

Negligence of Traditional Heritage Buildings: Demolition of the Historical Residence Bait Al O'oud, in Manama, Bahrain

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Abstract

The residence of Sayed Saeed Khalaf, also known as Bait Al O'oud, was a historically significant merchant house in Manama, Bahrain. It was once a prominent residence during the pearling boom of Bahrain. It featured rare vertical architecture with three floors, two courtyards, and intricate craftsmanship, reflecting the socio-economic and cultural richness of the region. Today, modernization, shifting generational priorities, and the absence of conservation frameworks have led to the disappearance of such heritage buildings, diminishing the architectural heritage of Bahrain. This research investigates the neglect and loss of Bait Al O'oud that was demolished in the early 2000s. In order to understand the complexity of the issue, this research drew on theoretical frameworks including Hobsbawm and Ranger's concept of tradition, Lowenthal's heritage theory, and adaptive reuse as proposed by Plevoets and Van Cleempoel.

The study employed archival research, spatial mapping, and visual analysis as a research methodology. Through these methods, it observes and analyses the features, functions, and the location of Bait Al O'oud. A variety of digital sources were examined, including historical photographs, articles, and location maps documenting Bait Al O'oud before its demolition. In addition, visual and spatial analysis was conducted using satellite imagery. Comparative analysis of images between 2010 and 2025 clearly revealed the transformations of the site. Additionally, a valuable informal, unstructured conversation was conducted with a former resident of Bait Al O'oud.

The findings reveal the architectural uniqueness of the building, its strategic location near the Souq Al Manama, and its historical value; however, no formal documentation or preservation plan exists. In this context, this research demonstrates that the demolition was a result of insufficient attention to heritage buildings and a lack of skilled conservation expertise at the time it was demolished.

Keywords: Heritage Conservation, Architectural Identity, Urban Development in Bahrain, Adaptive Reuse, Bait Al O'oud.

Introduction

Architectural heritage of Bahrain, particularly in urban centers such as Manama, reflects a rich tapestry of social cultural and economic history. Among the most significant expressions of this heritage are the traditional merchant houses that once dominated the urban landscape. These buildings not only possessed vernacular architectural elements, such as

courtyards, *mashrabiya*s, gypsum detailing, and wind towers, but also embodied the values, identity, and way of life of earlier generations. However, in recent decades, rapid urbanization, shifting generational preferences, and the absence of adequate conservation policies have contributed to the widespread neglect and demolition of these historic structures.

One notable example of these is the residence of Sayed Saeed Khalaf, also known as Bait Al O'oud, a three-story merchant residence located in the Al Hammam neighborhood of Manama. Constructed in the early 20th century during the pearling boom of Bahrain, the house was a rare vertical type that integrated traditional craftsmanship and spatial organization with urban prominence. Despite its cultural and architectural significance, the building was demolished in the early 2000s without formal documentation, restoration, or public recognition. This loss raises urgent questions regarding the approach to heritage conservation in Bahrain that prevailed at that time (although the situation now is different) and the long-term implications of erasing such structures from the national urban fabric. However, although the building had been demolished in 2010, after being neglected for years and becoming uninhabitable, the absence of a family living there has also contributed to its neglect and eventual demolition.

In this context, this research investigates the demolition of Bait Al O'oud to understand the broader phenomenon of the loss of heritage in Bahrain. Its aim is to highlight the architectural and historical significance of the house and analyze the underlying socio-economic and institutional factors that contributed to its erasure. Its intention is to contribute to preserve the legacy of Bait Al O'oud through architectural documentation and critical analysis of its historical significance, while examining the broader factors that have contributed to the loss of architectural heritage in Manama and its impact on cultural identity.

Its objectives are:

- To document the architectural design, features, and historical significance of Bait Al O'oud.
- To analyze the key factors, such as rapid urbanization, generational priorities, and lack of specialized conservation expertise, that have contributed to the loss of heritage buildings in Manama.
- To assess the cultural impact of the loss of heritage buildings, such as Bait Al O'oud, on cultural identity and collective memory of Manama.
- To propose potential strategies and methods for reviving and preserving the heritage buildings of Manama for the future generations, through documentation, public engagement, or physical restoration.

Theoretical Background

This research investigates the deterioration and loss of the built heritage of Bahrain, with a particular focus on the negligence and demolition of historic merchant houses in Manama, such as Bait Al O'oud. The study employs the theories of tradition and heritage to analyze how their interplay affects conservation challenges.

Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) define tradition as a constructed process through which cultural practices and values are transmitted across generations, shaping communal identity. Merchant houses in Bahrain historically embodied traditional architectural features—such as courtyards, wind towers, and intricate ornamentation—that responded to both environmental and socio-cultural needs. However, rapid urbanization, shifting generational preferences, and modern expectations of luxury have disrupted this transmission, leading to neglect and demolition.

Adding to this, Lowenthal (1985) conceptualizes heritage, as a selective process of preserving and interpreting the past to meet contemporary needs. In Bahrain, conservation efforts have been inconsistent, with some historic sites receiving preservation priority while others deteriorate due to economic and political pressures. This aligns with the arguments of Lynch (1960) who promoted the notion that urban heritage shapes the collective memory of a city. He says that when historic buildings are lost, communities experience a rupture in cultural continuity.

The intersection between tradition and heritage, in this context, is marked by negligence, a product of inadequate conservation policies, a shortage of specialized restoration expertise, and economic incentives favoring commercial redevelopment over preservation.

However, solutions such as adaptive reuse offer a viable preservation strategy. For example, the Burra Charter (2013) advocates conservation approaches that maintain historical authenticity while adapting structures for modern use. Articulating this further, Bullen and Love (2011) argue that adaptive reuse integrates traditional architectural elements with contemporary needs, ensuring both the preservation and functionality of heritage buildings.

In addition to the cultural and memory-based theories already discussed, adaptive reuse theory offers a critical framework when considering the preservation of heritage buildings such as Bait Al O'oud. Adaptive reuse is the process of repurposing buildings for uses other than those initially intended, while retaining their historic features. It is rooted in sustainability, architectural pragmatism, and cultural continuity. In this connection, scholars such as Plevoets and Van Cleempoel (2011) argue that adaptive reuse not only preserves physical structures but also sustains the intangible cultural narratives embedded within them. The theory emphasizes minimal intervention, reversibility and compatibility between the old and new elements. In the context of Bahrain, where traditional buildings face pressures from urban development and lifestyle modernization, adaptive reuse serves as a theoretical bridge between preservation and contemporary function. Although Bait Al O'oud has undergone demolition, applying adaptive reuse theory illustrates how it could have been preserved as a valuable cultural asset, adaptable to contemporary functions.

By examining how the neglect of traditions leads to the erosion of heritage, this study underscores the importance of informed conservation strategies to protect the historic urban fabric of Bahrain.

Review of Literature

The impact of urbanization and development pressure upon heritage buildings have been well documented. For example, Naaz and Samiuddin (2024) discuss the effects of rapid urbanization on the Kalan Masjid which is a historical mosque in Old Delhi, India. They highlight the issue of encroachment nearby the historical mosque, which is located in the midst of a complex series of residential buildings. Unfortunately, some of these buildings have encroached on the mosque's land, resulting in its deterioration in various places.

The deterioration of the traditional heritage buildings in Bahrain has spurred critical academic discourse regarding the socio-cultural and urban dynamics leading to their neglect. Heritage conservation has been a vital and evolving field of academic study in the Gulf region, where rapid urbanization often challenges the preservation of cultural identity. In this regard, Alraouf (2014) presents a detailed critique of the rehabilitation strategies in the historic areas of Bahrain such as Muharraq, revealing how redevelopment initiatives often prioritize commercial tourism over authentic conservation. He argues that the transformations of heritage sites into sanitized, commodified zones dilutes their original meanings and fail to preserve community memory. This reflects a broader trend across the region where heritage is viewed more as a consumable image than as a lived cultural legacy.

Similarly, El Masri, Karajica, and Dayaratne (2024), emphasize the role of vernacular architecture in maintaining cultural identity. They highlight the consequences of inadequate engagement with traditional architectural values, which results in not only the physical loss of historic structures but also the erosion of social narratives and collective memory. In fact, they identify the lack of community participation and awareness in conservation efforts as a key barrier to sustainable heritage preservation. Accordingly, they call for strategies that integrate local knowledge and engage with the lived experiences of urban residents to ensure that conservation is meaningful and is rooted in place.

In a similar vein, Anderson (2006) writes on the architectural past of Bahrain expressing his concerns. He underscores the persistent tension between preserving historic character and accommodating modern urban growth. Many of the redevelopment initiatives in Bahrain, he notes, focus on aesthetics and economic returns rather than addressing the spatial and cultural significance of heritage buildings. According to Anderson, projects often neglect the intangible dimensions of heritage, such as memory, identity, and spatial practices, which are essential to their authenticity and relevance. This results in a shallow approach to restoration, one that reconstructs buildings without reactivating their cultural values.

These perspectives align with the theoretical frameworks that help explain the challenges of heritage preservation. The theory of tradition as a constructed practice (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) underscores the role of architecture in shaping communal

identity and historical continuity. This concept illustrates how traditions, including architectural ones, are often selectively preserved or redefined to suit contemporary ideologies. The concept of heritage as a “selective interpretation” of the past (Lowenthal, 1985) advances this argument by explaining how societies preserve what they deem useful or symbolic, often sidelining structures that lack tourist appeal or immediate economic benefits. Together, these theories reveal that the marginalization of buildings like Bait Al O’oud is not simply a result of neglect, but of selective historical prioritization shaped by power, economy, and shifting values.

Literature also identifies major gaps in the conservation practices of Bahrain, particularly the lack of specialized restoration skills and the weakness of policy frameworks. Several studies point to the absence of structured legal protections for vernacular heritage, particularly for buildings not classified as monumental or tourist sites. This legal and institutional gap leaves many culturally significant buildings, such as private merchant houses, vulnerable to demolition or unsympathetic redevelopments.

However, recent scholarship on adaptive reuse offer more optimistic insights, especially in the context of the Gulf cities. In this regard, Plevoets and Van Cleempoel (2011) explore the theoretical foundations of adaptive reuse, emphasizing that interventions must respect the material and symbolic authenticity of historic buildings while allowing them to meet the present-day needs. They suggest that adaptation does not necessarily compromise integrity; rather, it enables a continuity of use and meaning. They argue that adaptive reuse is not just an architectural approach but a cultural strategy for sustainability, one that aligns well with the needs of rapidly evolving urban environments like Manama.

Douglas (2006) builds on this by providing detailed case studies of adaptive reuse projects where neglected or endangered heritage sites have been re-integrated into the urban fabric through sensitive redesign. He emphasizes the role of design in mediating between the old and the new, and how thoughtful architectural interventions can extend the life and relevance of historic structures. His work illustrates that adaptive reuse can act as a bridge between conservation and innovation, helping cities retain their identity while evolving.

In a similar vein, Bullen and Love (2011) strongly advocate for adaptive reuse as a sustainable practice that balances heritage preservation with economic viability. They demonstrate how the reused buildings retain embodied energy, reduce construction waste, and conserve historical identity. These environmental and cultural benefits make adaptive reuse particularly relevant in urban heritage contexts where land value and development pressures are high. They align their argument with the Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS, 2013), which promotes context-sensitive conservation that respects cultural significance and allows for compatible changes. When applied to cases like Bait Al O’oud, this literature indicates that demolition was not the only possible outcome; instead, adaptive reuse could have offered a pathway to preserve both structure and cultural meaning.

Together, these studies build a compelling case for rethinking heritage conservation in Bahrain. They stress the need for integrated strategies that combine theoretical knowledge, community engagement, skilled restoration, and adaptive architectural solutions. The literature suggests that the current practices of Bahrain fall short not due to lack of resources, but due to a fragmented vision of heritage values and how it should be preserved. Expanding this vision is essential if heritage is to remain a living, dynamic part of the urban landscape.

Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, case study approach with an evidence-based approach relying primarily on archival research and visual-spatial analysis to investigate the loss of vernacular architecture of Bahrain. It specifically examines the demolition of Bait Al O’oud in Manama, Bahrain as the case study. These methods were selected to reconstruct the architectural, historical, and cultural significance of the house and to contextualize its disappearance within the broader urban trends and policy gaps in heritage conservation.

This research is conducted in the year 2025, although the building had been demolished in the year 2010. Data gathering was carried out in the year 2024- 2025: in April 2025 to be precise. Given the fact that the author is closely related to the family who owns the property, it made it easier to access the data through the archives which would have been otherwise not available. Data was gathered with the full consent of the owners on the understanding that the material will be used for academic purposes only.

The Case Study

Bait Al O'oud was a large-scale traditional merchant residence located in the Al Hammam neighborhood of Manama, constructed in the early 20th century by Sayed Saeed Khalaf. It followed a vertical architectural typology, consisting of three floors arranged around two internal courtyards. The residence was designed to accommodate extended family living and, during its peak in the 1960s, housed approximately seven families, amounting to a total of 48 residents.

The spatial organization of the house included multiple private and semi-public rooms, such as gathering spaces (majlis), sleeping quarters, storage areas, and a distinct upper-level room (Kangiah) assigned to the eldest son. Functional circulation was structured around the courtyards, allowing for natural light and ventilation. The construction materials were typical of early 20th century Bahraini architecture, seen in the Figure 2, comprising locally sourced limestone, lime plaster, and timber beams. Ceiling finishes often utilized palm trunks and woven mats (al-basateen), while doors and windows were made from sheesham wood with copper joinery. Decorative features such as mashrabiyyas, gypsum corbels (ruknyat), denchels, and wall niches (warish) further reflected the craftsmanship associated with merchant-class architecture of the era.

Situated within a walking distance of the key trade and cultural centers such as Bab-Al-Bahrain and the Souq Al-Manama, the location of the house reinforced its social and economic prominence within the urban fabric of Manama. Although the property has since been demolished, its spatial footprint and archival documentation reflect the architectural language and lifestyle of Bahrain's historic urban elite.



Fig. 1: Location of Bait Al O'oud (in red) along Ammar Bin Yasser Avenue, situated in the center of Manama near key commercial areas (Bab Al Bahrain Avenue)

Source: Khalaf Family Archive



Fig. 2: Conceptual Plans of the House (a) Ground floor (b) First Floor (c) Second Floor

Source: Khalaf Family Archive



Fig. 3: A general view of the building, taken in the 1980s
Source: Khalaf Family Archive

1. Archival Research

Archival research formed the foundation of the study in terms of data gathering. A variety of digital sources were examined, including historical photographs, articles, and location maps documenting Bait Al O'oud before its demolition. These sources provided crucial insights into the construction materials, architectural details and historical function of the house.

This research relied extensively on archival data to reconstruct the architectural, cultural, and historical significance of Bait Al O'oud. The primary source of information was obtained from the Khalaf Family's archive, which included private photographs, demolition images, and oral records related to the residence. Access to these materials was granted with the consent of the family, and the data was used exclusively for academic purposes.

In addition, publicly available digital archives such as Google Earth were used to analyze the spatial footprint of the house before and after its demolition. This helped identify the physical transformations of the site over time. Supplementary references were obtained from academic publications and articles cited in the literature review (e.g., Anderson, 2006; El Masri et al., 2024), which contextualized the architectural and urban trends in Manama during the 20th century.

The archival materials were collected and analyzed between April and May 2025. They were contextualized and analyzed based on their content, architectural features, site layout, ownership history, and urban context, then cross-referenced for consistency. The table below summarizes the types of documents consulted, their sources, and the specific information provided:

All sources were analyzed to build a reliable narrative of the house's architectural and cultural relevance, and to situate its demolition within larger patterns of heritage neglect in Bahrain. The archival data were used to document the tangible characteristics of the building and uncover its broader economic and cultural context. All sources were systematically organized and cross-referenced to ensure accuracy and build a reliable narrative of the building's heritage significance.

Table 1: Documents Examined
Source: Author

Document Type	Source	Information Extracted
Family Photographs	Khalaf Family Archives	Architectural features: mashrabiyyas, gypsum, materials used, corbels (ruknyat), courtyards, Kangiah, etc.
Ownership and Family History	Khalaf Family Archives (oral and photo-based)	Formation of the house, merging of two-family houses, merchant background
Demolition Photos	Khalaf Family Archives	Visual evidence of architectural detailing and condition prior to demolition
Satellite Imagery	Google Earth (2010-2025)	Transformation of the site before and after demolition; spatial positioning
Published Articles	Anderson (2006); El Masri et al., (2024)	Contextual data on merchant houses and urban development patterns in Bahrain

2. Visual and Spatial Analysis

To supplement the archival findings, visual and spatial analysis was conducted using satellite imagery retrieved through Google Earth Pro, a publicly accessible digital platform. The imagery was accessed in April 2025, using the historical imagery tool that allows users to view site conditions at different time intervals. Images from the years 2010 and 2025 were selected for comparative study to observe changes over time.

The process involved identifying the exact coordinates of the Bait Al O'oud plot within the Al Hammam neighborhood. Using the timeline feature of Google Earth, satellite views from 2010 were examined to establish the footprint, spatial organization, and surrounding context of the house prior to its demolition. Corresponding views from 2025 were then analyzed to assess the physical transformation of the site. Screenshots of both timeframes were exported and marked up to highlight the footprint of the house, internal courtyard positions, and later, the erasure of these elements.

Additionally, spatial mapping was performed to locate the position of the site relative to the significant heritage landmarks, such as Bab-Al-Bahrain and Souq-Al-Manama. This was done using basic digital tools (scale measurement and line tracing within Google Earth) to assess proximity and connectivity. All observations were systematically recorded and organized into a comparative analytical framework aimed at identifying spatial and morphological changes over time through the integration of satellite imagery from 2010 to 2025.

This methodological approach enabled a comprehensive reconstruction of the spatial evolution of Bait Al O'oud and supported an informed assessment of its shifting role within the changing urban landscape of Manama.

3. Informal Insights from Supplementary Materials

Although not part of the primary planned methodology, a valuable informal, unstructured conversation took place with a former resident of Bait Al O'oud in May 2025 at their current private residence, offering a personal perspective that enriched the research findings. This anecdotal perspective, while not collected through formal qualitative research design, offered an important layer of lived experience that enriched the archival and visual findings. Notes were recorded by hand during the conversation, and the narrative was incorporated to complement and contextualize the empirical findings.

Findings

The key findings of the study are organized through three primary categories: archival documentation, visual and spatial analysis and supplementary anecdotal insights from a former resident of Bait Al O'oud. The findings highlight the architectural, cultural, and urban context of the building, and how its demolition reflects the wider trends of heritage erosion in Bahrain.

1. Findings from the Archival and Historical Research

Pictorial archives provided valuable insights into the construction, function, and socio-cultural significance of Bait Al O'oud. Located in the Al Hammam neighborhood in Manama,

the house was built in the early 20th century and belonged to Sayed Saeed Khalaf, a prominent figure during the pearling boom of Bahrain. According to a former resident of Bait Al O'oud, the residence has been formed by merging two adjacent family residences, his father's and his cousin's, into one single, expansive three-story structure. This vertical typology was uncommon for its time, especially in Bahrain, where residential architecture was traditionally low-rise.

The archival material reveals that Bait Al O'oud was constructed using traditional local materials, including limestone, lime plaster, and timber beams from native trees. The craftsmanship is evident in the architectural features such as *mashrabiya*s, gypsum corbels (*ruknyat*), *denchels*, walls niches (*warish*), and intricately carved *sheesham* wood doors with copper joinery.

Architecturally, the vertical expansion of the house, internal courtyards, and specialised rooms mark it as a distinctive example of the early 20th century Bahraini residential design. The layout included two internal courtyards, two water wells (*jafirs*), and a private upper-level room (*kangiah*) intended for the owner's son. These spatial features reflect both functional requirements and the socio-economic status of the family. The architectural expansion is indicative of the prosperity of the family during the pearling era and their social status within the community.

Strategically located near major commercial and cultural zones, Bab Al Bahrain, Souq Al Manama, and Souq Al Tawaweesh, the house held an important role in the social and economic life of Manama. Its proximity to local schools and active neighborhood streets further emphasized its integration into the urban fabric as a central node of daily life within Al Hammam neighbourhood of Manama.

The architectural composition of the house reflects the traditional Bahraini craftsmanship and includes the following key elements.

- Locally sourced construction materials, including limestone walls, lime plaster, palm leaf mats, and native timber beams (Fig. 4).
- Ornamental features, such as *mashrabiya*s, *denchels*, *ruknyat* (gypsum corbels), *shamsiyat*, *qamariyat* and *sheesham* wooden doors and windows with *copper joinery* (Figs. 5, 6, and 7).
- Functional spatial elements, such as two internal courtyards (Fig. 3), two *jafirs* (water wells), and the *kangiah*, a private upper-level room designated for the owner's son, (Fig. 8), typical of merchant-class homes of the period.

The intricate ceiling work and structural projections of the house, seen in the Figure 4 demonstrate both the aesthetic and functional sensibilities that had existed in the building. The internal courtyards have provided natural ventilation and privacy, while the spatial organization has supported the needs of an extended family typical of merchant-class houses at that time.

In terms of its cultural and economic context, the proximity of the house to major trade centers of Bahrain (Fig. 5) had offered the family direct access to essential economic networks. Furthermore, its location near the educational institutions and active neighborhood nodes reinforced its role as a key residence within the social and urban fabric of early 20th century Manama.



Fig. 4: Limestone walls and palm mat roofing details - Bait Al O'oud, 2010, during the demolition of the house.

Source: The Khalaf Family Archive.



Fig. 5: Archival photo of Bait Al O'oud façades, mashrabiya, early 20th century.
Source: The Khalaf Family Archive.



Fig. 6: Interior elements of Bait Al O'oud (including ruknyat, denchels, sheesham wooden doors, etc.), 2010s.
Source: The Khalaf Family Archive.



Fig. 7: Archival photos of Bait Al O'oud design elements (including shamsiyat and qamariyat), 2010s.
Source: The Khalaf Family Archive.



Fig. 8: Archival photos of Bait Al O'oud's interior spaces (highlighting Kangiah room, ceiling design, wall recesses, and decorations), 2010s.
Source: The Khalaf Family Archive.



Fig. 9: Proximity of Bait Al O'oud to Bab Al Bahrain, Souq Al Manama (yellow), and Souq Al Tawaweesh (green) for easy access to pearl trading, 2025.
Source: Google Earth (accessed 2025).

2. Visual and Spatial Documentation

A comparative analysis of satellite imagery from 2010 and 2025, as shown in the Figures 10 and 11, provides a spatial understanding of the disappearance of Bait Al O'oud. In the 2010 images, the house is clearly identifiable due to its large footprint, central courtyards, and organic architectural alignment with the older structures in the neighborhood. This spatial layout corresponds with urban planning of Bahrain in the early 1900s, where houses have been dense yet climate responsive.

By 2025, the site appears as a vacant lot, completely cleared of its original structure. This imagery demonstrates no effort at memorialization or reconstruction. The surrounding neighborhood has also changed dramatically, with the rise of denser, unrelated developments. These newer structures, found within close proximity to the neighborhood, lacked the spatial harmony and materiality of the original urban grain, which has resulted in a fragmented and decontextualized built environment.

Spatial mapping further reinforces the location of the house as a critical urban node, positioned at a cultural and economic junction that has had a high heritage value (Fig. 9). Thus, its loss signified not only the disappearance of a physical structure, but the erasure of a spatial memory embedded within the historic core of Manama.



Fig. 10: Satellite image of Bait Al O'oud site before demolition, 2010.
Source: Google Earth (Accessed in 2025).



Fig. 11: Satellite image of Bait Al O'oud site after demolition, 2010.
Source: Google Earth (Accessed in 2025).

3. Supplementary Insight: Community Memory

As mentioned, an informal, unstructured interview was conducted with a former resident of Bait Al O'oud, who resided there in the 60s and 70s. The former resident emphasized the role of the house as a neighborhood landmark, stating as follows.

“Everyone in Al Hammam neighborhood knew it. It stood out—three floors, two courtyards, and its shaded rooms. The protruding mashrabiya and height of the house made it stand out within the area. It clearly showed that this house belonged to a merchant. The house had all the significant architectural elements of traditional architecture in Bahrain. However, unfortunately, it wasn't even documented properly. No drawings, no public awareness. It just disappeared.”

This response highlights a sense of disconnection between the memory of the community and institutional processes of urban development. The interviewee was not aware of any restoration proposals or heritage listing attempts before the demolition of the house.

Analysis and Discussion

The findings reveal multiple layers of meanings behind the loss of Bait Al O'oud and offer insights into the structural and cultural factors at play. Through architectural interpretation, spatial transformation and visual analysis, the demolition of Bait Al O'oud reveals a broader crisis in heritage management in Bahrain.

1. Architectural Analysis and Significance

Architecturally, Bait Al O'oud is an exceptional example of a traditional house. Its rare vertical typology, triple-story massing, and double courtyards exemplified innovation within the constraints of traditional building norms of Bahrain. The craftsmanship found in its materials, limestone, wood, and copper joinery, signifies a high degree of technical skills and aesthetic sensitivity. The existence of decorative *ruknyat* and ceiling details further confirms its elite status during the early 20th century.

This analysis underscores that Bait Al O'oud has not been merely a residential structure, but a cultural artifact, embodying the values, technologies, and the lifestyle of the merchant class of Bahrain during the pearling era. Therefore, its demolition marks the loss of a living document of local history.

2. Urban and Spatial Fragmentation

The spatial analysis highlights how the demolition of the house has altered the morphology of the neighborhood. According to Lynch (1960), urban identity depends on elements like continuity, landmarks, and spatial coherence. Bait Al O'oud has once served as a landmark, anchoring the surrounding streetscape and linking residential life with commercial activities. Its removal, and the replacement with nondescript structure or voids, has fractured the urban image, weakening community identity and memory.

This aligns with the argument of Lowenthal (1985) that heritage structures serve as vessels of collective memory. Once demolished, the social knowledge they embodied becomes inaccessible, leaving a cultural vacuum that cannot be filled by modern buildings devoid of historical resonance.

3. Theoretical Interpretation: Traditions and Heritage

The concept of tradition as a constructed continuity (Hobsbawm and Ragner, 1983) helps explain the gravity of the loss of the house. In fact, Bait Al O'oud represents architectural traditions passed down through generations. Its destruction breaks the chain, disrupting the transmission of identity through built form.

Simultaneously, Lowenthal's (1985) view of heritage as selective memory points to why the house has not been protected. In the context of Bahrain, preservation of heritage tends to focus on marketable or intentionally visible sites. Vernacular residences without tourism values are often overlooked in conservation agendas, reflecting a pattern of exclusion rather than inclusive preservation.

4. Absence of Adaptive Reuse

Nonetheless, it is evident that the demolition of Bait Al O'oud's was not inevitable. According to Plevoets and Van Cleempoel (2011), adaptive reuse can be a powerful tool to extend the life of heritage buildings by integrating them into contemporary contexts. The spatial layout, location, and material quality of the house had made it well-suited for adaptation into a cultural center, a museum, or even an educational space.

Indeed, its large size and urban positioning could have supported a variety of new uses while retaining historical integrity. However, none of these have been seen by either the owners or the authorities. The lack of such a vision reflects a failure to engage with sustainability in its architectural, cultural, and ecological forms. As Bullen and Love (2011) suggest, adaptive reuse offers continuity of both environmental appropriateness and identity, an opportunity missed in this case.

5. Final Synthesis

In summary, the analysis of the demolition of Bait Al O'oud offers insights that extend beyond a single case study. It exposes the tensions between modernization and memory, institutional neglect and cultural value, and economic priorities versus social heritage. The findings call for a redefined conservation framework, one that sees heritage not just as tourism capital, but as an essential medium for social cohesion, historical continuity, and urban identity.

Conclusions

The research into the demolition of Bait Al O'oud in Manama reveals a multi-layered failure in the preservation of vernacular architecture of Bahrain, specifically in Manama. Grounded in archival research, visual-spatial analysis, and supplementary lived experience, this study reconstructed the architectural and cultural significance of the house and examined the systemic factors that contributed to its erasure. The conclusions drawn are rooted in the documented evidence and spatial observations gathered through this process.

First, the archival findings confirm that Bait Al O'oud has been a rare and historically valuable structure. Built in the early 20th century by a prominent merchant family, its architecture had reflected high-quality craftsmanship, a complex spatial organization, and adaptation to environmental and social needs. The use of traditional materials and features, such as gypsum corbels (*ruknyat*), wooden mashrabiyas, courtyards, and water wells, indicates its deep connection to cultural identity of Bahrain. The three-story vertical form of the building, uncommon in its time, further emphasizes its architectural uniqueness and socio-economic significance within the historic fabric of Manama.

Second, visual and spatial analysis demonstrate that the demolition of the house has resulted in both a physical and cultural void. Satellite imagery reveals a complete erasure of the structure between 2010 and 2025, with no commemorative traces left in the site. The replacement of traditional urban grain with disconnected, modern developments have fragmented the spatial cohesion of the Al Hammam neighborhood. The absence of zoning protections or an urban conservation framework has allowed this transformation to occur without resistance, despite the proximity of the house to heritage zones such as Bab-Al-Bahrain and Souq-Al-Manama.

Third, the absence of any heritage listing, official documentation, or adaptive reuse plan for Bait Al O'oud highlights a critical policy gap during its time of demolition. Moreover, the supplementary insight from a former resident supported these findings by revealing how the house served as a neighborhood landmark and a repository of collective memory. The emotional significance attached to the house, and the resident's reflection on its undocumented disappearance, illustrate the disconnection between community knowledge and institutional planning. This disconnection is reinforced by the broader analysis, which shows a loss not only of structure, but of urban identity and intangible cultural values.

In conclusion, the demolition of Bait Al O'oud stands as a significant case study illustrating the cumulative consequences of personal neglect, policy oversight, and modernization pressures. The study confirms that the loss of the house was not inevitable; its historical, architectural, and locational values had made it highly suitable for adaptive reuse. Unfortunately, however, the lack of vision and conservation foresight has led to an irreversible loss of a structure that had embodied the architectural heritage of Bahrain, urban memory, and communal identity. This case study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive conservation policies that extend beyond tourism-driven preservation and recognize the importance of vernacular architecture in shaping cultural continuity by itself.

Despite this neglect however, the situation has drastically improved today with more and more awareness about the relevance of heritage is being constructed in the society, both by the Ministry of Culture, Universities as well as organizations such as DOCOMOMO. It is noteworthy that architects themselves are deriving inspirations from such cultural heritage, as discussed by Hussain, Ali & Karajica (2025). Given these new developments, there is hope that no similar lapses will occur and that the heritage in Bahrain will be duly protected through conservation efforts.

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Data Availability: Data collected for this research is available with the author, for scrutiny. Some data are available with the owners of the house. In any case, data has been cited in this research with permission from the owners of the data.

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