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Adeyemi Akande
Nigeria

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THE IRELE

by Adeyemi Akande
Architect | Nigeria

HONORABLE MENTION

Inspired by the art and architecture of the Yoruba and Hamar peoples



INTRODUCTION

Irele is inspired mainly by the traditional architecture of the Hamar people of Ethiopia and, contextually, by the ideals of Yoruba daily living. In addition to the two architectural cultures mentioned above, a thematic aesthetic element used in the prototype is the West African “humility and strength” symbol.

The design has avoided the direct translation and copy of ancient form. Rather, it rigorously sought to present a form based on the interpretation and understanding of traditional space function and order, and has appropriated it in a modern dialect.

THE SKIN

The fundamental feature that makes up the visual character of the prototype is the repetitive cylindrical exterior wall made to mimic the texture of closely packed sticks as seen in the traditional architecture of the Hamar tribe.

A MODERNTWIST

The design adequately considers the traditional lifestyle of the two tribes mentioned, but more importantly it interprets these lifestyles and appropriates them in the context of modern demands. Therefore, a space such as the reading lounge becomes essential as it responds to an aspect of our current lives.

WELCOME KINSMAN, I SHALL JOIN YOU OUTSIDE

The design pays keen attention to the treatment of exterior space as “the outside” is socially more important than “the inside” in African architecture. Hence, the elaborate entrance porch which serves as a major family space in the evenings after the day’s work. In practically all African tribes, the idea of interior space is strictly for sleeping and other private activities and not entertainment of visitors. The concept of a living room is foreign to traditional Africa, though it has been well integrated. Irele attempts to reclaim the original system of entertaining guests by creating an outside appeal at the entrance for family and guests. The entrance porch thus captures an essential part of our social practice and it encourages a healthy interaction and conversation among talking parties void of the distraction of electronics like television.

THE SYMBOL OF HUMILITY AND STRENGTH

This image served as a binding icon throughout the design. The idea was to use it as an aesthetic element to tie the two featured cultures together while presenting the notion that through humility, we can come together as Africans. And our coming together will give us untold strength. The symbol is featured prominently on the iron burglary proof and also on the railings of the roof garden. It also boldly brings all elements together in the mini courtyard. This symbol is sometimes called Dwennimmen in areas of Ghana.

WHAT WAS USED?

The deliberate approach was to employ common, easy to find materials that are relatively maintainable. Materials chosen are intended to sublimely situate the prototype within the context of modern life without disposing the homeowner to undue scrutiny and awkwardness. The foundation was done with reinforced cast concrete. The walls are a mix of baked clay and cement blocks covered with plaster and paint. Roofing tiles cover the front side while the rare end is of concrete decking. Burglary proof is made of iron. Windows are glass, while stone, gravel and tiles are used both outside and inside respectively. Wood is used for columns. If the construction process and project flow is prudently executed, the prototype will border around the 6 million Naira mark – this I must say is an extremely tight budget and some of the feature seen in the 3D

rendering may be greatly simplified to cut cost, e.g. the carved columns.

HEAT AND VENTILATION

For cooling, the windows are large and carefully positioned to maximize cross ventilation. In addition, heat release vents are situated near the ceiling at different points of the house to mitigate effects of rising hot air and evacuation of the same. The vents also allow efficient air flow fed through the courtyard void.

AFRICAN KITCHEN

Clearly tiled floor and the pounding mortar cannot work. This prototype splits the kitchen into two: the inside and outside kitchens. The inside part caters for the everyday activities as prescribed by modernity while the outside part which is an integral of the whole house system is made of concrete slab floors and only has a 1 meter high wall. It is semi covered and it allows for all forms of traditional African cooking such as frying with palm oil, pounding yam in mortar, grinding/cracking nuts, sieving grains, mixing semi solid food in pots placed between the cook's feet on the ground, etc. The inside kitchen epitomizes the modern side but in this design it has responded to the admixture with traditional times too by its integration with the outside kitchen.

WHY BUY THIS HOUSE?

This design responds to the changing and often contradictory demands of the mixture of traditional and modern lifestyles. It captures the metamorphosis of Africanism as we venture into a future without losing our identity. The following features help make this design a preferable option for African families.

- The roof top vegetable garden: sustainable and healthy. Also presents a further private area for family members.
- The ventilation is excellent making for a cool system in the African heat.
- Courtyard: the modern reality and challenge of the courtyard system begs the issue of security and convenience (rain, insects etc). This design responds to these challenges adequately.
- The central part is not paved so to facilitate efficient percolation.
- It has blinders that can manually be pulled down during down pours and to prevent uncontrolled intrusion of insects attracted to night lights.
- Allowance is made for an optional manually retractable security barn door that can secure the courtyard opening at night while still allowing airflow.
- Further shading for the outside porch area can be done manually by pulling an inbuilt mat down to shield the sun's rays and this also prevent rain splashes.
- The interiors are simple and space interaction is well defined
- Spatial transformation: The living area has large retractable doors. When open, it gives a sense of space continuity with the courtyard and allows maximum airflow.
- Efficient water collection through a detailed sprout system that transports rain water to a collection tank behind the house. Water collected here is used for watering the vegetables.

BUILDING CODE

I recommend that a green roof should be a requirement and at least 30% of the land should be

