

RESTORATION OF THE MOROCCAN RIAD

CULTURE, CLIMATE AND COURTYARDS OF THE MARRAKECHI MEDINA

Behind the walls of the Marrakechi medina lies a dizzying labyrinth of tight, windowless alleyways of which no map has precisely documented and no trace of logic or contemporary planning can be found. Modest portals sporadically dot these aged passageways, entering through one of which will usher you into the heart of domestic Moroccan living. A dimly lit corridor progressively brightens as you make your approach to the core of the Moroccan home: a two-story open air courtyard where sounds of chirping birds and flowing water, scents of mint, spice, jasmine, and local citrus infuse a space enveloped by billowing curtains behind Andalusian colonnades. Here in the Moroccan riad, a hybrid of Islamic traditions, climactic responses, and regional architectural and artistic influences have harmonized to create an enchanting cultural and architectural identity unique to this North African desert outpost.

Marrakech is a city designed with cultural wealth in mind. An Imperial City enclosed in a wall of red sandstone, it was founded by the Almoravid Empire (1062-1147), later becoming its capitol. Since then, the Red City has experienced waves of prosperity and hardships, captured and recaptured by the passing dynasties of the Almohads (1147-1269), Marinids (1269-1525), the Saadis (1525-1659),

and the Alaouites (1666-present), each leaving their own unique contributions to the architectural heritage of the city. Yet through each political and economic shift, the riad, the backbone of the medina, has remained.

The most recent influx of architectural contributions has come alongside globalization. In the late 20th century, Europeans (primarily the French), have taken a great deal of interest in the Marrakechi medina, buying out many of the abandoned riads that wealthy locals had left when relocating to larger cities, converting them to guesthouses and restaurants. With an outpouring of foreign investment and a considerable influx in tourism, many crafts-trades have been brought back to life and deteriorating buildings preserved. Though with any kind of overhaul as large as this one, the question does remain of whether it puts the city at risk of losing its authenticity to homogenization.

What we see in these riads today, and what we experience in the medina, is not a preservation of history or a restoration to a former time, but a re-interpretation of history through the lens of modern eyes. A current UNESCO World Heritage Site, the medina offers some of the most interesting examples of restoration work in the world.

My studies would focus on how these riads showcase and translate Moroccan traditions and culture through their restorations and renovations.

Pre-trip research will include a more in-depth analysis of the history of the medina and the riads' role in its development, as well as its origin story and influences throughout time.

On-site study will include staying in the medina, fully immersed and residing in a number of different riads chosen based on varying sizes, ages, backstories, and design intents. Utilizing photography, video, sketching, and diagramming, this work will showcase how locals and foreigners alike have approached highlighting Moroccan craft and tradition while juxtaposing it with contemporary influences, and what that means for local cultural identity today.

BUDGET	RT FLIGHT	\$
[1]. RIAD OMRI	2 nights	\$240
[2]. RIAD DAR DARMA	2 nights	\$460
[3]. DAR ASSIYA	2 nights	\$420
[4]. RIAD MATHAM	2 nights	\$160
[5]. RIAD MERIEM	2 nights	\$160
[6]. VILLA DES ORANGERS	1 night	\$430
[7]. ROYAL MANSOUR	1 night	\$850
[8]. RIAD KNIZA	1 night	\$250
TOTAL		\$3870
+ADDT'L EXPENSES		~\$5000



Medina alleyway, between riads | drawn by Trici Venola

TYPICAL FEATURES OF A RIAD

ROOF

- Terrace
- Used for gardens, pools, or laundry
- High walls common [privacy]

Mouchara-bieb: carved wooden latticework

Tadelakt: smooth colored surfaces

Zellige: complex geometric tilework

SECOND FLOOR

- Tight, winding stairs
- Dimly lit
- Tucked into corners

Bayts: elongated rooms around courtyard, typically public salons, dining rooms, or bedrooms, traditionally with a central arched passage and door or curtain

- Colonnaded galleries
- Passages between rooms
- Kept cool with coverings

GROUND FLOOR

Sahridj: fountain or basin, typ. at center of courtyard

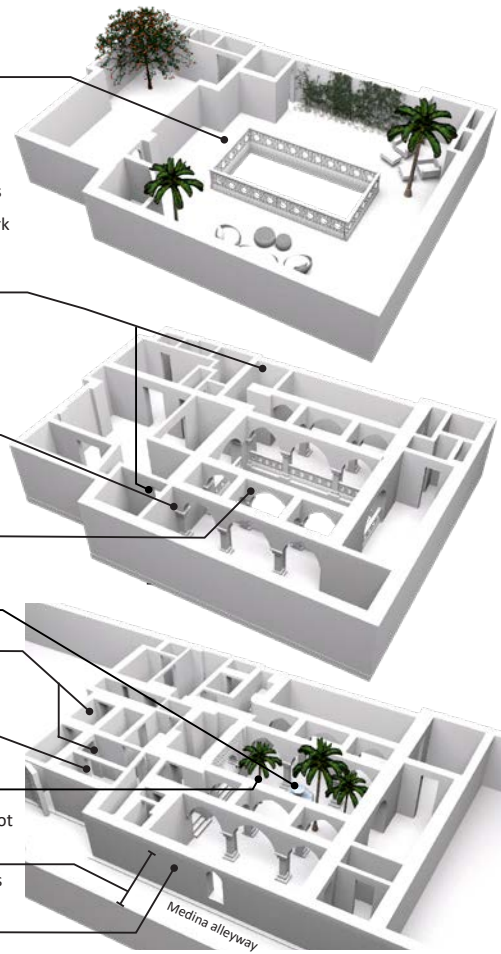
Corridors leading to courtyard:
 • interior not visible from street
 • modest lighting brightens with approach to courtyard

Setwan: sitting area at entry for guests

Inner courtyard as focus: native citrus, palms, jasmine, etc. House organized around court, though not necessarily symmetrical

Exterior walls parallel to those across alleys forming passageways

Unassuming exteriors, few or no windows



[1]. RIAD OMRI | DAYS 01-03
 New work highlighting Moroccan Craft: Arabo-Andalusian columns & arches, vaults, secular ironwork, carved cedar, zellige, etc.

[2]. RIAD DAR DARMA | DAYS 04-05
 18th century riad recently restored, hand-painted wood, precious plasters, ancient doors, furnishings and contemporary decor.

[3]. DAR ASSIYA | DAYS 05-07
 15th century noble residence with ancient portals and elegant decor, renovations inspired by Islamic, Persian & Andalusian gardens.

[4]. RIAD MATHAM | DAYS 07-09
 16th century riad belonging to a wealthy Berber family. High painted ceilings, rtaj doors, and stucco plaster. Rooms after Moroccan dynasties.

[5]. RIAD MERIEM | DAYS 09-11
 Renovated by NY designer; fusion of oriental textiles, African and Asian fabrics, paintings, fine art photography and Marrekechi artisanship.

[6]. VILLA DES ORANGERS | DAYS 11-12
 Previously a villa for a wealthy local; converted into guesthouse in late 1990s. Blend of North African and French colonial artistry.

[7]. ROYAL MANSOUR | DAYS 12-14
 Built by King Mohammed VI to showcase Moroccan craft and ancestral knowledge, highlighting regional architectural tradition.

[8]. RIAD KNIZA | DAYS 13-14
 18th century riad restored by Haj Mohamed, a prominent antique dealer. Renovated with traditional materials honoring Moorish architecture.

