Honors thesis

COURSE OF

ARCHITECTURE CONSTRUCTION CITY

Abstract

Old Delhi and its architectural heritage:

adaptive reuse of *havelis* in Shahjahanabad

Tutor

Valeria Minucciani
Michele Bonino
Valeria Federighi
Anuradha Chaturvedi
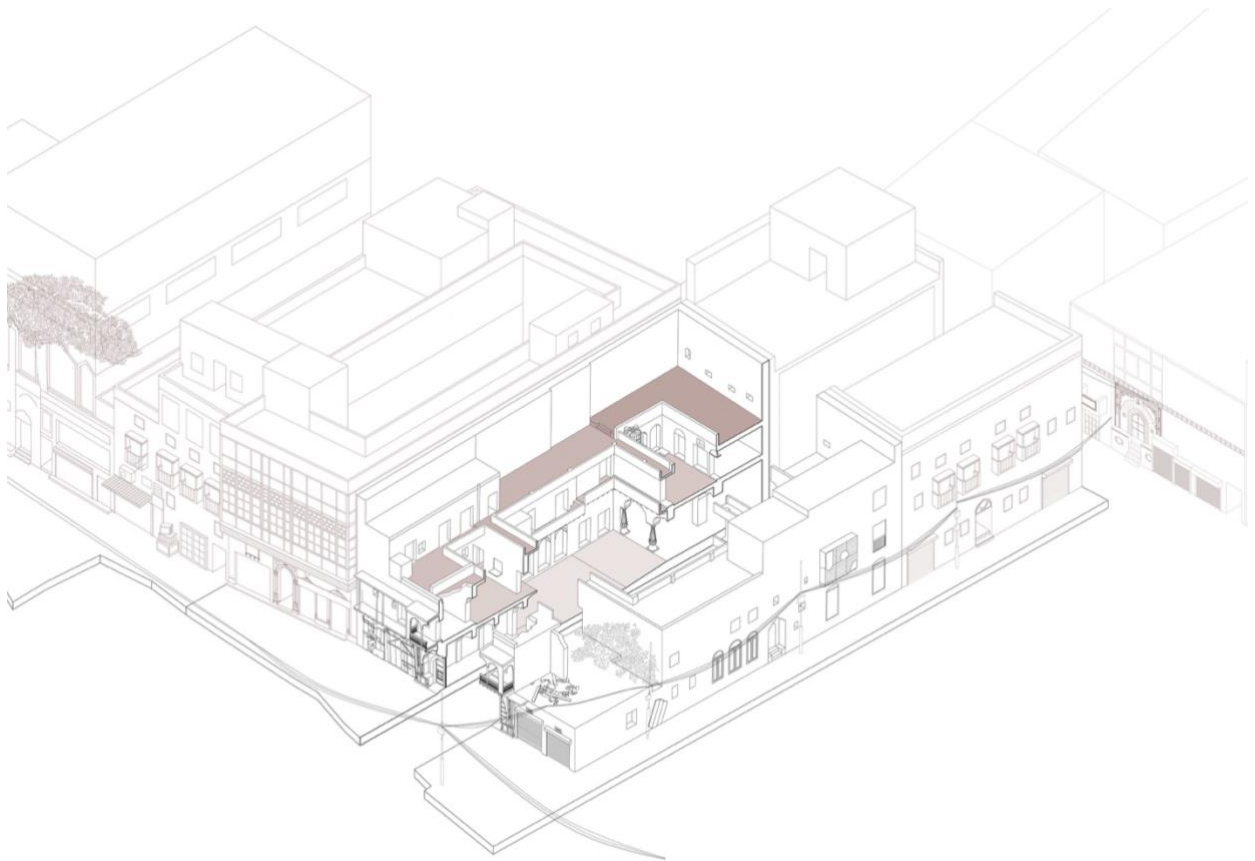
by

Gianluca D'Agostino

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Old Delhi – historically known as Shahjahanabad – is a living historic city, where the splendour of its built heritage is still visible and evident, despite decades of lack of maintenance and preservation. Covering an area of only 6 sq. km, the old city is characterised by a dense urban pattern, made of narrow roads and plenty of valuable heritage buildings. Studying the history of conservation and cultural heritage in the Indian context, I chose to focus my attention on the main heritage core of the old city: a traditional courtyard mansion typology constructed during the Mughal period, called *haveli*.

Analysing a specific area, called Dharampura mohalla, I have tried to better understand the urban reality, with its main features. To implement my research, I spent plenty of time on site, visiting many *havelis* and doing interviews with local people. Then, I have looked for other case studies of reuse or restoration to compare, and deeper understand the current conditions of these buildings. Finally, I have worked on adaptive reuse of a specific *haveli* that was meant to be a pilot project, to show a common path and tangible action to revitalize *havelis* in the historic city. Conservation and promotion of this building typology were the main goals of my design project, thanks to culture as driving element. Due to the urgent need of intervention on *havelis*, I have proposed a Heritage Building Centre where people could learn and work on the conservation of *havelis,* and especially on the restoration and re-use of the main materials as timber, plasters, stone and metals. Activities, classes and training works would take place in the restored existing building and in a new portion I chose to add: placed in a collapsed corner of the haveli, a bamboo scaffolding structure raised to host the plaster laboratory. This approach would like both to denounce the increasing loss and collapses of *havelis* in Old Delhi, due to lack of care and maintenance, and to show that there is no need of expensive interventions to give a new life to these beautiful mansions. Moreover, I have thought other cultural activities to involve both residents and tourists, to share and make everybody aware of the history of Shahjahanabad and its unique heritage.

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Abacus of *havelis* gateways.

Exploded axonometry of the Haveli – actual conditions.

Front elevation of the adaptive reuse project design.

For further information please contact:
Gianluca D'Agostino, dagostino.g.luca@gmail.com