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FUSION POINT

by Zuhra Zuhair
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HONORABLE MENTION



DESIGN NARRATIVE

Architecture in Africa today is a receding echo of our history traced back from ancient Egypt to the layers of cultural diversity influenced by indigenous architecture, colonialism, western architecture and religion. As a result, Africa's historical and cultural heritage, which are a reflection of Africans, are lost in translation. Fusion Point, a home design prototype, aims to reflect Africa's heritage and create spaces that Africans can relate to on an elementary level. It evokes memories of our history and influences that inform our lifestyle through architectural design.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Fusion Point features an internal courtyard, which serves as the social core of all other activities revolving around it. The significance of the courtyard can be traced back to the earliest record of African architecture in ancient Egypt. On the subject of the evolution of African architecture, Nnamdi Elleh reveals the description of ancient Egyptian habitations by the French explorer Felix Dubois, who indicates that they were characterized by enclosed courtyards with plastered walls. The subsequent use of the courtyard is evident in various regions of Africa such as the Ashanti culture in Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, Djibouti, the city of Lamu in Eastern Africa, as well as the Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo cultures of Nigeria.

The facade of Fusion Point displays a modern interpretation of entry portals. Records of African architecture in ancient Egypt depicts the use of large entry pylons. Dubois, in his description of the houses in Mali, states the similarities brought down from ancient Egypt. Subsequent cultures in countries such as Nigeria, Cote D'Ivoire and Burkina Faso have adopted the use of pylons and elaborate entrances as a large symbol of power. In the Yoruba culture of Nigeria, the Oba's Palace known as the afin, have highly decorated and elaborate entrances. Nancy C. Neaheer also relates the use of imposing carved door panels by the people of Awka in Igbo land in the decoration of their portals.

The entrance at Fusion Point features protruding plastered brick surfaces with sharp sloping sides characterized by the simplicity of form embodied by modern architecture. The facade is further decorated with symbols constructed with polystyrene and metal panels.

The anteroom serves as the entrance hall to the house. Additionally, it creates an extra level of security. A similar space in the Hausa culture of Nigeria is called the zaure. Muhammad-Oumar describes the zaure as an entrance hall mainly used by the male members of the family to receive guests.

A door leads to the living room from the anteroom. All rooms open into the courtyard and direct access is provided from the kitchen to the dining room. An emergency exit and service door is situated near the outdoor kitchen area. Each bedroom has its veranda or porch, which reflects Western influence on Africa, and their use in the Yoruba culture of Nigeria. The door and gate to the veranda of the second bedroom can be accessed from the exterior for guests residing temporarily within the building.

The exterior form of the building mimics a pyramid shape with sharp sloping sides. The pyramid has its symbolism in Africa as a depiction of eternal presence and power.

AESTHETICS

The entrances and facade of the building is decorated with metal panels depicting geometric patterns found in Islamic religion, Igbo culture and Ashanti culture in Ghana. In Igbo culture, the mgbo ezi, which are panels that span the entrance to a compound, are intricately designed with geometric shapes. Symbols derived from the adinkra, a hand woven fabric developed by the Ashanti culture, are often found decorating the walls of their houses. Symbols decorate the entrances of Fusion Point and the metal panels, which also serve as burglary proof within the building.

Fusion Point utilizes local sustainable materials that reflect Africa's history, evolution and climate. It creates a dialogue between the past and the present through tactile representation of African architecture.

The building is constructed with oven heated bricks left bare and plastered only at the protrusions of the building. Bricks are locally attainable in many parts of Africa. It has superior thermal properties, can withstand corrosion, and resist fire.

A gable roof flanked by parapet covers the building. The wooden roof members are visible from within the interior. Polystyrene ceiling is fitted between the spacing of the wooden rafters to provide a smooth and modern finish to the ceiling. Timber is also locally available in many parts of Africa such as Nigeria, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the eastern part of Nigeria, it was used extensively in traditional housing.

Bamboo is used to partition the living and dining rooms. It is utilized to form the structure of the bedroom verandas. Additionally, it is used in the zaure to create a security barrier and simultaneously admit light into the building. The use of bamboo provides a light weight structure that separates spaces but allows natural ventilation and daylight without the use of solid walls with windows or openings. Its lightweight structure provides flexibility of design as opposed to block or concrete walls. Bamboo is locally available in Africa, particularly within the tropical regions.

Aluminum framed glass doors and windows provide access into the courtyard and admit daylight into the rooms. Blinds made from raffia provide protection from glare. Raffia is used extensively in traditional Igbo Yoruba architecture for walls and roof construction. Its application adds indigenous character to the building in addition to its functional purposes.

Traditional architecture in some parts of Africa have a history and relationship with the landscape. Where fruit bearing trees are available, they are planted within the compounds and used in home cooking. The perimeter of the courtyard at Fusion Point is lined with fruit bearing trees that can be harvested for cooking.

The arrangement of spaces around the courtyard offers a more sustainable arrangement in terms of ventilation and daylight. Additionally, circulation is easier and more flexible as opposed to the rigid plan of modern housing.

SUMMARY

Fusion Point creates a dialogue between Africa's history from ancient Egypt, and its transition to modern architecture. The utilization of spaces such as the use of the anteroom, courtyard and verandas reflect African living from historical and cultural Western influences. Locally available materials reflect the character of indigenous architecture. The application of symbolic patterns and elaboration of entrances evokes memories of Africa's history and culture. The pyramidal form of the building reflects ancient African symbolism and ideology. The use of modern materials such as glass, aluminum and polystyrene reflect our transition to modern architecture. The composition of all these gestures creates a thoughtful architecture that provides a harmony and reflects the influences that form the heritage of African architecture.

