

CURRENT TOURISM IMAGERY AND TOURISTIC LANDSCAPES IN HAITI

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ST CARIBBEAN
ARCHITECTURE AND
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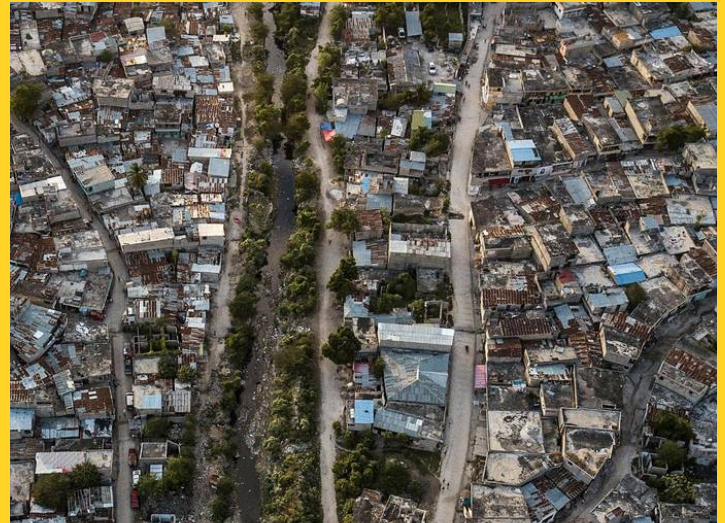
COLLAGE SHOWING A MIZ OF TAKEN IMAGES AND SEARCHED ONES

THE DIASPORA OF RESIDENTIAL HAITIAN ARCHITECTURE



TAKEN BY: DEAN BAILEY

Haitian architecture takes many forms, that thanks to tourism, often go overlooked. When properly analyzed there is a wide diaspora of architecture that begins to make up Haiti's urban environment. Homes in Haiti have been characterized by the country's history of national disasters, and the tendencies for the architecture to respond directly to the environment. Often times, global tourists give much of their attention toward architecture related directly to their experiences, and leaving much of the architecture that is not in some way related to the tourist's gaze unnoticed and underappreciated. There is a certain tragedy that lies in how much focus is placed upon Caribbean nations as destinations for visual tourism. As tourists visit, there is increased focus placed upon tourists typologies, and much of the infrastructure throughout struggling parts of the country go ignored. There comes a certain perversion of the country in terms of its cityscapes, and landscapes that accompanies the larger perception of the Caribbean as a tourist destination. Haiti, was the first free black nation in the world, and one of the earliest to be liberated in the Caribbean. Because of this, Haiti has not been given some of the access to resources that other Caribbean nations have, and has been historically mistreated by its parent company, France.



<https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/2229-haiti-s-gingerbread-houses-focus-of-preservation-efforts>

The economics of Haiti have played a significant part in the establishment of its architecture. The lack of resources and economy remains one of the main causes for gaps between styles and quality of infrastructure throughout the country. These variations in quality directly affect residential architecture, what style applies to rural homes, urban ones or even historic establishments. The breadth of Haitian architecture takes its influence from several different aspects of Haiti's past and present, that have inspire architectural tropes and motifs throughout the country's history. Haiti's rich and ambiguous background provides multiple perspectives to the establishment of its various architectural styles, and creates a colorful diaspora of residencies throughout the country.

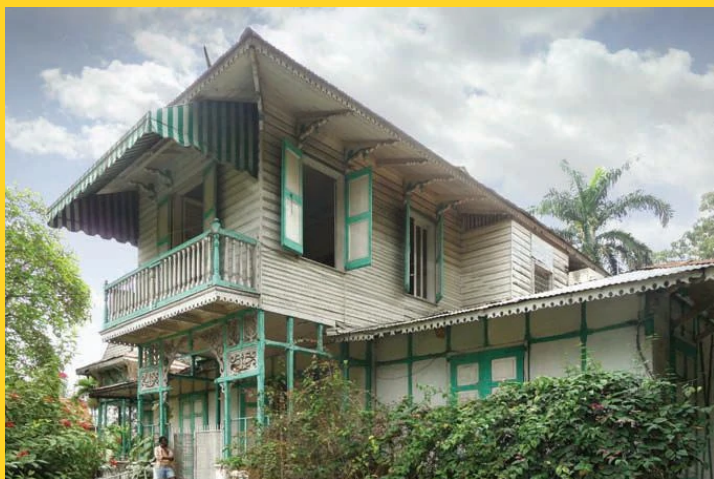


https://haiti.fandom.com/wiki/Gingerbread_District

French Colonial Representation

GINGERBREAD HOUSES

Haiti, is one of the best known countries in the Caribbean that was colonized by the French, and such influence shows in some of the residential architecture. Architectural features like iron working, pitched roofs and the use of heavy timber as structural members are featured in these establishments. Usually found in more formal pieces, French aesthetics have made their way into residential architecture through features and elements that accentuate aesthetics, deal with the environment, or place ownership upon the buildings by the colonial power. Gingerbread style homes are one of the mainstays of Haitian architecture.



<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703551304576261440650733446>

They were originally inspired by French architectural themes, and specifically feature “brick-filled timber frames adorned with lacy wooden latticework, high ceilings, and graceful balconies set over wide porches – all designed to take advantage of the prevailing winds”(“Gingerbread Houses - a Caribbean Architectural Marvel · Visit Haiti.”) Many of these buildings actually survive longer than the concrete based architecture that has been established throughout many of the Haitian cities. At one point in history, circa 1925, gingerbread houses were actually banned in Haiti because of their use of heavy timber, and fears of fires. The gingerbread houses remain incredibly strong pieces of architecture even today, and continue to be one of the most unique parts of Haiti’s architectural diaspora. Oftentimes many of these French buildings will have decorated porches, and decks that boast ornamental guardrails, and even sometimes ironworking. The style of the cornice is, the placement of the doors and even the colors used can speak directly toward the French colonial style, and how it has been evolved by some of Haiti’s own tropical aesthetics and design choices. Much of the architecture has evolved to deal better with the Haitian environment, making more room for windows, and semi permeable membranes as part of the building’s enclosure systems, and envelopes.

Source:

(“Gingerbread Houses - a Caribbean Architectural Marvel · Visit Haiti.”)

Resort and Commercial Architecture

HOTELS AND RESORTS

Cultural tourism and the inciting advertisement of the cruise industry have helped travelers fantasize Haiti as a Caribbean paradise destination. Because of this much of the resort based architecture has begun to be based on the gaze of tourists who celebrate the Caribbean picturesque. This includes landscape architecture and traditional architecture that begin to play a role in blurring the lines between what is historically true, and what has become marketable in the eyes of tourists throughout global history. Haiti is not much different from other Caribbean islands in the way that it is seen by tourists. Despite its earthquakes, and socio-political unrest, Haiti's coast is seen as a tropical paradise that gives way to bright colors, wood-based architectural structures, thatched roofs, and verandas that I'll begin to speak directly to the nature that surrounds them. Aesthetics may include the use of bright colors, colors with high contrast, and even some statuesque aspects into some of the landscape architecture.



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Much of the landscaping becomes bright and novel toward the experience of the tourists. Usually touristic establishments are located close to water, and tend to focus on the creation of beachfront views. Companies like Royal Caribbean own expanses of land in Haiti, and have begun to rent them out for touristic purposes. This has begun to change some of the residential architecture in Haiti, shifting it from simple hotel architecture, to resort architecture. Resort architecture is much more expensive than simple hotel architecture that might be found in the city.



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Resorts are often found on coast fronts, or in rural areas where they're able to spread as much as they need to serve their patrons. These establishments tend to make use of the highest quality construction methods the country has to offer, and will feature fully assembled walls and floors, so as to appeal to their foreign visitors. These establishments are generally equipped with running water and electricity, and are reminiscent of construction standards that exist all across the world. There is a marginal difference between the architecture that one might see used in the Haitian countryside, and what is used to build touristic establishments. Hotels and resorts have suffered similar damage from the earthquakes and hurricanes that have struck Haiti, but continue to evolve to handle the challenges of the environment present upon the island. The difference in privilege becomes apparent when this style is compared to many of the architectural pieces that might not serve visitors, and it highlights one of the ways in which Haiti's economy perpetuates the housing gap.



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The Common Style

PORT AU PRINCE

Common homes in Haiti make use of concrete architecture. These family home typologies are found in Haiti's urban environments like Port au Prince, and Petionville. Oftentimes bolstered with rebar, these buildings tend to be small, and will usually only hold a family. Usually located in close proximity to one another, the families living in these homes might tend to be smaller, to avoid overcrowding. The homes are located at varying elevations because of the mountainous region that begins to make up cities like Port-au-Prince. Many of the establishments are colored with bright paint, an aesthetic that has become synonymous with some of the architecture and homes of Haiti. Many of these homes have been damaged by earthquakes, and some remain in need of repair due to the struggling economy. These homes reference cheap architectural styles, and inexpensive construction methods. Much of the architecture that can be seen in Port-au-Prince is based on concrete. Many of the constructs involve large concrete slabs, accented by rebar. This is because Haiti lacks access to heavy timber in large quantities, and it is not commonly used in fear of widespread blazes.

Without timber, the citizens of Haiti have had to make do with the materials they have. Large quantities of concrete are imported to the island, and taken by the cities, and small personal builders. These homes are erected quickly, and are more likely to last through natural disasters than some of the mud homes that can be seen throughout the countryside. Many of the original gingerbread homes in Port-au-Prince have been destroyed by earthquakes. And currently there's much effort toward the building of seismic resistant structures within the city limits. Many of the dwellings within the city, especially in terms of residential architecture feature small to medium size homes with anywhere from 2 to 3 rooms. If they have a second level, which many of them do, it usually will house the bedrooms, and a balcony. Much of the architecture seen in these dwellings combine standard construction practices with concrete blocks, which are painted in bright colors and topped with roofs made of whatever can be found. Rebuilding Port-au-Prince after all of the earthquakes has been especially difficult for the citizens living there. Cities like Petionville typically house many of Haiti's richer citizens, who often experience better construction methods and processes than citizens living in Port au Prince. Some of these homes are larger, and richer citizens might even own mansions up near the mountains.



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Rural Architecture

STYLE AND CONTEXT

Many of the homes in Haiti are built in rural areas. A large number of Haiti's citizens invest their time in agriculture and farming. They commonly live far away from standard cities and neighborhoods, and live in small homes. Usually these homes are made up of two rooms constructed of wood or mud walls, and generally feature mud walls. These humble establishments are often topped with a thatched roof fashioned from whatever material is accessible. Sometimes these rooms might even feature galvanized metal if it can be found. Haiti's general lack of heavy timber makes it difficult for people to make formal wood constructed homes outside of the availability of infrastructure. Usually these homes are constructed by the people living inside of them, and do not include electricity or running water. These homes will be accompanied by a single outhouse, oftentimes dug into the ground, that stands relatively far from the home. Many of these farming homes exist in neighborhoods known as compounds, and work as a community to feed the neighborhood's children, while making sure all of the people living within them are healthy and clothed.



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It is often seen that the male heads of the household will construct and design their homes with their friends and relatives living within the compound, and has become a cultural tradition in many of the neighborhoods to build homes with the surrounding men. This typology of residential housing is extremely different from what one might see in an urban neighborhood, where homes are generally made of concrete and might even have wood floors. Typically the people living in these farming communities have less money than those living in the urban environment, and significantly less than those living in hotel or vacation-based environments. Tourists often gloss over these farm homes as the standard typology of Haiti when visiting, but these hold significant presence in terms of Haiti's current residential style. or sometimes not even overgeneralize Haiti as only having such small and modest dwellings.

Rural architecture in Haiti is one of the most prevalent styles, and speaks toward the resilience of the Haitian people.

What defines Authenticity?

HAITI'S MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

Attempting to define what is “authentic” architecture in Haiti is a difficult task. Whether attempting to define it as rural, the common urban style, French colonial or even resort architecture, Haiti’s architecture has originated from multiple different starting points and perspectives. The designs that have come out of Haiti have been inspired by not only its phases throughout history, but it’s socio economic status throughout. Due to the natural disasters, the influx of Caribbean tourism and even Haiti’s own political troubles, architecture and infrastructure have changed and evolved according to the domestic situation. It becomes a difficult task to say what authentic architecture for Haiti is. In one sense, authenticity could reference the architecture developed by Haiti’s current inhabitants, but could reference historical influence in contrasting paradigms. Authentic architecture in Haiti could be defined as: architecture after the colonial period that has evolved to handle Haiti’s climate, and has been built by the Haitian people for their own purposes of use.

Haiti’s “authentic,” architecture is often defined as what was built by the French during their colonial conquest of the Caribbean island. However this narrative becomes problematic when one begins to consider the strides made by the Haitian citizens, to create and rebuild their own homes in the wake of natural disaster. The Haitian citizens, whether they are rich or poor, have worked hard to create their own typologies and establish a new and rich architectural language. These new establishments begin to define the people, giving their built environment a voice and providing a style to the culture of Haiti. These forms of architecture are just as valid as the works created by the French, they simply show off a different perspective than the historical pieces.

Understanding Haiti’s architecture in authenticity in this way makes it so all of the typologies begin to be seen as authentic and speak to the nation as a dynamic environment capable of hosting multiple typologies. This acknowledgment is important, as there is no one way to define what is authentic, but respect should be given to all forms of architecture as they appear. They each have significance and Haiti’s history, and contribute equally to Haiti’s diaspora of residential establishments, helping to define the country as diverse in its character.

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KINAM HOTEL

FRENCH STYLE
ARCHITECTURE

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FRENCH COLONIAL
EXAMPLE

PORT AU PRINCE

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