



The Java House

The structure you see before you is part of an original house circa 1875, from the central part of the Island of Java. Java is an Island of the country of Indonesia in the Indian Ocean, northwest of Australia.

Javanese houses of the wealthy and aristocratic class in the 19th century were actually several buildings linked together within a walled compound. This building was the "DALEM", the central building of the compound that was reserved for formal meetings with important visitors (the front room), and the spiritual heart of the home (the large upper room). The richness of the carving and the shape of the main roof (called a JOGLO), indicate that this house was for a very important person.

Entirely hand carved out of solid teak, the house was constructed without nails, and with great ritual. The front door, (as it did on the island of Java) faces south, the symbolic direction of the sea. The arrangement and number of panels, the stacked central beams, the different levels of the building-were all designed according to very strict beliefs that formed Javanese culture.

The Javanese belief system includes Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, mingled with indigenous beliefs, to form a world-view, encompassing ideas, deliberations and actions in both culture and architecture. Even today, when the island of Java has a population of 160 million people, this belief system is still relevant and used in the PETUNGAN, a book covering numerology, fortune telling, sickness healing, and the process of design and building.

The PETUNGAN is comparable to FENG SHUI (Chinese geomancy) and covers issues about site selection, layout, dimensions of the building and of construction members, the proper time to take action, and rituals preceding any action in building. Each component of this building has a special significance, and a certain order of construction.

This structure was discovered by Larry Vann, the owner of Bird Kingdom, totally disassembled and wrapped in rotting burlap, stored in an old tractor trailer, parked in a farmer's field approx. 30 km from the Aviary. Apparently there it had sat for the better part of 20 years, the original purchaser had lost interest in his find and was willing to sell it to Mr. Vann as long as Mr. Vann was willing to trust that the pile of wood wrapped in rotting burlap actually contained something of significance.

When the various objects were unwrapped, we discovered a rich array of carved building components that to our disbelief comprised the entire structure including roof tiles. Though each piece was numbered, the instructions to assemble the pieces had long since been lost. Over a period of two years, this building was assembled and re-assembled until we discovered the peculiar and remarkable secrets of its structure and how it all fit together.

Unfortunately, as Java and Indonesia joined the modern world, they had little regard for this particular aspect of their architectural heritage, and these rare and intricately detailed houses were dismantled and most pieces have been removed from the island. Today, it is next to impossible to find these old buildings intact. Carved panels, columns and beams can be found in some lobbies of hotels, banks, and bits and pieces in a few private homes on the island of Java and Bali.

This building, THE JAVA HOUSE, at the Bird Kingdom Niagara Falls is truly one of a kind. There is no current record of this type of structure to stand complete and assembled with its front entrance facing South, anywhere in North America and quite possibly the world.