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AMAI

by Gratio Ray, Kevin Yamaputra & Cynthia Javanny (Achromatic Design)
Architects | Indonesia

HONORABLE MENTION

Inspired by the people and culture of Zimbabwe



A mother is the truest friend we have, when trials heavy and sudden fall upon us; when adversity takes the place of prosperity; when friends desert us; when trouble thickens around us, still will she cling to us, and endeavor by her kind precepts and counsels to dissipate the clouds of darkness, and cause peace to return to our hearts. – Washington Irving

INTRODUCTION

Everyone in the world has a similar, fundamental understanding about a home. This conception is projected in an ambiguous phenomena of physical and psychological simultaneously marks the existence of home in human life. As a physical space, a home is defined structurally as a constructed space or building. Psychologically, a home is a sanctuary of life; a place where people seek safety from many surrounding problems..

What is a home, if not a shelter from the storms of life? Safety and security are the core aspects of the conception of home. In order to design a prototype, the understanding of the African philosophy and culture, which holds symbolic value to their everyday life, is prior . For example, physical objects such as arts and craft, working tools, and architecture are internalized philosophical and symbolic representations of traditional beliefs and culture. Needless to say, homes have deep value and meaning, as it contains the fundamental aspect of human life.

Research to find cultural and regional examples lead interest to the dry Southern Africa, particularly Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, there are distinctive ancient masonry craftsmanship and materiality that are different among other regions of Southern Sahara where mud clay is the key material used to build..

SPIRITUALITY OF MOTHERHOOD & CRAFTSMANSHIP IN ZIMBABWE

Imba Huru, known as the Great Enclosure, is Zimbabwe's crowning achievement and Africa's largest masonry structure by the Shona Civilization.

There are some special characteristics of spatial configurations among dwellings in ancient Zimbabwe, as seen by examples of the Imba Huru, Nalatale, and Khami Ruins. They each form an enclosure forming the womb of a pregnant mother. In this context exists a close relation between the conception of a mother and a home. Remembering that the function of a house is to provide safety and nurture the home owner, these points inspire architects to bring the spirit of motherhood through the expression of architectural design.

DESIGN PROCESS

Reinterpreting Traditional Form to Modernity

The design needs to achieve 3 goals: aesthetic appeal, functionality, and cultural value. Therefore, the design approach needs to embody the holistic transformation of traditional to modern language.

The challenge for architects today is to avoid naively replicating the traditional form, while still maintaining the traditional value, spirit and culture through modern architectural expressions.

When studying the fundamentals of living, there are two basic aspects: harmony and security. The symbolic expression of Adinkra Aya refers to resourcefulness and endurance, and Kete Pa of good bed and marriage (harmony); both are to be reinterpreted as pattern building elements.

SPATIAL PROGRAM

This design aims to create a prototype of a small, modest home yet contains the fundamental needs for modern living. The indoor space is divided with semi outdoor space for the needs of natural lighting and ventilation.

The flexibility of the living room, dining room and kitchen gives more possibilities to hold social activities. This social aspect defines the African kitchen as a traditional identity in a modern language for African houses.

STRUCTURE & CONSTRUCTION

The construction and materials are considered to be as simple and as low cost as possible. The materials are chosen by the local availability and simple assembly method, without devaluing the aesthetics and functions of the building. The wall construction is mostly made of cob wall which is earth based material supported by concrete structure. The concrete roof, chosen for its durability, functions to catch rainwater and store it as secondary water supply. To prevent cracks and heat absorption in summer, the surface is covered by locally available thatch and gravel to avoid the heat directly touching the concrete surface.

SUSTAINABILITY: WATER RECYCLE SYSTEM

To enhance efficiency of daily water usage, this design will apply a system to reduce, reuse, and recycle rainwater and waste water

CONCLUSION

Africa has is rich in culture, beliefs, and other traditional values that depend on the characteristics of the local environment. This proposal is a prototype to offer an alternative approach to give a modern language to traditional African Architecture.

This proposal also offers the idea of a modest and low cost architecture possible for a house. This house would express intimacy, modesty, and simplicity that nurtures the home owners to live and grow, and shelter them in safety like a mother loves her child. Therefore, this proposal is named “mother”, or AMAI, in Shona Language.

