional architecture from several areas such as Najd, and Asir, in addition to Hejaz, where it is located. However, all other cafes adopt the traditional architecture of their location. The study found that the abstraction of conventional elements was not considered in some cafés.

Table 2. The number of traditional Saudi design vocabulary used in modern cafes.

	North Region				Asir				Najd				Hijaz				Al-Ehsa				Total Number of elements used			
	*C	S	P	M	A	C	S	P	M	A	C	S	P	M	A	C	S	P	M	A				
Dar Al-Hana						✓		✓						✓			✓							3
Fasilah											✓	✓	✓		✓	✓								5
Kulasah	✓	✓									✓							✓						2
Hentiah												✓										✓		
Sadaf						✓		✓	✓															3
Mound																		✓			✓			2
Toqa											✓	✓	✓	✓										4
Asib			✓								✓	✓			✓									4

*The Letters in the second row represent the following words (C-Colour, S-Shapes, P-Pattern, M-Material, A-Architecture Elements).

To analyse whether the café designs succeeded in reflecting traditional design elements and principles in a modern space, photos of the selected café were displayed for experts to rate. The experts were asked if the design succeeded in reflecting

traditional design in a contemporary space through colour, pattern, abstraction, rhythm, and material. According to Attiah (2024) , colour is an essential part of conventional pattern and design. She goes on to assert that studying colour is mandatory when discussing new products of this traditional craft. Therefore, the first design element that was investigated in this study was colour. Figure 4 illustrates the experts' assessment of whether the design succeeded in reflecting the colour of traditional designs. It shows that Toqa café in Riyadh got the highest percentage with 66.6 %, as it reflected the sandy colour that was famous in traditional Najd architecture, followed by Sadaf with 50 %. Sadaf used brown and beige colours from stone in the traditional heritage of Aisir, but it also used them in some parts where they reflect Alqatt patterns, while Alqatt is famous for its mix of colours. Then Hentiah and Mound had a similar percentage of 33.3 %.

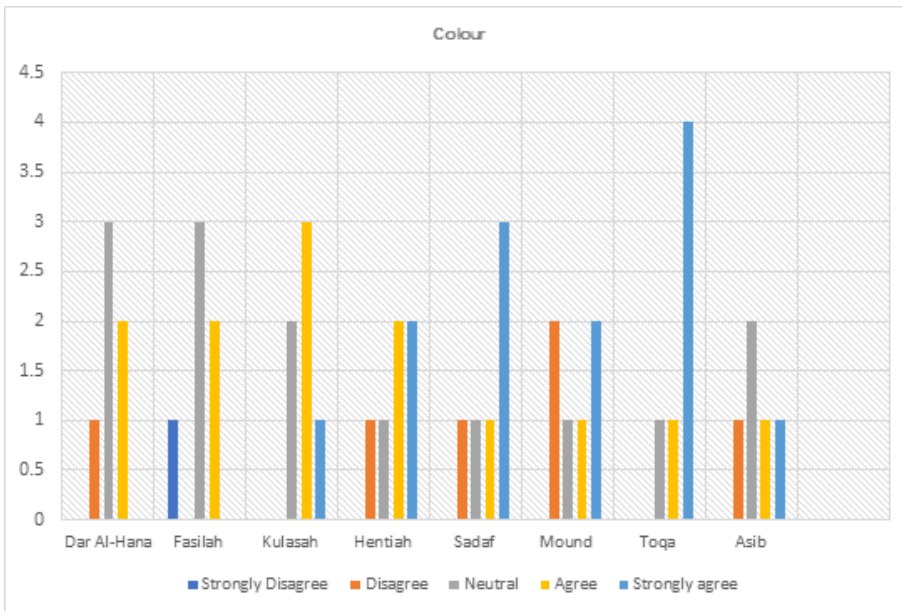


Figure.4 illustrates the experts' evaluation of colour reflection from traditional Saudi design in selected cafes.

The second design element investigated is the pattern. The pattern is found in the traditional architecture and interior design of many regions of Saudi Arabia. For

instance, Saudi Arabia, in the northern region, is used in interior furniture and clothing (Al Jasser, 2024). Alqatt, in the South region, is used as a decorative wall design. These patterns reflect the cultural identity of the areas, as Rabie and Rizq (2018) discussed the importance of the Sadu fabric in enriching tourism in Saudi Arabia. They also assert the importance of heritage designs, such as Sadu, in modern furnishings and decorative pieces to enhance heritage tourism and national identity. The researcher goes on to argue that this will increase opportunities to reflect traditional design in modern innovations. This is also evident in Al-Ghamdi's (2023) study, which presents a new vision for contemporary visual design inspired by conventional Sadu designs in terms of patterns, colours, and shapes.

Additionally, Al-Sharif and Al-Harbi (2023) presented new designs for Sadu, taking into consideration the colour and pattern details. To reflect traditional design in contemporary space, new technology is a powerful tool. AutoCAD helps architects and designers create very detailed patterns, such as Al-qatt, quickly and easily, which was time-consuming when done manually. It has been used in other fields such as textile printing, providing great result (Alfawaz, 2024). In this study, the second investigated design element was patterns. It was found that Sadu was absent in most of the studied cafés. However, Al-qatt from Asir, Alzaraneeq, and Alsharf from Najd were found in greater numbers. It was found that the majority of participants (83.3 %) strongly agreed that Toqa café succeeded in reflecting the Alzaraneeq and Alsharf from the Najd region. The pattern is applied to the wall, tables, and plates. Hentiah and Sadaf succeeded in only 33.3 % for each. On the other hand, 66.6 % strongly disagreed that Dar Al-hana and Sadaf succeeded in reflecting the Al-qatt pattern as shown in Figure 5. Toqa café continues to lead with 83.3 % strongly agreeing that the café design succeeds in reflecting rhythm, followed by Sadaf café with 66.6 %, as shown in Figure 6.

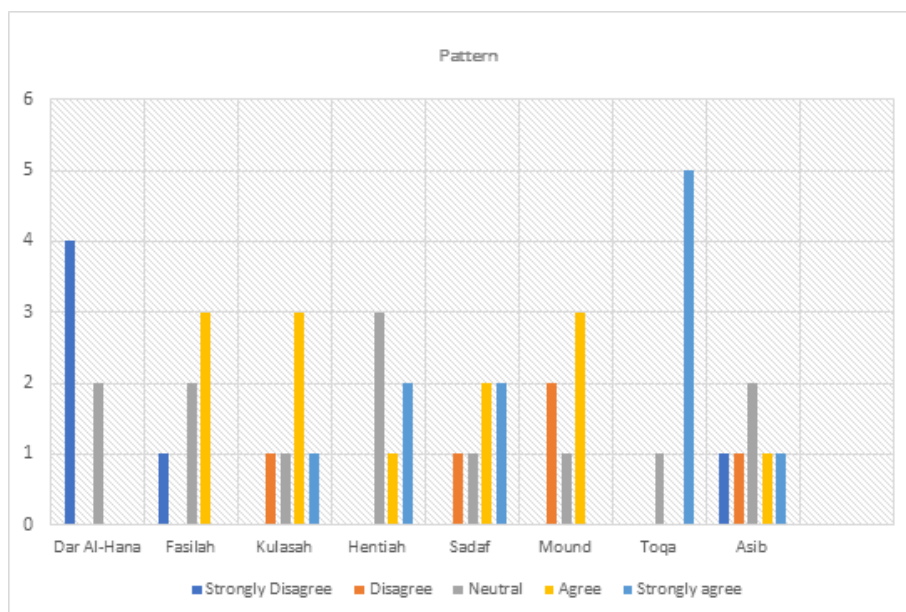


Figure.5 illustrates the experts' evaluation of pattern reflection from traditional Saudi design in selected cafes.

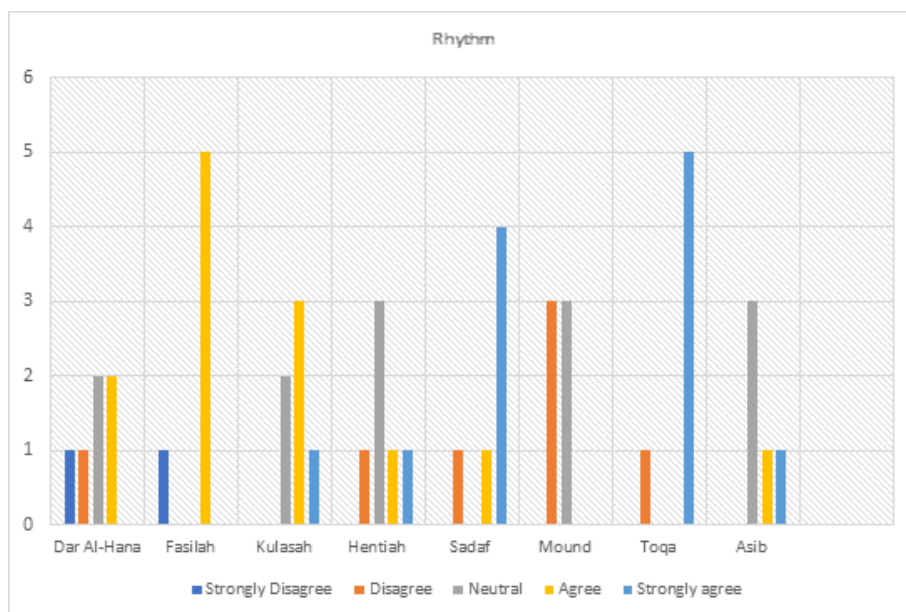


Figure.6 illustrates the experts' evaluation of Rhythm reflection from traditional Saudi design in selected cafes.



Regarding material selection, it is important to note that the materials used in different periods reflect the values and culture of those periods (Jones et al., 2017). In Saudi Arabia, each region uses materials differently. For instance, Wood windows, “Roshan” coral stone for building walls were standard in Hijaz (Baik, 2023). However, mud and Noura were common in Najd (Alnaim, 2023). In this study, it is found that T café continues at 83.3 %, then A and S are both at 50 % strongly agree on the success of using traditional materials. Then, Fasilah and Kulasah got 37 % agreement as shown in Figure 7. It is essential to investigate whether the traditional elements were abstracted when reflected in the new design. This is because abstraction from architectural heritage to contemporary design creates a sense of emotional belonging between the community and the environment. In Western architecture, abstraction involves simplifying shapes while considering proportions. They do not prefer using patterns in abstractions.

On the other hand, in Arabian architecture, content and form is considered with a focus on invisible spiritual aesthetics. They also prefer using patterns in modern abstraction (Fathi, 2017). In this study, experts evaluate abstraction as the process of simplifying details from a traditional pattern. Most experts agreed that the Kulasah café abstracted traditional elements by 83.3 %, followed by Toqa and Asib with 66.6 %. For Fasilah, Sadaf, and Mound, only 33.3 % of experts agreed that they used good inspiration, as shown in Fig.8. Participants highlighted the importance of considering abstraction and rhythm in the design stage of space, as it enhances the creativity level. Finally, the participants were asked if the café design succeeded at drawing inspiration from the chosen traditional region. It was found that Toqa and Sadaf got the highest percentage with 83.3 %, followed by Hulasah, Asib, and Dar-Alhana at 66.6 %. Fasilah and Mound got 33.3, as shown in Figure 9.

In conclusion, Table 3 shows a final comparison between eight cafes according to experts' evaluations. It shows that there is a statistically significant difference in pattern, rhythm, and abstraction with P values of 0.02, 0.02, and 0.002, respectively. The data compares eight cafés across six aesthetic criteria: material, color, pattern, rhythm, inspiration from the region, and abstraction. The expression is based on experts' ratings. Statistical analysis reveals significant differences among the cafés in pattern, rhythm, and abstract expression ($p < 0.05$), with abstract expression showing the most pronounced variation ($p = 0.002$). Additionally, pattern and rhythm are statistically significant with P values of 0.02 and 0.02, respectively. Toqa Café consistently received the highest scores across all categories, indicating a strong and cohesive design appeal. Overall, while some elements like material and color showed no significant variation between cafés, key experiential aspects such as patterning and rhythm played a notable role in distinguishing the design quality and regional expression of most cafés.

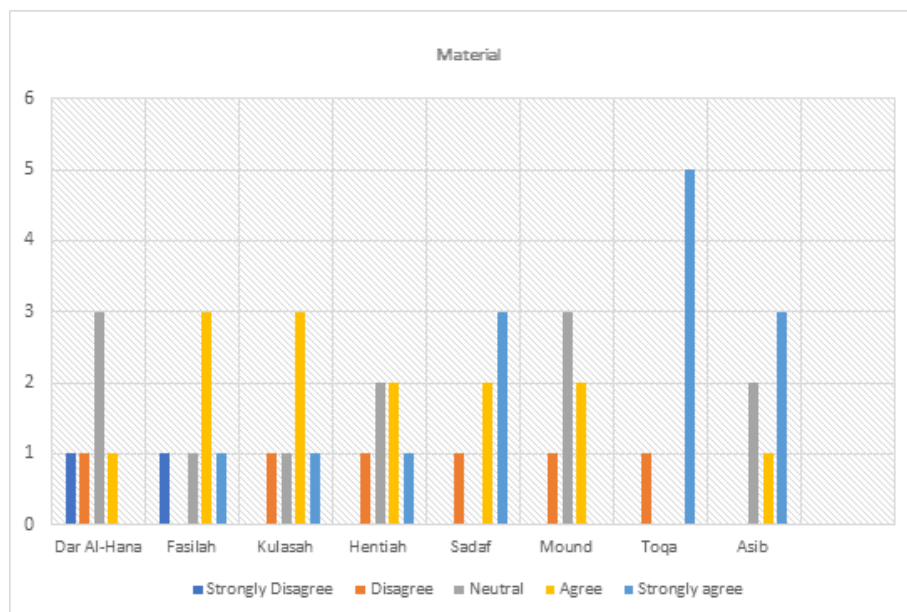


Figure.7 illustrates the experts' evaluation of material reflection from traditional Saudi design in selected cafes.

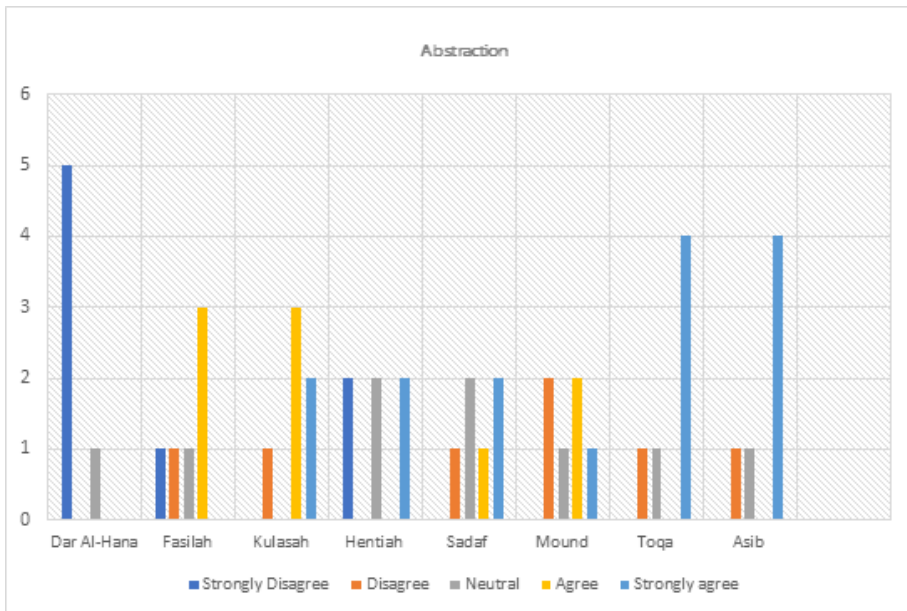


Figure.8 illustrates the experts' evaluation of abstraction reflection from traditional Saudi design in selected cafes.

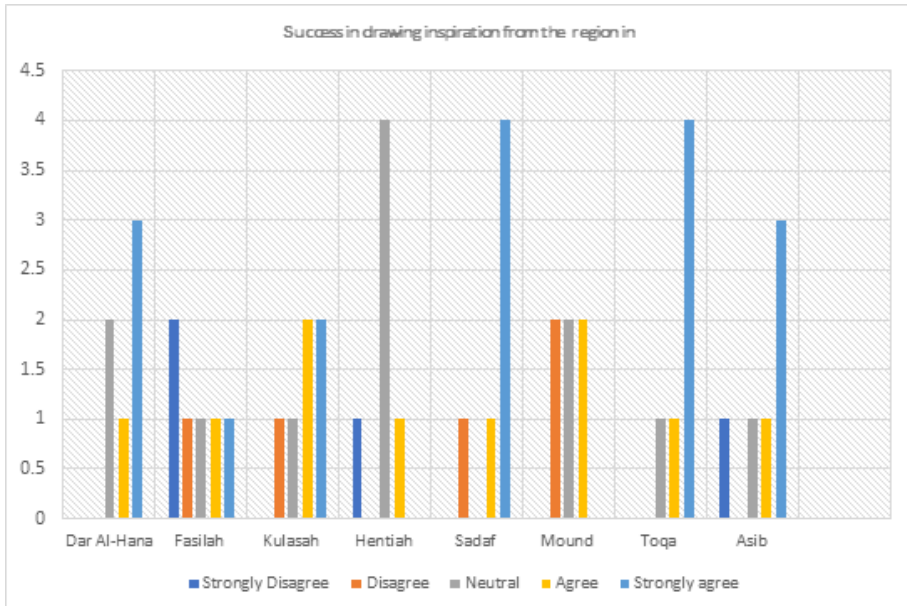


Figure.9 illustrates the experts' evaluation space successful in drawing inspiration from tradition in selected cafes.

Table 3 Statistical comparison between eight cafes in studied

	Material	Colour	Pattern	Rhythm	Succeed in drawing inspiration from the region	Abstraction
Dar al-hana	2.6± 1.0	3.1± 0.7	2.1± 1.3	2.8± 1.1	4.1± 0.9	1.0± 0.0
Fasilah	3.5± 1.3	3.0± 1.1	3.1± 1.1	3.5± 1.2	2.6± 1.6	3.0± 1.2
Kulasah	3.6± 1.0	3.8± 0.7	3.6± 1.0	3.8± 0.7	3.8± 1.1	4.0± 1.1
Hentiah	3.5± 1.0	3.8± 1.1	3.8± 0.9	3.3± 1.0	2.8± 0.9	3.0± 1.7
Sadaf	4.1± 1.1	3.0± 0.6	3.8± 1.1	4.3± 1.2	4.3± 1.2	3.6± 1.2
Mound	3.1± 0.7	3.5± 1.3	3.1± 0.9	2.5± 0.5	3.0± 0.8	3.3± 1.2
Toqa	4.5± 1.2	4.5± 0.8	4.6± 0.8	4.5± 1.2	4.5± 0.8	4.1± 1.3
Asib	4.1± 0.9	3.6± 1.2	3.0± 1.4	3.8± 0.9	3.8± 1.6	4.1± 1.3
P value	0.11	0.18	0.02	0.02	0.06	0.002

The second part of the interviews with the participants was an open discussion of their comments and recommendations on how each café reflects traditional architecture. Starting with Dar Al-Hana, most experts assert that this café does not abstract traditional designs as it relies mainly on placing traditional kitchen wares or traditional patterns, as shown in Figure 10. The interior wooden windows are placed on the walls as a decorative element. Some of the columns and walls contain Al-qatt pattern. It does not show the use of a clear inspiration from a specific traditional design, as the wall contains both the Roshan from the Hejaz region and the Al-qatt from the South region. There is no artistic classification of the heritage pieces in terms of their function and employment within the design space, which, in a way, makes the client feel the beauty of the heritage and links it to the information they know about it. Participants believe that this is important for tourists and Saudis who carry in their memory nostalgia for the heritage piece (the past). The experts went on to agree that the design of the café and restaurant appeared to be just as an assemblage. The participants recommend that it is important to change the method of display for heritage pieces in cafés or restaurants, as this method is mainly used in museums. The designer should reconsider the classification of the pieces and instead employ them

within the design fabric, so that the design carries a story in terms of the choice of modern materials in the decoration, linking them to the heritage piece.



Fig.10 Dar Al-Hana café. Source: (Author, 2025).

Fasilah restaurant also shows inspiration from different regions as shown in Fig 11. For instance, the exterior façade contains wooden windows inspired by Roshan from Hijaz and a triangular shape on top of the façade from Najd. Traditional Najd doors are placed at the interior entrance as a decorative element. According to participants, the design reflects the countrys region and blends Najdi elements in a harmonious way, while also stripping the elements in a contemporary manner. The restaurant displays various collectibles throughout the ages from regions of Saudi Arabia, which were displayed using old shelves and alcoves. The participants agree that the design needs to in convey the language of heritage through the artistic fabric of the design, despite his use of a design centre, the Najdi door, which is placed inside Najdi homes. Participants agree that the choice of material was successful. They recommend that a café focusing on the heritage of one region may be better, more visually appealing, and display the regions most prominent heritage elements.



Fig. 11 Fasilah restaurant and café in Jeddah. Source: (Google maps, 2025).

The next café was Kulasah and, located in Riyadh. Figure. 12 of café shows the inspiration from heritage, but no specific area can be determined. It contains imposed niches in the back, which could be inspired from Alwijar. It is an imposed niche used to be placed in traditional building walls to put coffee pots in. Abstracted dynamic shelves on the wall could be inspired by triangular shapes. However, the café relies mainly on the fabrics that hang from the ceiling, the walls, and the floor, which feature abstracted Najd patterns and the use of red colour from Sadu in the North region. The designer focused on some elements of the Sadu weaving craft. The patterns are well-defined and incorporated into the design. It is one of the places that gives a sense of heritage. This is due to the designer's use of materials such as fabric and wood. The group of opposite triangles facing each other at the top is beautiful as the designer has used it to make a small library and shelves for antiques. Participants recommend that such a design may be attributed to the designer's philosophy, which is to feel the past and combine it with a modern style, while borrowing from Saudi decorative heritage, including the Sadu fabric and its decorations.

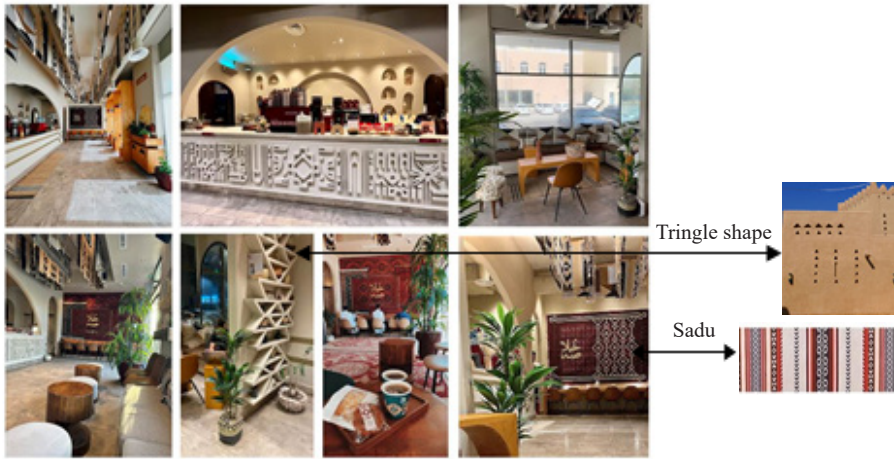


Fig. 12 Kulasah café in Riyadh. Source: (Google maps, 2025).

One of the common designs styles in contemporary architecture is minimalism. It focus mainly on the adoption of fundamental geometric forms, a restrained color palette consisting of monochromatic and primary hues, along with streamlined lines and minimal surface detailing, signifies a shift away from decorative aesthetics toward a more simplified and function (Nikolić & Vasilski, 2017). Hentiah café in Riyadh reflects the concept minimalism is some pasts as it shows in Fig.13. This café relies mainly on fabrics hanging on the walls and floor. In this café, the floor seating uses the same fabrics as in the past. It could be inspired from sadu, but with different colours. The other part of the café contains brown, beige and sandy coloured fabrics that are hanging on wood. It also contains brown wood furniture One of the common design styles in contemporary architecture is minimalism. It focuses mainly on the adoption of fundamental geometric forms, a restrained color palette consisting of monochromatic and primary hues, along with streamlined lines and minimal surface detailing. This signifies a shift away from decorative aesthetics toward a more simplified and functional approach (Nikolić & Vasilski, 2017). Hentiah café in Riyadh reflects the concept of minimalism in some aspects, as shown in Fig. 13. This café relies mainly on fabrics hanging on the walls and floor. In this café, the floor seating uses the same fabrics as in the past. It could be inspired by sadu, but with different colors. The other

part of the café contains brown, beige, and sandy-colored fabrics hanging on wood. It also features brown wooden furniture with unique animal-leg styling. There are also niches in the walls with decorative elements. It is important to mention that built-in niches in walls are a significant design element of traditional Saudi architecture in most regions, called alwijar. Some regions use them behind the coffee fire as a place to put coffee pots and cups. Others use them to display decorative elements. The design evokes a sense of the past, but this does not dominate the restaurant. Another effective design choice is the use of natural colors, with white as the base, complemented by shades of brown. One expert suggested that if the design were of a prehistoric kingdom made of stone with drawings on rocks, it would have been more fitting with the current style of the design. It is important to mention that imposed niches in walls are a significant design element of traditional Saudi architecture in most regions called alwijar. Some regions use it behind the coffee fire as a place to put the coffee pots and cups. Others use it to put decorative elements in. The design gives a feeling of the past, but this does not dominate the area of the restaurant. Another good design is the use of natural Others use it to add decorative elements. The design evokes a sense of the past without overpowering the restaurants overall style. Another good approach is using natural colors, with white as the base and various shades of brown. One expert suggested that a design inspired by a prehistoric kingdom of stone and rock paintings would have been better and more in line with the current style.



Fig. 13 Hentiah café in Riyadh. Source: (Google Maps, 2025).

In Abha, the southern region of Saudi Arabia, only one modern café was found that blended traditional elements with contemporary design, as shown in Figure 14. This café is called Sadaf. It reflects the regions traditional architecture, with Al-qatt in some parts of the café. An apparent abstraction of Al-qatt is evident in the counter desk and wall arches, as well as in a complete pattern on one wall. However, it is essential to note the changes to the original Al-qatt colour as the designer used different tents and tones of the colours. The overall atmosphere of the café shows creative design, as seen in the wooden lines on the ceiling, the plant in the middle, and the stone wall that reflects the regions nature. It is one of the most successful cafés in terms of its design, integrating modernity and heritage elements, with a focus on lighting and materials. The combination of Al-qatt art, murals, and modernity in the design was clear, strengthening the design's basic element.

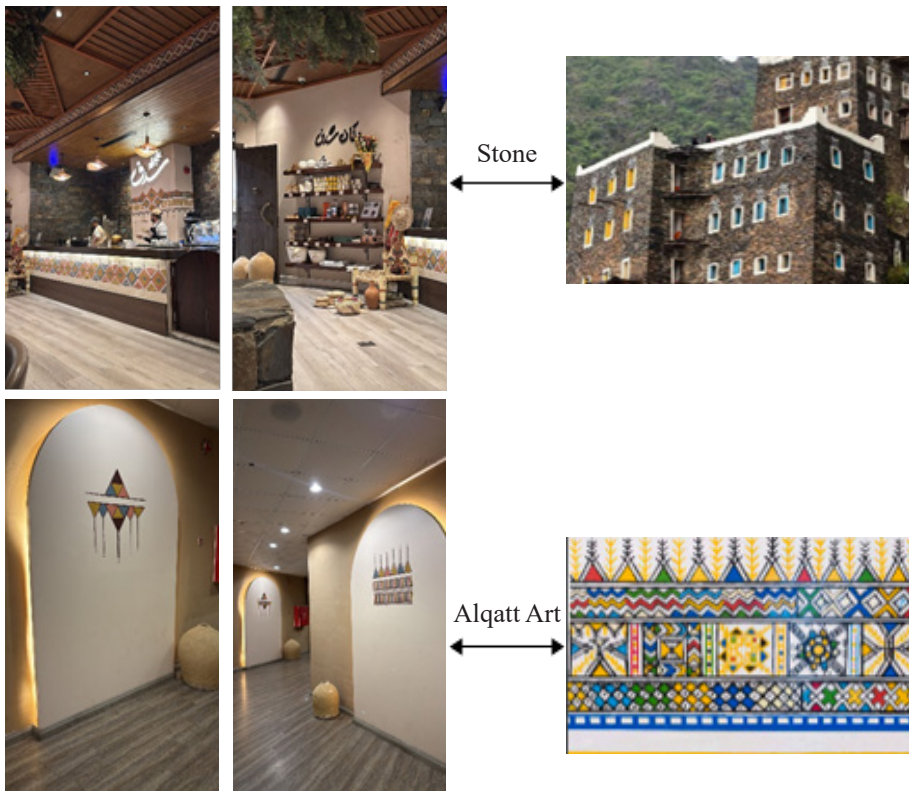


Fig. 14 Sadaf café in Abha. Source: (Author, 2025).

In the eastern region, Mound café was selected as shown in Figure 15. The café features niches on the walls, in the fabric on the walls, and on the ceiling, as discussed above regarding the café in Riyadh. Additionally, this café reflects some of the traditional architecture of the eastern region called Kamar, particularly in its arches. Traditional buildings also inspire the wall texture in the area with the same mud texture. These arches are an essential part of this café's design. It is used in exterior doors and windows, and interior walls as a division between spaces. The elements were largely stripped, giving it a contemporary rather than a more traditional touch, while still connecting the place to a sense of heritage. The café symbolises the eastern region. This café succeeds in reflecting the concept "sense of place," which is emotive bonds. This concept also refers to the distinctive qualities or unique identity that characterize specific localities and regions (Kitchin & Thrift, 2009). The café used interior wall textures and colours that create an emotional bond with the traditional building. It is important to note that cost could be a reason for not replicating traditional wall textures or materials in other contemporary buildings.



Fig. 15 Mound café in Alkobar. Source: (Author, 2025).

Toqa café was built to a significant height, as discussed at the beginning of the results. The design is harmonious and expressive of the regions identity. To achieve the goal, elements of Najd heritage have been employed in a more creative, simple line. Experts agree that it is one of the most beautiful cafes they have seen. The design makes the visitor feel the past of Najd in a modern way while preserving its originality. There is also the excellent use of decorative details, as shown in Figure 16. The time taken to apply the furnishings design was done excellently and creatively.

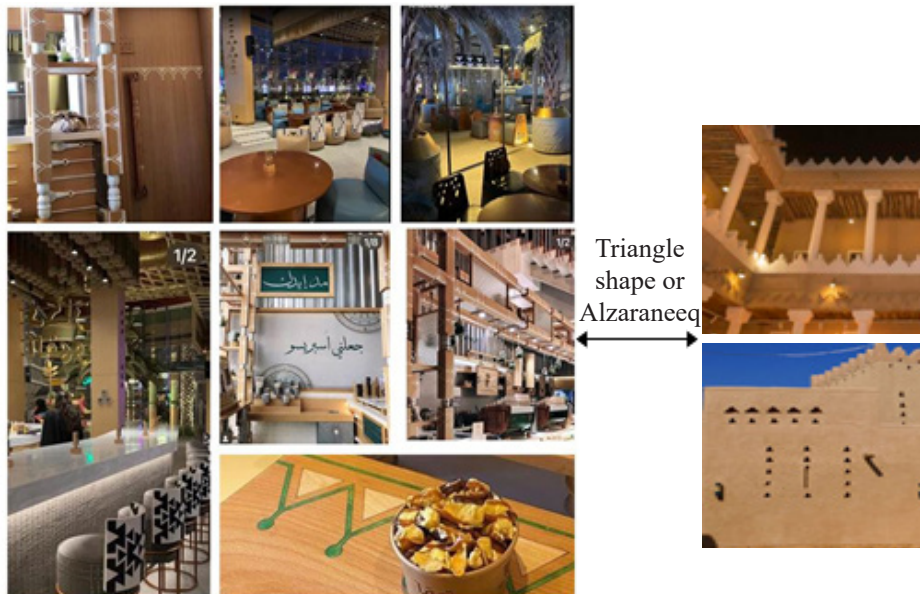


Fig. 16 Toqa café Riyadh. Source: (Google maps, 2025).

Asib restaurant in Riyadh shows clear inspiration from the north region with Sadu on the wall, chairs, and floor rugs, as shown in Figure 17. It also features designs inspired by Najd, as seen in the triangles on the walls, both inside and outside. The design of some space of the café is that of a museum. This combination gives the feeling of a personal museum, and it is more than just a place in which to have a good time. Indeed, experts agree that the design is excellent and reflects the buildings purpose as well.

Although some studies claim that there is a lack of country heritage identity in modern architecture due to technological developments and globalization (Ibrheem, 2019; Salamah, 2022), after analyzing the eight cafes, the study found that there is care taken to reflect country identity. However, participants recommend reducing the abundance of heritage elements used. This could be achieved by abstracting traditional vocabulary, such as patterns. To achieve this, a guidebook is needed to analyse how traditional elements can be reflected in contemporary public spaces, such as cafes or restaurants. The guidebook needs to cover pattern abstraction, colour tones, material, and shape placement in terms of repetition and rhythm.

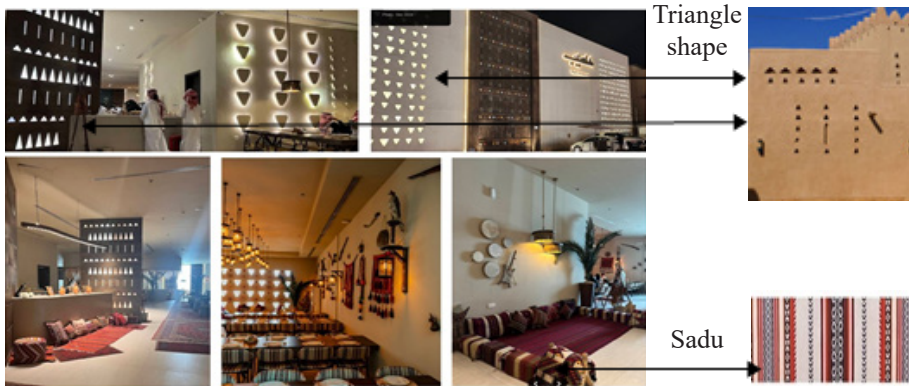


Fig. 17 Asib restaurant in Riyadh. Source: (Google maps, 2025).

Conclusion

Recently, in 2021, King Salman's Urban Charter was published by the Ministry of Culture to prompt architects to apply the six values of the charter in their new designs (Alobailan, 2023); (ADC, 2021). The six values are originality, continuity, human centrality, liveability, innovation, and sustainability (ADC, 2021). A previous study discussed how to incorporate traditional decorative elements into contemporary interior design. The study clarified that traditional, beautiful humanistic meaning should be reflected in buildings, ensuring the appreciation of their value (Zhang, 2021). This can be reflected either directly or by abstracting the traditional architectural vocabulary into new designs (Abdelrahman, 2012). In alignment with the above studies, this study revealed that it is essential to make a guidebook on how

to reflect traditional Saudi Architecture in contemporary interior spaces, such as cafés and restaurants. The study investigates how the design elements and principles of conventional Saudi Arabia are applied in new buildings. It has also investigated how such is used in furniture fabric, wall design, etc. One of the significant findings was that the number of contemporary cafés that creatively and professionally reflected traditional designs was limited, which was the context in which the study was applied. No specific traditional region is commonly used in modern cafés. However, Najd and Asir's traditional design elements were used more often than others. This study strongly found that the abstraction of traditional elements needs to be developed in design. Experts agreed that the design of the selected sample appears to need greater depth of heritage. They also highlight the importance of abandoning the museum display method for heritage pieces. This includes reconsidering the classification of the pieces and employing them within the design fabric, so that the design carries a story through the choice of modern materials in the decoration that are close to their past influence, linking them to the heritage piece. Additionally, this study makes a significant contribution by establishing a methodological framework to evaluate the extent to which Saudi architectural identity is represented in contemporary cafés. The study also shows the importance of a design guidebook for public spaces such as cafes or restaurants to help designers and stakeholders adopt traditional elements in contemporary designs.

There are limitations to this, as this study is limited to the cities of Riyadh, Jeddah, Aba, and Kohbar, which are major cities in the country. Second, they contain a high population. Third, they contain a high number of contemporary cafés. Yet the sample size was limited to six experts. Further studies should be conducted with larger samples of both experts and users to ensure the generalizability of the results. It is also recommended that future studies incorporate different geographical areas in Saudi Arabia. The significance of this study was its contribution to knowledge of how traditional architecture should be applied in modern cafés in greater detail.

Recommendations

- This study also recommends that designers or architects study how to reflect or abstract traditional design elements in contemporary spaces.
- It is recommended to encourage more stakeholders to care about reflecting traditional architecture in contemporary spaces.
- Further research to investigate users perceptions of the reflected traditional architectural design in contemporary cafés and their recommendations.
- Building regulations are recommended to add more guidance for architects and designers on how to reflect traditional architecture in modern, contemporary spaces, especially cafes.

Declaration

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Consent for publication

Written consent was obtained from study participants for their participation in the interview.

Availability of data material

Data are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

Competing interest

The author declares no competing interests.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Jeddah.

Funding

This study did not receive any financial funds.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank all participants for their participation in the study. In addition, the author would like to extend sincere thanks and appreciation to all the cafés that have shown a notable interest in reflecting traditional architectural and enhancing cultural identity through their designs and concepts. This approach



demonstrates a deep awareness of the importance of connecting the past to the present. It effectively contributes to preserving heritage while presenting it in a contemporary context that enriches the visitor's experience and strengthens local identity.

References

- Abdelrahman, M. (2012). Inspiring urban heritage - from copying to rooting and sustaining local architecture and urbanism Hosting Major International Events, Innovation, creativity and Impact Assessment, Cairo.
- Aboueila, A. (2019). A contemporary interior design inspired from Al qatt Al asiri heritage art in Saudi Arabia Residential Spaces. International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology (IJAST), 28(16), 17061720-.
- Abu Elkeir, N. (2023). The Artistic Values of Saudi Heritage Ornaments: An Approach to Beautify Openings in Contemporary Buildings Using Mechanical Engraving Techniques-A Case Study of Taif University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Journal of Architecture, Arts and Humanities, 5(22), 554577-.
- ADC, A. a. D. C. (2021). King Salman's Urban Charter. King Fahd National Library.
- Al-Assadi, F. I., & Al-Dewachi, M. H. (2020). The Role of Brick in Determining Features of Iraqi Architecture. IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering,
- Al-Talbi, J., & Al-Zaidi, N. (2019). The importance of Urban Heritage in Supporting Cultural Tourism. AL-ADAB JOURNAL, 2(131), 255266-. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31973/aj.v0i0.956>
- Al Jasser, H., Shalaby, A., Rokia, W. (2024). Creating Fashionable contemporary womens clothing designs to achieve the sustainability of Saudi Sadu (Traditional Textile)
- Saudi Art and Design Journal, 4(3), 183139-.
- Alajaji, T. N., & Alfulaij, W. M. (2019). Revival of the Heritage Using Porcelain Units Inspired by Traditional Sadou Decoration and Kufic Calligraphy in Fashion Design.. Al-Academy, 2(92), 253270-.

- Albahnasi, A. (2003). Islamic architecture and Its Characteristics in Teaching Curricula. Publications of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- Alghamdi, A. (2017). Benefiting from some vocabulary of ancient architecture in the Al-Baha region to confirm the national identity of art education students. Journal of Specific Education Research, 2017(48), 387410-.
- alghammas, H. M., M. (2022). A new vision for Saudi heritage houses between expressiveness and functionality through artistic printing. Arab Journal for Scientific Publishing, 29(2), 529558-
- Ali, A. A. (2024). Heritage Architecture of Saudi Arabia. El-esh group.
- Alkhozaim, S. (2025). The Role of the Purple Economy in Promoting Cultural Identity of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: A Case Study of Diriyah. Journal of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, 9(2), 131-.
- Alnaim, M. M. (2023). The Architecture of Mosque Integration of Decoration, Functionality, and Spirituality: An Overview of Najd Region Mosque Architecture. Journal of Engineering Research 3(1), 23071877-. <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.36909/jer.ICMA.20217>
- Alobailan, L., Barifah, S, Alawad, A, Bettaieb, D. (2022). Najd traditional of design the in tifsMo of aspects different and characteristics 2(1), 5790-.
- Alobailan, L. A., A. (2023). Proposals For Implementation of the King Salman Urban Charter in Proportion to the Asir Region of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Art and Design Journal, 3(3), 149189-.
- Alzahrani, A. (2022). Understanding the role of architectural identity in forming contemporary architecture in Saudi Arabia. Alexandria Engineering Journal, 61(12), 1171511736-.
- Architecture, S. (2025). Saudi Architecture. <https://architsaudi.dasc.gov.sa/ar/contact-us>. Retrieved 10 from <https://architsaudi.dasc.gov.sa/ar/contact-us>



- Attiah, D. (2024). Colour in Modern and Retro Saudi Handcrafts: Uses and Applications in Sadu (Traditional Textiles). *Saudi Art and Design Journal*, 4(3), 108138-.
- Baik, A. (2023). The Evaluation of the Wooden Structural System in Hijazi Heritage Building via Heritage BIM. *International Conference on Structural Analysis of Historical Constructions*,
- Commission, H. (2025). Commission Projects. <https://heritage.moc.gov.sa/Projects>. Retrieved 10 from
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.
- El-Meligy, F. (2014). -Simotika architectural heritage in Taif for heritage
- continuity in buildings of modern colleges students in Taif
- University. *Egyptian Journal of Specialized Studies*, 2(9), 1541-.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field methods*, 18(1), 5982-.
- Ibrheem, S. (2019). Introducing heritage v oducing heritage vocabular oabulary in contempor y in contemporary architectur chitecture to
- preserve the future heritage. *International Design Journal*, 9(3), 4074014-.
- Ishaq, H. (2010). Rooting The Elements Of Architectural Heritage And Its Cultural Values In Modern Arab Architecture: A Model Of The Yemeni Experience - A Case Study
- *Journal of the University Researcher for Humanities*(24), 319354-. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.698442/cy3dm11>
- Jones, C., Meyer, R. E., Jancsary, D., & Höllerer, M. A. (2017). The material and visual basis of institutions. *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism*, 2, 621646-.
- Kitchin, R., & Thrift, N. (2009). Sense of Place. In *International encyclopedia of human geography*. Elsevier.
- Maspul, K. A. (2023). Al-Qadis Poetic Wisdom as a Catalyst for the Sustainable Preservationof

- Saudi Arabias Coffee Culture. Innovative. Journal Of Social Science Research, 3(4), 92159232-.
- Maspul, K. A., & Almalki, F. A. (2023). From Cafés to Collaborative Hubs: Empowering Communities and Transforming the Coffee Value Chain in Buraydah. EKOMA: Jurnal Ekonomi, Manajemen, Akuntansi, 3(1), 179206-.
- MOCHeritage, H. C. (2023). Urban heritage sector. Heritage Commission.
- Nikolić, M., & Vasilski, D. (2017). Minimalism in contemporary architecture as one of the most usable aesthetically-functional patterns. Facta universitatis-series: Architecture and Civil Engineering, 15(3), 333345-.
- Othamn, M., Mohammed, R. (2019). Utilizing the Persian architectural heritage to enrich the aesthetic values of contemporary tourist buildings. Journal of Engineering Sciences & Information Technology, 3(3), 61.
- Othman, M., Mohammed, R. (2019). Utilizing Farasan Architectural Heritage to enrich the aesthetic values in the contemporary tourist buildings. Journal of Engineering Sciences & Information Technology 3(3), 8961-.
- Salamah, M. (2022). The architectural identity of contemporary Egyptian architecture between globalization and technology. Engineering Research Journal (Shoubra), 51(1), 204216-.
- Vale, L. (2014). Architecture, power and national identity. Routledge.
- Vision, S. (2025). Saudi Vision 2030. Retrieved 10 from <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/ar/overview>
- Xeumei, Y., & Manteghi, G. (2024). THE VALUE OF TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE AND ITS ENLIGHTENMENT TO CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN. Lim Hock Ann, AP. Dr.
- Zhang, K. (2021). Research on the Application of Traditional Architectural Decoration Elements in Modern Interior Design. Learning & Education, 9(5), 148149-.

Figures

Café Photos were taken from Google map 2025 except some taken by author.