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M. Covarrubias Jamir

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The Lantin House of Candelaria

M. COVARRUBIAS JAMIR

A discerning traveler passing through Candelaria, Quezon on his way to points farther east cannot help but notice a large residence on the left side of the highway a few meters before reaching the plaza fronting the church and the municipal building. The house is not particularly attractive. Its adobe ground floor is a faded pink, and its wooden upper storey a drab brown. But what catches the eye and makes the residence unusual are the bold, scrolled cut-out arches that frame the front and side of the corner bay, a bay that is fully enclosed by sliding window panels of colored frosted glass. These two features, plus other details evident on the facade, mark out this *bahay na bato* as a transition house. This particular house is important for the study of Philippine architecture because in it are combined elements of two popular styles: the geometric and the floral. It is also one of the very few remaining *bahay na bato* in Candelaria, as well as the largest. We will elaborate further after a short historical background.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Inquiries in the town reveal that the residence is known as the Lantin house. We obtained access to the house through the help of a friend, Mrs. Estela A. de Guzman, a well-known resident of Candelaria and town historian. The present owner and occupant is Mrs. Lourdes Lantin de Mesa, a Home Economics graduate married to a lawyer. The house was constructed in 1918 by Doña Rustica de Gala who was married to Aguedo Macasaet. Doña Rustica was a member of the large de Gala clan of Tiaong, Tayabas who were prominent members of the *principalia* of that town and owners

of large tracts of agricultural lands. Doña Rustica was a fourth generation descendant of Don Domingo San Miguel who was the *gobernadorcillo* of Tiaong in 1812 and again in 1821. In 1849 the Spanish Governor Narciso Claveria issued a decree (implemented in 1851) that Filipinos who had no family names were to choose one from a catalogue of Spanish surnames provided by the government. Those who wanted to change their surnames could also do so. Domingo San Miguel became Domingo de Gala, because natives were forbidden to use the names of saints as family names, unless they could prove that they had kept it for four generations.

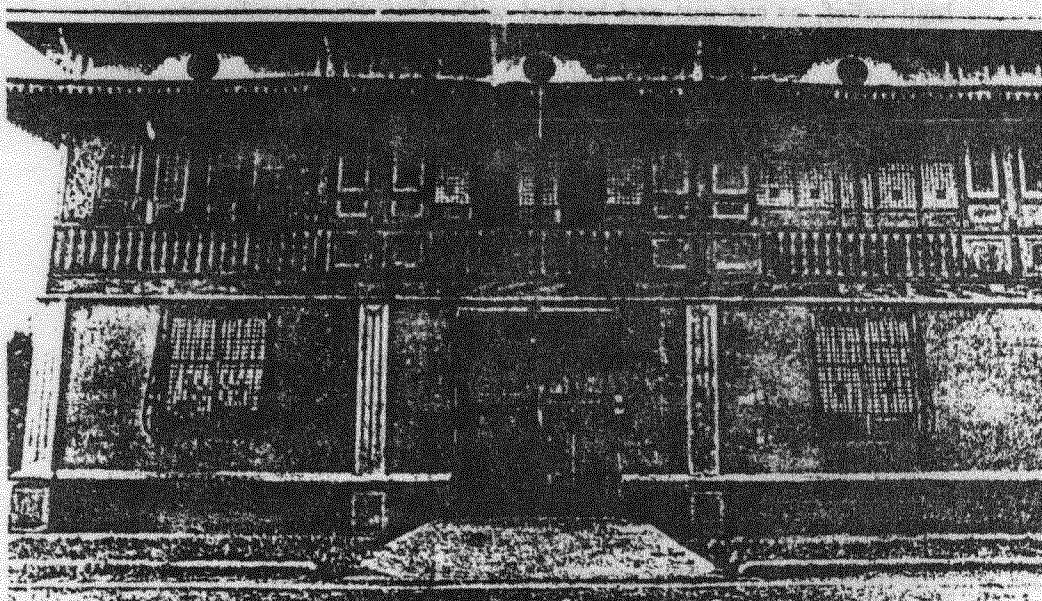
When Doña Rustica died she willed the house to her only daughter Dolores, who became Mrs. Lantin. The granddaughter Lourdes Lantin de Mesa got the house in an extrajudicial partition of properties because she had been residing continuously in it since 1962, whereas the other members of the Lantin family were permanent residents of Manila. During the Japanese period the Lantin house was occupied by the Japanese forces and used as their headquarters. This may account for the loss of the original furniture.

THE GEOMETRIC AND FLORAL STYLES

The Lantin house combines qualities of the geometric style as well as the floral, which may indicate that this is a transition house. The term "geometric style house" was coined by Fernando Zialcita and Martin Tinio, Jr. in their book *Philippine Ancestral Houses*.¹ "The Geometric style is an art of essentials. No superfluous ornaments ruffle the house's simple and, at times, majestic form," to quote them. It's a bahay na bato whose characteristics are a ground floor of thick adobe stone walls; a second storey with sliding capiz-paned windows with a transom above made of capiz panes in a diamond pattern, both extending the whole length of the facade; the space underneath the window sill opened up with *ventanillas*; and a hip roof of curved red tiles.²

1. Fernando N. Zialcita and Martin I. Tinio, Jr., *Philippine Ancestral Houses (1810-1930)* (Quezon City: GCF Books, 1980), pp. 149-51.

2. *Ventanillas* are rectangular openings beneath windows that allow cool air to enter a house. These are safeguarded by wooden balusters or wrought iron grills and closed with sliding solid wood panels when it rains.



The facade of the Lantin house combines the geometric style of bahay na bato popular in the last century with accents of the floral style, such as the ornately scrolled brackets, the bull's-eye apertures and the bold, scrolled cut-out arches of the porch

The building can also be classified under the tectonic style which is "the style of strict arrangement and clear adherence to rule."³ This is evident in its facade which lies on a single plane and shows a three-part composition. The ground floor which is subordinate to the second storey in importance incorporates an imposing stone doorway as the central motif of the facade, with two large grilled windows usually flanking this door.

The floral style (according to the same authors quoted above) "flowered fully between 1880 and 1930 . . . when the Geometric began to fade in the 1870s . . . The new forms were used only as decorations, they were not allowed to influence the bahay na bato's basic structure."⁴ Attractive features of the floral style include exterior wall panels elaborately carved with leaf and floral motifs, flower garlands over facade windows carved in

3. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History* (1950), p. 149.

4. Zialcita and Tinio, *Philippine Ancestral Houses*, pp. 149-51

high relief, or cut out and backed with glass; the introduction of circles (bull's-eye apertures), elongated diamonds, and open fans (fanlights) into exterior transoms; scrolled eaves brackets; vents in the roof eaves cut out in elaborate patterns of floral or foliate scrolls; galvanized iron awnings for shading windows; elaborate wrought iron grills for the *ventanillas* and the ground floor windows; glass panes (colored or frosted) instead of *capiz* shells in windows; and the substitution of galvanized iron sheets for the curved red tiles after the earthquake of 18 July 1880.⁵

"A Floral interior creates an expansive space that dissolves boundaries and lightens masses," to quote Zialcita and Tinio again. There was a proliferation of floral traceried *sala* arches that extended from post to post; *calados* above doors were lengthened to cover the whole expanse of the wall;⁶ walls and ceilings were embellished with murals, or decorated with vines, flowers, birds and butterflies in *art nouveau* style.⁷

Geometric style characteristics found in the *Lantin bahay na bato* are the ground floor of adobe stones with its formal composition of a large central doorway flanked by two grilled windows; a second storey with sliding *capiz*-paned windows on the central and right bay of the facade; and the use of *ventanillas* underneath the window sills protected by wooden balusters.

5. Galvanized iron sheets were recommended by the Spanish government after the earthquake of 18 July 1880. The tremendous jolts of that quake sent roof tiles tumbling into the streets, especially in Manila, where a bigger number of *bahay na bato* were constructed. During an earthquake the thick adobe or brick walls of the ground floor stood firm while the wooden upper storey with its posts and frame construction shook with the tremors, thus dislodging the heavy curved roof tiles. Due to the heat accumulated in galvanized iron roofs, another roofing material was included in the 1880 government decrees. This was the *teja plana* (flat roof tile) which was popular in Spain and other parts of Europe. It was cooler than G.I. sheets and held together better during an earthquake. But being more expensive than the latter, it did not become popular.

6. *Calados* are carved and pierced wooden decorations used as arches to delineate the demarcation line of the *sala* and dining room and as door transoms. The purpose, aside from being decorative, was to allow the free flow of air between rooms. These carvings were popularized and utilized in the *bahay na bato* of the nineteenth century as well as in those of the first three decades of this century.

7. *Art nouveau*, a defined style of architecture and decoration, was launched in the 1890s by Belgian architects. Self-conscious in its reaction to the imitative styles of the nineteenth century, *art nouveau* was rooted partly in the determined individualism of William Morris and the arts and crafts movement in England, and partly in a valid appreciation of new materials and mechanical developments. The style was first designated the *style belge* and in 1885, the *style nouveau*. not until 1898 did it become known as *art nouveau*. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1968, Vol. 2, page 550.

Floral style features of the Lantin house are the four shallow pilasters that separate the three bays of the ground floor, each pilaster ending at the top with an *art déco* motif of three concentric half circles accented with raised dots and teardrops;⁸ the upper storey bays delineated by framed panels of solid wood, an architectural feature that was common during the last decade of the nineteenth century; the corner bay enclosed by sliding window panels of colored frosted glass with scrolled cut-out arches framing it on front and side; the use of bull's-eye apertures, closed with frosted glass and framed with scroll-like carvings, in exterior transoms; the addition of ornately scrolled brackets under the roof eaves installed for decorative effect; the addition of wide galvanized iron window awnings with scrolled trim; and the use of galvanized iron sheets as roofing material.

The interior of the house echoes the floral style of the outside. The wide doorways are superimposed with carved and pierced transoms. Above these transoms and extending around three sides of the sala are intricately scrolled ventilation friezes that reach up to the high ceiling. This ceiling is accented by a wide border of four thick parallel lines with floral scrolls in between the lines. The effect is that of a large rectangular garden, employing a combination of art nouveau and art déco motifs. This floral design is repeated on the wall panels flanking the doorways. In some bahay na bato murals were painted on canvas stretched over the ceiling and on the walls. In the Lantin house the floral designs were painted directly on the wooden ceiling and walls.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

Several important nineteenth century events which took place in and out of the country contributed to the economic development and social progress of the Philippines and paved the way to the remaking of Philippine society and hence to the evolution

8. *Art deco*, the fashionable style of the interwar period (1918-39) which supplanted *art nouveau* and coexisted with the Machine Age styles of Le Corbusier, Rietveld, F.L. Wright, and the Bauhaus. It developed out of the modernist, antihistorical, elements in *art nouveau* but displayed rather less regard to refinement of craftsmanship and naturalistic ornament. It owes its name to the first major international exhibition of decorative arts to be held after the first World War – *L'Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* held in Paris in 1925. John Fleming and Hugh Honour, *The Penguin Dictionary of Decorative Arts*. 1979, pp. 37-38.

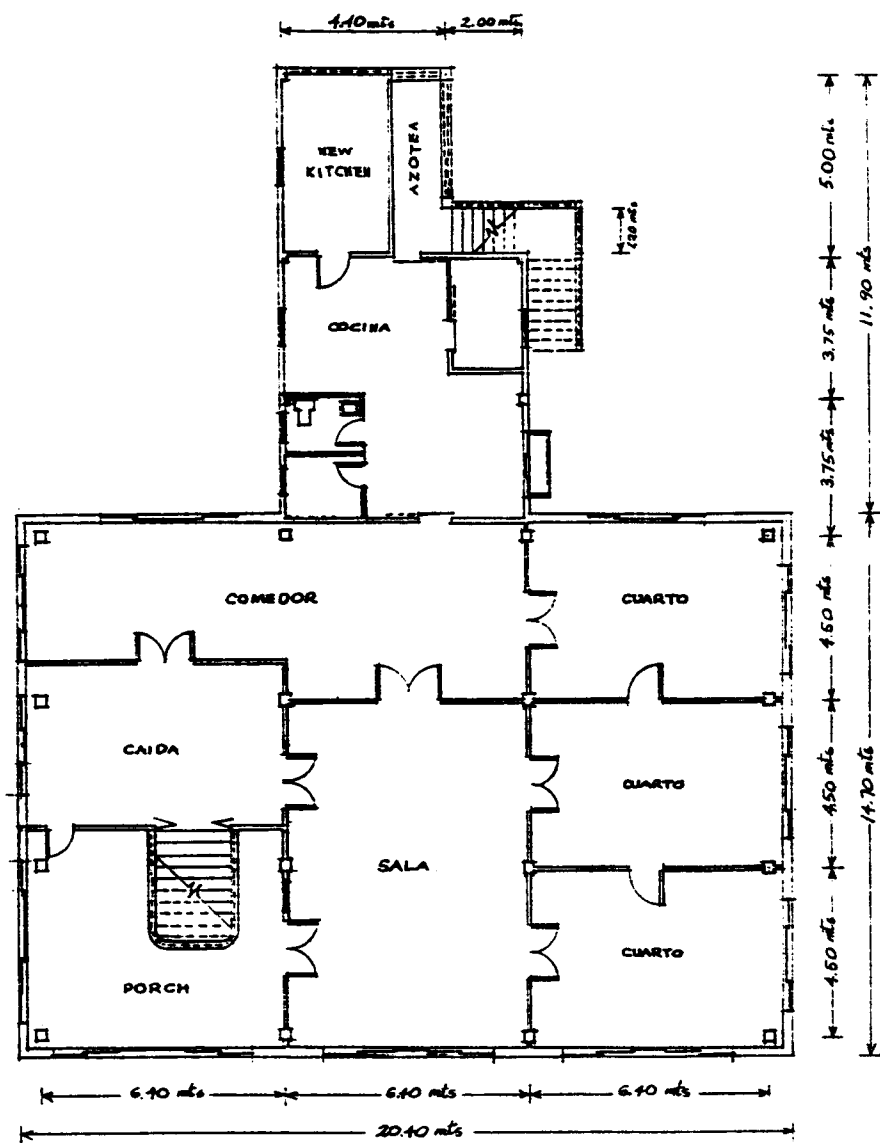
of the bahay na bato and its status as the residence of the principalia and the ilustrado. The opening of Manila to ships of every nationality, the abolition of the Galleon Trade, and eventually the opening of more ports such as Sual, Iloilo, Cebu and Zamboanga to foreign trade and foreign commercial houses, spurred greater agricultural and commercial activity and a subsequent growth in population. Exports of sugar, hemp, rice, copra, tobacco, and coffee increased, and gave rise to a prosperous class of Filipino entrepreneurs. This prosperity created a demand for solidly constructed houses, furniture, and imported luxury items for themselves and their homes, which led to the rise in their standard of living as well as a change in the social mind. Higher education was offered to Filipinos with their admission to the University of Santo Tomas where they could pursue courses in law, medicine and pharmacy. The opening of the Suez Canal, shortening ocean travel from Spain to Manila to one month, brought Western culture and foreign ideas to the Filipinos, increasing their "prosperity, intelligence, and self-esteem," as prophesied by Feodor Jagor, the German scientist, in *Reisen in den Philippinen*.⁹

The location of the Lantin house is a carry-over of the Spanish plaza-complex, where the church and convent, the *tribundl* (today the municipal building) and the marketplace, were the foci of social activity, and the residences of the principalia were grouped around this complex. Doña Rustica, coming from this privileged class, decided to build her house next to the town plaza and abutting the principal street. Its sheer size dominates the houses in the vicinity.

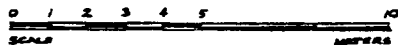
In the last century a home was more than a physical dwelling. It became a "social and cultural instrument and symbol," to quote Resil B. Mojares, author of *Casa Gorordo in Cebu*.¹⁰ He continues, "The home is a focal point of Philippine life: in it is figured the life of the family and the values, like solidarity and stability, associated with this institution. For many, then

9. Feodor Jagor, *Reisen in den Philippinen* (Berlin, 1873). Translated into Spanish by Sebastian Vidal y Saler in Madrid, 1875

10. Resil B. Mojares, *Casa Gorordo in Cebu* (Cebu: RAF Inc., 1983), pp. 103 and 113.



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



as now, the home was the one sure haven away from the hazards and uncertainties of both natural and public worlds."

Doña Rustica, having grown up in such a home and having imbibed those same values, must have decided to carry on the tradition for her own three children and built this house in Candalaria. A glance at its layout reveals an ample sala where probably only the best of Batangas style hardwood (*tindalo*) furniture were displayed and where much entertainment took place, as befitted her social position and affluence as a large landowner. (The ground floor of her bahay na bato was used exclusively for storing her vast harvests of *palay*). Her dining room (*comedór*) which has a length of two-thirds of the width of this very large house (total floor area upstairs is 470 square meters) could have accommodated two long dining tables that could easily sit fifty guests. Her kitchen, typical of those commodious kitchens of the last century, must have witnessed much culinary activity, a symbol of the hospitality of upper-class Filipino families.

Since the Lantin bahay na bato combines the qualities of both the geometric and the floral styles that had shaped its evolution on the local scene, it shows that Doña Rustica was well aware of the architectural and decorative trends that were taking place in Europe, such as the art nouveau and the art déco. The house is also a tribute to her taste. Its facade presents a solid structure characteristic of the geometric style, with a subtle blending of floral style motifs that enhance the building's appearance. It is very probable that although her furniture was locally made, her furnishings and accessories were imported, most especially the appointments on her dining table such as crystalware, china, stem glasses and goblets, bronze candleholders and other appurtenances of luxury. The wood curtain valances with scrolled edges and cut-outs above the doorways in the sala indicate that heavy, expensive drapes once covered those doors. This was the home of a woman of means and culture, a home where influences straddled two periods in our history, the Spanish and the American, but which, inspite of the foreign influences remains a Filipino home in ambience and architecture.