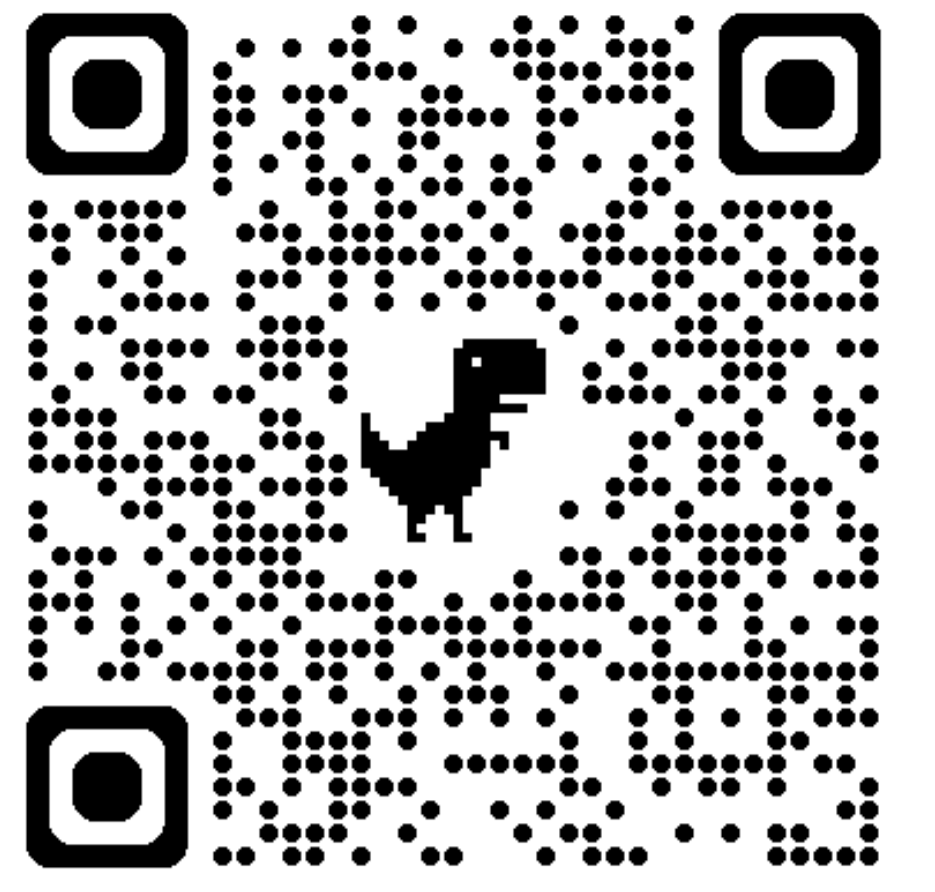


Ethnobiological Use of High Andean Forest as a Source for Vernacular Architecture at OECM La Ilusión



Text and images: Natalia Laverde-Bohórquez

This work is dedicated to: *Los antiguos* of the Hondura-Tibagota village, whom still offer their knowledge, and those whom are not longer with us.



- Two houses (1890,1910) built in vernacular architecture were preserved, restored and adapted as the Interpretive Center at La Ilusión Nature Reserve: the first area in Latin America recognized and reported as an OECM (Other Area-based Effective Conservation Measure) in 2021 by the UNEP-WCMC.
- The restoration belonged to the Natural and Cultural heritage Program of *El Bosque y La Niebla* Foundation. The program aims to prevent the disappearance of intangible and tangible heritage related to the High Andean Cloud forest in Colombia.
- The complex is made up of two buildings built in techniques known as: "bahareque" (wooden framework with mud mortar) with indigenous background, and "adobe" (sun-baked clay brick) european background, both traditionally used in rural areas of Colombia.



1. Oscar Eduardo Villamizar - Heritage Architect-Leader



3.

Phase 1: identification and assessment (1) of the two buildings generated an intervention proposal for the restoration and adaptation of both buildings. The original structure, environment, history of the site and local community were respected.

Phase 2: (2) Botanical identification of wood and plants use in buildings. Ethnographic research: in-depth interviews with elderly traditional inhabitants. History documented.



2.

Phase 3: Upon completion, the Structural Design Plan for the Interpretive Center (SDPIC) was implemented. The SDPIC defined the narrative content and educational tools that allow sharing the ethnobiological history of the architectural complex.

Visitors learn about the past, present, and future of their territory, and how "the cloud forest became both a house and a home".



4. Finished interiors. "Time Window" of the Tía Pascuala House 3. Interior El gato house. 4.

- Altitude: Between 2650 – 2980 mts
- Temperature: 5 C -24 C
- Ecosystem: High Andean Cloud Forest
- Bioregion: Cundinamarca, (Intertropical Andes)
- Area of complex 300 m2
- Restoration time: 5 months
- Budget: USD 20.000
- Year of restoration: 2020



Volume Tía Pascuala: Bahareque



Exterior facade. *Cyathea* used as column



Tree fern (*Cyathea*, sp.)



Andean bamboo *Chusquea*, sp.



Ceiling. Andean bamboo canes tied with *Cuerón* bark.



Cuerón (*Daphnopsis caracasana*)



Local Elder selecting and collecting Andean bamboo cane to replace damaged pieces.



Enencillo (*Weinmannia tomentosa*) (4) and *aliso* (*Alnus acuminata*) lumber were used for structure and floors of both volumes. The usage of 8 native flora species were found.

Volume El Gato: Adobe



Mineral tinted paint from the site was applied to the facades. 5 type of rocks (minerals) were documented.



Geological characteristics: Both houses use white, yellow, and pink clays extracted from the same site and belonging to the Guaduas Formation, a Subachoque syncline characterized by claystones, siltstones, quartz and coal sandstones.



Both houses featured the doweling technique, which uses wooden joints such as tenons and mortises to fit pieces together.



5.



2015



2026

Spontaneous restoration area at La Ilusión Nature Preserve.

Biocultural factor

The Interpretive Center exhibits indigenous artifacts found in the reserve, such as hand tools and Muisca spindle whorls (5) from the Chingá indigenous community (Herrera Period), ancient farming tools found on the site, and an art exhibit related to the cloud forest. An audio recording explains the ethnohistory of the area and the construction techniques used to build the houses. It is not a touristic experience but an educational initiative. Besides protecting cultural heritage, the Nature preserve La Ilusión (OECM) is home of 500 flora species, 180 bird species, 24 mammal species, 40 orchid species.

Passing the torch

The restoration involved local elder inhabitants that shared vernacular building knowledge to local youngsters and restoration team..

Mr. Alvaro Cortés Former inhabitant of the house



Andean coati (Vu)



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