

## Dwelling experience in the traditional Javanese Joglo type house: A phenomenological study

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article history:</i> Received November 10, 2025 Received in revised form Dec. 15, 2025 Accepted December 31, 2025 Available online March 01, 2026</p> <p><i>Keywords:</i> Dwelling experience Joglo Phenomenological inquiry Traditional Javanese</p> <p><b>*Corresponding author:</b> Josephine Roosandriantini Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan Bandung, Indonesia Email: <a href="mailto:joseproo.psy@gmail.com">joseproo.psy@gmail.com</a> ORCID: <a href="https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5679-4191">https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5679-4191</a></p>	<p><i>This research examines lived experiences and interpretations of dwelling in traditional Javanese Joglo houses through a phenomenological perspective. The Joglo represents Javanese architectural traditions embedded with cultural, social, and spiritual values, expressing cosmological principles and social stratification through its spatial arrangement. Although increasingly marginalized by modernization and urban development, the Joglo continues to hold cultural significance for communities maintaining ancestral traditions. The study seeks to reveal residents' subjective experiences and the meanings they assign to everyday life within a Joglo, emphasizing two central phenomenological dimensions: the textural dimension, referring to what is experienced, and the structural dimension, describing how experience is lived. Using in-depth interviews with residents from three generational groups, the research documents narratives of dwelling within this environment. The findings demonstrate that the Joglo integrates cultural, spiritual, and material dimensions of architecture, influencing residents' lifestyles and practices. The house is understood not only as a built form, but as a symbolic setting filled with values and significance. This study contributes to architectural preservation discourse in Indonesia by emphasizing the balanced relationship among people, space, and culture within Javanese society.</i></p>

### Introduction

Contemporary architectural discourse increasingly questions the long-established dominance of visually oriented design approaches. Scholars such as Juhani Pallasmaa criticize modern architecture for frequently overlooking the multisensory and embodied dimensions of human experience, which can lead to a sense of detachment from the built environment (Pallasmaa 2012; Sofian 2019). In contrast, traditional architecture, including the Javanese Joglo house, demonstrates a multisensory framework deeply embedded in cultural values. The Joglo functions not only as a

place of residence but also as a manifestation of cosmology, spirituality, and social relationships, embodying the principle of harmony among humans, nature, and the cosmos (Michelle and Purbadi 2021). Nevertheless, processes of modernization, urban expansion, and lifestyle standardization have increasingly marginalized the Joglo, both in contemporary construction practices and in the cultural imagination of younger generations (Aulia and Siregar 2023), thereby endangering the continuity of affective and symbolic spatial experiences (Fadli and Mulyadi 2021; Hadi and Pratama 2023).

Accordingly, this study reexamines how the Joglo is lived in and interpreted by its inhabitants



through a phenomenological approach that prioritizes direct experience and multisensory engagement. The research addresses several questions: How do inhabitants' multisensory experiences inform their perception and understanding of space? In what ways do interactions among physical, cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions shape the attribution of meaning to the house? And how can the Joglo continue to sustain cultural, spiritual, and emotional values within contemporary Javanese society?

The literature review underscores the significance of sensory and embodied experience in architectural understanding. Spatial perception is inherently connected to the body as the primary medium of experience (Klein 2022), while bodily responses to architectural elements influence perception within a dynamic spatial context (Hernandez and Sharma 2021). Dwelling is also understood as a spiritual experience, positioning the home as a central locus of life (Rochman 2023). Moreover, spatial qualities affect emotional states (Wang and Li 2023), and personal narratives and memory play a crucial role in forming emotional attachment to place (Morris 2023).

Within the local context, the Joglo is recognized as a cultural embodiment containing complex Javanese symbolic systems (Priyotomo 1984). Social transformations have altered both its physical form and its meanings (Waterson 1990), while younger generations have become increasingly disconnected from this architectural heritage (Hafiz 2015; Soekarto 2018). Architectural elements such as the saka guru and tumpang sari serve as visual and cultural markers that shape spatial experience (Budiwiyanto 2023). Spaces including the pendopo and senthong function as repositories of memory and emotional attachment (Margono et al. 2020). Phenomenological foundations derived from (Husserl 1931; Norberg-Schulz 1980), alongside an emphasis on cultural context (Rapoport 1969; Gelebet 1986), reinforce this theoretical framework. Collectively, the literature supports an understanding of the Joglo as a lived space experienced holistically, as a form of living cultural heritage that continues to hold relevance (Salura and Fauzy 2012).

At a broader scale, modernity has increasingly transformed the home into a commodity (Frampton 2020), while local preservation initiatives often remain confined to physical

conservation and museumification strategies (Wijaya and Asri 2022). This condition risks eroding the intangible values embedded in architectural works (Nurgandarum and Sari 2023). A phenomenological approach helps bridge this gap by recognizing inhabitants' subjective experiences as a legitimate source of knowledge, enabling an exploration of how traditional spaces are continually inhabited and reinterpreted over time (Kusumawardhani and Setiadi 2024). The findings of this study are expected to offer a holistic and human-centered perspective for sustainable conservation, in which experiential and cultural dimensions are valued alongside physical attributes.

Based on this framework, the objectives of this study are: (1) to identify the dimensions of inhabitants' subjective experiences of the Joglo as a multisensory spatial environment; (2) to examine the formation of cultural, spiritual, and emotional meanings through interactions between inhabitants and traditional architectural elements; and (3) to contribute to discussions on traditional architectural preservation by emphasizing the significance of lived experience and cultural continuity.

The spatial structure of the traditional Javanese Joglo house

The architectural form of the traditional Javanese Joglo house is defined by an arrangement of primary components, each possessing a distinct function, spatial significance, and multilayered symbolic interpretation. This spatial segmentation not only represents the traditional lifestyle of Javanese society, which is firmly grounded in inherited cultural practices, but also serves to strengthen the social hierarchy and spiritual principles embedded within the overall spatial order (figure 1).

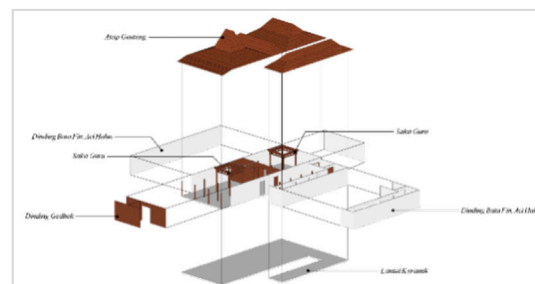


Figure 1. Prototype elevation and spatial structure of the traditional Javanese Joglo house

The functions and symbolic interpretations associated with the main elements of the traditional Javanese Joglo house are outlined as follows (table 1):

**Table 1.** The functions and symbolic meanings of the principal elements of the traditional Javanese Joglo house

No	Main elements of the Traditional Javanese House	Function	Symbolic meaning
1	Pendopo: An open pavilion located at the front of the house	a. Ceremonial area: utilized for welcoming guests, conducting traditional rituals, and organizing family gatherings b. Social activities: functions as a communal space for assembly and interaction among family members and the surrounding community	a. a symbol of hospitality and openness. b. a marker of social status.
2	Pringgitan: A transitional space between the pendopo and the dalem agung (rear house)	a. Waiting area: provides space for guests prior to entering the inner house ( <i>dalem agung</i> ) b. Performance area: designated for <i>wayang</i> (traditional shadow puppet) performances	a. connector between public and private spaces. b. a venue for public activities and art-cultural events
3	Dalem Agung (Omah Mburi): The core and most private, sacred area of the traditional Javanese house	a. Family space: serves as the main area for daily family interaction b. Sleeping quarters: the <i>senhong</i> space commonly functions as the parents' bedroom c. Primary domestic activities	a. Intimacy and Family: represents the core of familial life b. Spirituality: functions as the spiritual center of the house, used for religious activities and meditation
4	Senhong: A sacred space located within the Dalem Agung	a. Sacred function: used for meditation and for storing heirlooms or sacred objects b. Sleeping area: utilized as bedrooms for family members ( <i>senhong kiwo</i> and <i>senhong tengen</i> —left and right chambers)	a. Purity and Serenity: regarded as the dwelling place of ancestral spirits or the storage site of heirlooms b. Prosperity: symbolizes the family's fortune and well-being

No	Main elements of the Traditional Javanese House	Function	Symbolic meaning
5	Gandhok: Ancillary buildings flanking the right and left sides of the Dalem Agung	Multipurpose use: functions as additional bedrooms, storage spaces, or work areas	a. Privacy: serves as an additional private area for family members b. Protection and Completeness: complements and reinforces the structural integrity of the house
6	Pawon: The kitchen area and adjacent domestic spaces	a. Cooking area: allocated for food preparation activities b. Gathering space: serves as an informal meeting place for family members and neighbors during communal cooking	a. Abundance and Warmth: regarded as the life source of the family b. Continuity: reflects the intergenerational transmission of culinary traditions and daily life practices

The spatial organization of the Joglo house embodies the value system of Javanese society, which prioritizes order, harmony, and the interrelationship between space, human activity, and the natural environment. In the context of the traditional Javanese dwelling, exterior spaces carry functional, social, and symbolic significance that is equally vital as that of interior areas. The outdoor zones act as an extension of the interior, facilitating natural light, cross-ventilation, and landscape composition while also mediating social interaction between residents, neighbors, and the wider community. Activities such as resting, sweeping the courtyard, socializing with neighbors, or performing traditional ceremonies, such as *selamatan* for family members or communal events, commonly take place in the outdoor spaces surrounding the house. Large-scale ceremonies are often hosted in these external areas, underscoring their cultural and social importance.

## Methods

### Research method

This study adopts a phenomenological methodology to examine the lived experiences of Joglo house inhabitants across multiple

generations. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and participatory observation, including architectural measurements, from September 2024 to October 2025. Two participants were purposively selected for their multi-generational experience with Joglo houses. The research emphasizes the transmission of memory, habitual practices, and cultural values through embodied dwelling behaviors.

#### Research approach

A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to investigate the lived experience and meaning of residing in a traditional Javanese Joglo house. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' subjective experiences within the architectural environment, emphasizing consciousness, perception, and the assignment of meaning to spatial arrangements.

#### Selection of research objects

The study focuses on traditional Javanese Joglo houses that have been continuously inhabited by multi-generational families for decades in Pojoksari, Magetan Regency, East Java. The area is geographically located at 7°38'30" S and 111°20'30" E, with a lowland-to-mountain climate and average temperatures ranging from 16°C to 26°C. Two houses were selected as case studies to explore the holistic dimensions of the inhabitants' lived experiences.



Figure 2. The facade of a traditional Javanese Joglo house

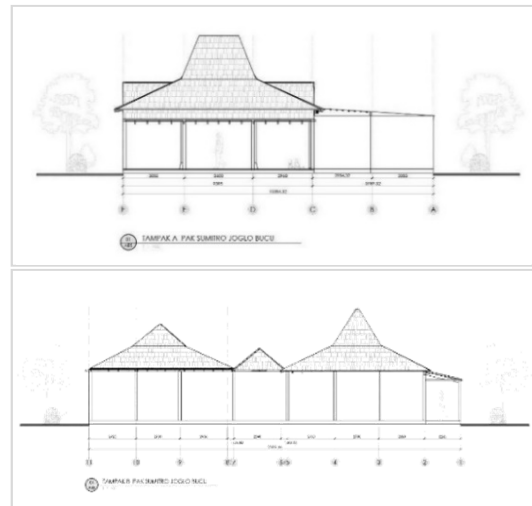


Figure 3. Elevation of a traditional Javanese Joglo-type house

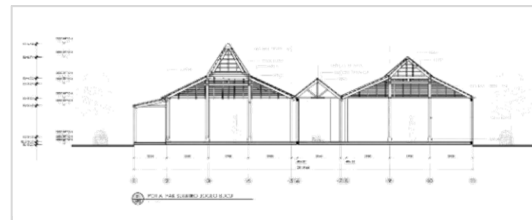


Figure 4. Section of a traditional Joglo-type house

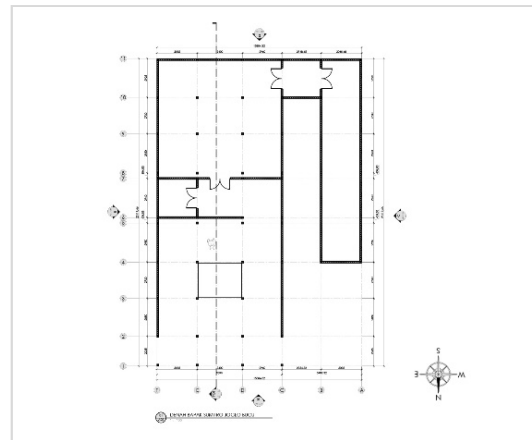


Figure 5. Floor plan of a traditional Joglo house

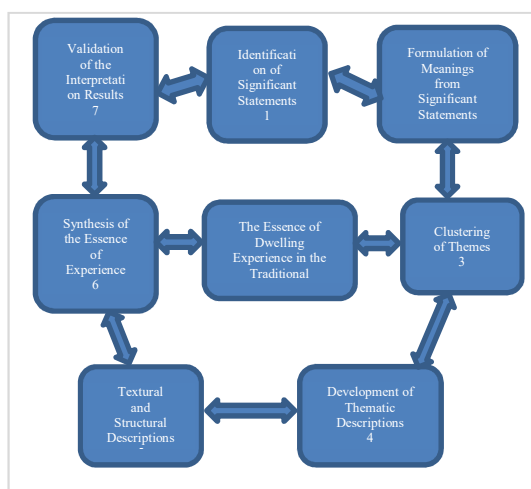
#### Stages of phenomenological analysis

The analytical procedure follows Colaizzi (1978) phenomenological protocol. Epoché was applied to suspend prior assumptions and fully engage with the participants' experiences. The stages include:

1. Identifying significant statements within interview transcripts.
2. Formulating meanings from these statements.

3. Grouping the meanings into thematic clusters.
4. Developing thematic descriptions encompassing both the textural (what was experienced) and structural (how the experience occurred) dimensions.
5. Synthesizing the essence of the lived experience of dwelling in a Joglo house by integrating textual and structural insights.
6. Validating the findings through member checking with participants to ensure the accuracy of the interpretations.

Through these stages, the research illuminates the meaning of dwelling as a practice that is not merely functional but deeply embedded with cultural values, spirituality, and personal attachment, shaping the relationship between inhabitants and their living environment.



**Figure 6.** Stages of phenomenological analysis of the lived experience in a traditional Javanese Joglo house  
 Source: (Colaizzi 1978)

## Results and discussion

### Identification of significant statements and formulation of meanings

Verbatim interview transcripts were systematically examined to identify and code statements that capture the participants lived experiences within the Joglo house. Each statement was interpreted to derive its underlying meaning. This process, summarized in table 2, forms the foundation for a comprehensive phenomenological understanding of daily life in the traditional Javanese dwelling.

**Table 2.** Examples of significant statements and corresponding formulated meanings from the lived experience of inhabiting a traditional Javanese Joglo house

No	Examples of Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
1	The participant keeps heirlooms in a designated room to enhance their aura of authority, even though the associated ritual practices have faded.	Ancestral heirlooms constitute crucial cultural legacies that influence both the homeowner's spiritual well-being and social standing.
2	The participant recounted a burglar mysteriously failing to exit the Joglo house despite the absence of physical barriers.	The house is perceived as possessing a sacred and mystical quality beyond rational explanation.
3	The participant believes that installing a golden nail and red cloth in the molo (ridge) ensures the house's comfort, following ancestral tradition.	Construction and renovation practices must adhere to traditional rituals to maintain the occupants' safety and serenity.
4	The participant feels a sense of comfort living in a traditional Javanese house, where no fences separate one house from another, thereby facilitating easy communication among neighbors.	The spatial configuration promotes and reinforces social interactions and communal relationships.
5	These narratives are further complemented by numerous other significant statements, encompassing fourteen thematic issues related to the lived experience of inhabiting a traditional Javanese Joglo house.	-

### Clustering of Thematic categories

Significant statements were grouped into broader thematic categories to identify recurring patterns in participants' narratives. The resulting clusters encompass functional, symbolic, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions, forming the basis for a holistic phenomenological description. Key thematic clusters are summarized in table 3:

**Table 3.** Identified general themes and their descriptive explanations

No	General themes	Descriptive explanation
1	Emotional Attachment to Space	The Joglo house serves as a source of comfort, identity, and memory through deep emotional bonds.

No	General themes	Descriptive explanation
2	Space as a Representation of Cultural and Spiritual Values	Spatial organization and architectural elements convey Javanese cosmology, rituals, and symbolic meanings.
3	Intergenerational and Familial Experience	Emphasizes the transmission of traditions and values across generations within the family.
4	Harmony between Humans and the Environment	Architecture is integrated with nature to balance the built environment with ecological considerations.
5	Sensory Meaning in Spatial Experience	Multisensory perceptions shape the lived experience of space.

These thematic clusters provide the foundation for constructing a comprehensive phenomenological description and interpreting the essence of the Joglo dwelling experience.

#### Textural and structural descriptions of meaning

Following the identification of general themes, the analysis proceeds with constructing textural and structural descriptions. Textural descriptions articulate “what” participants experienced, while structural descriptions explain “how” these experiences were lived and interpreted. Together, they distinguish the essence of the experience from the mode of its occurrence.

#### The textural description of lived experience

The textural description synthesizes participants’ experiences into a narrative that captures the essence of dwelling in a Javanese Joglo house, integrating physical, spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions. Inhabitants perceive dwelling in a Joglo as a multidimensional experience that merges physical, spiritual, and cultural elements. The house functions not only as a residence but as a microcosm reflecting Javanese cosmological principles, in which humans, nature, and cultural values coexist harmoniously, fostering comfort, safety, and existential meaning.

The Joglo preserves family memories and personal histories, serving as a site for intergenerational rituals. Daily practices, including lesehan (floor dining), gatherings in the *pendhapa*, and sleeping in the *dalem*, reinforce familial bonds and establish the house as a distinctive space of emotional and social significance.

Traditional spatial arrangements reflect hierarchical and sacred values: the *senthong tengah* (central chamber) holds the highest

spiritual importance, the *pendhapa* accommodates guests and social activities, and the *dalem* functions as the private family area. Embedded rituals, such as placing a gold nail (*paku emas*), performing *bersih desa* (village cleansing), and *selamatan*, further strengthen social cohesion and harmony with ancestral spirits. Material elements, particularly teak wood (*kayu jati*), carry strong symbolic weight, affirming the Joglo as a living cultural heritage.

In essence, the textural meaning of dwelling in a Joglo house is inseparable from its emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions, which are continuously reinforced through practices, memories, and symbolic interpretation. The Joglo is experienced not as a static architectural object but as a living entity shaped through the inhabitants’ engagement and cultural continuity, forming the foundation for structural meaning.

#### The structural analysis of meaning

Structural meaning articulates how the dwelling experience is enacted and interpreted. Comfort and emotional attachment are shaped not solely by architectural features but by social interactions and cultural practices. The Joglo functions as a lived space inseparable from communal engagement and collective values.

Preservation of the Joglo reflects the continuity of ancestral heritage in both tangible and intangible forms. The house embodies intergenerational transmission of cultural values and functions as a marker of identity. Preservation practices, including maintaining original teak structures and traditional construction systems, reinforce this continuity.

The Joglo also facilitates socio-cultural cohesion through communal rituals such as *selamatan*, *bersih desa*, and *gotong royong*. Sensory experiences, such as the aroma of *tanah ampo* and the practice of *lesehan*, enhance its multisensory quality. Structural meaning emerges from the layered interaction of physical space, cultural rituals, and spiritual orientation, interwoven into daily life. This experience is reflective, ritualized, and firmly grounded in generationally transmitted tradition and symbolic significance.

#### Synthesis of the essence of the dwelling experience

Phenomenological analysis culminates in articulating the essence of inhabiting a Joglo house. The textural description reveals a

multidimensional phenomenon, encompassing physical, spiritual, and cultural dimensions. The Joglo functions as a microcosm that mirrors cosmic order and the meaningfulness of life (Rochman 2023; Setyawan and Nurgandarum 2022), where its architectural components shape an atmosphere and spatial experience imbued with symbolic and cultural significance (Budiwiyanto 2023).

The structural description indicates that comfort and emotional attachment are shaped not solely by architecture but by the surrounding social dynamics and cultural practices. Communal interactions and traditions, such as *gotong royong*, constitute essential elements of the dwelling experience (Noor and Salura 2020). Traditional spaces act as repositories of memory and place identity, the continuity of which depends on two pillars: the preservation of adaptive physical structures and the community's capacity to maintain values, practices, and social cohesion (Margono et al. 2020; Susanto et al. 2022; Pramudita and Ikaputra 2023).

By integrating the textural and structural perspectives, the essence of dwelling in a Joglo can be articulated as follows: "The Joglo is not merely a shelter, but a living landscape that unites cosmology, culture, and social engagement. Its presence reflects the interconnectedness of humans, space, nature, and spiritual values, internalized through everyday practices. It constitutes a space that is simultaneously inhabited, felt, interpreted, and transmitted across generations through lived experience."

This synthesis emphasizes that traditional architecture should be understood as a dynamic and living cultural representation. Preserving the Joglo entails safeguarding the intangible meanings ascribed by its inhabitants. Its resilience derives from its enduring role as a living space rich in cultural and spiritual significance.

## Conclusions

Dwelling in a Joglo embodies a multidimensional, relational, and transcendental phenomenon. Its essence emerges through inhabitation, social practices, cultural awareness, and embedded spirituality. The Joglo represents a living cultural symbol, functioning as a medium connecting human, ancestral heritage, the community, and cosmological values.

The findings confirm that preserving traditional architecture is inseparable from maintaining its meanings, lived practices, and socio-cultural structures. This study recommends documenting symbolic meanings, adopting a holistic approach to conservation, and developing adaptive models for contemporary contexts. Through these efforts, the Joglo can remain a vital living heritage in modern Javanese life, serving as a lens for understanding local wisdom throughout the Nusantara.

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**Iwan Sudradjat** conceptualization, resources, formal analysis, writing original draft, writing review and editing..  
**Rahadhian Prajudi Herwindo** methodology, supervision, validation, writing review and editing.