

Iranian door knockers: an entrance to a beautiful and unique cultural past

by DANIELLE TAN

Knocking on the door in other parts of the world can be a pleasurable experience as the visitor beholds and traces the intricate designs on a door knocker. Alireza Jahanpanah, architect and photographer, has researched and photographed door knockers in Iran for 25 years. Jahanpanah's Iranian Door Knockers project is on display (June 10 - July 4) at Deep Cove's Seymour Art Gallery. The display shows a selection from 2,500 photographs, a short documentary film and two antique Iranian door knockers.

His presentation was read by a relative on Sunday June 14 at 2pm at Seymour Art Gallery, followed by a screening of the documentary film about the project and a reception with Iranian music by Nava Art Centre.

"What I've tried to show in these photographs is the simple, vibrant, aesthetic talents of local people which are rapidly fading away with the passage of time," says Jahanpanah in a prepared statement. "I also wanted to reveal a unique hidden cultural identity of door-knockers as a nation's indigenous relics, and the small part they play in our cultural and historical heritage."

Iranian door knockers are relics of the past. No blacksmith of Iran can make them today. Instead, these artifacts from a rich

cultural past are being preserved in Jahanpanah's photographs.

Destiny knocks

Born in Tehran, Iran, Jahanpanah worked for over 20 years as an architect designing residential spaces in Iran, and as a project manager for custom-made exhibition projects in the Middle East and Europe.

While studying architecture, Jahanpanah was fascinated by his country's historical and indigenous architectural designs.

"When I saw old buildings, as an architecture student, it felt as if their creators had used specific, efficient models intimately connected to the universe and nature; and in harmony with human essence," he says in his artist statement.

Jahanpanah spent six years travelling across rural and urban areas in Iran in search of basic, indigenous examples of living spaces which he then mapped, photographed and researched extensively.

"As I passed through urban and rural architectural spaces, door knockers, a tiny part of a building, which can be touched by hands to create a sound that sends a simple message from the outside in, began to capture my interest as a poetic expression of people, architecture, culture and history," explains Jahanpanah.

Jahanpanah studied door knockers in 20 Iranian cities and towns. With his wife Irandokht



Photo by Alireza Jahanpanah

▲ Door knocker for female use in Isfahan, Iran.

Pirsaraee's help, the research became a detailed analysis of the door knockers' shapes and designs.

Unique identities

When Jahanpanah came across door knockers, he noticed, as a small part of the entrance, they hold deep cultural values.

"Iranian door knockers hold in themselves many tales about the house, the owner, architecture, culture and the life of a city during a certain historical era," he explains.

The door knockers, some of which are about 350 years old, are made out of iron for their repeated use and longevity. Jahanpanah explains how producing designs on iron, while it is hot, is

exhausting. Through heavy hammering, the general shape of the door knocker is formed and the artisan would use tools such as files and mandrels to produce unique shapes and designs.

"The result is the creation of a specific identity for each door-knocker," says Jahanpanah. "The complexity and attraction of these patterns were directly related to the skills of blacksmiths and the development of the craft within those cities."

In his research, Jahanpanah sought to identify the door knockers' forging methods and characteristics as well as the artisan's artistic signature.

Door knockers are also made specifically for each gender to produce a distinctive sound, enabling the inhabitants to identify whether their visitor is male or female.

Men's door-knockers are called "hammers" while women's door-knockers are called "rings." Each would produce a distinct sound, heralding the gender of the visitor and greeting the house's inhabitants with a clear and characteristic echo.

"This is an example of how organic factors in old buildings and the spaces built by humans situated us in harmony with the universe, and could make life in its details creative, rich and pleasurable," explains Jahanpanah. ✎

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