



Iranian artist and sculptor Mohammad-Ali Vadood has been named the Top Master of Wood Arts in Asia and the Pacific at the 2025 China Asia-Pacific Furniture and Woodworking Industry Forum (CAPFA), according to Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts. The title was awarded following Vadood's nomination by Iran's Federation of Wood Industries, Furniture and Interior Architecture and an assessment of his professional background and artistic works, the ministry's news outlet, Miras-e Arya, reported. Vadood has previously received international recognition for his work. In 2021, he won a bronze award at Italy's A' Design Award competition for his piece "One Thousand and One Nights." Much of his artistic practice focuses on exploring the visual potential of wood and creatively incorporating wood fragments and offcuts into his works.

**Iranian Crafter
Named Asia-Pacific's
Top Master of Wood
Arts**

Mudbrick Houses: The Heritage of Traditional Iranian Architecture



Iran's traditional mudbrick houses, with their thick walls, domed roofs, central courtyards and windcatchers, demonstrate how architecture adapted to local climates and limited resources. These structures reflect centuries of experience in using natural materials to cope with extreme heat, cold and water scarcity.

Historical Background and Architectural Features

Archaeological evidence shows that mudbrick construction on the Iranian plateau dates back to the late ninth or early eighth millennium BCE. Builders used locally available soil, often mixed with straw and chaff, to construct walls, vaults and domes. The affordability and availability of these materials, along with their suitability for dry climates, contributed to the widespread use of earthen architecture.

Thick mudbrick walls reduce heat transfer, helping maintain comfortable indoor temperatures. Central courtyards, shaded alleyways, underground spaces and windcatchers further improve natural ventilation and thermal comfort. These features demonstrate how traditional builders addressed environmental challenges without relying on mechanical systems.

Courtyards and Windcatchers

In many traditional Iranian houses, the courtyard served as the center of family life. Rooms were arranged around this enclosed space to provide privacy and a comfortable living environment. Trees, plants and water features also helped reduce heat and improve comfort in desert regions. Windcatchers, known as Badgirs, are among the most distinctive elements of Iranian architecture. They capture and direct airflow into buildings, providing natural ventilation. Yazd is a remarkable example of this climate-responsive design, where windcatchers, earthen walls and courtyards work together as an integrated system adapted to desert conditions. Yazd and Bam: Outstanding Examples of Earthen Heritage

The historic city of Yazd, with its narrow lanes, mudbrick houses, windcatchers and traditional water systems, represents an outstanding example of architecture adapted to a desert environment. It was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2017.

The Bam Citadel in Kerman province demonstrates how mudbrick, rammed earth, vaults and domes were used to create a large fortified settlement. Its development was closely connected to underground irrigation channels known as qanats. Although the 2003 earthquake severely damaged the citadel, conservation and restoration efforts have helped preserve significant parts of the site. Earthen architecture can also be found in Kerman, Kashan, South Khorasan and Sistan. Differences in soil, climate, water resources and local traditions have produced a variety of architectural forms across Iran.

Modern Relevance and Conservation

Traditional mudbrick houses face growing threats from neglect, abandonment, urban expansion and the replacement of traditional materials with modern construction. However, growing global interest in sustainable architecture has renewed appreciation for their design principles. Building orientation, shading, natural ventilation, thermal mass and the use of local materials can also help reduce energy consumption in modern buildings. The Esfahk Mud Center in South Khorasan, established in 2015, is one initiative dedicated to teaching and reviving traditional earthen construction techniques. Such projects demonstrate that mudbrick architecture is not merely a relic of the past but a valuable body of knowledge that can still be studied and applied.

Conclusion

Iran's mudbrick houses represent more than historic buildings; they embody generations of knowledge about adapting to the natural environment. Preserving this heritage protects Iran's cultural identity and historic landscapes while offering valuable lessons for sustainable architecture and addressing today's environmental challenges.

Saravan, a Living Museum of Historic Minaret Architecture

Saravan's historic minarets offer travelers a distinctive way to explore the evolution of religious architecture in Iran's southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan province, where mud-brick construction, local craftsmanship and centuries-old religious traditions have shaped the landscape.

Unlike the tall, mostly symbolic minarets seen at many modern mosques, the older structures of Saravan preserve evidence of a time when a minaret was a working part of daily religious life. Before loudspeakers transformed the way the call to prayer was delivered, muezzins climbed stairs, ladders or raised platforms to reach elevated points from which their voices could travel across surrounding settlements. This architectural evolution can still be traced in and around Saravan. At some historic mosques, the place for the call to prayer was little more than a raised platform reached by a spiral staircase. Elsewhere, mud-brick stairways were built beside the mosque or covered to protect those using them from the harsh local climate. The remains therefore tell more than a story of religious practice. They reflect how local builders adapted architecture to the region's environment, available materials and community needs. Among the most notable surviving examples is the minaret at Aspich Mosque, regarded by local researchers as the only completely circular historic minaret still standing in Saravan. Built of sun-dried mud bricks and mud, the structure rises about 10 meters and contains a narrow internal spiral staircase of around 20 steps. Visitors approaching the minaret can



still see the simple logic of its design: the staircase leads upward through the compact structure to the point where the muezzin once stood to deliver the call to prayer. Local accounts also suggest that the elevated structure could have served as a lookout in times of emergency, although its principal purpose was religious.

The survival of the Aspich minaret is itself part of the story. Local residents and religious figures have helped preserve the structure over the years, and it underwent restoration and mud-plastering in 2021. Its continued presence offers a rare glimpse into the construction techniques and religious architecture of earlier generations. Another important example stands at the historic mosque in Zangian. About eight meters high, the mud-brick and mud structure has a distinctive architectural form: its exterior is broadly square, while its interior is circular. An internal staircase once allowed the muezzin to reach the upper section. Two openings at the top and the minaret's visibility from a distance were practical features of a structure designed primarily for the call to prayer. The Zangian complex also preserves a different layer of the region's heritage. Beside the minaret is a small chamber traditionally known in Baluchi as a sonia, or retreat, which was associated with worship, spiritual discipline and seclusion by religious figures. Together, the minaret and the chamber demonstrate how tangible architecture and intangible religious traditions could exist within the same historic setting.

From Ancient Clay to Living Tradition: The Enduring Art of Iranian Pottery

Pottery is among the oldest forms of human craftsmanship, transforming ordinary clay into vessels and objects of practical use and artistic expression. In Iran, this ancient art has evolved over thousands of years, reflecting the country's changing civilizations, cultural exchanges and artistic traditions. From prehistoric earthenware to elaborately decorated ceramics of the Islamic period, Iranian pottery offers a glimpse into the country's long history of innovation and craftsmanship.

The craft involves shaping clay by hand or on a potter's wheel, followed by drying and firing. Depending on the raw materials, techniques and intended use, finished pieces may retain the natural colors of the clay or receive decorative coatings and glazes. Across Iran, potters have developed distinctive styles, forms and motifs, creating a diverse tradition that remains alive in several parts of the country. Although the precise beginnings of pottery in Iran remain uncertain, archaeological evidence places its origins in prehistoric times, possibly as early as the eighth to fifth millennia BC. Regions including Gilan, Kordestan and Sistan-Baluchestan have played important roles in the development of the craft. The emergence of painted pottery on the Iranian Plateau also demonstrates how early communities combined practical skills with an increasingly sophisticated sense of design. During the Achaemenid period (c. 550–330 BC), pottery production developed alongside other artistic traditions. Vessels took on varied shapes, while rhytons, drinking vessels often fashioned in animal forms, became part of the broader repertoire of ancient Iranian craftsmanship. Pottery continued to develop during the Parthian period (247 BC–224 CE), when different production techniques and decorative styles circulated across a vast geographical area. Excavations at the Anahita Temple in Kangavar, western Iran, have yielded evidence of both unglazed vessels and glazed

pottery. The latter included pieces with red, gray and greenish finishes, reflecting the range of materials and techniques available to potters of the time.

Under the Sassanids (224–651), pottery makers produced bowls, jars, jugs, figurines and animal-shaped objects. Some vessels featured geometric and vegetal patterns, carved designs and raised decorations. Others carried inscriptions in Middle Persian, also known as Pahlavi. Glazed pieces decorated with fish and animal motifs were among the characteristic products of the period.

Sassanid artistic conventions also influenced pottery produced in subsequent centuries. Winged animals, mythical birds, arabesque-like patterns and the Sassanid eagle became part of a visual vocabulary that continued into the Islamic period. Some later ceramics decorated with motifs associated with pre-Islamic Iran became known as Gabri ware, a historical term used for certain types of pottery. Examples of pottery from different periods are preserved in the National Museum of Iran.

The arrival of Islam brought further changes, as potters adapted earlier decorative traditions and experimented with new techniques. Iranian ceramic production reached a notable level of technical sophistication during the Seljuk period (11th–13th centuries), often regarded as a golden age of Persian ceramics. Craftpeople employed methods including incising, relief decoration, pierced designs, painting beneath or over glazes, gilding and enameling. These techniques enabled the production of vessels with intricate patterns and a wide range of finishes. For researchers, these regional traditions help connect archaeological discoveries with contemporary craftsmanship. Iranian pottery is more than a record of ancient domestic life: it is a continuing cultural practice in which materials, techniques and designs preserve memories of the past while adapting to the needs of the present.

Perspective



Tehran Tourism Needs

Coordinated Policies

Tehran's main tourism challenge is not a shortage of infrastructure but fragmented policymaking and limited public awareness of the capital's existing attractions, a city council member said. Seyyed Ahmad Alavi, head of the Tehran City Council's Tourism and Cultural Heritage Committee, said better coordination among municipal bodies and stronger promotion of the city's historical,



recreational and tourism facilities were essential to expanding domestic tourism. Alavi said responsibility for tourism and leisure facilities had been divided among several municipal organizations, resulting in separate decision-making processes and a lack of integrated planning. He said the council had pursued the establishment of a municipal tourism company to address the problem, a proposal that was eventually approved after years of discussion.

Under the previous arrangement, different organizations oversaw various aspects of tourism and recreation, including amusement parks, cultural facilities and urban beautification projects. A unified structure could help coordinate their activities and make better use of existing assets, Alavi said.

He also highlighted a significant increase in the budget allocated to tourism tours and sightseeing buses, adding that further funding could be considered if the proposed tourism company presented viable plans that could be incorporated into the municipal budget.

Tehran tourism needs coordinated policies, not more infrastructure: council member Reviving neglected recreational facilities has been another priority, he said.

The Basij amusement park, which had remained closed for about six years despite previous investment, was among the facilities targeted for reopening. The amusement park at the Abbasabad cultural and recreational complex had also been completed during the current council's term, while plans were being developed for six additional amusement parks.

Alavi said the city was also expanding sightseeing bus services and establishing dedicated routes connecting historical landmarks and sites associated with Tehran's cultural identity.

These services could help residents discover attractions they might otherwise overlook, he added. He acknowledged that reorganizing the sector was complicated by competing interests among municipal bodies.

Nevertheless, he said the council aimed to improve coordination, public access and promotion of existing attractions rather than focusing solely on building new infrastructure.

