This section on the houses of Isfahan is divided into four parts. The first part (pp.305-307) presents a selection of views from five different houses to give a foretaste of their rich interiors. In the second and third parts (pp.308-313) two specific houses are illustrated in some detail; and in the last part (p.314) the plan of one of these houses is used to demonstrate that rehabilitation for modern needs is possible without damaging the basic concept of axial symmetry and centrality.

The characteristics of the traditional house were, first, external walls without windows for protection; second, a tortuous entrance via an octagonal hall ('hashi') to maintain the privacy of the courtyard; and third, a courtyard plan, basically single-storey, with the pool and ceremonial rooms on the north side, the open summer house opposite, and the two joined by side wings which provided the everyday living accommodation.

1 (p.305), main ceremonial room in the Nemat Baksht house (see also 7).
2, Qajar wall painting in the Jami house, Julfa.
3, one of the reception rooms in the Zorcheian house, Julfa. Stained glass was popular in the Qajar period.
4, Sheikh-al-Islam house: courtyard.
5, stained glass in the Majlesi house.
6, Sheikh-al-Islam house: main ceremonial room in Qajar style.
7, Nemat Baksht house: vaulting detail.
8, wall painting of Fath Ali Shah (1798-1834) in the Barsagh house, Julfa.
ZARIY BAF HOUSE

The name means gold brocade-makers and the two courtyards were probably part of a larger complex which once belonged to this guild, for the octagonal hall has two disused entrances which may have led to other courtyards or gardens. The small courtyard belongs to a house which is a perfect miniature and which may have been inhabited by the guardian of the guild. On the north side of the large courtyard stands an unusual building which was probably used by the guild both as a store for the precious raw material and as a showroom where buyers could come without being observed. Behind the front rooms lies a hidden structure based on a Greek-cross plan and dominated by a central wind-catching tower which lights and ventilates its five spaces.

9, part of the long narrow passage which leads to the small courtyard.
10, the stone pool is unusually ornate.
11, the small courtyard with the pool in front of the south-facing ceremonial room.
12, the large courtyard looking north towards the three vaulted rooms which conceal the brocade store and showroom behind.
13, the long entrance passage (left) and the short return to the small courtyard, seen from the octagonal entrance hall.
MOSAVER-UL-MOLK HOUSE

16. the courtyard from the roof of the
summer house, with the Registry north block
of ceremonial rooms and the residential
tower on the opposite side.

17. detail of stained glass mosaics and painted
plaster decoration in the main ceremonial
room (see also 18).
MOSAVER-AL-MOLK HOUSE

Still lived in by a well-known octogenarian miniaturist, this is one of the best preserved and most typical of the city’s seventeenth century houses. The plan repays study. The original entrance was down a long passage and via the ubiquitous ‘hashi’, which also gave access to three other houses. This idea of a common hall originated in the days when a single property might include as many as six courtyard units—for men, women, eunuchs, servants, stables, horticulture. Between the doors of the octagonal hall were seats where the men sat and talked or intercepted unwanted visitors. The tortuous passage connecting the hall with the courtyard provided a visual barrier which protected the women of the household. In the corner adjoining this passage was a square room where the men of the household received visitors, adding yet another degree of protection.

The accommodation around the courtyard follows the classic plan. The ceremonial rooms for entertaining are on the north side and are raised over a basement which provides storage space. It also gives this important part of the house a prominence which is further emphasised by the greater height of the rooms, and which is necessary to protect the courtyard in winter against the north winds. Stairs lead to rooms on the first floor which are traditionally reserved for guests to sleep in because they are cooler; or for the women to see without being seen during the parties which they may not attend. In the hot season the family would use the summer house on the south side of the court (now closed in, but originally open) and repair to the wind-catching tower room in the heat of the day. Dominated by an octagonal tower which will catch any breeze that is blowing and magnificently vaulted, this tall, top-lit, galleried space constitutes one of the most original contributions to domestic architecture.
The side wings provided the normal living accommodation—one side for the parents, the other for a married son or daughter. They consist of a central room flanked by a bedroom on one side and a wardrobe on the other.

Like all traditional houses, the Mosaver-al-Molk house is built of sun-baked mud bricks dug out in situ, a fact which explains why houses are invariably below street level. To prevent the walls from being undermined, the brickwork stands on a stone plinth. Internally floors are brick and walls are plastered. Externally both the walls and the brick-vaulted or timber roof structure are finished with a mixture of mud and straw which has weather-proofing qualities.
REMEDY 3

REHAB

Here we take the plan of the Mosaver-al-Molk house on p312 and show two rehabilitation proposals, both of which presuppose the supply of adequate services. Both proposals make intensive use of the space and depart from the traditionally unspecific function of individual rooms. The top plan shows the house converted for multiple family use and assumes the possibility that a number of families, who are friendly with one another, would be prepared to sacrifice some of the privacy of a modern flat for the sake of space and comfort. The bottom plan shows the house converted into a students’ hostel with a warden’s flat in the wind-catching tower room which could also serve a number of other neighbouring houses similarly converted.

![Plan of Mosaver-al-Molk house with rehabilitation proposals](image-url)