

## The Zaimovic Family House in Gornji Zovik Near Brcko - The Oldest House In Bosnia And Herzegovina

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### ABSTRACT

The Bosnian chardaklia is one of the most authentic achievements of traditional architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a residential building, it most fully reflects the housing culture of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian man, and his overall view of the world. The Bosnian house of čardaklija reached its classical stage of development in the 18th century, and the solutions reached will be maintained during the 19th and 20th centuries, in some places until today. Unlike the town hall (which in Bosnia and Herzegovina, similarly elsewhere in the world, was generated with more or less pronounced influences of other cultures), the Bosnian chardaklia house very directly reflects the natural environment of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the social environment (socio-economic relations, philosophy, religion, morals ...). Bosnia and Herzegovina is rich in forests, and this fact is directly reflected in the generation of the spatial concept of the house, its construction and materialization, where wood plays a key role. The application of wood in the creation of the Bosnian chardaklia house can be threatened by designing all its essential elements: foundations, walls, mezzanine structures, stairs, roofs, elements of openings (doors and windows) to surface treatment, both in the interior and exterior. The house of the Zaimovic family in Gornji Zovik near Brcko is an example of a Bosnian house of čardaklija whose owners are rich landowners (beys). The house presented here is part of a former residential complex consisting of several housing units: a house for male family members (selamluk), houses for female family members (haremluk-object presented here), guest houses (musafirhana), service houses and guards complex, fortified tower (watchtower). There are also a number of utilitarian facilities: two mills, a stable for horses, a well.

**Keywords:** Zaimovic family, Gornji Zovik, chardaklia house, konak, wood, sustainability.

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### INTRODUCTION

Bosnia and Herzegovina is situated in Southeast Europe, in an area where two different climatic zones meet (Mediterranean belt and continental climate zone), with a number of transitional forms (sub-Mediterranean climate, mountain climate, temperate-mountain climate), (Figure 1). The diversity of the climate is largely, along with the geographical location and global distribution of land and sea, the result of geomorphology, where the Dinaric Massif (stretching from northwest to southeast Bosnia and Herzegovina) creates a huge natural barrier between the Adriatic Sea in the south and the vast Pannonian Plain in the north. The High Dinaric Massif (average altitude of 1500-2200 m) is a natural “catcher” of precipitation (snow and rain). In its porous geological structure (limestone) there are huge accumulations of water which, and at its foot many natural sources of a large number of rivers [1, 2]



**Figure 1:** Geographical position of Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Source:** [http://www.visitmycountry.net/bosnia\\_herzegovina/bh/index.php/geografija/27-vmc/geografija/224-geografski-](http://www.visitmycountry.net/bosnia_herzegovina/bh/index.php/geografija/27-vmc/geografija/224-geografski-)

In addition to numerous streams and rivers, in Bosnia and Herzegovina there are many lakes (Boracko, Busko, Prokosko, Blidinje, Balkans, Satorsko, Deransko...), which themselves are becoming “shapers” of the climate in the local context.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is an area with a different geological structure. In the profile southwest - northeast, from the Adriatic Sea to the river Sava, the following paleogeographic-structural units can be distinguished:

- Dinaric carbonate platform (Outer Dinarides), mostly in the Adriatic basin and smaller in the Sava river basin,
- Bosnian flysch, sub-basin of the Sava river,
- Paleozoic-Triassic allochthonous formations that to a lesser extent belong to the Adriatic Sea basin and to a greater extent to the Sava River Basin. The basin of the Adriatic Sea includes the southwestern parts of the mountains Zec, Bitovnja and Bjelasnica (Neretva river basin). The Sava River Basin includes the Paleozoic and Triassic terrains of the Ključ, Sanski Most, Vranica, Igman and Bjelasnica mountains, the wider Sarajevo and Gorazde areas,
- Ophiolite zone which includes the mountains Ozren and Konjuh (typical non- karst terrain in which basic and ultrabasic rocks predominate), Sava sub-basin,
- Sava-Vardar zone (Tuzla and Posavina cantons), Sava sub-basin [2].
- Within these paleogeographic-structural units, postorogenic Oligocene, Neogene and Quaternary formations have been singled out in which significant water bodies of intergranular porosity have been formed.

Geographical position, relief, river watercourses and lakes formed the climate of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, along with the geological structure of the soil, generated the appearance of rich forests. Thus, wood was intended as one of the key building materials in traditional architecture [3, 4, 5, 6, 7].

In addition to wood, stone was (and still is) a very important building material that is always used in those elements of the structure of architectural structures where wood, due to its properties, can not meet the required requirements (part of the structure of the building in the country) [7, 8, 9 ].

Throughout its history, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a kind of “buffer zone” between different worlds (culture, religion, ideology...). For this reason, the culture of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina is complex, with a more or less visible influence of cultures (from the East and from the West) [10, 11, 12].

The natural and social environment determined the entire material and spiritual culture of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which the house of čardaklija is one of its most authentic expressions [9].

### **The location**

The house of the Zaimovic family in Gornji Zovik near Brcko, known as Semsi-beg's konak or Hajri-beg's konak, is located on flat terrain, on a huge private estate of the famous beg Zaimovic family, (Geographical coordinates: 44°45'30.24"N, 18°42'35.38" E, Elevation: 192 m. Source: Google Earth) [13, 14], (Figure 2). A number of auxiliary facilities for leisure were built next to the house, as well as spacious orchards of pears, apples, plums, cherries, walnuts ... The house was built in 1563, and it is the oldest Bosnian house čardaklija that has been preserved to this day<sup>1</sup>. This house was originally built to house the female members of the Zaimovic family, while the male family members lived in another house as part of the residential complex. A special facility (musafirhana) was built for the guests. There was also a defense tower within the residential complex (the second tower of the Zaimovic family was in Bijela near Brcko). The tower was built by Osman-beg Zaimovic, the ancestor of the Brcko Bey family Zaimovic<sup>2</sup>. Above the entrance to the tower was written a chronogram (tarih) in the Ottoman-Turkish language, which, translated into Bosnian, reads:

- Everything has been decorated with this castle,

<sup>1</sup> The author visited and filmed this house in detail on July 19, 2016. The owner of the facility, Mr. Mehmed Zaimović (born in 1949), assisted him in filming. The author received the following information from Mr. Zaimovic:

- The building was built in 1563,
- Mr. Mehmed Zaimovic's grandfather (1949), Mehmed, was a fugitive (landowner), but he joined the partisan movement 1941-1945.
- The great-grandfather of Mr. Mehmed Zaimovic was a fugitive (landowner) with 10000 dunums (10 km<sup>2</sup>) of arable land and forest. It also had two towers, one in Gornji Zovik and one in Bijela. He was a member of the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1910 (Mr. Mehmed Zaimovic keeps a photograph of his great-

grandfather in this house).

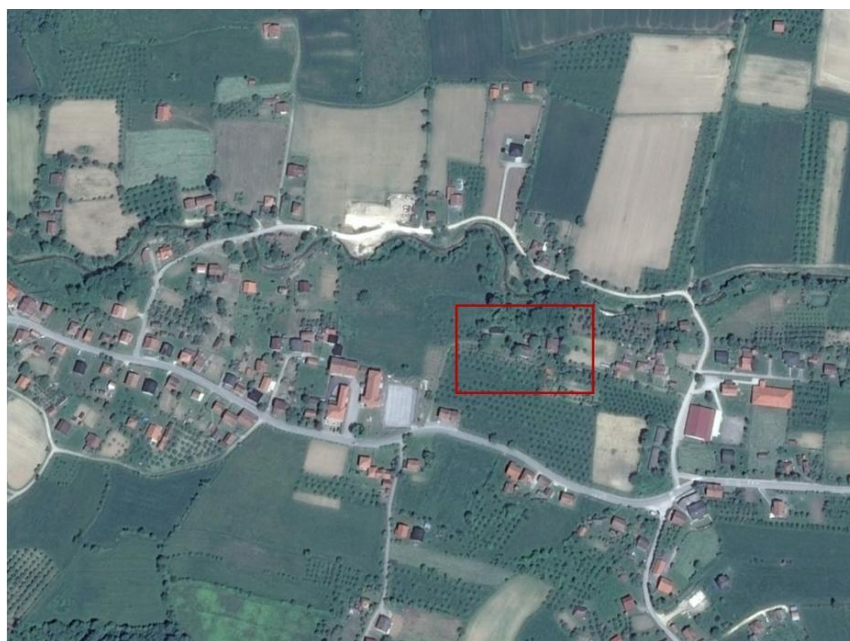
- (On the beys Zaimovic, see more in: Kresevljakovic, H., Selected Works, Book II, Veselin Maslesa, Sarajevo 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Josip Eugen Tomic (1843-1906) wrote about the Zaimovic family tower in Gornji Zovik in his novel “Dragon of Bosnia”, which tells about the great and tragic love of Husein-beg Gradasevic and Mejra, the daughter of Rustem-beg Zaimovic.

- This guest, pleasantly and in peace, comes,
- Whoever comes, welcome.

The tower was demolished in the 1930s, and a Catholic church was built of its carved stone in the village of Boce near Brcko.

They stayed in this konak in the summer, and in the winter in Brcko, the settlement of Kolobara near the Kantardžić fountain. On the property next to the konak, there have always been (until today) workers who serviced the property.



**Figure 2:** The Zaimovic family house in Gornji Zovik near Brcko. The location  
**Source:** Google Earth, accessed 10.25.2021.

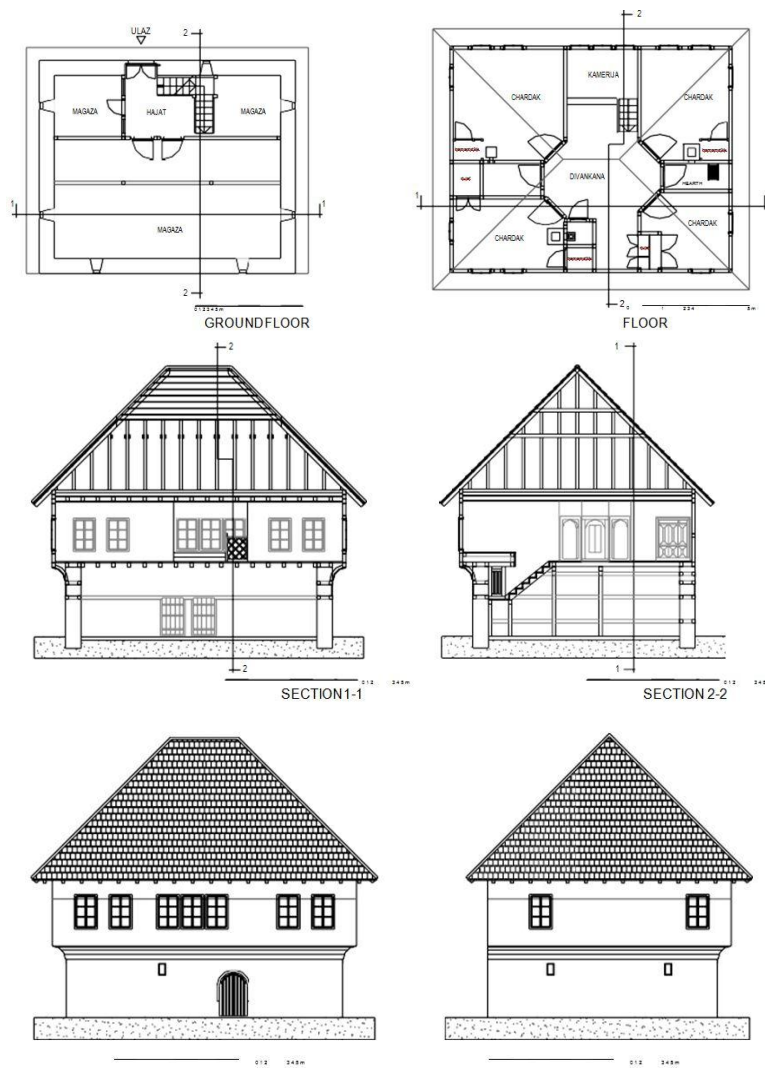
## THE ZAIMOVIC FAMILY

The bey's family Zaimovic from Brcko and Tuzla originates from the medieval royal family Altomanovic [14]. Nikola Altomanovic (1348-1376) was the master of Uzice and the Uzice region, and his brother Cvjetko Altomanovic was the master of the region of Usora and Soli. With the arrival of the Ottomans in Bosnia, the Altomanovići converted to Islam. Three families come from Cvjetko Altomanovic: Tuzlapase (Tuzlici), Muratbegovici and Zaimovici. With the Sultan's charter (beret), the Zaimovics received the status of a bey, and thus the land holdings (spahiluke) in Bosanska Posavina. These estates were most likely acquired in the period 1550-1560, since the tower with a chimney (court) was built in 1563. The estates were ziyamets (military land estates) which were awarded only to prominent military leaders for their war merits. At the beginning of the 19th century, some representatives of the Zaimovic family from Zovik went to Tuzla, Brcko and some other places. The Zaimovics from Zovik were called Zovicani. The Zaimovic family branch from Zovik and Rahic played a major historical role in the political, cultural and commercial life of Bosnia during the 19th and 20th centuries, mostly thanks to Semsibeg Zaimovic, son of Emin-beg. Six Zaimovic families from Zovik had large land holdings in the area of northeastern Bosnia, mostly in the districts of Brcko and Bijeljina. Thus, Semsibeg, Emin-beg, Esref and Dzemil, daughters of Osman-beg Zaimovic, Mehmed-beg and Zaim-beg had a total of 8589,298 dunums (0.89 ha) of land, of which 5664.32 dunums (0.56 ha) of arable land and 2924,988 dunums (0.29 ha) of uncultivated land and forest [14]. These estates were located in Mrtvice, Zovik Gornji, Zovik Kalajdzija, Palanka, Rahic Gornji, Brezovo Polje, Razljevo, Zovik Donji, Kozjak, Vrsani and Dragunj. These estates of the Bey Zaimovic family began to fall apart, first in 1878, then in 1918, and finally with the confiscation of property with the arrival of the communist regime. The current owner of this konak, Mehmed Zaimovic (1949), is the son of Hajri-beg Zaimović, who was named after his grandfather Mehmed-beg. Konak inherited after the death (March 7, 1983) of his father Hajri-beg and mother Ajša (she died in April 1993).

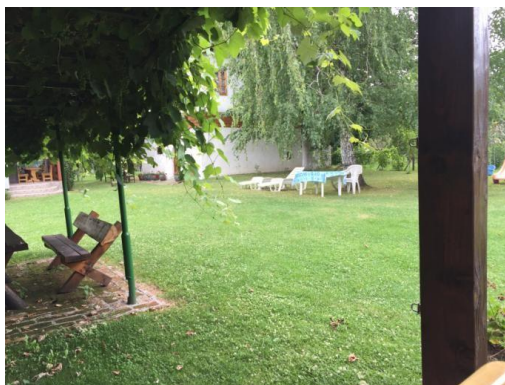
According to the current owner of the konak, Mehmed Zaimovic, the male part of the konak and musfirhan were burned in a fire caused by children in careless play. The stone from the tower (16x16 meters, 22 meters high) was donated by his grandfather for the construction of a Catholic church in Boc.

**Spatial-form characteristics of the house**

The house of the Zaimovic family in Gornji Zovik near Brcko, according to the disposition of its horizontal plans, belongs to the central type of the Bosnian house of chardaklia, which is developed vertically through the (high) ground floor and first floor (Figures 3 - 6).



**Figure 3:** House of the Zaimovic family in Gornji Zovik near Brcko. Disposition  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)



**Figure 4:** Spacious private park next to the house

Source: Autor (07.22.2016.)



**Figure 5:** View of the house from the southeast (left), northwest (middle) and south (right)  
Source: Autor (07.22.2016.)



**Figure 6:** In front of the front door, a stone has been preserved from the time it was mounted on a horse  
Source: Autor (07.22.2016.)

On the ground floor of the house there is an entrance hall with a staircase to the first floor, and the space of the house storage. The walls of the basement are made of roughly worked stone (about 80 cm thick), with the exterior plastered and whitewashed, while the interior surfaces are in nature (Figure 7).





**Figure 7:** Ground floor space  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)

Staircase (basamaci). Since the height of the ground floor is large, the staircase is made as a two-legged one, with a landing at the point of breaking the direction of its floor plan in the form of the letter “L”.

The staircase leads to the floor level, first to the wide space of the divanhana, which is richly lit by natural light thanks to a series of windows (Figure 8).



**Figure 8:** Wooden staircase (basamaci) ground-floor  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)

Divanhana (sofa). Similar to other Bosnian chardaklia houses that are of the central solution type, the Zaimovic family house in Gornji Zovik near Brcko has a divanhana in which a part called “gornja divanhana” (“upper sofa”) and a part “donja divanhana” (“lower sofa”) are separated (Figure 9). An annex with toilets was built on the area of the “lower sofa” (Figure 10), in the original design of this house, which was removed in one of the numerous reconstructions and adaptations of the building. The floor of the “upper sofa” is raised by two steps above the floor of the rest of the sofa, which emphasizes the importance of this part of the house (Figure 9).





**Figure 9:** Arrangement of the space of the “upper sofa”  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)



**Figure 10:** Arrangement of the space of the “lower sofa”  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)

Chardaks (Porches). At the floor level, there are four balconies, one on each corner of the base of the floor. Their size is different, but each of them is accessed through a door set in a wall that coincides with the adjacent walls of the loggia at an angle of 135° (Figures 11, 12, 13, 14).

Authentic bathrooms (hamamdzici) and brick stoves for space heating are arranged in three balconies. In this case, the heating of the furnace is from the narrow space next to the loggia, and not from the space of the loggia in which the furnace is placed (Figures 11, 12).



**Figure 11:** View from the sofa into the space of the “big chardak” through the open door  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)



**Figure 12:** View from the divanhana towards the entrances to the chardak  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)



**Figure 13:** Arrangement of a small chardak  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)



**Figure 14:** Arrangement of the chardak in the northeast corner of the floor: fireplace, hamamdzik (bathroom), chest of drawers.  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)

Service areas. In addition to the main rooms on the first floor of the house, balconies and sofas, there are service

rooms, rooms for preparing hot water (culhani) and an open fireplace for preparing meals (Figure 15). One culhan is arranged between two chardaks while the other culhan is arranged next to one of the four chardaks. The open fireplace is arranged between two chardaks. All rooms upstairs are accessed from the central hall, “upper” and “lower” sofa.



**Figure 15:** Room with fireplace (upstairs)  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)

### CONSTRUCTION AND MATERIALIZATION

**Walls.** The ground floor wall is built of stone, 80 cm thick, with a binder made of lime mortar and molten lead in some of its segments. At a distance of about 1 to 1.5 meters along the height of the wall, wooden oak beams were inserted, two at the same height of the wall, interconnected by short wooden beams. These beams (hatules) played the role of modern cerclages which were supposed to ensure the shear of the wall due to possible subsidence of the terrain [15]. In the walls of the ground floor, small openings (former loopholes) have been preserved to this day, which are now closed by small glazed windows. Today, they serve as niches (dulafi) or niches for storing cut objects or souvenirs (Figure 16).



**Figure 16:** Construction and materialization of the ground floor wall  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)

The walls of the first floor are made of wooden skeletal (bondruk) with a brick filling (which was replaced by brick in the reconstruction in 2008-2010).

**Inter floor construction.** The inter floor constructions ground-floor and floor-attic are made of oak beams with massive wooden floors (Figure 17). The inter floor structure towards the attic has a compacted layer of clay with shavings of straw and chaff (which improves the heat-insulating properties of the floor-attic boundary, both in summer and winter) [15].



**Figure 17:** Structural assembly of the house visible from the ground floor  
**Source:** Author (07.22.2016.)

Roof construction. The roof of the house is four-pitched, of medium slope (about 45°), with a construction of the type “horns with a crucifix”. The original roof construction has been preserved (Figure 18). The roof covering is pepper-tile (known here as “hoof” tile – “kopitaš”).



**Figure 18:** Roof construction  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)

Surface treatment. All interior surfaces of the space (floors, walls and ceilings) are treated in natural materials, in accordance with the purpose of a particular space.

The floor covering of the ground floor is made of stone laid in sand, covered with cement mortar. This is fully in line with the purpose of the ground floor space as a place of intensive communications and storage for roughage. Similarly, the floor covering in the open fireplace on the first floor was made of stone laid in a layer of sand, among other things, as an adequate solution for proto-fire reasons. The floor covering in the upstairs rooms (verandas and sofas) was primarily made as a ship's wooden floor which, due to the need for a feeling of warmth, was covered with woolen rugs of domestic handwork (Figure 19).



**Figure 19:** Floor covering on the ground floor (“magaze”) are stone slabs (left) and floor covering in the first floor (chardaks and sofas)

**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)

The ceiling at the ground floor level is a sub-floor of the ground-floor mezzanine structure, ie wooden beams and a floor covering made of solid oak planks made by carving (Figure 20).



**Figure 20:** Preserved original mezzanine structure ground floor-first floor  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)

The ceilings in all rooms of the floor are made of wood (bottles) of high craft-technical and architectural-artistic value (Figure 21).



**Figure 21:** Wooden ceiling in the sofa space  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)

The interior wall surfaces on the ground floor are treated in a natural version of the stone wall where the joints between the stones are treated in lime mortar. The interior wall surfaces on the first floor were made of lime mortar and painted with lime milk. This treatment suggests good lighting, freshness and cleanliness of the space. Framed photographs depicting the history of the Zaimovic family were applied to the wall surfaces of the divanhana space (Figure 22).



**Figure 22:** On the wall in the “upper divanhana” is a photograph of members of the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1910, whose member was the great- grandfather of Mr. Mehmed Zaimovic (1949), the current owner of the house

**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)

### DOORS AND WINDOWS

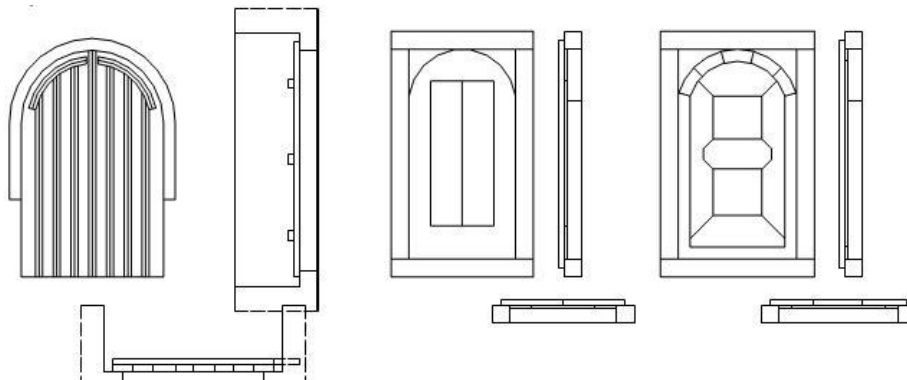
The front door is authentic, made of oak. An interesting system for securing the front door, made of solid oak crossbar (mandal) (Figure 23). The door lock is made of wrought iron. The exterior carpentry was originally made of linden wood, and was in operation until 2008 when it was replaced by new carpentry.



**Figure 23:** Entrance door to the house. Entrance door closing mechanism (wooden beam-mandal)

**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)

The interior carpentry has been preserved in its original design and materialization, made of white linden wood (Figures 24-27).



**Figure 24:** Archaic door design

**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)



**Figure 25:** Original pantry door (accessed from the stairwell landing)  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)

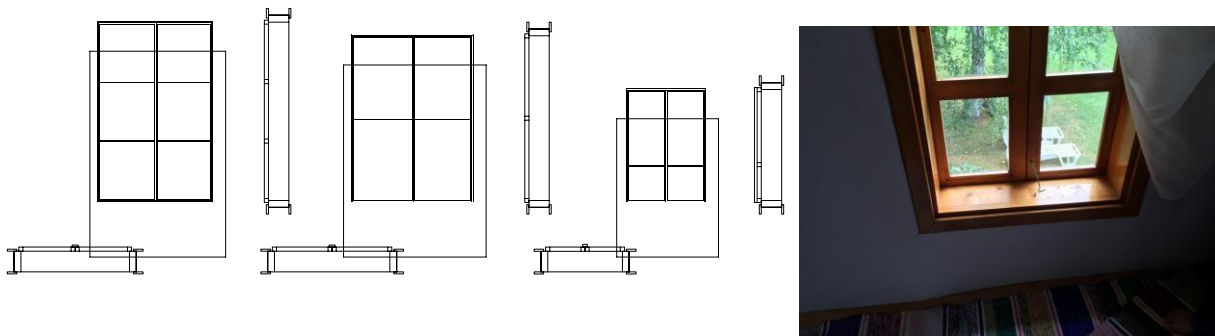


**Figure 26:** Doors on the chardaks and in the kitchen area (mutvak)  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)



**Figure 27:** Door on one of the balconies (left) and on the room with the fireplace (right)  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)

The windows are single whose wings are divided into smaller panes. They are made of maple wood (Figure 28).



**Figure 28:** Different window design solutions (left) and view through the window in a large chardak (right)  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)

### SPACE EQUIPMENT

In a suitable place, in all rooms of the house, one can see useful objects and technical devices from various time epochs that were used in this house (Figures 29-35).



**Figure 29:** In some parts of the house, original utensils whose age is longer than the age of the house itself are kept  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)



**Figure 30:** Fireplace and hamamdzik in a small chardak  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)



**Figure 31:** Bathroom (hamamdzik) in a small chardak (left) and a room next to a small chardak (culhan) from where a fireplace was lit and water for a hamamdzik was heated  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)



**Figure 32:** Wardrobe in a small chardak (left) and stove and hammam in a large chardak (right)  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)



**Figure 33:** Hammam in a large chardak (left) and brazier in one of the chardak (right)  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)



**Figure 34:** Equipment of the space of one of the chardak (chardak in the southeast corner of the floor)  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)



**Figure 35:** Some original utility items (in the sofa area)  
**Source:** Autor (07.22.2016.)

### **TODAY'S CONDITION AND PURPOSE OF THE HOUSE**

Of all the Bosnian chardaklia houses, the house of the Zaimovic family in Gornji Zovik near Brcko is the best preserved in its authenticity. Its construction, opening elements, original surface treatment, space equipment have been preserved.

The greatest credit for this condition of the house goes to its current owner, Mr. Mehmed Zaimovic, who, as a highly educated man, is fully aware of the invaluable value of this house, which he inherited from his ancestors, in the chain since 1563, when the house was built. The house was renovated in the period 2008-2010.

The preservation of this house should encourage individuals and institutions throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina to understand the indigenous values of tangible and intangible culture, to preserve them and make them available to the world public, because in that way the world will become richer and more beautiful.

### **CONCLUSION**

Throughout its history, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a „special state“. „Trapped“ between East and West, North and South (Europe and the World as a whole), was a kind of „buffer zone“ between typical European regions in which different influences „collided“: geopolitical, religious, cultural. It was, at the same time, her wealth and difficult destiny: wealth - since diversity always brought new quality, great strides into the future, and difficult destiny - since diversity in the circumstances of wars (which were common here) generated meaningless sacrifices „The other one“ and material destruction.

The house of the Zaimovic family in Gornji Zovik near Brcko is precisely the symbol and paradigm of such Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its first builders were nobles from the (Serbian) family Altomanovic (Nikola Altomanovic, 1348-1376), who, with the arrival of the Ottoman Empire in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1463) converted to Islam. The house itself is located in an area where the majority of the population is Catholic (Croat). The spatial concept of the house is arranged according to the patterns of „oriental city house“, modeled on the housing estates of rich families in the Ottoman Empire, which includes two parts of a unique housing complex: public (selamluk) and intimate-family (haremluk). The house of the Zaimović family presented here is part of a once large residential complex - the harem.

Although this house has been devastated several times during its long existence, its renovation follows its originality, both in terms of overall physical structure and its furniture and equipment. Its value is extremely great: historical, cultural and symbolic.

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