

THE YASMEEN LARI EXTRAORDINARY WORK AND THE FUTURE OF ARCHITECTURE FROM PAKISTAN

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The Pakistani architect [Yasmeen Lari has received the 2023 Royal Gold Medal for architecture from the Royal Institute of British Architects \(RIBA\)](#) for her work championing zero-carbon self-build concepts for displaced populations. The Award celebrates the work she has undertaken since her retirement in 2000, when she shifted her attention to creating accessible, environmentally friendly construction techniques to help people below the poverty line and communities displaced by natural disasters and the impact of climate change. The RIBA website explains that in 1980 she co-founded the [Heritage Foundation of Pakistan](#) with her husband, Suhail Zaheer Lari, pioneering the design of self-built sustainable shelters and housing, resulting in the creation of 50,000 dwellings. Lari is also known for the designing of the Chulah Cookstove, of which there are now over 80,000. An eco-alternative to a traditional stove, it significantly reduces emissions, tackling unfavourable environmental and health issues associated with cooking on an open fire.



[An article published in 2020 by the RIBA architecture website](#) presented the work of Yasmeen Lari highlighting that after the Kashmir earthquake in northern Pakistan in 2005, she became renowned for her work with communities living in disaster-prone areas of the country. The article also highlighted the work carried out by the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan to carry out this mission.



The [Dezeen Magazine published a series of articles presenting many details of Yasmeen Lari's work](#) and the awards she has received from many prestigious international actors.

Having completed her education in England, studying architecture at Oxford Brookes University, Yasmeen Lari opened her architectural practice in Karachi in 1964, going on to become Pakistan's leading female architect. She built houses for the new lifestyle of the urban middle class, creating urban landmark buildings, as well as social housing. Together with her husband Suhail Zaheer Lari, she founded the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan, dedicated to the research and conservation of the architectural heritage of their country, both the World Heritage Sites in Makli and Lahore, including everyday buildings.



Over the past two decades, through the [Heritage Foundation of Pakistan](#), she has developed and implemented her system of zero-carbon architecture based on local economies, innovating traditional building techniques, using climate-neutral materials of bamboo, lime, and mud, as well as providing training in self-building and community-centered ways of working. Together with climate refugees and the landless people, Lari has built tens of



thousands of flood- and earthquake-resistant houses, sanitation infrastructure, smokeless stoves, and community facilities

The work of Yasmeen Lari and her Foundation in disaster risk reduction got a big boost in 2005, when one of the most destructive earthquakes ravaged the region of Kashmir, killing more than [80,000 people](#) and leaving 3.5 million homeless. The Foundation adopted a "barefoot social architecture", which uplifts impoverished communities while treading lightly on the planet. This involves substituting expensive, emissions-intensive materials such as concrete and steel, which need to be transported to the site, with local ingredients that are low-carbon, low-cost and have been used in vernacular construction for thousands of years. Since 2005, the architect has trained thousands of locals in constructing these shelters through the [Heritage Foundation of Pakistan](#), as well as via open-source [YouTube tutorials](#).

The [Pakistan Chulah Cookstove](#), is one of the innovative tools created by the Heritage Foundation, fuelled by agricultural waste like cow dung, or sawdust bricks, which reduces the use of firewood by 50 to 70 per cent. Made from locally-sourced mud and CO₂-absorbing lime plaster, the stove comprises a fire chamber, an air regulation pipe, a hand-washing area, a ledge where cooking utensils or dinnerware can be kept, and a chimney which keeps any smoke produced from the fire to a minimum. The whole structure sits atop a sturdy raised platform, providing a clean area for families to enjoy their meals. This platform also means that, in the event of a flood, the stoves are less likely to be washed away. The stove improves cooking efficiency by around 25 per cent. It also becomes a focal point in the village where women from neighbouring houses can meet and interact, strengthening social ties. The design for Chulah Cookstoves was adopted for a self-build version of the traditional Pakistani stove that enhances food preparation, hygiene and quality of while creating a place for community. In 2018, the stove [won the UN World Habitat prize](#), and by the end of 2019, over 60,000 stoves had been built.

[Most of Lari's current work focuses on the floodplains of the River Indus, where several villages were devastated in 2022 by catastrophic floods.](#) These floods were among the worst in Pakistan's history, causing 33 million people to lose their homes and resulting in \$30 billion worth of damages. Many rural homes in Pakistan are constructed from mud and twigs, materials that are abundant, help cool the interiors, and reflect traditional building techniques. However, these structures are highly vulnerable to flooding. Lari's solution reinvents traditional architecture by integrating a bamboo frame, reinforcing structures while preserving local building methods. The bamboo skeleton can be prefabricated off-site and assembled in the village, where the community completes the walls with locally available materials and skills they already possess. It's an elegant, low-cost, and sustainable approach that not only provides shelter but also keeps the community empowered by utilising their existing skills.

After extreme floods put a third of [Pakistan](#) under water in 2022, Yasmeen Lari vowed to build one million flood-resilient homes by 2024. In an article published by the [Designing for Disaster series in the Dezeen Magazine](#), the Foundation reveals it is a third of the way towards that target. The latest update from the [Heritage Foundation of Pakistan](#), is that the rebuilding programme has so far provided 333,000 homes for those displaced by the 2022 floods.



[The article published in the Dezeen Magazine](#) presents the work made by the Foundation to assist the communities in building family shelters with local materials intended to be flood-resilient to safeguard against future issues. Instead of being built from concrete or steel, which has become the norm in Pakistan, they utilise vernacular building methods and materials that draw from "ancient wisdoms and techniques", [according to Yasmeen Lari](#). The structures are formed of locally sourced earth, lime render and bamboo, and can be built by hand. This approach forms part of what the Pakistani architect calls [Barefoot Social Architecture](#) a zero-carbon, self-build approach that supports impoverished and marginalised communities.

In the villages, the Heritage Foundation also provides a hand pump for households, toilets and solar panels installed on a sharing basis with their own contributions. They teach women how to build the [clay stoves](#) that facilitate cooking without the environmental and health risks of open fires. [The website of the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan](#) presents the impactful results achieved by their work in the country.

Continuing to test the potential of this architectural activity further, Lari has developed and shared a design and construct self-build model for shelters, using readily available bamboo to create economical and beautiful braced frames for inhabitation. This is a model of structure and enclosure that fulfils the need for long life, loose fit, and in her case, zero carbon architecture. Always working to empower the most disadvantaged communities at the most difficult times, Lari has most recently developed designs for a system that allows the construction of 100 emergency shelters in four days.

Lari's vital contribution identifies different ways of working which suggest how the international architecture profession can play an ever more useful role in helping communities to help themselves, while also responding to climate change, following the principles of low-cost, zero carbon and zero waste.

Yasmeen Lari and the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan have been recognized by prestigious international awards. In particular, in 2002, the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan received the UN Recognition Award for its work in promoting cultural and historical conservation. In 2006, she was awarded the Sitara-e-Imtiaz, one of the highest civil awards, by the Pakistani government. In 2021 Lari was awarded the Laurea Magistrale ad Honorem in Architecture from the Politecnico di Milano. She has received the Jane Drew Prize (2020); World Habitat Award (2018); the Islamic Development Bank Prize for Women's Empowerment (2013); Star of Distinction in 2006 and Crescent of Distinction in 2014 from the President of Pakistan. In 2016, she received the Fukuoka Prize from Japan for Asian Art and Culture (2016). In the same year, Lari's work was included in RIBA's 'Creation from Catastrophe' exhibition, and her work is also part of RIBA's permanent collection.

[In 2023, the Museum Quartier of Wien has organized a monographic exhibition on Yasmeen Lari: architecture for the future](#) where previously unpublished photographs, drawings, and documents from the architect's own archives show her impressive journey from international modernism to zero-carbon architecture.

To know more



[Yasmeen Lari awarded the 2023 Royal Gold Medal for architecture by the Royal Institute of British Architects \(RIBA\)](#)

[Article in RIBA architecture website](#)

[Yasmeen Lari in Wikipedia](#)

[Heritage Foundation of Pakistan](#)

[Heritage Foundation of Pakistan in Facebook](#)

[Dezeen Magazine articles presenting Yasmeen Lari's work](#)

[Cookstoves winning the 2018 UN World Habitat prize](#)

[Article in Dezeen Magazine](#)

[Article in greennetwork.asia](#)

[Article in spab.org.uk](#)

[Article in Aljazeera.com](#)

[Mqw.at website Jasmeen Lari-Architecture for the future](#)

[Mqw.at website article -Yasmeen Lari](#)

[Archdaily.com Article Yasmeen Lari: The Latest Architecture](#)

[Article in designboom.com](#)

