

eminal publications on West African Architecture such as Kulterman's New Architecture in Africa and the Architectural Review's New Commonwealth Architecture came to define the African Modern Movement as it was understood internationally. This paper explores the specific context within which this new architecture developed and the actors that helped to shape it. Vaughan–Richards' Ola–Oluwakitan House and Cubitt's Elder Dempster Offices are analyzed in terms of their engagement with the socio–cultural context in which they were conceived, the site–specific Modernity of the former contrasting the corporate International Style response of the latter.

By Ola Uduku

agos is the site of the Elder Dempster Offices and the Ola-Oluwakitan Cottage, designed respectively by James Cubitt and Partners, and Alan Vaughan-Richards¹ in the 1960s. The Nigerian economy was booming at the time with the onset of crude-oil revenues. On gaining 'independence' from Britain in 1960, Nigeria initiated several grant-aided development projects, such as the secondary schools project funded by IDA/World Bank, the Kaduna Masterplan, or the UNESCO-funded public libraries project in Eastern Nigeria.²

As the economy flourished, developments in the built environment were called for to accommodate emerging activities. A number of new Modern offices were built including those for the Cooperative Bank of Western Nigeria, Barclays Bank, and Chase Manhattan Bank, Elder Dempster's Head Office, the Nigerian Post Authority, and Independence House. Furthermore, premier leisure facilities were built such as the Bristol and Ikoyi Hotels. Lagos thus became a showcase for a new post-colonial architecture.

Most architects involved in constructing Modern Lagos were expatriates, working in British architectural practices with satellite offices in Nigeria or in the Ministry of Works. In the 1960s there were few indigenous Nigerian architects, but these few, including Nigeria's first female architect, made a significant contribution to the architectural landscape of Lagos. Amongst the better known were Olumide Olumuyiwa, Alex Ekwueme, Frank Mbanefo, Kola Bankole, and subsequently the Britishborn Alan Vaughan–Richards, who settled in Nigeria in the 1950s and whose œuvre represents the breadth of the indigenous architectural style.³

Olumiyiwa, possibly the most prominent of this generation and most noted for his Crusader House offices in Lagos, was central to the establishment of the Nigeria

Institute of Architects (NIA). He sustained debates about the appropriateness of Western architectural education for the tropics with fellow architect Adedokun Adeyemi.⁴ Paradoxically however, it is Alan Vaughan–Richards' body of work that shows a clear and continued development from his pre–Nigerian independence architectural work at the Architects Co–Partnership (ACP), where he was first employed, to the evolution of a hybrid architectural style incorporating cultural and architectural influences of Western Nigeria in his later projects. The Ola–Oluwakitan House as well as his own residence are amongst the best examples of this development.⁵

Although the influence of British architects in the 'post-colony' context did allow for the interpretation of the brief period of Modernity as a transitional stage from colonialism and its appendages, to a quasi neo-colonial African approach to design, as evidenced in the more region-specific examples of Modern architecture of the time. In the less accomplished cases the term "Modern" described the slavish copying of the 'International Modern' style, with no reference to context, culture or local socio-economic conditions.

Elder Dempster Shipping Lines Head Office

Prior to the construction of the Lagos Office, the Elder Dempster shipping line had already commissioned Cubitt to build an office for their operations in Sierra Leone, completed in 1962.6 These offices were much smaller and seem to have been an early prototype for Lagos. The architect's attention and concern for the site is demonstrated in the diagrammatic analysis and building report for the Freetown planning office. The innovative use of pre-cast sections as mullions and shading devices for the glazing are particularly noteworthy. The sculptural approach to structure is revisited in the Lagos office building. Despite the prominence of the Lagos site, overlooking the historic port, it presented several limitations, namely the presence of an existing building on one side and Porto Novo Street, a main thoroughfare on the other. The design brief called for a distinctive office building that would serve both as

< Freetown Elder Dempster Shipping Lines Head Office completed in 1962 by James Cubitt.

a headquarters and as a booking office for Elder Dempster's shipping activities in Nigeria. It was also to provide its owners with speculative rental office space [figure 1].

The evolved design also had to overcome the ground conditions of the site for most of the natural ground surface of Lagos Marina was and remains below sea level. The building is recorded as one of the first in Lagos to have used pile foundations in order to assure the structural stability of the medium sized high-rise (ten-storey) block that was built [figure 2]. The building's structure comprises a customized ground floor with the entrance and shipping line offices and rental office space above. Designed around the structural columns, the floor spaces above the ground floor are open-plan, with services fitted within the floor structure above and centrally alimented from a roof top plant room. The semi-basement car park allows for the evacuation of water as the low-lying Marina area floods periodically. The upper floor offices are shaded by means of the Modern brise-soleil reinterpreted by the architect, whereby the form simultaneously serves as a billboard to inscribe Elder Dempster's initials. James Cubitt's influence as a sculptor comes to the fore with the design of the sculpted funnel form in an echo to Le Corbusier's Ronchamp at roof level.⁷ The raised ground floor booking hall was conceived as the pièce de résistance, with a circular drum showing a sinusoidal projection of the world and its time zones behind its booking desk. This served as the visual and symbolic representation of the extent of Elder Dempster's worldwide shipping empire.

The offices appeared to have been conceived to work in tandem with their tropical setting, using shading devices and being elevated above the ground thanks to a system of structural columns. On closer inspection however, the building's trademark modern sculpted funnel has been used to screen the air-conditioning machinery required to provide the offices with central air conditioning. Furthermore, the depth of the building in plan implied that much of the office space required artificial lighting. Operationally therefore, the building opposed many of the principles of tropical architecture.

By the time the offices were completed, the era of the passenger ship was coming to an end. Up until the mid 1960s, the company had an unchallenged international network of ships crossing the world. Prior to air travel, and with shipping being primarily associated with container trade, the glamour of travel was played out on luxury liners carrying expatriates and the nouveau riche to and from West Africa by passenger boat. M.V. Aureol, Elder Dempster's flagship mail-boat, took both missionaries and government functionaries to British West Africa in the last days of the 'Empire', as well as the newly re-

turning elites from their educational sojourns abroad.⁸ The location of the shipping offices on the shoreline of the Lagos Marina, ensured the building's incorporation into the Lagos skyline, offering the first glimpse of the city to passengers and ships coming into the Lagos lagoon. Furthermore, the sculpted funnel structure at its apex figuratively and metaphorically conveyed Elder Dempster's eminence in international shipping and travel.

With the introduction of cheap, regular airlines from the mid-1960s, the transportation of people and mail switched from ocean liner to airplane. The Aureol made its last voyage in 1974. Container shipping in Nigeria became commonplace from the 1970s onwards, with the development of purpose-built roll-on roll-off shipping facilities at Tin Can island. The Marina was also expanded in the mid-1970s, and is now crossed by the motorway network, with only visiting navy ships occasionally setting down at the former moorings.

The Elder Dempster building thus initially represented the epoch of Modern architecture in West Africa. However, whilst its outward appearance seemed to follow the conventional Modern charter styling, on closer inspection, this purism was compromised by the introduction of air conditioning and the attention paid to aesthetics at the expense of a more environmentally rational design for the office spaces, sufficient in day lighting and shading.

Today, the Elder Dempster building is imperceptible amongst taller office blocks on the skyline. Its ownership changed hands when the shipping line ceased to operate and the offices are presently owned by a private property company. The structure has a limited conservation status and has been infrequently cleaned and painted externally. Its distinctive funnel façade nevertheless remains visible within the indifferent landscape downtown Lagos, dominated by 1980s office buildings.

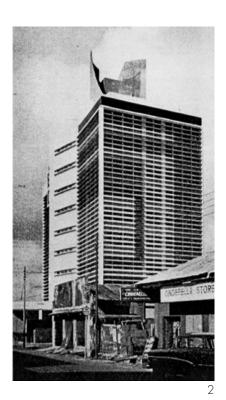
The Ola-Oluwakitan Cottage

Translated as "God has given us his blessings in abundance", the Ola-Oluwakitan Cottage is one of the most significant works of Alan Vaughan-Richards, attracting both publicity and critical comment. Built on a prominent site in Ikoyi, Lagos, the walls and exterior form of the house dominate the view as one approaches. The layout and design of the residence are restricted to the size of the plot, and there is relatively little room for maneuver in relation to optimal ventilation and lighting. Its form and finishing however, show considerable originality and creativity in their execution [figures 3, 4].

The non-rectilinear design of the façades bears witness to Vaughan-Richards' experimentation with form, going beyond the conventions of Modern tropical buildings in the 1950s and 60s, whose façades adhered to

the rationalist sobriety of the CIAM canon. The interiors however remain conventional in terms of design and layout, with a concession towards more open-plan, flexible living. The use of artists trained in the traditional crafts of West Nigeria in the design and realization of the façades as well as the interiors of the dwellings contributed to the indigenous character of the building. The sculptors Francis Idehen and Bruce Onabrakpeya were employed to develop the sculpted entrance area, while a Lagosian craftsman executed the name of the building on the façade using lettering that is commonplace in the Brazilian 'Aguda' part of Lagos [figure 5].





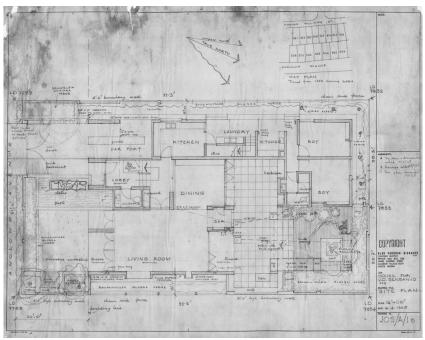
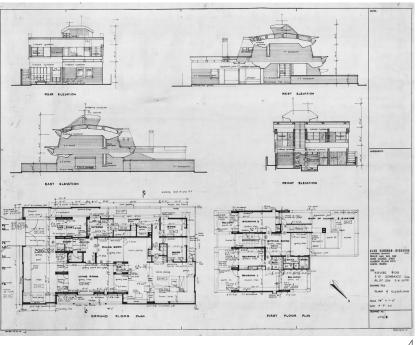


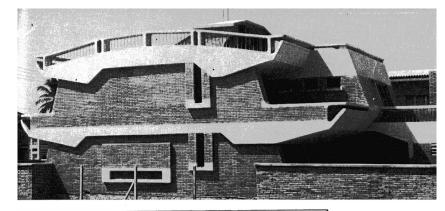
Figure 1. Lagos Elder Dempster Shipping Lines Head Office in the 1960s by James Cubitt. Photo from West Africa Builder and Architect.

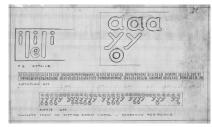
Figure 2. Freetown Elder Dempster Shipping Lines Head Office completed in 1962 by James Cubitt. Photo from West Africa Builder and Architect.

Figure 3. Floor plan of the Ola-Oluwakitan Cottage by Alan Vaughan-Richards. Courtesy of Ms Remi Vaughan Richards, Alan Vaughan-Richards Archive.

Figure 4. Drawings of the Ola-Oluwakitan Cottage by Alan Vaughan-Richards. Courtesy of Ms Remi Vaughan Richards, Alan Vaughan-Richards Archive.







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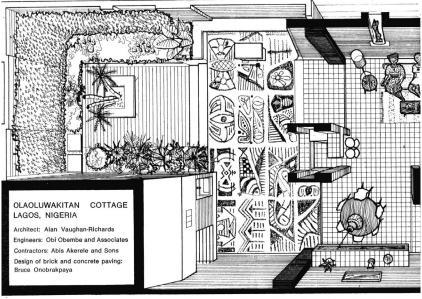


Figure 5. A Lagosian craftsman executed the name of the building on the façade using lettering that is commonplace in the Brazilian 'Aguda' part of Lagos.

Courtesy of Ms Remi Vaughan Richards, Alan Vaughan–Richards Archive.

Figure 6. Drawings and image of the Cottage in West Africa Builder and Architect, 1966.

When the inside space has to flow into the outside
When complete openings are required

When permanency and economy

are vital
SPECIFY VERANDAH SCREENS BY

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THE BUILDERS MERCHANTS

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6

The metallic mesh screens that represent stories from Yoruba mythology and the carved wooden floors contribute to an "African aesthetic". The materials employed within the house such as hardwoods and textiles were almost exclusively of local provenance too. Notably, an article on the building in the major West African architecture journal of the day West Africa Builder and Architect emphasizes the architect's choice of local craftsmen and suppliers [figure 6]. However, despite these abundant allusions to local culture, the incorporation of the word 'Cottage' in the building's appellation and the clearly Western lifestyle that the interior has been designed to embrace, point to the hybrid nature of Vaughan-Richards' oeuvre, whereby the indigenous is juxtaposed with the universal vocabulary of the Modern Movement. The Ola-Oluwakitan Cottage, is thus native in appearance and

Modern in its spatial layout and urban disposition, typical of 1960s Ikoyi.¹⁰

It is argued that the resultant design articulates the architect's will to differentiate himself from the new International Style. Significantly, less than a decade before its construction, Lagos was still a colonial outpost, where colonial style was seen as progressive.

These case studies illustrate the multi-faceted nature of Modern architecture in Nigeria. Whilst most architecture of the era was and could still be identified and labeled as Modern, the most successful buildings the movement produced in West Africa evidenced a reinterpretation of indigenous architecture rather than a tabula ras a on local history and tradition. James Cubitt and Partners was both prolific and groundbreaking in its work. Although the firm has been justly criticized for placing commercial

profit and commissions before architectural creativity, Cubitt's built oeuvre clearly demonstrates his commitment to a tropical Modern vision with particular emphasis on building orientation, shading and cross-ventilation, as well as the functional distribution of spaces.

Furthermore, despite the more corporate character of the office, Cubitt and his associates did on many occasions engage the services of local artists to give their buildings, particularly commercial ones, an exotic aspect be it African in reference or other, using murals, engravings or sculpture. The resultant African-Nigerian aesthetic nevertheless tended to remain a purely visual gesture without functional implications.

Vaughan-Richards, besides collaborating for a period with the Nigerian architect Alex Ibru, worked nearly exclusively as a sole practitioner. He did however develop a number of collaborative alliances with artists and writers, including Kunle Akinsemoyin, with whom he wrote and illustrated Building Lagos for the 2nd Festival of African Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977.¹² The originality of Vaughan-Richards' work is arguably best perceived in his residential projects, where the architect was not burdened with the task of pleasing a corporate client. Vaughan-Richards was unusual in setting up and running his practice in Nigeria rather than carrying out most of the design work in the UK with only skeleton staff offices on site, as was the norm at the time. Arguably his marriage into an established Nigerian family must have precipitated his immersion into African culture and the desire to reinterpret the Modern discourse within the Nigerian context.

Indigenous Nigerian architects contributed little to the evolution of the indigenous Modern style. The first local Nigerian architects, including Ekwueme, Bankole and Olumuyiwa, were mainly trained in the UK and did not begin to practice until the late 1950s. 13 It would nevertheless be wrong to suggest that Nigerian architects did not contribute to architectural debates or that the few that were in practice did not have their work acknowledged. Olumuyiwa's Crusader House, mentioned previously, received significant attention in Kulterman's African Architecture series, and has more recently been critically reassessed.

Ekwueme set up the largest indigenous practice in the 1960s, gaining a number of significant government commissions including the design of the nationwide Federal Government Colleges, designed and planed with UNES-CO-IDA funding. He also designed the infrastructure for the now-defunct national airline, Nigeria Airways, comprising offices and airports throughout the country. His œuvre clearly challenges the view that the early body of buildings by local architects was less architecturally

impressive than the production of the expatriate teams of the day. Ekwueme's hospital for the Nigerian Railway Corporation in Lagos as well as Olumuyiwa's aforementioned Crusader House indeed received critical mention.¹⁴

The recognition given to the few Nigerian practices involved in building Modern Nigeria was important for socio-political reasons. Nigerian architects were amongst the first African architects to compete and produce architecture on the international stage. Their work, though possibly less critically challenging than the expatriatedesigned commissions, made clear that a new African style was emerging. The visibility of their work was also crucial to the growth of the local architectural profession in Nigeria and ultimately in sub-Saharan Africa. The lucrative nature of architectural practice in West Africa in the 1950s and 60s, and its time commitments, however meant that this new generation of African architects made limited contributions to the development of architectural education in West Africa, which remained in expatriate hands until the 1970s. This might explain the lack of development of an indigenous post-Modern architectural style on the subcontinent.

This paper's premise is that West Africa, specifically Nigeria, was a prime site for International Style Modern Movement buildings with a specific tropical flavor from the late 1950s onwards. However, there was a distinct other, more hybrid Modern style that began to emerge in the early post-'independence' era, championed, in Nigeria's case, by the architect Alan Vaughan-Richards, who promoted an exploratory and localized approach to the production of Nigerian architecture.¹⁵ Noteworthy is also the contribution of unsung local Nigerian architects, whose work, though less architecturally interesting than the "AA-associated group" comprising of Cubitt, Fry and Drew, ACP and others who dominated much of West Africa's Modernity, was fundamental in the establishment of the profession and its identity in an emergent, culturally independent Nigeria.

Whilst this move to produce a distinctly 'other architecture' was short-lived in Nigeria, and much of West Africa, the Ola-Oluwakitan House designed by Vaughan-Richards in 1964 serves as a vivid embodiment of this will for stylistic differentiation. Gillies Reyburn's Drama Centre in Accra (1966) and the collaboratively produced Anglican Cathedral in Onitsha (1966), supervised by the British Architect Richard Nixon, are further examples of this ephemeral movement.

So why was this differentiated Modernity, of such originality and authentic cultural appeal, so short-lived? A number of factors arguably contributed to this. Firstly, the hybrid nature of the construction materials used required

the support of an indigenous building industry. Despite there being a local building research institute in Lagos, it remained a branch of the British based Garston research establishment, which, in the 1950s and 1960s, was not concerned with research on materials from a cultural perspective. The elements used by Vaughan–Richards in the Oluwakitan Cottage were custom made and never reproduced on a mass scale.

The nature of society in the early 1960s also favored its albeit brief development. The newly attained 'independence' of most of West-Africa, in the early 1960s and the short-lived economic strength of countries like Ghana and Nigeria meant that the continent's local elites, could and did show their identity through the profusion of expressed and lived culture. The local music and textile industries flourished and were accessible to all citizens. The elite could furthermore inhabit this new independence-driven culture by commissioning uniquely designed residences in Lagos and beyond. There was also the initiative to produce a cultural centre, though never completed, as well as new housing projects recalling the 1952 CIAM-inspired vision.¹⁶ Architect Olumuyiwa's proposal for the cultural centre was unfortunately never built and aside from Max Lock's Kaduna Plan, most of the housing schemes were Western imports taking only passing note of cultural requirements and perception.¹⁷

Finally, as Vaughan–Richards had eloquently discussed in his paper on the "new architecture generation", there were few schools of architecture in Nigeria. ¹⁸ Those that existed received very little support in developing a body of indigenous reference material, despite the efforts of architects like Charles Cockburn to set up a library at the Ahmadu Bello University School of Architecture in Nigeria, or the AA–school approach introduced to the Kumasi School by John Lloyd, Max Bond, Lutz Christians et al. ¹⁹

The practicing local architects, who arguably ought to have played a major role in the development of architectural education, seemed constrained by the demands of architectural practice. Olumuyiwa however, founding member and president of the NIA sought to ensure that the organization acted both as a legal and socio-political body giving Nigerian architects access to the lucrative architectural commissions of the period. Ekwueme served as the president of the NIA between 1965 and 1968.

The demise of the traditional Modern project could be explained along the same lines as the decline of Nigeria's 'differentiated Modern'. Having received the same training as the expatriate practitioners, local architects were less committed to indigenization, and more influenced by global trends. Cubitt went on to design major University

campuses in Malaysia and in Libya, whilst Vaughan-Richards' former practice ACP, designed schools in Algeria and other parts of North Africa, until the untimely death of its founder, Leo De Syllas in the late 1960s.

It is argued that Cubitt's Elder Dempster offices illustrate the transition from tropical Modernity to the corporate style, as air conditioning needs took on a prominent role in the design and the global image of shipping was of greater importance than the environmental conditions of the building's location. Furthermore, the standardization of construction materials and methods, as foreseen by the use of piling technology in Cubitt's office building, might be considered as a key factor in the development of a globalized corporate architecture that prevailed from the 70s onwards.

It would appear that by the end of the 1960s, the CIAM-inspired tropical Modern Movement had had its day. By the mid to late 1970s, architectural design was dominated by a more globalized architectural style. Western lifestyles had become widely mediated through publicly accessible television, print and other media.²⁰ FESTAC, hosted in Nigeria in 1977, had as its centerpiece a Bulgarian-designed auditorium with an appliqué of African sculpture on its exterior, while the associated housing planned as a Lagos suburb, 'Festac Village', was designed by European planners with limited local consultation.²¹ Nigeria's new capital city, Abuja, commissioned at the same time and designed almost exclusively by foreign consultants, has been labeled a tropical Milton Keynes, working but bearing little relation to its cultural and environmental landscape.²²

Drawing on the above-mentioned cases, one can conclude that Nigeria's Modern period was unique and short-lived. It has been particularly difficult to record this significant part of its architectural past for unlike vernacular architectural forms that can be archaeologically preserved, tropical Modern buildings have a recent history, and remain in full use. Although Nigeria does have a National Commission for Museums and Monuments, the concept and idea of listing is less commonplace and rigorous than in the West.²³ Furthermore, the environmental conditions in West Africa have rendered much print-based documentation, such as ink line plans and reports, useless due to the effects of heat moisture and insects. Many buildings that still exist have been adapted to accommodate changes of use, or were in some cases thoroughly redesigned.

With digital technology, the architectural history of Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa in general can be recorded and archived. Such is the objective of the Alan Vaughan-Richards Archive Project, which seeks to develop a non-perishable record of his key buildings, ac-

cessible to both researchers and students of this period in Africa's architectural history. The project is thus based on the premise that preservation does not have to be physical, the digitized nature of the archive ultimately being more accessible and manageable than the remaining buildings whose state and functions are inherently subject to change.

Notes

- 1. Throughout this paper, unless otherwise indicated, the main reference sources for both Elder Dempster's offices and Ola-Oluwakitan Cottage are from the journal West Africa Builder and Architect, specifically vol.4 nº 6, 1964, 110-113 and vol. 7 nº 2. Also see Okoye I. S. Architecture, History and the Debate on Identity in Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa, Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, vol. 61 nº 3 September 2002, 381-396, who notes that Ola-Oluwakitan House is now a restaurant and under new ownership.
- 2. For more on the IDA project see editorial in West Africa Builder and Architect, also I am indebted to John Godwin for allowing me to access his files on the project in Lagos in 1992. For the Kaduna masterplan see Lock M. and partners, Kaduna 1917 1967 2017: a survey and plan of the capital territory for the government of Northern Nigeria, London, 1967, and for the history of public libraries in Nigeria see Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science, vol. 33, Libraries in West Africa, 9, 10 and Emjorho D. Public Library and Nation Building, Library Management, April 2005 vol. 26 issue 3, 36-43 respectively.
- Three of these are featured in Udo Kulterman's second volume on African Architecture, New Directions in African Architecture (tr. Maas), London, 1969. Olumuyiwa is first quoted as contributing to the conference on Tropical Architecture hosted at the AA in 1953, co-organized by Otto Koenigsberger (Conference on Tropical Architecture, London, 1954).
- See Le Roux's paper "The Networks of Tropical Architecture", Journal of Architecture, September 2003, 337–354 for a more detailed discussion of Adeyemi.
- Plans and a description of Vaughan Richards' house can be found in "House for an Architect", West African Builder and Architect, vol. 6, nº 1, 1966, 2-6.
- Located in Freetown and completed in 1962, this was a one-floor office building with rental accommodation and parking onsite. See "Elder Dempster Offices", West Africa Builder and Architect, vol.3, nº 6, 109-110.
- 7. James Cubitt (1914-1983) was an influential member of the prewar AA set, he saw service in Burma during WW2, and set up JCP with partners Fello Atkinson (1919-82), Stefan Buzas (b.1913) and John Maitland (1918-1969). From a family of builders he studied at Oxford and then at the Architectural Association. He was both an architect and a practicing sculptor.
- For more textual narrative on journey by sea see both Achebe's "No Longer at Ease" and Okoro's "Dr Amadi's Postings". The history of te M.V. Aureol, launched in 1951, final voyage in 1974, and finally melted in India for scrap metal in 2001, is fascinating in itself.
- His other notable buildings include Braithwaite House (West African Builder and Architect vol. 4, n° 5, 1964, 100-102) and his own house (West African Builder and Architect vol. 6 n° 1, 1966, 2-8, and Hannah Le Roux, "Post-colonial Architecture of Ghana and Nigeria", Architectural History, vol. 47, 2004;
- 10. It should be noted however that in a 1966 West African Builder and Architect editorial, the unrestrained design of houses in South West Ikoyi is berated as spoiling its planning so this originality of design was by no means always welcome.
- 11. This carried on up until the 1980s with their banking hall and offices

- building at n° 54 Marina, also on the same street in central Lagos, which has cowrie shells and murals in its main banking hall.
- 12. Akinsemoyin, Kunle; Vaughan-Richards, Alan, *Building Lagos*, Lagos, F&A Services, 1977.
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- 15. Vaughan-Richards, Alan, "Architecture, the New Generation", West Africa Builder and Architect, vol. 7, nº 1 and 2, 1967.
- 16. See Grove online, 2006 Art and Modernism.
- See Lock, 1966 and compare this with the Kano Plan (Trevallion, 1960) and the later Festac Village (1977) Satellite Town (1979) and Abuja Masterplan (1983-to date)
- 18. See footnote 16
- Cockburn, C. "Educating the Missing Man" West African Builder and Architect, vol. 6, nº 2, 1966 and the AA Journal for more on the Kumasi school.
- 20. This was the case in most of Africa, except South Africa where the Nationalist Government censored all media, and television particularly was only broadcast in the late 1970s.
- 21. Apter, A, The Pan African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria. Chicago University Press Chicago, 2005.
- See Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) Masterplan, Lagos, 1979.
- 23. A small independent grouped named 'Legacy' has however been set up in Lagos, which works to preserve the architectural heritage of Lagos and includes amongst its founding members the architects John Godwin and Gillian Hopwood.

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