

APPLICATION OF CONTRAST, NUANCE, AND IDENTITY IN ARCHITECTURAL COMPOSITION AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON BUILDING EXTERIOR DESIGN

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Abstract

Architectural composition is not merely a formal arrangement of visible elements, but a disciplined system through which architectural meaning, spatial order, visual hierarchy, and aesthetic impact are produced. Within this system, the relational categories of contrast, nuance, and identity occupy a central position because they determine how architectural elements are perceived in relation to one another and how a building exterior acquires legibility, expressive power, and contextual coherence. The present article examines the application of contrast, nuance, and identity in architectural composition and analyzes their influence on building exterior design from theoretical, aesthetic, and pedagogical perspectives. The study argues that these three categories should not be understood as isolated decorative techniques, but as fundamental compositional mechanisms governing massing, proportion, rhythm, fenestration, material articulation, color modulation, tectonic clarity, and the perceptual balance between unity and variety. Contrast intensifies perception by establishing strong oppositions; nuance refines visual continuity through subtle gradation; identity stabilizes the composition by ensuring consistency, repetition, and recognizability. When properly integrated, these relations transform a façade from a mere envelope into an architecturally meaningful exterior system. The article draws on both international architectural theory and Uzbek-language literature in architectural composition and aesthetics, thereby situating the discussion within a wider disciplinary framework while preserving local pedagogical relevance. Particular attention is given to the role of these concepts in the formation of exterior image, the control of visual dominance, the regulation of façade rhythm, and the establishment of urban presence. The findings indicate that successful exterior design rarely relies on only one of these relations; instead, architectural quality emerges from their calibrated interaction. Excessive contrast produces formal aggression, excessive

identity results in monotony, and unstructured nuance weakens compositional clarity. The article concludes that the conscious use of contrast, nuance, and identity is essential for contemporary architectural education and professional design practice because these categories help architects balance expressiveness, harmony, context, and recognizability in the outer appearance of buildings.

Keywords: Architectural composition, contrast, nuance, identity, exterior design, façade composition, visual hierarchy, architectural aesthetics, building image, compositional relations.

Introduction

In architecture, the exterior of a building is never a neutral wrapper placed around an interior program; it is the first field in which structure, function, symbolism, technology, and artistic intention become visible to society. For this reason, the design of building exteriors has always depended on compositional thinking. Among the many principles that organize architectural form, the triad of contrast, nuance, and identity occupies a particularly significant place because it governs how the human eye compares elements and how the architectural mind organizes them into a meaningful whole. In the Uzbek pedagogical tradition of architectural education, this triad is treated not as an optional stylistic theme but as a dedicated compositional problem. In *Arxitekturaviy kompozitsiya asoslari*, X. Po‘latov and co-authors explicitly identify “kontrast, nyuans, ayniyat” as a separate instructional topic within the sequence of architectural composition, placing it alongside scale, proportion, rhythm, symmetry, color, and spatial organization [1]. This curricular position is not accidental. It suggests that the visual relations among elements are as important to architecture as the elements themselves. Contrast refers to the sharp differentiation of qualities such as large and small, light and dark, vertical and horizontal, simple and complex; nuance refers to slight, controlled variation; identity refers to the near or complete sameness of compared elements [1]. These are not merely descriptive terms but operational categories of design thinking. Through them, the architect decides whether a façade should assert dominance or continuity, whether an entrance should be announced dramatically or approached gradually, whether a roofline should read as a unified datum or as a differentiated skyline, whether the material palette should

amplify tectonic articulation or soften it into atmospheric continuity. From the standpoint of perception theory, such relations are not superficial. Arnheim demonstrated that visual experience is structured by tensions, balances, weights, and directional forces rather than by passive reception of shapes [8]. Ching similarly emphasized that architectural form is perceived through relationships among mass, void, plane, edge, and sequence rather than through isolated objects [5]. Thus, exterior design becomes compelling only when compositional relations are intentionally constructed. A façade with no contrast often dissolves into monotony; a façade with no identity loses coherence; a façade without nuance may become rigid, abrupt, or visually crude. The problem is therefore not whether to use these relations, but how to calibrate them. This question becomes especially important in contemporary architectural practice, where digital tools allow architects to generate complex geometries and visually striking skins with alarming ease. Software can multiply formal options, but it cannot by itself determine which differences are meaningful, which repetitions are necessary, and which transitions are graceful. In other words, the machine can vary; only design judgment can compose. The issue is equally important in architectural education. If students learn to model façades before they learn to regulate contrast, nuance, and identity, they may produce spectacles without structure or order. Uzbek architectural pedagogy has long recognized that compositional education must train the student to compare, differentiate, and harmonize elements through controlled exercises and analytical observation [1]. This is one reason why contrast, nuance, and identity are taught through visual tasks, klauzura, and model-based experimentation rather than through abstract definitions alone. Their educational significance also extends beyond formal analysis. In aesthetics, harmony is not achieved by eliminating difference, but by organizing it meaningfully. Sher and Husanov, writing from the Uzbek aesthetic tradition, stress that aesthetic cultivation is bound to perception, evaluation, artistic structure, and the refinement of taste [2]. Applied to architecture, this means that the exterior of a building affects not only visual pleasure but social orientation, symbolic reading, and cultural memory. A public building may require stronger contrast to assert civic significance, while a residential block in a delicate urban tissue may rely more heavily on nuance to maintain continuity. Identity, meanwhile, often underpins module, rhythm, and recognizability, especially in repetitive façade systems, urban fronts, or ornamental fields. Even monumental and mural art traditions tied to architecture

depend on such relations: Xudayberganov notes that composition linked to architecture requires purposeful placement, proportional coordination, and the careful use of color contrast, silhouette, light, and shadow [3]. Therefore, the study of contrast, nuance, and identity in architectural composition is not a narrow theoretical exercise. It is a direct inquiry into how building exteriors communicate force, calm, continuity, hierarchy, texture, scale, and presence. On this basis, the present article investigates how these three compositional relations function in exterior design, how they influence the visual and semantic image of buildings, and why their balanced application remains essential both for architectural education and professional design practice. A further reason this topic deserves focused study is that exterior design is judged simultaneously at multiple scales: from the urban panorama, from the street approach, and from the close tactile encounter. At each scale, the proportion between contrast, nuance, and identity changes. What reads as a useful contrast from two hundred meters may appear coarse at ten meters; what feels nuanced and refined at close range may disappear in the city silhouette; what ensures identity in repetition may at times require interruption to avoid fatigue. This scale-dependent character makes the triad especially valuable in teaching façade design, because students learn that compositional decisions are not absolute but relational to distance, light, context, and use. The architect therefore does not merely choose a form, but chooses how difference and sameness will be perceived over time. In climates with strong sunlight, for example, shadow itself becomes part of the compositional system, intensifying contrast on deep openings while revealing nuance in relief, jointing, and texture. In contexts where materials weather visibly, identity may be preserved through stable modular order even when tonal variation changes seasonally. Such observations confirm that the triad belongs not only to visual theory but to the practical intelligence of building design. The basic visual distinctions summarized in Figure 1 offer a compact didactic model for explaining how the same façade problem may be organized through sharply differentiated, gradually modulated, or deliberately repeated relations.

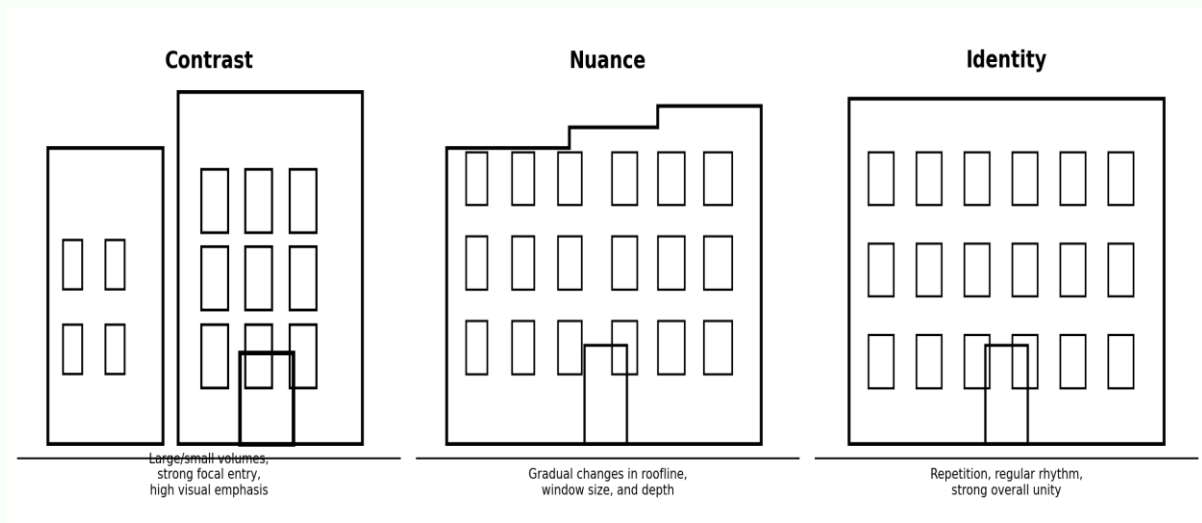


Figure 1. Schematic comparison of contrast, nuance, and identity in façade composition

Materials and Methods

This study is based on a qualitative theoretical-analytical methodology and is positioned within architectural theory, composition pedagogy, and aesthetic analysis. The main materials of the research consist of classical and contemporary sources in architecture and design theory, supplemented by Uzbek-language educational literature in architectural composition, urban history, and aesthetics. The core local source is Po‘latov et al.’s *Arxitekturaliy kompozitsiya asoslari*, because it provides direct pedagogical definitions of contrast, nuance, and identity and treats them as formal relations applicable to line, color, shape, and volume [1]. Additional contextual support is drawn from Sher and Husanov’s *Estetika*, which frames aesthetic perception as a cultivated cognitive and evaluative activity rather than a purely subjective response [2], Xudayberganov’s writings on composition and contrast in relation to architectural art and mural integration [3], and Po‘latov’s *Shaharsozlik tarixi*, which is useful for understanding the broader spatial and environmental logic within which building exteriors are perceived in urban space [4]. These Uzbek-language sources are combined with international works by Ching, Unwin, Arnheim, Lawson, Norberg-Schulz, Pallasmaa, Alexander, and Frampton in order to build a layered interpretive framework that links formal composition to perceptual psychology, contextual meaning, and design pedagogy [5–12]. Methodologically, the article uses conceptual analysis, comparative interpretation, and compositional synthesis. Conceptual analysis is applied to clarify the meanings of contrast, nuance,

and identity as relational categories rather than decorative labels. Comparative interpretation is used to examine how these categories operate at different levels of exterior design, including massing, façade subdivision, material articulation, color organization, opening rhythm, and urban presence. Compositional synthesis is then used to explain how these relations interact rather than function in isolation. The research does not rely on statistical measurement, because the primary aim is not to quantify façade preferences but to uncover the internal logic through which exterior design acquires visual coherence and expressive force. A secondary pedagogical lens is also employed, examining how the triad of contrast, nuance, and identity contributes to the training of architectural students in analyzing and producing exterior form. In this respect, the article treats exterior design as both a professional outcome and an educational problem: one must first learn to see difference, gradation, and sameness before one can design them responsibly. The validity of the study therefore rests on the coherence of the theoretical model, the relevance of the selected literature, and the explanatory capacity of the relational framework developed through the analysis.

Results

The analysis shows that contrast, nuance, and identity function as three fundamental relational mechanisms through which building exteriors become readable, expressive, and compositionally organized. Figure 1 schematically compares the three modes in a simplified façade study, while Figure 2 systematizes their application across major exterior design levels. The first and most direct result is that contrast is the primary generator of visual emphasis in exterior design. It enables a building to declare hierarchy by differentiating the dominant mass from subordinate parts, the entrance volume from secondary surfaces, the base from the crown, the structural frame from infill, or the solid field from transparent openings. Strong contrast in scale, tone, projection, texture, or geometry intensifies attention and clarifies what the observer should read first. In public architecture, this often produces monumentality or civic presence; in commercial architecture, it may be used to enhance branding and recognition; in residential design, controlled contrast can articulate privacy gradients or distinguish communal from individual zones. The exterior therefore gains force not through complexity alone, but through differences that are legible and intentional. The second result is that nuance performs the opposite but equally necessary role: it

prevents the exterior from collapsing into either monotony or visual violence by introducing measured variation within an overall order. Through nuance, a façade may preserve a common module while slightly varying window depth, material grain, cornice projection, panel color, or shading density. This produces a richer and more refined perceptual field, especially at close and middle range. Nuance is particularly important where a building must remain calm, dignified, or contextually sensitive, because it allows articulation without rupture. The third result is that identity serves as the stabilizing ground of the composition. Identity is visible in repeated modules, consistent structural bays, ordered material systems, recurring decorative patterns, aligned openings, and coherent proportional rules. It builds recognizability and formal discipline. Without identity, an exterior loses internal law and begins to appear accidental; with too much identity and too little modulation, it becomes deadeningly repetitive. Thus, identity is most effective when it establishes order but leaves room for selective contrast and nuanced transformation. A fourth major result is that the impact of these relations on exterior design is not limited to the two-dimensional face of the façade; it extends to volumetric organization. In mass composition, contrast may appear between large and small blocks, open and closed corners, vertical and horizontal emphases, or heavy podium and light upper volume. Nuance may appear in stepped setbacks, incremental roof shifts, gradual changes in surface articulation, or calibrated transitions between primary and secondary masses. Identity appears in repeated volumetric modules, consistent bay spacing, or typological continuity across a façade line or housing ensemble. Therefore, the architectural exterior should be understood as a three-dimensional field of comparative relations rather than a flat graphic composition. A fifth result concerns materiality. The same compositional triad operates through concrete versus glass, brick versus plaster, matte versus reflective surfaces, rough versus smooth textures, warm versus cool tonalities, and monolithic versus articulated assemblies. Material contrast can dramatize tectonics; material nuance can produce atmospheric richness; material identity can unify the building image. Because exterior design is experienced under changing weather and light, these relations are dynamic rather than static. Contrast may intensify under strong sun, nuance may emerge only at close range or under diffuse light, and identity may become more or less visible depending on viewing distance. A sixth result concerns color and shadow. As Xudayberganov notes, composition depends not only on placement and proportion but on color contrast, silhouette, and the regulation of light

and shade [3]. In exterior design this means that chromatic contrast can sharpen figure-ground relations, tonal nuance can soften transitions across large surfaces, and color identity can produce a memorable architectural image. The seventh result is pedagogical and analytical: Uzbek architectural pedagogy presents contrast, nuance, and identity as relations that can be observed in historical architecture and trained through compositional exercises [1]. Po‘latov et al. specifically connect identity, nuance, and contrast to architectural examples, including identity in ornamental and formal repetition, nuance in the graduated relation of domes, and contrast in the relation of mass and surrounding space [1]. These examples are crucial because they show that the triad is not an abstract classroom invention but a historically operative design logic. The eighth result concerns urban context. Exterior design is always read against neighboring buildings, street width, vegetation, sky, and movement. A building that is compositionally balanced in isolation may become visually disruptive in its actual setting if contrast is exaggerated or identity with context is absent. Conversely, nuance can mediate between a new building and an existing environment without resorting to weak imitation. Finally, the overall result of the study is that successful building exterior design depends not on choosing one of these relations but on composing their interaction. Contrast gives force, nuance gives refinement, identity gives order; together they create an exterior that is legible at a distance, engaging at intermediate range, and rich upon close inspection. A ninth result concerns the relationship between compositional relations and climatic responsiveness. In hot and sunny regions, exterior design frequently relies on recess, screen, overhang, and layered surfaces. These environmental devices are not simply technical appendages; they also generate contrast, nuance, and identity. Deep shading around selected apertures may create focused contrast, a repeated brise-soleil field may establish identity, and calibrated variation in screen density may produce nuance while controlling solar gain. The environmental and the aesthetic therefore intersect in the façade rather than operating as separate domains. A tenth result is that the triad strongly influences the symbolic reading of building type. Civic institutions, cultural facilities, educational buildings, and housing blocks are not read by users in identical ways. A courthouse or museum may require stronger contrast to express entry hierarchy and institutional gravity; a school may depend more on identity and nuanced articulation to project order, calm, and accessibility; housing often benefits from repeated identity moderated by nuanced differences that allow individuality within

the collective whole. In this sense, compositional relations help encode the social character of architecture. An eleventh result is that the triad has direct consequences for renovation and adaptive reuse. When a façade is extended, repaired, or modernized, the question is rarely whether the new intervention should imitate the old completely or oppose it violently. More often, the design problem lies in establishing an intelligent relationship between identity with the existing structure, nuanced adjustment to inherited proportions, and selective contrast that makes the intervention legible as a contemporary layer. Thus, the triad also offers a conceptual tool for heritage-sensitive transformation. A twelfth result concerns educational assessment: student work becomes easier to evaluate rigorously when the critique is organized around these categories. Instead of relying on vague statements that a façade is “interesting” or “weak,” teachers can ask whether hierarchy is generated through meaningful contrast, whether repetition is stabilized through identity, whether transitions are resolved through nuance, and whether the three relations remain balanced across massing, openings, materials, and context. This improves critique culture by making visual judgment more explicit, teachable, and defensible. The balancing logic shown in Figure 3 further clarifies that architectural quality emerges not from the isolated dominance of one relation but from their calibrated equilibrium.

Figure 2. Application of compositional relations across façade design levels

	Contrast	Nuance	Identity
Massing	Dominant vs. secondary volumes	Stepped transitions	Repeated modules
Openings	Accent entry / large-small voids	Subtle depth variation	Regular window rhythm
Materials	Glass vs. brick, rough vs. smooth	Tone and texture gradation	Consistent palette
Color & Shadow	Sharp light-dark effect	Soft tonal modulation	Stable image memory
Urban Context	Landmark emphasis	Sensitive mediation	Street-line continuity

Figure 2. Application of contrast, nuance, and identity across principal façade design levels

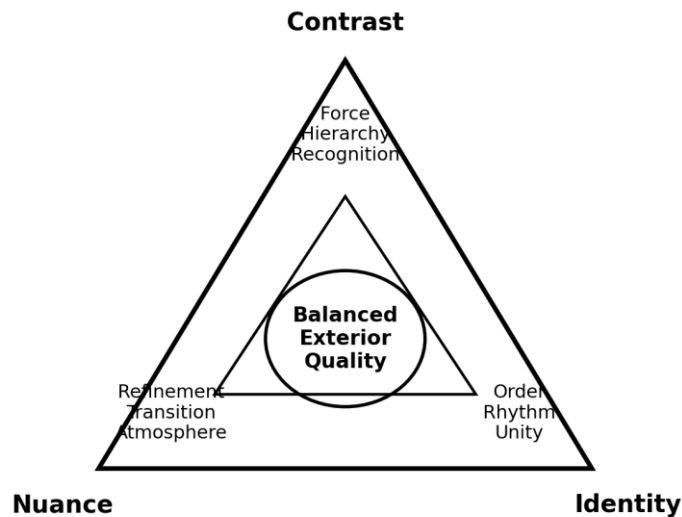


Figure 3. Exterior quality emerges from the calibrated interaction of contrast, nuance, and identity

Figure 3. Balanced exterior quality as the interaction of force, refinement, and order

Discussion

The results make it possible to argue more broadly that the triad of contrast, nuance, and identity is one of the most effective interpretive keys for understanding why some building exteriors appear architecturally resolved while others remain either monotonous or chaotic. Figure 4 illustrates this issue at the urban scale by comparing a sharply contrasted insertion with a more nuanced contextual response. In practice, many design failures can be described as failures of relational calibration. When contrast is overused, the exterior becomes visually noisy, fragmented, or self-advertising in a crude manner; every element tries to become dominant, and the building begins to shout at the street rather than speak to it. Such façades often confuse dramatic difference with architectural strength. They may juxtapose too many materials, scales, colors, and geometries without a stabilizing system of identity, producing spectacle instead of composition. On the other hand, when identity is overextended, the exterior loses tension and communicative depth. Endless repetition of identical windows, bays, and surfaces may achieve efficiency, but unless relieved by nuance or selective contrast, it creates fatigue and suppresses architectural character. This is the curse of the obedient but boring façade: disciplined, yes; memorable, no. Nuance, meanwhile, is frequently misunderstood because it operates in a quieter register. Its weakness is not inherent but pedagogical: students and even

practitioners sometimes overlook it because it does not announce itself as loudly as contrast. Yet nuance is often the mark of architectural maturity. It is the means by which a façade acquires subtle proportional intelligence, atmospheric delicacy, and contextual politeness without becoming timid. A nuanced transition in cornice height, opening depth, material tone, or shadow pattern can resolve what blunt contrast would rupture. For this reason, nuance is indispensable in historic settings, residential environments, educational buildings, and any architectural situation requiring continuity rather than visual confrontation. The discussion also suggests that the three relations should not be treated merely as formal abstractions but as ethical and contextual choices. Exterior design affects public perception, urban memory, and the sensory comfort of everyday life. In dense urban settings, an aggressively contrasted façade may dominate its neighbors to the point of visual arrogance, while a carefully nuanced composition can create dialogue with surrounding streetscape. Here Po‘latov’s broader argument that architecture and urban space must be understood through the relations of function, construction, and aesthetics remains highly relevant [4]. The exterior is not only an image but part of a shared visual environment. This is especially important in the contemporary Uzbek context, where new development often stands in proximity to historic architectural traditions rich in patterned identity, proportional order, material nuance, and selective contrast. Historical examples from Central Asian architecture demonstrate that powerful visual effect does not depend on random excess. Po‘latov et al. point to nuance in the graduated relation of domes, identity in ornamental and formal repetition, and contrast in the interplay of mass and surrounding environment [1]. Such examples are instructive because they reveal that architectural intensity can emerge from controlled systems, not from compositional undiscipline. The same insight applies to contemporary façades using glass, metal panels, terracotta screens, or concrete shells. Advanced materials do not cancel compositional law; they merely provide new media through which it operates. Another important implication concerns perception across distance. From far away, contrast is often the dominant reader: silhouette, massing, and major tonal divisions define the first impression. From middle distance, identity and rhythm become more visible: window ordering, bay repetition, and structural cadence shape the building image. From near range, nuance emerges in texture, jointing, depth, shadow softness, and material transitions. An architect who ignores this layered reading will design exteriors that work only in renderings or only from one viewpoint. Good exterior

design must perform across distances and durations of perception. Pallasmaa's emphasis on embodied experience and Unwin's focus on architectural analysis help explain why exterior composition must be understood not as static picture-making but as sequential, lived perception [6,10]. The building is approached, circled, entered, and remembered. This temporal character reinforces the need for all three relations: contrast for initial recognition, identity for coherent orientation, nuance for lasting richness. The pedagogical consequences are equally significant. In architectural education, students should be trained not simply to identify contrast, nuance, and identity in existing buildings but to control them experimentally in façade studies, mass models, and analytical drawings. When Po'latov's textbook frames these categories through exercises and visual examples, it implies that compositional intelligence is learnable through disciplined comparison [1]. That implication should be taken seriously in contemporary studio teaching. Students should test how much difference is required before contrast becomes legible, how slight a variation can still qualify as nuance, and how repetition can remain alive rather than mechanical. They should also analyze historical and local architectural examples to understand how these relations are embedded in real buildings rather than only in abstract diagrams. In professional practice, the same logic supports more responsible design decisions. A housing complex may rely on identity for modular discipline, nuance for apartment differentiation, and contrast to articulate entries and communal nodes. A museum may use contrast to establish civic presence, identity to stabilize gallery order, and nuance to mediate between public plazas and enclosed masses. A school may require a calm nuanced envelope rather than hyper-contrasted formal drama. Thus, the triad functions not as a stylistic formula but as a relational toolkit adaptable to typology, climate, culture, and urban condition. The broader conclusion of this discussion is that the exterior quality of architecture depends less on novelty than on the disciplined orchestration of difference and sameness. In architecture, as in music, the problem is not whether notes exist, but whether they are composed. Contrast without order is noise; identity without modulation is monotone; nuance without structure is vagueness. When these three are composed intelligently, the exterior becomes architecturally persuasive. This leads to another important discussion point: the triad can serve as a bridge between traditional compositional pedagogy and contemporary digital design workflows. Students often encounter parametric tools that allow continuous variation across façade panels, structural skins, or shading systems. Yet

variation alone is not nuance, and difference alone is not contrast. Without a governing identity, digitally generated exteriors can become formally restless; without carefully weighted contrasts, their visual field may remain uniformly busy; without nuance, even complex systems can read as blunt patterning. The compositional triad therefore provides a critical filter through which digital outputs can be judged rather than merely admired. It helps distinguish between complexity that is organized and complexity that is merely produced. Another implication concerns sustainability discourse. Contemporary architecture rightly emphasizes energy efficiency, material responsibility, and lifecycle thinking, but sustainable façades still enter public life as visible architectural objects. A high-performance envelope that ignores compositional coherence may perform technically yet fail culturally or psychologically. By contrast, a well-composed exterior can integrate shading, ventilation, modular repetition, and material economy into a form that is both environmentally responsive and publicly meaningful. In this regard, contrast, nuance, and identity should be understood as allies of sustainable design, not rivals to it. A final point worth stressing is that the triad also refines the architect's ethical restraint. Many weak exteriors are not weak because they lack effort, but because they contain too much formal insistence at once. The disciplined use of contrast teaches selectivity; the disciplined use of identity teaches order; the disciplined use of nuance teaches patience. Together they cultivate design maturity. And maturity, in architecture, is rarely loud. It appears when a building knows where to be emphatic, where to remain calm, and where to let small differences carry large meaning.

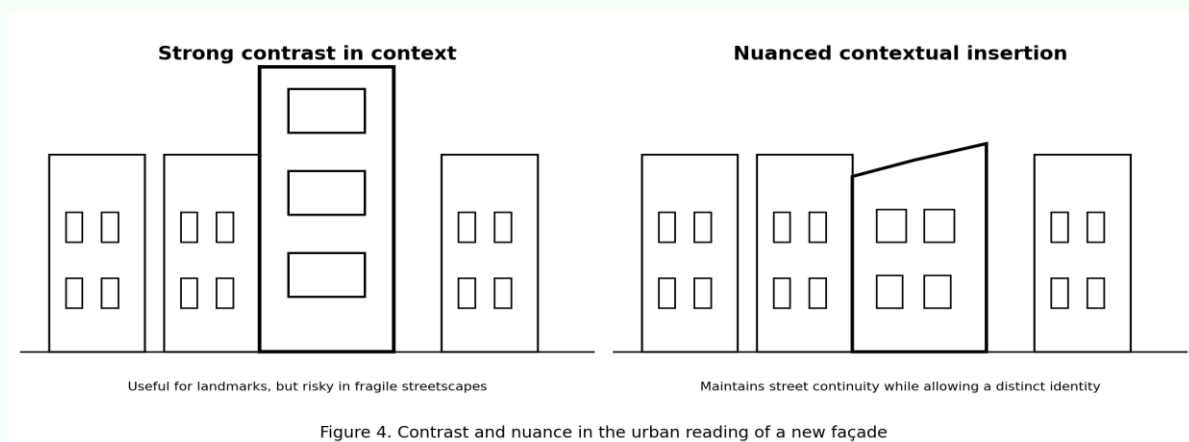


Figure 4. Contrast and nuance in the urban reading of a new façade

Figure 4. Urban reading of façade design through contrast and nuanced contextual insertion

Conclusion

The study confirms that contrast, nuance, and identity are not peripheral aesthetic notions but core compositional relations that decisively shape the visual, symbolic, and contextual quality of building exterior design. Contrast gives the exterior energy, emphasis, hierarchy, and distance-readability; nuance gives it refinement, continuity, and atmospheric depth; identity gives it order, recognizability, and structural calm. A building exterior becomes compositionally mature only when these relations are not used separately or mechanically, but balanced in accordance with typology, urban setting, perceptual distance, and design intent. The analysis also shows that Uzbek-language architectural literature provides a valuable pedagogical and theoretical basis for understanding this triad, particularly in the teaching tradition that links compositional categories to real architectural examples and practical exercises. This is important because it grounds the discussion not only in universal theory but in a local educational framework relevant to architectural training in Uzbekistan. In contemporary practice, where façades are often overburdened with image-making, branding, or digital effects, the return to relational compositional thinking is especially necessary. The exterior of a building should not be judged by novelty alone, but by the precision with which it organizes sameness and difference into architectural meaning. For that reason, the conscious application of contrast, nuance, and identity should be regarded as one of the essential criteria of professional exterior design and one of the foundational topics of architectural education.

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