

INAUGURAL LECTURE SERIES 288

**“VERNACULARIZING” NIGERIA’S
CONTEMPORARY RESIDENTIAL
ARCHITECTURE:
*You Can Eat Your Cake and Have It!***

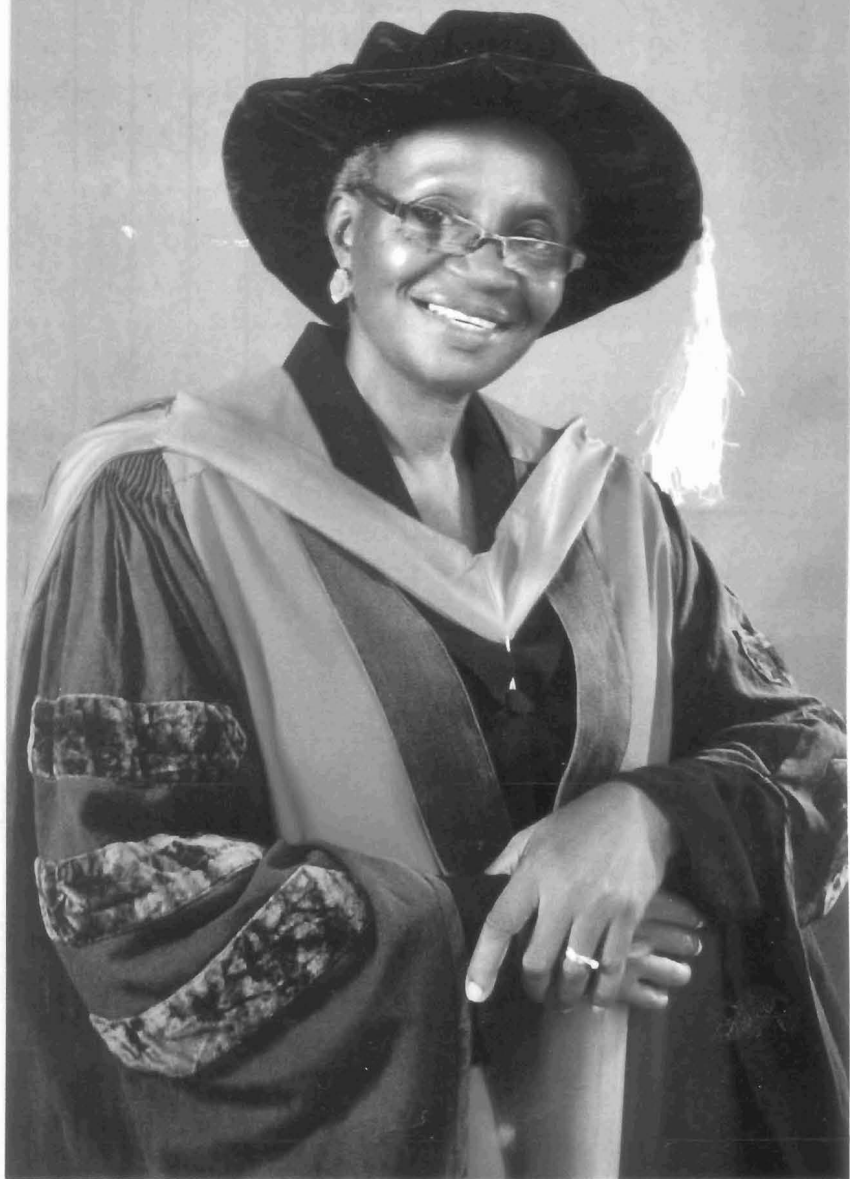
By

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OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY PRESS, ILE-IFE, NIGERIA.



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An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at Oduduwa Hall,
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
On Tuesday, 16th August, 2016.

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Inaugural Lecture Series 288

Obafemi Awolowo University Press Limited
Ile-Ife, Nigeria

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ISSN 0189-7848

Printed by
Obafemi Awolowo University Press Limited,
Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

“VERNACULARIZING” NIGERIA’S CONTEMPORARY RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE: *You Can Eat Your Cake and Have It!*

1. PREAMBLE

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I consider it an uncommon privilege to stand before you this day, to give an account of my stewardship on the various platforms on which, in the last thirty-two (32) years, the drama of my life has unfolded, in this great citadel of learning. Perhaps more than anyone else in this gathering, I stand amazed and in unparalleled gratitude to God, that this is happening.

By the time I was finishing my academic training in Architecture (i.e. M.Sc. Arch.), the prospect of National Youth Service placement in an architectural practice – to be followed by immediate employment in the same firm – already awaited me; that I never took up the offer and today, I can stand before this august audience to deliver an Inaugural Lecture, is a tribute to the inscrutable but sure ways of Divine Providence – moreso, since as a prospective Nigerian university student taking Concessional Entrance Examinations, I had never wanted to come to the University of Ife, and so had never bought its forms!

Architecture, as a course of study – but more importantly, as a career – is multi-faceted. Its requirements (for versatility, creativity and, above all, resilience) are stringent. To have opted – in fact, to have doggedly resisted the urge to settle for another, more readily-accessible course (given limiting health challenges from childhood days) – should not be attributed to any outstanding virtue on my part; rather, it has been purely the work of grace.

2. MY ACADEMIC CAREER

2.1. The Early Days: Studentship

In 1977, I joined a group of about fifty (50) other students, in the then Department of Estate Management, Faculty of Technology, in Part 2. Not only were we a motley crew in outlook, we were

equally varied in background, as several of us already had the Ordinary National Diploma (OND) in Estate Management, while others came with a Social Sciences background; I was a Transfer Student from the University of Ibadan, coming from a Science background. The attraction for people like me was that we had learnt that Architecture, among other new courses, was going to take off in Ife, that Session, and I had wanted to read Architecture – so, desperately that it was my third application to ABU (Ahmadu Bello University) that coincided with my coming to Ife; interestingly, a letter of admission was eventually sent to me – but after I had settled down at Ife! This floating of new programmes materialized during the tenure of Professor Ojetunji Aboyade, as Vice-Chancellor.

By the time we got to Part 4, the decisive year in which we were to be divided into our specialty “departments”, our number had been whittled down to 45; two of the five females who had started the course with us and some male students had dropped out. Fifteen (15) students eventually qualified to read Architecture; I was the only female among them.

Those were the days of Dr. (now Professor) Kunle Ade Wahab, the founding Head of Estate Management (and, later, founding Dean of Environmental Design and Management); more specifically, they were the days of his 7.00a.m. lectures! Those were the days of a linkage programme with the University of Trieste, Italy, and the days of expatriate teaching staff (mostly Italian, but also Ghanaian and British); those were also the days of uninterrupted University calendars!

In 1981, twelve (12) of the original fifteen (15) pioneer students of Architecture graduated on the Bachelor of Science programme (plates 1 and 2); two years later, we similarly completed the Master of Science. Despite unique challenges at both levels – and to the glory of God – I had the best result at both levels.



Plate 1: Pioneer Students of Architecture, Ife (1981).

Front row (left to right) – Afolayan, Owowa, Dr. Barbero, Akinsowon, and Omatsone.

Back row (left to right) – Oluwatudimu, Fatodu, Arayela, Fadamiro, Yoha, Ajie, and Odubanjo (Osasona).

2.2. The Early Days: Trainee Lectureship

2.2.1 Appointment

Before we completed the M. Sc. programme, I had two requests for NYSC placement: one, from Arc. Bunmi Adedeji of Gideon Associates, Ibadan (my erstwhile boss during our 9-month Internship Training Scheme), and the other, from the Department of Architecture, University of Ife; in both cases, the bait was the promise of employment afterwards. Taking the long-term perspective, I opted for spending the Service-year in the University (as my fiancé was already in the system).



Plate 2: Pioneer Students of Architecture and Faculty of EDM Staff (1981).

Seated, front row (left to right) – C. O. Odubanjo (Osasona), Prof. Aradeon (External Examiner), Dr. K. A. Wahab (HOD), Prof. Costa (Ife-Trieste Italian Linkage Coordinator), Dr. Barbero, Arc. Rosemary Mills-Tetty and Arc. Ralph Mills-Tetty.

I took up appointment with the University of Ife as an Assistant Lecturer, on March 22, 1985; two of us (the best and second-best students) were so employed. Within a few months, we were interviewed for a doctoral-study scholarship, to be utilized in Italy; my colleague won the award. I later learnt that I had interviewed better; however, I had been relegated on the grounds of gender. It had been argued that being female, “marriage and domestic issues” would likely prevent me from “performing” – I would not be as much an asset to the system as my male counterpart was sure to be! As such, my colleague got the scholarship; he travelled to Italy in 1987 – but, paradoxically, *never* came back!

2.2.2 Mentorship

When I joined the teaching staff of Architecture, there were only four (4) other Nigerian lecturers on ground; the academic staff strength was boosted by two (2) Ghanaians (in the persons of

Ralph and Rosemary Mills-Tetty). As with any fledgling enterprise, precedents were few and far between. Generally, many of those who should have been role-models – actively engaged in mentorship -- were either too busy defining their own career-paths, or never saw the importance of giving coordinated guidance to up-and-coming junior colleagues. Nevertheless, I would like to acknowledge the avuncular role played by Professor Ralph Mills-Tetty, who, from time to time, made me aware of opportunities for publishing and general self-improvement. Through his agency as Acting Head of Department, in 1992, I got a British Council Higher Education Grant (as Lecturer II) for a three-month Fellowship stint at the Centre for Architectural Research and Development Overseas (CARDO), University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, in the United Kingdom. This resulted in a working partnership with Professor Anthony Hyland, Head of the Centre, culminating in 2006, in a book publication (Osasona & Hyland, 2006). The Mills-Tetteys have remained, till date, professional role-models and personal friends.

2.2.3 Academic Orientation

A combination of the fledgling status of the Department (and in fact, of the Faculty), inadequate mentorship, an inappropriately heavy workload, the need for professional authentication, and predictable family demands, made defining a research orientation – and following through with publications – a real (and often overwhelming) challenge, in the early days of my academic sojourn. Based on information that the Department of Fine Arts was about to start a Doctor of Philosophy programme, I enrolled, part-time, in 1987, for the Master of Arts (M.A.), that would eventually qualify me for it. In 1990, I completed the course, finishing in Distinction. However, the Ph.D. programme did not take off as proposed, then; though an approved programme is now in place, the very first Ph.D. graduate of the Department was produced only recently (i.e. on March, 30, 2016).

This disappointment notwithstanding, my M.A. (Fine Arts) course opened up a vista of research prospects, centered on the

complementarity of Art and Architecture – particularly in the traditional African context. My dissertation in 1990 (titled, “*Decorative Elements in Yoruba Traditional Architecture*”) would later provide inspiration for a book of a similar title, in 2005.

3. MY CONTRIBUTIONS TO ACADEMICS

The “Teaching, Research and Service” requirements of the system have been established to produce rounded academics; over the past thirty (30) years, I have consistently striven to meet the requirements.

3.1 Early Exploratory Experiences

In the spirit of “Assistant Lectureship”, the early days of my teaching activities exposed me to a wide range of courses such as Graphic Communication, Architectural Graphics and History of Architecture. All the then available relevant texts recommended to students were, expectedly, produced by expatriates; with courses like History – particularly of African cultures and socio-political institutions – there was invariably a skewing of facts in favour of a colonial (or at best a Western) viewpoint. These issues raised queries in my mind – a challenge to explore these various issues from an “insider” point of view: for instance, why do we, as Africans (and, more specifically, as Nigerians) invariably infuse Art into Architecture? Susan Denyer (1978) had posited four (4) contexts of “art-in-architecture”:

- i. As “art for art’s sake”;
- ii. As a sign-post;
- iii. As a structural expedient, and
- iv. As a social expedient.

My research findings (based on fieldwork in Ile-Ife and parts of the Middle Belt region of Nigeria), supported her submission. However, both contexts and expressions were, of course, very different – as espoused in Osasona, 1989. These early research efforts (and later, more seminal work), unearthed symbolism in Nigerian building cultures, transcending utility value; forms,

materials, characteristic aesthetics – and even process – were found to be imbued with nuances far beyond functionality. Two of my works capture the unique symbolism of such Nigerian building craft (Osasona, 1990; Osasona, 2001).

In related research – and despite the popular (but unfounded) belief that traditional building was an all-male endeavour – my studies of building practices among different Nigerian ethnicities have supported the submissions of several foreign authors (Nadel, 1951; Basden, 1966; Roth, 1968; Talbot, 1969) that women were involved – beyond being drawers of water and carriers of earth. True, significantly, this involvement was with respect to finishing; nevertheless, in the Benin area, women assisted their menfolk in wall-construction, while in the South-East (specifically with wattle-and-daub construction), women were traditionally responsible for wall-cladding (Talbot, 1969). With shrine architecture and its embellishment, I was able to establish that Ife women, through executing the various ritual motifs, are responsible for the necessary preliminary invocation and worship at centres such as Oluorogbo and Orisa’Kire Shrines; such mural motifs are deity-specific and ritualistically symbolic. (Osasona, 1995).

My Master’s thesis, in 1983 (*Optimum Housing for Low-/ Middle-Income Nigerians in Oyo State*), had sought to probe the absurdity of Government invariably providing “low-cost” housing, ostensibly for the nation’s low-/ middle-income groups – only for such housing schemes to end up as “kangaroo projects”. This sorry outcome was exemplified by the houses either being beyond the reach of the target-groups, or being successfully delivered to them, but grossly inadequate for their actual spatial needs. Experience has repeatedly shown that the low-income group invariably has the greatest number of children and other dependants. Of what value then, is a provision of a one- (or two-) bedroom apartment to a man with two wives and seven children – plus a retinue of other dependants? Little wonder such “housing estates” invariably wind up as “shanty towns” (slums)! In 1991, I pushed this line of

thought further, and posited that “*optimum*”(as opposed to “low-cost”) housing was what the Nigerian situation calls for. I defined it as housing that anticipates growth for the original allottee, both demographically and economically, and caters for it by an original “core-unit” allocation with built-in growth potentials. Termed “the extendible house”, it was based on the principle of “percentage completeness” earlier espoused by Wahab (1978), and employed by the Lagos State Government of the early-1980s, popularly referred to as “Jakande Housing”. The research effort was backed up by prototype designs of core-unit housing and the eventual, fully-developed houses. The highlight of the proposal, published in the Nigerian Institute of Architects’ Journal, was the eventual adaptability of each fully-matured building to old-age family realities (Osasona, 1991). Figs. 1-8.

Adequate and appropriate housing issues still occupied my early academic activities, spurring joint research into development prospects for the middle-income group, in 1991. Some of the factors generating the phenomenon of middle-class multi-apartment housing were identified as:

- (i) the urban housing crisis;
- (ii) urban socialization;
- (iii) improved construction technology and
- (iv) housing privatization and commercialization.

Prototype layouts were presented from Lagos, Akure, Ile-Ife and Ijebu-Ode, and analyses covered such phenomena as investors, spatial organization, infrastructure and amenities (individual and community), prevailing rents, and general liveability. Some of the measures we suggested to effectively contain the situation include the encouragement of cooperative apartment home-ownership systems, the regulation of rent and land-speculation, and the provision of incentives to the private sector. (Ogunshakin & Osasona, 1991).

THE EXTENDIBLE HOUSE

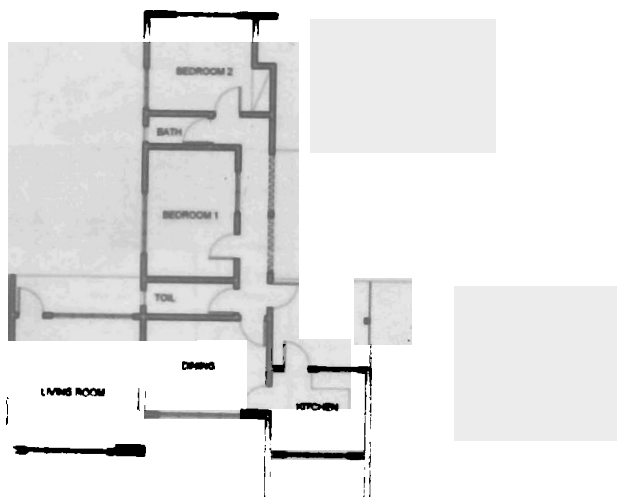


Fig. 1: Typology A – Phase 1 (initial, core-unit allocation)

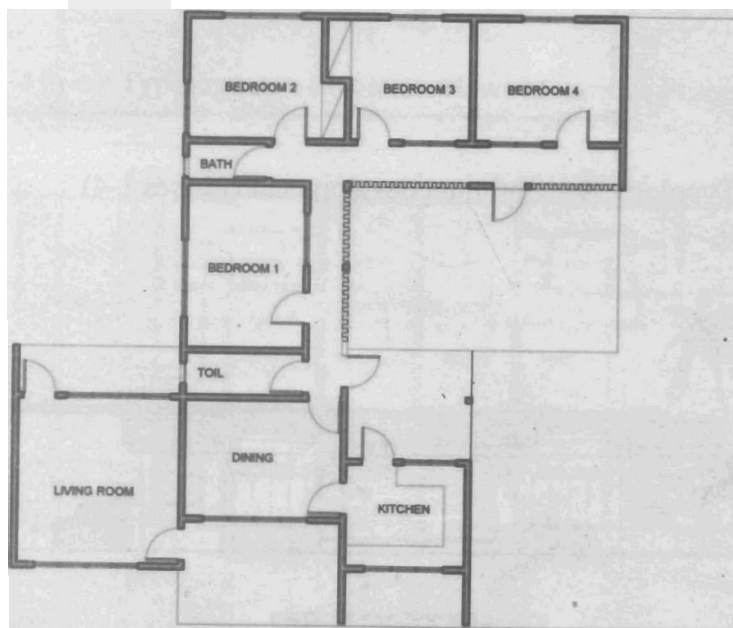


Fig. 2: Typology A – Phase 2 development

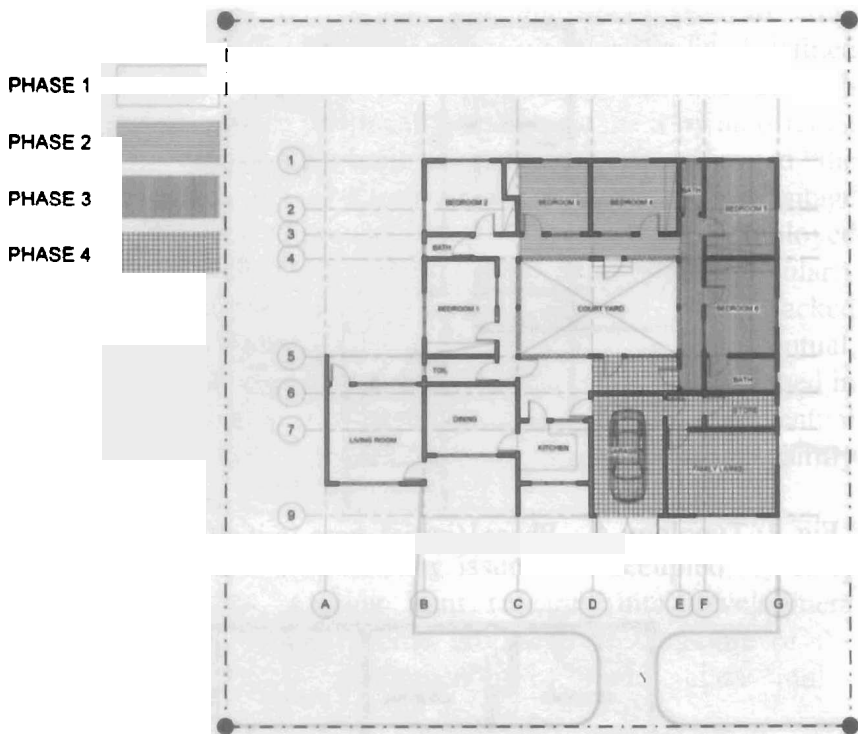


Fig. 3: Typology A – Optimum development (Phases 1-4)



INITIAL STAGE FRONT ELEVATION: SEMI-DETACHED UNITS

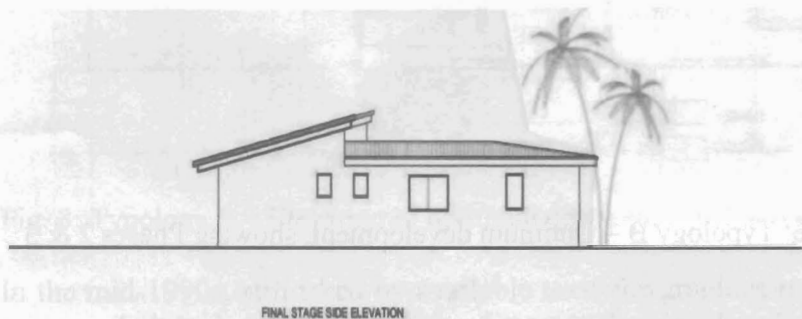
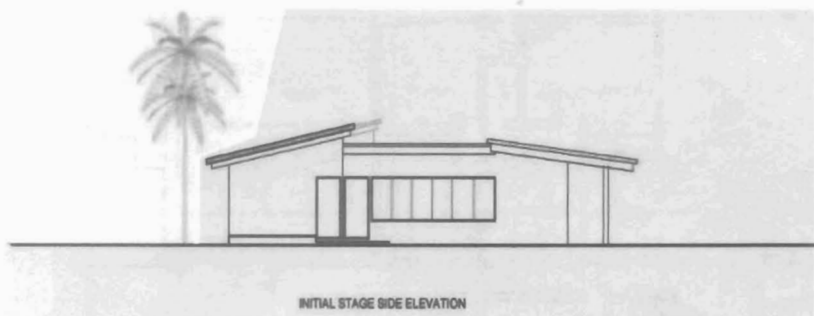


Fig. 4 (a-c): Typology A – Elevation views of various Phases

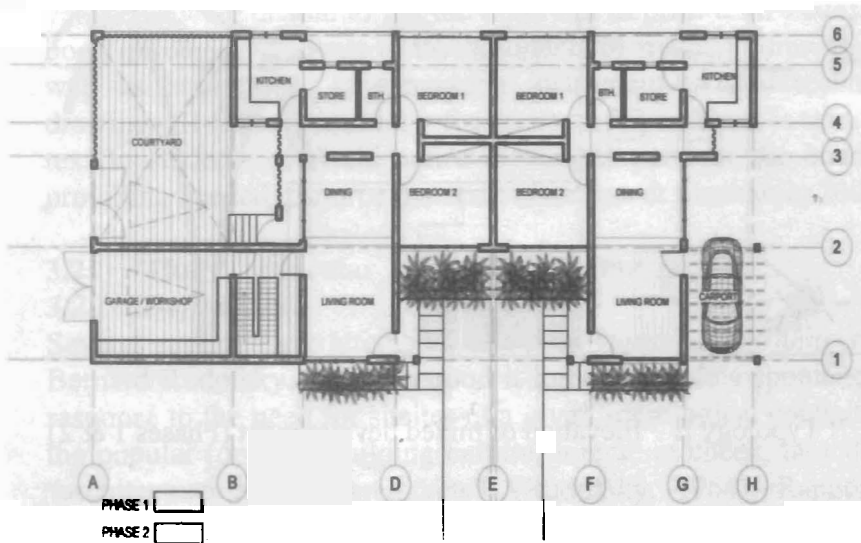


Fig. 5: Typology B – Phase 1 & part-Phase 2 development



Fig. 6: Typology B – Optimum development, showing Phases 2 & 3



Fig. 7: Typology B – Elevation of mixed development (Phases 1 & 2)



Fig. 8: Typology B – Elevation of optimum development (Phases 1-3)

In the mid-1990s, still irked by available texts for graphics-related courses being imported (and so beyond the reach of most students), I attempted to remedy the situation, by working on a book with a colleague with whom I taught such courses. Sad to say that, despite the manuscript having been ready for over five (5) years, we were unable to get the book out in print until 2004! The book introduces students to the rudiments of freehand drawing, as well as basic skills in generating instrument-assisted technical drawings. Despite the initial setback, however, today, it is standard text to students of Architecture in various parts of the country, providing needed resource material. (Osasona & Onabanjo, 2004).

3.2 The “Vernacular Architecture” Journey...

3.2.1 Definitions

Several authors have attempted to define *vernacular architecture*. Bernard Rudofsky has understood it to be a people’s spontaneous response to the need for shelter in a given sociological context i.e. the popular (or folk) building culture; tongue in cheek, he calls it “architecture without architects”. (Rudofsky, 1964). Rappoport adds the dimension that such sociological considerations override purely physical ones (Rappoport, 1969). Synthesizing the various

submissions (including Oliver, 1969, 1971; Prussin, 1974; Osasona, 2002a, 2007a) it can be deduced that vernacular architecture has the following attributes:

- i. It is not the architecture of formally-trained specialists;
- ii. It is predicated on a culture's traditional building practices;
- iii. It is not *strictly* traditional, as it bears evidence of extraneous influences;
- iv. It is highly popular, as it is culturally relevant, affordable and sustainable; and
- v. It is ever-evolving.

3.2.2 Faltering Steps

In the late 1990s, a new curriculum was introduced in the Department, and I was given the quite onerous task of teaching *Architectural Conservation and Restoration* – a new postgraduate elective course; in addition, the course *Vernacular Architecture in Nigeria*, was ceded to me. I could not have imagined then, that, based on my initial interest (born out of an agitation that Africans can best tell their own story, mentioned above), these two courses would eventually define my academic future. Both courses required me to commit to grassroots engagement with traditional communities – studying their cultural development, their building craft and, sometimes, individual family histories. The development of actual teaching material – and particularly sourcing environmental contexts and building samples for fieldwork – opened up hitherto unimagined vistas to me. In practical terms, the spontaneity of vernacular builtform became real to me.

3.2.3 Pioneering Work

The compelling force under-pinning much of the work I have done from 2001 to date, has been the unmistakable “handwriting on the wall” vis-à-vis the future prospects of much of Nigeria's heritage architecture. The national phenomenon of cultural profligacy has been mostly responsible for the neglect that is daily hastening these inestimable evidences of our material culture to their sure extinction. If the rest of the world had had the same attitude as we

do, there would be no Egyptian Pyramids, no Leaning Tower of Pisa, no Eiffel Tower, no Pantheon, no Colosseum, no Parthenon and certainly no Buckingham Palace for us to be flocking abroad to see, today.

A significant aspect of my work in this area, was centered on tracing the progression from the strictly traditional to the vernacular expressions of builtform. For us in Nigeria, the major historical phenomenon that provided the enabling milieu for socio-political exchanges that left indelible marks on the local cultures, was British colonization. This experience, of monumental significance, produced two streams of architectural influence: (i) the direct British, and (ii) the (indirect) Brazilo-Cuban and Sierra-Leonean influences. Specifically, colonization provided opportunities for foreign building craft to be both visually and practically experienced, and eventually assimilated. The cumulative effect was that, over time, the local building cultures were modified with selectively borrowed orientations, features and even ornamental motifs. Osasona (2001a, 2001b and 2001c), discuss some of these adaptations and general assimilations.

As my experiences with teaching the aforementioned courses deepened and broadened, it became imperative to bring in other competencies. I teamed up with Mr. Friday Ewemade (Department of Architecture) and Dr. Adisa Ogunfolakan (Natural History Museum). Ewemade, originally a Land Surveyor, brought in his expertise in that area, while Ogunfolakan's professional training as an Archaeologist, was a great asset; also, being an Ife indigene, Ogunfolakan's unofficial role as "Public Relations Manager", facilitated many an interaction. This team, working with postgraduate students, undertook several field assignments, each invariably culminating in a publication. [Osasona & Ewemade (2002); Osasona & Ogunfolakan (2003); Osasona & Ewemade (2009); Osasona, Ogunfolakan & Ewemade (2010); Osasona & Ewemade (2010); Osasona & Ewemade (2011)].

In line with my original interest in art in African builtform, this phase of my research pursued the phenomenon, and established certain facts related to the Nigerian vernacular building culture:

- i. The colonial stylistic legacy is essentially tropicalized Modern Architecture;
- ii. The traditional Nigerian styles which have metamorphosed into the vernacular are Tropical-climate-responsive – so readily identified with colonial adaptations;
- iii. Though significantly impacted by the British and Afro-Brazilian styles, the latter is the dominant influence;
- iv. The ornate articulation of elemental features of the Afro-Brazilian is its major defining characteristic;
- v. The previously-established spontaneity of integrating art even into the *process* of construction, predisposed transforming traditional Nigerian architecture more in favour of the Afro-Brazilian Style; and
- vi. The “political neutrality” of the Afro-Brazilian was also a major attraction for vernacular trends.

In probing the art-harnessed-to-architecture phenomenon, I have traced the progression from strictly traditional to constantly transforming vernacular (Osasona, 2001b, 2007a; Osasona & Ewemade, 2011). I have found it expressed as overtly (or covertly) symbolic mural painting or sculpting (Osasona, 2007b, 2010); as complementary decorative fencing and gate-works (Osasona, 2006; figs. 9-12); and as the basis for a nationwide incidence of culturally-iconic buildings (Osasona, 2001a; Osasona & Ewemade, 2002, 2009; Osasona, Ogunfolakan & Ewemade, 2010; Osasona, 2015).

Despite the fact that, till date, my efforts in the area of drawing attention to the nation’s perishing heritage architecture have essentially been akin to that of “a voice crying in the wilderness”, I continue, motivated by feedback from the unique engagements *Architectural Conservation and Restoration* has brokered. In my research team, our *modus operandi* has always been to intervene –

no matter how minimally – in arresting the continued decay of selected buildings within the Ife community, and environs; for us, this has been “community service”, our way of giving back to the society. Postgraduate students who take the course express their delight at the exposure, having had their horizons broadened by the experience; the lives of such buildings (albeit only a few) are lengthened; neighbourhoods where such restorative work has been conducted are given a face-lift, and mutually beneficial relationships are established.

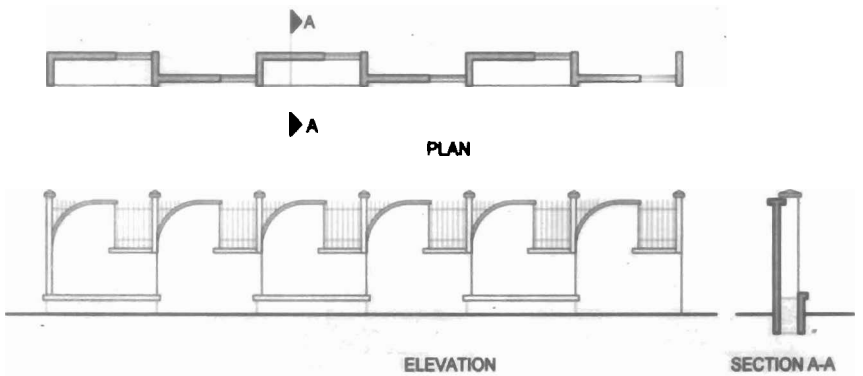


Fig. 9: Complex contemporary fences (1): Wall-and-rectilinear-planter design

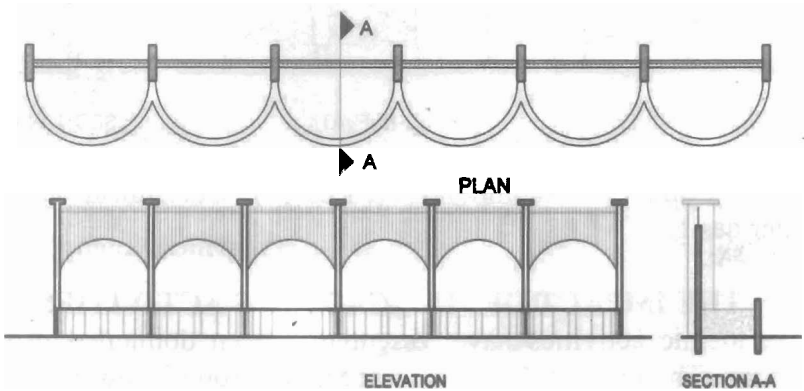


Fig. 10: Complex contemporary fences (2): Wall-and-curvilinear-planter design

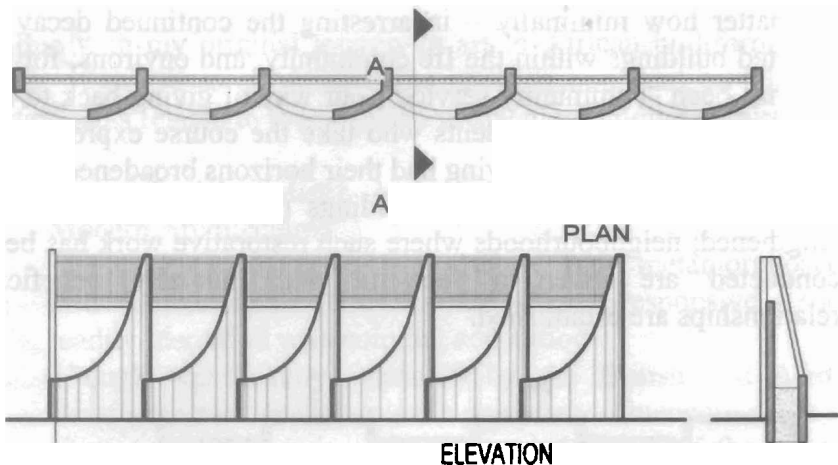


Fig. 11: Complex contemporary fences (3): Wall-and-doubly-curvilinear-planter design

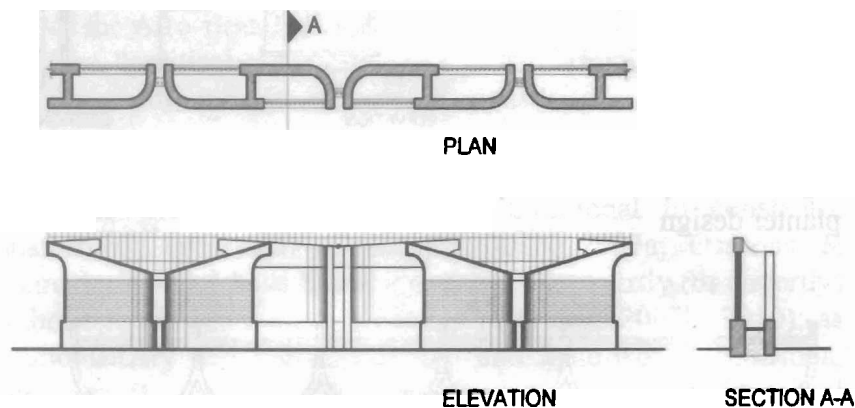


Fig. 12: Complex contemporary fences (4): Curvilinear-double-planter design

4.0 THE IMPACT OF MY ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

My academic activities have, essentially, been domiciled in the “History, Theory and Criticism” specialty-group. However, my research interests have more commonly followed the path of the “History” dimension of the specialization. I have published in the areas of Public Housing, Architectural Graphics, Architectural

4.1 Architectural Graphics

As previously mentioned, a book (*An Introduction to Graphic Communication – A Beginner’s Manual*) in which I am lead-author, has become standard text in many Nigerian universities where Architecture is taught (namely, at Covenant University, Ota; Federal University of Technology, Akure; the University of Lagos, Lagos; Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso; Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Nkpolu; Federal University of Technology, Minna, and, of course, Obafemi Awolowo University). The book has since been revised, and the Second Edition is already awaiting publication. It essentially gap-fills – meeting the need for affordable local material in the subject-area.

4.2 History of Architecture

My preoccupation here has been with African (in particular, Nigerian) traditional and vernacular building techniques, forms and materials, exploring their various contexts, and giving alternative interpretations to traditional Western readings. Also, documenting endangered practices and features, has been an overriding motivation for publishing. Two of my books published in these contexts (Osasona, 2005, and Osasona & Hyland, 2006), sold on Amazon, the international cyber-bookstore, for several years. Though the latter citation i.e. *Colonial Architecture in Ile-Ife, Nigeria*, was originally written in English (for obvious reasons!), I am aware that it has been translated into French, and equally sold to a global market; that this happened without due process is, undoubtedly, unfortunate. Fig. 13.

Book Covers

Close

- Add
- Manage

Colonial architecture in Ile-Ife, Nigeria
C.O. Osasona and A.D.C. Hyland.

Published 2006 by Bookbuilders, Editions
Africa in Ibadan, Oyo State.

Written in French.

Edition Notes

Includes bibliographical references (p. 115-116) and index.

Classifications

Library of Congress

NA1599.N52
I356 2006

Fig. 13: Web-citation to show availability of French version of *Colonial Architecture in Ile-Ife, Nigeria*

In addition, this book (*Colonial Architecture in Ile-Ife, Nigeria*), has provided resource material for Pupil-Architects taking preliminary examinations in preparation for the final Professional Practice Examinations (PPE), the precursor to full membership of the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA), and full registration by the Architects' Registration Council of Nigeria (ARCON).

Nigeria has a rich architectural heritage in colonial buildings, as well as structures attributable to Modern Architectural practice traceable to the colonials. The majority of such structures were the result of progressive tropicalization – resulting in buildings that are environmentally suitable for the Tropics and which are, generally, low-energy in use. A Master of Philosophy student of mine (Mr. Kabiru Abubakar) recently defended his thesis on a study of the works of Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew – British pioneers of Modern Architecture in Nigeria – within the city of Ibadan. The thrust of the work was lessons to be learnt from their architectural vocabulary, relevant to the contemporary clarion call for “green architecture”.

4.3 Conservation and Restoration of Heritage Architecture
By “heritage architecture” is meant buildings that are imbued with iconic significance, within a particular cultural setting. It has been established that buildings so regarded could qualify for conservation-restoration intervention, if they possess any of the following attributes:

- i. Represent the beginnings of a new style in the local context;
- ii. Depict the peak in the crystallization of the characteristic features of an architectural style;
- iii. Refer to a major historical event in the life of the host community; or
- iv. Display excellent craftsmanship in construction details.

Nigeria abounds with such architectural monuments that qualify to be so considered.

My work in this regard has been limited to Ile-Ife and its immediate environs. Apart from actually embarking on tentative restoration (e.g. on the Olayinka House, Ologbenla House 1 and Ologbenla House 2), I have published such interventions – mostly as conference proceedings, delivered at international fora. These publications have served to draw the attention of the global heritage-conservation community to Nigeria’s potential in this

regard; it was also partly the basis for the academic exchange between the Obafemi Awolowo University and Harvard University, meant to lead to a holistic conservation programme for such heritage buildings all over Nigeria. However, the linkage agreement is yet to be concluded.

5.0 MY PROFESSIONAL CAREER

5.1 Why “Vernacular”?

My professional orientation (vis-à-vis my preferred architectural genre), has been significantly conditioned by my firm belief in the “vernacular” *never* being outdated. This has had nothing to do with being whimsical or nostalgic. Rather, pragmatism and generally well-informed rationality have been the bedrock of this predisposition. As earlier explained, the vernacular is both culture-specific and culture-sensitive – implying it accommodates a people’s socio-spatial requirements within a cultural context. Additionally, it is invariably sustainable – environmentally and economically, as it lays no pretensions to unnecessary highfalutin orientations or grandstanding, but concentrates on practical demands of climatic context, social orientations and available short- and long-term means. As such, vernacular architecture is always appropriate.

How then, does one define “appropriate”? Stemming from the last submission, it would be a style that generates buildings that are environmentally-responsive; for instance, here, in the southwest, the featural and morphological articulation will cater to mitigating excessive heat build-up (to ensure interior liveability); it will protect both structure and occupants from adverse rainwater; it will utilize locally-available (though *not* necessarily indigenous) building materials and technology; it will not financially stress the owner, and will give him the socio-physical environment to determine and express himself.

5.2 My Architectural Experiments

“Vernacular” does not necessarily mean “backward”, “unprogressive” or “limited in ideas” (or possibilities) – all

common (but uninformed) epithets. We should remember that, in its very definition, “vernacular architecture” is always a product of *conscious* choices within available options, always motivated by all-round convenience. Thus, in my application of the vernacular concept, I have expounded on the salient attributes, expanding the scope beyond the commonly-accepted, stigmatizing “low-income” reference. For me, nothing stops “vernacular” from being applicable to middle- as well as high-class residential expressions.

5.2.1 My Design “Palette”

I have worked majorly on residential buildings (although I have also handled several institutional, especially church, designs). It was earlier established that one reason why Nigerian vernacular architecture tilted more in favour of the Afro-Brazilian than the (British) Colonial Style (particularly in the Southwest), was because of its preponderant ornamentation. With our various cultural histories of unconsciously infusing art into builtform, the inclination to borrow motifs and general predispositions from this Style was a foregone conclusion. As such, I have taken on board a conscious integration of decoration to building facades. As we are situated within the Tropics, my buildings are designed for optimum tropicalization (with particular emphasis on lighting, sun-shading, ventilation and rain-water issues). Regardless of our personal social status, sustainability (both in capital outlay and running costs) is always a much sought-after attribute of investments in property. In addition, despite our obvious heterogeneity, some socio-cultural orientations are truly Pan-Nigerian. All these I have tried to accommodate in my buildings.

5.2.1.1 Climate-responsive Design

Certain considerations favour environmental appropriateness of building design, in the Nigerian context. These include the following:

- i. Building orientation (with the shorter axis east-west): this facilitates locating windows on the building’s longer facades for adequate cross-ventilation;
- ii. Exclusion of excessive insolation from building interiors;

- iii. Mitigating the effect of insolation on external walls, and protecting a substantial part of them from rainwater run-off; and
- iv. Ensuring adequate ground-level clearance for interior space.

In articulating (i) – (iii) above, I invariably orientate my buildings to optimize the prevailing Southwesterly winds; windows are also strategically located mostly on these wind-ward facades – always ensuring good day-lighting of interior space, and *cross-ventilation* (even if the outlet producing the “drag-effect” has to be located over doors) to ensure indoor thermal comfort. As such, my designs are passive, and I never design for the use of the air-conditioner. Figs. 14-15.

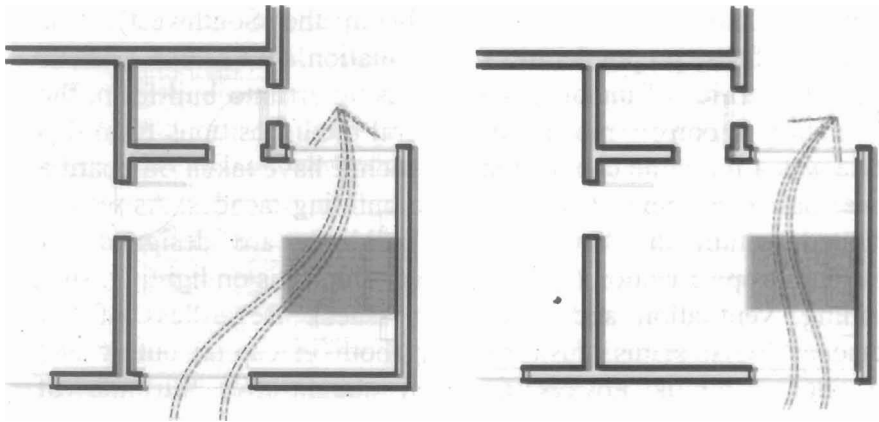


Fig. 14: Cross-ventilation: some options, with regular window arrangements

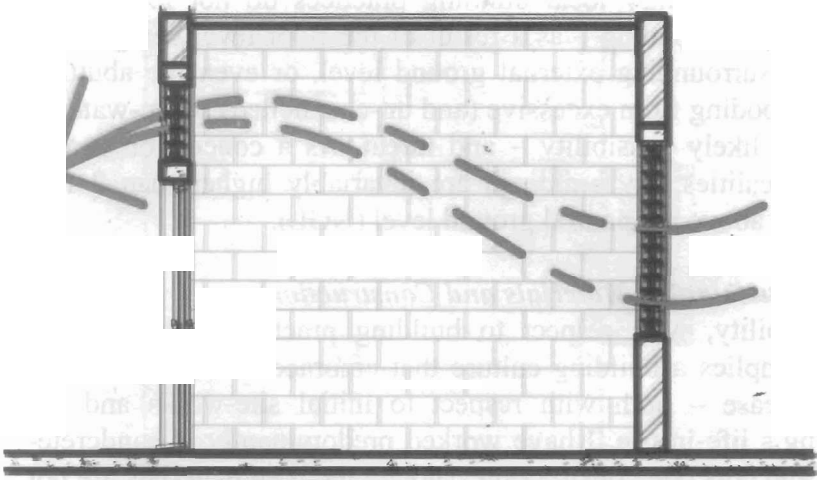


Fig. 15: Cross-ventilation: a sectional view, with aeration assisted by above-door window arrangement

To service items (ii) and (iii), I have adopted the traditional eaves (similarly endorsed by Colonial practices); i.e. a projection of a *minimum* of 4 feet (1.2 metres) – despite the now nationally popular (but *totally* inappropriate) fad of the use of cornices as eaves! (Lagos and Abuja – and even Ile-Ife – are replete with examples of such ineffective, pretentious roofs). The well-projected eave provides deep shade, both for walls and building interiors. Creating netted perforations within the ceiling sheets at the eaves facilitates aeration of the roof space, which is subjected to a build-up of heat – an invariable fall-out from the use of metal sheet-cladding. In addition, by reason of this extension, a significant portion of a building’s external cladding is protected from regular direct contact with driving rain. Deep verandas (beyond environmental control, additionally serving the function of social interactions) are a common feature of my buildings; these ensure that the walls of living spaces adjacent to such verandas are never in direct contact with solar radiation. Also, to eliminate glare within interior space, I have created a “signature” window-hood.

Many contemporary local building practices do not foresee the possibility of flooding – as a result of the floor level being lower than the surrounding external ground level, or even the abutting roads. Flooding from excessive (and un-channelled) storm-water is always a likely possibility – and threat. As a concession to our rainfall realities, my buildings are invariably higher than 2 feet (600mm) above the natural ground level (NGL).

5.2.1.2 Sustainable Materials and Construction

Sustainability, with respect to building practices, among other issues, implies a building culture that embraces affordability and relative ease – both with respect to initial site-works and the building’s life-in-use. I have worked predominantly in sandcrete-block and concrete construction. Though the base materials are not “traditional”, they are, nevertheless, locally-produced – and hence, readily-available and reasonably affordable. I have also worked, in limited measure, in stabilized earth, expressed as mortar-bonded blocks and interlocking solid/ hollow blocks.

My major contribution with respect to building components has been my promotion of the use of louvre-blade windows. Today, it is the norm – in the spirit of “*keeping up with the Joneses*” – to insist on sliding, projected or casement windows; this, based on an assumption that they are “ultra-modern”. As a historical fact, both the casement and projected window-types are as much British Colonial in origin as the disparaged louvre-window; it is only the sliding window that can lay claim to being truly “modern”. The apparent contemporary attraction is that these other types now come in various colours of flashy aluminium framing and equally bedazzling glass tints, indubitably enhancing their aesthetic appeal. The reality, however, is that it is only the packaging that changed; the contents remain the same.

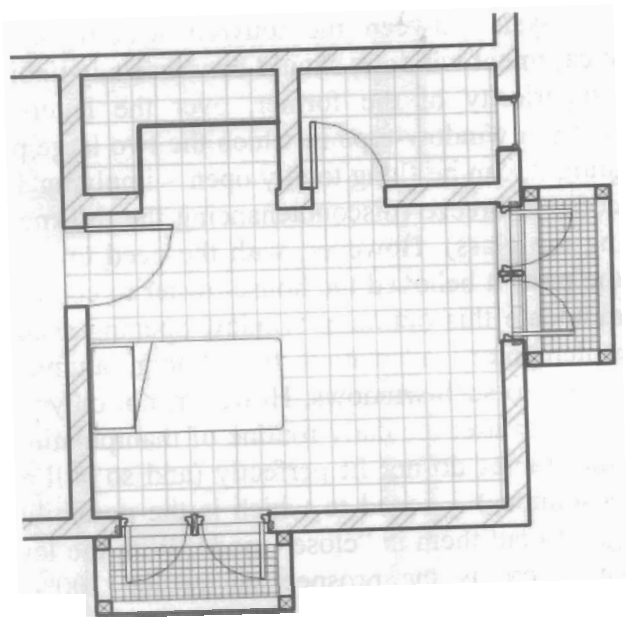


Fig. 16: Plan view of the use of casement windows

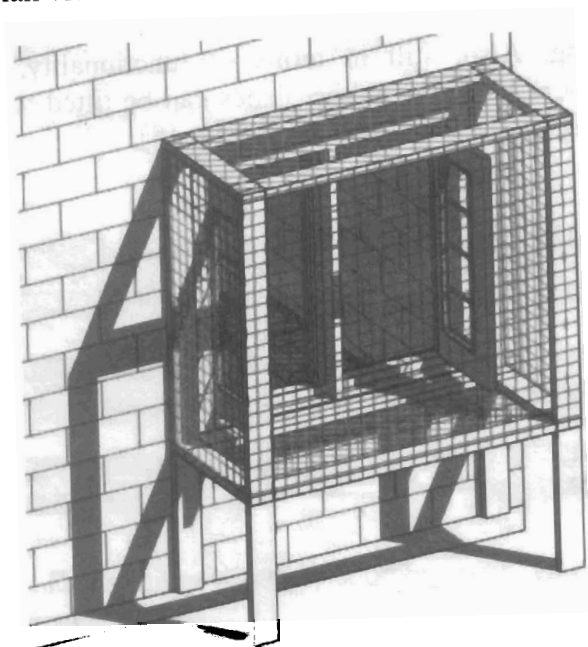


Fig. 17: An isometric view of the original “cage”-option for mosquito-netting

A comparative analysis between the louvred window and its closest rival, the casement window, should convince any unbiased umpire of the superiority of the former, over the latter. The casement (Fig. 16) is a window-type in which the two large panes of glass constituting it, can be flung totally open – implying 100% possibility of access to breeze (discountenancing the thickness of the metal framing the glass). However, with the need to exclude mosquitoes, in the past, it behoved the house-owner to construct a “cage” to accommodate this optimum window-opening scenario; fig. 17. The contemporary adaptation fits sliding, aluminium-framed mosquito-nets to such windows. However, not only is this contraption unwieldy in use; the daily routine of manipulating the nets is tedious, the frames do not fit perfectly (and so still allow the ingress of mosquitoes) – added to which is the possibility of forgetting, outright, to put them in “close” mode. With the louvre-window, however, there is the prospect of getting 100% air-ingress, less the cumulative thickness of the individual blades, metal blade-holders and frames. This slightly lower efficiency is offset by the cost/ utility advantage of using permanently-fitted mosquito-netting. Also, still in terms of functionality, louvre-windows are more versatile, as the blades can be tilted to control air-flow, quantitatively and directionally (fig. 18).

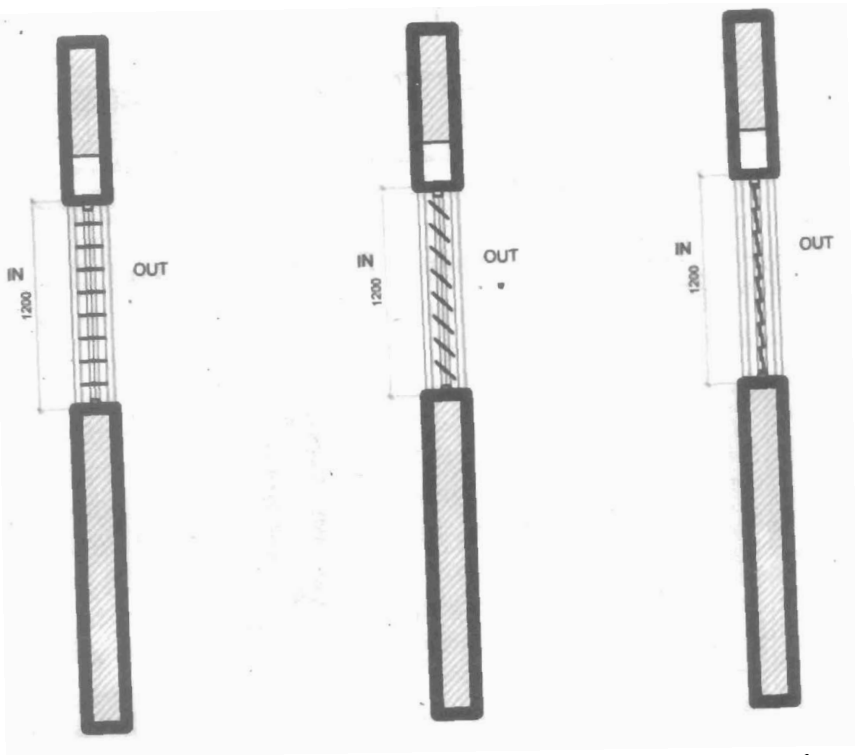


Fig. 18: The louvre-window, demonstrating three opening options

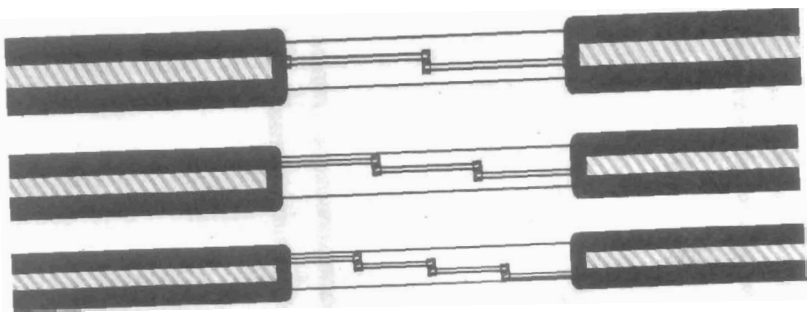


Fig. 19: The sliding window, showing plan views of 2-4-panel arrangements

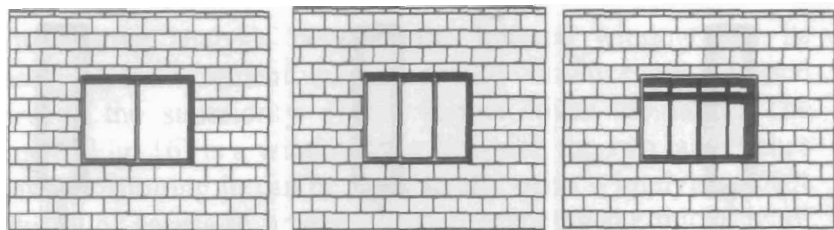


Fig. 20: The sliding window. Elevation views of 2-4-panel arrangements

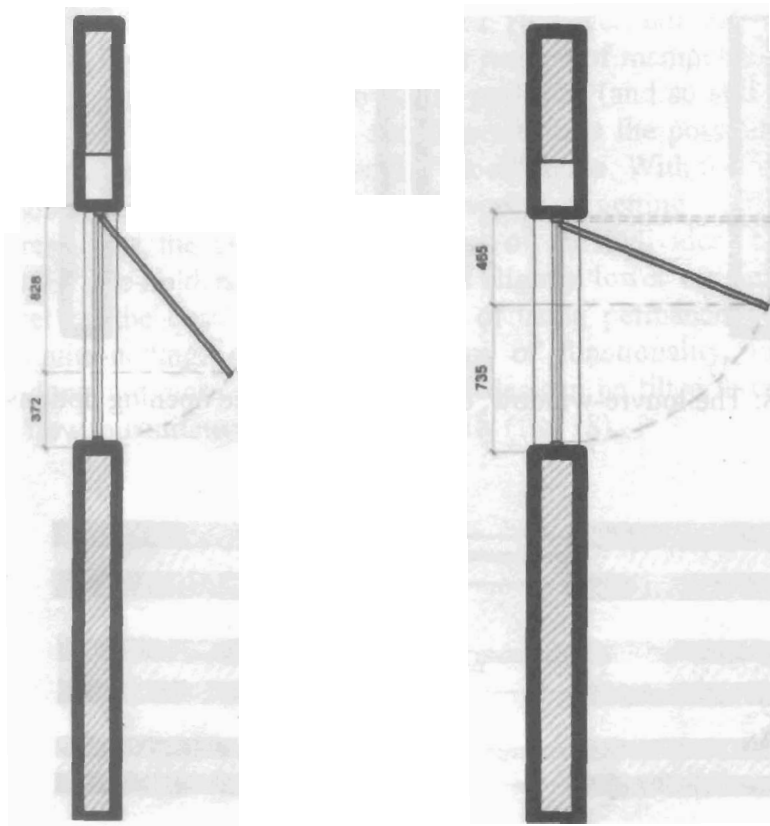


Fig. 21: The projected window – (a) 50% opening capacity, giving 31% airflow efficiency; (b) 75% opening capacity, giving 61% airflow efficiency

Both the projected and sliding windows are comparative non-performers; a sliding-window arrangement robs one of cross-ventilation prospects, to the tune of one part of the total number of partitions contained in the window-opening i.e. if there are two (2) panes, the greatest possibility of air-ingress is 50% (implying a 50% air-loss); if three (3), there is a 33% loss; etc. The impracticability of increasing the number of panes, in a bid to optimize wind-movement, is obvious. (Figs. 19-20). With the projected window, the possibility of moving the panes up and down is not a significant advantage as, unlike louvre-blades, the panels are large, cumbersome and often, unilaterally shift position downwards, based on their own dead-weight. In addition, even at a theoretical 75% opening-capacity of each pane, only 61% ventilation prospect is achieved (because of the angular disposition); fig. 21. The foregoing analyses show that the sliding window (the most modern of the prevailing four window-types) is the least environmentally appropriate for Nigeria; this, in an era when the watchword is “passive (or green) architecture”.

Sustainability also implies good economic sense. As mentioned above, ancillary structures to window-finishing in Nigeria, come cheaper with the louvre-window. Also, in the event of an accident (e.g. a thrown stone, kicked ball or other missile), only the affected blade (or blades) need(s) to be changed; the 3-foot (obscure) louvre-blade is the most expensive in the range, currently selling at N350 per blade; in addition, a fitter’s services are not needed. A similar accident, with respect to the other window-types, will call for an overhaul of the total glass sheet, at a cost of between N4,800 and N6,000 per (1.2m x 1.8m) sheet of *plain* glass, excluding a carpenter’s workmanship charges.

5.2.1.3 Building Ornamentation

As a true reflection of my innermost artistic leanings – and in the character of the original vernacular models – I invariably harness ornamentation to my works. This is expressed as sculpted columns, window- and corner-enhancement, carved fascia-boards,

external wall-tiling, stucco calligraphy and, often, my personal mixes of standard factory paint to get specific, unusual hues.

Increasingly, I have observed that it has become quite commonplace in Ile-Ife for new buildings springing up, to feature external wall-tiling. While I am gratified at the various expressions (and look forward to the continuance of the practice), I am also aware that, unfortunately, much of this is a smokescreen – an effort to mitigate the effects of defective foundation-works (resulting in capillary-movement of ground water)! This is borne out by the fact that, frequently, this tiling is restricted to the base of external walls. In such cases, yes, the exterior looks aesthetically-pleasing; however, invariably, on the inside, subterranean moisture continues to rise; paint continues to peel and havoc to fittings, furniture and belongings stored in contact with walls and floors, continues unabated!

5.2.1.4 Social-Culture Consciousness

Some significant orientations bind us together as Nigerians. Our ingrained disposition to celebrate every occasion is phenomenal – even in the face of “Austerity Measures” like the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the 1980s! The Yoruba cliché *aa’emise o*, significantly captures this characteristic.

Another major attribute is our living-trading penchant. For the average Nigerian, to have a place to live, invariably is to have a place to do “quick business”. Even the Obafemi Awolowo University Staff Quarters and students’ Halls of residence are not exempt from this phenomenon!

In my designs of residential buildings, I have attempted to accommodate these two dispositions. At “The Fortress”, a 14-flat staff-housing project at Ifewara, provision was made for the women of the estate to come together, in the event of occasions such as birthday, naming, graduation, etc ceremonies, for “mass-cooking”. The extensively paved area around the water-tanks is meant to be temporarily converted to a cooking area by covering

part of it with corrugated metal sheets (which will be removed afterwards, and the place cleaned up). At the level of private residences, appropriate space is annexed to the kitchen area to accommodate this occasional large-scale cooking, as well as any regular spill-over culinary requirements. Also, to cater to the certain incidence of the tenants of The Fortress engaging in trade, ample back-verandas, capable of accommodating kiosks or other makeshift structures, are provided. Commonly, however, this living-trading disposition is accommodated in my Gate-house designs – a strategic resolution of the issue, as this is the first point of contact in a fenced property, anyway.

The Ijebu are said to be notorious for baggage (*“Ijebu kan, eru mewa!”*); nevertheless, I have discovered accumulation of “excess luggage” is a general Nigerian phenomenon. As such, ample storage space is a priority in my designs.

5.2.1.5 Developmental Perspectives

In the spirit of economic viability vis-à-vis roofing, I intend to pursue the theme of carved fascia-boards further. Some 12-15 years ago, Nigerite Ltd. introduced fibre cement-boards to the market. Their dimensional versatility (with widths ranging from 250 mm to 2.4 metres, and thicknesses from 8 mm to 20 mm), makes them readily adaptable to multiple uses. I see the prospect of such a franchise creating a fascia-board brand with sculpted profiles as highly viable – and a cheaper alternative to the customized approach I currently adopt.

5.2.2 “Vernacular” Stately Homes? Why not?

As a professional architect, expectedly, my services may not be affordable by the “rank and file”. As such, my clientele has been mostly restricted to colleagues in academia, as well as other professionals. However, do the elite build “vernacular” houses? My response is, *“Why not?”* At this juncture, I would like to acknowledge my clients who have given their kind permission for me to feature their projects in this presentation; you are all much appreciated.

Building *vernacular* is building appropriate and sensible – so who says you cannot combine gable roofs with an overall “colosseum” effect? Who says you cannot embrace the traditional courtyard, contemporarily – and thereby, properly ventilate your home? Why should louvre-windows be considered “ugly”, and/or “not classy” – when you can “ritz” them up with mouldings? Most vernacular buildings are modest-sized – but if you can afford a sprawl, why not? (Like they say, “*If you have it, flaunt it!*”).

Who says *vernacular* is necessarily shabby – or lacking in good taste? Building *vernacular* is building beautiful. Though beauty may be “*in the eye of the beholder*”, yet some forms of it are self-evident! True, we believe in “live-and-trade” – and our unfortunate security concerns make home-guards virtually non-negotiable – but we might as well make an architectural statement about these issues!

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, building *vernacular*, is truly building us (i.e who we are)!

6.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS

6.1 My Pioneering Achievements

It would appear that, for me, it has been a long-settled matter that I would always pioneer one thing, or another. In 1973, I was among the first set of students who took the West African School Certificate Examinations, WASCE, in May-June (as opposed to the previous September-October slot) – implying we spent just five (5) months (January to May) in Form 5! In my School, Fine Arts was not taught beyond Form 4. However, because I was adamant about taking it (somehow, believing I would need it for my career later as an Architect), I was fielded, the sole candidate in the set, for the WASCE Fine Arts examination. Again, going for Basic Studies at the Polytechnic, Ibadan, the late Dr. Adetunji (who was Registrar then) created the special combination (Mathematics, Geography and Fine Arts) that I wanted to read, saying that, having made Grade I, he did not have the heart to turn me away.

As previously stated, I was the only female student of Architecture in my set – implying that I am the first female architect to be produced by the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University); the first alumna to take up a teaching appointment in the Department and Faculty; the first female Head of Department and Vice-Dean, in the Faculty of Environmental Design and Management; the first female Professor in the Faculty; the first female to give an Inaugural Lecture in the Faculty and, more significantly, the first Professor *at all*, to give such a lecture in the Department of Architecture – all by God’s infinite grace, and to the glory of His matchless name.

Outside the confines of this great citadel of learning, I am the first female Fellow of the Nigerian Institute of Architects in Osun State (and was actually only the second Fellow in the whole State, at the time of the award). I am currently the only female Fellow of the NIA who is also a Professor. Lastly, I am the first female Professor of Architecture in southwestern Nigeria. To God be all the glory!

6.2 Academic, Professional and Other Services Rendered

I have served as External Examiner to several institutions (the Federal University of Technology, Akure; University of Lagos, Lagos; the Federal Polytechnic, Offa, and Kano State University of Science and Technology, Wudil). In addition, I have been a reviewer to several academic journals (namely, the Association of Architectural Educators’, AARCHES, Journal; the Journal of the School of Environmental Studies, the Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti, and the Journal of Urbanism, the United Kingdom). I have also served (or am still serving) as External Assessor (for promotion cases) to the University of Lagos, Lagos; the Federal Polytechnic, Ede, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana.

At the professional level, I have been a member of the Nigerian Institute of Architects’ Board of Architectural Education (NIA-BAE), since 2007. On this platform, I am a Resource Person at

seminars to groom candidates for the build-up to taking Professional Practice Examinations (PPE), to qualify for full registration. Similarly, I frequently participate as a member of Accreditation Panels to Schools of Architecture; to date, I have been involved in accreditation visits to the University of Lagos; the Enugu State University of Technology (ESUT), Enugu; Bells University, Ota, and Covenant University, Ota. At the international level, I have been Africa In-Region Commonwealth Association of Architects' (CAA) representative on similar accreditation exercises to Makerere University, Kampala; the Uganda Martyrs University, Nkozi, Uganda, and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana.

Here at Obafemi Awolowo University, in addition to statutory requirements of participation on various Faculty Boards, I have had the privilege of chairing several Task-Force activities. In 1998, I was Chairperson of the Technical Sub-Committee of the Task Force on the Repair of Lecture-Room Facilities in Obafemi Awolowo University, under the Vice-Chancellorship of Professor Wale Omole. In 2010, during the tenure of Professor Mike Faborode, I was the Convener, with respect to the Sub-Committee on Facilities Rehabilitation (on the platform of the ETF Special Intervention Fund programme). In addition, I served as Vice-Dean, Faculty of Environmental Design and Management, from 2008 to 2010. Since 2012, and to date – under the Vice-Chancellorship of *another* Omole (i.e. Professor Tale Omole) – I have been Chairperson, Campus Aesthetic and Trading Regulatory Committee (CATREC) – an organ of the University administration that oversees all commercial activities on Campus, as well as the maintenance of our celebrated scenic beauty.

6.3 Conclusion

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I have attempted to give an overview of my academic and professional stewardship, so far. My research activities have established the existence of a thriving and ever-evolving vernacular architectural practice; however, it has also, sadly, highlighted the fact that a lot of the buildings that should rightly constitute the nation's "heritage architecture" – and from which present-day vernacular practices could have drawn inspiration – are daily perishing as a result of warped values and a resultant criminal neglect. I have contributed variously to the debate on how best to arrest this drift towards ultimate bankruptcy in material-culture conservation. By and large, until the government and civil society at large, see its preservation as their statutory or social responsibility (as the case may be), this trend will continue unabated.

My professional practice has attempted (and continues to attempt) to re-configure trado-vernacular themes, making them both relevant and appropriate in today's ultra-modern world, in a bid to harness the advantages of both contexts. As my work has attempted to prove, a "stately mansion" – the dream of every upwardly mobile Nigerian – or other investment in real estate, can encapsulate the luxuries, comfort and general aura of 21st-Century architecture, while, at the same time, retaining geographic and socio-cultural appropriateness, as well as important identity-engendering characteristics.

In the light of my experiments to date, Mr. Vice-Chancellor – and contrary to the long-famed adage – I make bold to say, Sir, that it is possible for you to both "*eat your cake and have it*"!

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I thank you very much for your kind attention.

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