

HERITAGE ARCHITECTURE IN IBADAN, NIGERIA: THE HOUSE OF ADEBISI GIWA OF IDIKAN

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ABSTRACT

Original Article

This paper examines the architectural design and planning of the residential apartment of the great Ibadan icon, businessman and philanthropist. The architecture is neo-classical and the building boasts of at least eighty five living spaces (parlour and rooms). The Adebisi mansion is a symbol of Ibadan-Yoruba material heritage. The people of Ibadan had great respect for the patron of the house - Giwa Adebisi and this is confirmed in the fact that his memories are preserved in legend, songs and poems that enunciate the man's wealth and influence. These legends and songs that accompany his home in Ibadan is rarely found elsewhere in Yoruba society. The paper discusses the grandeur of the Adebisi mansion and concludes that the building is of significant historic and architectural heritage value and thus makes a worthy material for preservation.

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INTRODUCTION

“Eni ti o ba fe ko iru ile Adebisi, ko ni ile ko”

“One who seeks to build a house like Adebisi, is not ready to build a house”.

The aforementioned maxim in the Yoruba repertoire is a popular saying in Ibadan in the 20th century. It was used to advise young people not to nurture the desire to build a house like Adebisi's mansion as it will be futile. The mansion of Adebisi has been portrayed in the Ibadan worldview as a structure like the Mapo hall in grandeur, elegance and splendor. The prevalent belief at the time the structure was built was that materials for the construction of the building could only have come from Europe. The construction of the building started in 1927 and was completed before the commissioning of Mapo Hall in October 5, 1929 [1]. The idea behind heritage Architecture which is primarily concerned with structures or parts of structure which carry a historical value often in the context of its host culture or society helps us put this study of the Adebisi mansion in perspective. The study helps us demonstrate and appreciate the importance attached to the brilliance of human

creativity as expressed in built form. Architectural heritage embodies the outstanding artistic and historic value of a monument while manifesting human ingenuity [2]. This paper advances the functional use of space as a creative material culture independent from colonial finance, maintenance or repairs. The building symbolizes the wealth of Adebisi as cultural metaphor and a significant historical connotation for the Oyo Yoruba groups in Southwest Nigeria. It emphasizes the phenomenal position of the built environment in the architectural development of Ibadan society.

Sanusi Adebisi Giwa of Idikan

An Ibadan native, Sanusi Adebisi Giwas was a prominent businessman in Ibadan in the first half of the twentieth century. Owing to the sketchy and uncoordinated process of formal registration of birth in the late nineteenth century in western Nigeria, Sanuni's exact date of birth is unknown but he is believed to have been born around early-1890s. Historian professor Adesina describe him as a hard driven entrepreneur in the Ibadan cocoa business scene. The story of his childhood is scanty but research shows that as a youth, he was involved in his father's business enterprise which was basically



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structure was one of its kind and such that was not to be seen in Ibadan or elsewhere in Yoruba society during colonial times. The building takes on a dual role of residence and court in the manner that contest with the loftiest abodes of Ibadan royals. Many Ibadan indigenes derived pleasure in the use of the building for social, political and economic interactions within the city. The building has an inspiring influence towards higher ideals in the city's development and broadened their outlook by given them a taste for finer things (Figures 1, 2 and 3).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a historical approach by examining the monumental and popular historic buildings designed by a British engineer in colonial Ibadan city in the first half of the 20th century.

The data for the study were obtained through direct observation, oral interviews with families and relatives to the owner of the building as well as information from books and journal articles related to the study. Photographs of the building were taken by the authors after obtaining permission and acceptance of the occupants living in the residential apartment. The sketch plan of the building provides the background plan of the building.

Description of the Building: Building materials, techniques and construction of Ile–Adebisi Giwa of Idikan walls.

The sandcrete wall of the building was finish with cement mortar and concrete blocks (Figure 4). With this technique and materials, the Adebisi house accommodated vernacular building practice. What is more concerting is in spite of the unapologetic neo-classical exuberance, the structure remains faithful in philosophy to the use of materials that are in synchrony with traditional Yoruba building ideology.

1) Doors and windows: Doors were made from timber typical of Yoruba traditional houses and windows are made up of glass materials with timber frames in order to admit light into the inside of the building from the outer surroundings or from the courtyard. The main buildings have large glass windows while the bungalows have wooden boards as windows. In fact, in some living and sleeping areas, the windows were so small admitting little light through the outside rather reminiscent of early traditional Yoruba building conceptions.

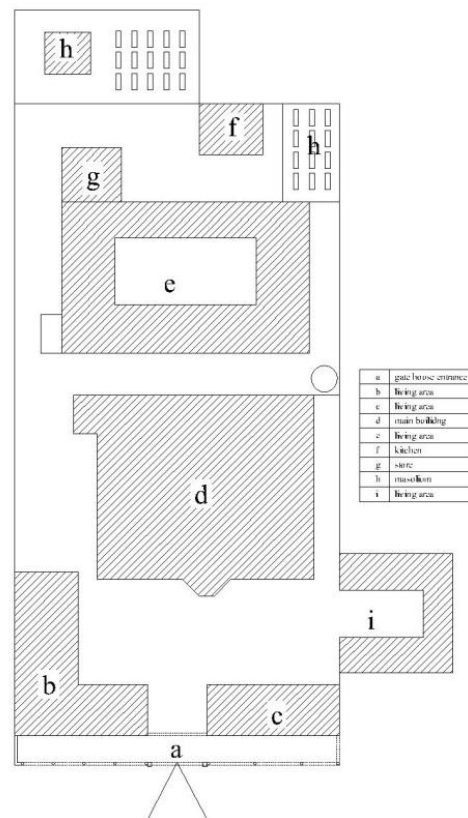


Figure 1: Site Layout.

a. Entrance façade; b. Living area 1; c. Living area 2; d. Main Building; e. Living area 3 (children and wives); f. Kitchen; g. Store; h. Burial area (Cemetery/mausoleum); i. Extended family living area (Source: Authors' Survey, 2017).

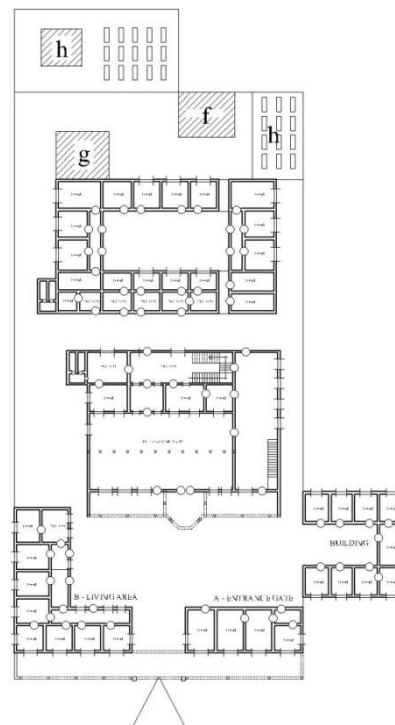
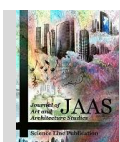


Figure 2: Ground Floor Plans.



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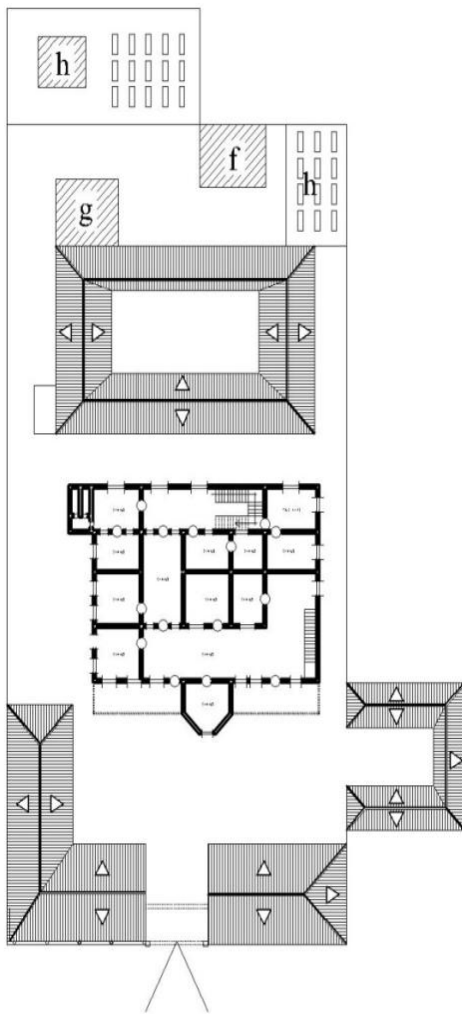


Figure 3: Upper Floor, and roof Plans.

2) Roofs: The main building and the adjoining living areas were roofed with corrugated iron sheets draining into a roof gutter and connected with pipes to drain of the run-off from the hipped end roof. The roof of the main building and the adjoining living areas to the main entrance of the compound were also finished with concrete facial round the total perimeter of the building (Figures 3 and 5).

3) Fencing: The fencing of Adebisi house was well articulated to delimit the property from other structures. The fencing was done in such a way that different flanges between wings of the property were well differentiated from the main building. For instance, the wing housing the parents and other extended family were fenced off from the main building premises but was connected with a gate entrance to accommodate them too (Figure 6). The space left out (at the rear end of the compound) for burial of the dead was also fenced off from the main compound.



Figure 4: Side view of the building



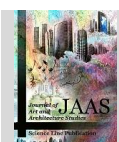
Figure 5: Extended Family house



Figure 6: Entrance gate to the extended family area

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Adebisi Sanusi mansion in Idikan has been described by Ibadan locals as parallel to no other building owned by an individual under colonial rule



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in Western Nigeria. The house was indeed a symbolic creative form of art and architectural master piece of its time. The planning and architectural design of the building was a product of colonialist ideology distilled in modernity. The architecture of the building was articulated in a careful mix of neo-classical and Afro- Brazilian style. Both the western and eastern entrance of the building features a 19th century Portuguese style curved pediment. The eastern end features a remarkably simple low bas relief rendition of a flower on the frontal end. The main approach view of the building is symmetrical and formal in appearance.

The arch curvature at the entrance is supported by two square base columns to each side of the entrance gate. The curved pediment on top of the western entrance is also engraved but this side features an elephant motif with a squirrels placed on either side in an arrangement style that mimics the medieval western European crests. The pediment is further decorated with a flower verse and the inscription “SAG” which stands for Sanusi Adebisi Giwa, the patron of the building (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Entrance gate to the building (the elevation rests on an imposing column signifying the strength, power and quality of the building).

Architectural design and planning of the building

The built area of the Idi-Kan house of Adebisi seats on about a half-acre (3 and 1/2 plots) parcel of land. The house comprises of about 85 rooms on two floors of four separate structures with adjoining bungalows providing shelter for other members of the family (Figures 1, 2 and 3). Made entirely of sandcrete walls and floors, the structure features typical modern fitted doors and windows made from

timber/wood and glass. Reputed to be about ninety years old, it is now mostly in a state of disrepair. That notwithstanding, the building still carries an aura of brilliance and it is still occupied by the members of the Adebisi’s family.

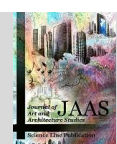
Symmetry was a design ideology in the conceptualization of this structure. This is evident in the careful arrangement of the Doric style columns on the approach elevation. Each arch lands on Doric columns and are distributed at equal distance from each other. The central arch which hosts the pediment is flanked by three columns each to both sides (Figure 9) emphasizing balance in the arrangements and forms, a key aesthetic character of the building. The deliberate use of sturdy Doric columns further enunciates rigidity, power and influence; all hallmarks of the patron Adebisi. Though on a minuscule scale, the balustrade on the first floor of the building gives balance and verticality to the otherwise sturdy character of the ground floor.

The central arch which doubles as the entrance porch leads to a big hall (*Igbejo*) (Figure 10) which is about 86.4m² in size and serves as visitor’s waiting area and the patron’s court used for general family meetings and disputes resolution for neighbours and family members alike. In addition to the court, the ground floor of the main building also consists of a large living room and five adjoining bedrooms. The ceiling of the hall was made of a wooden slab supported by arch curvatures of 10 columns doubling as support for the upper floor slab. The columns serve as the main structural support to the upper floor slab (Figures 8, 9 and 10).

The ground floor of the hall was finished with PVC tiles with wooden skirting round the wall edges to make a neat and well-finished edge. The enclosed walls were finished with glossy paint while the windows are of well-designed wooden net/blind and glass windows (Figures 11 and 13).

It is however clear that the oil paint on the wall now is not the same that was used at inception. It is not uncommon in the western part of current Nigeria for wealthy patrons to repaint their houses yearly in some type of renewal ritual and also as a show of continued affluence and relevance. The ceiling was finished with well-seasoned timber laid in layers and painted in white colour though in dilapidating state now (Figure 12).

The *Igbejo* hall (Figure 10) on the ground floor also leads to a central lobby which in turn continues to other four adjoining bedrooms and a private



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apartment with a living room and two bedrooms. The private apartment can be accessed via a separate lobby which also provides access to a stair well. The left wing of the hall leads to a stair hall doubling as corridor leading to other parts of the compound. The stair is made of concrete at the lower part (about 10 risers and 9 goings) while the rest (upper) part was made up of timber with wooding balustrades (Figures 14 and 15).

The upper part of the staircase is protected with a wooden door providing security to upper parts of the main building (Figures 15 and 16). The rear part of the building features another stair hall leading to the upper part of the building from the rear which houses the Chief's big private sitting room and his personal bedroom with other bedrooms (about five) used for special guests as the need arose.

The upper floor consists of a long (wide) terrace (Figure 17) in the exterior with wooden balusters/handrails round the terrace with a pronounced centrally positioned pediment at the top of the main facade finished with the earlier described elephant motif flanked two squirrels showing purposeful ornamentation, a composite order of classical architecture (Figure 17). The pronounced enclosure serves as bedroom for one of Chief Adebisi's sons.

The adjoining two other structures at the back of the main building is famed to house the 36 wives of Chief Sanusi Adebisi Giwa and his children. The other structure adjacent to the main building is built in form of a boy's quarters with sitting rooms and adjoining bedrooms while the last structure at the rear was arranged in a row round a central courtyard and also serves as living apartment for the wives of the Chief and other members of the extended family. The rectangular arrangement in courtyard style aids circulation, lighting and ventilations. Towards the rear of the compound is located the central kitchen which is now out of commission. In the early days, it served as the central cook-house where all the main meal of the compound was prepared. Toward the left was an open bathroom located at the very end of the compound.

In the rear portion of the entire structure and compound houses the mausoleum and the cemetery for the dead members of the family. The main mausoleum houses the remains of Chief Adebisi while the rest of the surrounding land is where his late parents, brothers and some wives were interred. This portion of the compound was fenced off from the main compound to give privacy and respect for the dead.



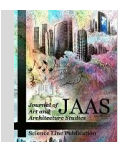
Figure 8: Approach view of the main building



Figure 9: Doric style columns holding the main entrance arches/porch to the building



Figure 10: Igbajo Hall



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Design patterns, layout and function of the building

The primary purpose and typology of the building is residential for the Adebisi family at Idikan, Ibadan. The plans of Adebisi Idikan house as depicted by Figures 1, 2 and 3 showed the compound layout. In figure 1, the site layout is seen showing the Gate house(a) and the adjoining living areas (b & c), next to it is the main residential building (d) accommodating the chief and some of his guests and grown-up sons. The boys' quarters and the rest living areas (e) house the children and the other wives of the Chief Adebisi. The main significant proportion of the living area in this wing combined the traditional impulvium - courtyard which shows that not only does the design rests on two major neo-classical styles already mentioned, but it also borrows from traditional expressions making it a significant example of hybrid experimentation in colonial western Nigeria. The back of the building contains

cooking area-kitchen (f) and the store (g) while the last portion (h) was used as cemetery. The separated living area to the right wing of the compound at the entrance of the compound accommodates the extended family members and Adebisi's parents (Figure 6).

Table 1 below revealed that the building form is rectangular in shape with courtyards showing the characteristics of new-classical and Afro-Brazilians style. The floor finish comprises – polyvinyl chloridetiles while the upper floor (stab) was finished with timber finished. The major function of the floor is to enhance smooth movement of occupants and to prevent moisture and (damp penetration) vegetation growth with the building. Other functions of the floors are to support the occupants to rest their feet and withstand the loads that will be imposed upon it. These loads could be persons, furniture, machines, equipments and book among other.

Table 1. Analysis of the Design Form and Building components of Ile-Adebisi.

Generic structure	Type	Material	Functions usage
Building form	Rectangular with traditional courtyard system. Neo-classical and Afro-Brazillian style	Purely sancrete and concrete	Residential Building.
Floor	Sanderete, PVC tiles and timber.	PVC floor tiles, concrete slab and timber	For resting and smooth movement of occupants.
Walls and materials uses	Sanderete block, concrete block wall and paint.	Cement and sand	Privacy and protection.
Door type and their sizes	Wood/ timber	Timber and glass	Accessibility and circulation movement
Window type and floor sizes	Wood/ timber and glass	Timber and glass	Lighting and ventilation.
Gates types and materials	Steel grills	Steel	Security.
Ceilings finishes	Concrete crete and timber finish	PVC floor tiles, concrete slab and timber and paint	Security.
Conveniences	Water System and pit latrine	Ceramic and Sandcrete/ concrete	To easy and making good of the body.
Rooms	About 85 rooms	Sanderete block wall and cement mortar plaster	Sleeping and relaxation.
Hall type and functions	Igbejo	Sanderete walls, timber ceiling	For receiving large visitors, holding of family meeting and mini-court to settle disputes among family and neighbours.
Roof	Hip roof and concrete roof slab (roof gutter) /deck and semi-circular arches.	Corrugated iron sheets with concrete facial, concrete roof slab with gutter.	Security, shield from weather elements and protection.

Source: Authors' analysis and interpretation (2017)

The walls of buildings are basically used to divide and enclose spaces, for protection and privacy. The walls of Adebisi Giwa was made up of sandcrete

blocks concrete blocks finished with plaster and rendered with emulsion paints. The walls are also used to divide the buildings in to apartments or



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