

# COFFEE TABLE BOOK AS A MEDIUM FOR THE REVITALIZATION OF MAJAPAHIT RED-BRICK HERITAGE IN MOJOKERTO

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**Abstract.** This creation develops a Coffee Table Book as a medium to visually revitalize Majapahit red-brick sites in Mojokerto, including Gapura Bajang Ratu, Candi Tikus, Candi Brahu, and Gapura Wringin Lawang. Combining photography, illustration, and short narratives, it highlights the beauty and strength of Majapahit architecture while showing that the exposed-brick style long preceded modern trends. Using the design thinking method combine with Sanggit-revitalization approach, the process covers site exploration and content creation, positioning the book as both an educational tool and a site-branding strategy. Alongside the printed version, an e-book were produced to reach a wider audience. This project aims to preserve and promote Majapahit's cultural heritage, emphasizing its aesthetic and historical values and connecting Nusantara's visual traditions with contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Coffee table book, revitalization, Majapahit red-brick, cultural heritage.

## INTRODUCTION

Red brick is an architectural feature of the Majapahit Kingdom in Trowulan, Mojokerto, that distinguishes it from previous kingdoms such as those found at the sites of Ancient Mataram and Kediri, which used more andesite stone. The use of red brick at these Majapahit Kingdom sites not only demonstrates the expertise of the people of that era in building structures, but also reflects the characteristics of the region, which is rich in clay as the main material for making red bricks (Poernama & Putra, 2022:5). In addition, no traces of adhesive such as cement were found on the buildings at the site, so it is estimated that the construction of these sites used a technique of rubbing the red bricks together (Nurhidayah & Budiyo, 2022:490). This is phenomenal because these sites have survived for hundreds of years without any adhesive elements and only with the rubbing technique.

Nowadays, red bricks are better known as a material for industrial architectural styles, especially among urban communities. In addition to their aesthetic value, red bricks also have the potential to improve the thermal efficiency of buildings due to their ability to absorb heat and maintain stable room temperatures, thereby reducing energy consumption and ensuring the comfort of occupants (Monika et al., 2024:15). This is certainly relevant to Indonesia's tropical climate, as regions with tropical climates tend to be hot and have high temperatures throughout the year due to their proximity to the equator, which receives high-intensity sunlight (Surinati & Kusuma, 2018:1).

With the same advantages, many people do not realize that Indonesia has a rich heritage of red brick architecture, namely the Majapahit style. Unlike exposed industrial brick, which emphasizes an unfinished look, Majapahit architecture has aesthetic and cultural values that are closely linked to the nation's history. In the city of Mojokerto, architectural elements characterized by Majapahit red brick are easy to find, from sidewalks and office fences to hotel buildings. The city government seems quite consistent in promoting this Majapahit identity, even using the slogan "Spirit of Majapahit." One form of implementation is a subsidized housing program designed with red brick and a touch of Majapahit style. However, despite the prominence of this visual identity in the urban space, most of the community, such as the residents of Kampung Majapahit in Sentorejo village, Trowulan, Mojokerto, do not understand the history and meaning behind the Majapahit red brick architectural style of their homes (Bilqies et al., 2023:84).

Seeing this, it is important to introduce media that enriches public understanding that red brick is not only part of modern industrial design trends, but also the cultural heritage of the Majapahit Kingdom. In addition, efforts are needed to introduce Majapahit red brick sites to audiences who are familiar with the architectural style but do not know the history and meaning behind it. Therefore, the Sanggit-revitalization approach is applied to revive the uniqueness of red brick through creative reinterpretation. Sanggit-Revitalization is a creative activity that processes traditional art forms by adapting them to contemporary conditions, in terms of theme, form, and technique, so that traditional artworks are not only preserved but also remain relevant (Dharsono, 2021:3). Through this approach, traditional elements are integrated into a modern context, ensuring cultural continuity while encouraging innovation. As a result, Majapahit red bricks are reintroduced through media appropriate to the current era, allowing people to appreciate them beyond their aesthetic value and understand their historical significance. The result of this approach is the creation of a Coffee Table Book about the red brick site in Trowulan, Mojokerto.

A coffee table book is a book that is usually placed on a lounge table as a companion to coffee, on a living room table, or can also be found in a waiting room. Coffee table books are characterized by their focus on visual elements such as images and photographs with short narratives, intended to be light and entertaining reading that still contains information (Widyamurti et al., 2020:261). Therefore, Coffee Table Books were chosen as the medium of creation because they have the ability to present visuals well, and their narrative format is concise and not too heavy, making them easy for readers to understand. In addition to these reasons, Coffee Table Books are also able to highlight the beauty of the red brick architecture of the Majapahit Kingdom in Trowulan to the fullest extent.

With this Coffee Table Book, it is hoped that the public will see that red brick is not just a building material, but part of the identity and architectural glory of the Majapahit Kingdom that is still relevant today. Through interesting documentation and visual exploration, this Coffee Table Book is expected to connect the Majapahit heritage with modern society, increase knowledge about the Majapahit Kingdom heritage sites, become a new reference in the field of architecture, and serve as a visual reference for print media.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study applies a descriptive qualitative method with three main data collection techniques: field observation, literature study, and questionnaires. The descriptive qualitative approach is used to explore and understand the visual, historical, and cultural aspects of the Majapahit red-brick sites as the basis for creative interpretation in the design process.

Field observations were carried out directly at several red-brick sites in Mojokerto, including Gapura Bajang Ratu, Candi Tikus, Candi Brahu, and Gapura Wringin Lawang. The observation revealed that although the sites are visually striking, they lack comprehensive and accessible information for visitors. Existing signage provides limited explanations, and the QR codes intended to offer further details were mostly non-functional. This finding highlights the need for a new medium capable of communicating the sites' cultural narratives more effectively.

The literature study was conducted to identify previous references related to coffee table books, visual identity design, and Majapahit heritage. However, no existing publication was found that specifically combines photography and illustration to reinterpret the Majapahit red-brick architecture in Trowulan, Mojokerto. This absence strengthens the originality of this creation.

The questionnaire was distributed to 31 respondents aged between 20 and 35 years, consisting of design students, art students, and general audiences familiar with Mojokerto's cultural heritage. The data from the questionnaire serve as supporting material to understand public perceptions and expectations toward the visualization of Majapahit sites. The summarized findings are used in the analysis section to align the design outcome with audience preferences.

## RESULT AND ANALYSIS

### 1.1 Conceptual Ideas

The objects of this creation are the red-brick sites of the Majapahit Kingdom in Trowulan, Mojokerto, namely Candi Tikus, Gapura Bajang Ratu, Candi Brahu, and Gapura Wringin Lawang. These sites possess strong aesthetic and historical values that reflect local wisdom in the use of red brick as a construction material. To revitalize their visual and cultural identity, this project develops a Coffee Table Book that combines visual storytelling with accessible technology. The Coffee Table Book medium is chosen to offer a reading experience that is both informative and sensory. Printed books provide tangible qualities such as layout, paper texture, and visual depth that evoke emotional engagement (Spence, 2020). An e-book version is also produced to reach a wider audience and promote open cultural preservation without reducing the value of the printed edition.

In addition, Coffee Table Books were chosen as the main medium because this type of book has characteristics that combine visual aesthetics, historical documentation, and the reader's personal experience in one memorable physical format. Unlike digital media, which tends to be fleeting and difficult to leave a lasting impression, Coffee Table Books are tangible, can be touched, stored, and enjoyed repeatedly. This is in line with the essence of Majapahit's cultural heritage, which is eternal and monumental, making books a conceptually harmonious medium of representation.

From a branding strategy perspective, this Coffee Table Book can also function as a modern cultural artifact, an object that not only contains information but also symbolizes regional pride and identity. It can be collected, displayed, or used as a representative souvenir for cultural tourism in Mojokerto. Thus, the choice of a coffee table book is not merely an aesthetic consideration but a conceptual decision that supports the primary mission of its creation: to revive the Majapahit heritage in a relevant and sustainable format.

This Coffee Table Book combines photography and illustration to deliver both documentation and artistic interpretation. Photography captures the architectural authenticity, brick textures, and spatial character of the sites, while illustration enriches the imagery with narrative depth, depicting how the sites might have appeared or functioned in the past. This integration forms part of a Sanggit-revitalization approach, aiming to reintroduce Majapahit heritage in a contemporary yet respectful visual form.

The book's visual layout applies a narrative approach, positioning text and visuals not merely as information but as an immersive reading experience. Sequential page composition guides readers as if they were exploring the sites directly. In addition, the use of colors inspired by the four elements, earth, water, fire, and air, reflects the symbolism of Javanese cosmology, which emphasizes harmony between humans, nature, and the divine (Pamungkas, 2021:vi). Balance in layout is also maintained through symmetrical compositions.

Furthermore, the target audience of this Coffee Table Book is young adults aged 20-35 years, as they tend to have limited connection and knowledge regarding local cultural heritage (Dewi et al., 2024). In the era of globalization and the dominance of rapidly changing visual content on social media, many young people are more familiar with modern visual styles but lack engagement with cultural sites such as the Majapahit heritage remains (Vitry & Syamsir, 2024). This phenomenon

often causes historical sites to be perceived merely as tourist attractions or photo backdrops rather than as meaningful, living heritage that remains relevant today.

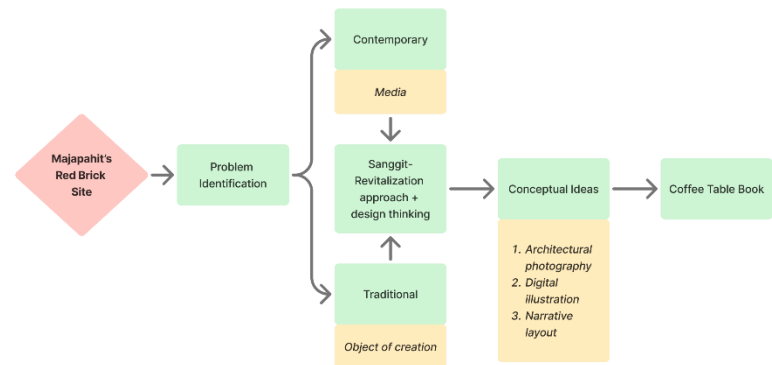


Table 1. Conceptual Framework

1.2 Creation Method

The creation method used is the design thinking method developed by David Kelley, combined with a Sanggit-revitalization approach. This combination is used to reinterpret and modernize the visual identity of the red-brick heritage while maintaining its original cultural values. The design thinking method is chosen because its structured steps facilitate the creative process and focus on solving problems through the perspective and needs of the target audience, making the resulting work relevant to their expectations. Design thinking consists of five stages: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and testing (Abdulhafizh & Djatiprambudi, 2020:113). Meanwhile, the Sanggit-revitalization approach serves to adapt traditional elements to contemporary contexts, ensuring that cultural works are not only preserved but also remain relevant (Dharsono, 2021:3).

1.2.1 Empathize

The initial stage was conducted through field observations of red brick sites such as Candi Tikus, Gapura Bajang Ratu, Candi Brahu, and Gapura Weringin Lawang in Mojokerto, literature studies, and questionnaires to the target audience. The results showed that most respondents only recognized the sites visually, without understanding the historical context or philosophy behind the shape and material of the red bricks used.

1.2.2 Define

From these findings, the main problem was formulated: "How can we reintroduce the history, aesthetic value, and philosophy of Majapahit red brick temples to modern society, which has minimal information about them, through a communicative and attractive visual medium?" This problem became the basis for determining the design and content strategy for the book.

1.2.3 Ideate

At this stage, various visual media ideas were considered. However, the Coffee Table Book was chosen for its ability to combine visual aesthetics, historical documentation, and the reader's personal experience in one physical medium. Unlike digital media, which is fast-paced, this book format presents a lasting impression that is in harmony with the character of the Majapahit heritage. Additionally, the Coffee Table Book provides ample space for visual exploration and presents historical narratives in a light yet meaningful way, making it an effective medium for cultural revitalization.

1.2.4 Prototype

After passing through the ideate stage, the author moved on to the prototyping stage. At this stage, the book structure was compiled, the manuscript was written, photos were selected, and layout experiments were conducted.

#### 1.2.5 Testing

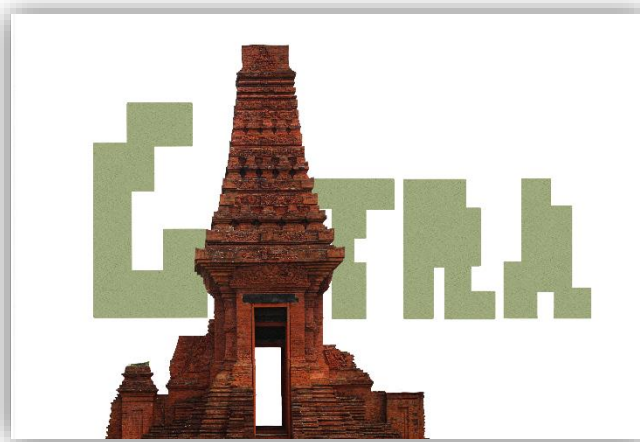
The prototype was tested through user testing with a small group of design and art students. Evaluations were conducted on aspects of readability, narrative flow, and visual impression. Frequent feedback included the need for a more concise but clear historical explanation, as well as a balance between text and photos to avoid boredom. This feedback was used to refine the book until the final version. A cultural Sanggit-revitalization approach was applied throughout the process, ensuring that this work not only modernized the form, but also preserved the authentic values of Majapahit that inspired it.

### 1.3 Result

The final outcome of this project is a coffee table book titled “GATRA: Gema Abadi Tatanan Raja”, measuring 20 x 30 cm with a total of 40 pages. The book presents visual documentation of the red brick temple sites in Mojokerto, combining historical narratives with visuals that merge photography and illustration. It consists of four main chapters, each focusing on a specific site: Gapura Bajang Ratu, Gapura Weringin Lawang, Candi Tikus, and Candi Brahu, all of which represent the grandeur of red brick architecture during the Majapahit era. The book is printed on 260 gsm art carton paper to ensure both durability and visual quality, and features a hard cover for a solid and elegant presentation.

#### 1.3.1 Cover

The cover design, as shown, highlights Gapura Bajang Ratu, chosen for its symbolic meaning as a gateway leading to a sacred place, representing the transition between the physical and the spiritual realms. The title “GATRA” is designed with stacked brick gesture, resembling stacked red bricks, to visually reinforce the essence of Majapahit’s architectural identity.



**Table 2.** Cover

#### 1.3.2 Character

The illustrated characters represent two contemporary explorers who act as visual narrators throughout the book. Their presence bridges the historical atmosphere of Majapahit with the modern viewer's perspective, allowing the audience to experience the heritage sites through a relatable and human lens.



**Table 3.** Character design

The illustration style of the two characters adopts a semi-realistic yet simplified approach, balancing between expressive visual storytelling and accessibility. The visual form avoids excessive stylization, instead focusing on proportion, texture, and color that resemble real human features in a subtle, approachable way. This approach allows the characters to blend naturally with the photographic elements throughout the book. The linework is minimal, with soft texturing that mimics the roughness of red bricks, reinforcing the connection between the characters and the architectural theme of the Majapahit heritage sites. Neutral and earthy tones dominate the palette to maintain coherence with the overall warm, brick-based color scheme of the book.

1.3.3 Book contents

The first chapter, Gapura Bajang Ratu, explores one of the most iconic Majapahit red brick structures, known as the gateway to sacred grounds. The visual presentation in this chapter combines photography, illustration, and poetic narration to create an immersive storytelling experience. Each spread captures not only the architectural beauty of the gate but also its symbolic essence as a passage between the temporal and the spiritual. Through a mixture of detailed close-up shots and wide aerial perspectives, the book highlights the precision and sophistication of Majapahit craftsmanship. The use of illustrated characters and narrative texts serves to connect contemporary viewers with the historical atmosphere of the site, evoking curiosity and emotional engagement. The subtle color tones and soft visual transitions emphasize the warmth of the red bricks, portraying Gapura Bajang Ratu not merely as a historical remnant, but as a living symbol of heritage that continues to inspire visual reinterpretation today.



**Table 4.** 10 pages of the chapter on the Bajang Ratu Gate

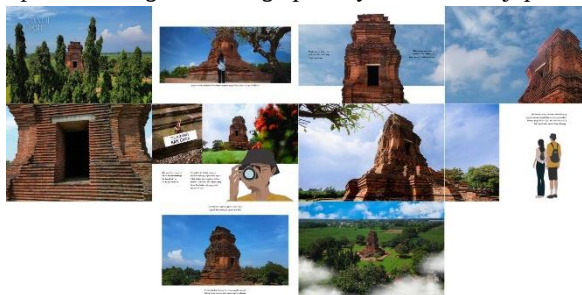
The second chapter, Candi Tikus, presents a different atmosphere from the previous site. Known as a ritual bathing pool from the Majapahit era, this site carries both architectural harmony and spiritual symbolism. Through the composition of aerial photographs, detail shots, and illustrated figures, this chapter aims to reawaken the viewer's sense of curiosity about the sacred function and hidden narratives behind the site. The visual direction emphasizes reflection, both literally, through the mirrored water surfaces, and conceptually, as an invitation to contemplate the purity and cyclical nature of life. The combination of color and black-and-white imagery creates a contrast between the spiritual stillness of the past and the dynamic curiosity of the present generation. By merging documentary photography with subtle illustration, Candi Tikus is not only portrayed as an archaeological artifact, but as a living trace that connects the human body, nature, and memory within one visual frame.



**Table 5.** 10 pages of the Candi Tikus chapter

The third chapter, Candi Brahu, shifts the atmosphere toward a more serene and contemplative tone. Surrounded by open fields and lush greenery, this site is believed to have served as a sacred cremation temple for the Majapahit kings. Through wide-angle compositions and illustrations that depict moments of quiet observation, the chapter invites readers to experience the solemn grandeur of this historical space. The visual storytelling in Candi Brahu emphasizes scale and silence. The vast sky and expansive landscape frame the temple as both monumental and humble, a remnant that stands between the earth and the heavens. The narrative rhythm slows down here, by combining photography and illustration, this chapter brings warmth and familiarity to a site that is often overlooked. The result is a visual dialogue between the temple's physical endurance and the viewer's emotional reflection, reinforcing the idea that heritage is not only to be seen, but also to be felt.

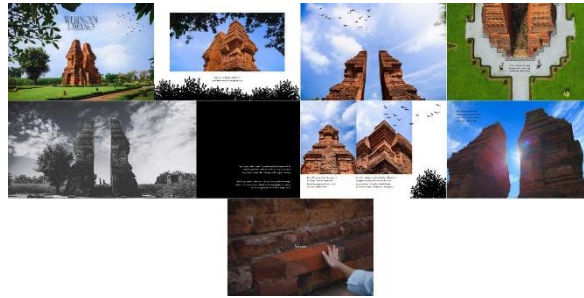
The fourth chapter, *Gapura Weringin Lawang*, portrays one of Majapahit's grand gateways as a



**Table. 6.** 10 pages of the Candi Brahu chapter

visual representation of both historical legacy and symbolic power. The visual direction focuses on the warm texture of red bricks and the majestic form of the split gate, emphasizing the monumental yet inviting character of Majapahit architecture. The composition of photographs, ranging from frontal perspectives to bird's-eye and low-angle shots, highlights the gate's grandeur and spiritual significance. Natural color tones are preserved to maintain authenticity, while elements such as leaves and flying birds add a sense of life and contemporary movement. Overall, this chapter

presents *Weringin Lawang* not merely as a physical remnant, but as a metaphor of openness and transition, reflecting the identity and evolution of the Majapahit civilization.



**Table 7.** Pages of the Gapura Weringin Lawang chapter

Across all chapters, the exploration of these heritage sites through photography demonstrates how visual storytelling can revive historical spaces with emotional and narrative depth. However, this process also reveals that motion-based media such as video can further enhance this experience. Capturing the atmosphere, light shifts, and ambient sounds in motion allows viewers to perceive not only the structure itself but the living rhythm of the space. Hence, if photography captures the *memory* of a site, video captures its *pulse*, offering a more immersive way to experience heritage as a continuous story rather than a still moment frozen in time.

## CONCLUSION

The creation of this coffee table book is an effort to visually revitalize the red brick site of the Majapahit heritage in Mojokerto. Through a combination of design thinking methods and a cultural Sanggit-revitalization approach, this work presents a visual format that is more relevant to the modern context without losing its historical and philosophical value.

Observations show that the public still has a low level of knowledge about the history and meaning of red brick sites. This finding became the main basis for formulating a design strategy that not only highlights visual beauty but also functions as a medium for education and preservation.

The resulting coffee table book, “GATRA,” serves as a medium connecting the cultural values of the past with the visual perceptions of the present. This work shows that visual design can be an effective means of rebuilding the image of cultural heritage to bring it closer to the modern public.

Apart from being a documentary work, this book also has the potential to be further developed into various interactive media and other visual derivative products. Thus, this project is expected to become a model of sustainable visual heritage revitalization, where design not only beautifies but also revives cultural meaning.

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