

INVESTIGATING OF AESTHETIC AND FUNCTIONAL POTENTIAL OF SRI LANKAN HANDICRAFTS FOR CONTEMPORARY INTERIOR DESIGN

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Abstract: Sri Lanka has a rich history of handicrafts based on cultural heritage, natural resources, and traditional skills. Sri Lankan handicrafts are not used more in contemporary in interior design. This research investigates the aesthetic and functional potential of traditional Sri Lankan handicrafts, such as cane weaving, Dobara mat weaving, wood carving, Laaksha and brass work in interior spaces of the contemporary style. Through the analysis of material qualities, making techniques, and awareness of modern design trends, the study aims to advance how these can be employed to enhance spatial quality, sustainability, and cultural heritage in interiors.

The study examines the challenges and opportunities for the evolution of these crafts in contemporary contexts. The results will be used to create a plan for designers to integrate Sri Lankan handicrafts into contemporary interior spaces with cultural awareness and design sustainability.

Keywords: *Sri Lankan Handicrafts, Contemporary Interior Design, Kandy, Craftsmanship, Traditional.*

1. Introduction

Sri Lankan handicrafts embody a deep cultural and artistic heritage, representing the country's rich history and traditional craftsmanship. Art forms such as Dumbara mat weaving, wood carving, lacquer work, cane and rattan, and brass craft have been preserved across generations, safeguarding techniques that express Sri Lanka's unique cultural identity (Koswatte, 2020). The intricate patterns, natural materials, and handmade qualities of these crafts contribute not only to aesthetic value but also to the support of local economies and artisan communities (Qin & Zahari, 2024).

However, contemporary interior design trends characterized by minimalism, functionality, and neutral palettes can make it difficult to integrate traditional craft elements without compromising cultural authenticity or modern design principles (Li et al., 2024). Although these crafts add warmth, texture, and historical depth to interiors, designers must find a balance that maintains coherence within modern spaces (Jia & Wang, 2024).

The core challenge lies in merging traditional Sri Lankan crafts with contemporary interior environments in a way that honours their cultural significance while meeting modern aesthetic expectations. Successfully achieving this not only enriches modern interiors but also helps sustain Sri Lanka's artisanal traditions (Jin, 2022). Innovative design methods such as combining traditional materials with modern forms, using handcrafted elements as focal features, and adapting traditional techniques for new applications can bridge the gap between heritage and modernity (Jia & Wang, 2024). This research, therefore, examines strategies for incorporating Sri Lankan handicrafts into contemporary interior design, ensuring their continued relevance while respecting their historical and artistic value (Li et al., 2024).

Research question

How can Sri Lankan handicrafts be integrated into contemporary Interior design to enhance both aesthetic appeal and functionality while preserving cultural heritage?

Aims and objectives.

To explore the aesthetic and functional potential of Sri Lankan handicrafts in modern interior design, focusing on their integration into luxury interiors while preserving cultural heritage and supporting local artisans.

- Analyze the aesthetic qualities and design characteristics of Sri Lankan handicrafts.
- Evaluate the functional potential of Sri Lankan handicrafts in interior spaces.

Explore the impact of handicrafts on sustainability, artisan communities, and luxury hotel interiors.

2. Literature review

Sri Lankan handicrafts reflect the island's cultural, artistic, and religious traditions, offering both aesthetic and functional

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value. In modern interior design, especially in luxury hotels, there is growing emphasis on integrating these crafts to reserve cultural heritage, promote sustainability, and create unique interior experiences. This section reviews the history, materials, techniques, aesthetics, functional uses, cultural significance, and contemporary applications of Sri Lankan handicrafts.

2.1 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SRI LANKAN HANDICRAFTS

Sri Lankan handicrafts date back to ancient kingdoms such as Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, where artisans produced elaborate carvings, sculptures, and metalwork influenced by Buddhism. The Kandyan era further advanced crafts like lacquer work, Dumbara weaving, and wood carving. Colonial periods introduced new motifs and furniture styles. Despite disruptions from modernization, preservation efforts continue through institutions like the National Crafts Council.

2.2 INTRODUCTION TO SRI LANKAN HANDICRAFTS

Sri Lanka has diverse handicraft traditions, including brassware, ceramics, batik, beeralu lace, wood carving, and cane weaving. These crafts are rooted in rural communities and rely heavily on natural, sustainable materials. Over 20 categories of handicrafts are officially recognized in the country.

2.3 MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES IN SRI LANKAN HANDICRAFTS

Crafts typically use local materials such as teak, kumbuk, jak wood, palmyra, coir, clay, and natural dyes. Traditional methods such as chiselling, hand weaving, and lacquer turning remain central, though some artisans adopt modern tools for efficiency while maintaining authenticity.

2.4 AESTHETIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SRI LANKAN HANDICRAFTS

Aesthetic qualities are influenced by Buddhist and Hindu symbolism, featuring motifs such as liyawela vines, lotus petals, and animal figures. Colour palettes draw from natural environments, while textiles and carvings emphasize texture and contrast. These elements help designers merge traditional motifs with modern interiors.

2.5 FUNCTIONAL POTENTIAL OF SRI LANKAN HANDICRAFTS

Handicrafts offer practical uses beyond decoration. Cane and rattan furniture provide lightweight durability, while ceramics offer sustainable homeware options. Handcrafted materials such as Dumbara weaves and bamboo also serve as acoustic panels, partitions, and ceiling features in modern interiors.

2.6 INTEGRATION OF SRI LANKAN HANDICRAFTS INTO INTERIOR DESIGN

Contemporary hotels and designers increasingly incorporate local crafts into interiors through furniture, textiles, wall panels, partitions, and lighting. These elements help achieve cultural authenticity and sustainable design. Examples include Jetwing, Amaya, and Cinnamon hotels, which use handcrafted décor as part of their branding.

2.7 CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND HERITAGE IN INTERIOR DESIGN

Handicrafts play a vital role in preserving cultural identity, storytelling, and traditional craftsmanship. Their integration into hospitality spaces enhances visitor experiences and supports artisan communities. Luxury hotels such as Heritage Kandalama and Anantara Tangalle use handicrafts to express Sri Lankan heritage and create meaningful spatial narratives.

Investigating of aesthetic and functional potential of Sri Lankan handicrafts for contemporary interior design

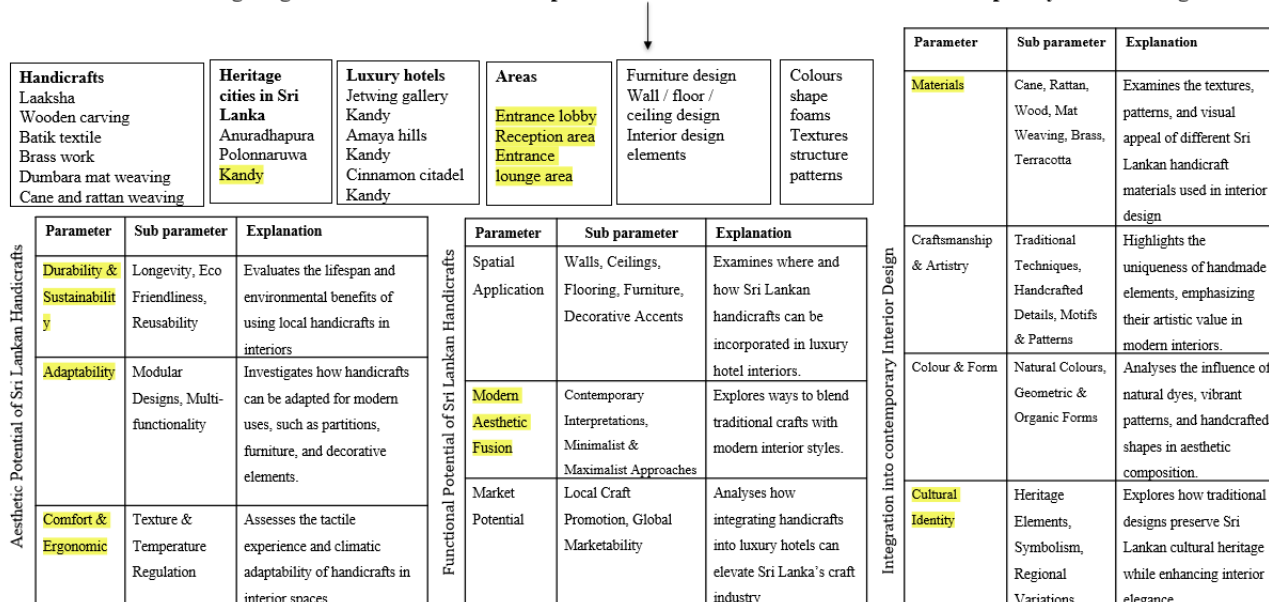


Chart 1- Theoretical framework by Author

3. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory methodology to investigate how Sri Lankan handicrafts can be both aesthetically and functionally integrated into modern interior design, with a particular focus on luxury hotel settings. The study is structured into several phases, beginning with a comprehensive literature review to establish background knowledge and identify key themes. This is followed by research design development, case study selection, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This phased approach ensures a holistic understanding of how traditional Sri Lankan crafts can be meaningfully applied in contemporary interior spaces.

The research strategy is centered on case study analysis, with selected luxury hotels, **Amaya Hills**, **Cinnamon Citadel**, and **Jetwing Kandy Gallery** serving as practical examples. These hotels were chosen for their cultural relevance and their active integration of traditional Sri Lankan crafts into modern interiors. Data is gathered through visual observation, site visits, photography, and sketching to document how elements such as cane, rattan, batik, dumbara weaving, lacquer work, and wood carving are utilized in key interior areas like lobbies and reception spaces. A **thematic analysis** is then conducted to identify design patterns, functional applications, and innovative approaches that fuse tradition with modernity.

This study uses both primary and secondary data collection methods. Primary data includes interviews with artisans, interior designers, and hospitality experts, as well as on-site observations of traditional craftsmanship in use. Questionnaires and surveys were distributed to hotel staff, designers, and guests to collect insights on the functional and aesthetic perceptions of these handcrafted elements. Secondary data was collected from scholarly articles, historical records, and interior design journals, providing contextual support and comparative analysis. By comparing traditional uses of handicrafts with their contemporary adaptations, the research aims to assess their current relevance and potential for future design integration.

The study specifically examines how handcrafted elements enhance guest experience, promote cultural immersion, and support environmental sustainability in hospitality spaces. It focuses on aspects such as craftsmanship techniques, materiality, cultural symbolism, and their alignment with modern interior design principles, particularly in terms of visual appeal, functionality, and sustainable practices.

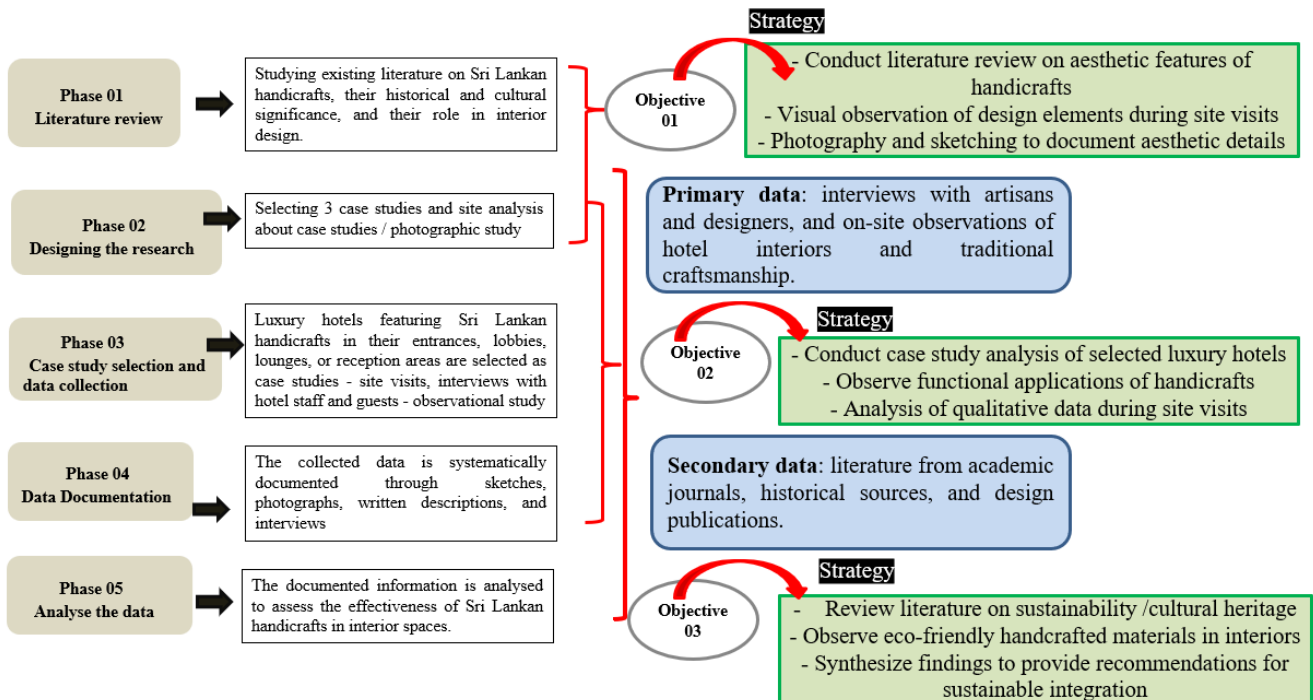


Figure 1: Methodology flow chart, by Author

The hotels selected, Amaya Hills, Cinnamon Citadel, and Jetwing Kandy Gallery, are all located in culturally significant regions such as Kandy and are recognized for blending traditional Sri Lankan artistry with contemporary interior aesthetics. Their strategic use of local handicrafts makes them ideal case studies for understanding how heritage can be preserved and celebrated within the framework of modern luxury hospitality design.



Figure 2: Case studies, by author

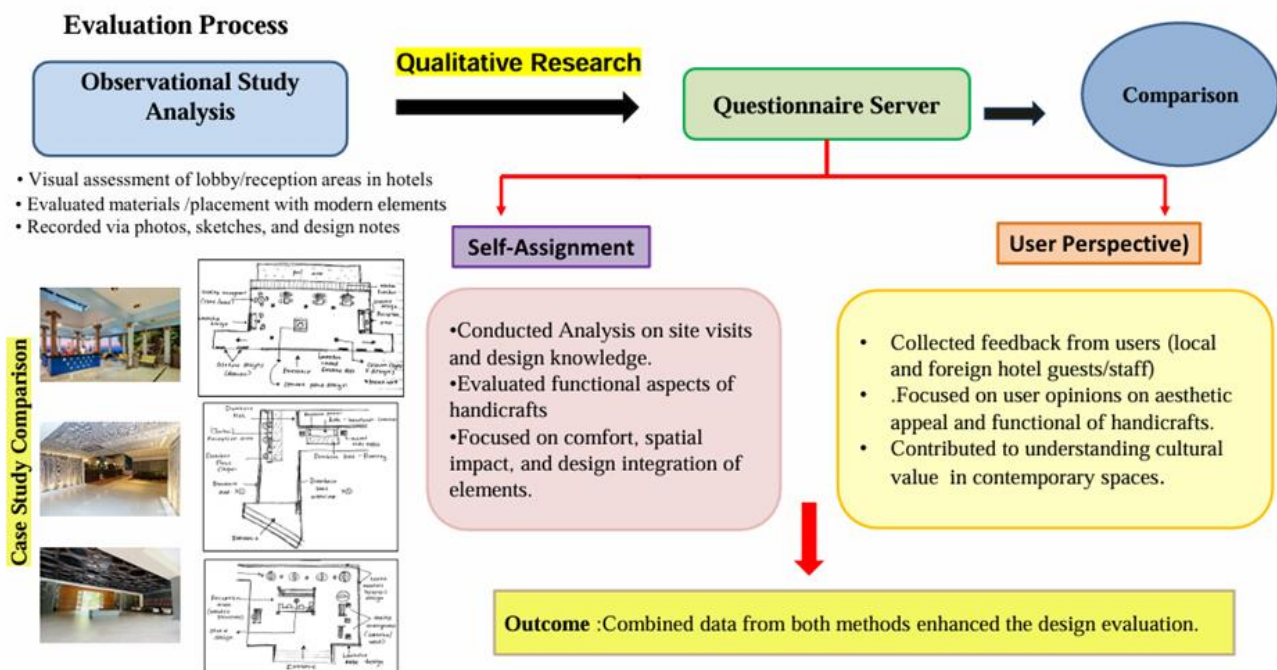


Figure 3: Evaluation process, by author

4. Result and discussion

The results of this research highlight the effective integration of Sri Lankan handicrafts into the interior design of luxury hotels, specifically in culturally significant locations like Kandy. The three selected case studies, Cinnamon Citadel, Amaya Hills, and Jetwing Kandy Gallery, demonstrated thoughtful applications of traditional crafts such as dumbara weaving, cane and rattan furniture, wood carvings, lacquer work, and batik. These handcrafted elements were strategically incorporated into entrance lobbies and reception areas, serving both aesthetic and functional roles.

Photographic analysis confirmed that these handicrafts not only enhanced the visual character of the spaces but also contributed to cultural authenticity, comfort, and guest engagement. The designs reflected a successful balance between modern luxury standards and Sri Lankan cultural heritage. Features like woven ceilings, carved timber furniture, and decorative panels added texture, warmth, and narrative depth to otherwise contemporary interiors.

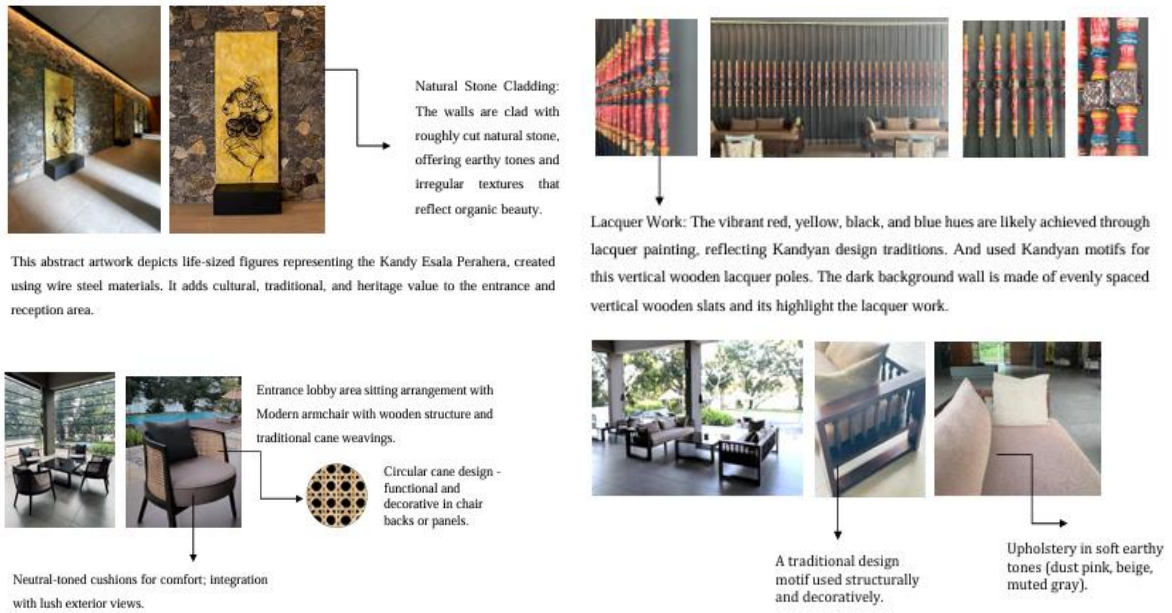


Figure 7: Hotel Jetwing Kandy gallery observational studies, by author

The questionnaire survey included a diverse group of participants relevant to studying the use of Sri Lankan handicrafts in luxury hotel interiors. A total of five participants from each selected hotel were surveyed. Respondents consisted of both hotel guests and staff, representing a range of age groups (21–30, 31–40, 41–50, and over 50). The sample included male, female, and gender-non-disclosing individuals. Participants were also categorized as local (Sri Lankan) or international to capture cultural and geographical perspectives.

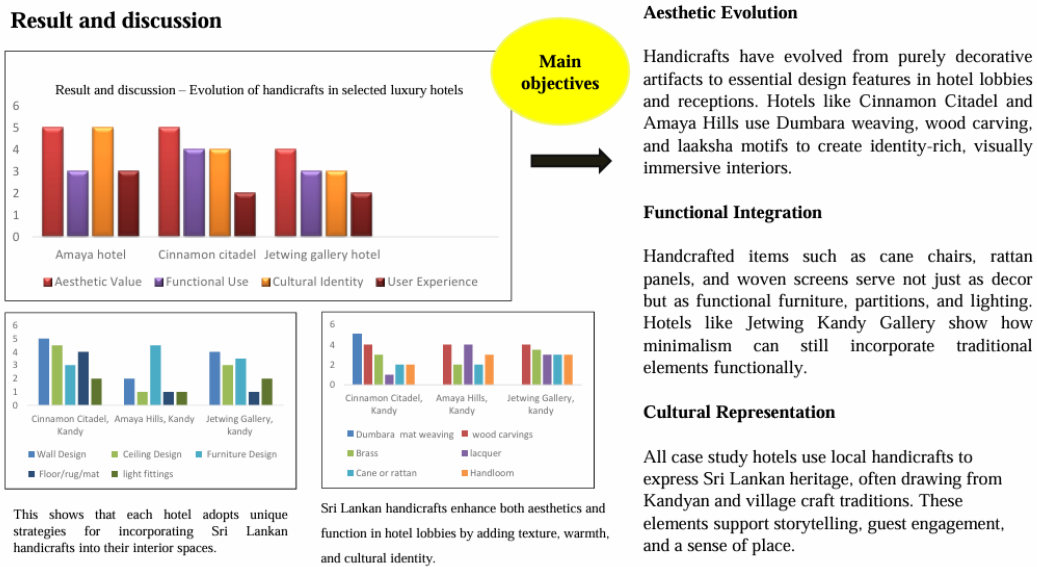


Figure 8: Evaluation process, by author

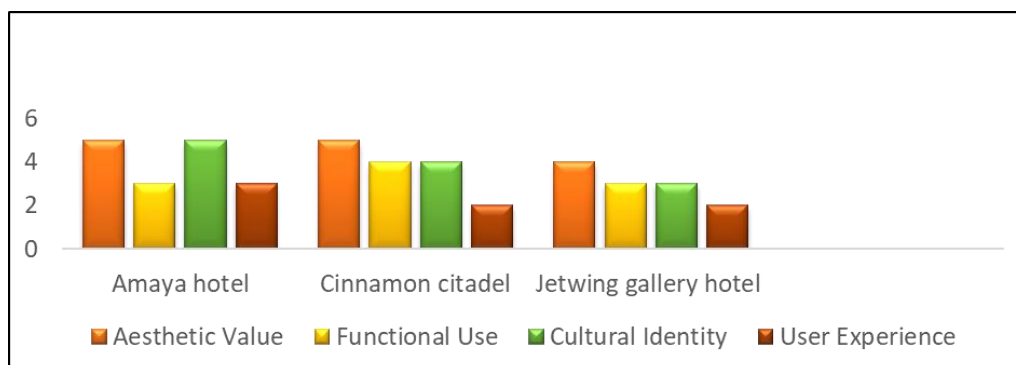


Figure 9 Evolution of handicrafts in selected luxury hotels, by author

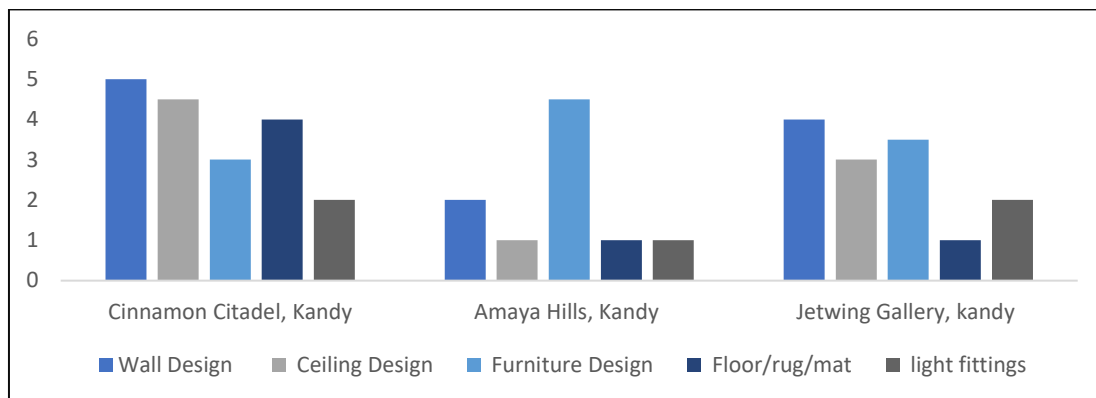


Figure 10 Sri Lankan handicrafts into their interior spaces by author

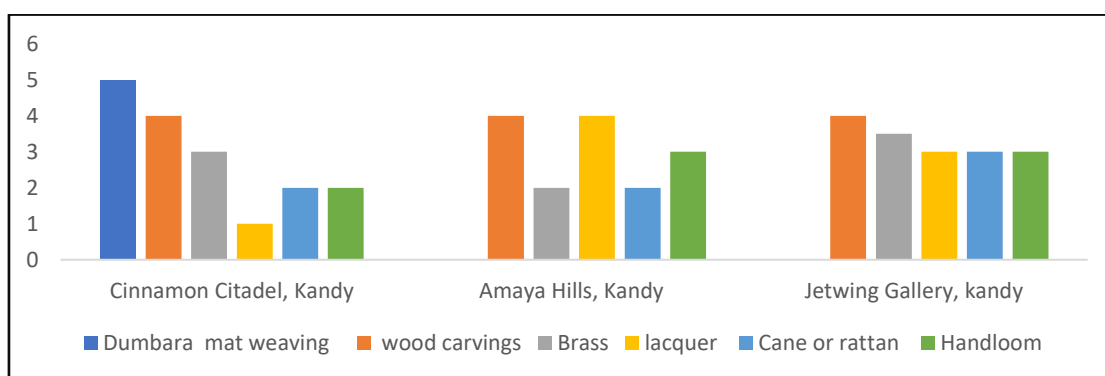


Figure 11 Rate of Sri Lankan handicrafts for luxury hotels by author

Overall, the results and discussion clearly show that Sri Lankan handicrafts play a vital role in enhancing luxury hotel interiors by preserving cultural heritage, promoting sustainability, and enriching the guest experience. The findings strongly support the continued use and revival of traditional crafts in contemporary interior design practices.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the rich aesthetic and functional value of Sri Lankan handicrafts in contemporary interior design, especially within luxury hotel reception and entrance lobby area spaces. By analysing traditional techniques and materials like dumbara mat weaving, brass work, laaksha, cane, and wood carving, the research shows how these crafts can enhance visual appeal, comfort, and cultural identity. Integrating them into contemporary interiors not only supports sustainable design but also preserves Sri Lanka’s cultural heritage and empowers local artisan communities. Ultimately, this research encourages innovative design solutions that bridge the gap between tradition and modernity.

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