The Mountain Houses
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Folk Architecture

In a masterly study Willy Henry Scott classifies the Cordillera houses into the northern and southern strains. The northern is exemplified in the Isneg and Lower Kalinga house, and the southern, in the Ifugao, Ibaloi, Kankanai, and Bontoc houses. The octagonal Kalinga house is a combination of both strains.

The northern style is characterized by a gable roof, sometimes with bowed rafters; a three-section, two-level, reedmat floor; and two sets of posts, one; floor-bearing and the other, roof-bearing. The space below the floor is not used.

The common features of the southern strain are a steep pyramidal or hip roof; a house cage, which among the Ifugao, Kankanai, and Ibaloi is the living area, and among the Bontoc and Sagada, a granary; and the house cage support consisting of four posts carrying two girders, in turn carrying three beams or joists. The space below the floor is used. Except in the Ibaloi style, the house has no windows. The prototype of the southern strain is the Ifugao house, which probably developed from a granary. This is apparent from the use of stilts and rat guards, features of granary constructions.

The Ifugao house has a peripheral shelf at waist height. The Mayoyao and Kankanai houses have a low platform around the floor, or in fact, a two-level floor. The Kalinga and Isneg houses have lateral platforms which are used as head-rests or “pillows” and which provide space for storage. Platforms wide enough for sleeping create a play of levels in the Sagada house. In the Bontoc house, levels and clearly defined sections exemplify both a practical and ritual organization of space. In spite of its minimal area, the interior of the Igorot house is, like the far larger houses in the lowlands, a space surrounded by space.

Igorot houses religiously employ post and-lintel construction to the exclusion of diagonal bracing even in the roof frame. Roof supports consist of king posts, and queen posts in some cases, resting on beams and stabilized by horizontal straining members. House size and structural design – the latter limited to short spans and in some cases multiple supports – appear to result partly from the custom of cutting timer in the forest to sizes that could be easily carried by men.

The interior design of both northern and southern strain houses appears as an attempt, conscious or otherwise, to visually expand the one-room space by means of levels and defined sections. The Ifugao house has a peripheral shelf at waist height. The Mayoyao and Kankanai houses have a low platform around the floor, or in fact, a two-level floor. The Kalinga and Isneg houses have lateral platforms which are used as head-rests or “pillows” and which provide space for storage. Platforms wide enough for sleeping create a play of levels in the Sagada house. In the Bontoc house, levels and clearly defined sections exemplify both a practical and ritual organization of space. In spite of its minimal area, the interior of the Igorot house is, like the far larger houses in the lowlands, a space surrounded by space.
RICH HOUSE/ POOR HOUSE

Even before Christian lowlanders encroached on their lands, the Cordillera people were already divided by class. Some families had plenty of Riceland, enjoyed full granaries, and hosted feasts where their many guests ate and drank for several days at their expense. Other families had limited land, had little to store, and never knew where their next meal would come from. In between these two extremes were those who, though not wealthy, were not destitute either. These extremes in social class are reflected in house types.

The poor man’s dwelling, among the Ifugao, is called the abong, while the dwelling of the more fortunate, the bale. Barton says that the former does not have uniform dimensions, is built of poorer materials, is but slightly raised from the ground, has not rat fenders on its posts, rarely has a pyramidal roof, and has but one door. The abong’s walls do not slope outward from below, as in a bin, rather they stand perpendicular to the ground. Not only does the poor man’s dwelling have less rice to store, it is also less protected from rats.

Some bale dwellers are very wealthy. They commission carved posts in their interiors, flutings on their exteriors and underneath their roof eaves, a public status marker: the hagabi. The opposite ends of this carved wooden long seat have animal heads. Some claim the animal is a carabao or a pig, others say it is a goat. Whatever the heads stand for, the several days of feasting and drinking before and after the hagabi’s installation plus the months of labor that went into its making will forever remind everyone of its owner’s preeminence.

Wealthy Bontoc live in the fay-u, the poor in the katyufong. The fay-u holds a granary at its center and has walls less than a meter high at the front and back, as though to openly boast of its resources. A display of carabao horns signifies bravery in battle and the owner’s wealth. In stark contrast, the katyufong, according to Jenks, has only a single story structure built on the ground with the earth as its floor, has mud walls that completely enclose it, and has no granary to show off.

Among the Kankanai, the binangiyan is for the prosperous, while the apa and the allao are for the less fortunate. One type of apa is more simply built than the binangiyan, according to Bello. Like the poor Ifugao’s dwelling, the walls are perpendicular to the ground, while the four main posts stand directly at the corner, thus making it easier for the rats to scurry up. Instead of ike narra; split bamboo and runo sticks make-up the floor, while runo sticks and wooden boards comprise the walls. Though conical, as in the binangiyan, the roof is lower and extends closer to the ground. Rather unique is the allao, for its floor is rectangular and its roof a gable. Since the roof slopes down beyond the floor, its long sides may dispense with walls. The roof has no space for an attic, white the floor, being low, needs not stairway. Poor or young families intending to save for a binangiyan, live in an apa; the aged and the widowed in the allao.
The Mountain Houses – Isneg

In the rugged landscape of the Cordillera, Apayao is the only region that has a navigable river, the Apayao, after which the region is named. Thus, among the Cordillera people, only the Isneg are boatmen and boat builders. The Isneg boat, barana’y or bank’l, consists mainly of three planks; a bottom plank, which tapers at both ends, and two side planks, which are curved to receive the bottom plank.

House design appears to have been influenced by boat design. The roof of the Isneg house suggests an inverted hull, and the floor joists, which are visible outside, suggest the profile of a boat. The Isneg house is about 8.00 m. long, 4.00 m. wide, and 5.50 m. high from ground level to the roof ridge.

The binuron house rests on a total of 15 posts, which are visible, the floor being about 1.20 m. above the ground. The slanting wooden walls on the sides are a section of the house has a gable roof and is about 6.50 m. long.

The six inner sinit posts, there on each side, support the girders running lengthwise. Laths are mortised onto 11 floor joists which run crosswise across the girders. As among the Kalinga, mats made of reeds form the floor and can be rolled up and washed. The floor frame is so constructed that it accommodates the lateral platform and allows wallboards to be removed.

The frame actually consists of two: an inner one and an outer one, running parallel to and mortised one to the other but enclosing the roof-bearing posts. They receive both the floor platforms and the lower ends of the wallboards. An upper horizontal frame mortised to the crossbeams and girders grips the boards’ upper ends.

The ridge-pole at the roof rests on a variety of posts. A special post, the atobtobo, rises outside the house wall; an ensemble consisting of a carved king post and two queen posts, rides a central crossbeam. Purlins running horizontally, three on each side of the roof, touch the ends of the straining beams. Across the purlins pass rafters, thin pliable boards and rattan stems. They are laid alternately from the ridgepole to the wall beams in akind of pointer arch. A reed sheath covering the rafters and rattan stems serves as a base for the thatch.

Along the gable edges thick boards are mortised on to the beam and purlin ends. Where the atobtobo post stands, two beams are attached to these gable boards: one at the bottom, the other halfway to the roof ridge. Both beams are rabbeted to receive wall boards, but the space above the upper gable beam is left open.

At the other end of the house, where the annex is attached, cogon grass pressed between a pair of frames made of reeds covers the gable’s upper half. The annex’s lean-to roof covers the lower half.
In some areas, the roof covering consists of half-sections of bamboo laid on like shingles. The roof is quite thick, having as many as 15 to 20 rows of bamboo sections with wide overlaps. A narrow, flat “roof” of bamboo covers the roof ridge.

Inside the house, next to the post opposite the door a square hearth framed by four sills welcomes the visitor.

There seems to be no standard orientation for houses. Entrances may face once another or face the same direction or any of the cardinal points. Granaries are located near the houses or outside the clearing. Since the Isneg are swidden farmers and are often away from the village for prolonged periods, small temporary huts are built in their work sites.

Isneg hamlets, which are scattered a few kilometers apart, have anywhere from three to 12 houses, and are located along waterways, elevated areas inside the bend of a river being preferred. One comes upon an Isneg village after traveling through groves and forests and across streams and stretches of quiet landscape. A village may consist of one cluster of houses or several small clusters. Formerly Isneg villages were surrounded by bamboo stockades or palisades of tree fern trunks. At present the houses are built in a clearing, in more or less circular or elliptical fashion, and surrounded by a fence. At the edge of the clearing are coffee, cacao and coconut trees, and beyond, wild grass, bushes and ferns.

Attached to one end is an annex, tarakip, as wide as the house and extending 1.50 m. from it. Its floor is slightly higher than that of the main section, but its roof is lower, sloping downward from the base of the gable.

The posts, girders, joists and walls are of wood; the roof is of thatch or bamboo. Most Cordillera houses have pyramidal or hip roofs; the Isneg house, like the Lower Kalinga house, has a gable roof. Some Isneg houses have annexes at both ends.

A ladder leads to a door on one end of the side wall, actually the front. In some houses the entrance opens at the gable and under the protection of a lean-to roof. Inside the house the space expands because the walls slant outward. No ceiling hides the roof’s woodwork. The space immediately visible within corresponds completely with the external form of the house. The floor, made of reeds, seems transparent, as light filters through, suffusing the house with a gentle glow. The floor is a space surrounded by space. The main section, datag or xassaran, is surrounded on three sides by narrow, slightly raised platform, tamuyon, and at the remaining end by the slightly raised floor of the annex.

To make windows, three or four of the side walls’ vertical planks are removed. Indeed walls are constructed in such a way that all the planks can be taken out, thereby converting the house into a roofed platform for festive occasions.

The following is a summary of Morice Vanoverbergh’s description of a typical house:
Of the 15 posts of the Isneg house, eight *sinit* or inner posts support the floor – six inner posts for the main section of the house, and two additional ones for the annex. Six other posts, the *adixi*, carry the roof and one, the *atobtobo*, supports one end of the ridge pole.

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The Mountain Houses – Kalinga

The Chico river – or the Rio Chico de Cagayan, so named to distinguish it from the Rio Grande de Cagayan – runs north-northeast into the Kalinga region from Bontoc, and past Lubuagas, swings eastward to the Cagayan Valley. Flanked by ridges rising 1,500 to 2,000 meters, the Chico divides Kalinga into three sections and its people into three major groups. A north-south ridge east of the Chico divides Southern Kalinga from Eastern Kalinga. The Pacil River running from the southwest, and the eastern course of the Chico divide Northern Kalinga from Southern and Eastern Kalinga. The settlements are about 500 to 700 meters above sea level. Natives refer also to Upper Kalinga and Lower Kalinga, the former being the region on the heights along the Chico, and the latter being the area including Balbalan, Pinukpuk, Tabuk and Conner.

The Northern Kalinga, who are swidden farmers live in scattered hamlets with six to 30 houses. A village consists of a nuclear group of a dozen houses, near each other arranged in two rows, and houses scattered singly or in two’s and three’s near the swiddens. Preferred sites are leveled sections of slopes or pockets which have an unobstructed view of the surroundings.

The Southern Kalinga, who farm on both wet terraces and swiddens, have town-like settlements, some with up to 200 houses, as well as small villages. In large settlements houses are built close to each other and are sometimes grouped around open spaces. Early in this century Kalinga villages were protected by bamboo stockades, and on the trails leading to them were warning devices, deadfalls with heavy logs, or pits with sharpened stakes at the bottom.

The octagonal house called binayon or finaryon is found in Upper Kalinga, in settlements along the Chico River. It is not, however, the only house type in the region. Rectangular houses are just as common, if not more common. It has been suggested that the octagonal houses were houses of the rich. This, however, may be disputed. It has also been suggested that the octagonal house is the older type. This has yet to be verified. An account written in 1887 by Alexander Schadenberg mentions the octagonal – and even round – houses of the Guinaanes, the name given to the inhabitants of the region around present-day Lubuagan. The scholarly eye of the German traveler noted that houses were painted on the outside with “round designs or figures, representing men and women with strongly
marked genital parts." Whether this was traditional decoration or juvenile graffiti not cleaned up by time is open to question.

The exterior of the octagonal house does not have the architectural impact of other Cordillera houses, since its features are not strongly defined. The thatched, hipped roof is not high and steep, and the eaves form a rough edged circle. The octagonal form is not clearly pronounced in the wooden and bamboo walls. The octagonal house is about 6.00 m. long and 5.20 m. wide. The floor of the living quarters is 1.20 m. above the ground. The height from the ground to the roof ridge is about 4.50 m. Unlike in the Cordillera houses previously described, the roof ridge is parallel to the sides.

The visitor enters the house through a ladder leading to a narrow platform on the front wall. A low door opens to the platform. Beside the ladder, on the left wall diagonal to the front wall, a door at ground level opens into a small ground level working space within the house. Opposite the front door, on the back wall is another door. The walls from floor level to eaves are of wooden boards placed vertically. From ground level to floor level, the walls are of plaited bamboo or sawali. Logs are piled against the lower section of the wall.

The interior of the octagonal house is remarkable for its spatial concept and organization. The floor is divided into three parallel sections running front to back, the central portion being lower than the sides. The eight sides are more clearly defined inside the house than outside because of the exposed structural frame of walls and roof. The roof's inner configuration dominates the interior space. In the Cordillera houses previously described, a loft or granary conceals the roof from the living space. The Kalinga roof's vault and octagonal plan create a sense of expansion within the interior. The floor, consisting of reed mats that can be rolled up, gives the interior a play of textures.

The Kalinga house's unique form is made possible by 12 short posts: four inner posts marking a square at the center and eight outer ones forming an octagon. Girders and joists passing over these posts support the floor laths, while rabbeted beams on the eight outer posts receive the wall boards. Four tall posts are mortised on to intersections of the beams and joists. They carry two crossbeams, each of which supports a pair of queen posts. The crossbeams that connect the tops of the queen posts allow rafters to rise in a slight curve over the roof beams to end at three ridgepoles.

To the left, as one enters the house, and towards the rear, is the fireplace slightly raised above floor level.

The Kalinga house is not an equilateral octagon, the four diagonal walls being shorter than the front, back and side walls. The floor is not a perfect octagon, since the corners are not all floored over. At one side of the entrance a large portion of the floor is eliminated to provide a working space that reaches from ground level to roof height. As one sits inside the Kalinga binayon the walls and roof seems to form a dome-like and even spherical space, which suggests expansion rather than enclosure.
The traditional house in Lower Kalinga is about 6.00 m. long, 5.00 m. wide and 5.75 m. high from ground to roof ridge. The roof is gabled and its ridge is parallel to the sides of the house. Houses are generally located near the river, and the roof ridge, which marks the axis of the house, does not follow the downstream flow of the river, but rather lies crosswise, crossing it, as it were, like a dam, in order to prevent misfortune. The roof, of moderate pitch, may be of thatch or bamboo. The floor rises about 1.50 m. above ground level; a ladder connects it to the ground. The walls from ground to floor level are of horizontally laid bamboo poles, and from floor to eaves level are of vertically set wooden boards. In front and at the back, the wooden walls end at height of about 2.50 m., and from there on to the roof ridge horizontally laid bamboo slats cover the gables.

The floor consists of a wide middle section, dattagon, and two narrow slightly elevated side sections, sipi, each about 1.20 m. wide. It is basically a bamboo mat woven with rattan strips and laid on laths. At the middle section the bamboo strips of the mat run crosswise; at the side sections, lengthwise, thus further defining the levels and spaces. Front door and back door do not face each other directly. Windows open at opposite ends of the house diagonal to each other. Or they may be at both ends of the same sipi. As in the Upper Kalinga house, the roof’s inner configuration is a prominent feature of the interior space.

On the left at the rear of the room is the fireplace, bounded by sills. Rice is stored on the sipi beside the fireplace, and water jars on the sipi opposite it. Clothes are kept in rattan boxes on the side floors.

Four inner posts forming a square or rectangle constitute the house’s core support. The posts are partly sunk into the ground. They should be of chest or abdomen height – or above a man’s height – but should never coincide with eye or mouth level. With the posts at eye level, evil spirits can look into the house and cause misfortune: at mouth level, all the family’s savings will be eaten up. Opposite each inner post, and at each corner of the house is an outer post, tall enough to support the roof. These eight outer posts stand on stones. Their bottom ends may fork to rest like clamps on partly embedded stones. The floor is a bamboo mat which can be rolled up and taken to the river for washing.

Outside the eight outer posts an rabbeted still receives the vertical wall boards. Beams crossing the tops of the outer posts secure the upper ends of these boards.

On the sills that define the lower central section of the middle floor stand posts, each one set around 40 cm. from the front or back wall boards. A transverse beam connects each pair of such posts and carries a tapered king post. These king posts pierce a horizontal brace and support the inner roof ridge. Rafters run over the beams to this inner roof ridge, oton. Purlins on the rafters receive a runo sheath woven with rattan, and over which thatch is laid. Where thatch is used, rafters may be curved or bowed.

Another kind of roof is made of bamboo. Halved bamboo is laid one over the other in concave-convex fashion. In the kinimpal style of roofing, several layers of bamboo are used; the pieces are shorter at the eaves, becoming longer towards the center of the slope, then becoming shorter again towards the ridge. In the tinalob style, only two layers of bamboo are used. The roof ridge has a thatch cover, bubong.
The Mountain Houses – Ifugao

Ifugao villages are located amid rice terraces and preferably near a spring or a grove, and are accessible through foot paths on terrace walls. Houses are in clusters, as in Banaue, or are scattered singly on the pond fields, as in Mayoyoao. Lone houses on the crests of hills or in the pockets of mountain slopes are not uncommon. Villages may have anywhere from five to forty houses.

Village terraces are classified as central or middle, border or lower, that is, near the pond fields, and end or upper, near the mountain slope. The rich choose the central terraces for their house sites. Betel nut trees, forming screens and groves, are planted at the edges or in the middle of house terraces. There are no fences except for those who have pigs. Fences, where used, are made of runo sticks or tree branches planted into the ground. Some houses are surrounded by low stone walls.

Houses are arranged according to the shape of the terrace. On narrow terraces they may stand in irregular rows, or on wide terraces, may be spread out or grouped around an open space. Entrances do not all face the same side, but generally face away from the rise of a slope.

The Ifugao house may be visualized as a three-level structure. The first level of structure consists of a stone pavement, whose perimeter coincides with the edge of the eaves; four posts and girders. A wooden disk; halipan, which serves as a rat guard, if fitted on each post a few centimeters below the girder.

The second level is the house cage, that is, roof frame, walls and floor. The third level comprises the roof.

Since the posts of the Ifugao house rise to about shoulder height from ground to girders, they do not frame the house cage nor directly support the roof. Thus the house is a cage resting on stilts and a roof resting on the cage. Although the upper frame of the house cage is above head level, the wall boards rise from the floor to chest or waist height. In contrast, the roof slopes downward beyond the upper frame of the cage to floor level and the section from head to level to waist height serves as the upper complement of the wall boards. A shelf, patie, extends outwards from the top of the wall boards to the underside of the roof and forms a recess that circumscribes the interior.

The space within the house can be conceptualized as three-leveled: the floor as the lower, the shelf as the middle, and the loft above the upper frame of the cage as the upper. With the room square in plan, the outward slant of the walls, the inward slant of the roof, and the slight illumination that blurs outlines make one feel as if enclosed by a sphere. Since the house cage is 2.00 to 3.00 m. square and slightly less than 2.00 m. in height, an occupant standing or lying down dominates the spaces. The Ifugao house breathes intimacy, and while the since of enclosure is quite pronounced, it is more reassuring than oppressive. While seated on the floor, on can relish the configuration of space in the Ifugao house.
It is interesting to note that the space within the house is classified according to gender. That side of the roof to the left of the front door as one enters is the male side. It is called *nundatu*, which means continuing, because it is longer. To the right is the female side, called *na-ulya*, which means lacking because it is shorter, part of it being taken by the fireplace. In certain rituals, the husband’s relatives sit on the male side and the wife’s relatives on the female side.

The structure employs the post-and-lintel system throughout thereby producing an intriguing play of horizontal and vertical thrusts. Triangular or diagonal bracing is not used, so that structural stability depends entirely on precise joinery and careful alignment. Mortising and rabbeting plus wooden pegs fit together the various wooden pegs; rattan lashes together other parts. Nails and other metal hardware are therefore alien and unnecessary. After all its parts have been crafted a house can actually be assembled in far less time than the two or three days prescribed by ritual. Furthermore, should the houseowner wish to transfer residence, the house can be dismantled reassembled on the new site. The craftsmanship of the Ifugao home is all the more remarkable since it relies on such primitive tools as axes, adzes and bolos.

The Ifugao granary resembles the house in design and construction, except for some modifications. It is smaller and the cage more securely enclosed. Also it has no circumscribing *patie* shelf and back door.

Within Ifugao, there are local variations. Since the roof of the Kiangan house is not as steep as that of the Banaue house and does not descend to floor level, it exposes the house cage. No longer pyramidal, but hipped, the roof ridge runs parallel to the house front. With the walls reaching head level, the *patie* shelf is eliminated. Wall sidings may be of wood or *sawali*, woven bamboo strips.

In Mayoyao the roof is steeper and completely conceals the house cage. While the house employs three-joists-on-two-girders-on-four-posts, it dispenses with the rat guards. Within, a low platform, about 30 centimeters in height, surrounds the floor on three sides, extending to the undersides of the roof, thereby making three sides of the roof serve as walls. The waist high shelf *patie* in the Banaue house is here and lower and closer to the floor built of sturdier material, wide enough to serve as bed, and strong enough to carry large jars and wooden chests.

Among the Ifugao houses, the Mayoyao type is eminent for its pure, classic outline and fine craftsmanship. Since houses in Mayoyao are scattered singly, each house has a spacious setting that dramatizes its simplicity and symmetry, and invests it somehow with the serenity and mystery of a temple.

**Kankanai - The Mountain Houses**

North of Ibaloi territory, the northern part of Benguet and the southern part of Bontoc area, live the Kankanai whose traditional houses, *binangiyan*, are distinctly different from those of the Ibaloi and remarkably similar to those of the Ifugao. The Kankanai house has a high, steep, hipped roof with the ridge parallel to the front. The roof drops, to about 1.50 m. above the ground, thereby concealing the house cage. The roof rests on the upper frame of the house cage, and the house cage in turn rests on a three joists-on-two girders-on-four posts structure. Under the house cage, Bauko furniture is built in as evidenced by the bench.

Stone is carved into containers for animal fodder.
broad planks laid slightly above ground level form a spacious platform that extends to the line of the eaves. Around the lower floor is a rough stone pavement. The house cage measures about 4.000 by 4.500 m. and the plank floor, about 7.000 by 7.500 m. The height of the house from ground level to roof ridge is slightly over 6.000 m. The Kankanai house is made of narra or pine.

In the Bauko house shown in the photographs, the sill supporting the front wall of the house cage extends to the eaves and is supported at each end by a post. The living quarters consist of a main area where the fireplace is located and a small room at the rear. On each side a shelf at about waist height, cuts the slanting wall and extends to the roof, forming a continuous alcove with its ridge the high roof provides a spacious loft directly above the living quarters. Outside the house cage, shelves extending from the walls at floor level to the eaves yield additional storage space.

While the intersections under the ends of the roof ridge have openings for the smoke to escape, a hole midway on the front slope of the roof serves the same purpose. The house has only one entrance, the front door, to which the visitor ascends by means of a slender, detachable ladder. The door panels are decorated with vertical flutings and the beams and joists with horizontal wave-like flutings. Like the Mayoyao house, the Kankanai house dispenses with the disc-shaped rat guards under the girders.

Don Alfonso Martin Quirante, who led an expedition to the gold mines of Galan, Benguet, in 1624, describes the Kankanai villages as follows: “Their settlements are on the crests of the mountains and on the roughest of them, where they can watch all the paths so that no one can climb up without being seen by their sentinels who are on continuous duty day and night… above all they seek out the most secure and strategic site.”

Eighteenth and 19th century sources mention villages of 15 to 20 houses, some up to 40, throughout the Cordillera. Some villages and houses were surrounded with low stone walls, in 1620 the settlement of Boa, now Antamok, had a dry moat and wooden fortifications.

Villages planned or equipped for defense are hardly encountered nowadays among the Kankanai.

The Northern Kankanai, like the Bontoc farm in wet-terrace, and have large compact villages divided into wards called dap-pay. The Southern Kankanai and the Ibaloi, who are dry gardeners, have their houses scattered at some distance from one another of fields and hillsides and even on steep, forbidding slopes.