

THE ARTS

Duke's modernist-Islamic shrine

Shangri La conjures up eternal youth and paradise in some exotic location. On more earthly grounds, in 1937 Doris Duke (1912-1993) built a house near Diamond Head in Honolulu with her first husband, James Cromwell, named it Shangri La, and decorated it as if it might have been built by a Sultan who lived in 15th century Spain or 17th century India.



BLUE GREENBERG

A re-creation of that house by using large photographs, interior decorations borrowed from the house and architectural sketches are part of this exhibition. Rounding out the show is the work of six contemporary artists, whose work is in response to Shangri La as they understood it when they were part of its artists-in-residence program.

The name Doris Duke has special significance in Durham. Her parents were Nanaline Holt Inman and James B. Duke, the founder of Duke University, and her grandfather was Washington Duke. When she was 13, her father died and she became one of the richest people in the world. We know very little about her life until she married at age 22. We do know her mother refused to let her go to college and instead took her on the grand tour of Europe.

It is also a matter of record she sued her mother during those years to stop her from selling some of the family assets. As cavalier as she seemed about friends and money, she was an astute business woman and the trusts grew sizably throughout her life. From an early age she established charitable foundations and before she died, she had carefully set up the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation to carry on her interests in the arts, environment, medical research and child abuse prevention.

The Nasher's assistant curator, Katie Adkins, walked me through the exhibition, pointing out how the galleries had been rearranged into smaller spaces to simulate a home

environment. A wall-size photograph in a light box welcomes us to the exhibition; it is a picture of one of the sitting rooms.

Other photographs pop out from the wall of each gallery, adding to the feel we are walking through three-dimensional space.

It is difficult to separate the Duke who generated sensational headlines from

the very young American woman who went on an around-the-world honeymoon and fell in love with Islamic art. The exhibit focuses on this heiress as rich, but hands-on, with a keen aesthetic eye and a determination to turn Islamic architectural ideas into a real place where quiet beauty and tranquility abounded.

India was one of the last of the honeymoon stops and, after a visit to the Taj Mahal, she immediately hired Indian craftsmen to design a bedroom and bath for her new home (which was originally planned for Florida) in marble with motifs she saw in the decorations of this glorious monument. Newly married, Duke was one of the richest people in the world, but she was not just a shopper. She had a good eye and was in tune with other rich Americans who were collecting exotic art, although only a handful were interested in things Islamic.

Duke, however, was not looking for museum art; she was buying things to live with. And, in most cases, she was commissioning ceilings, walls and doors crafted by contemporary artisans. In an interview on NPR with Frank Stasio, Deborah Pope, the executive director of Shangri La, said museums that collected Islamic art would "kill" for some of the objects Duke collected, but would

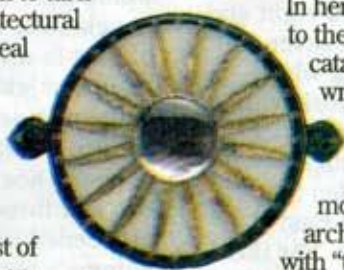
EXHIBIT INFO

"Doris Duke's Shangri La: Architecture, Landscape, Islamic Art," Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, through Dec. 29. The Nasher is open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m.

also pass by many others, because they were "bazaar" art. The point was made over and over: Duke bought what she liked and lived with it and while the house might sound like a hodgepodge it was a beautiful blend of objects across the Islamic world.

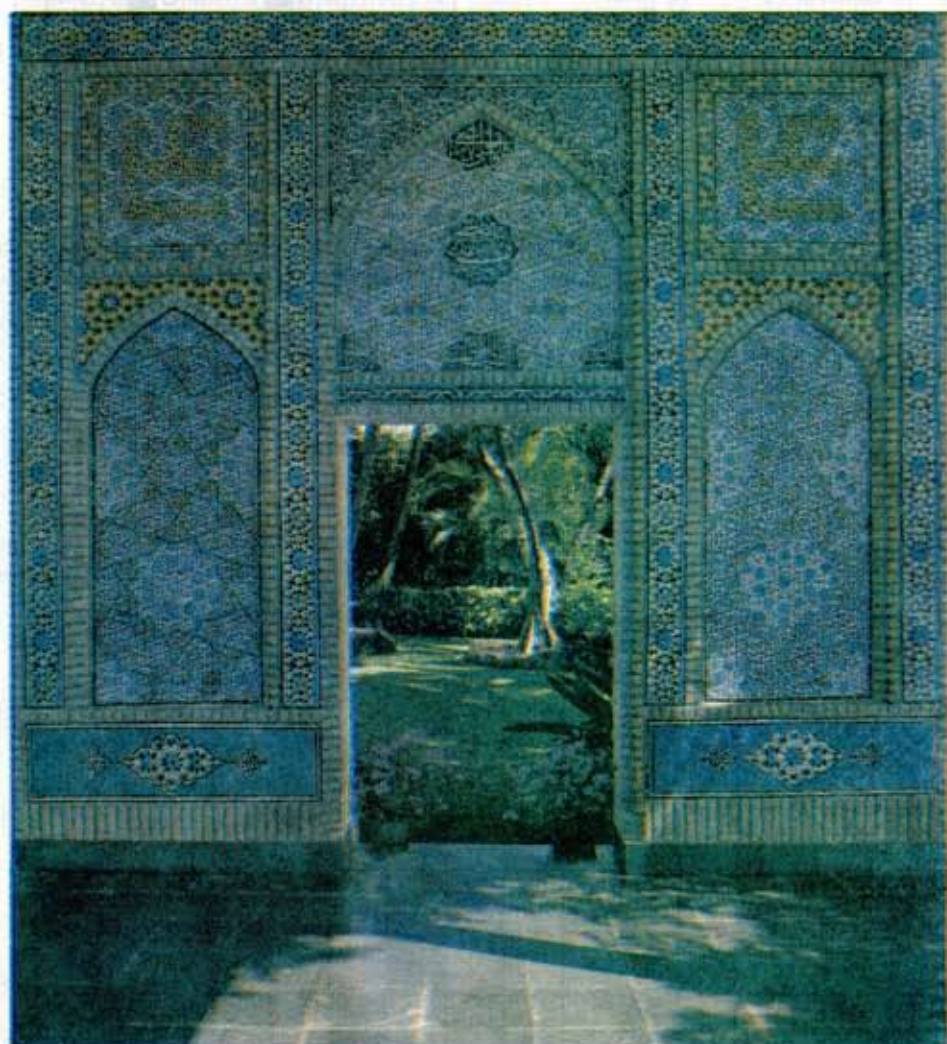
In her foreword to the exhibition catalogue Pope wrote that Shangri La melds 1930s modernist architecture with "traditions from India, Morocco, Iran, Syria and a large collection of Islamic art." Duke called it "a Spanish-Moorish-Perisian-Indian complex."

As we walk through the rooms there are rugs and old fabrics in cases on the walls, lighting fixtures hanging from the ceiling and various objects that were originally arranged throughout the house, either to be used or to be enjoyed from some wall niche. There is much to look at and well-written wall labels for those who want to know more. Everything deserves a stop. My favorites include a delicate "Kursi (Qur'an stand)," Egyptian 1900s; a 19th century Indian hand mirror; a pair of gold Indian bracelets studded with rubies and diamonds; and two magnificent door panels of filigreed ivory. One of the very few representations of a human form is the Iranian painting "Woman with a Cat," late 18th century; the wall text labels it "late, decadent, and



David Franzen

This northern Indian hand mirror, 19th century (jade, gold, gemstones and mica) is on view through Dec. 29 at the Nasher Museum of Art.

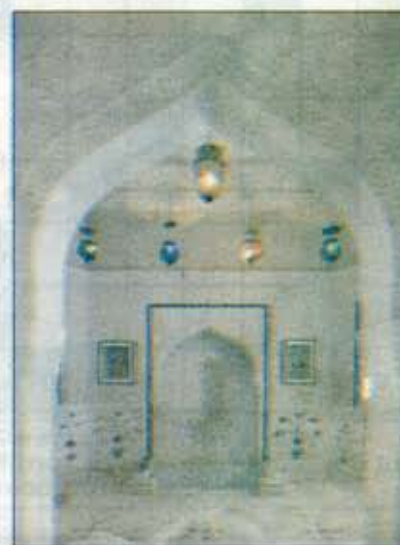


Tim Street Porter/Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art

This image of a mosaic tile panel in the form of a gateway, Iran, probably 19th century, is on view through Dec. 29 at the Nasher Museum of Art.

European influenced." Duke was a woman of great taste, a keen sense of business but a poor judge of people. And so there is the Doris Duke of the tabloids. Her second husband, Porfirio Rubirosa, a handsome Dominican, had such dubious connections the American government insisted he sign a pre-nuptial agreement to protect the estate in the case of her untimely death. That marriage ended within the year. Duke covered a \$5 million bail bond for her friend Imelda Marcos who, with her husband, was under indictment for looting \$100 million from the Philippines.

Along the way she became a follower of Hare Krishna and met a young woman whom she legally adopted only to later renounce the adoption. In a tragic accident, she ran over and killed her interior decorator who was opening the gate to the driveway, and finally she left her butler in control of her trusts. For those who



This is an image of a bathroom in the Mughal Suite at Shangri La, the Hawaiian home of Doris Duke. The exhibit is on view at the Nasher Museum of Art through Dec. 29.

sniff that it is just a bunch of stuff put together by a rich woman, realize that it is much more than that. The exhibition offers us a look into a home that is simple yet rich in the beauty of Islamic decoration. And who doesn't love a peep into the lives of the super rich?

Blue Greenberg's column appears each week in Entertainment and More. She can be reached at blueg@bellsouth.net or by writing her in c/o The Herald-Sun, 2828 Pickett Road, Durham, NC 27705.



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