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REVIEW

# Privacy, modesty, hospitality, and the design of Muslim homes: A literature review



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**Abstract**

Traditional Islamic teachings and traditions involve guidelines that have direct applications in the domestic sphere. The principles of privacy, modesty, and hospitality are central to these guidelines; each principle has a significant effect on the design of Muslim homes, as well as on the organization of space and domestic behaviors within each home. This paper reviews literature on the privacy, modesty, and hospitality within Muslim homes. Nineteen publications from 1986 to 2013 were selected and analyzed for content related to the meaning of privacy, modesty, and hospitality in Islam and the design of Muslim homes. Despite the commonly shared guidelines for observing privacy, modesty, and hospitality within each home, Muslims living in different countries are influenced by cultural factors that operate within their country of residence. These factors help to shape the architectural styles and use of space within Muslim homes in different ways. Awareness of the multifactorial nature of the influences on the Muslim perception of home and the use of space is necessary for architects, building designers, engineers, and builders to be properly equipped to meet the needs of clients.

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**1. Introduction**

The home environment is conceptualized in numerous ways in the academic literature. Some authors conceive a home in terms of the rich interdependent psychological meaning it holds for its occupants (Stafford, 2011; Moore, 2000; Sixsmith, 1986). Other scholars propose that a home expresses a symbolic social communication that defines interpersonal creative expression and style, as well as represents the social network and social class of its owner (Heathcote, 2012; Altman and Chemers, 1984). Heathcote (2012) notes that the interior decor or the arrangement of the furniture and artifacts in a home reflects the lifestyle and ambitions, as well as the personal life journey, of the owner. Rybczynski (1987) conceptualizes home as a symbolic place that offers notions of domesticity, comfort, and well-being through domestic intimacy and privacy. Heathcote (2012) identified spatial and architectural elements such as doors, windows, and bedrooms as features that are functional but also exert substantial influence on human domestic behaviors and interactions within the home environment. Regardless of the size, number of available rooms, architectural style, or real estate value, each home provides its dwellers or owners with meanings that serve both their personal and social needs. Sixsmith (1986) suggests that a home is composed of three main structures: (a) *the personal home* (an extension of oneself with central emotional expression), (b) *the social home* (a place to share, entertain, and build relationships), and (c) *the physical home* (the physical structure, space, and architectural style). The above mentioned authors provide insights into the micro-level symbolic meaning of home from a universal perspective. By contrast, other authors including Altman and Chemers (1984) highlight the importance of macro-level factors, such as climate, culture, socioeconomic factors, and religion in shaping individual perceptions of home. One macro-level factor that requires considerable attention is the influence of other cultural traditions on home perception, space utilization, home design, and domestic behaviors. The migration of large numbers of people to countries with cultural and religious traditions that markedly differ from those of their country of origin is now commonplace. Home building in foreign lands that can meet particular individual needs presents an array of opportunities and challenges.

Many Muslims have established new homes in different locations across the globe in recent years. Islam involves strong religious traditions that apply directly to the structure and organization of life within the home and its environment. Within the Islamic faith, a home is considered to be a

“microcosm of Islamic culture and civilization” that is of “matchless delight” (Omer, 2010). The design of traditional Muslim homes is subject to guidelines from principles outlined in Islamic Sharia Law, which are derived from the Quran (revelations of Allah to Prophet Muhammad) as well as *hadiths* and *sunnahs* (utterances and actions of Prophet Muhammad). Following three main principles have emerged from these guidelines (Othman et al., 2014; Omer, 2010; Mortada, 2011):

- a) privacy, a safe and private place for personal and family’s sanctuary;
- b) modesty, a home with spaces for religious rituals and activities, further defined by humility in design through economical and sustainable designs, and;
- c) hospitality, a dwelling with opportunities to extend hospitality to neighbours and enhance relationships with the society.

In combination, these three principles form the primary considerations of those who seek to create a traditional Muslim home (Othman et al., 2014). However, the migration of Muslims across the globe also exposes them to the cultures and traditions of their host countries. Many studies have focused on the ways Muslims achieve and perceive privacy and extend hospitality within their homes. However, little is known about the importance of domestic spaces for performing religious rituals and the practice of humility within the context of home design.

To date, the body of scholarly literature is related to the three principles of privacy, modesty, and hospitality, but their respective connections to home design are fragmented. To the best of our knowledge, a review of the available literature in this topic remains unavailable, thereby leaving architects, builders, and designers unfamiliar with the different design approaches used by Muslims within their homes to adhere to these principles. The present study aims to conduct a review of studies published over the past three decades to ascertain the influence of these three principles on the design of Muslim homes, considering the similarities and differences that emerge between countries.

**2. Material and methods**

Database searches were undertaken to identify publications that provide insights into the relationship between the Islamic principles of privacy, modesty, and hospitality, as

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