

Crown and Canopy: Ranthambore's Royal Legacy in Hospitality Interior Design

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Abstract

Two things define Ranthambore: the memory of Rajasthan's royal past, and a forest that has never really been tamed. Together they give the region a character that luxury hospitality here has started to lean on. This paper looks at how that pairing actually shows up inside hotel and resort interiors around Ranthambore. As wildlife tourism has grown, so has a fairly predictable design vocabulary — stone, arches, courtyards, textiles, earthy tones — borrowed from Rajasthan's royal architecture. Used carelessly, this vocabulary risks turning into decoration rather than meaning — which raises this paper's central question: can a hotel honour Ranthambore's royal legacy without letting that heritage crowd out its wilderness? To work through this, properties in Ranthambore and Sawai Madhopur were studied through site visits, photographs and close reading of their spaces, materials and guest experience, with attention to how traditional references get adapted for comfort and how the landscape is folded into the interior through views and indoor-outdoor connections. What emerges is that luxury in Ranthambore doesn't need to look like a rebuilt palace — it can just as easily sit in old craft, present-day comfort and the plain fact of being close to the wild. That is the logic behind this paper's two terms: "Crown" for heritage and memory, "Canopy" for nature and wilderness, together making up a hospitality experience that could only really belong to Ranthambore.

Keywords: luxury hospitality, royal heritage, Rajasthani architecture, craftsmanship, regional identity.

1. Introduction

History and nature sit unusually close together in Ranthambore. The fort carries the weight of the region's royal past; the forest around it carries something rawer. That combination is a big part of why the place now draws crowds well beyond the usual adventure traveller — people come wanting comfort and privacy almost as much as a tiger sighting. It's this shift that has pulled Ranthambore into India's wider luxury hospitality market, where interior design ends up doing most of the work in shaping how guests actually experience the region's double identity of royalty and wild. Hotels and resorts have multiplied around Ranthambore and Sawai Madhopur as wildlife tourism has grown, and most lean on the same set of Rajasthani design cues — local stone, arches, courtyards, jharokhas, earthy colour palettes — to signal regional identity. Used purely as decoration, though, the result starts to feel predictable and whatever cultural meaning it once carried thins out. Resorts built around the forest

swing the other way, chasing jungle views and rustic materials while barely nodding at the royal history. The harder task isn't picking one identity over the other; it's holding both at once, so heritage and wilderness read as one experience rather than two competing themes. There's another route to luxury here that has less to do with architecture at all: the landscape itself. Forest views, daylight, open space, privacy, natural materials — these can build a real connection between a guest and the place, no grand interior required. Luxury doesn't have to mean scale or ornament. For this paper, it's treated instead as a considered kind of comfort, privacy and craftsmanship, one that responds honestly to where it actually is. The concept of "Crown & Canopy" comes from this relationship between Ranthambore's two identities. "Crown" represents its royal history, craftsmanship and cultural heritage, while "Canopy" represents its forests, wildlife and natural landscape. What follows looks at how the two can be pulled

together in present-day hospitality interiors — spaces that feel luxurious and genuinely of Ranthambore, rather than a re-run of a Rajasthani palace [1-5].

1.1.Aim

This research sets out to understand how Ranthambore's royal heritage and craftsmanship can be woven into its wilderness through hospitality interior design — working toward a language of luxury that feels authentic, responds to place, and takes heritage and nature equally seriously Shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Ranthambore's forest landscape — the wilderness that anchors the “Canopy” identity discussed in this paper

1.2.Objectives

The objective is to study Ranthambore's royal history, its architectural heritage, its traditional crafts and its relationship with the surrounding landscape, then look at how contemporary luxury hotels and resorts actually interpret these elements. From there, the aim is to suggest design approaches that bring royal heritage, nature and contemporary aesthetics together into one authentic hospitality experience.

1.3.Need of Study- Beyond the Palace Look

This study is done because Ranthambore's royal heritage is usually reduced to a fixed palace look, when it could be reinterpreted more openly — balancing royalty, contemporary luxury, local craft and wilderness into hospitality interiors that feel genuinely tied to the place rather than borrowed from it. Travelers coming to places like Ranthambore no longer think of luxury as a set of palace motifs ticked off a list; they want authenticity, comfort, and some real sense of where they are. That expectation is

exactly why it's worth studying how hospitality interiors can move past decorative heritage and actually respond to both Ranthambore's royal legacy and its wilderness. There's also a practical reason for this research: designers must turn heritage references into livable space, and without understanding what they're working with, that translation slips easily into surface decoration. Looking closely at how existing properties combine heritage and wilderness gives designers a sharper vocabulary for future projects. This study's position, in the end, is that Ranthambore's identity is served better by interiors that interpret its past than by ones that simply borrow from it.

1.4.Scope and Limitations

The scope here is to study how Ranthambore and Sawai Madhopur's royal heritage and cultural identity show up — and get reworked — in contemporary hospitality interiors, focusing on luxury hotels, heritage properties and wildlife resorts. That means looking at spatial planning, materials, furniture, lighting, traditional crafts and nature integration, and asking how courtyards, verandahs, local stone, timber and regional artwork build Rajasthan's royal character alongside modern luxury expectations. Particular attention goes to how interiors connect with the surrounding landscape, and how views and vegetation shape guest experience. This research stays geographically limited to Ranthambore and Sawai Madhopur, so it doesn't claim to represent Rajasthan's hospitality design language as a whole. It focuses on interior architecture and guest experience rather than hotel management or construction, and draws on a limited set of hotels and resorts shaped by what site visits and published material were actually available. Some properties don't make much information public, so certain details couldn't be studied in depth; the goal is to identify design patterns, not to document every property exhaustively.

1.5.Research Gap

There is exiting research on heritage buildings, on luxury hotels, on nature-based design — but almost always as separate subjects. Nobody seems to have looked closely at what happens when a single place is both royal and wild at once, the way Ranthambore is. That overlap, a palace-like heritage sitting right

next to a tiger reserve, hasn't really been studied together before, and that's the gap this research is trying to fill. Can a hotel in Ranthambore feel genuinely luxurious and rooted in its royal past, without letting that heritage overshadow the wilderness that makes the place special? Shown in Figure 2.

2. Flow of Methodology

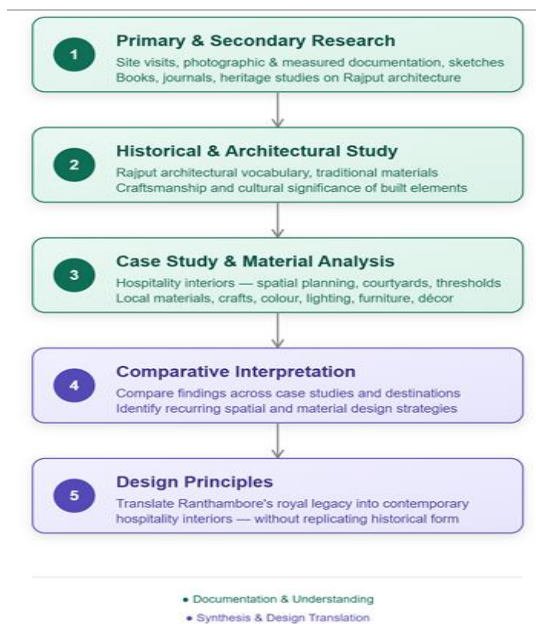


Figure 2 Flow of methodology followed in study

3. Literature Review

Understanding how royal heritage and wilderness might come together in hospitality design means first looking at what's already been written about each idea on its own — and where that writing falls short once Ranthambore enters the picture. Rapoport (1969) argued that a traditional building's form comes mainly from the culture and lifestyle of its builders, not just climate or materials — courtyards exist because they once solved real problems, not because they looked good. Frampton (1983) pushed this further, suggesting regional forms should be reused with real understanding rather than copied for their look, since that's what makes them feel rooted rather than decorative. For Rajasthani forts and havelis this matters directly: jharokhas and Jaali screens served real purposes that today's hospitality interiors often forget to carry forward. Gupta (2021) looked at this in Rajasthan, arguing that converting

havelis into heritage hotels only works if the building's original character is preserved and new construction stays limited to what modern comfort requires — a balance that depends on the design team respecting the existing structure. This lines up with Rajasthan's wider heritage hotel movement, where palaces such as Umaid Bhawan and Rambagh were converted from the 1970s onward, tourism giving these buildings a reason to keep standing. Pine and Gilmore (1998) made a related point: businesses today succeed less by selling a product or service than by selling a memorable experience people will pay extra for. Applied to hospitality, luxury should be judged less by how much gold or marble fills a space and more by how a guest feels moving through it — visible in heritage hotels like Rambagh Palace and Umaid Bhawan, and newer properties near Ranthambore such as Suján, all of which turn royal buildings into modern luxury experiences. The third idea this research leans on is nature. Kellert, Heerwagen and Mador (2008) argued that buildings genuinely designed to connect people with nature improve occupant wellbeing — an idea usually called biophilic design, treating nature as a starting principle rather than an afterthought. Architect Geoffrey Bawa put this into practice, as Robson (2002) describes, by blurring indoor and outdoor boundaries through courtyards and framed views, especially relevant to Ranthambore, where wilderness is as much part of its identity as its royal past. Taken together, this body of work still treats heritage, luxury and nature-based design as three separate conversations, with almost nothing bringing them together for one place. That gap is sharpest for somewhere like Ranthambore, which happens to be genuinely royal and genuinely wild at the same time — and closing it is what this research is trying to do [6-10].

4. Case Study

Primary Case Study 1: Sterling Bagh, Sawai Madhopur, Ranthambore

Sterling Bagh Ranthambore is a contemporary wildlife resort in Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan, close to Ranthambore National Park. Spread across roughly 2 acres, it holds 36 rooms and suites, landscaped lawns, a pool, a restaurant, a bar and event spaces — a mix of modern hospitality with Ranthambore's natural character and cultural identity

built in. The design centres on a courtyard and pool acting almost like an oasis inside the wilderness, with indoor and outdoor spaces blended so guests stay connected to nature. Materials stay warm and natural — wood, stone-like surfaces, glass, earthy textiles — set against beige, cream and muted brown tones that keep the landscape as the visual focus, while warm lighting keeps things feeling relaxed rather than showy Shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3 Sterling Bagh, Sawai Madhopur — a contemporary resort built around a central courtyard and pool

Sterling Bagh doesn't try to reproduce palace architecture; instead it brings in Ranthambore's history through storytelling. Its Discovery Central space shares the legends of Raja Hammir Dev and the Trinetra Ganesh Temple, while the Sawai Restobar carries regional identity through Rajasthani cuisine. Here, "Crown" comes through heritage storytelling and craft, and "Canopy" through greenery and landscaped courtyards — a good example of a contemporary resort interpreting royal identity without copying palace architecture Shown in Table 1.

Primary Case Study 2: Aman-i-Khás, Ranthambore

Aman-i-Khás is a luxury tented camp near Ranthambore National Park, right at the edge of the Aravalli landscape. Rather than rebuilding a palace or fort, it draws on the Mughal tradition of travelling camps and royal pavilions — which is what makes it useful to the "Crown & Canopy" idea. Each large luxury tent works as its own pavilion, built around a high central canopy, with sleeping, bathing and dressing areas separated by draped cotton screens

instead of solid walls. The arrival sequence carries the same logic of shelter within landscape: guests move from an enclosed entry through a pathway that gradually opens onto views of the Aravalli hills — a compression-and-release rhythm that continues inside through open edges and outdoor seating. Materials stay simple throughout — cotton, timber, teak, leather and stone in soft, neutral tones — with minimal, functional furniture that reflects the practical spirit of a travelling camp. Luxury here comes from space, comfort and craftsmanship rather than anything ornamental Shown in Figure 4 - 6.

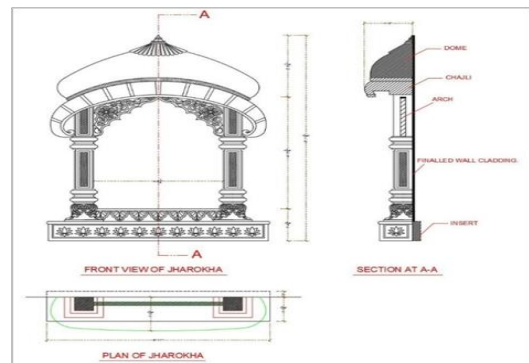


Figure 4 Jharokha detail (front view, section, and plan) illustrating the Mughal pavilion form referenced at Aman-i-Khás

The "Crown" shows up in the Mughal pavilion tradition and the grandeur of the canopy itself; the "Canopy" is the wilderness around it, brought in through open edges and framed views. The heritage reference leans Mughal rather than Rajput-specific, which leaves room for future interiors to draw more on local Rajasthan crafts — but even so, Aman-i-Khás makes a solid case for how royal heritage and wilderness can coexist purely through spatial design.



Figure 5 Tented pavilion exterior, set Aman



Figure 6 Outdoor fire-pit lounge, seating oriented toward the wilderness beyond

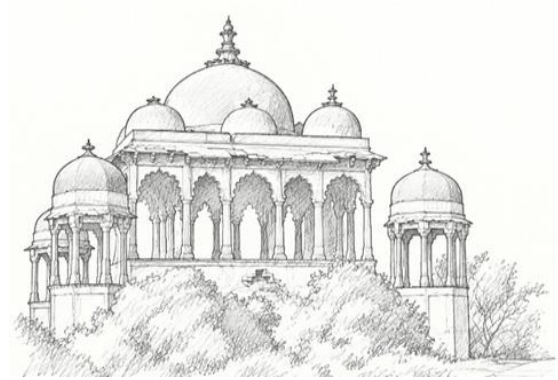


Figure 7 Architectural Elegance: A Timeless Heritage Sketch

4.1.Comparative Analysis

Table 1 Comparative analysis of the literature review against Sterling Bagh and Aman-i-Khás

Literature Review vs. Case Studies

Theme	Literature	Sterling Bagh	Aman-i-Khas
Regional form	Rupted, Framptian — relic forms with masking, not decoration	Courtyard as organizing device	Pavilion form itself as structure
Experience over enhancement	Pine & Gilmore — luxury = experience, not excess	Storytelling (Discovery General), regional cuisine	Arrival sequence, spatial craft
Biophilic integration	Keilert et al., Bawa — blur indoor/outdoor	Courtyard/pool blends landscape in	Open edges, screens, framed hill views
Heritage expression	Gop; heritage / luxury / nature studied separately	Rajput, via narrative	Mughal, via spatial typology

Materials and Craft as a Shared Language

Both properties also settle on a fairly restrained, natural material palette — wood, stone-like surfaces, cotton, earthy textiles — instead of the marble and heavy ornamentation usually tied to palace interiors. That choice supports a broader point: luxury today reads as increasingly experiential rather than purely material Shown in Figure 8 & 9.



Figure 8 Traditional Rajasthani wall art and built form near Ranthambore, reflecting the region's craft vocabulary

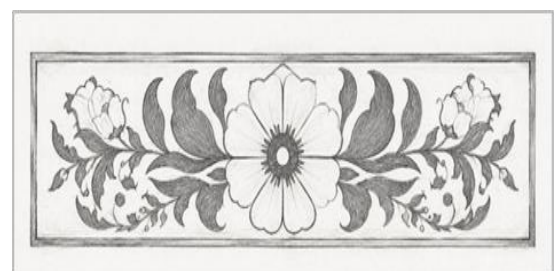


Figure 9 Traditional Rajasthani floral motif, an example of the decorative vocabulary discussed in this paper

5. Results and Discussion

5.1.Results

Heritage Expressed Through Space and Story, Not Ornament

In both case studies, royal heritage comes through less as applied decoration and more as spatial organisation and narrative. Sterling Bagh leans on a dedicated storytelling space, Discovery Central, plus a themed restaurant, to carry its royal legends; Aman-i-Khás instead expresses heritage through the form of the Mughal travelling pavilion itself, reworked into a modern tented suite. In neither case does heritage stop at arches or carved motifs — it's built into how guests actually move through and experience the space Shown in Figure 7.

Courtyards and Pavilions as Spatial Bridges

At both properties, a spatial device does most of the work of connecting built form to landscape — the central courtyard at Sterling Bagh, the canopy-led pavilion form at Aman-i-Khás. Both are rooted in older tradition, Rajput and Mughal respectively, which suggests these spatial types can be reused fairly flexibly in contemporary hospitality design as a way of holding heritage and wilderness together.

5.2.Discussion

Put side by side, Sterling Bagh and Aman-i-Khás back up this paper's central claim — that Ranthambore's hospitality interiors don't have to choose between "Crown" and "Canopy". Sterling Bagh gets there through place-specific storytelling paired with nature-facing planning; Aman-i-Khás gets there through a purely spatial reinterpretation of a royal building type, without leaning on decorative heritage vocabulary at all. Between them, they show heritage and wilderness can be integrated at very different points on the spectrum — from literal storytelling to abstract form — and still read as authentic. That said, both properties share a limitation: neither draws especially deep on Ranthambore's specifically Rajput or local craft vocabulary. Sterling Bagh's heritage references stay broadly regional rather than site-specific, and Aman-i-Khás leans Mughal rather than Rajput. So while the "Crown & Canopy" idea is already present in hospitality design near Ranthambore, there's still room for future interiors to root the "Crown" half more specifically in Ranthambore Fort's own history.

5.3.Considerations / Suggestions

- Use courtyard and pavilion forms as a bridge between built heritage and the wilderness around it, instead of treating the two as separate zones.
- Build in dedicated storytelling spaces, like Discovery Central, that tell Ranthambore Fort's specific history rather than relying only on decorative motifs.
- Root the material palette in local Rajasthani stone, timber and craft techniques, working with regional artisans instead of reaching for generic luxury finishes.
- Save heavier ornamentation — arches, jaalis,

carved brackets — for a few well-lit focal points rather than repeating it across every surface.

- Use draped, screened or semi-open partitions, the way Aman-i-Khás does, to carry the privacy logic of Rajput interiors into lighter, nature-facing structures.
- Treat luxury as a function of comfort, privacy and craftsmanship rather than scale or amount of decoration, in line with the experience-led model both case studies point to.

Conclusion

This research explored how Ranthambore's royal heritage and wilderness can be integrated into hospitality interiors. The study found that luxury does not require recreating a palace; it can emerge through spatial planning, natural materials, craftsmanship and storytelling rooted in the local context. Sterling Bagh and Aman-i-Khás demonstrate different approaches to combining heritage with nature. The proposed "Crown & Canopy" framework brings these identities together while highlighting the need to draw more specifically from Ranthambore's Rajput history and regional crafts.

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