

ALHAMBRA PALACE

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The Alhambra is an ancient palace, fortress and citadel located in Granada, Spain. The eighth-century-old site was named for the reddish walls and towers that surrounded the citadel: «al-qal'a al-hamra» in Arabic means «red fort» or «castle». It's the only surviving palatine city (a royal territorial centre) of the Islamic Golden Age and a remnant of the Nasrid Dynasty, the last Islamic kingdom in Western 1,730 meters (1 mile) of walls and thirty towers of varying size enclose this city within a city.



Access was restricted to four main gates. The Alhambra's nearly 26 acres include structures with three distinct purposes, a residence for the ruler and close family, the citadel, Alcazaba—barracks for the elite guard who were responsible for the safety of the complex, and an area called medina (or city), near the Puerta del Vino (Wine Gate), where court officials lived and worked.

The different parts of the complex are connected by paths, gardens and gates but each part of the complex could be blocked in the event of a threat. The exquisitely detailed structures with their highly ornate interior spaces and patios contrast with the plain walls of the fortress exterior.



Myrtle's patio



Lion's patio



Partal Palace

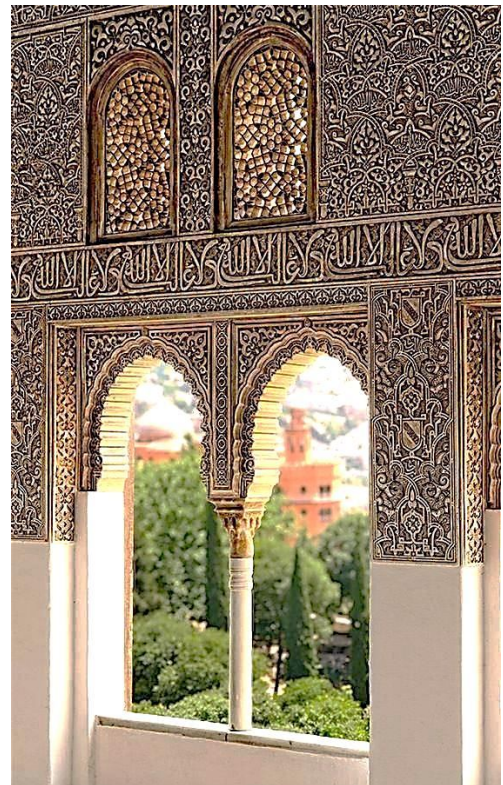
The Alhambra's most celebrated structures are the six original royal palaces. These are the Nasrids Palace, the Mashuar, the Komares Palace, the Palace of Lions, the Palace of Charles V, and the Partal Palace, each of which was built during 14th century and has its own unique structure. Structures of the palaces are adorned with magnificent patios: Mashuar patio (patio of the golden room) and Machuca patio in Mashuar Palace, Myrtle's patio (patio of the Pond) in Komares Palace, Lion's patio in the Palace of Lions. The most famous of Alhambra patios are Myrtle's and Lion's. Myrtle's is famous for the green myrtle hedge around the pond, Lion's – for the fountain of lions.

Interior and Exterior Re-imagined

To be sure, gardens and water fountains, canals, and pools are a recurring theme in construction across the Muslim dominion. Water is both practical and beautiful in architecture and in this respect the Alhambra and *Generalife* are no exception. But the Nasrid rulers of Granada made water integral. They brought the sound, sight and cooling qualities of water into close proximity, in gardens, courtyards, marble canals, and even directly indoors.

The Alhambra's architecture shares many characteristics with other examples of Islamic architecture, but is singular in the way it complicates the relationship between interior and exterior. Its buildings feature shaded patios and covered walkways that pass from well-lit interior spaces onto shaded courtyards and sun-filled gardens all enlivened by the reflection of water and intricately carved stucco decoration.

More profoundly however, this is a place to reflect. Given the beauty, care and detail found at the Alhambra, it is tempting to imagine that the Nasrids planned to remain here forever; it is ironic then to see throughout the complex in the carved stucco, the words, "...no conqueror, but God" left by those that had once conquered Granada, and would themselves be conquered. It is a testament to the Alhambra that the Catholic monarchs who besieged and ultimately took the city left this complex largely intact.



References:

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