

TRADITIONAL NIGERIAN ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

There is a very weak link between Traditional Architecture and Contemporary Modern Architecture in Nigeria. Although Nigeria is a vast country with 32 states and a countless number of tribes, one cannot agree that basic distinction on its architecture is between the North and South Regions. In the North, the strongest influence came from Islam whilst in the South influence came from the return of ex-slaves (mainly from Brazil) and colonisation. However, both styles of Traditional Architecture used local materials such as earth, wood, stone and thatch (for roofing). The climate, human physiology and geography led to the development of Curvilinear conical and mud roofed structured in the North and Rectilinear thatch roof mud houses in the South.

Nowadays, Nigerian Architecture is characterised by the post-modern buildings of the 1990's and a sprawling new Nigerian Architecture that is taking shape due to the introduction of new building materials mainly imported from China. The beautiful circular shapes apparent in Hausa Architecture with its domed roofs, thick monolithic walls and decorative plasters have been replaced by a rectangular concrete prototype with imported roman column replicas that have no structural function and only act as decorative elements adorning the entrance of the buildings. Of course it will be most difficult to roof a circular building with corrugated metal sheeting. There are no longer courtyards in the middle of Northern Nigerian Buildings where the family or colleagues can gather round in the shade to dine or meet or children to play in. There are no longer gardens or land surrounding the houses and public buildings of the South where children can ride their bikes or play with their friends in. Nigerian Buildings no longer give their occupants a chance for rest or simply enjoy nature within their personal space. Traditional Nigerian Architecture is now visible in the planning and layout of the building where high ceilings and toilets adjoined to every room are accepted as a common practice in building design practice. A situation an INTBAU member describes as the bush man in us. Presently, in Kano State, the heart of Northern Nigeria, there is a group of the newly rich with traditional titles, with connections to traditional rulers or the proud Hausawa (people of the Hausa Tribe which can mainly be found in Northern Nigeria, Niger and Ghana) who have taken the famous Symbol called Zanko and have directly translated it into modern concrete buildings and which many now incorrectly refer to as Traditional Nigerian Architecture.

So what is the Future of Traditional Nigerian Architecture? Since its inception in 2008, INTBAU Nigeria has been working to find avenues that will lead to the revival of Traditional Nigerian Architecture. After the completion of 3 Events all of which were unsuccessful due to the fact that these events had to be free in order to get a significant participation. The ongoing project with the National Commissions for Museums and Monuments since it hosted a West African Meeting to 'Harmonise the West African Tentative List for UNESCO World Heritage Sites' has come to a halt. It seems we have to face the difficult truth that there is no significant interest by The State, The Traditional Rulers or The People to Conserve, Regenerate and Preserve the estimated 90% destructed site of the Kano Walls and Associated Sites.

This Landmark which was once revered by neighbouring countries and which added to the greatness of Kano City in ancient times lies fallen around the entirety of Kano's old city. The National Commissions for Museums have not been able to raise the money that will make this project possible. Nobody Cares. Many do not know It's History or Significance. There are currently only six Traditional Buildings of World Heritage Standard that remain standing in Kano. The sixth being a series of gates which form a part of the Kano Walls and lead to particular areas in the old city. **So what is the Way Forward?** Based on the previous evidences, it is clear that the Conservation of the Kano Walls which is probably the most significant Nigerian Architecture we currently have is not going to be possible. The way forward which a lot of our INTBAU Members agree with is to Target the 'New Build'. The current issues of Climate Change have put Sustainable Building in the forefront of all Architects' and Builders' thinking. Our Mission is now to target Students of Architecture and a few Professionals with interest in Traditional Architecture and Design to shift the focus unto the Essence of Traditional Building. Hence the Materiality (Earth, Wood, Stone and Thatch) and the Principles (Privacy, Space, Comfort) guarding the designs of Nigerian Traditional Architecture. INTBAU Nigeria is currently working with Department of Architecture, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria to Propose a Centre for Research into Natural Building Materials and Technologies. Meetings are also ongoing this week with The Nigerian Institute of Architects to see whether we can partner to organise Building workshops using Traditional Materials so as to encourage a New Nigerian Architecture that is an innovation directly formed from the Traditional.