Subject: Vernacular
Topic:
Presented by: Mahesh Rawat

African Vernacular Architecture

Documentation for Preservation

African Vernacular Architecture

A village or homestead is composed of numerous vernacular structures.

— Sierra Leone

African vernacular architecture is a topic that is not well reprsented on line. A majority of African's reside in rural areas and build and live in structures constructed with materials that are obtained locally. These structures use techniques that have been utilized for generations. It is an architecture that is both sustainable and beautiful.

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Every place has it's own uniqueness... this is called "**genius loci**" a Greek term which means "the spirit of a place
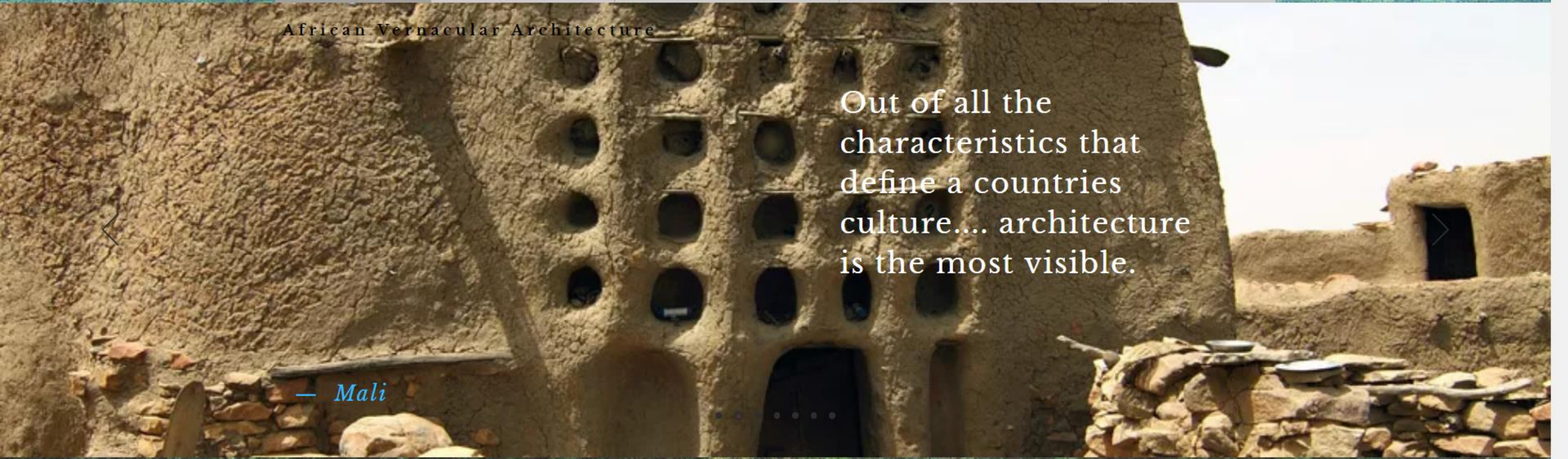
— *South Africa*

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Out of all the characteristics that define a countries culture.... architecture is the most visible.
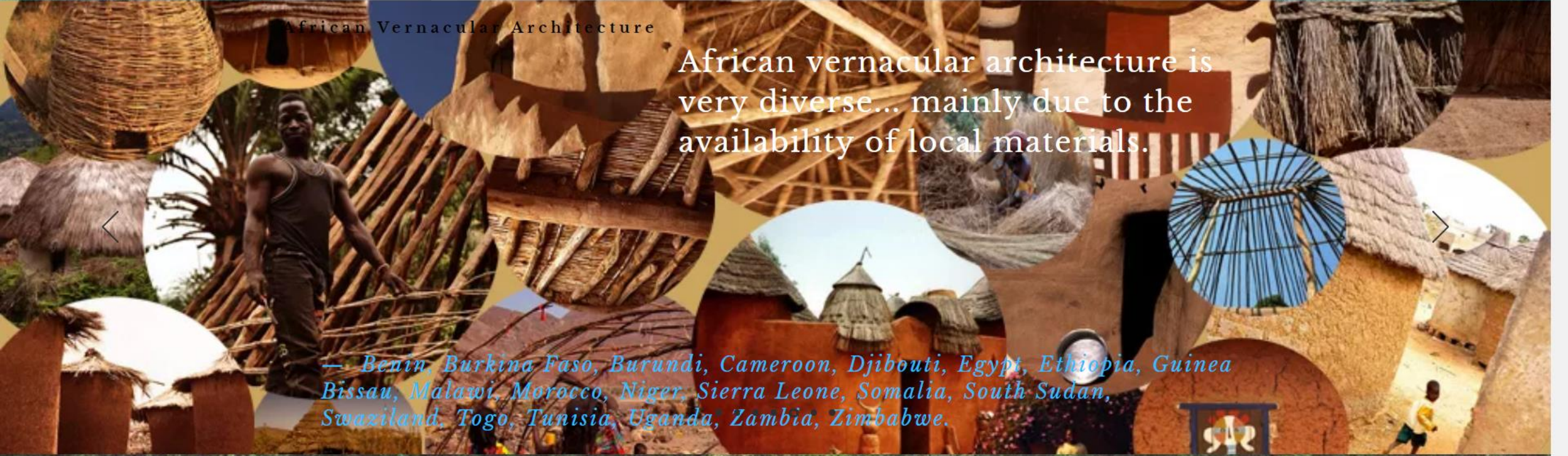
— *Mali*

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African vernacular architecture is very diverse... mainly due to the availability of local materials.

— Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Malawi, Morocco, Niger, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Swaziland, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

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These structures are not only practical.... but quite beautiful as well.
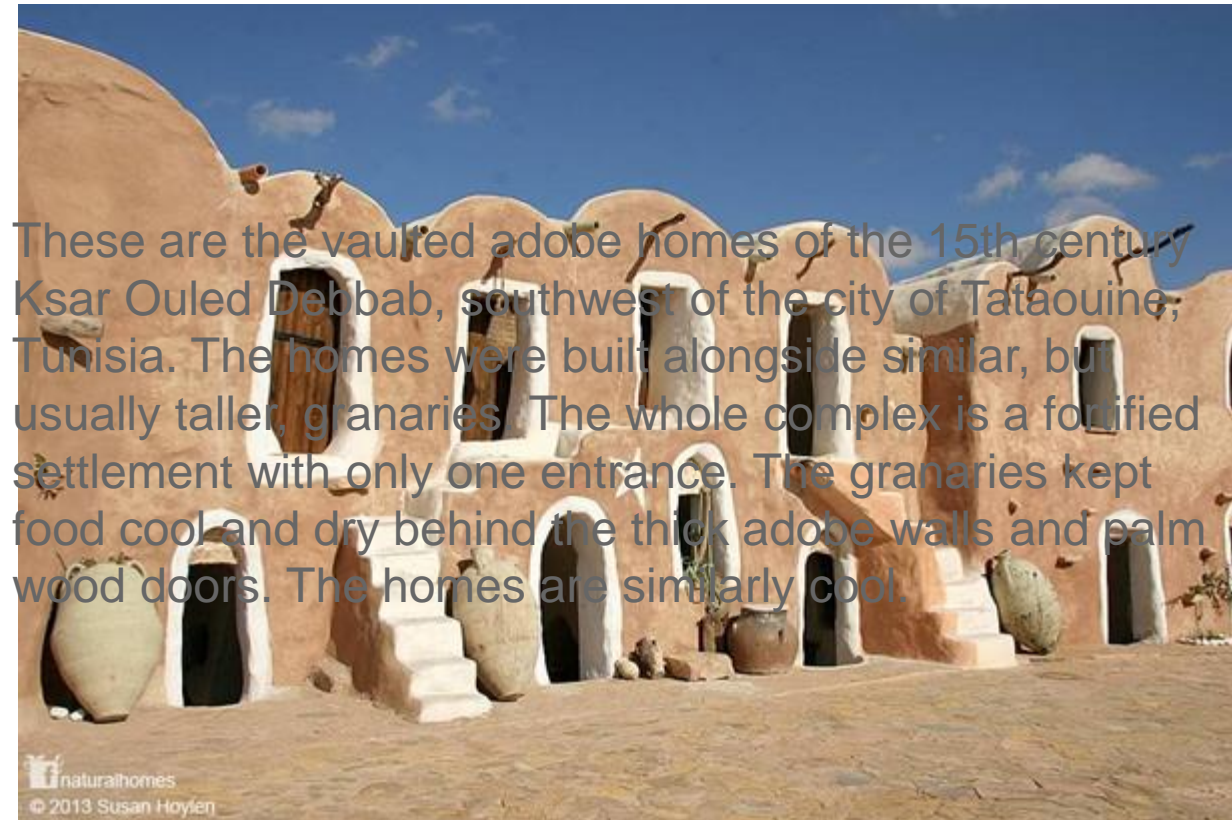
— Zimbabwe.

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The Toposa are one of the biggest tribal groups living in the south eastern border area of South Sudan. They live in well organised villages, with different houses for dry and rainy season and granaries where they keep their food and valuables. This is a typical home called a tukel. The external structure is a temporary scaffolding for the thatcher. The framework of the home is built from many strands of small branches bound together with twine.

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These are the vaulted adobe homes of the 15th century Ksar Ouled Debbab, southwest of the city of Tataouine, Tunisia. The homes were built alongside similar, but usually taller, granaries. The whole complex is a fortified settlement with only one entrance. The granaries kept food cool and dry behind the thick adobe walls and palm wood doors. The homes are similarly cool.

These are the Obos of the Musgum people in Pouss, Cameroon. They are designed in much the same way as the Turkish beehive homes in Harran, to provide efficient cooling in the baking heat. Both are designed with vents at the top of the building and small entrances with few, if any, windows. The high domes collect the hot air, moving it away from people sleeping at the bottom of the house keeping the interior around 75F (24C).

This is a traditional split bamboo plaited roundhouse by the Sidama people of Ethiopia. The dome, with its pointy top, is designed to shed heavy rainfall where a circular dome would have a flat region prone to leaks. Bamboo once played an important role in the rural economies of East Africa but indiscriminate clearing of natural bamboo forests have resulted in losing natural resources and many of the traditional building skills

These are the homes of the Batammariba (meaning "those who model the earth") people, whose impressive earth tower homes, called takienta, have become a symbol of Togo.

Many of the buildings are two storeys high. Some of the buildings have flat roofs, others have conical thatched roofs. They are grouped in villages, which also include ceremonial spaces, springs, rocks and sites reserved for initiation ceremonies. UNESCO's video right gives more detail about these earthen homes.

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These are the earthen homes of the Gurunsi in Burkina Faso. The men build the house and the women decorate the facades. All the figures have a symbolic meaning.

Round small houses 'dra' belong to young singles. The rectangular 'mangolo' with terrace belonging to young couples. The 'gilobées' belonging to the older women and young children. The water used to clean **shea butter**, which ends up with an oily texture, helps to make the plaster water-proof.