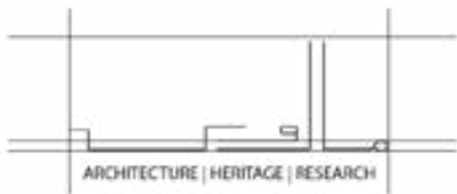


Irani Cafes of Saddar



ARCHITECTURE | HERITAGE | RESEARCH

pcc PAKISTAN
CHOWK
COMMUNITY
CENTRE

documenting past and present
reinterpreting a lost culture
looking to the future

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In the early 1900s, as migrants left Iran in favour of the sub-continent, the stopover in Karachi proved inviting enough to some that they stopped and set up shop. In these early restaurants lie the seeds of Karachi's vibrantly flowering Irani cafe culture. Numbering at over a hundred at their peak, these restaurants brought new and innovative service standards and offered diverse and inclusive spaces where anyone from shopkeepers to students, newspaper editors, office workers and all manner of intellectuals could mingle for discussions, delicious Persian cuisine or a hot cup of chai.



Documenting Communal Memory and Re-interpreting the Heritages of a Lost Cultural Landscape

Abstract

Comparing the idealised past and collective memory of Karachi's Irani cafes and documenting how the intergenerational dialogue between decades of cafe owners and goers has shaped the cultural landscape of the city.

Keywords: Archiving, Cultural Landscapes, Heritage, Inter-generational, Memory, Migration, Preservation



IRANI CAFES OF KARACHI



*Irani Cafe Locations
Illustrated by Uzayr Agha, 2019*

RECOLLECTING LOST CULTURAL LEGACIES



View of Cafe Khairabad, photographed by Shaheen Nauman, 2019

WITH FEWER THAN 10 IRANI CAFES LEFT, THE NEED TO DOCUMENT THESE SPACES HAS NEVER BEEN MORE PRESSING.

The apparent demise of Irani cafe culture has many culprits: everything from the death and departure of successive restaurant owner and visitor generations, ever rising running costs, the price of real estate in the old town, the extortionist bhatta culture, and societal changes like population growth and the rise of materialist consumerism that sees would-be customers thronging to vacuous malls and fast food joints. Yet the resilience of stalwarts like Khairabad Tea Shop offer insight into methods for preserving or revitalising the future of these cafes.

This report will address several aspects of Irani cafe culture. First, research methodologies of the report will be laid out and addressed through the context of findings obtained via fieldwork. Second, a necessary exploration of the history and precedence of these cafes will address their origins. Questions such as who used them, what made them so popular and

what made an Irani cafe unique are the key to understanding the culture's appeal. Relevant to this is a reckoning with how this culture has been documented and/or romanticised and idealised in recent documents. This requires a critical analysis of idealised pasts: was there a culture that was actually lost or has it adapted to the present in new forms?

Finally, this report seeks to document the remaining Irani cafes and their culture by identifying their main features and characteristics focussing on some key metrics of significance: (I) the urban, which covers their location, their local usage and importance within the wider neighbourhood/urban fabric, (II) architectural, which covers the materiality of the building's heritage, architectural features, interior design and decor, and (III) cultural & social which includes diverse aspects like food, visitor demographics and current social activities within these cafes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this study, we undertook several stages of fieldwork to compile a report on individual cafes as well as the historical activities, practices, usages, styles, cultures and heritages of these cafes. These took the forms of (I) Sitting Observations, (II) Gastronomic and Atmospheric Experiences, and (III) Oral Documentation.

(I) Sitting Observations

Fieldwork began through individual observations of the seven cafes addressed in the report. This involved sitting in the cafes at different hours of the day, observing cafe visitors and the atmosphere, noting salient architectural and design features and photographing the spaces for a spatial documentation in preparation for later analysis. The purpose of these observations was to gage the current state of surviving Irani Cafes in order to identify cultural remains and accurately assess the current culture of the cafes.

(II) Gastronomic and Atmospheric Experiences

After making simple sitting observations, fieldwork turned towards sampling the cuisine and atmosphere of the cafes through longer exposure. We went at popular meal times and tea time, tasted some of the popular dishes (which often were not the Irani food) as well as the Irani fare, and drank tea. We also talked to waiters, observed customers within the restaurant.

(III) Oral Documentation

Taking the form of recorded interviews, we sought conversations with cafe owners as well as individuals who have experienced it in its heyday.



Tea at Cafe Khairabad, photographed by Shaheen Nauman, 2019

Migration History

Any good history of Iran in the twentieth century would convey a time of great turmoil and upheaval; world wars, famine and drought, a coup and a revolution all created an unstable environment from which significant numbers of Iranians migrated seeking brighter futures. The blossoming of Irani cafe culture in the Subcontinent can be attributed to these successive 20th century migrations.

During the 1910s, the Iranian economy was shattered under the failing Qajar dynasty. The Great Powers of Russia and Britain, long embroiled in the

Great Game that carved up Central Asia between them, had been eyeing Iran for its strategic value. Now they entered its yawning power vacuum by dividing it into strict zones of control. Its oil reserves and geostrategic location to the war in Mesopotamia meant Iran's declaration of neutrality was quickly

discarded as the Ottoman Empire invaded the west in 1914. While the Ottomans were defeated and war never came to Iran as a whole, the subsequent Great Iranian Famine (1917-1919) caused by drought and the demands of war taking much needed food killed by some estimates 2 million people of a population averaging 10-15 million.

Leaving Iran for greener pastures, many were attracted to the port city of Bombay for its reputation as a glitter-

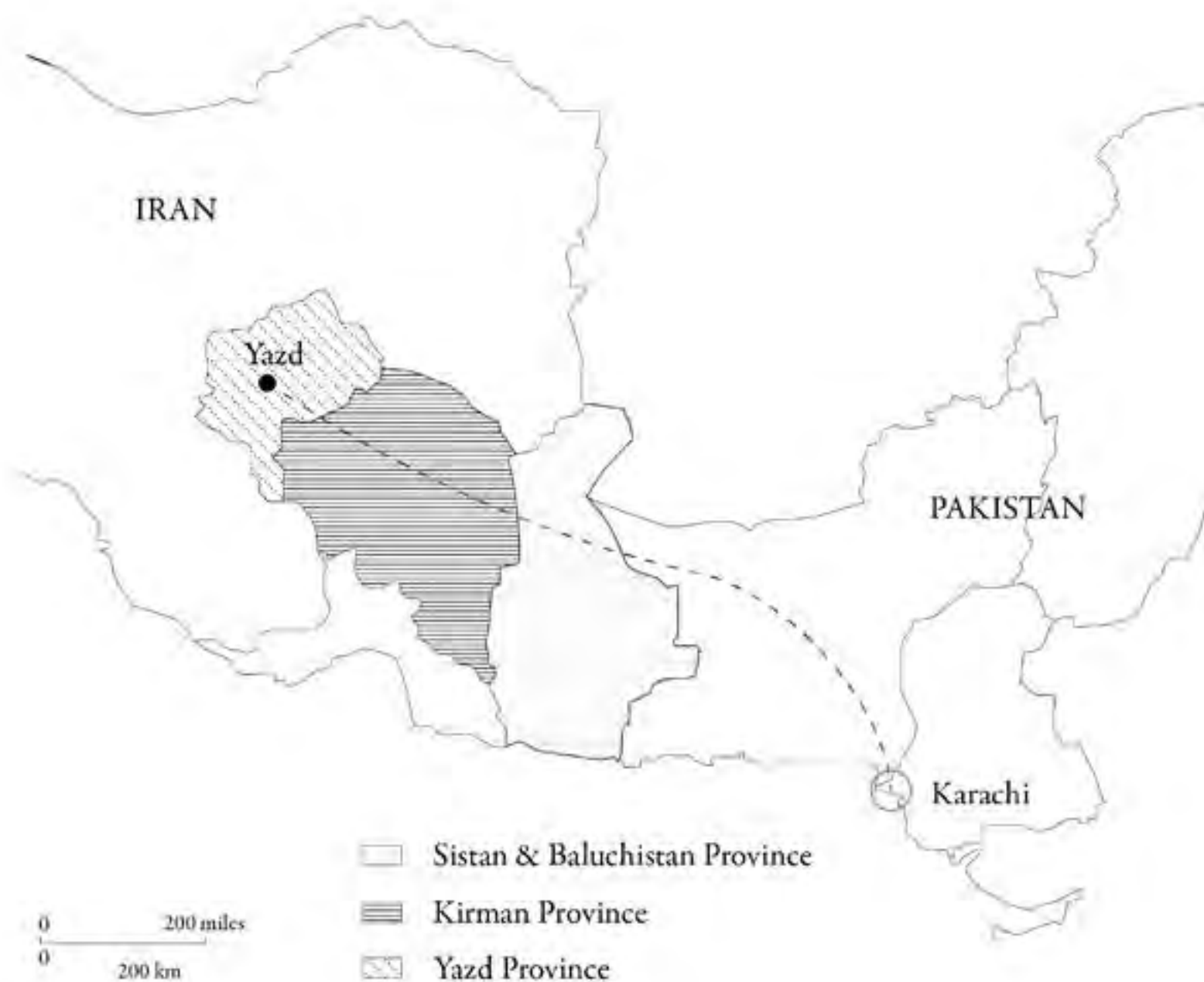
ing jewel of the Raj. Southern Iran was already under British influence, so travel to Karachi by land or sea was a logical step on the journey to India. Many of the earliest Irani cafes in Karachi and Bombay were set up during this time by low income Irani migrants who found a niche within the restaurant cultures of those cities. Cafes were set up in the most available sites. In Bombay, Hindu cultural beliefs divided storefronts into two categories: lion faced and cow faced. As Hindus favoured locations with wider

interiors and narrower fronts (cow faced), Irani migrants made adaptive use of 'lion faced' properties in prime locations on the corners of road intersections.

World War II was equally destabilizing for Iran. The 1941 Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran deposed Reza Shah and replaced him with his son to secure supply routes to the USSR and Iran's oil reserves. Both sides undermined Iranian power structures to secure their control, but the USSR pulled out at the war's end.



Migration Map 01
Illustrated by Uzayr Agha, 2019



Migration Map 02
Illustrated by Uzayr Agha, 2019

The origins of several Irani cafe-owning families in Karachi can be traced to places in eastern and central Iran like Yazd, Kerman and Sistan

In 1953, Iran's nationalist prime minister Mossadeq was overthrown in an Anglo-American coup that reinforced the Shah. His years of brutal crackdown of dissent and the poor state of Iran's economy was followed by the 1979 Iranian Revolution that toppled the Shah and Iran's rise as an Islamic Republic. It was during this time that many more Iranian migrants arrived and cafe culture grew in the 40s and 50s post-Partition. Many iconic cafes were born in this period, established by Iranis of many faiths - Muslims, Baha'is and Zoroastrians alike. Irani Cafe culture in Karachi reached its apex in the 1980s.

Some articles have suggested that these cafes represent the latest iteration of a tradition of Irani eating places situated at important trade hubs along the Silk Roads and designed to be welcoming, multicultural environments for traders and travellers. This seems unlikely due to the geographical and historical distance between these times and places. Additionally, the owners of these cafes came from poor Iranian contexts and adapted their cuisines to suit local tastes.

The origins of several Irani cafe-owning families in Karachi can be traced to places in eastern and central Iran like Yazd, Kerman and Sistan. Here geography is

ever important; eastern Iran, mostly desert, shares numerous land routes with the Subcontinent. Poor migrants leaving these regions had two options: they could head west to the greener Persian heartlands, or they could head east to what is modern Pakistan and India. Irani cafes were innovative for their introduction of table cloths and polite uniformed waiters, their use of extra plates and cutlery, practices that - according to the owner of Cafe Mubarak - upset local restaurateurs who resented the increased expectations this would give customers.

Irani Cafe Culture

Karachi experienced a cultural growth as cinemas and cafes provided venues for entertainment and nightlife. Irani Cafes became sites of communal engagement. At some cafes, families would gather and meet - family rooms encouraged a mix of customers. At others, the clientele were primarily men and could occasionally get rowdy. Regulars had favourite tables and often knew the owners. They met for tea time after sports matches or

work, or to hang out before/after going to the nearby cinemas.

In the 70s and 80s, the bun maska reigned supreme. Biscuits were also popular and many cafes had bakeries next door. Some of these have outlived the cafes themselves, such as Parisian Bakery that neighboured Parisian Cafe. One cafe goer, Mr Homi Ghadially remembers that people didn't go primarily

for the food. They served a wide variety of tea time foods and snacks, patties or sandwiches. Irani food only came to the cafes in the relatively recent past. Mr Ghadially attributes this to the revamp of Cafe Subhani into Chullu Kabab Sistani which highlighted Irani food as their signature dishes.

There were cinemas and discotheques in Saddar, with liquor available at small bars near the cafes. Often this alcohol was locally brewed and unregulated, therefore not of high quality. Liquor was neither sold nor allowed in the cafes, but this didn't stop some customers from stopping in for a bite to eat while intoxicated. This was ended in the 1970s beginning with Bhutto and later Zia ul-Haq who clamped down on 'unIslamic' cultural expressions. By comparison, Bombay began offering liquor licenses which some Irani cafes acquired to improve business. Irani cafes were also great places to bet on

horse racing. Bookies would take bets in the cafes and people would travel from them to the Old Race Course grounds to find out the winners. Similarly, cafes host marijuana sales for their informal and leisurely atmosphere.

Visitors to the cafes were predominantly male but there were no divisions based on religious affiliations or background. Saddar was the only nexus of the city at the time. A lot of newspaper offices were based in Old Town. Mr Ghadially has said that in those days there were no press clubs, so journalists often grabbed lunch in Irani cafes that were conveniently close by. This allowed for a mixing of intellectuals, the middle class and neighbourhood locals. Mr Ghadially's personal experiences were often centred on Jehangir Cafe simply due to its proximity to his home.



*Chai and Toast at Cafe
Mubarak, photographed by
Ghania Shams Khan, 2019*



01



02



03



04

01. Seating at Cafe Mubarak, photographed by Ghania Shams Khan

02. Seating at Cafe Darakshan, photographed by Ghania Shams Khan

03. Seating at Chullu Kebab Sistani, photographed by Ghania Shams Khan

04. Facade of Cafe Darakshan and Cafe Pehlevi, photographed by Ghania Shams Khan

PARSIS AND IRANI CAFES

Karachi has always been a migrant city and its vast growth post Partition is largely attributed to the arrival of displaced Muslims from India as well as rural-urban migration of Sindhis, Balochis and Pathans. But even before, this melting pot mythos was exemplified by the successful Hindu merchants of the city and the Parsi community in particular which boomed. In the twentieth century, Karachi and Bombay had large Parsi populations that had been settled for several centuries, some dating as early as the 11th Century. Irani cafes were set up by Iranians that migrated in the twentieth century, irrespective of their religions. While in no way purely Parsi spaces, some young Parsi men flocked to these cafes as great hangout spots. A senior Parsi philanthropist said, “as kids, we all used to go there because we knew the owner and they were all our family friends.” One particular cafe, Lyric Cafe in Saddar, was a favourite for its central location, its closeness to Parsi Colony and for the fact that families knew the owner. As the philanthropist put it, “if I know you I’ll come to you ... why go to his place when I don’t know him”.

Interior Typology



INTERIOR TYPOLOGY

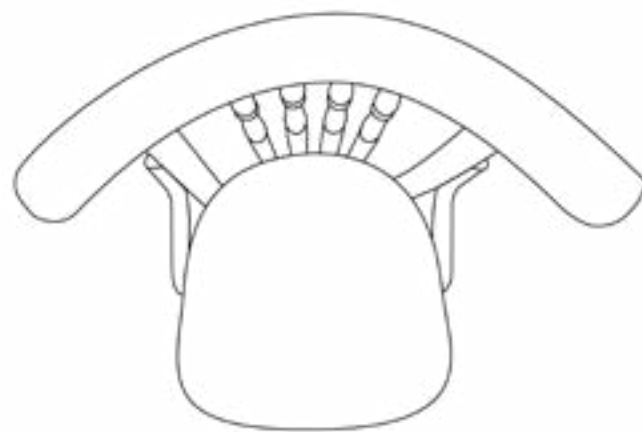
Irani Bentwood Chair

The ubiquitous bentwood chair design is an iconic visual element of Karachi's Irani Cafes. These hardwood chairs are curved through a process of heating to enhance comfort and stability. Guests and patrons of these cafes rest their backs on the top arch of these chairs as they drink tea and chat with friends or family.

One of the most noted manufacturers of the bentwood chairs was Austrian-German cabinet maker Michael Thonet (1796-1871) who is regarded as the inventor of bentwood furniture.

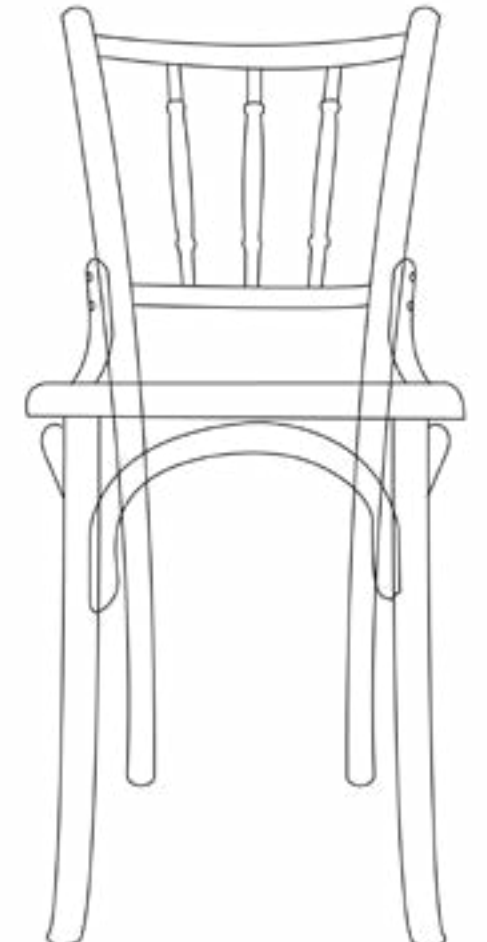
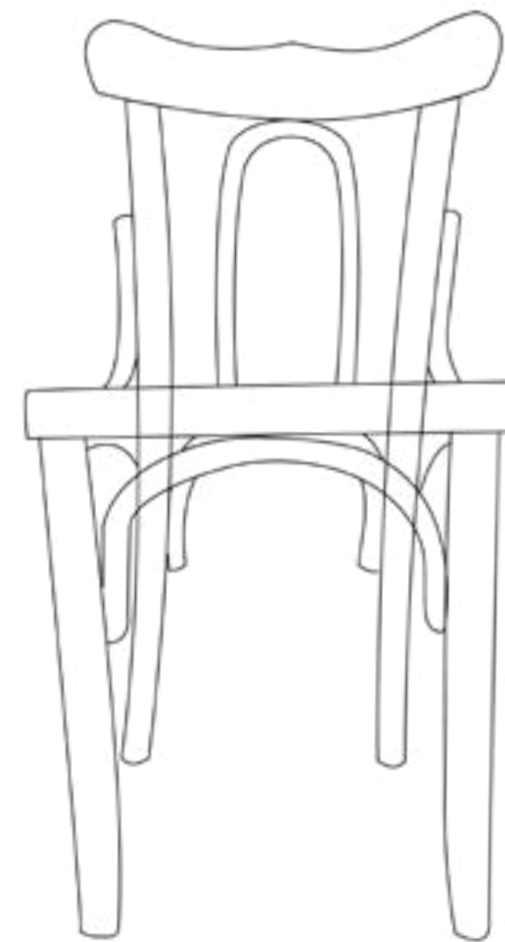
Left:
The Anatomy of the Bentwood Chairs
Illustrated by Uzayr Agha, 2020

Right:
Variations of the Bentwood Chairs
Illustrated by Uzayr Agha, 2020



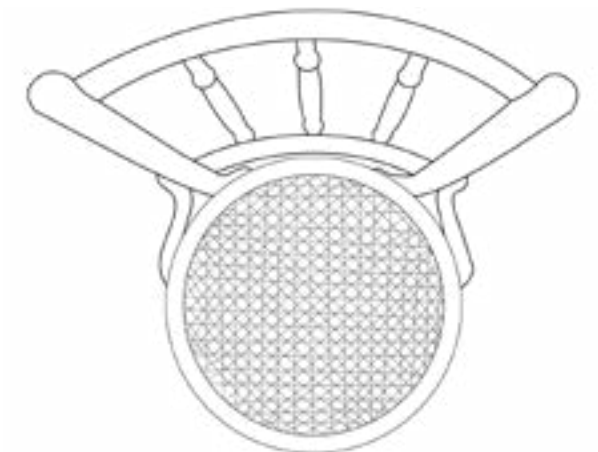
INTERIOR TYPOLOGY

Variations of The Bentwood Chair



Some types of bentwood chairs have cane woven seats (locally called beth). This process uses traditional weaving methods local to South Asia.

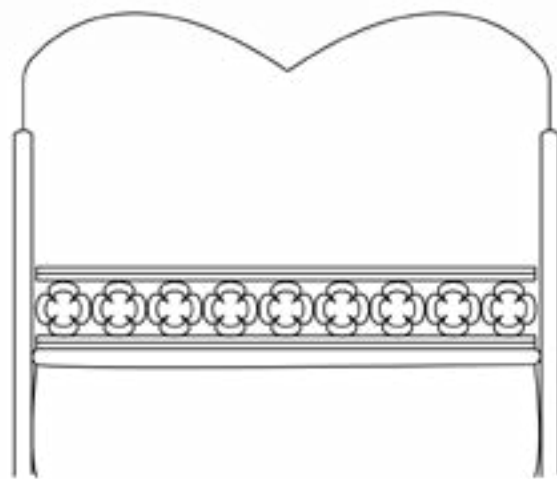
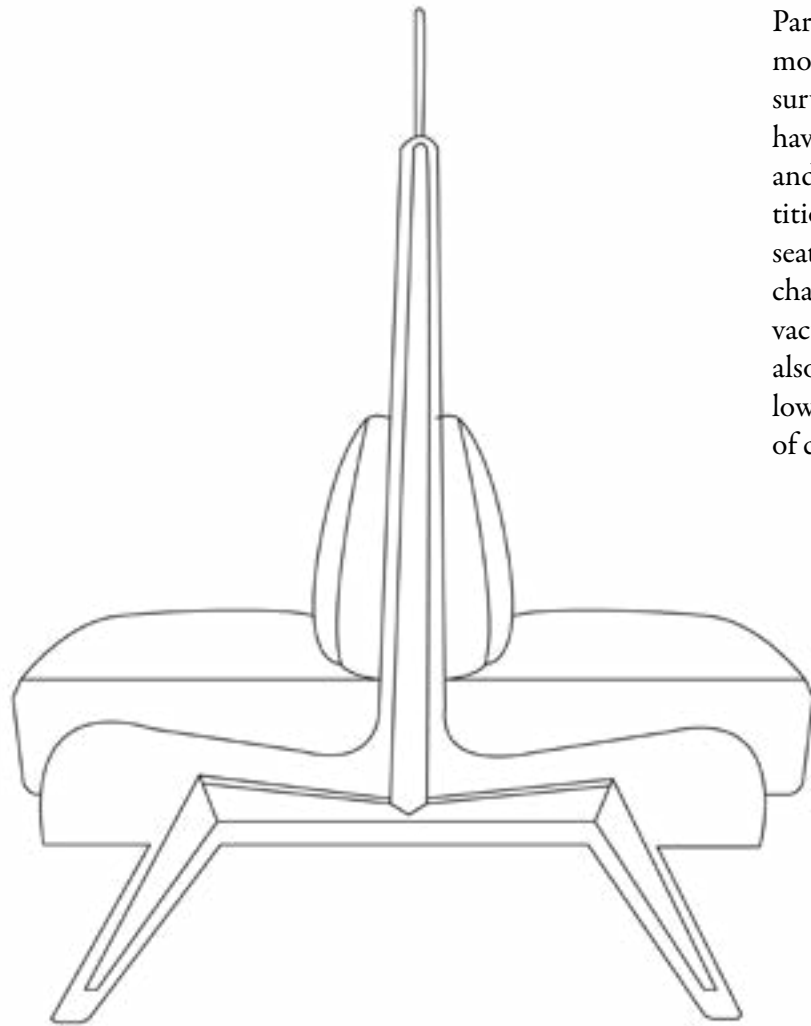
Furniture references provided by
Ahad Ali



INTERIOR TYPOLOGY

Partition Booth

Partitioned booths are also commonly found in most of Karachi's surviving Irani Cafes. These booths have faux leather cushions (regzine) and a curved heart-shaped glass partition between the opposite facing seats. The unique design of these chairs ensures a greater degree of privacy for all customers. The design is also economical and compact. It allows the cafe to seat a greater number of customers while using less wood.



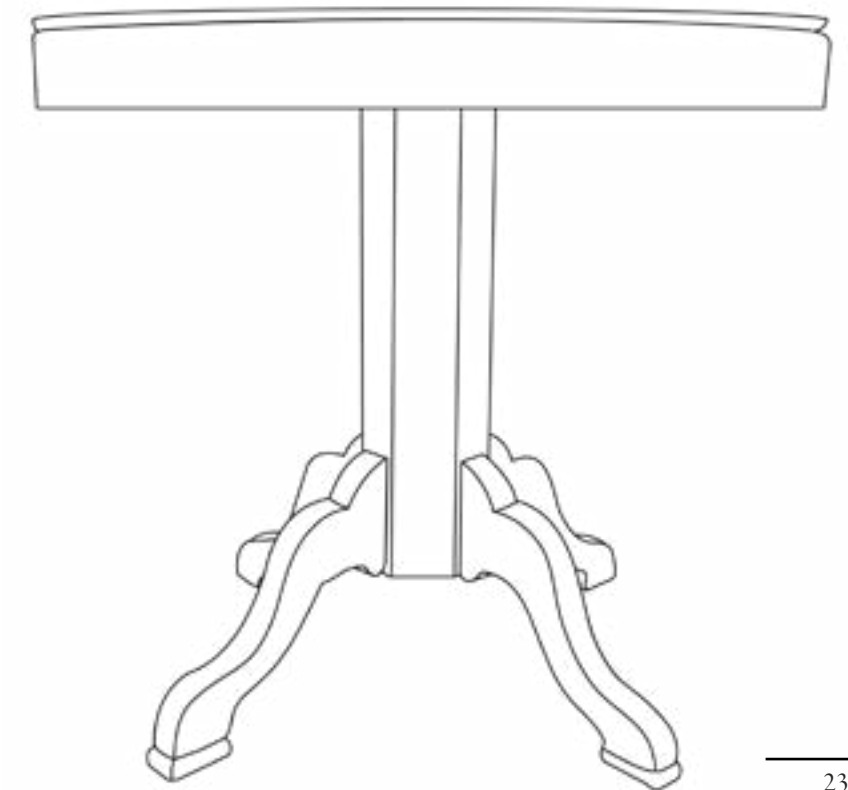
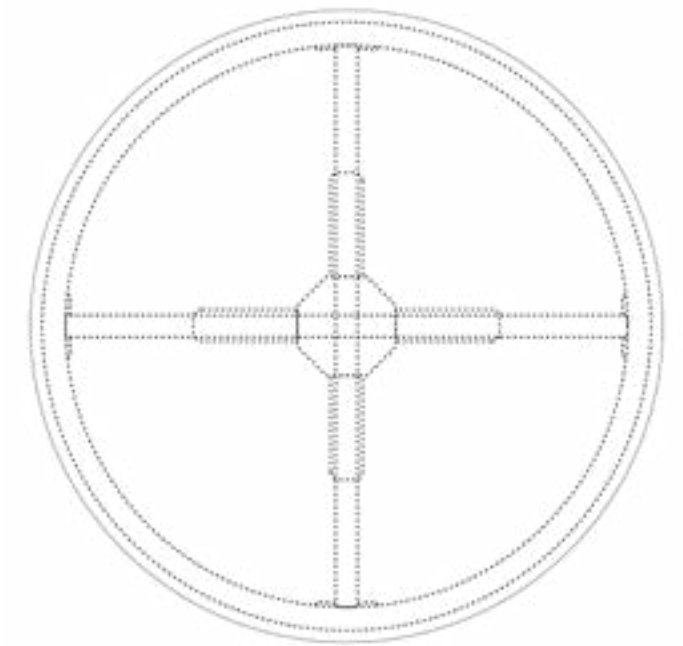
INTERIOR TYPOLOGY

Marble Table

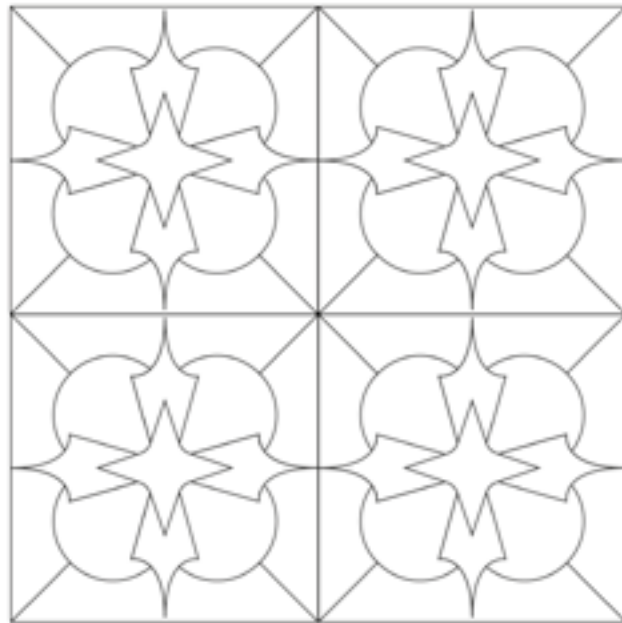
The round, wooden tables with white marble tabletops can be seen in some of the Irani Cafes of Saddar. Some of the tables are adorned with lion or bear shaped legs. Today, most of these tables can also be seen in old warehouses that collect furniture of a by-gone age. They require significant furnishing but can be purchased at an affordable price.

Left:
The Anatomy of the Partitioned Booths.
Illustrated by Uzayr Agha, 2020

Right:
The Anatomy of the Marble Coffee Table.
Illustrated by Uzayr Agha, 2020



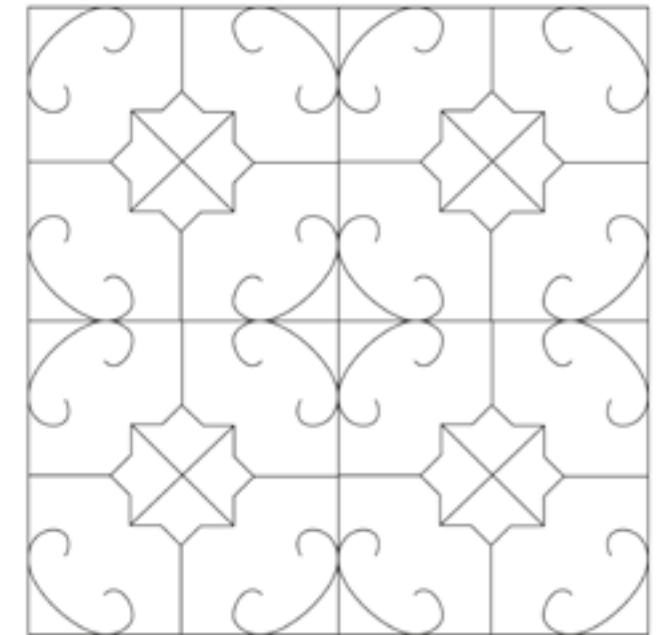
INTERIOR TYPOLOGY



Cafe Khairabad Grill

INTERIOR TYPOLOGY

Cafe Darakshan Grill



Cafe Khairabad Tilework



Cafe Victory Tilework



Tilework and Grills
Illustrated by Uzayr Agha, 2020

Tilework and Grills
Illustrated by Uzayr Agha, 2020

Cafe Khairabad

Cafe Khairabad or Khairabad Tea Shop is located in Rab Bagh Quarter on a strategic piece of real estate. It is at the corner of I. I. Chundrigar and Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed Road. Even though this cafe is nearly 50 years old, it remains as popular as ever since it is situated in the front of Karachi's iconic financial district. Many professionals have their lunch break

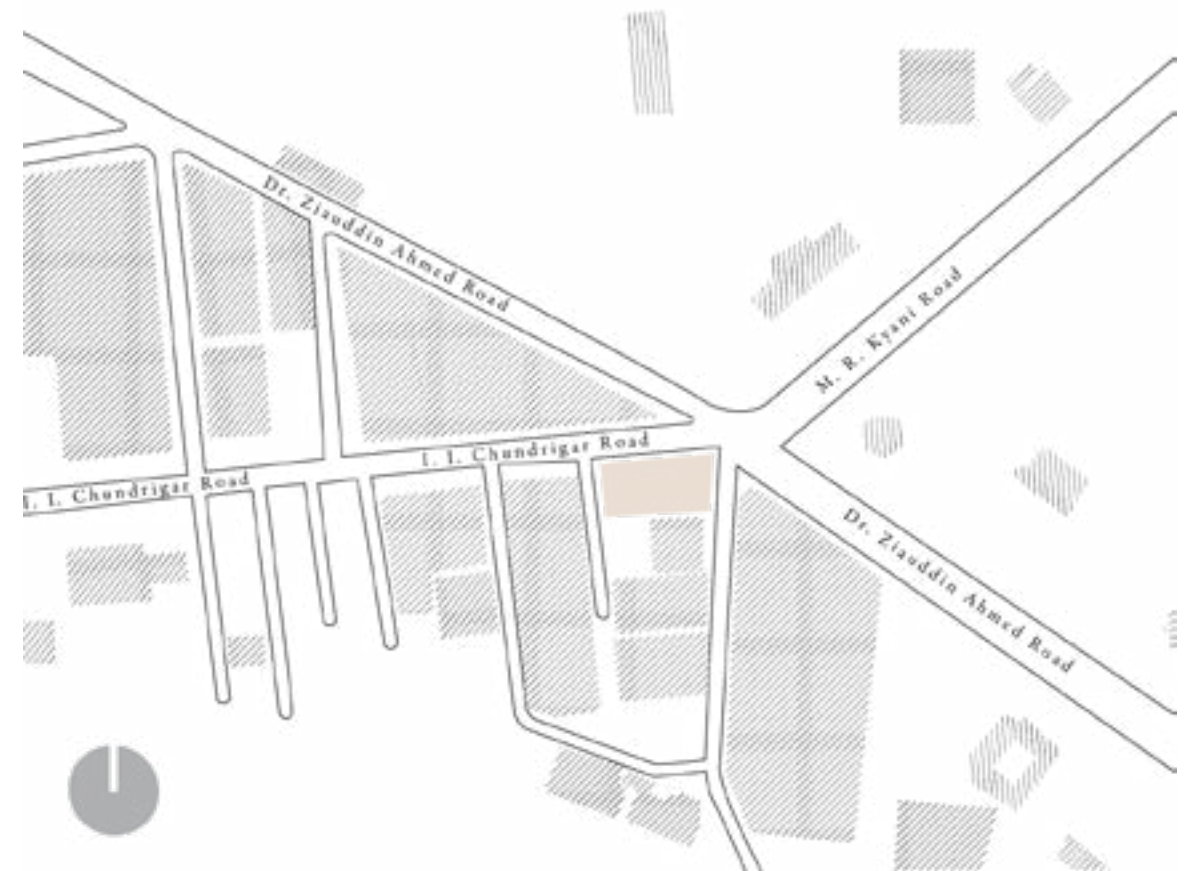
here, while others often visit after work for a cup of hot chai.

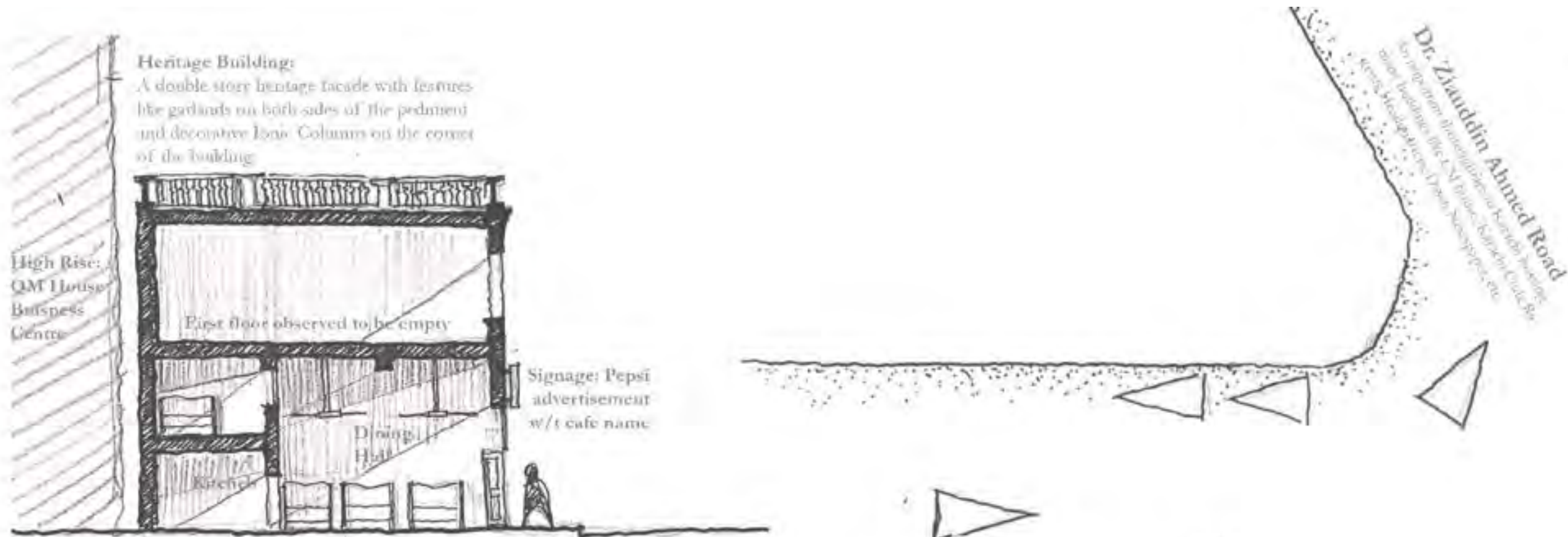
Cafe Khairabad's owner, Mr. Abbas Ali, traced his roots to the Yazd Province in Iran and said that this cafe was initially founded by his grandfather, who decided to name the tea shop after the village where they grew up. Aside from the

Chullu Kebab, most of the food found here is indistinguishable from the fare at other Pakistani restaurants. If it were not for the iconic spatial features, furniture, and for the fact that Mr. Abbas migrated from Iran, it would be a stretch to call this cafe uniquely Iranian. When asked about his famous Chullu kebab specialty, Mr. Abbas said that this dish was initially made to cater to the Iranian clientele in Karachi and those Pakistani pilgrims craving Irani food after returning from *Ziyarat* (holy pilgrimage). While Paki-

stani food tends to be full of spices and seasoning, Persian cuisine tends to be much softer on the palate, and dishes such as Chullu (Chelo) Kebab combine butter with steamed saffron rice and lightly seasoned meat.

After his mother and father passed away, Mr. Abbas says he considered moving back to Iran but eventually decided against it because of the warm welcome the people of Karachi gave his family when they first moved here.





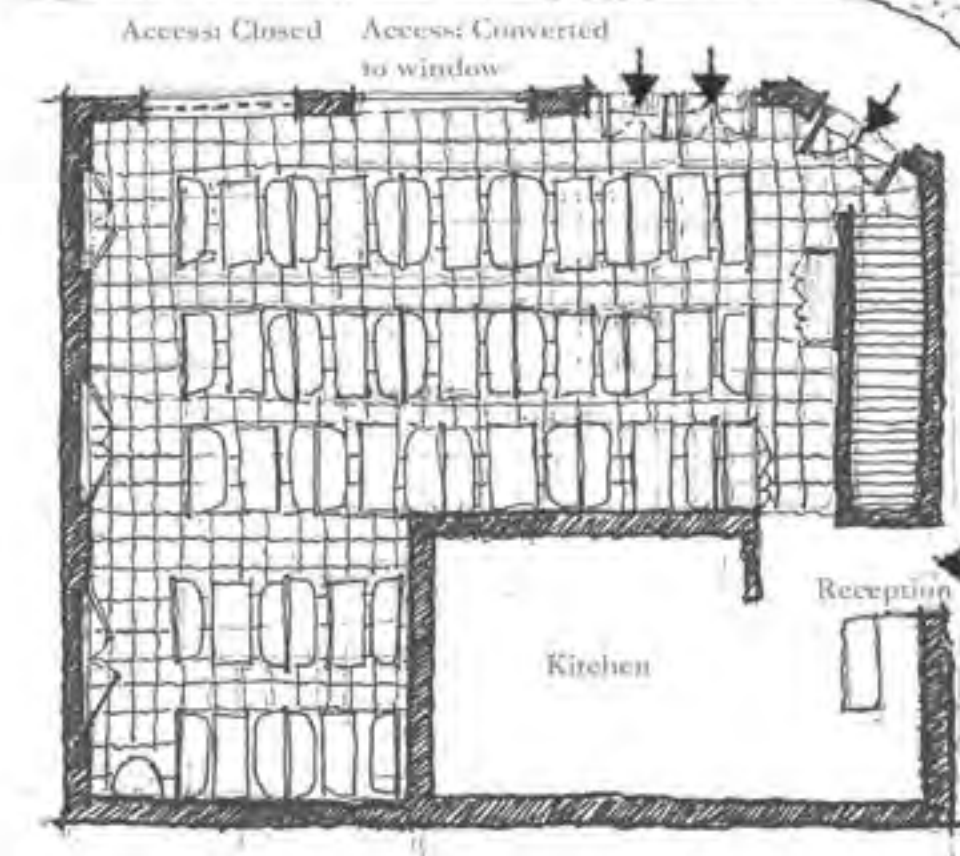
- Cafe Khairabad: Field Notes**
- Chai/Tea Menu
 - Table Service
 - Double swing wooden doors present on both sides of the Cafe
 - Old patterned tiling
 - Booth seating throughout the Cafe
 - Wooden free standing cupboards displayed with snacks

Spatial Arrangement

- Present at the junction of four important roads, I.I. Chundrigarh Road, Elandar Road, M.R. Kiyani Road, Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed Road.
- Entrance from two sides, Elandar Road and I.I. Chundrigarh Road.
- Double height dining hall with an enclosed mezzanine hall overlooking the space.
- Kitchen and reception situated under the mezzanine hall.
- Reception present at the secondary entrance from Elandar Road.

I.I. Chundrigarh Road

Formerly known as McLeod Road leads to the economic downtown of Karachi's old town, and is known for its Socio-Economic heritage as well.



Elandar Road

One of the few roads with its pre-partitioned name still being used. Historically being associated with electricity generation for the city. Currently houses the 'McElectric building' as well (Name: Power Newspaper of electric and the water supply).

Spatial Study By Ghania Shams Khan

Irani Cafe: Spatial Study

24°51'02.6"N 67°01'06.4"E
Cafe Khairabad





*Top Left:
Professionals visiting Cafe Khairabad during their lunch
break. Photo by Ghania Shams Khan*

*Top Right:
View of Cafe Khairabad's interior with the partitioned
booths and unique tilework. Photo by Ghania Shams Khan*

*Left:
View of exterior of Cafe Khairabad from I. I. Chundrigar
Road. Photo by Shaheen Nauman*

Cafe Mubarak

Like Cafe Khairabad, Cafe Mubarak is a historic cafe that has existed for over 50 years. It is located at the corner of two busy thoroughfares, Aga Khan III Road (formerly Garden Road) and Commissariat Road. Cafe Mubarak is a few blocks from the iconic Empress Market and is opposite the Old Town's Preedy Quarters.

This cafe is a treasure trove of memories for many of the IBA students that would take advantage of the cafe's affordable prices. The IBA City Campus is a stone's throw away from Cafe Mubarak, and there is even a pedestrian bridge built for IBA students to enable easy access.





Spatial Arrangement

- Present at the intersection of Commissariat Road and Sir Aga Khan III Road.
- Double story space, where two sides are open to the main streets.
- Kitchen and reception present below the mezzanine floor.
- The Cafe is lined with wooden full height cupboards and furniture significant of Irani Cafes.

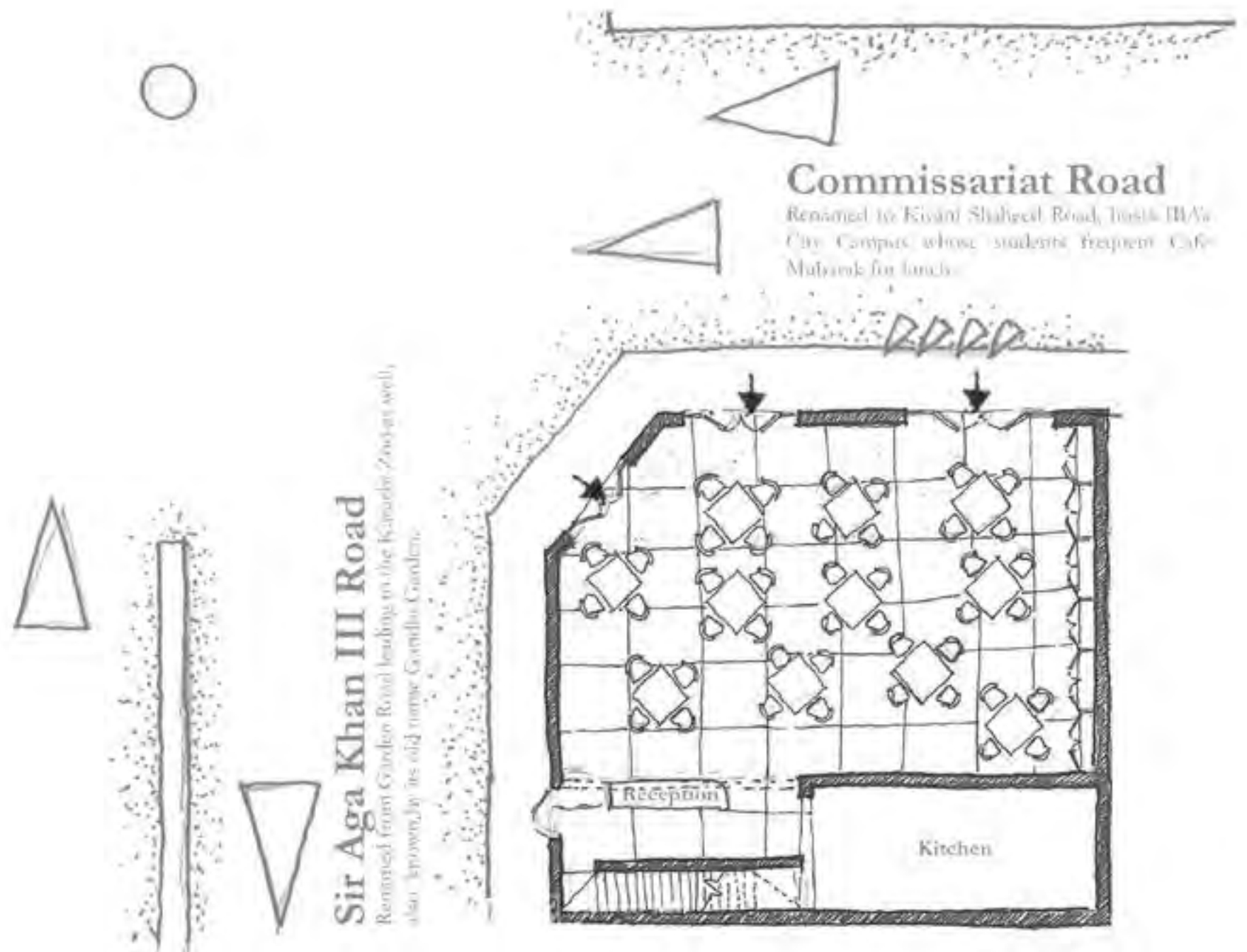
Spatial Study By Ghania Shams Khan

Irani Cafe: Spatial Study

24°52'00.3"N 67°01'27.3"E
Cafe Muharak.



- Cafe Muhrak: Find Notes**
- Chai/Tea/Pakistani Menu
 - Table Service
 - Entrance renovated with glass doors.
 - Marble top tables and Bentwood chairs.
 - Wooden free standing cupboards displayed with snacks.





*Top Left:
View of the interior of Cafe Mubarak from the mezzanine level. Photo by Ghania Shams Khan*

*Top Right:
View of Cafe Mubarak's entrance. Photo by Mirra Saigol*

*Left:
View of Cafe Mubarak's exterior from Commissariat Road. Photo by Mirra Saigol*

Cafe Pehlvi

Cafe Pehlvi or Pehlvi Restaurant is located in Preedy Quarter and is at the corner of M. A. Jinnah Road and Zaibunnisa Street. It is two blocks away from the newly renovated Jahangir Park. Cafe Pehlvi and Cafe Darakshan are both owned by the same family.

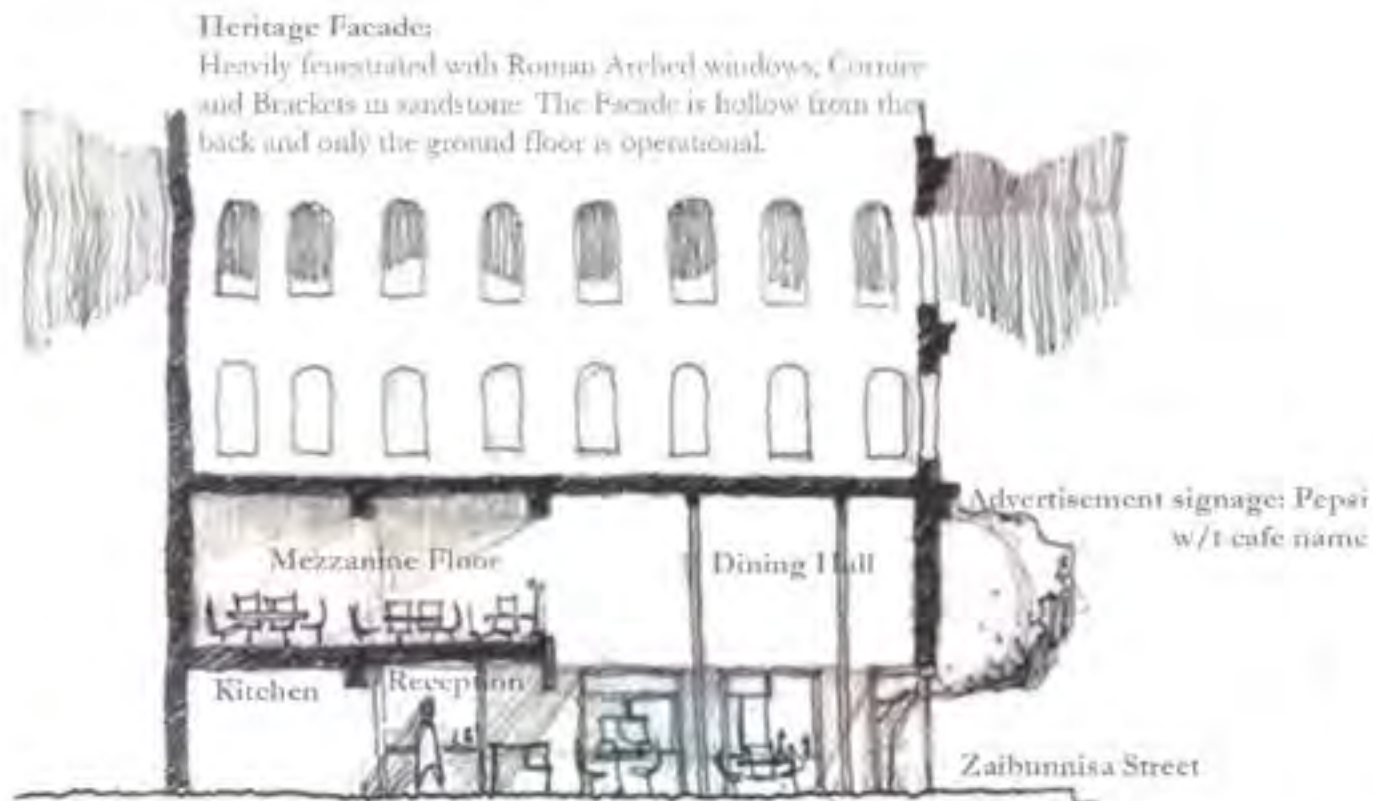
However, while Cafe Darakshan has preserved its traditional aesthetic and interior furniture, Cafe Pehlvi looks more like an aspiring fast-food restaurant than an Iranian cafe. False ceilings are supported by metal columns which are present in the center of the dining hall. Additionally, a huge silver

counter has replaced the old wooden reception storage that can be seen in other Irani Cafes.

Cafe Pehlvi and Cafe Darakshan were once a single cafe, but after the original owner passed away, he divided the property amongst his two sons. This split led to the construction of a

wall between the two cafes. One can still see the arch, now blocked with concrete, that served as a pathway between the two cafes. Fortunately, the two cafes do operate in unison, and if there are too many customers at one cafe, they will be directed by waiters to eat next door.





Spatial Arrangement

- Accessible from two sides: M.A. Jinnah and Zaibunnisa street.
- Dining hall with double height ceiling.
- False gypsum ceiling supported by metal columns.
- Mezzanine floor overlooking the dining hall.
- Kitchen/Reception below the dining hall.

Spatial Study By Ghania Shams Khan

Irani Cafe: Spatial Study

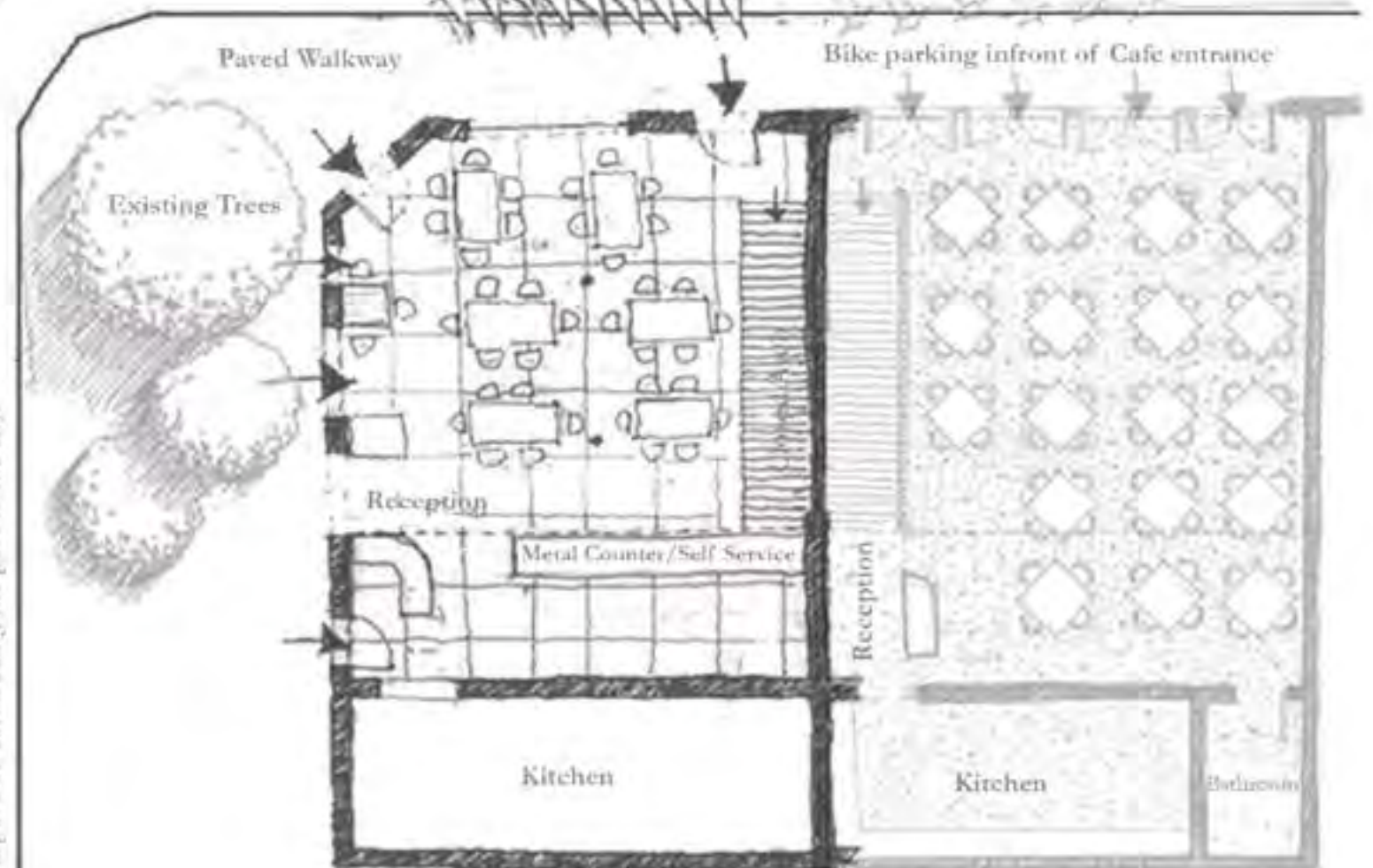
24°51'53.3"N 67°01'29.8"E

Cafe Pehelvi



M.A. Jinnah Road

The first major artery for the city; M.A. Jinnah served the purpose of connecting the port to the city.

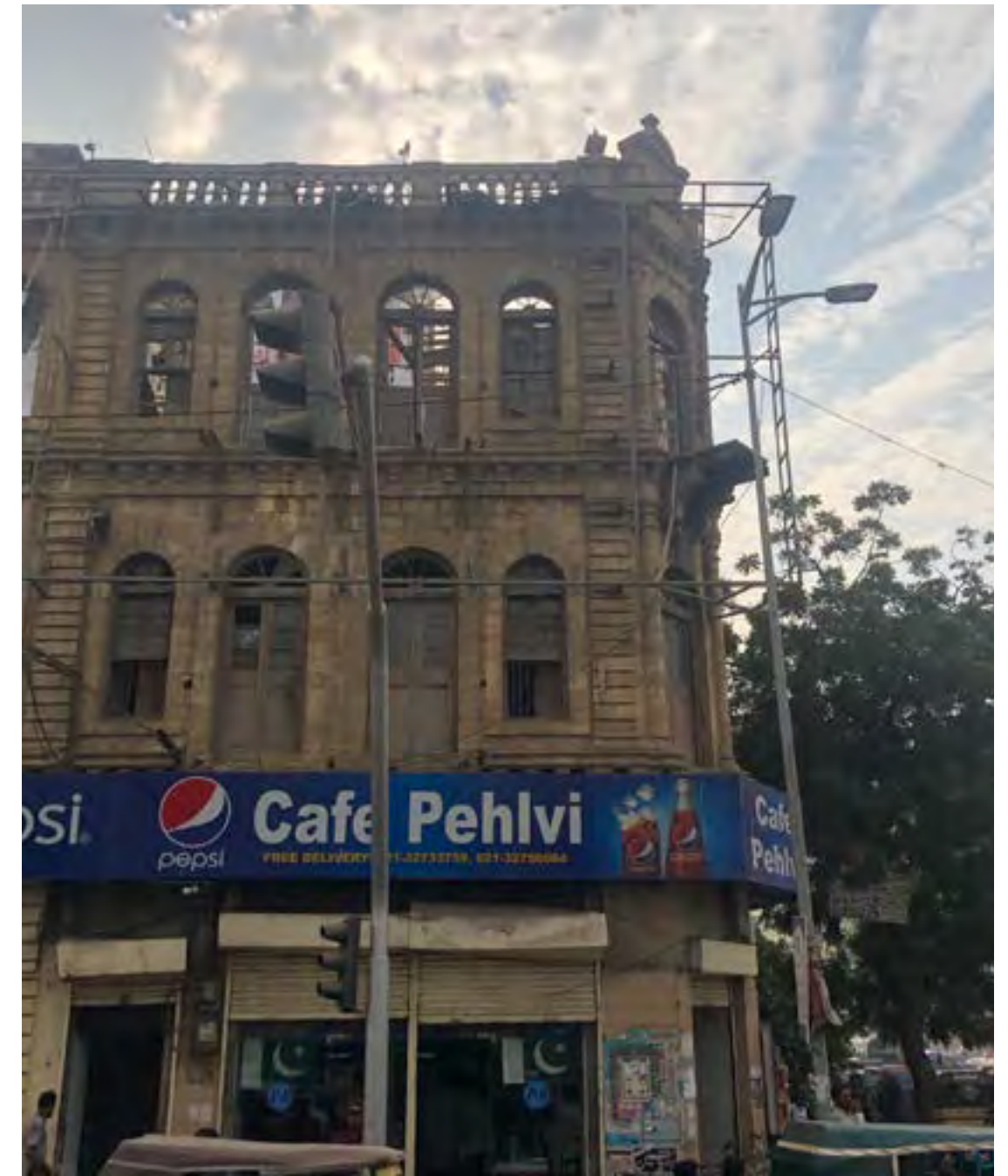


Zaibunnisa Street

Zaibunnisa Hamidullah was a prominent Pakistan writer and journalist in English. She was Pakistan's first female columnist, editor, publisher and political commentator. She was one of the founding members of the Pakistan Working Women's Association, founder member of the Karachi branch of Business and Professional Women's Foundation, and served as its first chapter-president.

Cafe Pehelvi: Field Notes

- Renovated with commercially available porcelain tiles.
- Self service/Table service.
- No Chai/Irani Menu.
- Metal columns supporting false ceiling.
- Entrance from two sides.



*Top Left:
View of the interior of Cafe Pehlvi. Photo by Ghania Shams Khan*

*Top Right:
View of Cafe Pehlvi exterior with a hallowed out, heritage facade. Photo by Ghania Shams Khan*

*Left:
Customers having lunch at Cafe Pehlvi. Photo by Shaheen Nauman*

Cafe Durakshan

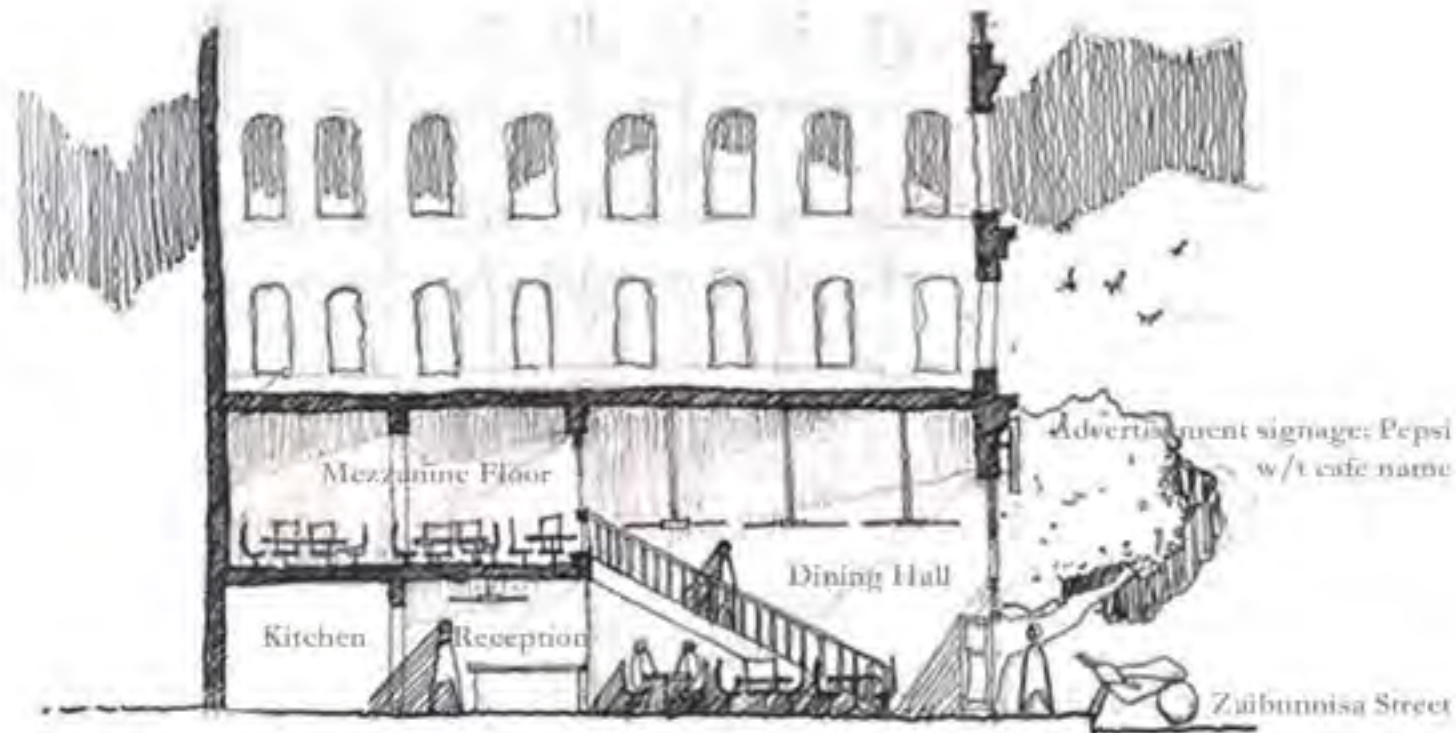
Cafe Durakshan is located in Preedy Quarter and is one of the only cafes that is not at the corner of two busy thoroughfares. This is perhaps due to the collective history of Cafe Durakshan and Cafe Pehlvi, which were once the same place.

This cafe has maintained and preserved its iconic interior features with large double swing wooden panel doors, square wooden tables with bentwood chairs, and a double-height wooden facade with clerestory windows.

The most popular dish at Cafe Durakshan is the Spicy Pulao, which even features a fried omelet on top of a steaming plate of chicken pulao.

The owner of Cafe Durakshan is Mr. Mohammed Mehdhi, who also traces his roots to the Yazd Province of Iran.





Spatial Arrangement

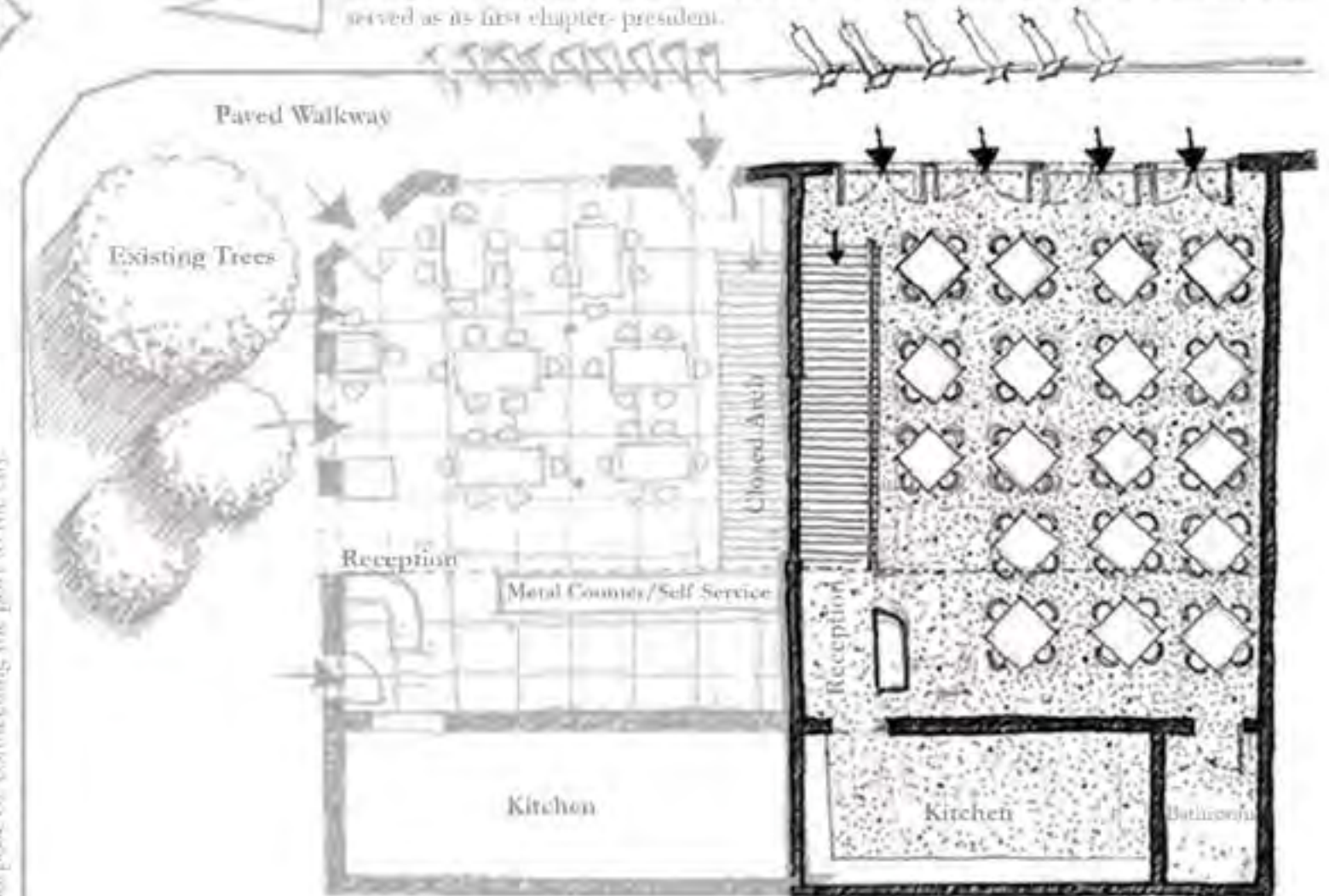
- i. Double height wooden facade with clerestory windows and double doors.
- ii. Dining hall with double height ceiling
- iii. Mezzanine floor overlooking the dining hall
- iv. Kitchen/ Reception below the dining hall.

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M.A. Jinnah Road

The first major artery for the city; M.A. Jinnah served the purpose of connecting the port to the city.



Cafe Darakshan: Field Notes

- i. Chai/Irani Menu.
- ii. Table Service.
- iii. Facade open to street, double swing wooden panel doors/clerestory windows.
- iv. Old Terrazzo Flooring.
- v. Wooden tables with bentwood chairs.

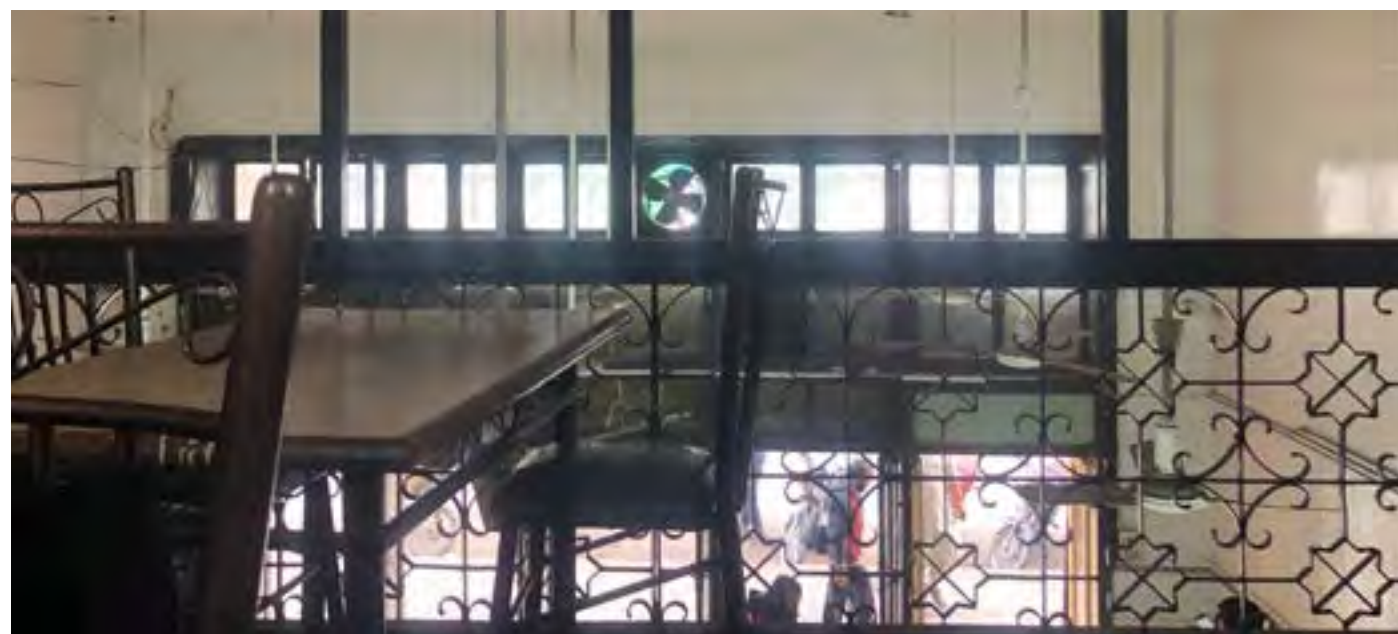
Spatial Study By Ghania Shams Khan

Irani Cafe: Spatial Study

24°51'53.3"N 67°01'29.8"E

Cafe Darakshan





*Top Left:
View of Cafe Darakshan's exterior with a hallowed out,
heritage facade. Photo by Ghania Shams Khan*

*Top Right:
View of Cafe Darakshan's interior from the mezzanine
level. Photo by Uzayr Agha*

*Left:
Detail of iron bannister grillwork on the mezzanine level
at Cafe Darakshan. Photo by Uzayr Agha*

United Coffee House

United Coffee House is situated in Railway Quarter and is tucked away on a relatively quiet street off of the bustling I. I. Chundrigar Road. Although it is not located at the corner of two major thoroughfares, it retains many of the features that characterize the Irani Cafes of the 70s and 80s. United is brimming with patrons during the office lunch break around 1-2 pm, and the ample parking space given to bikes and bicycles is a testament to the number of customers that frequent this space. The owner, who prefers to remain anonymous, said that he closes the shop daily at 5 pm as the only buildings that surround this cafe are office buildings.



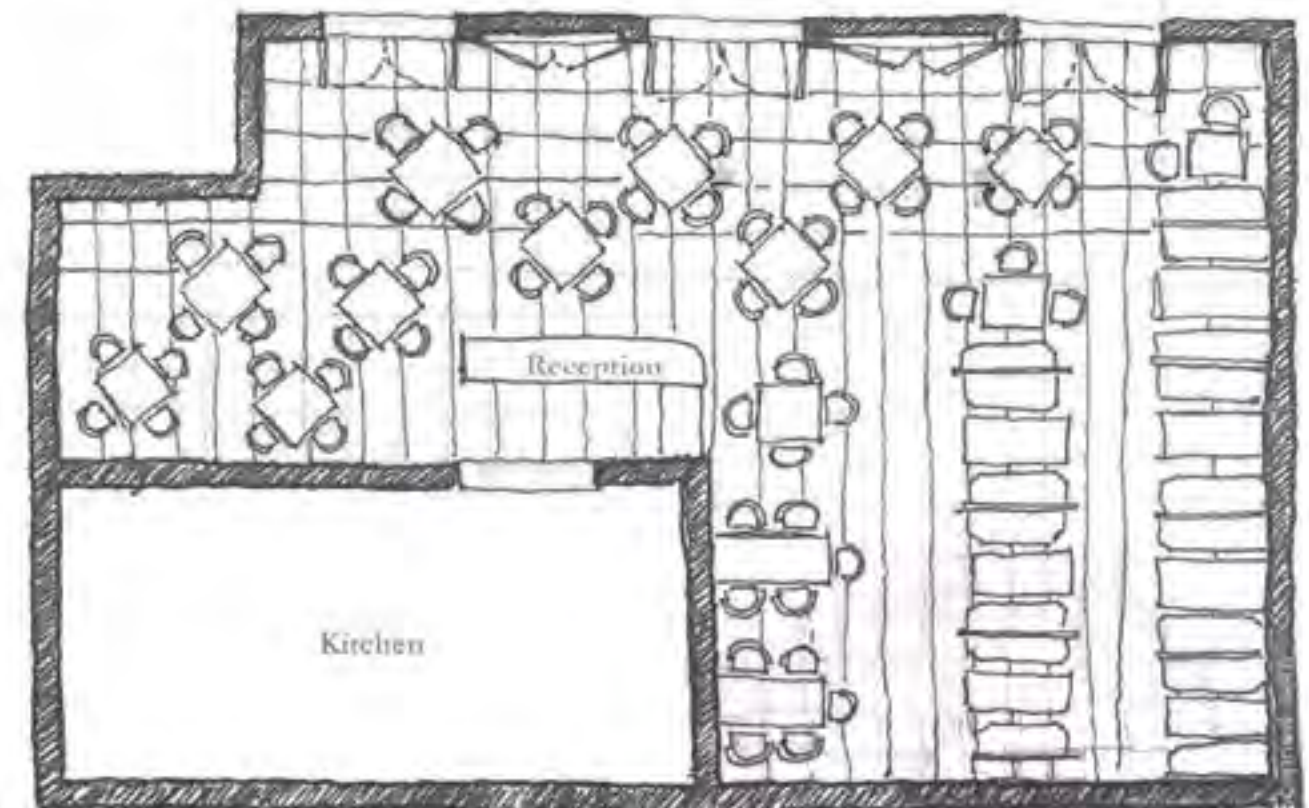


United Coffee House: Field Notes

- i. Chai/Irani/Pakistani Menu
- ii. Table Service
- iii. Entrance only from Railway Road
- iv. Divided into booth seating and marble table tops with bentwood chairs.

Spatial Arrangement

- i. Present at Railway Road in front of the National Bank of Pakistan.
- ii. With high ceilings, the Cafe is a large hall without any mezzanine floor.
- iii. The Cafe is a single story building lined with bike parking on its entrance.



Spatial Study By Ghania Shams Khan

Irani Cafe: Spatial Study

24°50'54.9"N 67°00'07.6"E
United Coffee House





*Top Left:
Interior view of United Coffeehouse. Photo by Ghania Shams Khan*

*Top Right:
“A Centre for Pakistani, English, and Chinese Food.” Photo by Ghania Shams Khan*

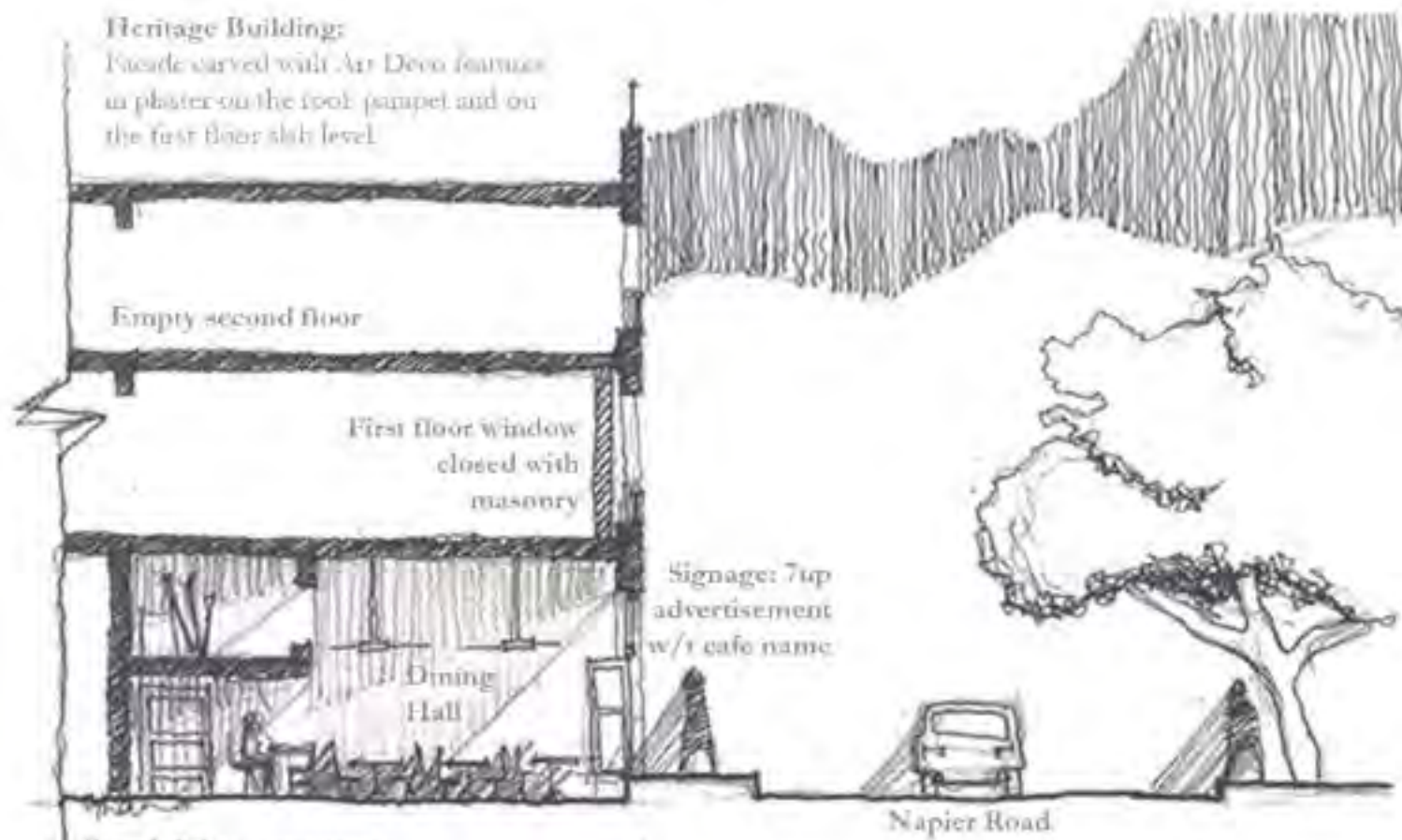
*Left:
Entrance and grillwork of United Coffee House. Photo by Ghania Shams Khan*

Cafe Victory

Cafe Victory is located in Serai Quarter and is at the corner of Napier Road and Grant Road. It is just behind the bustling I. I. Chundrigar Road and is also directly opposite Techno City Mall. Cafe Victory is near The Sindh Madressatul Islam University as well as the headquarters for several prominent domestic and international banks.

The entrance of this cafe is painted in bright orange, and the interior is adorned with bentwood chairs and square coffee tabletops. The cafe has also managed to preserve its historic floral tilework, and the high ceiling conveys a sense of openness by easing the transition from the cafe's exterior and interior.





Spatial Arrangement

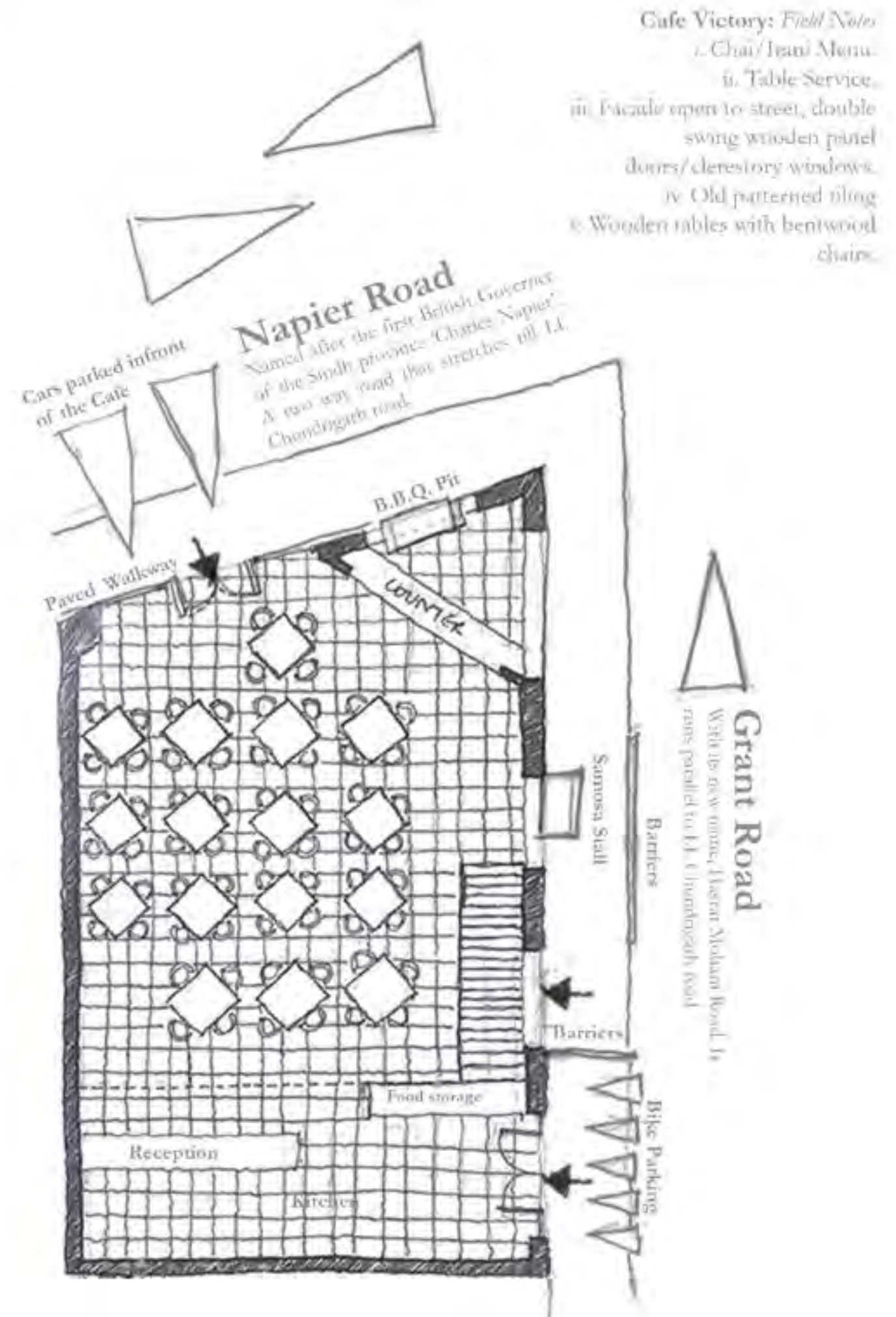
- Accessible from two sides: M.A. Jinnah and Zailunnissa street
- Dining hall with double height ceiling
- False gypsum ceiling supported by metal columns
- Mezzanine floor (being used for storage) overlooking the dining hall
- Kitchen/Reception below mezzanine floor

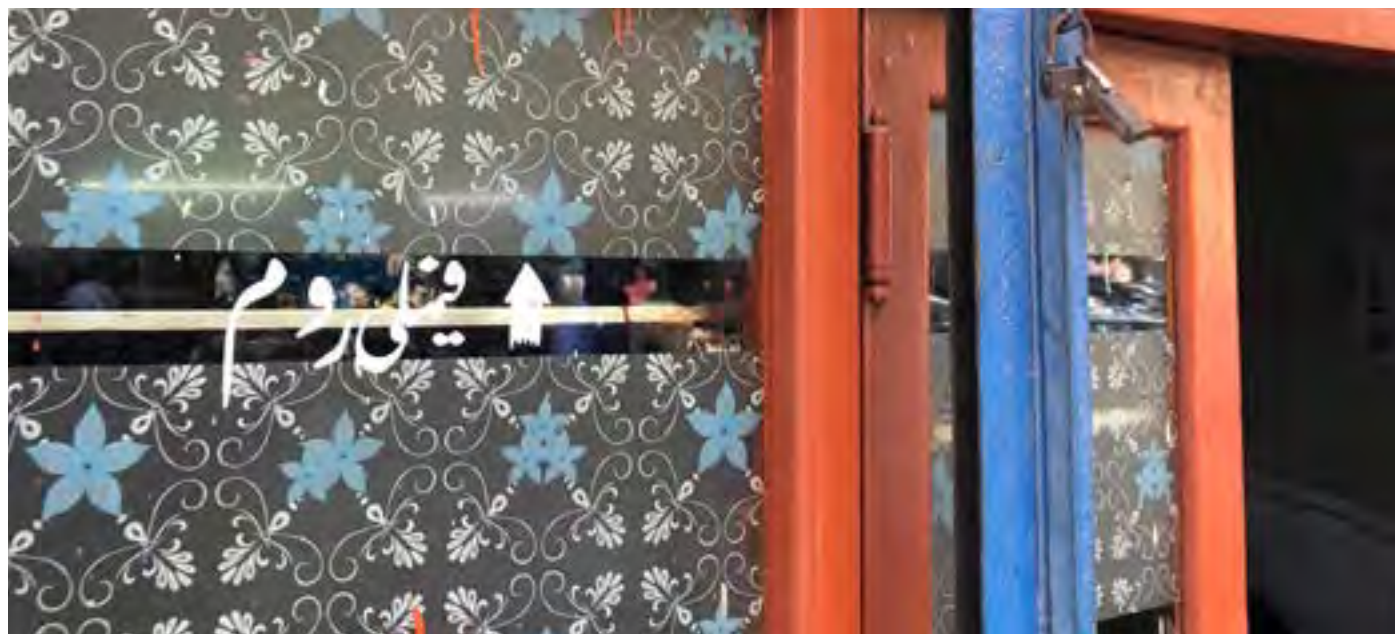
Spatial Study By Ghania Shams Khan

Irani Cafe: Spatial Study

24°51'01.9"N 67°00'26.0"E

Cafe Victory





*Top Left:
View of the interior of Cafe Victory from the mezzanine level. Photo by Ghania Shams Khan*

*Top Right:
View of Cafe Victory's exterior with art deco metal grills and surface carvings. Photo by Uzayr Agha*

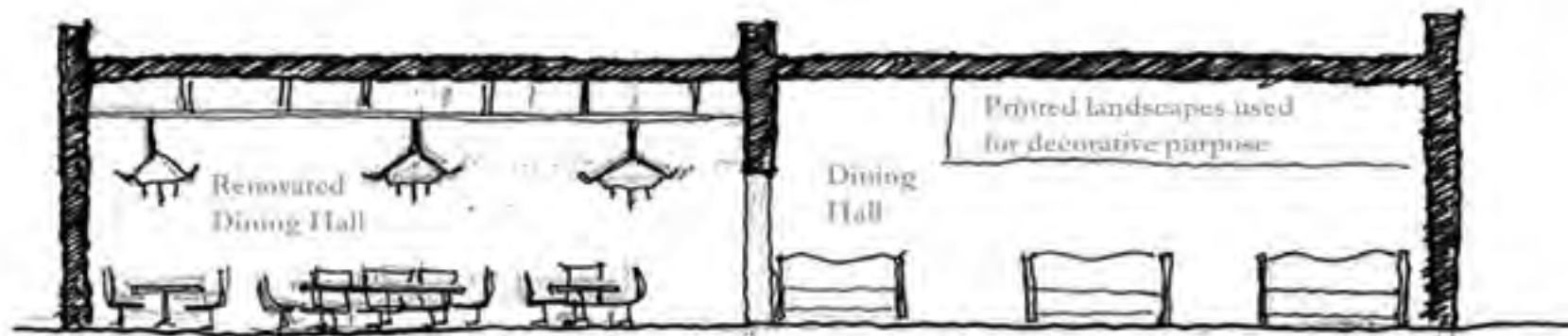
*Left:
Arrow with Urdu text directing customers toward the family room. Photo by Uzayr Agha*

Chullu Kebab Sistani

Chullu Kebab Sistani, formerly known as Cafe Irani, is situated in Artillery Maidan Quarter. It is located at the corner of Dr Daudpota Road and Sarwar Shaheed Road. While a large section of the interior halls have changed to cater to modern tastes, there is a part of the cafe that retains its unique flooring, partition booths, and landscape wallpaper.

The owner, Mr. Arif Haji, initially began Chullu Kebab Sistani as a cafe that only served tea, but this later evolved into a restaurant that catered to a wider client base. He traces the origins of this cafe to Pre-Partition India.

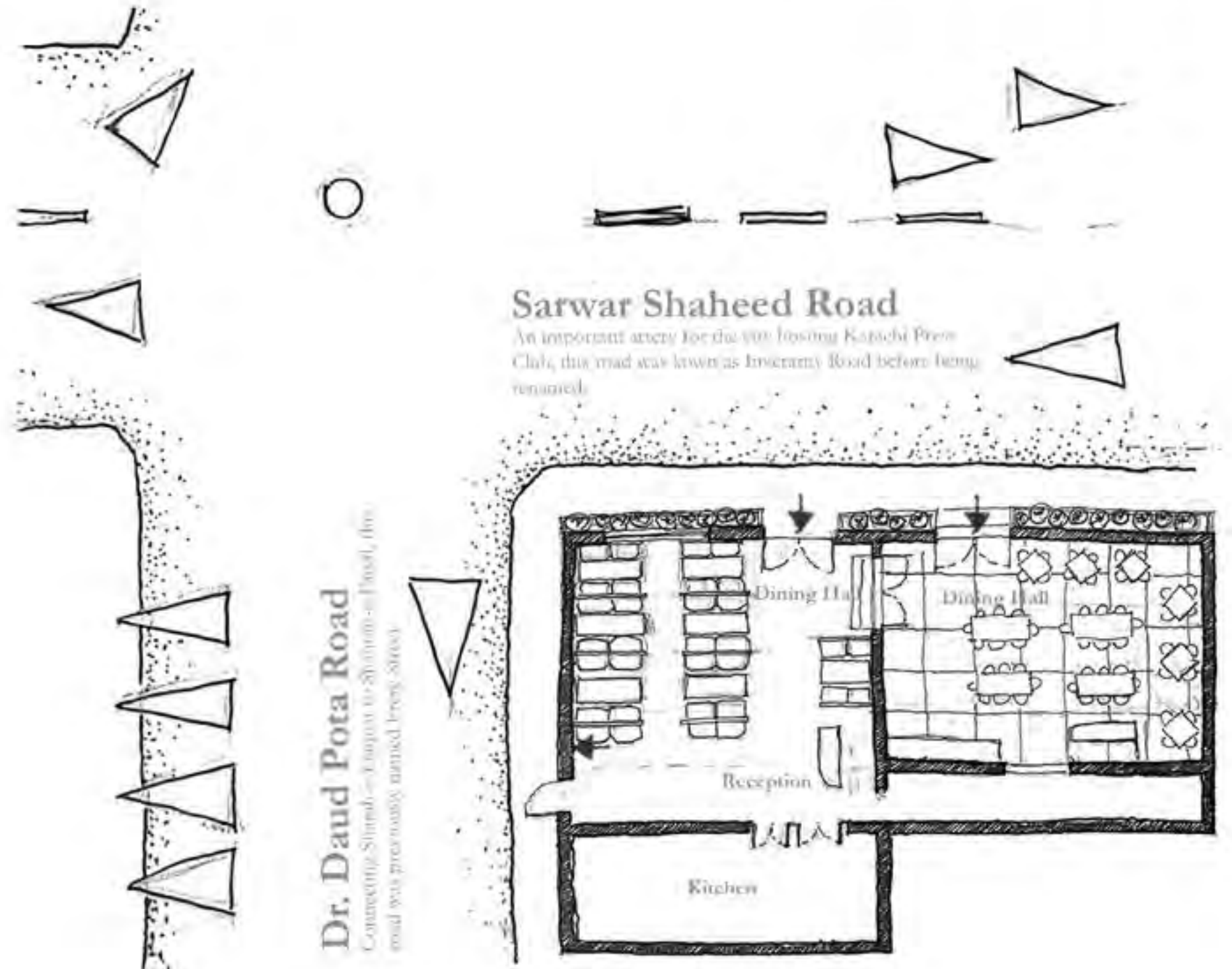




Spatial Arrangement

- Present at the junction of Sarwar Shaheed Road and Dr. Daud Pota Road
- The Cafe is divided into two sections, one retaining old booth seating and the other renovated completely as a restaurant
- The restaurant is a single-story building with none of the typical Irani Cafe features being retained

- Chullu Kebab Sistani: Field Notes**
- Restaurant renamed to Chullu Kebab Sistani to incorporate Irani Menu in a restaurant setting
 - Table Service
 - Entrance only from Sarwar Shaheed Road
 - Porcelain tiling in both the sections
 - Booth seating in one section of the Cafe and renovated modern furniture in the renovated space



Dr. Daud Pota Road

Connecting Shindoh Colony to Shindoh-e-Pasol, this road was previously named Breyi Street

Sarwar Shaheed Road

An important artery for the 400 housing Katchi Prem Club, this road was known as Inzeramji Road before being renamed.

Spatial Study By Ghania Shams Khan

Irani Cafe: Spatial Study

24°51'24.7"N 67°01'53.4"E
Chullu Kebab Sistani





*Top Left:
Exterior facade of Chullu Kabab Sistani from Sarwar
Shaheed Road. Photo by Ghania Shams Khan*

*Top Right:
Chullu Kabab Sistani's interior furniture featuring par-
titioned booths and wallpaper. Photo by Ghania Shams
Khan*

*Left:
Wallpaper at Chullu Kabab Sistani. A possible romantic
depiction of Helmand Lake in Sistan, present-day Eastern
Iran. Photo by Ghania Shams Khan*

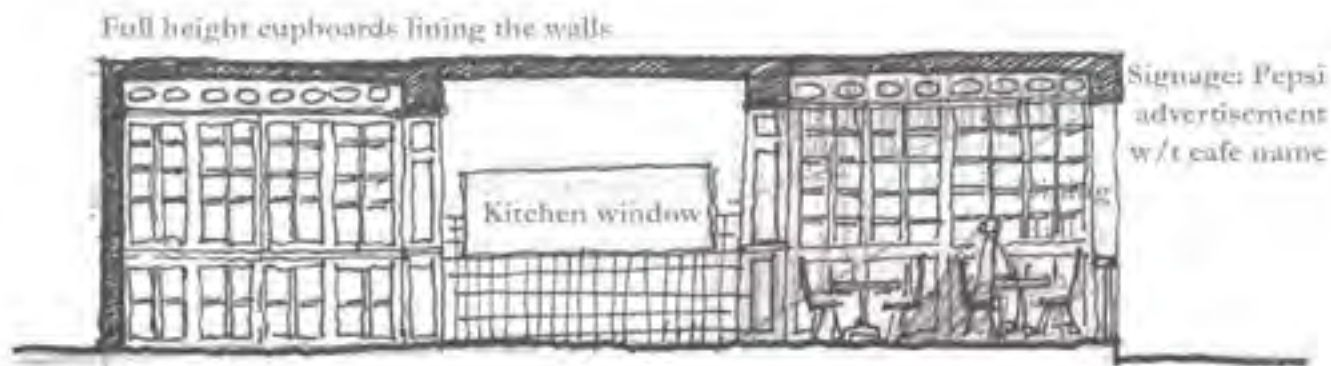
A-One Cafe

A-One Cafe is situated in Ram Bagh Quarter and is right off of M. A. Jinnah Road. It is flanked by two service roads that are used primarily for parking. The cafe is not far from Narayan Jagannath Vaidya High School and Jamshed Memorial Hall & School.

A-One Cafe has maintained its traditional Irani Cafe aesthetic and also

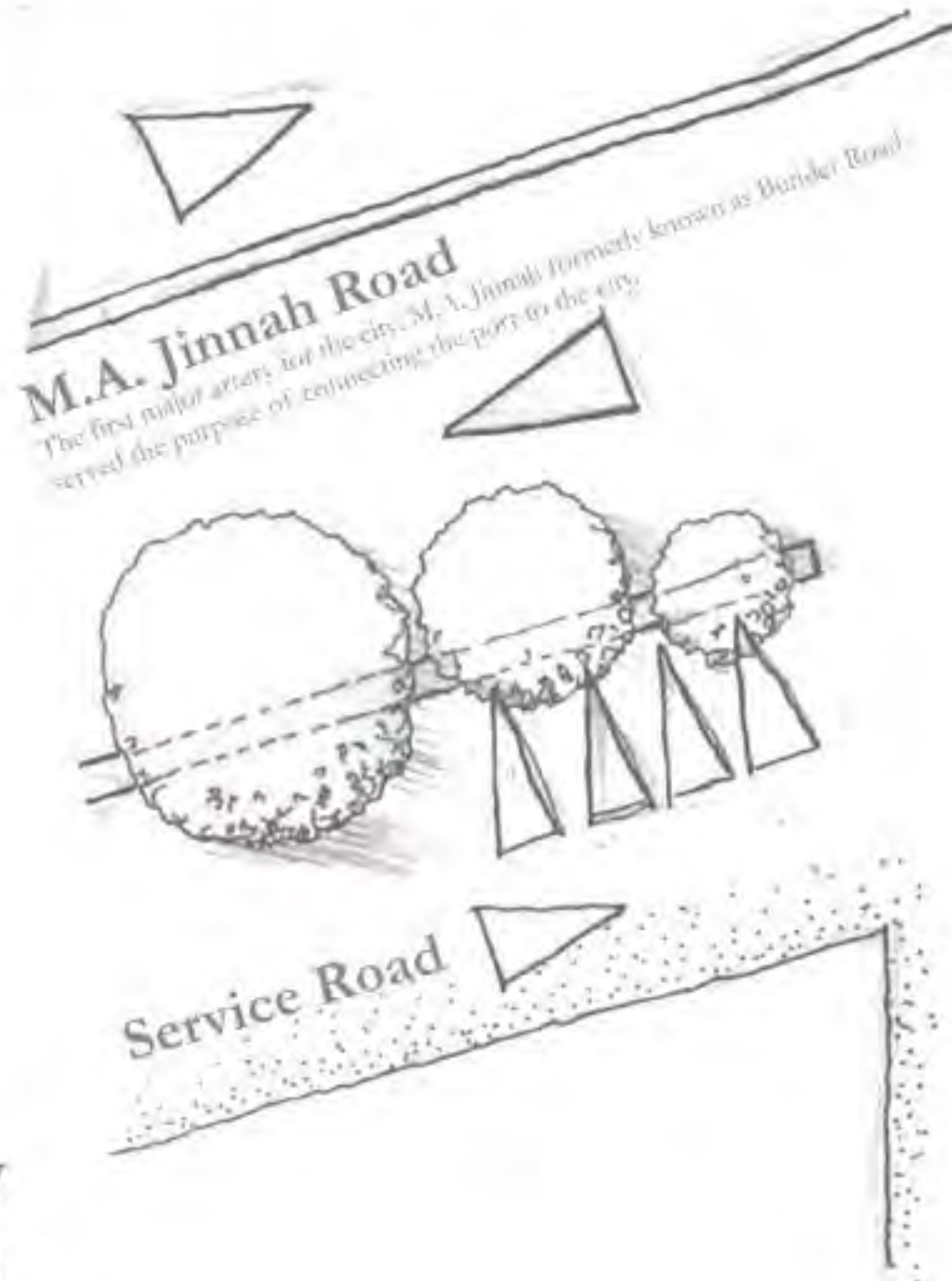
features unique wooden cabinets that are adorned with idealized landscapes. The dining hall furniture is strategically located at the periphery of the cafe and looks out onto the service road. Additionally, the double swing wooden doors provide an expansive view of M. A. Jinnah Road. One can observe the students coming in and out of NJV High School from this vantage point.





Spatial Arrangement

- i. Seen from main M.A. Jinnah Road, the Cafe owners the service road heading into Rambagh Quarters.
- ii. Single story space, where two sides are open to the activities on the service road, lined with seating.
- iii. Kitchen window opens up into the dining hall.
- iv. The Cafe is lined with wooden full height cupboards and furniture significant of Irani Cafes.
- v. The beams and columns are paneled with painted/printed landscapes.



Spatial Study By Ghania Shams Khan

Irani Cafe: Spatial Study

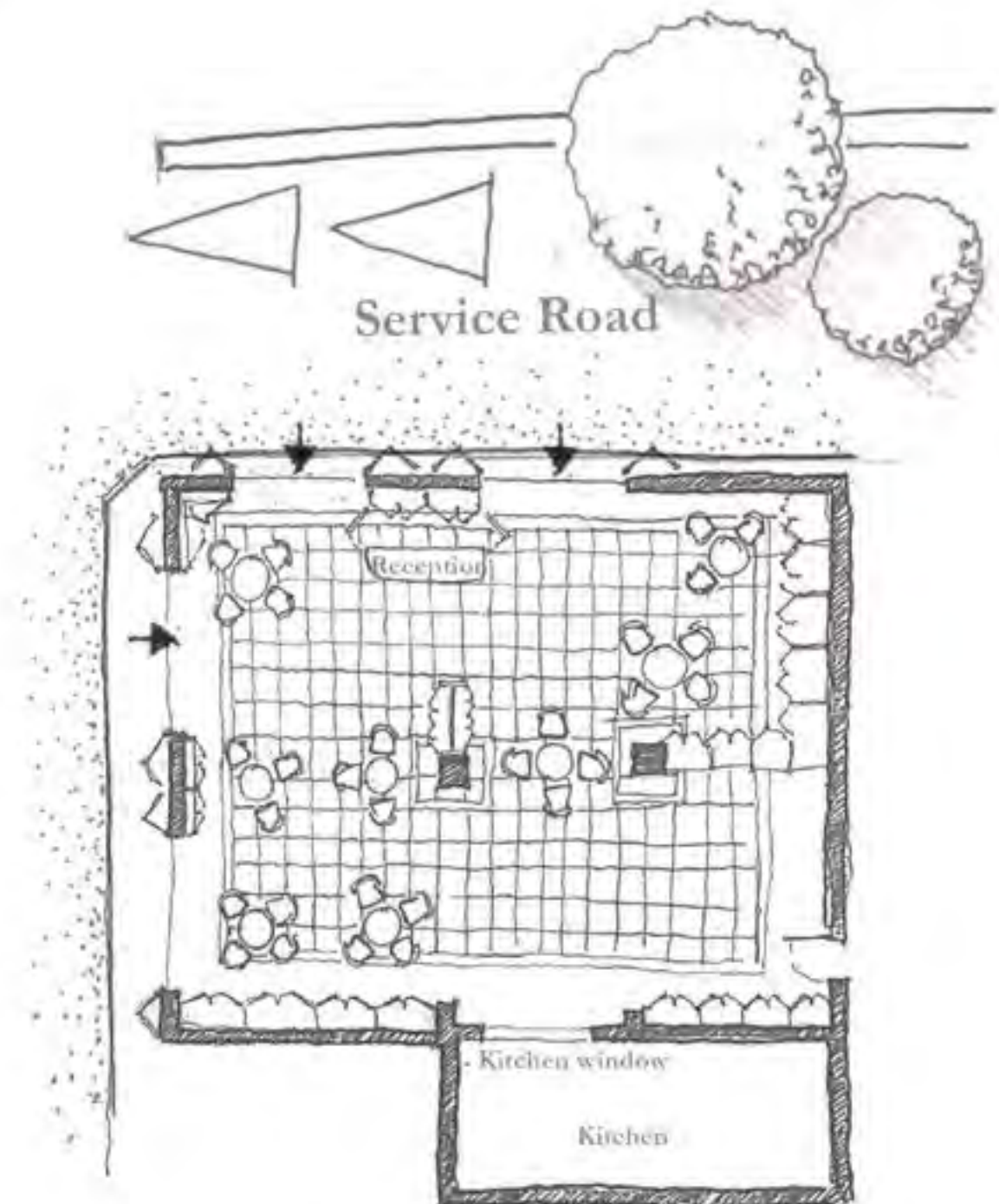
24°51'43.4"N 67°01'12.9"E

A-one Restaraunt



A-one Restaraunt: Field Notes

- i. Chai/Pakistani Menu
- ii. Table Service
- iii. Double swing wooden doors present on both sides of the Cafe
- iv. Old patterned tiling
- v. Round marble top tables and Bentwood chairs.
- vi. Wooden free standing cupboards displayed with snacks





Top Left:
A group of customers gather over a cup of tea at A One Cafe.
Photo by Ghania Shams Khan

Top Right:
A One Cafe furniture featuring the glass jars or martaban.
Photo Ghania Shams Khan

Left:
Glass and wood counter filled with snacks and drinks.
Photo by Ghania Shams Khan



*Framed photographs of oil painted landscapes at A One Café reflect a romantic cultural memory.
Photos by Ghania Shams Khan*



PRESERVING THE LOST CULTURE OF MINORITY INFLUENCE AN “IRANI CAFE MUSEUM”

The heritage colonial architecture of these Irani Cafes, combined with their unique interior style and sense of decor, led to a rare amalgamation of aesthetics that was reflected in the atmosphere and ambiance of these cafes. The iconic Irani bentwood chair featured in almost all of the Irani cafes is a local interpretation of a European technique of bending wood through a process of heating and steaming. German-Austrian cabinet maker Michael Thonet first popularised this practice. These chairs were trendy, and the craftsmen were known simply by their first names. One only had to specify the number of chairs needed, and the furniture makers would soon provide the seating.

In addition to the bentwood chairs, visitors would sit by the marble table-tops to enjoy a cup of tea. Sitting in the front of the cafe, customers could gaze out at the noisy streets and watch passersby engaging in their daily activities. A small pause in the urban chaos of Karachi, Irani cafes provided a dynamic public space in the everyday monotony of urban life. For the daily workers that would have lunch at the cafes or the students that would meet there after school, few substitutes for the Irani Cafes exist today.

A study of the small but significant details is necessary to move forward with the idea of revitalizing these experiences. Instead of superficially reviving these spaces in mainstream restaurant cultures, it is essential to archive or document why these spaces mattered in the first place and how they can exist sustainably in the future.

Cafe Pehelvi was the first to fall victim to such ‘modernisation’ trends. Porcelain tiles, false gypsum ceilings, and metal chairs replaced and removed the iconic patterned tiles and bentwood furniture that characterize these spaces. The only significant spatial element that remains is the location of Cafe Pehelvi, which is on a corner plot open on both sides with high ceil-

ings and a mezzanine floor. Fortunately, Cafe Darakshan, which is located right next to Cafe Pehelvi, still retains its old furniture and typical mosaic flooring. It also maintains its original double-sided door and family dining hall, which is located on the mezzanine floor. The reception counter and the kitchen are situated on the ground floor. This kind of spatial distribution fits well in our South Asian cultural structures, as it responds to societal and environmental considerations.

Many believe that the Irani cafes subverted traditional social barriers and religious taboos to become an essential part of the city’s public life. Today these cafes are shutting down because of the deteriorating infrastructure of Oldtown, the lack of comprehensive preservation laws, and increasing demand for fast-food restaurants. Many of the original Irani Cafes have changed their décor and menus to serve a more extensive customer base. Therefore, to preserve Karachi’s gastronomical and cultural past, we must take steps to record oral histories and document the iconic spatial design and culinary tradition of migrant communities in Pakistan. This can be curated in the form of an informal ‘museum’ — one that is not concerned with artifacts or objects but attempts to preserve a cultural tradition with honesty and sensitivity. Far from objectifying the nostalgia of these heritage spaces, it may be worthwhile to use this museum to expand public notions of intangible heritage and the importance of public spaces, especially at a time when public spaces are under higher pressures to become commercialized. Karachi has a rich history, and without signifying the importance of such areas, future generations may never know multi-faith and diverse their city used to be.

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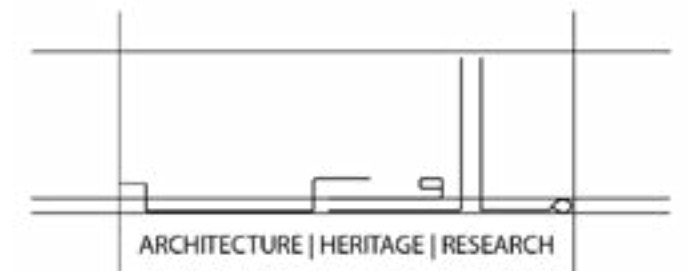
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