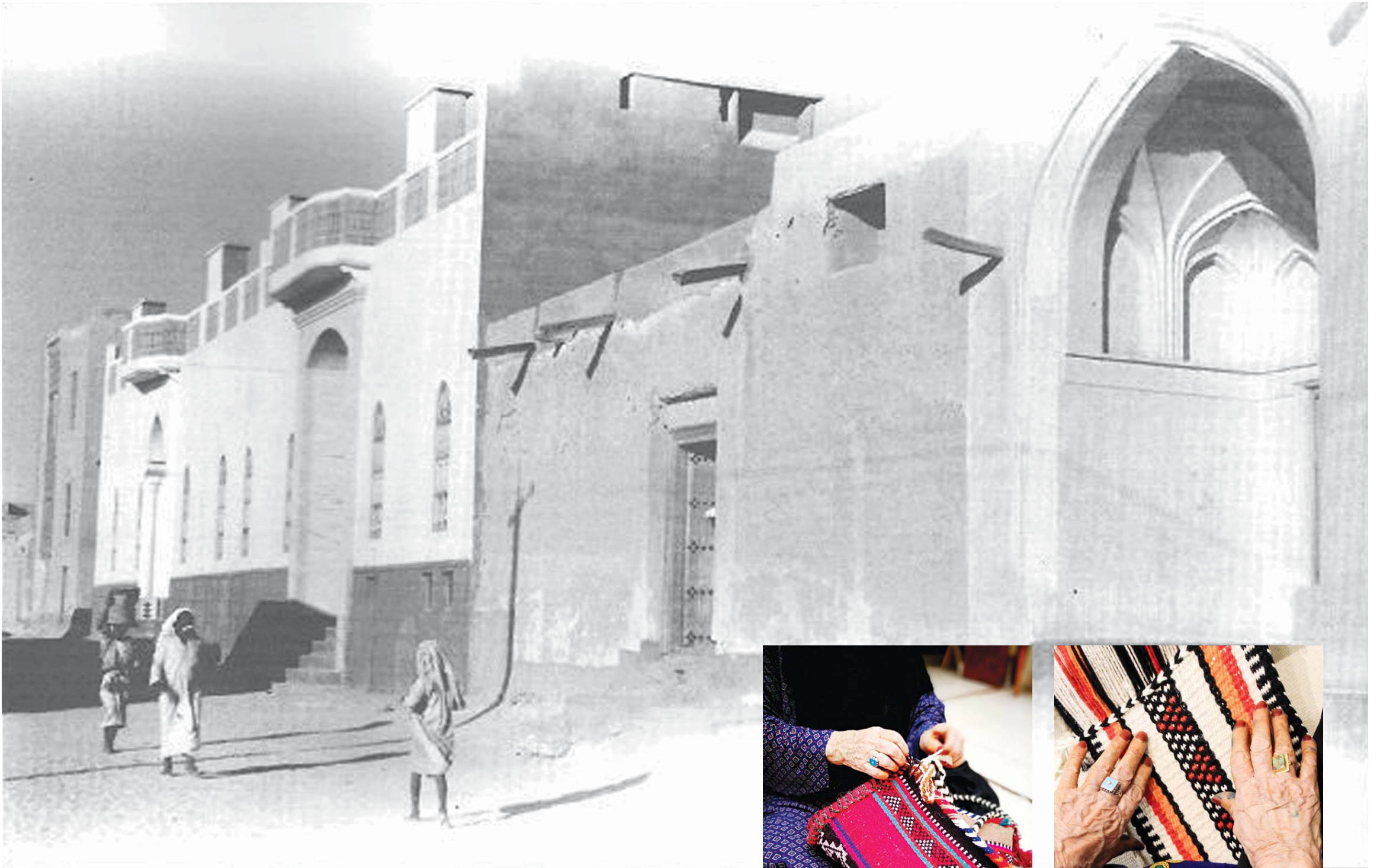




## SPECIAL REPORT



Clockwise from top: Historic house, hands of Bedouin weavers have woven Sadu for generations, entrance to the renovated Sadu House, Sadi encourages creativity and innovation in contemporary textile arts and design.

**By Chaitali B. Roy**  
Special to the Arab Times

‘Old buildings have a beautiful soul that is enriched with social history and stories to tell,’ Sheikh Altaf Al Sabah, an anthropologist and Honorary President of Al Sadu Weaving Cooperative Society, told me more than a decade back. For three decades, Sadu House, the house she nurtured, has been standing guard to one of Kuwait’s most significant examples of material culture — the art of weaving. For years before that, it stood witness to a time that has faded into the dusty pages of history books. On 30th November, Sadu House celebrated its 30th anniversary as the home of Sadu and its many achievements.

Sadu House is not just a stone and brick structure. It encloses a vital space with history and memories in it, and as such, it exudes an energy that has infused new life into a craft that was dying at one time. “Sadu House has many different stories to narrate,” Sheikh Altaf Al Sabah told Arab Times many years back. “There is the story of commercial and cultural exchange between Kuwait, India and Iran, a story of traditional architecture, the story of social history which it has witnessed and more recently a story of traditional craft and creative expression. The house has witnessed Kuwait’s movement from the desert to an urban lifestyle, and its positive energy reaches out to those who enter its space.”

Built in 1929 by Youssef Al Marzouk, Bayt Al Sadu was one of the earliest buildings in Kuwait to be made of cement and concrete. Constructed by Indian craftsmen, it combines traditional Kuwaiti architecture with distinct Indian and Persian influences. Over the years, Sadu House has served as an incubator for traditional crafts and creative innovation.

To Sheikh Altaf, the initiator and Sheikh Bibi Duaij Al Sabah, her daughter and present Chairperson of Al Sadu Society, harmonising tradition with modernity, thereby retaining meaningful aspects of the past for a better future is the way forward. Through research, steady documentation, workshops, and collaborations, Sadu House has built a reservoir of creative artistic skills and a valuable archive centre for researchers, students, and textile art enthusiasts. Today, Sadu House plays an essential role in emphasising cultural identity, inspiring contemporary creative designs, and celebrating collaborations. Arab Times spoke to Noura Al Nashi, Exhibition and Event Coordinator at Sadu House, about its journey and milestones.

**AT:** Tell us the story of how Sadu House was founded.

**Noura Al Nashi:** Sadu House, a traditional Kuwaiti house, was built in 1936 by the head of an affluent family, Youssef Al Marzouk. The house overlooked the seafloor and incorporated four open courtyards with many Indian decorative influences, exemplified in the decorations on the wooden doors brought from Karachi and the iron units on the windows.

In 1938 the house came under the ownership of Youssef Shereen Behbehani, who added a new floor and European style fireplaces in the diwaniya rooms. In the 1970s, the house was purchased by the State under the Ministry of Information and later was acquired by the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters. In 1980 it embraced the tradition of weaving and became the home of weavings and textiles — Sadu House.

**AT:** What have been the significant milestones of Sadu House in its 30-year journey?

**Noura Al Nashi:** In 1991, Al Sadu Corporate Craft Society was established. Al Sadu Weaving Cooperative Society is a non-profit self-sustained organisation dedicated to preserving, documenting, and promoting the rich and diverse textile heritage of Kuwait, from the nomadic Bedouin weaving of the desert through to the urban weaving of the town. We celebrate the values of productivity and creativity of the nations’ past generations, weaving together a cultural identity for both present and future generations.

In 1992, renowned Kuwaiti artist Sami Mohamed designed the Al Sadu Society’s Logo and in 1996, the setup of The Kuwait Textile Art Association (KTAA) under the auspices of Sadu House.

In 2006, the building was restored to continue its cultural role of introducing and preserving the weaving heritage from the vast spots of the rural desert to the urbanised city. As the conservator and guardian of the illuminating aspects of Kuwaiti heritage and social history, its role continues while still withholding its initiative to preserve cultural identity and encourage contemporary creative artistic expression.

**AT:** What programmes and initiatives adopted by Sadu House in 30 years have been successful?

**Noura Al Nashi:** In 2011, we launched the first educational program for children called Fun with Textiles under the Junior School of Textiles, running various textile workshops designed for kids to learn and further develop their creative skills in a relaxed and stimulating environment. Children between the ages of 7 and 13 are introduced to the beauty of textile arts in all its forms; traditional and contemporary.

In 2016, we launched the SADI, Sadu Art and Design Initiative, an artist in residency program. This program is aimed to foster artistic creativity by cooperating with different artists from all intrinsic disciplines. The program takes five up and coming Kuwaiti artists and exposes them to the expert skills of our master weavers, which provides an excellent source of research and inspiration. At the end of their residency, we hold an exhibition for the artists to showcase their work.

In 2017, the Studio SADI program was launched as an

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Dana Al Jouder, a Studio SADI artist



Celebrating 30 years

# Bayt Al Sadu bookends decades of history, culture

editor's choice

