

Preserving the Original through Transformation: The “Fitting” of Vernacular Heritage

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In vernacular architecture, the concept of “fitting” emerges from the tension between the permanence of historical fabric and the evolving demands of contemporary habitation. Within current heritage debates – which frame heritage as a dynamic condition shaped by memory, maintenance, and modification – adaptive interventions are essential tools for sustaining the continuity of inhabited historic environments. This paper explores this “fitting” process through a case study of a traditional masonry house in Ağırnas, Kayseri, located within the UNESCO Tentative World Heritage site of the Koramaz Valley.

Built in the 1860s over amorphous, rock-cut subterranean spaces, the structure exhibits a layered spatial continuity that challenges conventional restoration approaches. A 1956 property division for inheritance further complicated the site, splitting the original unit into two plots with distinct entrances and courtyards. While the house remains characterized by a small (S) scale, it must now be adapted to accommodate contemporary demands for larger (L) interior layouts and modern amenities. Utilizing locally sourced volcanic stone and traditional timber craftsmanship, the building embodies a material tradition that must “fit” modern technical requirements without losing its soul.

The study examines a restoration project aimed at reinhabiting deteriorated spaces for contemporary residential use while preserving spatial and material integrity. Particular emphasis is placed on the “calibration” of modern domestic functions – such as kitchens, bathrooms, and climate control systems – into the original masonry fabric. By prioritizing careful integration over imposition, the paper demonstrates how design interventions can sustain the continuous history of vernacular heritage, contributing to broader discussions on the maintenance of fragile historic urban environments.