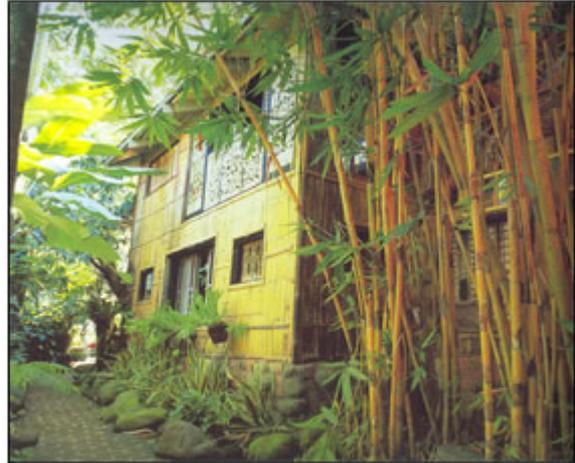


# Bamboo House

By Robert F. Lane

Bamboo: A Centro Escolar University Centennial Collection

**T**ao Po" you call out, because the door to a bamboo house is always open, and you don't want to come upon its occupants too suddenly. There is little chance though that you would. They would hear your footsteps, or the hens would cackle to see you, the dogs would bark. The bamboo house lets all the sounds of the outside in. You shake off your shoes as you get to the front steps, because you don't want to track in dirt. The bamboo house is often scrupulously clean and neat. The multi-purpose nature of the rooms dictate a clean-up after every use, so upon waking, mats and blankets are rolled up and set in a corner, and after eating, the dishes are taken away and washed and any meal remnants pushed through the floor slats with a wet rag for the animals to feast on in the *silong*. The bamboo floor invites air to come up through the slats, pushing hot air up and out through the shingles, cooling the house. A bamboo house is always built to catch a breeze. Windows are located for cross-ventilation by builders familiar with micro-climate in the area, and the porous surfaces breathe. All this ensure that the house is cool on even the hottest days.



*Bamboo planted around the house keeps the nosie of the city away, and seems to keep the smog at bay.*

As the afternoon wears on it will be time to prepare the evening meal. The rice needs winnowing and the fire on the hearth needs reviving. The needs of the kitchen are different from those of the rest of the house, but even these are met graciously by bamboo. The kitchen sits on an earth floor, bamboo walls letting enough light in but leaving no space wide enough for a wind to blow the cooking fire out. And always to one side a washing sink on a bamboo counter with a *banggerahan*, a bamboo rack on which to air-dry the dishes. Off to another side is the *batalan*, a platform on which to wahs and bathe, enclosed for privacy but without a roof so it can dry out thoroughly, quickly.

The tradition of building the bamboo house in the Philippines is at least 800 years old, but other bamboo houses have been found in other Southeast Asian countries as early as 200 B.C.

Bamboo house are built not by architects, but by the people who will live in them. They are built by the community that will live around them. "Folk houses are not the product of any theory design, but instinct, intuition, common sense and communal memory. Their form has been defined by climate, site, purpose, available materials, building technology, historical experience and world view."

Because bamboo demands its own craftsman, not all carpenters can build a bamboo house. A nail hastily placed will splinter the whole culm, and only experience gives the eye that can pick a mature reliable bamboo post. And what sort of knowledge is it that enables a builder to construct a house without a meter stick and yet cut eloquent proportions on a wonderfully human scale? The bamboo itself becomes the means measure – the nodes on a fully-grown bamboo are evenly spaced – and the builder uses it with an skilled eye and a seasoned hand.



*The best way to walk on a bamboo floor is barefoot. Allow the bamboo to shift with your weight, to flex and creak, and in return feel its smoothness against your skin, and know that it will support you.*

Within the basic traditional structure of the bamboo house the builder /owner is free to innovate, to amend features to fit the way he or his family lives. He may bring new materials, alter patterns, modify features, augment, embellish, enhance. Form follow function, but function follows form as well, and in constructing the house is always open-ended. A project never really finished, because when the bamboo gives way or need changing, parts of the house can be replaced, reworked, redesigned to accommodate changing needs.

It has been called the ideal house for the tropics, but is the bamboo house passing away? Not entirely, though the of life for which the *bahay kubo* evolved is itself becoming a thing of the past. A dwindling supply of bamboo has also contributed to its diminished use as building material.

But true to its nature, the bamboo house is adapting to the needs of its owners. Where there is need for permanence, builders sink concrete foundation to keep at bay moisture and insects that shorten the life of a bamboo post. Tiles or galvanized iron replace the *nipa* roof. Screens are installed in windows to keep out bugs. And researchers and technicians have developed a board consisting of bamboo sandwiched in layers of a resin as an alternative to plywood.

Whatever form the new bamboo house takes, we must hope that the common experience of building and the communal memory of living will continue to inspire a dwelling as suitable to the new way of life, as charming and distinctive, as our bamboo house.

Ref.: <http://filipinoheritage.zxq.net/crafts/bamboo/house.htm>