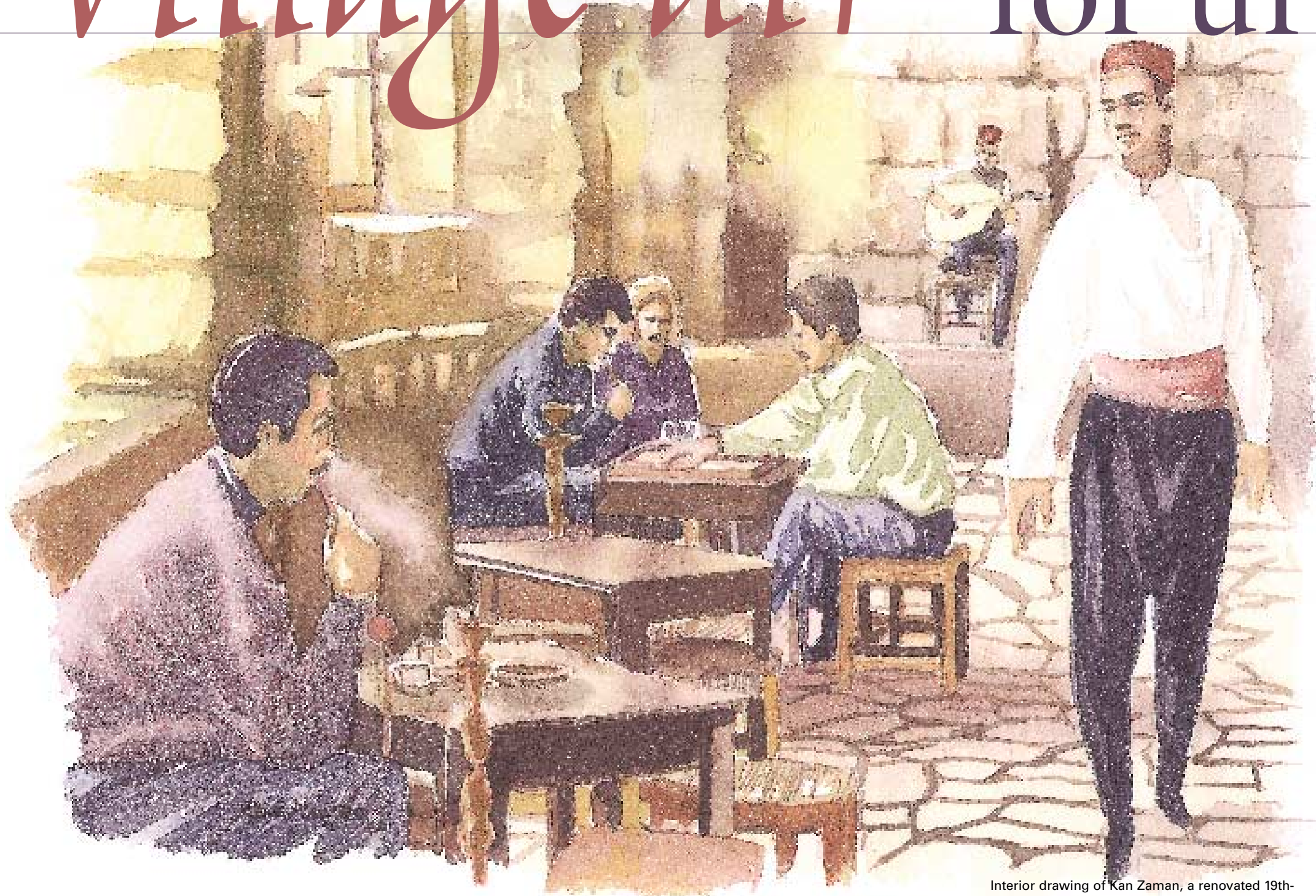


village air for urban elites



Illustrations By Rene Fuentes Photographs By Nabil Abu-Dayyeh

Memorializing everyday life is a common practice that spans cultures and countries. We easily recognize this in theme parks, living-history museums, and country inns that are intended as tourist attractions, as well as in historical preservation programs. The urge to celebrate a cozy domestic — and largely rural — past creates opportunities for today's sophisticated — and largely urban — consumers to connect with their not-so-distant heritage. It also offers enterprising marketers an economic opportunity to capitalize on a widely shared common impulse to rediscover a nostalgic lifestyle.

Over 20 years ago, in his essay "The Necessity of Ruins," J.B. Jackson drew our attention to the North American habit of reifying domestic life through monuments to the

By Sharon Nagy and Nabil Abu-Dayyeh

vernacular. "We [Americans]," he wrote, "admire and try to collect things not so much for their beauty or value as for their association with a phase of our past.... History means less the record of significant events and people than the preservation of reminders of a bygone domestic existence and its environment."

Jackson was interested in the way that North Americans' fascination with memorialized domesticity spilled out of the museum and private collection and into constructed urban and rural environments. But vernacularized memory and monuments are not peculiarly North American. Ethnotourism, a fast-growing sector of the worldwide tourism industry, guides tourists off the luxury trail into real or simulated experiences of local life. Living museums, where visitors can walk through staged reproductions of earlier lifestyles, have become standard features of cultural

Interior drawing of Kan Zaman, a renovated 19th-century agricultural estate that is decorated with relics of agricultural and Bedouin life. Patrons enjoy an array of "traditional" food, drink, water pipes, and musical entertainment.

Heritage Café Complexes in Jordan



An interior view of Al Hosh's restaurant and café, housed in a renovated farmhouse with vaulted ceilings and interior courtyards

unspecified time frame and because of the focus on everyday life. Visitors to a prehistoric city or a medieval castle experience the boundaries and the foreignness of antiquity. However, a cup of coffee and game of backgammon in a café simulating a recent and ruralized past does not seem as distant or foreign — it is likely to be easily imagined and more completely integrated into the patron's experience of the place. But the recent appearance of many such places is not simply a function of an idealized nostalgia. As it is elsewhere, the phenomenon of heritage cafés in Jordan is best understood as related to recent social change and movement — transnational movement, urban-rural movement, and movement across boundaries of both class and gender.

programs and urban entertainment in many countries. Heritage themes stimulate investment and consumption in areas as wide ranging as real estate, fashion, and cuisine.

JORDAN PRESERVES ITS PAST

Our research explores the ways the marketing of vernacular heritage connects the urban and rural landscapes for consumers in Jordan. We are particularly interested in privately developed café-and-gallery complexes that use historical preservation as part of their commercial strategy. Jordan's heritage cafés are leisure destinations, usually housed in renovated historic structures. The buildings and décor evoke the everyday life of the Bedouin and agricultural villages of bygone days but are designed to satisfy the tastes of international tourists and educated urban Jordanians. Purporting to be historical preservation projects, these café-and-gallery complexes are nonetheless themed commercial establishments aimed at selling a village atmosphere to an urban clientele.

In Jordan, where heritage has long been associated with antiquities such as the spectacular carved city of Petra, elaborate Byzantine mosaics, and Crusader castles, the heritage cafés represent a temporal leap forward. The heritage interpreted at the cafés and their associated shops is more accessible and tangible to their patrons than that available at the revered ancient archaeological sites, both because of the

HERITAGE TOURISM AND URBANISM

Amman's heritage cafés are a relatively recent addition to Jordan's urban and rural landscapes. These cafés are fueled primarily by private commercial investment and aided by efforts in architectural preservation and the development of tourism championed by Queen Noor and the Noor Al Hussein Foundation. Queen Noor, who has a degree in architecture and urban planning from Princeton University, advocates the revitalization of Jordan's "historic villages and towns" and the country's "living history." Her Web site, www.noor.gov.jo, explains the "abandonment of [Jordan's] historic villages and neighborhoods and the subsequent over-expansion of its urban centers" as linked to the "gradual erosion of cultural identity." In an effort to reverse this loss of cultural identity, the Noor Al Hussein Foundation integrates architectural preservation with sustainable tourist developments through the renovation of abandoned areas and the establishment of handicraft workshops and cooperatives. These efforts have encouraged and supported private investment in conservation projects, often prioritizing capital accumulation despite the rhetoric of cultural preservation.

In instances where heritage conservation, architectural or otherwise, is viewed as a means for capital accumulation, conservation projects are likely to take on a solipsistic character, isolated from surrounding social, cultural, and eco-

economic contexts. In his 1999 critique of conservation projects in Jordan, "Gentrification and the Politics of Power, Capital and Culture in an Emerging Jordanian Heritage Industry," Rami Farouk Daher argues that Jordan's heritage conservation projects have generally been undertaken as a specialized activity of the intellectual and economic elite. He describes projects that characterize the commercial strategies of conservation in Jordan, including a historic building in Amman transformed into an Internet café and Taybet Zaman, an entire town that was leased by Jordan Tourism Investments and transformed into a tourist attraction. Unfortunately, Daher notes, the result of such projects is often the gentrification and alienation of the host communities rather than a "revitalization" of their social and economic life or the reaffirmation of a sense of belonging to a shared place. Two of Jordan's heritage cafés, Kan Zaman and Al Hosh, may be seen as representative of the phenomenon. Both combine architectural preservation and the merchandising of memories, making them part heritage site, part retail destination. Both are housed in renovated 19th-century farmhouses, decorated in a manner that links past to present and urban to rural. These café complexes demonstrate ways in which time and space converge — how rural and urban become associated with points in time as much as geographic spaces, and how valorized notions of rural pasts are integrated into urban presents.

KAN ZAMAN

Kan Zaman is one of the best known of these commercial conservation projects. Located on a sparsely populated hilltop, Kan Zaman is a short drive from the heart of Amman. The drive up to the project gives visitors the impression of having left urban life behind, until they reach the crowded parking lot that overflows onto the approach roads on busy nights, especially during Ramadan and holidays.

Kan Zaman, whose name is translated for tourists as "Once Upon a Time," was originally a 19th-century farming estate, but it has undergone a tourism-inspired renovation as an "Ottoman Village." The estate now houses a restaurant, a coffee shop, an art gallery, handicraft studios, and gift shops. The entire complex is decorated with relics of agricultural and Bedouin life; patrons are offered an array of "traditional" food, drink,



An exterior view of Fuheis. In the 1990s private investors developed a section of the old village into a café-and-gallery complex.

and water pipes, as well as musical entertainment. Advertisements for Kan Zaman call the complex a Place in Time and claim that "for the sights, sounds, and tastes of Jordanian history, you could not get more authentic than Kan Zaman, where history reaches out to you."

Kan Zaman is unquestionably a tourist attraction, banking on staged and reconstructed authenticity to attract international visitors. Like other sites of its type, it has been criticized as an inauthentic and commercialized version of Jordan's past. Kan Zaman is nonetheless a relatively successful commercial venture, serving tourists and Ammanis alike. *Lonely Planet*, a guidebook series that targets tourists with a taste for the "authentic," captures the simultaneous criticism of and respect for commercialized heritage in its description of Kan Zaman:

How seriously can you take a place called "Once Upon a Time?" You know there is something wrong when a lanky Bedouin wearing full dress sword and other paraphernalia emerges to take the keys to your car and park it for you. This so-called turn-of-the-century restored Ottoman village is nothing more than a series of semi-stylish souvenir shops together with a very pleasant restaurant set beneath the vaulted ceilings of what could look to all the world as a venerable old souq (bazaar). The bigger Amman hotels ferry people here by the busload to sample the buffet dinner



Heritage cafés and complexes in Jordan are commonplace in urban and tourist areas. The two discussed in this article are located in Amman (Kan Zaman) and nearby Fuheis (Al Hosh).

accompanied by some Arabic music after a heavy shopping session. The coffee in the café costs twice the regular price, but then you are paying for ambience. It's a curio of sorts. . . It lies outside of Amman along the airport highway. . . The "village" is off to the left after a couple of km. Watch for the "Coca Cola" billboard.

It is important not to allow the touristic gloss to overshadow the extent to which these cafés play to local and regional consumers in addition to the flow of international visitors. While Kan Zaman is perhaps the most elaborate and well known of these heritage cafés, smaller cafés of this sort are scattered throughout the city. Those located in and around hotels primarily cater to tourists, many of whom are Arabs from other nations. Yet other cafés, located in various commercial sections of town, offer local residents an alternative to the more westernized restaurants and bars and serve a predominantly Arab clientele. The locations, prices, and atmosphere of these cafés attract Amman's educated, traveled middle and upper-middle class. For this segment of the population, the cafés are a safe and temporary form of identification with both the less cosmopolitan and less modern aspects of their "Jordanianess" or "Arabness" — forging imaginary

links with segments of the population, areas of the landscape, and periods of history that in the raw might be unpalatable. Despite the real and rhetorical valorization of rural pasts, it is unlikely that Jordan's urban residents would welcome an actual and permanent return to an agricultural lifestyle.

While heritage cafés are an established feature of Jordan's tourist and urban landscape, they have also recently begun to appear in towns outside of the urban centers and off the tourist trail. The suburban and rural heritage cafés are an ironic twist on the urban-rural link: They bring the urbanized version of the rural back to its village setting. Al Hosh, meaning "the courtyard," is a relatively new addition to the circuit of heritage cafés and is a particularly interesting example of this urban-rural twist. Located in Fuheis, a small town just northwest of Amman,

Al Hosh, as well as its surrounding "artist colony," is best understood within the context of recent structural changes in the town and its relationship to the city of Amman.

FUHEIS AND ITS ENVIRONS

Established on and around a number of freshwater springs, Fuheis was originally an agricultural village. Today, Fuheis's economy is fueled by three primary nonagricultural sources: the local cement factory, which is the largest local employer; remittances from expatriates in Europe and the United States; and income generated by its role as a satellite to the capital, Amman.

Fuheis grew as a satellite town to the nearby city of Es-Salt. The history and architecture of Fuheis and Es-Salt are therefore intertwined, but Es-Salt's influence on Fuheis is diminishing as Fuheis is drawn into Amman's urban sprawl. Es-Salt is the administrative center of the Directorate of Bahlqha, of which Fuheis is a part. However, it is likely that Fuheis will eventually become incorporated into the Directorate of Amman.

This expansion of the capital toward Fuheis has had significant impact on the town through rising land values, new residential construction for commuters from the city, and



LEFT: The most densely populated section of town now surrounds Fuheis's cement factory, built between 1952 and 1953. RIGHT: Fuheis, with its renovated historic core shown in the middle



the accessibility of urban clientele for local businesses. Fuheis is known as a predominantly Christian town. It has a high rate of emigration to Europe and the United States. Aspiring to own a home in Fuheis, many of these expatriates have built villas in low-density neighborhoods in the surrounding hills. In addition to the expatriate residences, many upper-middle-class Fuheisis employed in Amman live in Fuheis. Some commute daily, and others maintain two homes. Fuheis's proximity to the capital affords easy accessibility to the services of the city while maintaining the quality of life associated with small towns. These developments have been a mixed blessing for the town. On the one hand, rising property values have contributed to the fortunes of those Fuheisi families and individuals who own land in the hills toward Amman, providing new capital for residential construction in these areas. On the other hand, as they encounter the perceived threat of being swallowed by urban sprawl, the townspeople fear a loss of independence enjoyed until recently due to their relative isolation.

While the impact of Amman's urban expansion on the low-density residential areas in the hills of Fuheis (and on those who own that property) is readily apparent, its impact on the rest of the town is less obvious. Despite the building activities in the outlying areas, the basic form of the remainder of the town has stayed relatively intact. The town can roughly be divided into three sections, with corresponding differences in building style and residents' economic

status. The newest and most affluent area is the hills discussed above. The majority of the rest of the population lives in houses and apartments within the higher-density area near the cement factory, the town's primary employer. The cement factory is located a kilometer and a half up the hill from the center of the older agricultural village, the third section. When the cement factory was opened in 1953, factory pollution was not much of a concern: production levels were low and the factory was set on higher ground than the village. However, pollution and its accompanying health hazards have increased as production levels have risen and more of the population has moved closer to the factory. This older section of Fuheis has recently been mined for its historical value, and this is where the art gallery and café Al Hosh are situated.

AL HOSH: CAPITALIZING ON THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE "OLD VILLAGE"

In the oldest sections of the town are spaces associated with Fuheis's early history, such as the springs and gardens that supported the town's agriculture, the caves once used as chapels by the Christian communities, and the stone houses and churches that characterized the town's architecture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These spaces are the backdrop for much of Fuheis's oral history and folklore.

One story often retold by the town's elders recounts an event from 1640. The tale identifies an olive grove



Fuheis has experienced considerable new construction and growth as the capital city of Amman spreads toward the town.

west of the present Orthodox church where a Muslim sheikh and his associates were slain by members of a Christian group because the sheikh insisted on marrying the priest's daughter. Later, after holding services in *magharit er'ebaeh* (a large cave in this area), the girl's father asked his parishioners to step on his neck as they left the chapel. As they did so, he prayed that God take his daughter from him to assuage his feelings of shame. As legend has it, he returned home to find his daughter dead. In a less dramatic association with historical landscapes, the older generation of townspeople still recall the importance of the area's natural springs as focal points for community activity as late as the 1950s.

Despite the rich historical associations of the old village, the center of the town gradually shifted after the cement factory was opened in the 1950s. By the 1980s, portions of this older section of town had been abandoned, used as a dump, and slated for eventual demolition. Then, in 1992, a returned expatriate opened a small art gallery in one of the old stone buildings. He then proceeded discreetly to buy a few of the adjoining buildings and convert them into a small, self-contained heritage center, Al Hosh, selling

arts, handicrafts, food, and village ambience.

In contrast to the criticism of the commercialization at Kan Zaman, guidebooks praise Al Hosh. They speak of the developer as a "local character" who saved the buildings from demolition. "Although the crafts are uninspired," the *Rough Guide* says politely, "it makes for an interesting wander and the tiny lanes come into their own in the golden light of late afternoon." The Noor Al Hussein Foundation similarly applauds the development, using it as an example of the potential of private investment. In fact, in 1995, after the private efforts were well under way, according to Queen Noor's Web page, she intervened to "establish a Technical Committee for the Development of the Historic Sites of Fuheis to protect its historic buildings and ensure the integration of Fuheis's rich architectural and cultural heritage."

Despite the laudatory tone adopted by foreign and official observers, this development has met with mixed reactions locally. The project has received a positive reaction and encouragement from residents of the capital city. A few townspeople, recognizing the commercial potential, have joined the efforts, or at least supported them. Others view the new businesses and their owners as an unwelcome nuisance, bringing more traffic, more noise, more pollution, and offering little more to the local economy than a few busboy positions. The majority, however, living near and working in the cement factory, pay little attention to the development. Al Hosh fits neither their tastes nor their budgets.

So far, the rehabilitation effort in the old village has been primarily the work of volunteers and private entrepreneurs with a taste for the aesthetics of traditional village life, enthusiastically aided by architects interested in vernacular architecture. Some townspeople are implicitly flattered by recent interest in their town. Yet matters are complicated by the fact that intellectuals from Amman have generated the initiative, rather than the townspeople or their elected representatives. Many Fuheisis feel isolated from these developments, while others have been explicit in their opposition to them. The Ammani entrepreneurs prefer to think of this opposition as unjustified and xenophobic. Considering the chasm separating the urbanized investors from the more conservative town residents, the ambivalent reactions are justified. Town residents are reluctant to relinquish control over their immediate environment, even to well-intentioned outsiders.

Thus far the restoration and reuse of older buildings in Fuheis have been largely characterized by an overvaluation of the commercial and aesthetic, rather than the communal and collective memorial value of the older structures. The most positive aspect of the recent development in Fuheis has been educational. The Al Hosh café-and-gallery complex has forced residents to think about their town in new ways. Issues concerning the physical formation of their environment are now a subject of public attention and debate. Suddenly, architecture and social history matter. If the conservation efforts in the old village of Fuheis are to avoid the alienation and disassociation of the local residents, which Daher has documented in other projects, this effort will need to become increasingly collaborative.

THE CONVERGENCE OF TIME AND SPACE

Commercialized heritage complexes, wherever they are found, raise many questions about how individuals and groups perceive and engage heritage and identity. The heritage industry constructs current identities with reference to other times and other places. The perceived personal and societal need to fix identities to an imagined past is most commonly understood as a response to broadening transnational and global dynamics.

Despite the rhetoric of cultural preservation, the highly politicized and commercialized nature of the heritage industry is apparent to observers, tourists, and scholars alike. The skepticism and cynicism exhibited in travel guides like the Lonely Planet series indicate that even so-called "adventure travelers" accept the ironies of commercialized authenticity. The persuasive critiques by scholars such as Daher demonstrate the real political and economic inequalities of cultural preservation programs, but if these projects provide neither authentic cultural experiences nor community revitalization, how then are we to understand them? Research on the burgeoning heritage industry throughout the world has addressed issues as wide ranging as the construction of ethnic and national identities and the commoditization of others. Our focus here, as researchers interested in urban and built environments, has been on the convergence of time and space in the symbolic associations of heritage, exploring how rural traditions are brought into the experience of now urbanized Arabs.

In the cafés we've described, heritage provides more than a temporal link between past and present. It links space — rural, urban, and transnational — and spans the social



A concentration of houses of the old core of Fuheis's agricultural village that have been renovated and converted into a café-and-gallery complex. These buildings are examples of 19th- and early 20th-century rural architectural styles in Jordan.

boundaries of class and gender for café clientele. Perhaps the most accurate marketing slogan of these cafés is the one that promises "the best of yesterday, today." Jordan's heritage cafés indeed provide "a place in time," a space in which a cleaner, quieter yesterday can be enjoyed on today's terms, a space in which contemporary class and gender lines can be disguised through the time travel of commercialized heritage. Here women can sit among the men and share the *narghileh*, or water pipe. (For many, particularly tourists, the departure this represents from the past discounts the endurance of patriarchal structures.) Here the educated urban clientele can brush up against the trappings of agricultural and nomadic lives without loosening their ties. It is in many ways what Russell Nye, in his article "Eight Ways of Looking at an Amusement Park," calls a riskless risk. By bringing the rural into urban landscapes (and back again), collective memories are rewritten in a way that discards the hard truths of history and deemphasizes the social inequalities of the present.



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Two views of one of the houses in the renovated core that was transformed into a roof terrace for Al Hosh

University of Pennsylvania. Nagy's research focuses on the use of space in Arab-Islamic cities, primarily those in the Arabian Gulf states. Her earlier work was on the urban planning and housing policies in Doha, Qatar. Currently, she is conducting ethnographic research on the communities of east and south Asian workers in Bahrain. In the fall of 2002 she will begin her second year as a Fulbright Scholar in Bahrain.

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East (CERMOC), where he is engaged in preparation of a review of physical planning in Jordan between 1970 and 1990 and also working on a monograph on a historic neighborhood of Amman.



FOR FURTHER READING

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LEFT: Nabil Abu-Dayyeh
RIGHT: Sharon Nagy