

A Framework of Islamic Architecture: An Architectural Review of Four Studies

Muhammad Ismail Hasan^{1*)} , Asrul Mahjuddin Ressang Aminuddin²⁾ , Previari Umi
Pramesti¹⁾ 

¹ Vocational College, Universitas Diponegoro, Indonesia

² Faculty of Built Environment, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

*email korespondensi: hasan@live.undip.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to expand the critical indicators of Islamic architecture by synthesizing insights from four case studies presented in previous research. Employing a qualitative approach, the study analyzes diverse architectural contexts drawn from literature, selected for their variations in geographic location and functional typology within the domain of Islamic architecture. The first case examines the Prophet's Mosque, regarded as both an archetype of Islamic urban form and a foundational architectural model. The second focuses on traditional Arab houses, which reflect the early development of Islamic civilization and offer critical insights into residential architecture. The third case explores the traditional Islamic settlement of Majasto in Central Java, characterized by the spatial interplay among the mosque, cemetery, and residential areas. The final study investigates Muslim houses in Australia, analyzing how Muslim communities adapt domestic architecture to align with religious and cultural needs in a non-Muslim context. From these four cases, the study identifies four overarching principles of Islamic architecture: fostering faith through design, promoting environmentally sustainable practices, encouraging social connectedness, and preserving privacy. This research seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by proposing a comprehensive framework informed by varied architectural contexts.

Keywords: Islamic architecture; design fosters faith; green building; social connectedness; privacy

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1 INTRODUCTION

Islamic architecture serves as a manifestation of Muslim identity within the built environment. Rooted in Islamic thought, its foundations are derived from the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet, and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), with the primary aim of facilitating the daily practices of faith among Muslims (Mortada, 2003; Omer, 2010b). As such, Islamic architecture is inextricably linked to the rhythms of Muslim life, designed to support religious observance while constantly reinforcing the awareness of the Divine. In contemporary contexts, Islamic architecture is experiencing a resurgence, particularly in response to the growing global Muslim population. This has led to increased demand for housing that incorporates Islamic principles, presenting a significant opportunity for developers. The marketing of residential developments branded with Islamic concepts has proven effective in

attracting Muslim buyers. However, the authenticity and comprehensiveness of these concepts warrant critical examination, as many implementations fall short of embodying the holistic essence of Islamic architectural values (Perdana, 2021). This trend is considered a good influence on society, but the critical framework of Islamic architecture must be studied to avoid a misconception in the implementation.

In response to this concern, the present study seeks to construct a foundational framework of Islamic architecture by examining multiple scholarly perspectives, contextual settings, and functional applications. The first perspective derives from the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, as discussed in Spahic Omer's *History and Theory of Islamic Architecture*. The second explores traditional Arab housing, also presented in Omer's work, *Islam and Housing* (2010). The third perspective originates from a scholarly dialogue between an academic and a *mufassir*—a Qur'anic exegete—which forms part of a doctoral dissertation. The fourth is based on an empirical study of Muslim homes in Australia and their adaptive strategies in a non-Muslim context. Collectively, these diverse perspectives aim to enrich the discourse on Islamic architecture and contribute to a more comprehensive and contextually relevant understanding of its core principles.

2 METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach to critically examine four key sources that comprehensively articulate the concept of Islamic architecture. The selected literature includes works by Spahic Omer (2010, 2019), Indrawati (2016), and Zulkeplee Othman (2016). These sources were chosen for their depth, complexity, and holistic perspectives in presenting the principles of Islamic architecture across diverse contexts. In this research, the literature not only provides conceptual foundations but also serves as primary data. The analysis involves systematically interpreting the architectural principles presented in each work and synthesizing them through comparative examination to develop a more integrative understanding. Through this analytical process, the study identifies a comprehensive set of Islamic architectural principles derived from the four sources, offering a foundational framework for future research and design within the field of Islamic architecture.

3 THE FOUR KEY STUDIES

Following the collection of literature from the four key studies—Spahic Omer (2010, 2019), Indrawati (2016), and Zulkeplee Othman (2016)—this study critically analyzes how each source elaborates on Islamic architectural principles within the context of their respective study locations. The analysis first delineates the principles of Islamic architecture as articulated in each work, grounded in their specific case studies. These principles are then

comparatively discussed and synthesized, allowing for cross-referencing and thematic integration to formulate a more comprehensive understanding of Islamic architectural concepts.

3.1 LESSON LEARNT FROM PROPHET MOSQUE

Spahic Omer (2019) presents the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah as a foundational prototype of Islamic architecture, exemplifying the ideal form and function that a mosque should embody. Beyond serving as a place of worship, the Prophet's Mosque is conceptualized as an integral urban element capable of addressing the multifaceted needs of the Muslim community. Omer emphasizes that the mosque historically fulfilled a wide range of roles, including functioning as a center for education, governance, social welfare, rehabilitation, healthcare, and even recreation. This multifunctional character illustrates the holistic nature of Islamic architecture as envisioned during the Prophet's era. From this precedent, several key architectural principles emerge: functional, promoting social interaction, eco-friendly, maintaining cleanliness, up to date, considering safety, and comprehensive excellence. These principles provide a critical framework for understanding and applying Islamic architectural values in both historical and contemporary contexts.

3.2 LESSON LEARNT FROM ARABS HOUSES

The Middle East, as the birthplace of Islam and the region where it first flourished, holds significant importance in the study of Islamic architecture. Given that Islam is the dominant religion in this region, the built environment offers rich insights into how Islamic principles are deeply embedded in architectural practices. Building upon the earlier analysis of the Prophet's Mosque, Spahic Omer (2010) offers a complementary perspective by exploring the application of Islamic architectural values within the context of residential design. In his work *Islam and Housing*, Omer provides a nuanced discussion of the characteristics that define Islamic housing. These include the maintaining privacy, peaceful and Eco-friendly, fostering the Oneness of God, delightful, and the microcosm of culture and civilization. This perspective highlights the intimate relationship between faith, lifestyle, and domestic space in Islamic architectural thought.

3.3 Lesson Learnt from Majasto

A comprehensive discourse between Indrawati, a scholar from Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, and a *mufassir* (Qur'anic exegete), as documented in Indrawati et al. (2016), resulted in the articulation of three fundamental yet holistic indicators of Islamic architecture. These indicators are rooted in Islamic values and terminology, encompassing *hasan* (functionality), *thoyib* (goodness or appropriateness), and *jamil* (aesthetic

beauty). Together, these principles reflect a balanced integration of utility, ethical value, and visual harmony, offering a concise yet profound framework for evaluating architectural works within an Islamic context.

3.4 LESSON LEARNT FROM MUSLIM HOUSES IN AUSTRALIA

In his doctoral dissertation, Zulkeplee Othman (2016) conducted an in-depth investigation into the residential environments of Muslim immigrant communities in Australia, focusing on how these communities adapt and modify their homes to align with Islamic values and cultural practices. His study identified three core indicators of Islamic architecture within the context of diaspora housing: modesty, hospitality, and privacy. These principles reflect the essential socio-religious values that guide spatial organization and design choices in Muslim households, particularly in non-Muslim majority settings where adaptation is necessary to maintain cultural and religious identity.

4 RESULT

In this section, the study will provide a detailed elaboration of each identified indicator, supplemented with relevant theoretical frameworks, to offer a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Islamic architecture as derived from the four lesson-learned perspectives. This approach aims to contextualize and deepen the analysis of the core principles underpinning Islamic architectural practice.

4.1 ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES IN PROPHET MOSQUE

Functional: Optimizing building functionality to effectively serve its users is a central principle of this indicator. The Prophet's Mosque exemplifies a multifunctional architectural and urban complex, accommodating a wide range of activities beyond its primary religious purpose. It historically functioned not only as a place of worship but also as a center for governance, social welfare, healthcare, and leisure. This multifunctionality has been highlighted in numerous studies emphasizing the importance of maximizing the utility of mosque buildings (Armani, 2014; Baharudin & Ismail, 2016; Goodarzi, 2014; Khazaee, 2015; MahdiNejad et al., 2020; R. Othman, 2011), underscoring its role as a vital community hub within Islamic architectural tradition.

Promoting social interaction: A notable historical example of social interaction within the Prophet's Mosque is the fostering of fraternity between the two early Muslim communities: the migrants (*Muhajirun*) from Makkah and the helpers (*Ansar*) from Madinah. Such gatherings were fundamental to Muslim social life, serving as vital occasions for strengthening communal bonds and solidarity. The role of mosques as facilitators of social

connectedness is well documented in the literature, with several studies emphasizing their function as key spaces for community engagement and interaction (Alomar, 2000; Baharudin & Ismail, 2016). These findings highlight the mosque's integral role not only as a religious center but also as a social institution that nurtures cohesion and mutual support within Muslim societies.

Eco-friendly : As stewards of the Earth, humans bear the responsibility of maintaining a harmonious balance between society and the natural environment. Within the field of architecture, this responsibility translates into the essential implementation of sustainable design practices, a mandate that holds particular significance in Islamic architecture. Several studies have documented the incorporation of eco-friendly concepts in mosque design, highlighting efforts to align architectural practices with environmental sustainability and Islamic ethical imperatives (Bakri, 2018; Hidayat et al., 2018; Imriyanti, 2014; Taflaha, 2020). These findings underscore the importance of ecological consciousness as a fundamental component of contemporary Islamic architectural discourse.

Maintaining cleanliness: The concept of cleanliness holds an indispensable position within Islamic values, being regarded as an extension of *Iman*(faith), as emphasized in various Hadiths. Spahic Omer (2010b) further elaborates on this principle by citing a Hadith that highlights the provision of ample water within the mosque, which serves both practical and spiritual purposes by facilitating purification and maintaining hygiene. Additionally, the use of natural fragrances such as saffron or crocus is noted as a traditional practice to preserve the mosque's pleasant and pure atmosphere. These practices illustrate the profound integration of cleanliness as a vital element in the design and maintenance of Islamic religious spaces, reinforcing both physical and spiritual wellbeing.

Up-to-Date Adaptability: One of the distinctive principles of Islamic architecture highlighted by Spahic Omer is its inherent flexibility and openness to innovation. This principle emphasizes the importance of being receptive to contemporary developments, including the adoption of new technologies and materials—whether locally produced or sourced from abroad—in order to optimize building performance. Such adaptability reflects the dynamic nature of Islamic architecture, which encourages contextual responsiveness and continuous improvement while remaining rooted in core spiritual and ethical values.

Considering Safety: In his writings, Spahic Omer emphasizes that the principle of safety in Islamic architecture is closely aligned with the Islamic legal maxim '*la darar wa la dirar*', which translates as "do not inflict harm, nor reciprocate harm." This principle underscores the

ethical obligation to ensure that the built environment does not pose any risk or harm to its users or surrounding community. In architectural terms, this translates into thoughtful design practices that prioritize structural integrity, user wellbeing, and the prevention of both physical and psychological hazards.

Comprehensive Excellence: Spahic Omer further asserts that Islamic architecture, as exemplified by the Prophet's Mosque, should embody a spirit of *ihsan*—the pursuit of excellence. This principle entails striving for the highest standards of performance and quality across all phases of the architectural process, including pre-design, design, construction, and post-construction. It reflects a holistic commitment to integrity, functionality, and aesthetic value, aligning the physical outcome of the built environment with the ethical and spiritual aspirations of Islam.

4.2 LESSONS LEARNED FROM ARAB HOUSES

Maintaining Privacy: Spahic Omer (2010a) identifies privacy as a fundamental component of Islamic architecture, emphasizing the home as a protected sanctuary that ensures the physical, emotional, and spiritual security of its inhabitants. This emphasis on privacy is not merely cultural but deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, which advocate for the safeguarding of personal and family life from external intrusion. Numerous scholars support the view that privacy is a critical design consideration in Muslim residential architecture, influencing spatial layout, visual barriers, and the orientation of openings to uphold modesty and respect for individual boundaries (Alomari & Alqimaqche, 2013; Chinchilla, 2007; Dashti, 2016; Saifuddin et al., 2015).

Peaceful and Eco-Friendly: In Islamic thought, the home functions not only as a physical refuge for rest and comfort but also as a space that nurtures environmental responsibility and spiritual tranquility. It is envisioned as a place where individuals can live in harmony with nature while fulfilling their role as stewards (*khalifah*) of the Earth. This dual function of the house—as both a sanctuary and a site for practicing ecological consciousness—has been the focus of numerous studies exploring the integration of eco-friendly principles within Islamic residential design. These studies highlight the alignment between sustainability and Islamic values, reinforcing the importance of environmentally responsible architecture in Muslim contexts (Alomari & Alqimaqche, 2013; Apotsos, 2013; Bin & Rasdi, 2008; Binabid, 2017; Chinchilla, 2007; Dashti, 2016).

Fostering the Oneness of God (*Tawhid*): As articulated by Spahic Omer in his discussion of Arab houses, Islamic architecture—particularly in the residential context—serves as a sanctuary for the practice of faith and a medium through which the principle of *Tawhid*, the Oneness of God, is continuously reaffirmed. The home, in this regard, is not merely a functional

space but a spiritual environment designed to support the believer's constant awareness of and submission to God. Consequently, Muslim houses are expected to avoid design elements, symbols, or spatial arrangements that could compromise or detract from this core theological value. Numerous scholarly works reinforce this perspective, identifying *Tawhid* as a foundational concept in the theoretical framework of Islamic architecture, guiding both the form and function of the built environment (Alomari & Alqimaqche, 2013; Binabid, 2017; Dashti, 2016; Dewiyanti & Kusuma, 2012; Saifuddin et al., 2015).

Delightful: Spahic Omer (2010) describes the house in Islam as more than a physical shelter—it is a retreat, a sanctuary, and a space of rest, comfort, and leisure for its occupants. This understanding reflects the Islamic view that the home should offer not only functional adequacy but also emotional and psychological well-being. The creation of a pleasant and soothing domestic environment is therefore integral to Islamic architectural values, emphasizing the importance of beauty, tranquility, and harmony within residential spaces to support a balanced and fulfilling life.

Microcosm of Culture and Civilization: One of the most profound insights presented by Spahic Omer is the notion that the house in Islamic architecture serves as a microcosm of culture and the foundational unit of civilization. It is within the home that the values, beliefs, and traditions of a society are nurtured and transmitted, making it the initial environment where ethical formation and cultural continuity take root. The house functions not only as a private dwelling but also as a formative space for educating and cultivating both the family and the broader *ummah*. This perspective positions the home as a central site in the development and sustainability of Islamic civilization.

4.3 LESSON LEARNT FROM MAJASTO

The indicators of Islamic architecture proposed by Indrawati et al. (2016) emerged from an in-depth dialogue with a *mufassir* (Qur'anic exegete), leading to the articulation of a framework that views Islamic architecture as both an art and a science concerned with designing the built environment in alignment with Islamic values. This framework identifies three core indicators: **functionality (*hasan*)**, **goodness (*thoyyib*)**, and **aesthetics (*jamil*)**. Each of these indicators represents a dimension of architectural quality that reflects both practical and spiritual considerations within an Islamic worldview. The explanation of each indicator is elaborated as follows:

Functionality (*Hasan*): Functionality is regarded as the highest indicator in Indrawati's conceptualization of Islamic architecture. It is understood as a manifestation of humankind's divine mission on Earth as *khalifah* (vicegerent). This role directly connects humans to their Creator, Allah SWT, and entails the responsibility to uphold the Oneness of God (*Tawhid*) while

fostering moral integrity and ethical conduct. Thus, *hasan* encompasses not only practical utility but also the spiritual and moral dimensions essential to Islamic architectural practice. **Goodness (*Thoyib*):** Islamic architecture is expected to embody *thoyib*—goodness—by inviting and promoting benevolence, mercy (*rahmatan lil alamin*), and the holistic development of Islamic thought. This indicator comprises four key dimensions: universality, which reflects inclusiveness and broad applicability; rationality, emphasizing reasoned and thoughtful design; care, denoting attentiveness to human and environmental wellbeing; and the cultivation of civilization, highlighting architecture's role in shaping and sustaining societal progress. **Aesthetics (*Jamil*):** Aesthetic considerations are integral to both the architectural discipline and Islamic architectural principles. Indrawati's concept of *jamil* underscores that the aesthetic qualities of the built environment must eschew any elements of negativity or harm. Instead, aesthetics should actively support the principle of *Tawhid* by enhancing beauty, harmony, and spiritual tranquility, thereby contributing to an environment that uplifts its users and preserves moral and religious values.

4.4 Lesson Learnt from Muslim Houses in Australia

Zulkeplee Othman's study on Islamic architecture commenced with an extensive literature review to identify key architectural indicators—namely modesty, hospitality, and privacy—which were subsequently examined within the context of Muslim immigrant houses in Australia. The primary objective of this examination was to explore how these communities adapt and modify their residential environments to fulfill the requirements of a Muslim-friendly home (Z. Othman, 2016). Through this empirical investigation, Othman identified three central indicators that characterize Islamic architecture in this context: **privacy, modesty, and hospitality.**

Privacy: Privacy is a critical indicator in Islamic housing, essential for fostering a sense of tranquility and respite from external pressures, while simultaneously ensuring strong family cohesion. Privacy in this context is multifaceted, encompassing visual privacy, which prevents unauthorized or unlawful observation from outside; acoustical privacy, which minimizes the transmission of sound between interior and exterior spaces; and olfactory privacy, which controls the spread of odors between rooms or areas within the home. Together, these dimensions of privacy create a secure and serene domestic environment aligned with Islamic values. **Modesty:** The indicator of modesty reflects adherence to Islamic *Sharia* law and the cultivation of politeness and humility, aimed at preventing excessive exposure. Modesty in Islamic architecture is understood in two complementary aspects: external and internal modesty. External modesty involves the outward appearance and behavior, ensuring that the building and its occupants remain within the boundaries prescribed by *Sharia*. Internal modesty pertains to the provision of dedicated spaces for religious practice and reflection,

supporting the spiritual well-being of the household. **Hospitality:** Hospitality, as an indicator, emphasizes the importance of creating an inviting and welcoming atmosphere for guests. This includes the thoughtful design of appropriate gathering spaces that facilitate social interaction while strictly observing *Sharia* law. The architectural expression of hospitality thus balances openness and generosity with respect for religious guidelines and privacy considerations.

5 DISCUSSION

The present study reveals that indicators of Islamic architecture, as derived from diverse objects and geographical contexts, exhibit certain variations. Nonetheless, there are notable points of convergence among the indicators identified across the four studies. By synthesizing the findings from these distinct objects, this research develops a core conceptual framework of Islamic architecture. This integrated framework not only advances theoretical understanding but also serves as a practical tool for evaluating the implementation of Islamic architectural principles in various built environments. A visual representation of this synthesis is provided in Figure 1 below:

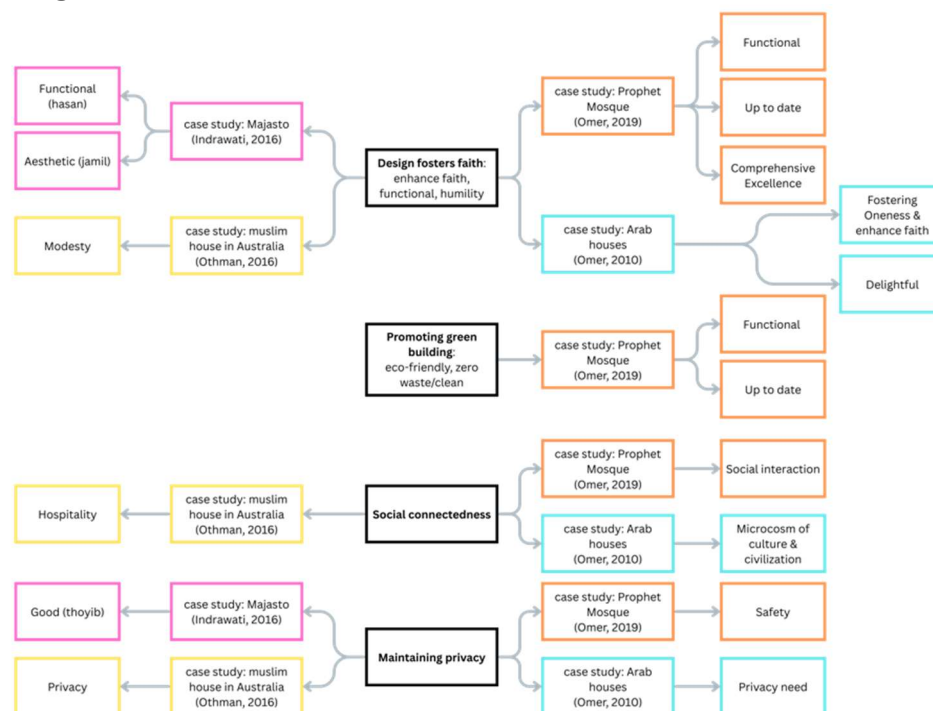


FIGURE 1. Synthesis of four studies regarding Islamic architecture (source: author, 2025)

5.1. DESIGN FOSTERS FAITH : ENHANCE FAITH, FUNCTIONAL, HUMILITY

The result of this study indicates that faith is the most matter element in humankind's everyday life. Any activity in life should refer to *ibadah* or performing faith as written in the Quran and exemplified in *Sunnah* or Prophet did. The four sources argued that any design in a

Muslim-built environment should foster their faith; any built environment should enhance the Muslim faith. Omer (2010) describes this indicator as fostering *Tawhid* or Oneness of God and enhancing faith by interpreting a house as a place to worship. Furthermore, Indrawati (2016) refers to this indicator (enhance faith) in functional that refers to functional (*hasan*). The meaning of functional (*hasan*) is that any built environment should accommodate the primary duty function of humankind, to worship Allah and implement the Quran and *Sunnah* in life. Another significant aspect of design fostering faith is functional. The function indicator is slightly different from what Indrawati (2016) proposed. Functional here means functionality, a spatial arrangement that accommodates the user's activity. Omer (2019) describes that functional is multi-purpose as reflected in the Prophet mosque that caters to various activities, not merely to praying activity but to governance, health, and welfare. Omer (2019) also describes the importance of a well-planned building, and consideration of up-to-date technology is required to strive the excellence; thus, the functionality of a building is achieved. In the Arab house case, Omer (2010) also explained that a house's functionality is essential to achieve, that is delightful to rest and unwind from outside pressure. In addition, it is also essential to look at humility as the indicator in the design that fosters faith. Humility describes as no extravagance in process design, construction process, and post-construction (Omer, 2019). Similarly, the two cases above, Majasto and Muslim houses in Australia, also indicate how humility in design describes how Islamic architecture should reflect. However, Islam encourages its believers to beautify their house with non-idolatry objects or artefacts, such as flowers or trees, decorated humbly with inexpensive material and no animal or human-like statues.

5.2. PROMOTING GREEN BUILDING: ECO-FRIENDLY, ZERO WASTE/CLEAN

The early 19th-century global issue of global warming led us to the green building concept, while Islamic thought in Quran and *Sunnah* has encouraged us to prevent ecological damage since far from that issue emerged. In this study, those two cases of Spahic Omer strengthen the concern of the green building concept. Implementing the green building concept will bring us to an eco-friendly and zero-waste building.

5.3. SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Maintaining social connectedness is inseparable from Muslim activity. Visiting family or colleagues' houses is strongly encouraged in Islamic thought as a value of *Sunnah*. Hence, properly hosting guests is mandatory in Islam and becomes a concern for spatiality in architecture. In Omer (2019), social connectedness in the Prophet mosque can be achieved

by providing various mosque functions and even leisure functions. Hence, a mosque can be enjoyed by anyone anytime, directly generating social connectedness. At the same time, Othman (2016) shared hospitality experiences in houses regarding receiving guests. Hospitality in hosting guests should not ignore the homeowner's privacy, and provide gender segregation if needed. Social connectedness practice is not limited to guests, colleagues, or friends; connectedness to a family member is also a priority. Omer (2010) explained that the house represents a microcosm of culture and civilization. He argues that the first milestone of education is figured in a house; therefore, a house should cater to bonding and communication between family members.

5.4. MAINTAINING PRIVACY

Both cases studies have explored the inseparable relationship between privacy and Islamic architecture (Indrawati et al., 2016; Omer, 2010a, 2019; Z. Othman, 2016). Four studies coincidentally assign privacy as a significant element when it comes to Islamic architecture. The critical feature of privacy in Islamic architecture is to secure the user physically or unphysically. In his study, Othman (2016) broaden specifically in privacy to three classifications, visual, acoustical, and olfactory. Hence, the term of privacy to secure the user is not merely about visual, hijab, and segregation, but acoustically and smell must be relook to comply the privacy.

6 CONCLUSION

This investigation aimed to assess the critical aspects of Islamic architecture from four objects by different scholars. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that the critical indicators set out in various case studies have led to the development of a comprehensive set of Islamic architecture indicators. The study has shown that both case studies complement each other, so this study comprehensively interprets Islamic architecture from different perspectives of objects and locations. The study has found that generally Islamic architecture can be investigated from these points: design fosters faith, promotes green building, social connectedness, and maintains privacy.

These findings contribute in several ways to our understanding of Islamic architecture and provide a basis for researchers and academicians in Islamic architecture. The generalizability of these results is subject to specific limitations. For instance, the basic interpretation of Islamic architecture from the Quran and *Sunnah* has not been investigated yet. Hence, it is considerably more work needs to be done to determine the interpretation holistically through the Quran and *Sunnah*.

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