

CHARACTERISTICS AND TRENDS OF CONTEMPORARY KOREAN RESIDENTIAL DESIGN SINCE 1960

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Contemporary Korean architecture and interior design have been strongly influenced by Western architecture since the 1960s, the starting point of Korean industrialization. Traditional Korean architecture and interior design have been rapidly supplanted by modern Western styles, using materials such as concrete, steel, and glass (S. J. Yoon, 1984). Trends and Characteristics of contemporary Korean residential design, however, have not been studied systematically up to now. This study attempted to survey the characteristics and changing trends of interior and exterior design of contemporary Korean houses since 1960, and to understand the impact of Western architecture and design. The study also examined the correlative expressive characteristics of interior and exterior design of contemporary Korean houses.

The study's specific objectives were:

1. To evaluate characteristics of the exterior design of modern Korean houses, including form, material, and dominant style.
2. To evaluate characteristics of the interior design, including architectural elements such as ceilings, walls, floors, doors, windows, and interior elements such as furniture, and other furnishings and ornaments.
3. To evaluate characteristics of the floor plan, including the relationship of the living room, dining room, and kitchen.
4. To evaluate the impact of Western architecture on Korean house design.

One constraint of this study was the limitation of the data. It was impossible to find photos of early 1960s residential design; therefore only late 1960s residential design was included in this study. Another constraint was that the study was limited to houses belonging to upper-middle or upper class owners where existing magazine photos, or major instrument of this study, were available.

Photos and floor plans were a major research instrument for a content-analysis approach, yielding quantitative data. The photographs, including exterior, interior, and floor plans were selected from magazines published since 1960. All photos of houses published in the 1960s and 1970s were used because the number of houses with interior and exterior views was extremely limited. For the analysis of the 1980s and 1990s, photos of houses appearing in more than two magazines were selected. The total number of houses selected was 101 (16 in the 1960s, 20 in the 1970s, 30 in the 1980s, and 35 in the 1990s). A design analysis checklist developed for the study was composed of three tables

to measure the physical characteristics, style, and the interior and exterior atmosphere of each house. Forms, finishes, and materials of roofs, exterior walls, windows, and verandas were included to analyze the physical exterior characteristics and forms, and materials of the ceilings, walls, floors, windows, furniture, furnishings and ornaments were included to analyze the interior spaces.

Studies of contemporary Western and Korean architectural trends, interior design, and industrial design were thoroughly reviewed, and Korean house designs were categorized into seven styles; modern, late-modern, post-modern, neo-modern (deconstructivism), neo-classic, Memphis, and Korean traditional. The seven tables describing the design characteristics of each style were used as a base for measuring design characteristics and for classifying an interior and exterior style for each house. This was followed by a validity evaluation made by design experts and professors.

The instruments mentioned above were pretested from December 5, 1997 to January 31, 1998 to determine whether the checklist provided useful data. As a result of the pre-test, the color analysis proved inadequate because the photos before 1980 were black and white, and the color of colored photos after 1980 could not be accurately evaluated because of photos and printing process differences; as a result color was excluded in the design analysis.

The study results were analyzed via frequency, percentage, and average. Since the number of late 1960's and 1970's houses was individually not enough for statistical analysis, these house group members were together for the analysis.

Several Important findings resulted:

1. The exterior design of contemporary Korean houses has been changing continuously in use of materials, roof form, and style. In the 1960s-1970s, the most dominant roof material was tile (33%), which was replaced by natural slate in the 1980s. But in the 1990s, asphalt shingle became the most common roof material, as the roofs adapted to new materials. As for roof form, the flat roof and the gable roof are the most popular in contemporary Korean houses. Several variations in roof form began to appear since the 1980s and culminated in mixed roof forms, for example putting flat and semi-circle roofs together in one house in the 1990s. This diversity reflects the international design trends of the 1990s. Modernism and late-modernism are the most common styles. Modernism, the most popular exterior design style in the 1960s-1970s has been replaced by late-modernism in the 1980s, a style which describes visual complexity through geometric transformations. Also, post-modernism and deconstructivism styles appear from the late 1980s, with deconstructivism spreading rapidly in Korean house exterior design.
2. The most common floor plans in contemporary Korean residential design are □ and L-shaped. This reveals that the □ or L-shaped floor plan, one of the major characteristics of traditional Korean houses, remains unchanged, a lasting tradition.

Openness among living rooms, dining rooms, and kitchens becomes more important in the 1990s, compared to the previous decades. After the 1980s, various relationships developing among these three areas reflects new lifestyle diversity and a preference for unpartitioned interior space.

3. Interior design of living rooms in contemporary Korean houses has undergone changes in ceiling, wall, and floor finishing materials, window treatment, types of closets, and use of lighting fixtures. Carpets and woods were the most common flooring materials in the 1960s-1970s, which have been since replaced by vinyl heating materials called 'Monoryum' and area rug. Modernism is the most common primary style in Korean living rooms from the 1960s to the present, with neo-classic and traditional Korean styles used as secondary living room styles. The changes from modernism to late-modernism, post-modernism, and neo-modernism shown in exterior design however do not appear in interior design.

The results show that modernism is the most favorite contemporary Korean residential design style. Traditional Korean design is characterized by unornamented minimal design, which also characterizes modernism, making modernism more easily accepted. In Korean residential design, the 1960s-1970s is a period of introducing contemporary western design, while the 1980s is a period of diversity, exploring ways toward harmony between Korean and Western styles, and the 1990s is a period of finally reconciling western styles and Korean residential design.