

INTERIOR DESIGN DECORATIONS OF THE MACEDONIAN TRADITIONAL HOUSE

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ABSTRACT

It is necessary to proceed from one's heritage, in order to accept the advances of modern architecture [1]. At present it is difficult to talk about the Macedonian folk house because of a significant lack of data, as well as because our traditional habitats are rarely saved in their original form. Therefore, this research article deals with the education for the traditional style design of the Macedonian traditional interiors, to support and improve the sector of vernacular architecture. Its goal is to present the authentic architectural aesthetics in the spatial plastic of our old houses.

Results: Using the analysis of the Macedonian traditional interior spaces, their interior processing and equipment are shown, as well as the symbols and semantics of their decorations and ornaments. This document gives an overview of the local ethnic characteristics of the domestic interior architecture, which are incurred as a result of centuries of continuous folklore creativity and tradition.

Key words: Macedonian traditional house, interiors, ornaments, symbols.

INTRODUCTION

General Information about the Macedonian Traditional House

The Macedonian architectural heritage includes a wide range of habitats, from simple ones to high living standard old houses with developed functional and aesthetic solutions. Raised on one or several floors with porches for shadows and salons with a view named "Chardaks" (plastic element in the façade), there are houses with widely open panoramas that even at present times inspire man and get him closer to the natural environment [2]. Whether we talk about village or town houses, they are an example of cultural heritage with universal significance, whose greatest permanent value is the special relationship to the used materials, structure, spatial composition and man's location in their interiors. The house for living has become a dynamic space with an existential dimension, in which man was naturally provided with functional factors from the surrounding environment (food, water, natural building materials, wood beams, roof hay etc.).

Goal and Structure of the Research Article

The main purpose of this analytical research is to describe the authentic old style interior design of the Macedonian traditional house. Through theoretical and field exploration, as well as photography, the significant elements and creative spirit of one national housing culture are shown.

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The following literature contains information on old house interiors dating from the Ottoman rule from XIV to XIX century, that origin from numerous original country places: Ohrid, Veles, Kruševo, Kratovo, Strumica, Debar, Galičnik, Tetovo, Skopje etc.

The further contents of this document are divided in two parts:

- **Approach and state of research.** The reader is informed about the applied working methods used as an approach to the research and about the basic information about the structure of plastic modeling of the old Macedonian house space, which are of interest for understanding the topic to the people who are not familiar with the authentic Macedonian interior architecture;
- **Interior equipment and processing.** This part refers to decorations, ornaments, symbols and semantics of the integrated, built-in and movable traditional furniture and the interior's original features of the region.

APPROACH AND STATE OF RESEARCH

Applied Working Methods

This article is created based on methodical research of the existing expert literature and ethnographic records on cultural values of the Macedonian traditional style house and field exploring of authentic morphological Macedonian places that are mixture of the past and the present, with old traditional houses, remains of old houses, reconstructed houses or newly built houses modeled on the "*Original Macedonian house*" that perpetuated the old Macedonian housing tradition. Published journals and internet materials are also being used as source of information.

Macedonian Old House's Spatial Organization

Barred by the Turks from public life, the Macedonians focused their architectural imagination on a house for everybody. The interior plastic housing is developed horizontally and vertically with levels, whose number of rooms and spatial differentiation showed the holders' economic power. *The Porch*, "*Chardak*" and "*Minsofa*" are usually set on three spatial levels, fused into a single functional area. The archaic space is structured according to several basic codes: up-down, left-right, male-female, culture and nature, sacral and profane, centre-periphery etc.

The fireplace represents the heart of the house, while the walls and the thresholds signify the peripheral and boundary areas of the dwelling. The horizontal house division contains two worlds: "*ours*" and "*alien world*", in both of which the symbolic meaning of the house doorstep plays a very important role. It represents the "*boundary*" between these two worlds and the people's crossing from one to the other world. The guest who enters the house symbolically represents the outside world. He must pass through several ritual stages starting from the entrance of the house (the lower level), so that he can reach the space with the fireplace (which is the host's intimate room) [3].

Often the spatial pattern of the Macedonian traditional house is divided in two oppositions: male and female. The female section is marked as an inaccessible place, a symbol of the female principle, fertility and keeper of bread and food, in contrast to the male principle [3]. A space with an interior staircase provides vertical communication between levels, a symbolic link between heaven, earth and the underground. The cattle lives in the lower level which implies the nature, while in the upper part is the cultural world with its representative rooms and fireplace, where is the center of the family ceremonial events.

The fundamental structure of the Macedonian old style house has developed three types of residential rooms: "*Economic space*" (household premises) with *Porch* on the bottom, winter premises (usually set in the upper level) with the room called "*House*" and a summer

living area with representative rooms (usually set on the top level) called “*Chardak*”. The central (middle) level called “*House*”, representing today’s living room, functions as a tampon zone between the production rooms placed on the bottom and the sleeping rooms on the top. Also, the house has various specific premises for household, sanitation and connecting spatial elements and other winter and summer rooms: “*Minsofa*” (room with a fireplace) and “*Tron*” in the “*Chardak*”, guest room “*Sharena odaja*” (painted room), lounge, hallway, shelter in the basement, bathrooms, winter and summer kitchen, “*Gjezentija*” (big hallway), wardrobe, kitchen called “*Ima*”, “*Sanduk*” room (female room), “*Kled*” and “*Dark room*” (pantry in the basement), laundry, “*Balkonce*” (little balcony) etc.

In conclusion, the traditional space housing is divided horizontally and vertically in sectors for everyday activities with an interpretation of Holiness connotation [3].

Decorations of interior equipment and furniture processing

Macedonian traditional style interior decorations of old town and village houses have symbolic, semi-logical, mythical and social characteristics. Integrated and movable wood equipment (ceilings, walls, “*Musandras*”, cupboards, doors, pillars, frames, boxes etc.) contains decorative carved surfaces and ornaments with motives from nature, everyday life and folk customs (figuration, zoomorphic, floral and geometric shapes). They directly provide interpretation and understanding of the basic meaning of the natural human environment and interior space.

The degree of decorative treatment is a symbol of a family’s prestige and wealth or it shows the importance of the room and its aesthetics or functional value. City rooms impacted village rooms not only with spatial conception, but also with interior decoration.

Decorations, Ornaments, Symbols and Semantics of the Integrated Furniture

The system of integrated furniture is a mixture of colorful and wood carved decorative ceilings that connect to decorative doors and processed curtains over windows with decorative profiles, and make a meaningful compositional system, in which everything is subordinated to the man and his measures.

Construction carpentry with its decorative treatment enriches the appearance of the Macedonian traditional style house. Decorative carpentry construction follows the decorative treatment of ceilings and cupboards in interiors and forms a harmonious aesthetic space union.

In some areas, exterior entrance doors had a semicircular shape in the form of a horseshoe and symbolized breeding culture in those regions. The decorations of the entrance doors can be simple or richer with decorated fields of carved wood [4].

The interior doors can be classified in different types: single and double winged, depending on construction to *carpenter* or “*tesar*” type, with rectangular or semicircular frames, carved with one or several decorative surface fields etc. Decorated doors indicate the representative character of the room (guest rooms, “*Chardaks*”, etc.). They were integrated in the walls and made interior union with the “*Musandras*”, ceilings, cupboards, shelves, fireplaces etc. The final decorative treatment of the doors was conditioned by the room’s function and importance. Representative rooms had beautiful doors, while rooms with secondary significance had doors with a simpler treatment. Doors were often decorated only on one side, the one that was on the inside of the representative room.

The decorative ornamentation of interior doors is with shallow aesthetic plastic on the door surface, which includes geometric compositions of squares, rectangles, triangles and trapezoids. Circles and semicircles were used less frequently; “*Rosettes*” appeared as a central motive on the door wing, with geometric decorative treatment developed around. The decorations on the doors are usually applied in the fields of the door frames and profiles with

carved details. Usually, geometric compositions are used on the door surfaces, in order to note the entry of the room. *Tesar type doors* were processed with geometric decorations [5].

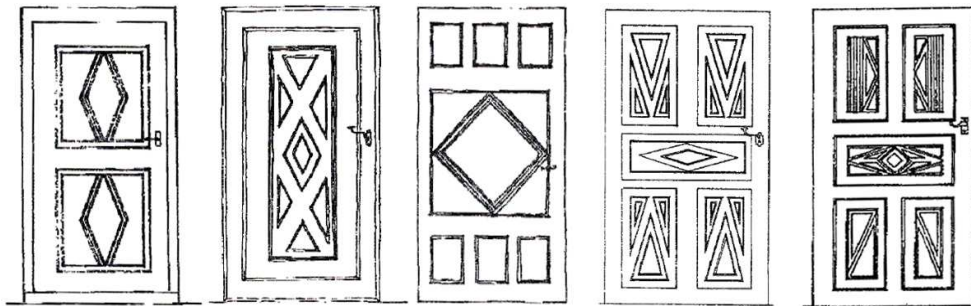


Fig. 1: Carpenter type doors with geometric carved decorations in separated fields

Windows, with their forms, processing and rhythm, brought art and harmonious play of light and shadows in the interiors. The most important window decorative element is the so called “*Pervaz*” – a wooden profile around the window hole. It represents a wooden mask, placed on the window frame. It can follow the window form or it can have a tympanum. Sometimes windows have light openings above them, with decorative wooden frames. The general impression of the elegant interior is completed with decorative wool and tweeted curtains.

The ceiling surface symbolizes the sky in the room of the house, while the rosette in the middle glorifies the sun which brings light, heat and happiness in the family [3]. Decorative ceilings and walls have an important role in the Macedonian interiors. The ceiling has a wide range of treatments - from simplest concepts to very high quality and complex solutions with high artistic contents. Ceilings are decorated with painted figural decorations and carvings with central “*Rosettes*”. From this period, we find “*raster*” – a zoographical ornamental decoration as the substitute for the expensive European wall tapestry. This decoration is applicable in guest rooms, reception rooms or the balcony. Often, rooms with applied ceiling decorations are found in houses where wealthy families showed their economic power.

Ceilings are classified in the following types: according to their architectural form, ceilings can be flat (set in kitchen rooms and bedrooms) or high ceilings (set in guest rooms); according to the materials applied, they can be wooden, plastered or combined; according to the decorative elements applied, ceilings can be wood-carved with geometrical or floral decorative elements; according to their composition, they can be made with proper raster or a central composition with a circle or polygon constitutive wooden element in the middle called “*Rosette*”, etc.[6] The basic concept of the “*Rosette*” and the composition of its foundation are the logical final part of the entire ceiling. The rosette is most often placed in the interior rooms, and more rarely in the open ceiling surfaces in the enclosed porches.

Ceilings consist of decorative frames usually with a rectangular shape, whose angles are sometimes formed corners (with carved floral motives). The second decorative frame on the ceiling is called cornice with rectangular, square, hexagonal or octagonal basis in the central part of the ceiling, thus forming a circular or elliptical area called *mirror*. The *mirror* reflects the shape of the central motive of the circular form, the *wheel* called “*Rosette*”. This middle area of the ceiling has the highest concentration of decorative elements with stylized motives in carvings, and the most commonly used is the “*Sun Rosette*”. These parts are usually represented in complex ceilings, while the simple ones, such as flat ceilings, contain the initial frame on the ceiling surface.

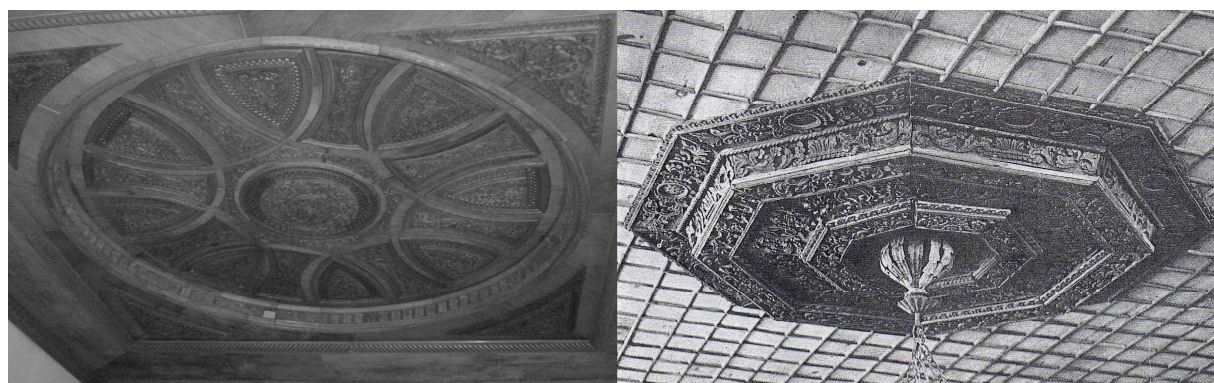
Macedonian traditional ceilings contain a greater volume of carved surfaces with high architectural and aesthetic values, composed in harmonious processing with other elements.

Especially distinctive are the wooden ceilings with ornately carved “Rosettes” with branches that belong to the group of high ceilings with complex form, placed in guest rooms. Most representative samples were prepared in the form of stylized floral motives that are complemented by shallow, accurate and undermined carving. Splendid central motives in the ceiling compositions remained unsurpassed interior components – a sign that the talents of folk artists had a fine spirit and sense of artistic extent. We can find great presence of art processing ceilings in the urban environment. They are decorated with friezes of geometrical and plant motives of stylized suns, stars and flower bouquets. Also, ceilings with technical processing solutions and simple geometric patterns, expressed in a reduced form and material, are present in village houses.

According to the decorative structure of ornamental timber motives, ceilings can be classified into three main decorative structures[6]:

1. Decorative structure I (DS I)- with application of geometric ornamental motives - material of straight lines
2. Decorative structure II (DS II)- with applications from the elements of DS I and geometric ornamental motives - material of curves
3. Decorative structure III (DS III)- with applied elements from DS I and DS II and ornamental motives - timber with biotech structure.

The most often applied stylized motives in carved ceilings are the parts of grapevine (leaf), acanthus leaf, flower as a central motive (bush, stylized wild rose, tulip, narcissus), different geometric motives and rare animal motives (birds). The leaf of the vine symbolizes Christianity, the tree of life and immortality, or roses as a symbol of love etc. Aesthetic and decorative elements applied in the processing of ceilings form a union with built-in furniture, doors and cupboards. The application of plastic decoration, “shepherd carving” on ceilings and cupboards, is very commonly used. The further development of woodcarving techniques enabled applying motives of animal origin in combination with plant motives’ stylized forms. An often applied form is the dove with a symbolic significance of peace at home, always set with its beak near the stylized flower blossom, and by repeating the same composition several times, it fulfilled the symmetry and the rhythmic element.



a. House in Ohrid

b. House in Tetovo

Fig. 2: Carved wooden ceilings with geometric and biotech ornamental motives and Rosette

Rosettes, which were a final element of the ceiling construction, were placed in the representative rooms of the Macedonian city house. The so called “Wheel”, is usually set indoors in the rooms or in open porch ceiling surfaces. The ones which are placed on the porch or ceiling surfaces in rooms have a modest decorative treatment, smaller dimensions, and shallow carvings with a simple technique. They usually have a circular shape or an elliptical one. Construction compositions of two or three decorated pieces are placed one over

another by reducing the dimension of the smallest on the upper surface. The smallest surface contains a stylized form of the sun which is formed of a set of sheets in the middle of the “Wheel” [7].

The rhythm of the composition of geometric patterns is composed in the whole “Rosette”, which is a stylized rhythmic element. The parts set in the highest area, with small dimensions, are mostly in an elliptical shape with a stylized flower and a bud set in the middle of the wheel and also on the ceiling that has a symbolic significance of light, life and fertility in the family. Rosettes have various sizes. The smallest, represents a union of two carved pieces placed one over another, with the applied technique “undermined accurate carving” [7].

Man’s inborn instinct to create a pleasant atmosphere at home, is reflected in colored decorations on the interior wall surfaces. The range from simple motives to more complex compositions became an arabesque embedded in the human sensibility for the beautiful and representation. Plant motives dominate, naturally treated or stylized. Composed in “girlandas” or “friezes”, floral motives meet wall surfaces and section of ceiling called “Chicheklaci”. Bird motives correspond to the plant world, enclosed by curtains and window openings. A unity of artistic expression is created, with arabesques that appear as architectural boundaries. The “Al-seko” technique of painting on dry plaster, is also frequently used [5].

Decorations, Ornaments, Symbols and Semantics of the Built-in Furniture

The fireplace is the most important element in the interior of the Macedonian old style house. It can be found in various forms: typical open fireplace with a stone stool in the lower part - set in the middle of the room or built in the wall; half-open fireplace with a final cap with a rectangular, prism or funnel form; fireplace built of stone with a ceiling chimney for smoke; wall masonry stove etc. It is set in almost every room of the house (on the ground floor, upper floors and the representative chambers), but mostly in the kitchen, where it can be built in the wall, set in the middle between cupboards or in a line with “Nishas”.

The hearth plays the role of Micro Center of the cultural housing space, with a holy symbolism. Its primary function is heating, lighting, food preparation and decorative function. Simply put, it’s a ritual space and a family temple. It represents the center of life in the house, and in the kitchen it is used for preparing food in pots set on metal tripods or hanging on a chain above the fire [3].

Its construction consists of a floor section and drainage channels called “Cap” (Umbrella) for collecting smoke. According to the type of the “Cap”, there can be an open or semi-open type of fireplace, with wooden or stone caps, with an oval or a square cap, with a funnel form etc. The floor under the fireplace is made of pressed earth for fire protection.

Most common are the fireplaces with geometric decorations on the closing cap, with a basic geometric shape of a circle or a rectangle. Some applicable vegetation or floral decoration in the “Pike-technique” can be found as well, on a flat vertical surface with a symmetric layout. On the bottom surface of the hearth, the so called “Pirustija” or “Fingu” is placed, which is a small metal stove or tripod for cooking, decorated with stylized motives. Often in mountain places the form of the fireplace is flat, treated with decorative floral motives and a central motive of a stylized “Sun of David”. Above the fireplace, the “Prayer” is set on the wall (an icon of the family saint) [4].



a. With geometric decoration, floral elements and Star of David

b. With geometric decoration

c. With geometric decoration, floral elements and stylized Sun

Fig. 3: Types of fireplaces, houses in Kruševo

Musandras, Dolaps and Nishas are cupboards with shelves with different dimension solutions and decorative treatment, built in the kitchen walls, guest rooms, representative chambers, balcony and other rooms. They serve for storage of cooking products in the kitchen and for decorative objects in the guest rooms and *Chardaks*. They can be single or double-doored; made from wood or glass; with a rectangular, semicircular or elliptic form; with a horizontal decorative shelf on the bottom. Usually, they are either mounted in the room singly, or in a composition unit made of *Nishas, Dolaps* and *Musandras*.



a. House in Kruševo

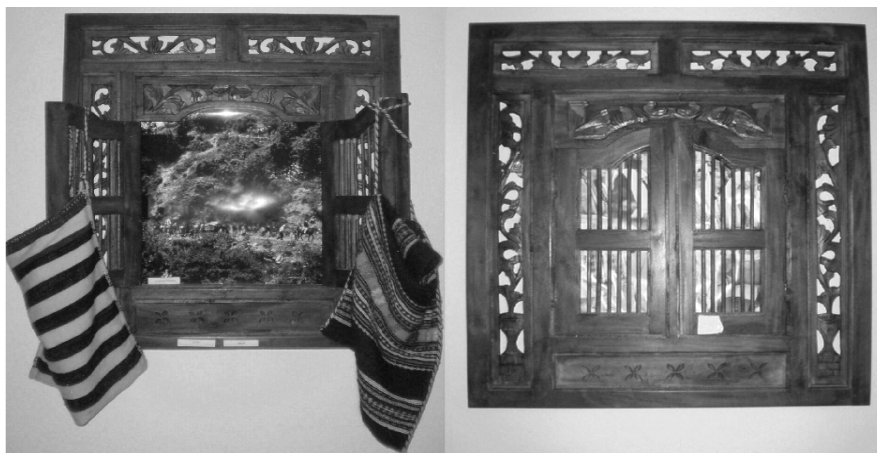
b. House in Bitola

Fig. 4: Symmetric type musandras with geometric decoration (a. and painted floral elements)

Cupboards were decorated depending on the location of the room. Examples with geometric decorations (straight, square or triangular ornaments) can be found, with repeated vegetation ornaments and decorative moldings in the upper part of the cupboard, painted with floral elements. The flaps of the cupboards are wooden with a rich decorative treatment, usually in the representative rooms.

The kitchen musandras are made with wooden doors, produced with a carpentry technique with a simple treatment and painted decoration. Cupboard wooden doors were usually made of carpenter processing (frames with filled tables) and with geometric or vegetation decorations.

The division of the cupboard parts is often emphasized with decorative processed “Pillars” with a pear form in the bottom and a “Capitel” with ornately carved floral elements in the top part. Specific detail is a segment of the wooden doors that is associated with a moveable fabric curtain. It is usually decorated with carvings of geometric and plant motives [8].



a. Opened Dolap, house in Galichnik

b. Closed Dolap, house in Galichnik

Fig. 5: Built-in Dolaps (cupboards) with carved decorations and floral motives

Decorations, Ornaments, Symbols and Semantics of the Movable Furniture

Rooms were equipped with a whole treasure of movable furniture which today represent rare ethnic examples. Tripod chairs of massive wood, colorful “Mindars” placed along the windows, long chairs, *Kanabs*, beautiful, simple, colorful or representative carved wooden chairs, carved wooden and metal rectangle and circle “*Sofras*” (tables), furniture for sleeping: “*Odars*” or “*Trons*”, classic beds (people started using them from the early 20th century) etc.

The furniture for seating and lying is decorated with white wool cloths with colored ornaments, floors are covered with carpets with rich ornamentation and windows are decorated with hand-knitted curtains (made with well-known techniques called “*Rishelje*” and “*Angle*”). Also, the interiors are decorated with beautiful candlesticks, family pictures, clocks, mirrors with carved wooden frames, lamps for lighting, hanging lamps called “*Lusters*” (Chandeliers) placed on the ceilings in the middle of the “*Rosettes*” etc. The “*Prayer icons*” placed in the “*Nishas*” or “*Musandras*” have a special spiritual significance.

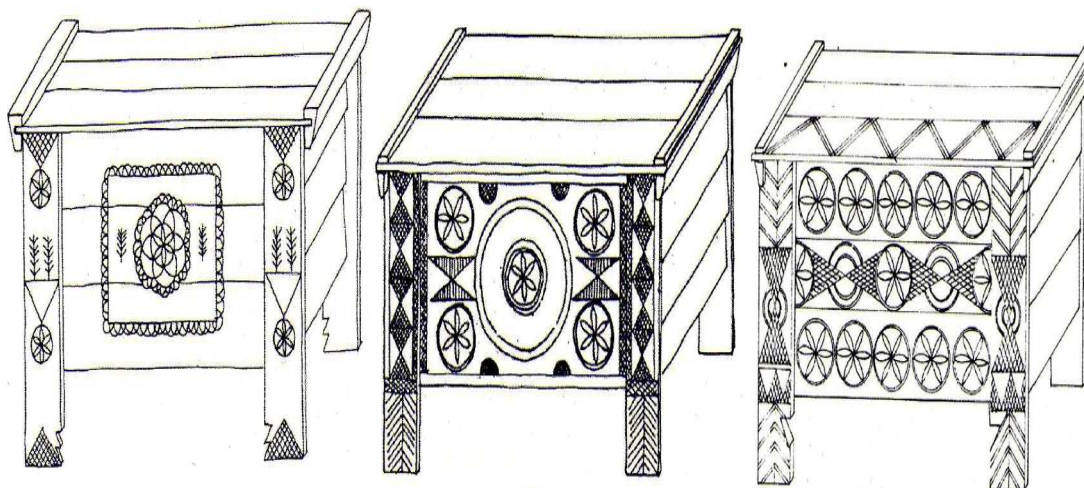


Fig. 6: Carved wooden caskets with geometric decorations and floral motives

Crates for girls' clothes (*Cheiz*), carpets, curtains, beds, etc are kept in special rooms called "*Sanduk*" chambers. Those interiors had different types of trunks: storage boxes for "*Noshvi*", containers for flour and bread preparation, etc. Regardless of their purpose, they had a rectangle form with four legs and an upper cover. They were made manually, with geometric decoration on the frontal and side parts. The decoration could be geometrical with circles, triangles, line decoration and their mutual combination, or vegetation with small twigs with rhythm and symmetry. Each country region had a unique ornament decoration. Moreover, plastic decorations as "shepherd carving" can be observed on most furniture objects, such as: boxes, wood and bone spoons, items for the kitchen etc.



Fig. 7: Guest carved wooden Sofra (table) with carved wooden chairs (decorated with vegetative and zoomorphic forms)

With the rapid development of industrial production, the traditional forms of life were gradually abandoned. Besides furniture, many decorative and functional items were made of metal, such as lamps, cups of coffee, small boxes for jewelry, ashtrays etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Macedonian traditional architecture has been developed in our authentic old villages and old quarters of urban neighborhoods as a reflection of the dialectical union of different factors such as, period of creation, geographical location, climatic conditions, economic, social and cultural level, as well as by the influence of all possible nationality traces: Turks, Spanish Jews, Cincars, Gypsies, Vlachs, Greeks, Albanians and Macedonians. Marked as “*Folk architecture*” or “*Architecture without architects*”, it has been created by anonymous creators called “*Dungers*” (builders) characterized with strong creative energy, who succeeded in building unique living environments in poor construction conditions [1].

When we talk about a Macedonian traditional house, we refer to its various forms, no matter whether it is a Mediterranean or a mountain style house, built in the distant past or in a more recent period of time, made of interwoven wooden branches covered with mud or made of stone, with a closed cubic form or divided spatial plastic, built on a symmetric or an asymmetric base, with closed or open “*Chardaks*”, with bay window thrown façades or flat surface façades, ground-floor houses, two-storied or multi-storied houses etc. Depending on the lifestyle, occupation and variables of the population’s economic existential needs, it has great development opportunities and differences of interior rooms. Fishermen’s houses, houses that belonged to traders, vintners, tanners, carpenters, craftsmen, farmers, etc., they are all recognizable by their timeless identity with the representative salons in the air for welcoming guests and the unique ornaments and symbols in their interiors.

Most traditional interior decorations are with ornaments in shallow plastic and drawings of geometrical arabesque. Spatial illusion was accentuated with wall paintings, polychromatic staining or background color of the velvet and natural wood color or polychromatic painted colors of the interior equipment. Rich interior decorations are often found with accurate carvings in fine, yellow wood ceilings, cupboards, stairs or golden wood carvings equal to church golden carvings, which were a symbol of a family’s prestige and wealth. Particularly significant aesthetic values are present in the appearance of applications in the carving vegetative ornamental motives - the timber ceilings, doors and cupboards. The stylistic design of the bridal wood caskets with shallow reliefs and patterns deserve special attention.

In the aesthetic analysis of wood carvings and interior decorations of traditional homes, a classification in nine groups of ornamental timber can be performed [6]:

- I. Geometric shapes;
- II. Symbolic decorative shapes;
- III. Vegetative shapes;
- IV. Anthropomorphic shapes;
- V. Object shapes;
- VI. Zoomorphic and prosopomorphic shapes;
- VII. Shapes created by the influence of the architectural and building shapes;
- VIII. Fantastic (theratomorph) shapes; and
- IX. Individual free shapes.

CONCLUSIONS

The Macedonian old style house has been organized with traditional interior spaces, furnished in its own unique style furniture made of massive wood with special features of ethnic spiritual ornaments and symbols. The interior designs have high aesthetic and functional values, made according to cultural characteristics, population’s traditions, terrain and climate of the original Macedonian settlements and cities. This housing design influenced

their public and religious architecture, developing Macedonian style creations of old urban and rural homes to the extent of popular style.

The fireplace is the hearth of the house with the strongest symbolic significance. It has various locations in the house, with various shapes and performances. It is the center of the internal world and of all the family activities with functional, existential, social and decorative significance.

The ceiling had a functional and strong representative message, according to the value (extent) of its decorations. “Wheels” (called “Kolca”) or “Rosettes” represent a unique feature of the country’s cultural heritage.

A treasure of movable and immovable furniture such as different cupboards (Musandras, Nishas and Dolaps), girls’ caskets, doors, windows, low tables, chairs etc., are timeless, produced with decorations that signify the identity, culture and unique genesis of the Macedonian people.

We can conclude that our inherited traditional houses with their interiors have an enormous significance for us, not only because they represent our cultural heritage, but because they are witnesses of the existence and development of our history. Ornaments, with their symbolic meanings which simply showered space equipment, carry a strong message of a cultural construction creation of universal significance. Today, many ruins of old traditional houses testify to the existence, identity and fate of our nation.

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