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# Svrzo's House

Short guide



**Svrzo's house** is a unique example of the architecture and life-style of the Ottoman Bosnian Muslim population over the past two centuries. It is located in Glodina street, no. 8, in Sarajevo.

The street itself is in the northern part of the town, on Ćurčića hill. Here, in 1482/83, the Bosnian sanjak-bey Jahja Pasha built a mosque, around which arose the mahala of the Jahja Pasha mosque, now Glodina street. This quarter was regarded as an elite part of town, since it was an extension of the Čaršija, the commercial heart of the town, and yet stood on a higher elevation. The fact that as well as prominent and prosperous Sarajevo families, Gaz Husrev bey himself lived here, speaks volumes for the mahala. The house was built by the prominent Sarajevo family Glodo, and later passed by marriage settlement into the ownership of the no less prominent Sarajevo family Svrzo, from the Ferhadija mahala. The Svrzos lived in the house until 1952, when they sold it to the Museum of Sarajevo City, and since 1965 the building, or rather the complex, has been open as a Museum.



Svrzo's house was built in several stages. The oldest part of the house is the women's or family quarters, which supports the thesis that in earlier times, houses of the oriental type were set well back in a courtyard, but that over time, they gradually drew closer to the street and commanded a view over the outside world from their doksat or oriel window. This is what happened with the men's quarters of Svrzo's house, which were erected somewhat later. The entire complex arose during the eighteenth century, with the exception of the ground-floor kitchen in the women's

quarters, which was completed in 1832. There are good grounds for the belief that there was already a house on this site before the great fire of 1697, when much of the city, including the Jahja Pasha mosque, was burned down. Remains of the older house can be found in the massive elements of the foundations.

The basic characteristics of the architecture of that time were high walls facing the street, four-slope roofs, and a combination of white walls and timber framing. The external aspect of the house, seen from the street, is unassuming and even austere, while luxuriance is preserved for the interior, for the family's enjoyment.



The house is a complex of three buildings and two courtyards divided into the selamluk, the men's quarters or public part of the house, and the haremluk, the women's or family quarters. The upper floors were invariably the living quarters, while the ground floor was used for auxiliary premises. Through the big gateway from the street, one enters the men's courtyard.

The gateway, situated opposite the entrance, formerly led into a large garden, the bostan, which belonged to the house, but the former owners retained it to build a new house. To the right is the so-called bachelor's quarters, with two rooms: one for the men-servants, and a kahve-odžak, a small area where coffee and tea were prepared.



The servants were poor boys and girls who were taken into the house and treated as members of the family. They would remain in the house until they married. Their rooms were no different from the other rooms in the house. All the rooms in the house are arranged to the same principle, without the kind of furniture typical of European homes. Along two or three of the walls there is a minder or sećija, a long bench seat, and on the fourth wall a musander of carved wood, composed of a dulaf or



cupboard, a built-in tiled stove with terracotta pots, and a bathroom.

Each room had a bathroom, an important element of Islamic culture, where water and hygiene hold a high place (we shall meet a fully equipped bathroom in one of the next rooms).



The centre of the room is always left bare, ready to be transformed according to the needs of the moment into a dining room, reception room for guests or bedroom.



The ground floor of the men's quarters includes an ahara or stable for horses, of which, as long as it remained in use for this purpose, led directly to the street. Beside the stable door is a large stone, the binjektaš or mounting block. This family had another house outside the town, where cattle were kept and vegetables grown for the family's own use. They also used this house for holidays and country outings.





Climbing the wooden steps to the first floor, we come to the divanhana, an open corridor, and the kamarija, a wooden balcony, from which the family quarters are reached.

An abdesthana a kind of wooden basin for abdest, the ritual ablutions prior to namaz or ritual prayer is built into the kamarija.



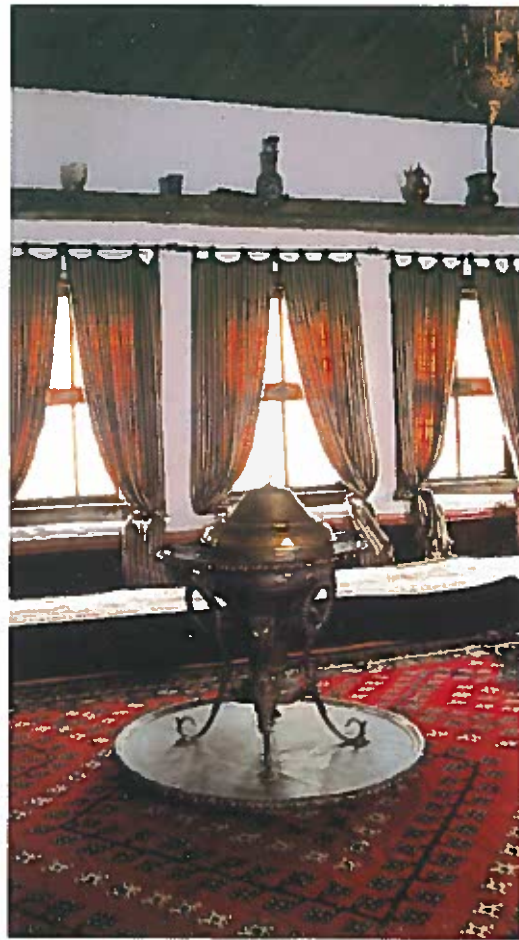
From the kamarija one enters the čardak, a small room used by the head of the household when he wanted to be alone, to read, to muse and reflect, or simply to gaze at the street. Here, too, is a kahve-odžak, making it easier to prepare and serve coffee to guests, an indication of the high standard and culture of living enjoyed here.

The central door leads to the men's room, where musafirs (guests, literally travellers) were received. It should be noted that the division of the house into men's and women's quarters did not mean that the men and women of the family lived separately it meant that family and social life were kept apart.



The men's room is the only one in the house that looks onto the street.

As well as the traditional furnishings already described, there is a mangala or brazier in the centre of the room, in which coals were be placed, with coffee or tea around them. It was usual to add fragrant herbs to the coals to fill the room with a pleasant scent, while the coals not only kept the coffee and tea hot, but also warmed and lit the room, particularly in spring and autumn.



One leaves this room via the mabejn that links the selamluk and the haremluk. In the centre, to the left, is the čenifa or privy.

The house formerly had several privies, always, as a rule, outside the house. In fact, this privy projects outwards, so that it too is external to the house, another pointer to the concern for hygiene.

Sewerage was dealt with by means of a deep septic tank.



From the mabejn one enters the divanhana of the women's quarters, with its kamarja and abdesthana. To the right is a room furnished as a bedroom. The family slept on the floor, and during the day the mattresses, quilts and pillows would be stowed away in the dulaf, so that the room could be used for other purposes.

Great attention was paid to the appearance of the bedlinen: quilts and pillows were usually hand-embroidered. At least once a year, it would be washed and the wool re-combed.



To the left is the girls' room, and ahead the dining room. In the girls' room is a derdef or embroidery frame; there was no Bosnian house where the girls did not embroider, preparing their trousseau and embroidering everything, from towels to quilts. As a rule, Bosniac houses were not decorated in the European style, with pictures and so on, but were enriched by decorative embroideries and wood carvings.



To the left of the girls' room is the dining room, with a sofa or table in the centre, composed of a demirlija, a large tray serving as a tabletop, and demira, the legs on which it stood, as well as a large tablecloth that was draped over the lap. The dishes were traditionally of copper, and beside the table stood an ibrik and leden ewer and basin for washing the hands before and after eating.

In this room there is also a fully fitted bathroom. The bathroom was always placed next to the stove, and a large pot was built into the stove to heat the water for bathing. A susak, a large ladle or dipper, hung on the stove, and from the ceiling a setilj was suspended, a vessel into which the water was poured and which had a tap at the bottom, the precursor of the modern shower-head.



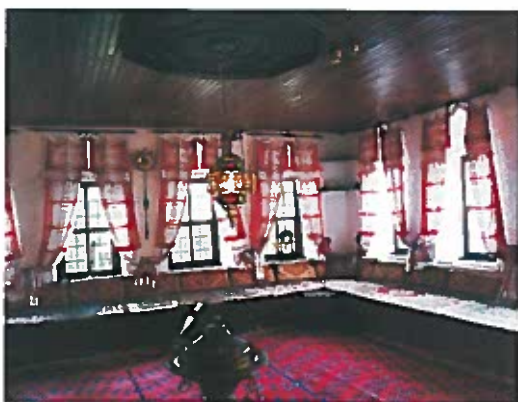
A staircase leads from this divanhana down to the women's courtyard. Above the stairs is a wooden flap, the peštahta, which serves a dual purpose. When raised, it was used as an extra table, for example to set down the coffee-making requisites, and when lowered, it served as a barrier preventing small children from falling down the stairs. Once down in the courtyard, to the left is the basement storeroom where supplies and textiles were laid down, but since this basement also has a musandera and minder, one can conclude that it could earlier have been used as a room during the summer.







From this courtyard, through the *hajaj* or open antechamber, one enters the large *halvat* or room, the *mutvak* or kitchen, and the women servants' room (now used for temporary thematic exhibitions). The large *halvat* to the right is the largest and most attractive guest room. Here family and *bajram* (Eid) celebrations were held. It is richly adorned with wood carving, *peškuns* (small round tables of elaborately carved wood), a Turkish-style clock, Venetian glass and imported prayer mats. The carpet, here as in the other rooms, is of a single piece, made to measure for the room. A door leads from this room into the small *halvat*.



The kitchen is equipped with traditional copper dishes and pans, *dermirlijas*, and vessels for sugar, flour and so on. In the centre there is a large hearth and a tiled stove with terracotta pots. In the rear is a small room for washing dishes, which also served as a winter kitchen in the coldest days of the year.



The women took great care over the arrangement of the courtyard. The cobbles are composed of carefully selected pebbles of approximately the same size. Combined with small flowers, the cobbles gave the impression of a fine carpet. Between the wall and the cobbles the women would plant flowers, fruit and medicinal herbs. The flowers that were usually planted were clove-pinks, roses including roses for making preserves and sweet thyme, while the most common fruits were apricots, quinces, and morello cherries, and the medicinal herbs included mint, sweet basil and so on. The roses that were used for preserves syrup, jams and vinegars were not only decorative, but also of medicinal value. There were gardens around the house, too, where fruit and smaller quantities of pot-herbs and vegetables for flavouring were grown.

In the passage-way between the two courtyards, to the right is a basement food store (where dried fruit and vegetables, home-made jams, pickles and so on were kept), which being below courtyard-level maintained a cool temperature all year. In the wall dividing the *selamluk* from the *haremluk*, or to put it rather crudely the men's from the women's quarters, is a very convenient contrivance the *čekme dulaf*. This is a hatch in the wall, with doors on both sides, with revolving shelves on which food could be passed, thereby further securing the distinction between family and public life. There are fountains in both courtyards. One of the owners of the house, *Munib effendi Glodo*, had the *Sedrenik* watermain constructed, and led a branch of the main into his courtyard, a privilege belonging only to the wealthy. The rest of the population carried their water from the fountains alongside every mosque.

In one of the courtyards there was formerly a well, which was probably dug before running water was introduced from the *Sedrenik* watermain.



This house is a cultural monument, and one of the most beautiful residential buildings of its period in the Balkans, but sadly, it is also one of the very few that have been preserved in Bosnia and Herzegovina.