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UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

UNIVERSITY HOUSE LAMU

an introduction to the
creation of a study and research centre
in the coastal region of Kenya

edited by G.A. Ast and J. Hagger
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Housing Research and Development Unit
Director - T. S. Chama.

OBJECTIVES

Professor Henry Wood, Dean, Faculty of Architecture, Design and Development stated that the University of Nairobi plans to use Lamu House as a cultural, academic, multi-disciplinary professional and student centre for the benefit not only of the University but of the whole Coastal Region.

The potential study and research activities may cover a wide range of University disciplines, such as african studies, agriculture, economics, social science, geography, history, languages and linguistics, development studies, physical planning and architecture. As far as the interests of the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Development are concerned, the following activities can be envisaged:

- a study of the forms of urbanisation, architecture and material culture which emerged in this part of Kenya during the previous ten centuries.
- an exploration of the development potential for the presently under-populated interior stretching from the Tana River to the Somalia border estimated to have carrying capacity for more than half a million population in the future (see Coast Province Development Plan, 1973).
- the preparation of planning solutions on regional, urban and rural levels for this vast development area.
- the development of proposals for housing and community development consistent with the historical areas of the Coast Province.
- participation in the planning and implementation of the conservation of gazetted buildings of national importance at various sites.
- participation in archaeological studies of the numerous, unexplored urban sites along the coast.
- the acquainting of students with the physical environment of the coast and its potential natural resources.

The University is concerned that the Lamu House prove of direct use to the local people as well. It is thought that seminars and workshops can be conducted at Lamu House which will involve the preservation and transmission of coastal crafts and skills which are presently in danger of being lost. In the same way courses can be conducted by the University community introducing modern technologies compatible with this urban area.

It is believed that this acquisition of Lamu House simultaneously with the scheduling of the Commonwealth conference, "Conservation and Development of Historic Towns", (Lamu, February 18 - 25, 1978) presents a unique opportunity to development. Lamu House will be available to working groups involved in the preservation and development of Lamu, its surrounding areas and all the coastal region.

THE BUILDING

Location/Access

The house is located in the central area of Lamu Town and is part of the remarkable old stone buildings. Its location at the corner of one of the totally built up blocks with two and an half of its elevations exposed to the surrounding streets can be considered as a particular advantage in terms of ample ventilation which is provided by numerous external openings. There are four access doors, two of which in the form of the traditional "dacca".

General Condition

The age of the building is estimated to be 100-150 years. It was recently renovated by its present owners and provided with modern sanitary facilities. This includes electricity and piped water to all floors. (3 bathrooms/W.C., kitchen, fridge, hot water-heaters). The house appears to be structurally sound, but minor repairs of plasterwork and paints have to be carried out in this type of buildings periodically.

Plot

The plot measures 12.30 x 21.00 = 258.3 sqm and is totally covered by the existing building to the exception of a courtyard on ground-floor level.

Ground Floor

The southerly part consists of the previous servant quarters with two separate access doors. It is vertically subdivided in two floors, accommodating a total of four independent rooms, bathroom/W.C., kitchenette and access spaces..

The northerly part is approached by two "daccas", a kind of recessed entrance hall with fitted "barazas", which served as a communication space between the exterior and interior and where by-passers and visitors are entertained. This part of the ground floor is grouped around an interior courtyard, accommodating the staircase to the upper floors and previously the well. This courtyard gives access to adjoining halls, store rooms, dining hall and kitchen.

The groundfloor could be converted to be used as caretakers accommodation, cafeteria, library and storage spaces.

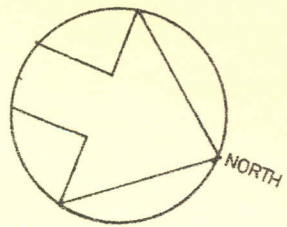
First Floor

This floor is equally grouped around a large interior court with adjacent open halls, which give access to four independent rooms and two bathrooms/W.C.s. The interior courtyard and adjoining halls could be used for teaching and study activities of small student groups; the independent rooms would be suitable as research and drawing offices.

Roof Terrace

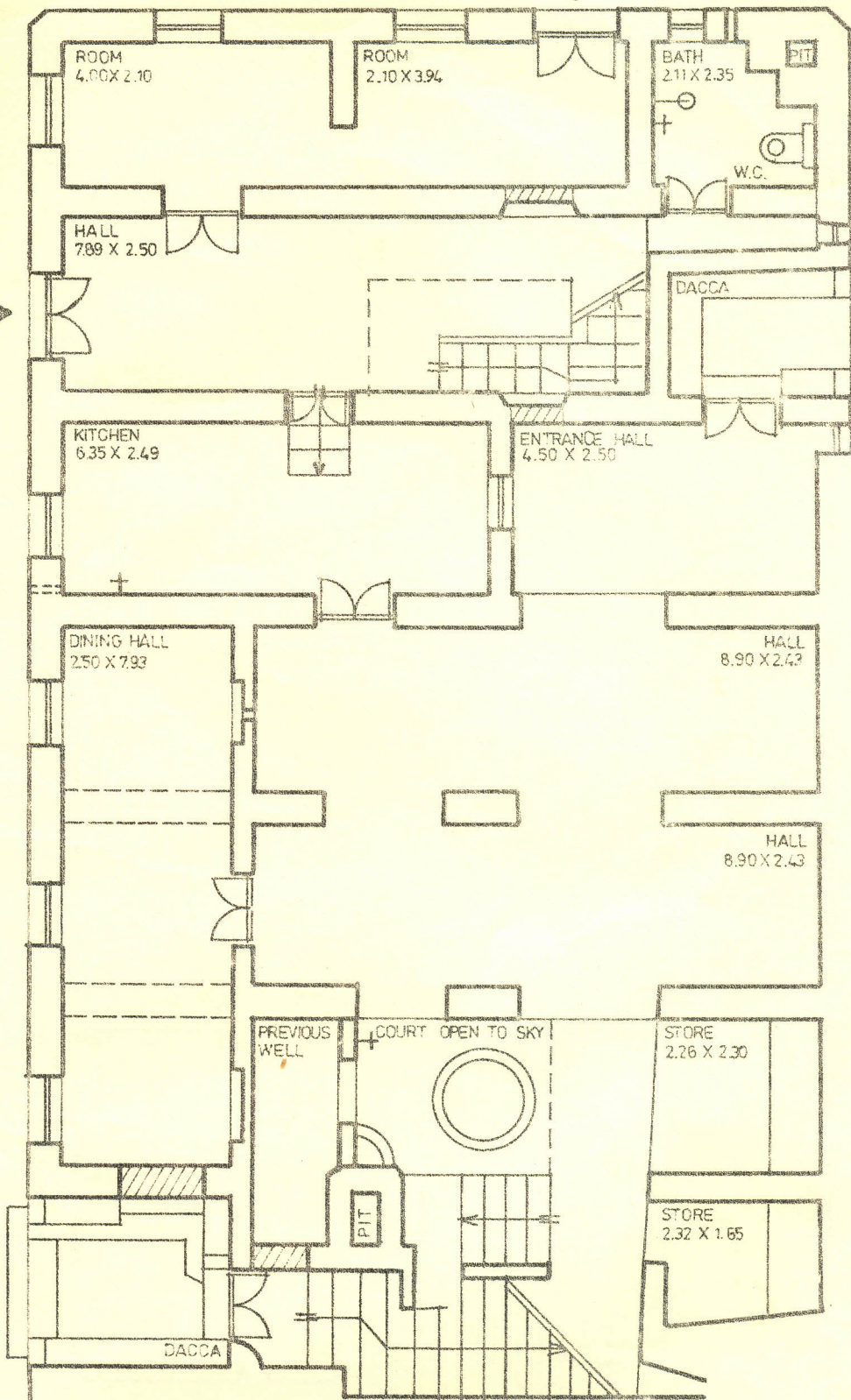
This ample space offers fine views of the surrounding roof-scape and sea. Two larger areas (40 + 26 sqm) are now under makuti-roofs, which if properly screened and subdivided could serve as temporary accommodation of staff and students. Additional sanitary facilities for this purpose could be provided in the earlier kitchen space.

The pages that follow present a series of architectural renderings of Lamu House. This section conveys a sense of the physical space of the new Lamu House Research Centre. It is our intention that within another year a description of Lamu House will also include a catalogue of the study and research programmes being conducted there for the benefit of the University, the people of the Coastal Region, and for all of Kenya.



HOUSE PLOT 484

LAMU CENTRAL AREA AND SEAFRONT



LAMU HOUSE PLOT NO. 484 GROUND FLOOR SCALE 1:100

GUIDO A. AST