

# U N - F O L D

A design research journal of the Moorish influence of art and design in Andalusia written and designed by Breanna Vick. This project is developed as a narrative report describing personal interactions with design in southern Spain while integrating formal academic research and its analysis.

*Migration of Moorish Design and  
Its Cultural Influences in Andalusia*

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*UROP Project - Breanna Vick*

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Printed and bound in the United States of America.

## *Author Bio*

Breanna Vick is a Graphic Designer based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She is interested in developing a deeper understanding of different methods of design research.

On a site visit to Morocco and Spain in May through June of 2017, Breanna tested her knowledge of design research by observing Moorish design integrated in Andalusia. By developing a research paper, establishing sketchbooks, collecting photographs, and keeping journal entries, she was able to write, design and construct this narrative book.

With Breanna's skill-set in creating in-depth research, she has a deep understanding of the topics that she studies. With this knowledge, she is able to integrate new design aesthetics into her own work.



## *Project Objective*

My undergraduate research project objective is to advance my understanding of how Moorish design appears in cities located throughout the southern territory of Spain. By studying architecture, design, and art, I found influences of Moorish design in areas which had already been documented, along with more modern influences which had likely not been documented previously to my research.



*Introduction – Determining a research method and formulating the research project*

Steven McCarthy, a professor in the design department at the University of Minnesota is teaching our class how he conducts design research and generates new content using influence he has found and developed from outside of the classroom. He is carrying a conversation with his students about a recent trip to Europe, showing us photographs of bright blue graffiti, a menu from a cafe, and a pattern of a cobblestone sidewalk. McCarthy describes to his students the power of research in the creative field.





I believe that creative research is often underdeveloped. Research does not always yield a numerical data set. It is possible to collect our data through visual imagery. Developing photography, drafting sketches, and implementing observed imagery into textual documentation can effectively communicate design to others. Designers work in a different realm now than they did even just a few years previously. With access to millions of digital images and templates today, a designer can quickly produce content by studying other compositions and pulling aspects of these concepts to use in their own work. While digital imagery can often be an effective method for design research, finding imagery solely online may not always be the most powerful method. By discovering content without a screen, a designer is brought into the realm of creating content from tactile, worldly objects. Pulling influence from objects that aren't already developed graphic design pieces can allow for a larger dimension of creativity. When design research is built off of a photo that hundreds of other people have seen, it may be more difficult to cultivate an original idea. However, when a designer develops a piece by observing a form on their own, the designer is allowing for their individual views, senses, and understanding to become more prevalent.

UNFOLD is a narrative book created after a recent site visit to Morocco and Spain, which spanned for the months of May through June in 2017. Before taking this expedition, I developed traditional research of the Moorish influence of art and design in Spain using digital resources and academic text to formulate my knowledge on the subject. After I had retained this information, I was capable of understanding the history of the Moors' power in Andalusia and how this impacted the culture, architecture, and design of the area. Upon arrival in Spain, I studied how these influences were incorporated in the past, and I could appreciate how they are still prevalent in the region today.

While abroad, I had the opportunity to research through the lens of my own creative process. I was able to develop an exposure to the pieces and structures that I had researched previous to my on-site visit. With this ability, I was in control of my own influence, rather than formulating inspiration from the outlook of another individual. The research I compiled abroad supported my endeavor to complete this visual book, which I prepared with the journal entries, photographs, and sketches that I established during my travel.

## *Section I – Initial Design Research*

My initial research objective entering this project was to determine how Moorish influence is still prevalent in Andalusia today. The strategy I hoped to implement to discover this information would involve documentation through an onsite visit to Spain, where I would collect visual examples of the Moorish impact on the area.

Before completing a site visit, I informed myself with the history of the Moorish rule over Spain. After delving into the background of Spanish history, I obtained an advanced and detailed understanding of what Moorish design elements consisted of and how this style of design is characterized. By expanding my comprehension of the Moroccan approach to architecture and design, I was capable of both understanding the processes used to create the motifs and stylistic choices created by the Moors, along with being able to properly identify the objects I saw as something that belonged to Moorish origin. Having a background in my topic allowed me to progress in formulating new research that does not yet exist regarding Moorish influence in Andalusia today. Once my initial research was completed, I was capable of identifying both traditional and modern influences of the Moors in Andalusia.





## *Section II - The History Of Andalusia*

Andalusia, a southern Spanish territory recognized for its diverse geographical contrasts, has eight provinces. In these provinces are an abundance of unique culture, architecture, and art, which derive heavily from Moorish influence. After seven centuries of Moorish rule, new order found way (Florian). However, Islamic migration remains evident today in its wide impact on Spanish culture, where influence of this design stands untouched throughout Andalusia (Buckingham). In cities throughout the southern territories of Spain, intricate Islamic design displays the historic impact that the Moorish people left on this region.

With a variety of structures and other articles displaying different forms of Islamic art, it was important to me to first recognize the key attributes that help one identify objects as Moorish in influence.

Islamic ornamentation often avoids using figurative images and instead focuses on the structure of ornate geometric pattern. Many traditional structures were hand-built and carved (Rosser-Owen, 2010).

Architectural pieces encompass complex tessellations presented in tilework that are incorporated on walls, floors, and ceilings. Stone archways featuring hand-carved wood and stone reliefs of arabesques appear above walkways



throughout gardens and churches. Arabic calligraphy traces its way across buildings and garments. Through these stylized creations and many others, the characteristics of Islamic influence began to form.

With the background knowledge and in-depth research of the techniques used by the Moors, I was prepared to collect my own research through my travel in Africa and Europe.

### *Section III – Travel In Morocco*

My travel originally began as our plane landed in the Marrakech Menara Airport, a structure that gives a promising glimpse into the architecture that we would experience later in our travels. The airport's walls are covered in tessellating motifs common in Moorish design. These motifs are modernized to fit the airports contemporary style, however, they are still recognizable in shape to the traditional patterns of Moroccan tiling, which were prevalent hundreds of years ago. While this may have been the first sign of Moorish architecture that was exposed on the trip, there were certainly more instances to follow. On the way through the city in our rumbling taxi car, our driver points a tan knuckle out the window at mosques, markets, and other outdoor structures illuminated by light. The streets are bare besides stray dogs and a few men scattered about, who may have already started a morning commute. It is not until the next morning that we will see the Moroccan influence that has been prevalent in the streets.

In the daylight, it is much easier to notice the decoration that adorns the city of Marrakech. Traditional tessellating tilework lines the insides of family homes, arabesques fill the interior of mosques, and stone archways lead me through souks. Marrakech displays traditional Moorish design well. Lush greens, cobalt, and orange hues make for a vivid geometric pattern that tiles across floors and wraps around structure walls.

At The Saadian Tombs in Marrakech, I observe a man sitting on a block of cement. He is using a metal tool to chip away at colorful blocks of tile. He lives in the region and does not speak English fluently. However, we can communicate well enough for him to describe to me that he is creating replacement pieces to restore the tombs as they deteriorate. The method he is using is a traditional technique where each piece of the tessellation is individually sculpted and placed into plaster.

As I continue to survey the country of Morocco, I see a variety of architectural and stylistic approaches that I have covered in my initial research. Traditional Moroccan design is abundant in the country of Morocco. The research objective that I developed did not constitute design in Morocco as a primary focus, but instead concentrated on Moorish influence in Andalusia, which specifically includes portions of southern Spain. A site visit to the region of Morocco, however, granted me the opportunity to recognize traditional methods used by the Moors and acknowledged a more structured understanding of how this design style is implemented into a cultural setting.

When the date of departure from Morocco arrived, I exchanged my dirhams to euros and took a ferry to Spain. Morocco provided me with detailed, tactile examples of how Moroccan design and architecture is displayed, making Moorish influence more recognizable upon my arrival to Andalusia. While Morocco embraced tile patterning and stone archways as their own, in Spain, the Moorish influence was integrated with Spanish architecture and design.

### *Section IV – Travel In Spain*

Of the cities in the region of Andalusia, I found the most prominent influence of Moorish design in Seville and Granada. While these two cities displayed different forms of Moorish influence, I felt that they were both significantly impacted by historic Moorish design and culture.

When the Moors conquered Seville, the area became known as the port city, as it was located near the Guadalquivir River, which led to the Atlantic Ocean. Through this port, Seville began to experience financial gain (Britannica, 2016). Historic Moorish buildings such as the Alcázar still stand, and Mudéjar style art, which was developed under Christian rule, remains prevalent in churches that were converted from Mosques. Influence is still shown in some other metropolitan structures that decorate the city. While Seville shows signs of Moorish design, Granada's influence appears even more prominent.

Berber tribes that once occupied Córdoba made way to Granada to start an independent territory. After seven centuries of rule, the city was surrendered and Al-Andalus came to an end. After the Christians established victory, Muslims who remained in the area often converted to Catholicism and other Christians migrated to the city. Today, the Alhambra still stands and traces of the old city remain (Gibson, M., & Rosser-Owen, M, 2011).

There are many sites within these cities where Moorish architecture, history, and culture have been preserved. While other cities in Andalusia display some characteristics or structures that could show potential signs of Islamic influence, the structures are not always as extravagant and well maintained as they were in both Seville and Granada. Original, historic influence is well preserved in spaces such as Mosques (many of which have been converted to Catholic churches), royal palaces, and other lavish accommodations.





Within the Alhambra in Granada and the Alcázar of Seville, there are thousands of beautifully crafted elements that display how Islamic influence is integrated in Spain. Patterns displaying arabesque detailing on concave and convex surfaces within domes can visually illustrate how important these structures were to the people of the time. Elaborate tilework with numerous different tessellating styles adorning walls and floors fit many surfaces. Calligraphic inscriptions on friezes, within hexagonal shapes, and on Moorish stars are also prevalent in these spaces. Archways, especially displaying a horseshow style, became a widespread architectural piece that the Moors brought to Spain during their time of rule. These archways are often constructed of stone, and have surface decoration with Islamic interlace patterns which make use of tendrils, lines, Arabic calligraphy, and geometric shapes. These castles, which were often constructed to be palaces or military watchtowers, are a presentation of power (Hughes, 1992).

While I was within these immaculate structures, it was difficult to take every detail in. To imagine the amount of dedication and labor that went in to each structure, engraving, and composition was nearly impossible to comprehend. Being in such a visual environment is breathtaking.

Islamic influence is demonstrated in areas where individuals of honor and high regard often resided. Because religion is important to many Islamic and Christian people, the influence of Moorish design is also present in religious centers.

Even after the power of Andalusia was in Christian reign again, Islamic influence stayed prevalent, especially in the city of Granada. Many of the churches from this time period are still in operation today. While some churches were built with this Islamic and Christian influence in mind, others were converted from preserved ancient mosques. The Renaissance of Baroque City Church of San Miguel Bajo is a church that still stands today in Granada. The Renaissance of Baroque City Church contains structures built with gothic elements and a Mudéjar framework lying overtop. Other churches with such styles include the Monastery of Santa Isabel la Real and Iglesia de San Gregorio Bético, along with others that were unmarked.

A less popular, but relevant place to discover historic Islamic design is in El Rinconcillo, a restaurant located in Seville serving tapas and other small plates. This space displays many historic elements associated with Spanish style culture. Jamón lines ceilings and flamenco dance posters are framed on each wall. However, the tilework that is displayed throughout the restaurant



brings Al-Andalus' style back into the space. I sit and enjoy a few small plates and a glass of wine as I observe the way that two cultures have meshed. While most of the tiles display a Moorish style, some exhibit the early characteristics of Spanish tiling. Spanish and Moroccan architecture are produced in contrasting methods from one another. While Spanish architecture feels soft and romantic, Moroccan works are more rigid and formal. The contrast of these styles in the space still seemed to integrate together nicely, as they did in many areas of Spain.

While there is a broad array of architecture that is prevalent in Andalusia, other articles also display the influence of the Moorish arts. Arabic calligraphy is present in book design, and objects such as textiles and carpets appear with motifs and patterns drawn from Islamic works. These textiles were often used in the Christian world for the use of liturgical and noble vestments. Many of these pieces are silk lampas and display Arabic calligraphy and patterning such as arabesques

and geometric motifs. A vestment on display at Museu del Disseny was created for Saint Valerie (Museu del Disseny). Most of the elaborate pieces displaying this hand-made work were created for those with high prestige or power. A variety of artistic pieces showing Islamic influence exhibit a clear and thorough view of the historic work from centuries ago. While these historic pieces display powerful objects, the way that Islamic influence is still implemented today is another approach to understand how the Moorish rule effected the region and still survives throughout Spain.

Original influence is challenging to decipher throughout city streets, as these areas have been reconstructed and no longer hold the same architectural style that was developed by the Moorish people hundreds of years ago. Spanish style housing with burnt red roofing tiles and white-washed walls are now integrated with Moorish influence. Areas that once might have consisted of bright tessellating tiles have since been reconstructed to better fit the lives of those living in neighborhoods.

Before visiting southern Spain, I expected there to be Moorish influence around every corner. I predicted that nearly every marketplace and city street would have some small remain of Moroccan design or tiling that was preserved like it is in the large mosques and castles. While at first this did not seem to be the case, with further investigation, it appears that some structures still did contain Moorish design. The traditional and authentic Moroccan influence was most prominently integrated in expensive

and well-known structures that I mention previously in this narrative piece. Now, modern influence speckles the streets and has been reinvented to fit the desires of the civilians and the tourist populations.

While original Islamic influence is challenging to identify throughout the city, this influence is often replicated in restaurants, shopping centers, hotels, and houses while also being created with modern methods. While original Islamic design was created by hand, today, these pieces are created by machinery and modern practice. I found tilework lining the underside of balconies, a tessellating Moroccan pattern motif integrated into graffiti on a garage door, and horseshoe archways creating gateways to private homes. Jali, a window treatment used by the Moors that created a type of ornamental screen to mask light was placed over storefront and private home's windows. Within tourist shops, small objects resembling the patterns and tilework associated with Islamic design are easy to recognize. In nearly every shop window, these motifs and other Moroccan objects are displayed. While some Spanish-style tiling and objects may also be sold, it can be assumed that the Spanish people who own shops with this merchandise see a benefit from selling Islamic artwork and design.

From my experience in Morocco, I can tell that the Spanish way of representing Morocco to tourists is somewhat idealistic and inaccurate. Moroccan dishes such as tangerine are sold in restaurants decorated with colored lights and velvet pillows. While southern Spain hopes to sell an unauthentic Moroccan

experience at a high price point, I still take note of how this Moorish influence plays out in the lives of those living in Andalusia today. While the traditional Moorish design integrated in old palaces and structures throughout the cities of Seville and Granada are the most appealing to me for their authenticity and history, it is apparent that Moorish influence stays prominent in Spain for many reasons. Some Spanish people are proud of the influence that still stands, while others use it as a marketing strategy to make an extra income in tourist novelty shops, restaurants, and living arrangements.

While the historic structures of the city are staying maintained, and new influences are being implemented throughout Andalusia, it appears that the characteristics of Moorish design are valuable to the culture and people of the region.

### *Conclusion – Final Project Thoughts & Research Objective Findings*

Islamic influence is an important part of the history of southern Spain for its impact on design, architecture, and culture. By analyzing the different forms of Moorish influence in Andalusia, it is possible to further understand how these elaborate, intricate, and awe-striking elements came to be. In the process of inspecting a variety of work, it may be possible to expand the knowledge of the history and transformation of design that is present in this region today. While influences are modified and redeveloped from past to future, it becomes possible to creatively explore how modern influences of Islamic art are expanding and growing with time.

My experience in Andalusia allowed me with the experience to learn and appreciate about the Moorish influence and how it has impacted Spanish living both in the past and in Spain's modern lifestyle.



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Special thanks to Steven McCarthy and UROP for making this project possible.