

Dar Mansur

A step back in time...

By Donn Hutchison and Bassam Almohor

If you wish to step back in time, visit Dar Mansur, a house full of memories and history.



Built in 1936, it features the thick walls, red tiled roof, and iron-barred windows that are representative of the style of Palestinian houses built during the British Mandate in Ramallah. Another typical feature is its veranda – frequently it is filled with potted plants in earthen pots that may sit in iron planters – that designated the entrance to the house.

Entering through the double-iron doors, opened with a huge iron key, one steps into the main hall where eight doors lead into the other rooms of the house. This main hall was the center of family life. At one end there was a sitting area, at the other, a table and chairs, sideboard and china cupboard.

The house has three bedrooms; two of them relatively large rooms on either side of the bathroom: a master bedroom and a bedroom for the children. In addition, there is a formal sitting room (in this case with a fireplace) from which a wall of glass-paned doors leads into a formal dining room.

Wooden stairs that have been added to this house now have been turned into bookcases that extend into two rooms. The stairs were twelve feet tall and used to lead to an old attic/storage room. Also added were the two wooden doors that are in the sitting room. They are probably close to 200 years old.

One bedroom has been transformed into a study. Bookshelves were added to fill one wall. The old day bed, keeping to traditions of the 1930s and reflecting Turkish influence of the time, is covered with pieces of old carpet. It also wears a lace skirt and has a fitted lace cover on the bolster at the back.

The house is kept much like it was in 1936. The Persian carpets are taken up in the spring, beaten, washed, rolled up, and put away until the cold weather begins again. The floors are mopped once a week, except for the kitchen and bathroom which are mopped every day. Once a month, hot soapy water is thrown on the floors that are then scrubbed with a short-handled broom; the water is simply swished out the doors.

In many ways, the house is like it was in the past, yet it is brighter and perhaps more like a mini museum. It certainly retains the Eastern flavor of olden times but now features a Western, almost *Country Living* style of décor with a collection of old objects that now serve a different purpose than that for which they were originally intended. Some items, however, continue to be used as they were over seventy years ago.

When you enter the Mansur House, you really are taking a *step back in time*.

Donn Hutchison, an American-Palestinian, taught at the Ramallah Friends Schools between 1965 and 2012. He was married to Sina Mansur, the late daughter of Dr. Jirius Mansur who built the house, and currently lives in the Mansur family home. He welcomes visitors who need to make prior arrangements through email: ya_badonn@yahoo.com.

Dar Mansur is located in the center of Ramallah, squeezed between the Canadian Representative Office and UNESCO. Location: 31.906573, 35.201785.

