

TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF ISSELE-UKU, NIGERIA:

Cultural and Material Origins in Residential Design



SKETCH OF A FAMILY COMPOUND

Issele-Uku man, before the advent of the western culture, which brought a lot of changes/modifications to his way of life, lived in a rectangular shaped hut, which he called Uno in his dialect. This Uno was made of organic building materials: Laterite (aja - ocha) Bamboo Sticks (otoche), Leaves (akwukwo-uma) Water (miri) Woods (osisi) etc.

The shape and materials used to make these hut implicated Issele-Uku's historical relationship with the Binis (Edo people). Besides, history has it that Issele-Uku was founded in 1230AD, by a mission from Bini, to stop the influx of the Ibos towards the Bini kingdom.

A typical Issele-Uku man, at that time, held to his culture and traditions tenaciously, usually married two wives, in order to raise many children that would assist him in the farm. In those days, a great man was known was known by the size of his farm.

He made separate huts for his wives, basically, to eschew quarreling amongst his wives, and most importantly, to avoid contact with either of his wives, who might be in her menstrual cycle. It was his belief that a contact with his wives while in their cycle would defile his spiritual power/belief. His wives' huts were built directly, behind his hut. Each of these huts had two rooms, with a parlour in between the two rooms. The two wives utilized a single kitchen, that was typically, built close to their abodes. Roughly nine yards behind the house would be the 'his and hers' building for the toilets and bathrooms. The man's hut would always be positioned in the front of the family compound, as to provide protection for his family. Behind the ancient Issele - Uku man's used to be thick bush, with grown trees.

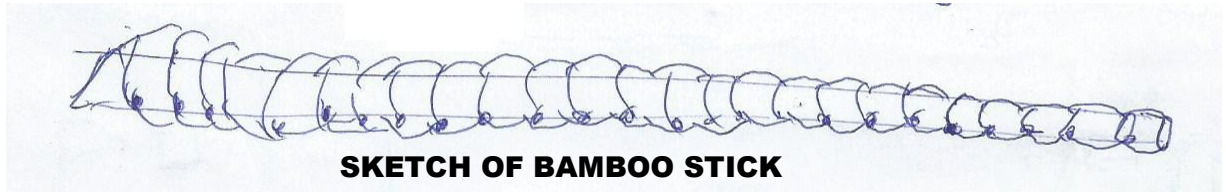
The ancient Issele-Uku man was mindful of security, and used the Ulu-oyibo, or Egbo trees, planted so closely, that even goats won't not pass in between them to enter into his compound to eat up vegetables in his small garden. He fenced his compound most importantly, for two core reasons:

- To enhance security of his compound and
- To mark his boundary with his neighbors

Some schools of thought argued that the idea of ancient Issele-Uku man, living in a separate space from his wife / wives was based on his religious/cultural belief. Which eventually, evolved into the modern concept of the husband staying separately in the master bedroom, while, his wife/wives occupied separate room/rooms.

THE UNO (HOUSE) WAS MADE WITH ORGANIC MATERIALS

1. Mashed Laterite (Clay Soil) (ajaocha) was used for the walling.
2. Bamboo Sticks (otoche) for making studded framing upon which the Laterite was placed on, to create cast walls.



SKETCH OF BAMBOO STICK

3. Ropes (elili or udo) a kind of creeping weeds used for the tying of the wall frames.
4. Local Hand Towel (Ubebe) used for the thickening and smoothening of the floor and walls.
5. Water from their reservoir (pond) (omi) to mix the mashed Laterite, as pounded by the workers (people of his community) before placing same on the made bamboo stud frames to form walls.
6. Leaf (Akukwouma or Igbodo) used in the place of modern roofing sheets.
7. Key (mkpisi) made by the blacksmiths to open the doors.



SKETCH OF MKPISI

8. Bolt



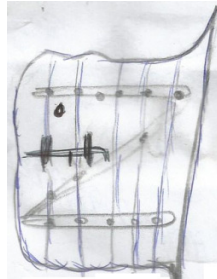
SKETCH OF BOLT

9. Nails were made by blacksmiths and used for nailing the bolts and local hinges, but it was not being used for the roofing.



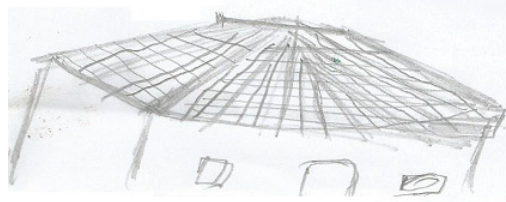
SKETCH OF NAIL

10. Door (Uzo) made from hard wood like Mahogany, usually made for a very heavy and secure door.



SKETCH OF DOOR

11. Roof. The pattern of woodwork used for the roof looked like modern roofing. The difference however is that the roofsof old were made from bamboo sticks, while the modern roof is made with planks. Ropes were used to tie the bamboo sticks while modern roofs use nails.



SKETCH OF ROOF WOODWORK

12. Leaf (Akwukwo or Igbodo). Leaves were the materials used to construct the roof. The roof leaves were so solidly inter woven they lasted up to 7 (seven) years with or without leakages. The quality and quantity used depended on how rich the man was. Inside the house was always cool because the Laterite walls and Leaf roof structure kept it cool. However, the houses were at risk of easy fires during the Harmattan season, because the weather was hot and very dry.



SKETCH OF AKWUKWO

INTERIOR SPACE LAYOUTS

- (1) Iba: (Bed) A mound of mashed and compacted Laterite was used to create a bed, well smoothed and polished edges. A fire place would be built on the iba to keep the house warm during the cold periods. Besides, the then, Issele – Uku man that believed there must always be light in a house at night to repel evil spirits.
- (2) Mkpaluupo (Chair). Chairs were made of a mound of compacted laterite, but smaller in width than Iba (bed) and more in length than Iba, smoothed and polished with water mixed with Laterite. Usually serving as chairs in the parlour, they were not moveable, just like the Iba (Bed).
- (3) Ufu: A small hidden hole on the corner of the wall usually behind the doors, where Ukoti (ancient razor blades) were kept from the reach of children as well as Mpisiwa also kept in Ufu.
- (4) Mpio: The windows were very small, in order for thieves not to enter the house. They used a type of animal skin curtain to cover the windows at night.
- (5) There were different types of wooden chairs, meant for different classes of people in the society. They were expensive (in those times cowries were the currency). For this reason, the MkpaluUpochairs were more popular.
- (6) Uli: this was used to mark their calendars on their walls. Sometimes women used it to beautify their houses both interior and exterior.

Names of different wooden chairs were:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| (a) Oche – Eze | – | Kings Chair |
| (b) OcheIkpalu | – | Chairs for distinguished persons |
| (c) Ochendichiechichi | – | Chairs for Chiefs |
| (d) OcheIkoro | – | Chairs for Ordinary Men |
| (e) OcheUmuaka | – | Chairs For Children |
- (7) Okpulu-Kpu: A kind of a wooden box, where men (Elders) kept their precious items. It was believed that the box had a mystical power to have instant effect upon any thief. Anyone who stole from it would suffer “shaky-shaky hands”. That would implicate him as the thief, before the elders.
 - (8) Akpata: A platform fixed about 4ft above on the wall in the rooms and also in the Kitchen (Ukoni) where valuables were kept.
 - (9) NKPANAKA: Was their lantern.

(10) AESTHETICS

Typical colors used for painting both interior and exterior walls of the home where red, white (Kaolin), black (Uli or char-cool). And the natural color of Laterite (mixture of red soil with water).

White paint was meant for the Native doctors or the Royal homes. Red for their shrines (signifying danger). Laterite color was the general color used for homes of the citizens. Uli patterns and motifs were used for decorating the walls of the homes, an art typically carried out by the women of the family. Special coded meanings and symbols that identified the owner of the homes were often inscribed using the Uli patterns.

APiece Of Work Based On Investigation and Research

Authored by:

UBA BON RICHIE

Issele-Uku

(2015)

