The Privacy and Social Needs of Women in Contemporary Kuwaiti Homes

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THE PRIVACY AND SOCIAL NEEDS OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY KUWAITI HOMES

By

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This thesis is dedicated to my husband Hamad, sons Salman and Othman, mother Dehya Saeed, brother Khalid, and to the memory of my father Hajeej Humoud
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the design of the contemporary Kuwaiti home to determine if it meets the needs of the contemporary Kuwaiti women in terms of privacy, social interaction, and aesthetic preferences, as well as connection to the past. To this end, a case study was conducted in a Kuwaiti house which included architectural and interior elements common in contemporary Kuwaiti homes. The research techniques of observation, visual documentation, and interview were used to explore how the home was used, with specific focus on three historical architectural features including the guest salon, the screen, and the courtyard. This exploration revealed that modern design failed to respond to meet many of the Kuwaiti women's needs for privacy, contact with nature, free movement within the home, and social interaction with family members. The study offers design recommendations that better meet the needs of Kuwaiti women in their homes.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

As a woman and Kuwaiti citizen, I am interested in the design of the Kuwaiti home and the impact of this design on the lifestyle of Kuwaiti women. Historically, women have had a huge influence on the design of the Kuwaiti home as well as the furnishings and materials used inside the home. The discovery of oil in Kuwait in 1936, and the economic prosperity which followed, brought many changes to the lives of Kuwaiti people and impacted the design of the homes in which they live. Research in this area can inform those interested in designing to meet the needs of the Kuwaiti culture.

The discovery of oil changed the country in many ways including the design of the Kuwaiti home. Historically, Kuwaitis resided in two types of houses, specifically adobe houses and tents. Both of these dwellings reflected the identity of Kuwaiti social structure. Throughout time, the Kuwaiti woman has had a significant impact on the personalization and individuality of the vernacular Kuwaiti dwelling. Because of religious rules and Arabian traditions, Kuwaiti women have needed, and continue to need, a high degree of privacy while performing their roles which include reproduction, guardian of the family, domestic duties, communal activities, and production of food, furnishings, and shelter. In order to provide the privacy needed for women in their homes, three architectural features have been traditionally utilized, including the courtyard, the screen, and separate male and female salons. In addition to their role as users and residents of the home, Kuwaiti women played another critical role as designers and manufacturers. They produced many decorative items for the adobe house, sewing and embroidering pillows, sheets, blankets, and mattress pads.

While some Kuwaitis lived in permanent structures, another social cluster of the Kuwaiti community, the Bedouins, were dwellers of the desert (Al Sabah, 2001). Because the Bedouins were a nomadic culture moving in search of water and food, they lived in tents. The design of these structures utilized the women's talent as professional weaver and provided an outlet for her creative energy. The task and craft
of weaving the tents was given to the Bedouin women, who created the tents from dark goat wool called *Bayt al Shaar* (house of the hair). The simple indigenous materials were exploited to build and decorate a space that was well-adapted to accommodate the severe environment. Whether women were active users or producers of the traditional dwelling, they contributed to the distinctive character of Kuwaiti architecture.

After the oil boom, the role of women in producing the architectural and interior features of residential spaces diminished due to the socio-economic growth in Kuwait. As a result, many of the new homes did not meet the needs of the contemporary Kuwaiti women because they lacked comfort and were not tailored to meet their crucial needs for privacy. The government had contracted with international architects and designers who were not familiar with the Kuwaiti culture or with women's role and status in Kuwaiti society. Many argue that the modern architectural features which now characterized residential spaces seem inadequate substitutes for traditional ones (Al Mutawa, 1994; Al-Hussayen, 1995; Boussora, 1990).

As producers of many of the products used in the Kuwaiti home, Kuwaiti women were negatively affected by the changes that took place following the discovery of oil. With the new affluence, female skilled professionals stopped practicing the time-consuming craft of embroidery. Moreover, in order to modernize Kuwait city, inhabitants of the adobe houses were re-located to new urban developments. The Bedouins had also settled in these neighborhoods as part of the social reorganization of Kuwait. As a result of this, the Bedouin no longer lived in tents, so the Bedouin women no longer wove.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore whether the design of contemporary Kuwaiti homes meet the needs of the contemporary Kuwaiti women in terms of privacy, human and social interaction, aesthetic preferences, as well as respect for the past.
Justification of Study

When people feel tied to places where they live, they convert these locations from mere inanimate landscapes to something like a living entity which becomes a source of personal identity and endowed with personality and spirit (Kellert, 2005, p.160).

As a Kuwaiti designer and a woman, I believe in the woman's role as the most active member in the residential space. My objective is to create modern houses which meet the needs of the Kuwaiti women. Fostering women's commitment to and stewardship of their personal spaces requires an understanding of Kuwaiti culture. By fully understanding the culture and fusing it with residential design, the home can help residents achieve emotional and intellectual attachment.

The study's objective is to integrate social values with modern design concepts and building techniques. To fully accommodate the needs, preferences, and social roles of Kuwaiti women, the designer must acknowledge the cultural dimension.

Definitions of Terms

*Hejab:* a decent dressing which the Muslim woman has to cover her hair and body, excluding her face and hands, in front of male strangers.

*Personal space:* the space strongly required to conduct certain operations in private and to control access. The demand for privacy and physical contact is not a universal desire but it is one about which different societies have different feelings (Deasy and Lasswell, 1985).

*Courtyard:* the open area within the house which is surrounded by the building elements from two, three, or four sides (Al-Hussayen, 1995).

*Diwania:* a very important space in the traditional houses in Kuwait. A public gathering and entertainment place for men (Al Mutawa, 1994).
Sadu: the Kuwaiti Bedouin used this word to refer to the weaving process, the woven objects, and the horizontal loom (Al Sabah, 2001).

Al-Sadu House: a cultural center concerned with preserving the traditional weaving of crafts and textiles.

Bedouin: derived from the Arabic term bedu (plural), badawi (singular) to mean the "dweller of the desert" or "nomad". The bedu term can be traced from al badia that means the vast open land where the eye can take the entire landscape in at once (Al Sabah, 2001).

Vernacular design: "the tailoring of the built environment to the particular physical and cultural places where people live and work" (Kellert, 2005, p.165).
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Ruskin said "an architectural artifact should not only look well and act well, but it should also speak well...Noble architecture is in some sort the embodiment of the policy, life, history, and religious faith of the nation" (as cited in Capon, 1999, p.107). The function of architecture goes beyond constructing an environment for human use; rather it is the visual language that reflects identities and heritage. Prior to the oil boom in 1936, the traditional dwelling in Kuwait mirrored the local identity and heritage of the country. It possessed architectural and interior elements that characterized the regional identity. The presence of some of these elements reveals two significant roles of Kuwait women in shaping the traditional dwelling in Kuwait: as a demanding user who impacted the space planning and as a designer and manufacturer. However, after the oil boom in 1936, and the spur of economic growth, the role of women as users and producers of residential spaces decreased.

Background Information

This review of literature will explore how Kuwaiti women greatly influenced the design of the traditional dwelling in Kuwait, as well as how their contributions declined in contemporary residential spaces. In order for the reader to understand such a notion, the review of literature will be organized under the following headings:

1. Overview of Kuwait's population and topography.
2. The characteristics of the traditional adobe house in Kuwait.
3. Factors producing the characteristics of the traditional adobe house in Kuwait.
4. Kuwaiti women's impact as users
5. Kuwaiti women's impact as producers.
6. Introducing the modern architectural identity in Kuwait
7. The characteristics of the contemporary houses in Kuwait
The decrease of Kuwaiti women's contributions.

Search Techniques

Both printed and online sources comprise the review of literature’s resources, including articles, books, conference proceedings, and thesis projects. Additional research involved interviews, conducted (mainly in Kuwait) with Dea`age Al Motairi, Associate Professor in the College of Islamic Studies and Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, Kuwait University, and with Om Waleed, a Kuwaiti weaving specialist at Al Sadu House, the National Weaving Museum of Kuwait. In the online search, the following keywords, used in combination, provided the best results: “traditional house,” “Kuwait,” “courtyard,” “lattice,” “screen,” “woman,” “architecture,” and “interior design.” The most useful publications included Mimar and The Journal of Architectural and Planning Research. A search in the library of Al Sadu House in Kuwait proved valuable in finding textbooks relevant to the subject.

Overview of Kuwait's Population and Topography

Kuwait is a small Arabic Middle Eastern country located on the Arabian Gulf. It shares its borders with Iraq and Saudi Arabia (see figure 2.1). Kuwait’s populace is challenged by its severe climate and geography, a dry desert with intensely hot summers and short cool winters. Eighty-five percent of the population is Muslim while the other 15% include Christian, Hindu, Jewish, and other religions. According to the Central Intelligence Agency's World Fact Book, Kuwait’s population reached 2,418,393 in July 2006. That number includes 1,291,354 non-nationals, approximately half of the population.
According to Al Sabah (2001), facing both desert and sea influenced the traditional system of social organization in Kuwait. Historically, the economy of Kuwait depended on the pearl trade and fishing. The majority of Kuwaiti society included wealthy families—who managed the pearl diving and trade—as well as fishermen, pearl divers, craftsmen, and skilled artisans. This community of individuals that earned their livelihood from the sea resided in adobe houses along the seashore.

Another social cluster of the Kuwaiti community was the Bedouins, the dwellers of the desert (Al Sabah, 2001). They depended on agricultural trading and grazing for their livelihood. Because the Bedouins were a nomadic culture moving in search of water and food, they lived in woven tents. The task and craft of weaving the tents were left to the Bedouin women, who wove the tents with dark goat wool called Bayt al Shaar (house of the hair).

In summary, the available livelihood and geography of early Kuwait influenced the two kinds of vernacular dwellings there, the adobe house and the tent.
The Characteristics of the Traditional Adobe House in Kuwait

The traditional Kuwaiti adobe house was located along the seashore. These traditional houses were commonly seen until the oil boom 1936, which greatly impacted the typical home. Historically, the traditional adobe houses had special architectural and interior features that expressed the regional identity of Kuwait. Al-Mutawa (1994), Al-bahar (1984), Lautrette (2006) specified these characteristics:

1. The door: Constructed of vertical planks, usually of teak, and held together by horizontal crossbars on the inside to which the planks were fastened by closely spaced nails. On the outside face of the door leaf, these nails had apparent large dome-shaped bosses. A small inset door (bejurer) was frequently constructed within the large pair of doors for daily use (see figure 2.2).

![The bejurer and the nails](image)

_Figure 2.2. The components of the traditional door (Lautrette, 2006)._

2. The mastaba dajah: An outdoor bench made of stone and mud near the house door (see figure 2.3).

![The outdoor bench](image)

_Figure 2.3. The outdoor bench (Lautrette, 2006)._
3. The courtyard *hosh*: The internal open space (see figure 2.4).

![Image](image1)

*Figure 2.4. The courtyard and Al-jeleeb in the middle (Lautrette, 2006).*

4. *Al-jeleeb*: A cistern well built in only a few houses placed in the center of the courtyard to collect the rainwater as shown in figure 2.4.

5. The arcade *liwan*: A passage that separated the rooms from the courtyard (see figure 2.5).

![Image](image2)

*Figure 2.5. The arcade (Lautrette, 2006)*
6. The palm tree, and *nabk*: Trees growing in the desert as shown in figure 2.6.

![Figure 2.6. Nabk tree (Lautrette, 2006).](image)

7. The vestibule *dehleeze*: A passage in front of the house-gate with an angle at its end (see figure 2.7).

![Figure 2.7. The vestibule, bent entrance (Lautrette, 2006).](image)
8. A roof-room: An isolated corner structure bearing wind-catcher recesses which was used either as a reception room (*kishk*) or as a sleeping room (*kurfah*) (see figure 2.8).

![Outside view](image1) ![Inside view](image2)

*Figure 2.8. An inside and an outside view of the roof-room (Lautrette, 2006).*

9. The *bagdir*: The pressure wind tower that brought air from the outside to the inside for cooling. Moisturized clay pots were located in the path of the air to lower the air temperature (see figure 2.9).

![Wind tower](image3)

*Figure 2.9. Wind tower ([www.archnet.org](http://www.archnet.org))*

10. The attic *sandra*: A raised floor to the middle of the room height for storing purposes, or for sleeping in winter.
11. The *chandal*: Apparent beams that were round and wooden and supported the roof (see figure 2.10).

![Figure 2.10. Al chandal (Lautrette, 2006).](image)

12. The roof: Reed mats, holding mud mixed with straw, were placed on the top of the *chandale* (see figure 2.11). Kuwaitis were assumed to sleep on them during the summer season.

![Figure 2.11. The construction of the traditional roof (Lautrette, 2006).](image)

14. Male Salon, *Diwania*: A public gathering and entertainment place for males. Visiting the neighborhood *diwantias* at night for socializing and discussing daily matters is widely practiced in Kuwait. These gatherings counted as social institutions and news sources (see figure 2.12).

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 2.12. Diwania in Al-Bader house (Hamad Alanzi)*

**Factors Influencing the Characteristics of the Traditional Adobe House in Kuwait**

The available materials, economic conditions, manpower, local topographies, and social and cultural norms defined the main features of the traditional Kuwaiti dwelling dating between the latter part of the 18\(^{th}\) century and the first half of the 20\(^{th}\) century (Al-Mutawa, 1994; Al-Baher, 1984). Kuwaiti adobe houses were designed and constructed by Kuwaitis of both the *alestad*, similar to an architect that supervised the construction, and the laborers. Moreover, Kuwaiti society's value of classlessness was reflected in the construction of the living units, which were built adjacent to one another, promoting unity and cooperation between Kuwaitis: the poor were the neighbors of the rich.
Indigenous elements such as sea rock, mud (*tin*), limestone, and gypsum were used to construct the adobe houses. Sun-dried mud pellets or seashore rocks were mortared with mud to construct the walls that were eventually plastered with mud (Al-Bader, 1984). And since Kuwait’s economy depended on caravans\(^1\) to Africa and India, additional construction materials were imported from India (teakwood), while *chandal* and *basajeel* (bamboo) were imported from Africa.

In spite of the simplicity of the traditional dwellings’ design, they proved effective and comfortable (Al-Mutawa, 1994, Al-Baher, 1984). With ingenuity, the builders solved problems confronting the early Kuwaiti’s, like high temperatures. Although the builders used an inexpensive material, mud, by controlling the walls’ thickness and the openings within them, they erected walls that cooled down the indoor temperatures. The mud, a thermal capacitor material, provided thermal insulation that modified the rather harsh climate in the hot summer months. In addition, Lautrette (2006) wrote that large horizontal recesses were located midway up the height of the exterior façade of a one-story building or on the upper walls of a roof-room (see figure 2.13, 2.14, and 2.15). These recesses, or wind catchers (*bagdirs*), deflected high air pressure from the outside, down into a shaft where the hot air cooled because of the insulation quality of the mud. Due to differences of the air temperature and density, a constant flow of air moving across the shaft down into the room was created. The bottom of the airshaft could be closed by a small shutter to stop the air movement. The builders’ simple, and yet, effective, construction techniques demonstrated their creative responses to the severe local topography.

![Figure 2.13. Wind catcher elevations (Lautrette, 2006).](image)

\(^1\) Diving excursions for pearls and trading caravans for selling and buying goods.
However influential the topography and climate were on the vernacular architecture of Kuwait, also powerful in their influence were Kuwaiti women, whose unique positions in Kuwaiti culture both individualized the culture and, by extension, indelibly marked its vernacular architecture. The chief demand of traditional architecture was preserving the privacy of the women's areas of the home, respecting the needs of Kuwaiti women. This value for privacy stemmed from the Quran which obligated Muslim women to wear a veil. The next section will explore the linkage between Kuwaiti women's need for privacy and their dwellings.
Kuwaiti Women's Impact as Users

Kuwait is an Islamic country that respects all religions and traditions, but more than 85% of the Kuwaiti population is Muslim. In Muslim societies, religious doctrine provides the general ethical framework for human behavior (Mahfouz & Ismail, 1990). Islam established a set of principles to regulate the relationship between females and males. For example, Muslim women can communicate with strangers but only under certain conditions like when wearing the veil, al hejab, as a gesture of modesty and decency (Al Motairi, 2006). The following Quranic verses regulate the interactions between women and men to preserve the women's privacy:

"Tell the believing man to reduce some of their vision and guard their private parts; that is purer for them, indeed Allah is acquainted with what they do. And tell the believing women to reduce some of their vision and guard their private parts and not display their adornment except that which ordinary appears thereof, and to draw their heads’ cover over their chests and not display their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, husbands’ fathers, their sons, their husbands’ sons, their brothers, their brothers’ sons, their sisters’ sons, other women, which that the right hands possess, or those male attendants who have no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women, and let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment and turn to Allah in repentance all of you believers that you might succeed" (Quran, 29, 30: 24).

The veil, al hejab, not only separates "the female from the male, but also the private from the public, the interior from the exterior, and the invisible from the visible" (Clevenot & Degeorge, 2000. p. 208). The need for a veil meets the need to maintain women’s areas out of sight from strangers. However, the house is assumed to be the most private space, where women should feel free to be informal, remove their veil to those relatives named in the above Quaranic verses.
Maintaining the privacy of Kuwaiti women inside residential spaces is a dominant social need because it helps structure traditional social roles (Al Mutawa, 1994), especially the major ones of birthing and raising children (Lewcock & Freeth, 1978). In addition, females have the duty of either supervising or performing the household tasks.

In the past, the home was the hub for much female creativity and craftsmanship, where Kuwaiti women used their spaces for an abundance of production roles, including preparing food, tailoring, weaving, spinning, and embroidering (Al Sabah, 2001). Also, the home provided the locale for most female gatherings and social interactions (Lewcock & Freeth, 1978). Kuwaitis perceived home as a significant space for Kuwaiti women because it was the most private sphere that accommodated their different social roles. In this manner, home became an expression of women's personal space. Consequently, the needs of Kuwaiti women were strongly integrated into the design of traditional residences.

In general, the design of human environments and settings are influenced by a consistent set of rules within a specific society (Abu-Gazzeh, 1996). The traditional role and perception of Kuwaiti women impacted the design of the vernacular house. Next, three key architectural features in Kuwaiti traditional dwellings will be discussed; they include the female and male guest salons, the screen, and the courtyard.

The Guest Salon

The built environment provides cues to the social situation that influences people's behavior (Rapoport, 1982). The space planning, including the location of windows and doors, in the interior spaces in the Kuwaiti traditional houses were controlled by several social customs (Al Mutawa, 1994; Al Baher, 1984). In particular, hospitality was, and continues to be, one of the deep-rooted traditions of Islamic teaching (Memarian & Brown, 2003). The prophet, Mohammed, said: "those who believe in Allah and doomsday have to warmly welcome their guests." The tradition of visiting neighbors and relatives was, and still is, a means of consolidating relationships between the members of Islamic communities. Usually hot tea and Arabian coffee are served for the guests, while big feasts are held for relatives, friends, and neighbors for celebrations like the birth of a baby, wedding parties, and
so forth. In the past, the afternoon tea, *chay Al daha*, was a custom at which women used to gather in the afternoon to chat, eat cookies, and drink tea and coffee.

Because guests must be warmly welcomed, the presence of guest salons was (and still is today) a very important element in the traditional house (Al Mutawa, 1994). But, as was consistent in the traditional adobe house, the need for privacy remained constant. Even the prized—and, by religious doctrine, required—custom of entertaining did not outweigh the value of women’s privacy. The view was that accommodating social gatherings should not interrupt the privacy of the inhabitants. Reflecting this viewpoint, the special reception space was designed (and still is today) to provide warmth and hospitality to visitors while maintaining the inner privacy of the household (Motairi, 2006). A specially-designed guest-reception area provided comfortable area for guests, accessibility to the family and household without disturbing its domestic privacy and daily life. This resulted in the separation of reception areas into two separate guest salons: the male salon (*diwania*) and the female salon. The women’s salon was set back and secluded, whereas the men’s salon faced or fronted the street (Al Baher, 1984).

In addition to separate guest salons, traditional households featured separate entrances for men and women. Since in the Kuwaiti tradition female members of households must not be in the view of male visitors, women even had a separate entrance. In addition, the female quarters were usually accessed through a side doorway via a backstreet, while the main entrance of the house led to the men’s quarters. In order to prevent a direct view of the private quarters, the front entrance led to a bent passageway that was located away from the courtyard (see figure 2.16).
As discussed, Kuwaiti women and their traditional social status impacted the design of the traditional dwelling. Satisfying the privacy demands of the female users in their personal spaces was the design focus of the traditional house. The borders of the female quarters—the female guest salon, the family quarter, and female entrance—were developed to function similarly to their *hejabs*, or veils.
The Screens

The purpose of the screen. Initially, lattice screens were used in Egyptian mosques to create a private space for the ruler (Kenzari & Elsheshtawy, 2003). Although separating the ruler from public prayers is contrary to the spirit of Islam, such devices were introduced in the first half of the eleventh century following a series of assassination attempts against Muslim rulers. As a result, an enclosure within the mosque was built for the ruler to pray while being protected from the public by wooden screens. Thus, the notion of concealing the individual for protection while permitting social participation grew to be associated with the application of screened windows.

Later, lattice screens became popular in many residential spaces in the Middle East for female inhabitants to gain visual access to public spaces while maintaining the norms of gender segregation (Kenzari & Elsheshtawy, 2003). Both the lattice-screened windows and screened balconies allowed the female occupants to view the outside world without the outsider viewing them. In addition, the screens were incorporated into the female salon, allowing views into the reception area so that men’s gatherings and festivals could be observed. Whether these architectural mechanisms overlooked the outside or the inside, private observation was ensured for the female occupants.

Kenzari and Elsheshtawy (2003) suggested that the lattice-screened window constitutes an architectural veil that is similar in function to a textile counterpart. Both veil and lattice screen allowed women to extend their privacy outside their residential space into the public domain. The norms of gender segregation could be upheld while the woman gained more access to the social life on the "other" side—outside the house or the male quarters inside the house. Also, like the textile veil, the lattice screen allowed the woman to negotiate her participation in public life while protecting her private sphere, and maintaining the separation between male and female domains.

The use of screens in the traditional Kuwaiti house. Lautrette (2006) said that because the notion of privacy and security is a dominant concept of the Kuwaiti community, using screens was an essential element in Kuwaiti dwellings. And while meeting the basic needs for privacy, the screens also permitted light and ventilation.
In traditional Kuwait society, screens were associated with women's quarters (Al-baher, 1984). Various forms of screens were produced based on the screens’ locations in the house and the materials used.

Reed Lattice Screens

The reed lattice screens (shish) were a type of parapet used throughout the 19th century for privacy and cooling (see figure 2.17).

Figure 2.17. A reed-lattice screen (shish) extends the visual privacy of the open-air shelter on the roof (Lautrette, 2006).

Parapet Balustrade

During the first half of the 20th century, a parapet balustrade was made of fired bricks to enhance the building decoration (see figure 2.18 and 2.19).

Figure 2.18. The fired-brick balustrade surrounds the roof. (Lautrette, 2006).
**Figure 2.19.** Types of roof parapets in Kuwaiti traditional houses (Lautrette, 2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of parapet</th>
<th>Building materials</th>
<th>Functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Plain wall</td>
<td>Sun dried mud bricks</td>
<td>Privacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lattice-work</td>
<td>Reeds</td>
<td>Privacy + Cooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Paneled wall</td>
<td>Mud or rammed earth + wooden beams</td>
<td>Privacy + Cooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Balustrade</td>
<td>Fired bricks</td>
<td>Privacy + Cooling + Decoration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Screen-Wall

Screen-walls were common at the end of a loggia (see figure 2.20). Usually, a wall set in the last bay of the liwan formed a screen pierced by a low window with a wooden lattice. Behind this wall was the more private living space entered from the loggia that was used for relaxing in less formal settings.

![Screen-Wall](image)

*Figure 2.20. On the left side in the last bay of the liwan is the screen-wall with its low latticed window (Lautrette, 2006).*

Plaster Grill

Lautrette (2006) explained that another type of screen, the plaster grill, was seen in Kuwaiti traditional houses. The plaster grill screen was related to the wooden screen found in other parts of the Islamic world; however, due to lack of wood in the region, these screens were made of plaster. Plaster grills within small openings (60 cm x 40 cm) were located in the upper walls of private quarters (see figure 2.21). They allowed cool breezes to penetrate the interior, regulated the humidity, and allowed some daylight to filter through (see figure 2.22). A variety of patterns are found on these little plaster trellises (see figure 2.23). The master carvers' pride in the craft encouraged them to not repeat the same pattern in another window until time had passed. A great variety of patterns, mainly geometric, had specified names, such as: shajrah (tree), silsilah (chain), and dawaer (circles).
Figure 2.21. Plaster grill on the upper wall of the female courtyard (Lautrette, 2006).

Figure 2.22. Plaster grill from inside the private room (Lautrette, 2006).

Figure 2.23. Several plaster grilles with various decoration motifs (Lautrette, 2006).
The Courtyard

**Definition.** According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the courtyard is defined as an open area surrounded by walls or buildings within the precincts of a large house, castle, homestead, etc. (Al-Hussayen, 1995). In the Spanish or Spanish-American house, the inner court which is open to the sky is called a *patio*. This term was introduced to the English language and is used interchangeably with the courtyard. In the Arabic language, the word *fina* is equivalent to the courtyard. It refers to the open area within the house that is surrounded by walls or buildings from two, three, or four sides.

**The characteristics.** Al-Hussayen (1995) wrote that the courtyard has been highly utilized in hot regions as a thermal regulator. The courtyard provides daylight and ventilation to the surrounding interior spaces. In addition, the shaded outdoor area was maximized by orienting the longitudinal courtyard toward the north-south direction. Moreover, sharing the external walls with the neighboring houses minimized the exposure of vertical surfaces to the sunrays. Finally, the landscaping within the courtyard not only enhanced the setting for outdoor activities, but also modified the air temperature and humidity. Landscape elements contributed to distribute, reflect, and absorb light. Courtyard walls and trees created shade and wind protection (Safarzadeh & Bahadori, 2005), while a pool, a lawn, shrubs, and flowers lowered the ground temperature and increased the relative humidity.

The courtyard played a vital social role in Arabic dwellings (Al-Hussayen, 1995). Privacy was a key quality of the courtyard house that facilitated a daily life outdoors free from observation by neighbors. The clustered spaces and surrounding walls around the open courtyard prevented the interference of outsiders. The courtyard was the location of the family's domestic responsibilities and social activities while they enjoyed the open spaces. Lewcock & Freeth (1978) documented the courtyard as a central space in traditional Kuwaiti women's lives:

*By midmorning, it would be a time to relax in some cool place*

*... drinking small glasses of sweet tea. In the corner of the yard*

*... a maidservant would work at the never-ending task of*

*picking over the rice to remove the tiny stones.... In homes*

*without servants this was often done by several female*
members of the family, sitting around the tray together, when it
would become a sociable pastime (p. 6).

Because the courtyard interconnected the surrounding interior spaces, it also
allowed the women to move freely about the home. When traditional residences
contained more than one courtyard, one courtyard remained private for women’s
access. In this manner, the courtyard lent itself to a high degree of domestic privacy.

The courtyard in the traditional Kuwaiti house. According to Lewcock &
Freeth (1978), the number of "functions of the house around the singular courtyard"
was the essential difference between a small house and a large one (p. 23). In affluent
families, houses took the form of having two adjacent courtyards; one was the private
living court for women (hosh al-harim), while another was used as a reception court
for men (hosh al-diwania) (see figure 2.24). Sometimes, the space planning did not
provide the male visitors the opportunity to enter and use the guest salon without
disturbing the life of the family in the courtyard. As a result, the women's movement
within the courtyard of the house became limited while male strangers visited. In
certain affluent houses, additional smaller courts for the kitchen staff and animals
existed.

Figure 2.24. Women’s courtyard in Al Bader house (Lautrette, 2006).
As we have seen, Kuwaitis strongly value privacy provisions for women inside their living units (Lautrette, 2006). In Kuwaiti tradition, it is not preferable to see a woman while she is performing her domestic duties or other social activities inside her house from the outside, or to see her in the male guest quarters (Al-Mutawa, 1994). Hence, a courtyard was central in the space organization of the traditional Kuwaiti residence. Not only did the courtyard preserve the private and secure quarters for women, but also functioned as a dynamic space for daily life (Lewcock & Freeth, 1978). The spaces used by Kuwaiti women—the bedroom, kitchen, the female guest salon, and the family area—were clustered around and overlooked the courtyard. This spatial planning, the close proximity of the houses’ rooms, allowed the women easy access among their chiefly used areas to handle the daily responsibilities of taking care of children, cooking, and cleaning (Al-Hussayen, 1995). When the house did not include a special guest salon, the courtyard served as a women’s gathering space most of the year.

The previously discussed architectural features—the guest salon, the screen, and the courtyard—were utilized in the traditional Kuwaiti dwelling. These elements were functional and had the power to support the social life of Kuwaitis. The guest salons were specially designed to accommodate social celebrations and maintain gender separation; the screens allowed the daylight and ventilation to penetrate the interior spaces and protected the female spaces; and the courtyard acted as a thermal regulator and dynamic space for the family and prevented the interference of outsiders. These architectural elements were tangible expressions for the Kuwaitis’ cultural perceptions related to Kuwaiti women’s social roles. The presence of these elements in the space planning of the traditional Kuwaiti adobe house became associated with providing privacy for the female users, which illustrated the degree to which Kuwaiti women contributed to the formation of architectural space.
Kuwaiti Women's Impact as Producers

Embroidery

In addition to the role of user, Kuwaiti women produced many decorative items in the adobe house. Om Waleed, a member of Al-Sadu House, mentioned that Kuwaiti women sewed and embroidered pillows, sheets, blankets, and mattress pads. Surrounding outside elements such as plants, trees, shrubs, birds, and stars inspired the colored cotton and silk-thread designs.

In many Kuwaiti homes, the bedrooms also served as a family's living area (Al Sayid, 2004). The mattress pads and pillows performed double duties, daily transforming a single space from reclining to sleeping quarters. During the day, the mattress pad lay on the ground and family members propped pillows against the walls for sitting, while at night, the pillows were placed between the mattress pads for sleeping.

It was a Kuwaiti custom that the bride’s family gave great attention to embroidering the bridal bedroom’s furnishings with gold or silk threads. An all-white silk mattress, back pillows, and cushions for the bridal bedroom were embroidered by a female Kuwaiti specialist. Since only a number of Kuwaiti women were masters in the skills of tailoring and embroidery, this craft was lucrative for female professionals. The creation of these handmade pieces surpassed their functional purposes; the pieces expressed Kuwaiti women's love of family and her artistry, by which Kuwaiti women forged the soul of the home.

Bedouin's Weaving (Al sadu)

The producer. "For many generations, weaving has been an integral part of the fabric of Bedouin life” (Crichton, 1998, p.11). Bedouin women wove everything from their tribes’ dwellings to their essential and decorative items (see figure 2.25). The process of wool weaving and the actual woven object as well as the loom itself are referred to by the old Arabic term, al sadu. Bedouin mothers taught their young girls the sadu weaving craft of spinning, dying, and weaving. Through the sadu weaving craft, women expressed their artistry and skills. The variety of designs and the quality of the tent's fabric construction indicated the skill level and the artistry of the weaver.
Figure 2.25. A Bedouin woman weaving the tent and its furnishings (Crichton, 1998).

**The motifs.** The *sadu*’s designs and patterns conveyed the ideology and creativity of the Bedouin woman designer. As Islamic principles restrict the representation of the human figure, the abstraction and the mathematical relationships were the soul of al sadu’s motifs, motifs derived from the surrounding environment. The abstracted forms chosen by the weaver such as stripes, dots, squares, and triangles, as well as their rhythmic repetition and symmetry, revealed the weaver’s personality.

Al-Qahtani (1999) explained that the primary elements and tones found in the woven fabrics express the spontaneous character and simple norms of desert life. Furthermore, just as with the extended horizons of the desert, Bedouin patterns were not confined within a framework or an overall border, but rather seem to stretch on and on. In his book, *The Primitive Art*, Boas (as cited Crichton, 1998) said that symmetry and rhythmic repetition have always been the basic elements of art because of natures’ influence on artist. Boas stated that the rhythmic repetition in nature—in the horizontal lines of the horizon, plains, and steppes, and in the regular phenomenon of the alteration of day and night—inspired the artists, seizing their imaginations, and emerging in their art.
Figure 2.26. Motifs symbolize the daily life of the desert, including from bottom to top: comb, Desert Storm air-plane figures, and comb, stars (Al Sabah, 2001).

The natural sources. Showing great resourcefulness, Bedouin women utilized indigenous materials to produce the traditional Bedouin art of *al sadu*. They used natural sources such as sheep wool and goat hair for yarn; dyes were derived from desert plants. For example, the women used the plant dyes of *argon*, *arfaj*, and *isfej* to give the yellowish hues, *henna*, to produce a pale red-brown tone, and *fewa* was selected for a reddish color. In contrast to the austerity of the desert, Bedouin women used bright colors such as reds and oranges to liven up the monotonous surroundings (see figure 2.27). They employed simple objects, transforming them to build and decorate their dwellings, which became virtual oases in the desert.

Figure 2.27. Al Sadu dyes were derived from the plants (Crichton, 1998).
The products. According to Crichton (1998), Bedouin women wove pieces of material 42 cm wide and then sewed them together with goat or sheep wool yarn. The tent was woven from goat hair because: a) the black color absorbed the heat, b) the yarn swelled, tightening the woven structure and becoming waterproof when wet, c) the natural oil in the fiber shed water, d) it was strong and hardwearing, and e) it had thermal heat properties, so it did not hold heat or cold (Al-Mutawa, 1994). Also, the erection of the tent was the Bedouin women’s task: three to four women were needed to erect a small tent, and the men were only asked to help if it was larger. Bedouin women wove the essential furnishing items, including rugs (sahat and mefaresh), storage bags (udul and mazawad), and saddle bags (khuruj) (see figure 2.28). They decorated the saddle and camel bags as a bride’s gift to her husband.

Figure 2.28. A saddlebag (Al Sabah, 2001)

Kuwaiti women were sources of the individuality seen in the traditional Kuwaiti dwelling. Whether women acted as active users or producers of the traditional dwelling, they affected its design and contributed in defining the characteristics of the vernacular houses in Kuwait. Unfortunately, at some point, the Kuwaiti women’s role in influencing architecture changed. Following the oil boom in 1936, the socio-economic growth in Kuwaiti communities negatively affected Kuwaiti women's traditional roles in articulating the residential spaces. The next section of literature review will provide an overview of Kuwaiti women’s decreasing contributions as users and producers in modern residential spaces.
Introducing the Modern Architectural Identity in Kuwait

In the early 1950's, an economic boom facilitated Kuwait's efforts to urbanize the capital, Kuwait City, and to plan new residential neighborhoods (Al baher, 1985). The government hired international experts to build a new infrastructure. Most of the Western and Arabic architects sought architectural solutions with more modern attributes which were dominating Western architecture. They adopted these approaches in designing the residential spaces and planning the domestic areas in Kuwait. These new architectural features, replacing the traditional ones, changed the architectural identity of Kuwait.

Along with the designers, Kuwaiti citizens also contributed in changing the aesthetic taste and the architectural identity in Kuwait. Al baher (1985) acknowledged the role of both the designers and Kuwaiti citizens in the loss of the architectural identity of Kuwait.

The overall affluence allowed the increased acquisition of motorcars, the introduction of new technologies, the importation of architects, engineers, other professionals and labourers from various parts of the world, in an effort to build the modern Kuwait. The newcomers, many of whom were Arabs, did not quite understand the various aspects of Kuwait's environment. The Kuwaiti citizen himself did not quite comprehend what architecture was all about. The Kuwaitis began to experience a sense of freedom from the constraints of the traditional way of life and a sense of affluence toward a modern living environment. They began with the aid of rather mediocre architects to express their confused thoughts architecturally. Many of their attempts were in search of a new identity that had no link with the past, and rather than develop, enhance and refine the traditional character in the context of the new, they simply discarded the old and started to build the new on very shaky and superficial grounds (p. 63).

Kuwaitis, newly affluent, and having traveled around the world and been influenced by foreign styles, sought unique designs for their dream houses (Al baher, 1985). Kuwaitis believed that imitating these foreign building styles would be the
bridge to manifest their individuality and the modern lifestyle they desired. But unfortunately, they misperceived the best style for their future modern houses. However, in hindsight, many argue that they lacked the vision of how to integrate the beneficial aspects of modern architecture with their particular needs. By adopting Western architectural styles, Kuwaitis looked to the modern era to have their houses reflect their increasing wealth and social stature. Unfortunately, these new designs came at a great cost to the socio-architectural integrity of their dwellings.

The Characteristics of the Contemporary Houses in Kuwait

Al baher (1985) classified the characteristics of modern houses dating from the 1950’s to the 1980’s in Kuwait into three periods:

Early Post Oil Stage (1950’s –Early 1960’s)

Architectural forms that characterized modern Western buildings were geometric facades, sloping roofs, deformed angles, spacious balconies, and decorative slabs, which were imported to represent a modern lifestyle. Providing air-conditioned interior spaces allowed for enlarging the openings of the windows. Exterior materials such as cement plaster, stucco, and natural stone became widespread (see figure 2.29).

Figure 2.29. An example of Kuwaiti house of early post oil stage (Al baher, 1985).
Middle Post Oil Stage (Mid 1960`s – 1970` s)

More attention was given to the structural function of residences in the post oil period. As a reaction to the peeling stucco caused by Kuwait’s severe weather, more durable materials such as limestone bricks were used for the external cladding. Because they were unused spaces, the balconies had been either reduced or eliminated. In spite of the attention to the practical details that had evolved over time in Kuwait, the designers imitated the foreign architectural motifs and styles of Spanish and Baroque (see figure 2.30). As a result, Kuwait’s neighborhoods resembled "an architectural extravaganza, a carnival, a showroom of copied styles and motifs" (Al bahar, 1985, p.65).

Figure 2.30. Examples of the Kuwait`s residential architecture of the middle Post-Oil period (Al bahar, 1985).

Late Post Oil Stage (1980` s)

In this stage, the design approaches were still oriented toward modern architecture. However, Kuwaitis began to appreciate the functional performance of Islamic architecture. Some Islamic architectural features such as the arch, arcade, courtyard, script, and lattice screen strongly inspired the design of Kuwaitis` houses (see figure 2.31).

Figure 2.31. Examples of the Kuwait`s residential architecture of the late Post-Oil period (Al bader, 1985).
The Decrease of Kuwaiti Women's Contributions

The Women's Role as Users of the Space:

During the 1950’s, Western architectural styles dominated the design of the residential spaces in Kuwait. Chowdhury (1985) explained "societies differ in their definitions … and responses to these concepts" (p.79). Assumptions about cultural aspects in Western countries were inapplicable to other regional contexts, and so the design of modern Kuwaiti houses failed to provide comfortable living environments in Kuwait (Al baher, 1985). In particular, these new houses were not tailored to meet Muslim women’s needs, physical or otherwise.

Today, the social status of Kuwaiti women has changed; they’ve gained wider access to educational fields and jobs. Although women are taking on new roles outside their homes, their traditional roles, and the wearing of veils outside of the home are still dominant Kuwaiti social values. And the house is still the private sphere where women can freely remove their veils and be informal while practicing their many roles—as mother and guardian of the family, supervisor of housework, creator of home furnishings, and hostess of social interactions.

"Privacy is a universal demand… it differs among cultures in terms of the behavioral mechanisms used to regulate desired levels of privacy" (Altman, 1977, p.80). This “difference,” in Kuwait society, requires that many kinds of architectural mechanisms be developed to respond to the privacy needs of Muslim women within particular communities. Yet, with the new Western architectural trend in Kuwait, the design focus shifted from responding to female users’ needs to imitating Western housing styles, both superficially and structurally. Adopting a Western architectural style neglected Kuwaiti women's unique needs as users of residential spaces. The designers failed to consider and accommodate the traditional social roles and needs of Kuwaiti women in their homes. For example, the non-courtyard house, typical in the contemporary houses, does not respond to the Kuwaiti female users’ needs for privacy in their residence. The following section will demonstrate the failure of non-courtyard houses to meet Kuwaiti women's requirements in their personal spaces.

Non-courtyard house. Relocating the residents of the old towns in newly planned neighborhoods accelerated the end of traditional building (Al baher, 1985). As a substitute for the traditional courtyard houses, non-courtyard houses became
widespread in Kuwait (Al-Hussayen, 1995). However, the design of non-courtyard houses failed to consider the Kuwaiti Muslim women's need for privacy. In contrast with the courtyard house where the interior spaces converge around the open space, in the non-courtyard house, the open spaces, or setbacks, surround the interior spaces (see figure 2.23). As the surrounding yard is exposed to the outsiders and neighbors’ windows, the female members of the family do not use this space (see figure 2.33). The curtains of the windows remain closed to block the view into the women's quarters preventing the natural light to get inside the spaces. Although glass can be used to allow the daylight in, curtains are still needed to be closed at night while turning the lights on, or during daytime while opening the windows. Thus, this space planning limits women's movement in the outdoor spaces as well as the penetration of daylight and ventilation into the interiors.

Figure 2.32. The courtyard in the traditional house compared with the non-courtyard contemporary house
The women's role as producer

As Kuwaiti women have extended their productivity to include more work domains, their traditional roles in domestic domains have waned (Al sabah, 2001). Traditionally, the domestic crafts of weaving and embroidery revealed Kuwaiti women’s contributions in articulating and decorating their dwellings—contributions eventually diminished by the country’s economic growth and industrial development. This development threatens the weaving craft with extinction.

Al sabah (2001) confirmed that "the cultural and social environment of weaving has changed in Kuwait" (p. 47). Bedouins have now settled in new urban developments as part of Kuwaiti new social organization. Consequently, Bedouin women no longer need to weave tent pieces as rich ornate dividers. In addition, skilled embroiders stopped practicing this manual craft in the early 1950's. Traditionally, skilled Kuwaiti women had taken embroidery as a profession because it was a "lucrative female craft.” With new affluence, Kuwaiti women no longer needed to consume long periods practicing this tiring profession. In addition, new technology provided less expensive alternatives, which decreased the demand for handmade embroidered products to include only the smaller items—cushions, small handbags, saddlebags, and rugs. However, the cushion cover is still commonly used in the diwanias, the male guest salons. Today, only a few number of Bedouin women pursue this craft to preserve the sadu’s heritage.
Summary

Kuwaiti women served two critical roles in articulating the architectural and interior identity of traditional residential spaces in Kuwait: as a demanding user impacting the space planning, and as a designer and manufacturer. Kuwaiti women perceive their dwellings as a significant space and require greater degrees of privacy due to the social traditions and norms of the Islamic religion in Kuwait. The dwelling serves as the private sphere for most of their social roles – reproduction, guardian of the family and domestic duties, production, and social participation. Responding to women's crucial needs, the design of the traditional Kuwaiti dwelling developed three architectural mechanisms, the screen, the courtyard, and the guest salon. These features enabled Kuwaiti women to perform their social roles in private spheres.

In addition to the role of user, Kuwaiti women played another critical role, as designers and manufacturers. They produced many decorative items in the adobe house, sewing and embroidering pillows, sheets, blankets, and mattress pads. In the desert of Kuwait, Bedouin women wove and erected the tents, an ancient form of Kuwaiti dwellings and the Bedouin's shelter. The Bedouin woman was a master weaver, who paid great attention to the details of her personal and family space, weaving the tent furnishings and other items, such as saddle and camel bags.

After the oil discovery in 1936, the role of women as users and producers of residential spaces decreased. On the one hand, women's role as users affecting the residential design waned because of the changing taste of both the designers and Kuwaitis. The foreign designers, most of them unaware of the regional context (the Kuwaiti environmental and socio-cultural demands) were responding to Kuwaiti’s ambitions for a more modern lifestyle. Due to increasing travel, Kuwaiti citizens formed new images of their dream houses. Many argue that the modern architectural features which now characterized residential spaces seem inadequate substitutes for traditional ones (Al Mutawa, 1994; Al-Hussayen, 1995; Boussora, 1990).

However, it must be noted that part of the decrease in the role of the women in shaping the Kuwaiti homes was a result of economic property of the country. As part of the new social organization of Kuwait, the Bedouins settled in the modern urban developments and the women no longer needed to weave tents and furnishings. With the new affluence, the skilled professionals stopped practicing the time-consuming embroidery craft.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore whether the design of contemporary Kuwaiti homes meet the needs of the contemporary Kuwaiti women in terms of privacy, human and social interaction, aesthetic preferences, as well as respect for the past.

Research Questions

The central inquiry of this study is: Does the design of the contemporary Kuwaiti home meet the evolving needs of Kuwaiti women in terms of privacy, human and social interaction and aesthetic preferences, while at the same time showing respect for the past?

In order to fully answer this central question, several supporting questions were asked:

1. What features in contemporary Kuwaiti homes have been derived from the traditional Kuwaiti home?
2. How have these contemporary homes been influenced by the culture, religion, and history of Kuwait?
3. How are the areas designed for men different from those designed for women?
4. How have women impacted the interior design of the Kuwaiti home?
5. What specific design features support the women's need for privacy, while allowing her to interact with her family and guests?

The Methodology

Qualitative methodologies are considered for information gathering when "the natural source is the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p.430). In this type of research, the scholar spends time in a particular setting in the attempt to provide "a good overall picture of what is
involved." In order to answer the previous questions, I examined one of the contemporary houses in Kuwait using qualitative techniques. The study can be considered a case study, with in-depth exploration into a contemporary Kuwaiti home.

The Site Selection

The House

A house possessing architectural and interior elements common in contemporary Kuwaiti dwellings was chosen for this case study. This house was constructed in 1996. It is owned by a middle class family headed by Abdullah Alenazy, an Assistant Professor in the college of Political Sciences, Kuwait University. He lives with his wife, Adala Aljaber and their five children in this house in Al Adan city. This field study was done when the homeowner Mr. Abdullah had invited his relatives (female and male) for a banquet because his nephew arrived from the United States of America. This case study was conducted in December of 2006. Studying the spaces while they were being used assisted me in recognizing the social patterns of the family and the guests and to reveal whether the design accommodates the needs of residents and guests. During that time, I was able to recognize the full range of users and the activities in the built environment and the relationship between interior spaces. The city is included within Mubarak Al Kabir, a recently designated province and is located southeast of Kuwait City (see figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Al Adan city Location.
The Block

In Kuwait, the mission of Public Authority for Housing Welfare (P.A.H.W.) provides housing welfare for any Kuwaiti patriarch who does not own a house or real-estate. Housing welfare could take the form of a zero interest loan, a zero interest construction loan and a 400 square meter lot, or a house. Some of Al Adan`s blocks contain houses that are constructed by this agency, while other blocks consist of lots being prepared for houses whose designs are chosen and paid for by individuals. The house chosen for this case study is one of the latter types. Al Adan is like any residential area in Kuwait where large shopping centers are not permitted. Neighborhoods have schools, mosques, medical units, supermarkets, a public library and a police station provided by the P.A.H.W.

The Surrounding Community

The Al Adan neighborhood represents the larger Kuwaiti society on a smaller scale. Several legislative blocs operate in the National Assembly: tribal groups, merchants, Shi'a activists, Islamists, and secular liberals live side by side. Applications for housing welfare services are handled on a first come, first served basis which has resulted in this diversity of residents in Al Adan. Moreover, the urban design of Al Adan, derived from the traditional planning of Kuwait city, promotes the relationships between neighbors. Houses clustered together in one block as shown in figure 3.2 is called a freej. The freej`s spatial arrangement—a group of villas that all face the center and are accessed by a common looping drive way—creates a sense of community and belonging between neighbors. The habits of visiting each other, sharing food, and performing family activities become the social norm in their lives. A mosque and a mini marketing center for each block provide opportunities for neighbors to meet regularly, promoting social interaction.
Figure 3.2. A top view shows Al Adan city, the fereej, and the house chosen for this case study.

Data Gathering

The research techniques of observation, visual documentation, and interview were used to explore whether modern design elements meet the needs and preferences of Kuwaiti women in today's society. These research methods will be discussed in detail below.

Observation

Observation provided a useful tool to explore the efficiency of contemporary architecture to determine if the designs accommodate the women's needs and preferences. Also, observation assisted me in obtaining insight into the interiors of the contemporary houses in Kuwait. I entered the observation session with prefigured foci—the lenses through which I look at the real situation—to see social norms and common aspects of contemporary Kuwaiti houses (Eisner, 1998). These prefigured foci came from previous personal experiences as a visitor and as an inhabitant of numerous residential spaces. Being a female designer belonging to the Kuwaiti culture enriched my perceptions and interpretations regarding the needs and preferences of Kuwaiti Muslim women. Moreover, my exposure to Kuwaiti television series filmed in local houses contributed in creating these prefigured foci.
Visual documentation

Photographs were taken to illustrate aspects of modern Kuwaiti culture which provide documentation of the interiors of the home. These images portray current customs of hospitality, gender separation, modes of dress, dining preferences and socializing postures. Pictures of architecture and interior design can effectively reflect both Kuwaitis aesthetic tastes and the necessary spatial accommodations needed for social interactions which involve large groups. These photographs allow readers to closely observe the reality of these private spaces without interrupting the spontaneity of the situation. I accompanied written description with the pictures to document the design features that are related to the research questions of this thesis. The written description will assist readers in clarifying any ambiguous settings that viewers may see in photographs.

While I was observing the female quarters, I depended on the reporting of the participant Mr. Hamad Alanzi, to study the *diwania* or men's gathering. I observed the female quarters only because I knew that as both a woman and outsider, I would not be able to witness the reality of the men's area. Therefore, it was vital that one of the male users gather data for this study, to allow for the natural flow of events. The observations of Mr. Hamad were adopted because he is very comfortable and familiar with the home setting; as one of the homeowner's relatives, he is invited to attend the *diwania* regularly and he contributed many design ideas in the building of the house. In the male salon, Mr. Hamad served as my eyes and ears, provided photo documentation and sharing his observations with me in a place that categorically excludes women.

Interview

Interviews allow me to further understand users` preferences, the functions the interior spaces are intended to serve, and the contemporary role of Kuwaiti women in articulating the residential spaces. Researcher's judgment was employed in selecting the subjects. The wives in Kuwait are co-owners of the property with their husbands. I interviewed Mrs. Adalah, a kindergarten counselor, who is about 45 years old because her position as a wife and mother makes her an authority figure within the home. I also interviewed their daughter, Noof who at 17 years old provided insight into the attitude of the younger generation.
CHAPTER 4
FIELD STUDY

The roles of Kuwaiti women, as users and producers, impacted the design of the vernacular dwellings in Kuwait. I looked at three historical architectural features, the guest salon, the screen, and the courtyard, in meeting the needs of Kuwaiti women. This research explored whether modern manifestations of the same elements are as responsive to Kuwaiti women's needs as the traditional one. As mentioned previously, a case study was conducted in a house that is owned by a middle class family headed by Abdallah Alenazy.

The space planning of this house includes common architectural and interior features of modern Kuwaiti homes. The location of the interior spaces within each floor is based on the degree of privacy required between the users of the spaces. The need for separation dictates segregating the residential space into several zones. The most private zone accommodates only the family members while very close relatives and female visitors use a semi-private unit. Also, the public space within the house is utilized by the male visitors. The interior spaces that require a similar degree of privacy among their users are placed on the same floor. The semi-private zone is located on the first floor including reception salons, a bedroom for guests, living and dining areas and the kitchen. Family bedrooms and a living area are placed on the second floor, whereas the diwania, and male chauffeur's bedroom are in the basement.

The Kuwait municipality permits construction of a third floor of no more than an area of 50 square meters. This floor is commonly utilized to accommodate the female housekeepers` bedroom and the laundry.

The following photographs represent the visual documentation of the case study. Each photo will be presented with detailed description of the space and the details of the design and activities taking place within. The visual documentation will begin with the exterior, and will then move to the interior spaces.
Western architectural approaches influenced the design of this residence. Elements of the exterior such as the stucco finish, the iron fence, the glazed front door, the path lighting, and the yard surrounding this house differ from traditional Kuwaiti dwellings. Because the windows face outward toward a public space, two-way mirror glass is used to provide visual privacy and light during the daytime when the curtains are not drawn. The main entrance of the house leads to the front entrance of the female quarters and to the *diwania* in the basement.
Figure 4.2. Landscape elements.

Landscape elements such as plantation boxes, grass, exterior lights and pavement are used to enhance the appearance of the dwelling. Two palm trees are planted in the front yard because this native tree needs little irrigation, creates a sense of visual privacy, and provides dates as well. It is common to see homeowners personalizing their front yards with green bushes and hedge plants which also serve as a means to establish territory and offer seclusion.
The main entrance of the house is used by the family and female visitors. It leads to private spaces that include the female reception area and family quarters. Because both female inhabitants and female visitors require a high degree of privacy, they share the same entrance. Opaque glass is chosen to screen the female quarters from view while still allowing light to enter. When female visitors are available in the guest salon, the male members of the family use a side doorway. A great deal of attention is given to the entrance design and materials which declare both warm hospitality and the social status of the homeowners. Above this door are Arabic words formed in metal: "By the name of God". Calligraphy blessing the house in this manner represents the Islamic architectural influence.
Figure 4.4. Receiving guests.

To show warm hospitality, the hostess receives the guests with greetings at the entrance. Before entering the private quarters, the women remain in formal dress due to religious and traditional rules; the guests may not expose their elegance to male strangers. Wearing black dress (*al abayia*), and covering their faces in public embody traditional attitudes of modesty and decency among Kuwaiti women.
Typically, inside the female salon, or Salah, guests feel free to take off their veils, black dress, and face coverings and to expose their elegance and beauty. There is diversity in expressing traditional Muslim dress, allowing a certain amount of individual interpretation. It must be noted however that all the guests in this field study can not take their veils off while being photographed. Because of the photographer, some of the guests were not willing to remove their public dress, while others did not mind having their pictures taken without it. The young girl in the picture above is not wearing a veil because she is not considered an adult. Knowing that these pictures are intended for publication, the visitors’ dress appears slightly more formal than usual at a women's gathering.
It is a gesture of hospitality to offer foods such as sweets, dates and pastries and beverages like juices, tea, and Arabian coffee to the visitors. These foods and drinks are served on a table placed in the middle of the salon. As shown in the lower picture, small movable tables are provided in front of each group of guests to receive plates and glasses.
The purpose of using the curtains in the guest salons is not only to preserve visual privacy for women, but also to enhance the interior view. During the night, curtains in modern houses can be an efficient means to provide privacy for women in their personal spaces while during the day; they prevent the penetration of the daylight. Therefore, most Kuwaitis use two-way mirror for windows. There is no need for curtains in spaces such as the living area which are sheltered by the perimeter wall enclosing the property.
This photograph of the women's reception area shows an open double salon that is designed to allow a lower degree of separation between female and male family members. It is common within private homes in Kuwait for women to sit in a mixed gender grouping of close relatives as long as they wear the veil. Extended family such as sisters, sister's husbands, brothers, brother's wives, nephews, and nieces can be received in the women's quarters. Female family visitors group in one side of the salon while the male family visitors sit separately in the other half. A hallway separates the two opened salons. For total gender separation, as required of those who are not close relatives, the men sit in the male salon in the basement while women occupy these reception quarters on the first floor.
Figure 4.13. The living area of the family.

Figure 4.14. Another view of the living area of the family.

Figure 4.15. One of reception salons.
Generally, Kuwaitis give great attention to the decoration of the salon as an expression of hospitality and the social status of the homeowners. In this house, the furniture in the two reception areas cost approximately $25,000. Small rugs are scattered on polished granite flooring. Different furniture and the accessories such as fabrics, lighting fixtures, chandeliers, pictures, interior plants, and glassware are all carefully selected by Mrs. Adalah. The decoration reflects the personal taste of the lady of the house and demonstrates foreign influence on Kuwaiti interiors. The pictures above show several styles of furnishing that borrow from other cultures. The favorite seating area of visitors is shown in figure 4.16. It can accommodate a greater number of people comfortably and the sections can be easily moved to various positions.
Most of the time there are more than 20 guests at the female salon. Two sinks are located in front of the rest room, adjacent to the female salon to accommodate the intensive use of the facilities. The guests need a sink to wash their hands before and after dining and a mirror to fix their make up and hair after removing their veils. Perfumes, tissues, soaps, towels are provided for guests.

Figure 4.18. Sinks outside the restroom.
The guests’ salons are located in the front portion of the home and facing the front yard for visitor accessibility. The family living area, dining area, restroom, kitchen, and staircase leading to the second floor are placed behind the visitors' quarters to maintain the privacy of the family. A door separates the reception quarters which includes two salons, a restroom, two sinks, and a guest bedroom, from the family spaces on the first floor. This space planning isolates the family area as if the house is built for guests instead of the owners.
Pictures above show the dining area adjacent to the living area. This dining area was originally included in the kitchen. During remodeling, a wall separating the dining area from the living area was removed and another wall was constructed to separate dining and cooking areas. Because most female gatherings exceed the amount of seating in the official dining room, this modification was required to accommodate them. These dining and living spaces were intended for the daily use of the family; however, they are both utilized for dining when a large group of guests attends. Tables are moved along the walls of the dining area to serve as a buffet. Guests carry their plates from the dining room and sit on the rug area in the living salon. In the past, most Kuwaitis were accustomed to sitting on the floor eating and sharing the same serving tray. This style of dining is still practiced, however, the younger generation of women often prefer eating from individual plates in a more western manner.
Since women refused to have their pictures taken while eating, this is a photograph of men dining to illustrate the traditional posture of eating on the floor from a communal serving dish. Guests form groups around trays of food. Sharing the same serving tray is a dining practice that takes a place in the men's salon more than in the women's because women are beginning to prefer a greater choice of selection in food, such as green salad instead of traditional dishes.
When sitting on carpet to dine, the plastic sheet is helpful to keep the floor clean. It substitutes for the dining table and the serving table in the middle of seating areas. The plastic sheet is used in the *diwania* to be able to serve tea and coffee for the guests. At dinner time, a bigger sheet is rolled out to eat upon.
Figure 4.25. Socializing in the Diwania.

Figure 4.26. Watching television in the Diwania.

Figure 4.27. Playing cards in the Diwania.
These pictures illustrate the different priorities between women and men in the reception areas. Kuwaiti men sit on couches in formal male gatherings, but carpet flooring is quite satisfactory to them when less formal sitting is preferred. Men like to freely cluster in groups inside the *diwania* for several entertainment activities such as playing cards, discussing politics, joking and watching television. The carpet allows easy group formation and many comfortable positions of sitting. In addition, the host usually provides a big screen television in the *diwania* whereas most of the women's salons lack this. In contrast with men's preferences, the women are much more likely to want space with more elegance in the furniture and accessories in their gathering spaces. Mazumdar & Mazumdar (1999) elaborated on the gender based perception of space:

*Males cherish objects of action …whereas women prefer object of contemplation on. Specific objects which have special meaning to men are T.V., stereo sets, sports equipment, vehicles and trophies. Females more often mention photographs, sculptures, plants, plates, glass and textiles (p.160).*
This picture emphasizes the influence of gender on the house design. The glazed but not screened entrance of the diwania in the basement allows the interior spaces to be seen from the outside because visual privacy is not required for men. Also of note is the pile of shoes outside the door. Kuwaitis do not wear their shoes on carpeted floors so they take them off before entering.
Interpretation

Although this case study can not be generalized to all Kuwaiti homes, it was chosen because it is representative of many houses in contemporary Kuwait. Based on my judgment as a Kuwaiti citizen, this house design possessed the common architectural and interior features of many modern houses in Kuwait. In addition, I have been a guest in many similarly designed houses and have lived in several as well. Also, similar design styles are portrayed regularly on Kuwaiti television.

The case study aimed to identify the contemporary architectural and interior features in Kuwaiti houses that have been influenced by the traditional home’s guest salon, screen, and courtyard. In addition, new manifestations of these historical features which include the porch, the window treatments, and the modern guest salon will also be addressed. While visiting the Kuwaiti home used in this study, photographing the interior, and interviewing the residents, I examined the interior features that were influenced by the history and culture of Kuwait as well as the modern adaptations of these elements.

Inquiry

Historically, Kuwaitis perceived home as the most private container for the traditional roles carried out by their mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters. The design of the traditional house nourishes the spiritual, human, and social needs of Kuwaiti women. Traditionally, it was the private shelter where Kuwaiti women felt free to be informal, remove their veil, and expose their beauty and elegance. The home was central to raising children and performing domestic duties. It was the hub for female productivity, including food preparation, tailoring, weaving, spinning, and embroidery. It was the locale for most female gatherings and social interactions. Consequently, the roles of Kuwaiti women impacted the design of the built environment, resulting in the development of distinctive features which include the courtyard, the screen, and the guest salon.

In the early 1950's, the distinctive personality of traditional building was effaced by the arrival of modernization to Kuwait. Western architectural styles dominated the design of the residential spaces replacing the traditional ones. With this new architectural identity, the role of Kuwaiti women in shaping the home also waned. These Western influenced designs did not often address the Kuwaiti women's
needs because they were tailored to another culture. Therefore, this study questions the suitability of modern house design in Kuwait.

To provide a context for the results of this study, findings will be evaluated in terms of answers to research questions. The central inquiry of this study was: *Does the design of the contemporary Kuwaiti home meet the evolving needs of Kuwaiti women in terms of privacy, human and social interaction, aesthetic preferences, while at the same time showing respect for the past?*

In order to fully answer this central question, several supporting questions were asked:

1. What features in contemporary Kuwaiti homes have been derived from the traditional Kuwaiti home?
2. How have these contemporary homes been influenced by the culture, religion, and history of Kuwait?
3. How are the areas designed for men different from those designed for women?
4. What specific design features support the women’s need for privacy, while allowing her to interact with her family and guests?
5. How have women impacted the interior design of the Kuwaiti home?

**Interpretation of Case Study**

This interpretation will evaluate whether the design of contemporary houses are as responsive to Kuwaiti women’s needs as traditional homes were. With modernization, the traditional elements of the courtyard, the screen, and the guest salon have been adapted and new elements including the porch, the window treatments, and the modern guest salon have been added. The next section will present the contrast between the old and new adaptations of these features.

**The Courtyard House vs. the Non-Courtyard House.** Relocating the residents of the old towns in newly planned neighborhoods accelerated the loss of the traditional building characteristics (Al bahar, 1985). Replacing the traditional courtyard houses, non-courtyard houses, often with porches rather than courtyards, became widespread in Kuwait (Al-Hussayen, 1995). In contrast with the courtyard house where the interior spaces converge around the open space, in the non-courtyard house, the open spaces such as porches, or setbacks, surround the interior spaces.
The Screen vs. the Two-way Mirror and Curtain. The screens in the vernacular houses provided privacy for the women, as well as serving as a decorative element adding beauty to their surroundings (see figure 2.17, 2.18, 2.21, 2.22). This fixed and permeable window treatment also allowed cool breezes to penetrate the interior, regulated the humidity, and permitted some light to filter through. With modernization came the technology that allowed for the adoption of air conditioning, now considered essential in the severely hot climate of Kuwait. These screens were no longer practical as window treatments and glazed windows became the solution. To adapt the modern glazed windows to the privacy requirements of Kuwaiti women, two-way mirror glass is currently used. This offers visual privacy and light during the daytime. During the night, curtains in modern houses can be an efficient means of providing privacy for women in their personal spaces. The purpose of curtains in the guest salon is not only to preserve visual privacy for women, but also to enhance the interior view. Homeowners personalize their front yards with green bushes and hedge plants which offer seclusion and also serve as a means of establishing territory.

Traditional Guest Salon vs. Contemporary Guest Salon. Entertaining neighbors, friends, and relatives is a deeply rooted tradition in Kuwait society. In order to provide hospitality for guests while at the same time maintaining privacy for the family, specially-designed guest-reception areas are prominent in traditional Kuwaiti homes as well as in contemporary ones. While satisfying the privacy demands of the family is highly valued, ensuring privacy for women in particular is required. Separate female and male reception quarters are among the design features that still exist. The design of the contemporary guest salons has changed. Some of these changes include:

1. **The location of the guest salons**: the guests’ salons are usually located in front of the main entrance and front yard for visitor accessibility. The family living, dining and kitchen areas are located behind the visitors’ quarters to maintain the privacy of the family (see figure 4.30).
2. **The guest entrance:** Kuwaiti homes most often have an outer court area which may be either paved or landscaped. Then, a main gate leads into a private front yard. Because both female residents and female visitors require a high degree of privacy, they share the same entrance. The front or main entrance to the house leads to private spaces that include the female reception area and family quarters. A service entrance is usually located around one side of the building while the male-only salon or *diwania* is accessed through a separate side door. The traffic to any of the three external doors flows through the inner yard (see figure 4.31).
3. **Decoration**: A great deal of attention is given to the decoration of the guest salon as an expression of hospitality and the social status of the homeowners. In the past, large rugs covered the guest salon floors while in the contemporary reception area, rugs are scattered on marble, granite, or ceramic tiles for aesthetic reasons and for ease of maintenance. Carpet can be used in male salons when less formal seating is desired. In contrast, the ladies of the house are much more likely to want the female salon to be elegant. Their personal taste is reflected in the carefully chosen furniture and accessories such as lamps, sconces, chandeliers, pictures, interior plants, and glassware. Other cultural styles influence these decorative items and furniture which are either imported or designed and manufactured by foreign laborers.

4. **The height of the seats**: The female guests usually prefer sitting on chairs or couches while male visitors like to sit on the floors, cushions, or low upholstered benches. Men usually like less formality, gathering in small groups to play cards, discuss politics, watch football, etc.
5. **Dining habits:** Historically, family members sat in a group on the floor and ate communally as shown in figure 4.32. Therefore, the living area or the reception salon where the floors were covered with carpets and woven pieces, was utilized for dining. In contrast, contemporary Kuwaiti houses contain a special dining room with a large table and chairs to accommodate the modern lifestyle. The traditional posture of eating on the floor from a communal serving dish is practiced only in gathering spaces; this style of dining takes place in the men's salon more often than in the women's. In the last decades, women prefer eating on individual plates, allowing for greater choice of selection in food, such as the now popular green salad beside the traditional dishes. Since the number of female visitors often exceeds the amount of seating, women carry their plates from the dining area and sit either on a carpet or on the seating in the female quarter.

*Figure 4.32. The traditional posture of eating.*
6. **Degree of segregation** Contemporary Kuwaiti homes express a range of attitudes about the issue of gender separation. Female and male visitors can be totally divided into separate spaces or sit separately in one large salon, as compared in figure 4.33. If complete gender separation is desired, the male salon can be located in the basement while the female salon is on the first floor so the women may be closer to the kitchen, or they could be two separate rooms on the same floor. The family quarters are typically on the second floor, which would not be an appropriate location for the salons.

*Figure 4.33. Total vs. partial separation between female and male reception salons*
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

After examining the home selected for this case study, and synthesizing those findings with my years of living in Kuwait, I will now discuss the positive and negative attributes of the typical contemporary Kuwaiti home. In my opinion, the design of contemporary houses falls short of an ideal accommodation of Kuwaiti women's needs. First, non-courtyard houses have failed to meet the Kuwaiti Muslim women's need for privacy. The surrounding yard is exposed to the outsiders and neighbors’ windows. The male visitors need to pass through the front yard to enter the male guest salon. Consequently, the female members of the family do not feel free to enjoy the outdoors because they feel exposed to male visitors and the public passing by in the street.

Furthermore, a design in which the guest salons occupy the entire front of the house relegates the family quarters behind them creating isolated spaces with no view of nature because the design of the home typically puts all of the landscaping in the front. Lack of contact with nature creates a sense of *placelessness* and makes people feel as strangers in their own home (Kellert, 2005). In order to derive the benefit from nature, people must have "access to place-based environmental and cultural contexts marked by familiarity, access, and security" (Kellert, 2005, p.61).

Moreover, contemporary design does not include an efficient alternative to the courtyard. The courtyard, private enclosed space open to the sky, brought a sense of nature to the heart of the home. In addition, the central location interconnecting the surrounding rooms gave women great flexibility and facilitated free movement between their spaces—bedroom, living room, female guest salon, and kitchen. With the adoption of air conditioning, the design was seen as impractical and fell into disuse, and yet, no modern space accommodates the functions that the courtyard served in the traditional house. Perhaps, the inclusion of an atrium or mezzanine in modern design could begin to fulfill the functions of this ancient space.

In sum, modern design fails to respond to Kuwaiti women's needs for privacy, contact with nature, free movement within the home, and social interaction with their
family members. The following recommendations offers for improving the current home design in Kuwait.

**Recommendations**

To better meet the needs of women, the design of the contemporary Kuwaiti home should:

1. Preserve the privacy of the female inhabitants throughout in the entire house (except for the male salon) in a manner that allows them to freely move about their space even when male strangers are present.
2. Accommodate the male salon with completely separate access, freeing up the outdoor spaces for use by the women.
3. Provide beautiful landscaping around the home to connect the family with nature.
4. Connect the female inhabitants with views of nature while maintaining their privacy inside their house.
5. Screen the yard from the street by establishing landscaped borders to maintain the privacy of the outdoors and the interiors on the ground level.
6. Include windows glazed with two-way mirror that allows the daylight to penetrate all the spaces and present a visual barrier toward the public during the day, as well as provide curtains and blinds for screening at night.
7. Situate the women’s guest salon at the back of the house and the living and dining areas at the front to maximize the natural view for the enjoyment of female inhabitants and the family (Many Kuwaiti houses have green spaces in the front only).
8. Interconnect the family space including living and dining areas and bedrooms with a central open area such as an atrium or mezzanine to promote the social interaction of the women with the rest of the family members and allow access to nature.
9. Offer flexibility in accommodating a fluctuating number of diners; it is common in Kuwait to invite from 20 to 40 people for a meal. To achieve this level of hospitality, the design of the dining room should accommodate a dining table with extension leaves and storage for the extra chairs. Otherwise, carpet can be used in the guest salon to double as banquet seating.
Conclusion

House design involves the union of the designer's vision and the needs of the users to create a successful solution. The efficiency of design approaches in fully accommodating the users' needs and desires is limited by the extent of the designer's understanding of the unique position of women in Kuwaiti culture. Historically, individuals who belonged to Kuwaiti culture designed and built the houses in Kuwait. They tailored the physical environment to conform to the privacy needs and the social roles of their mothers, wives, sisters, daughters. The house design was intended to nourish the spiritual, human, and social needs of Kuwaiti women. The architecture extended the private sphere of the textile veil, manifesting as the courtyard, the screen, and the guest salon. These elements constituted an architectural veil that was similar in function to their textile counterpart. Both preserved the intimate domains of Kuwaiti women (body, home) while they were performing their social roles.

This equation has become somewhat unbalanced after the oil boom in 1936. The government imported international experts to modernize Kuwait city. Most of the Western and Arabic architects sought architectural solutions with more modern attributes which were dominating Western buildings. They introduced innovative design concepts, and technologies like air conditioning. In contrast with the conventional courtyard house where the interior spaces converge around open space, in the new house, the open spaces, or setbacks, surround the interior spaces. Modern window treatments manifest as two-way mirror window glazing and curtains, replacing the traditional screens. Guest salons are now accessed, positioned, decorated, and enclosed differently than in the past.

These Western influenced designs have not often addressed the Kuwaiti women's needs because they were derived from another culture. First, the non-courtyard house offers less privacy out of doors. The porch is the modern equivalent of the courtyard. The female members of the family do not feel free to enjoy this space where they are exposed to male visitors and the public passing by in the street. In addition, a design in which the guest salons occupy the entire front of the house relegates the family quarters behind them creating isolated spaces with no view of nature. On the other hand, modernization has not been entirely negative for Kuwaiti women. Most people in Kuwait agree that life without air conditioning is unbearable.
Thus, filtering screens became no longer practical as window treatments. Two-way mirror glazing allows for climate control and yet satisfies the privacy needs of users.

In sum, Kuwaiti women's privacy, human, and social demands is the constant in this equation and the cultural sensitivity of the designer is the variable. Integrating the modern design concepts and tools based on this variable is the bridge for ideal accommodations for Kuwaiti women.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Turkiyah Hajeej Alenazy obtained a Bachelor's degree in interior architecture from the College of Architecture and Planning at King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia. She received a scholarship from Kuwait University to pursue her Master of Fine Arts degree in interior design at Florida State University in the United States. After earning the M.F.A., she will begin a Doctoral of Philosophy degree in interior design at the University of Florida at Gainesville. Currently, she lives in Florida, with her husband Hamad Alanzi, and sons Salman and Othman. She plans to be an educator at the Art and Design department at the College for Women in Kuwait.