

Design Resource

The Alchi Monastery

Life, learnings and more from Ladakh

by

Prof. Sumant Rao and Ruchi Shah

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/alchi-monastery>

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Alchi Village

Alchi is a small village about 70 kms away from the city of Leh. The first impression one gets, is how the location of a famous monastery has lent its identity to this small but scenic village that has sprung up with small cafes, craft shops, and home stays.

Interestingly it is one of the oldest monasteries, but its lies on a lowland and not high up on a hilltop. The unique style and workmanship is influenced by the Kashmiri style of architecture and painting.



The Alchi village.

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Handcrafted puppets at the various craft shops in Alchi.

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These are Buddhist Mahakaal Masks - which are worn during the mask dance performances which relay the story of the ancient fight between good & evil, it ends with the ultimate triumph of good.



Prayers flags introduce the entrance of the Alchi Monastery.



An Antique shop in Alchi.

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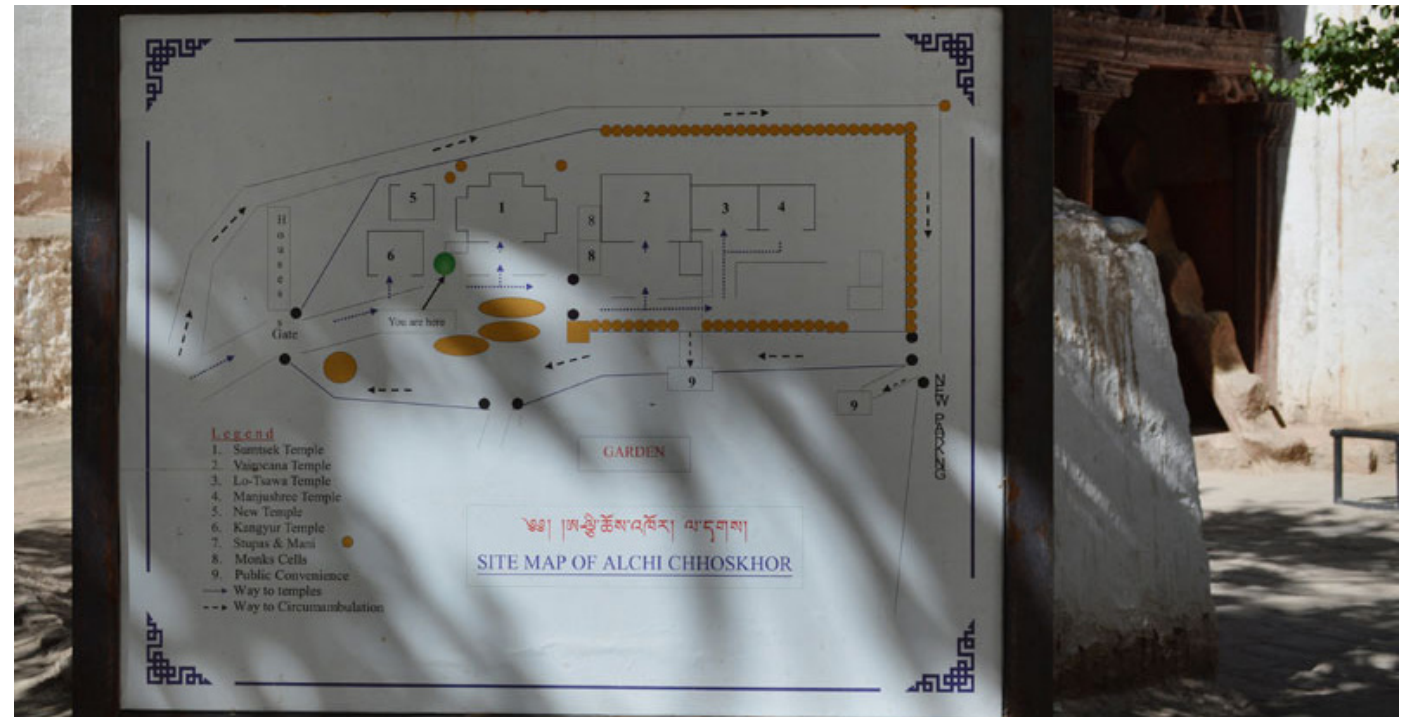
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Alchi Monastery

The creation of the Alchi temple complex has been attributed to Rinchen Zangpo (958–1055) a famous scholar – translator from the 10th century who has translated many of the Buddhist scriptures from Pali to Tibetan language.

The Alchi monastery is considered to be one of the foundations of Vajrayana Buddhism. The entire complex has 3 shrines, the ‘Dukhang’ or the Assembly hall, the Temple of Manjushri and the Sumtsek Temple. ‘Chorten’s’ or stupas can be seen scattered throughout the temple complex. Alchi is famous for the paintings on the temple walls and within the ‘chorten’s’. The thousands of miniature paintings of Lord Buddha on a wall remain the main attraction. The monastery is now under the care of the Gelugpa Sect, also known as the ‘Yellow hats’ which is a school of Buddhism. The beauty of the paintings here can be described as - stylishly created with an eclectic blend of Tibetan and Kashmiri features and clothes. Some of the paintings have been heavily damaged owing to the vulnerable architecture and leaky roofs. In 2008, The Alchi Tsatsapuri Conservation Project was carried out by German and Indian student conservators, in order to restore some of these paintings.



A map explaining the layout of the Alchi temple complex and its various parts.

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Alchi Sumtseg - Sumtseg means a 3 storied building, it was made by Kashmiri artists, hence it has a very different type of architecture and style of painting when compared to the other monasteries around Ladakh.

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The Buddha's painted on the walls of a temple within Alchi have been damaged heavily due to the old architecture and weather conditions.

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Contrasting to the Kashmir architecture, the entrance leading into the Alchi Temple complex follows the traditional Ladakhi architecture, and the doors are embellished with the 8 symbols of Buddhism.

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Chortens or stupa's within the temple complex.

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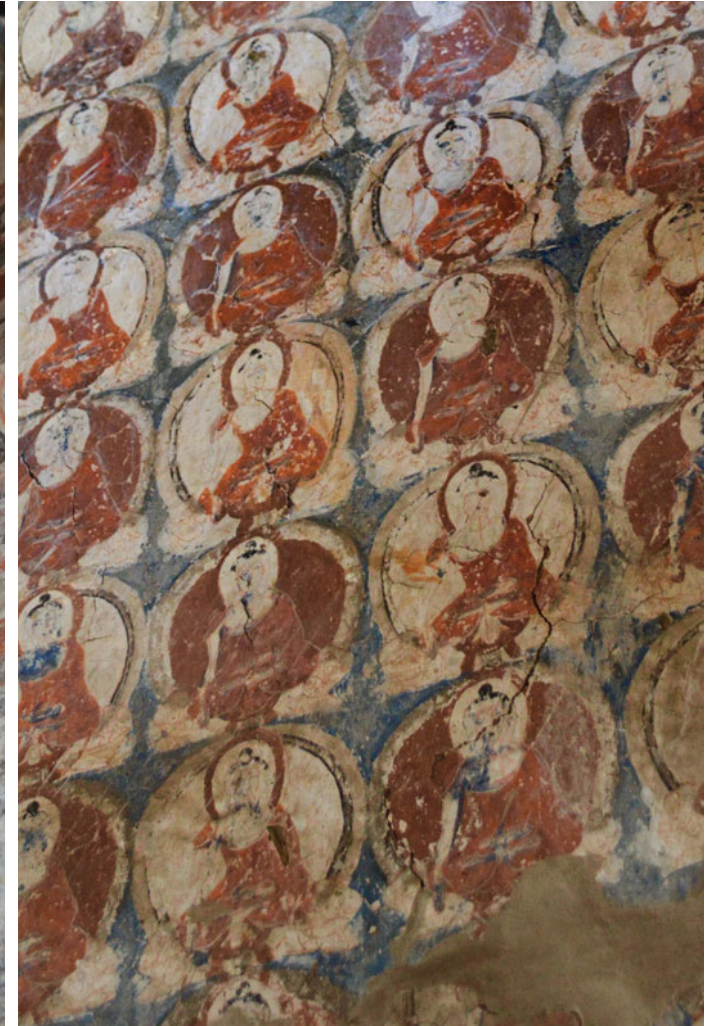
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These paintings can be seen within some of the bigger chorten's of the temple complex. They are beautifully painted from within.



A close up of the thousand painted Buddha's - reveals the damage done to them over the years. However one can clearly see the Kashmiri style of painting and the natural colors that have been used.

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On peeping into - and looking above, within a Stupa one can see beautifully painted Buddha's that adorn every inch of the Stupa from within.



This is the painted ceiling of a chorten in the Alchi temple complex. Some of these painting date back to the 12th & 13th centuries.

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This image tells us about the fine brushwork and beautiful colors used by Kashmiri artists for creating these paintings.



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When captured with a camera, some ceilings within the chorten look like a montage of patterns, symbols, and figures related to Buddhism.



A pillar outside the Manjushri temple gives an idea of the type of patterns and iconography that influenced the architecture.

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This is the entrance to the Manjushri temple - that is built around the four images of Manjushri, sitting back to back on a common platform in the centre of the temple.



More images showing the elaborate and painstakingly done paintings within chortens of the Alchi Monastery.

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