

# Vinces Old Town Hall

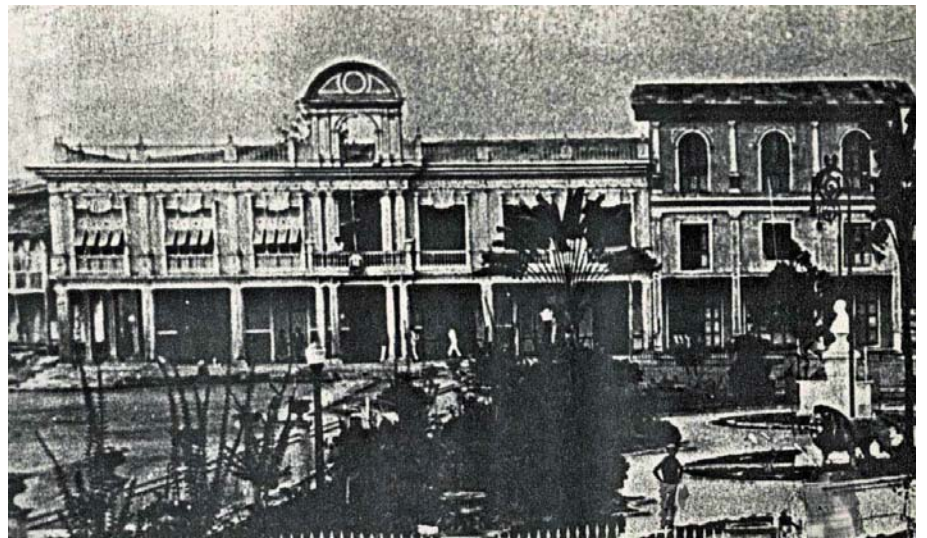
Coastal Traditional Architecture in danger

*Claudia Peralta González*

[cperalta@ucsg.edu.ec](mailto:cperalta@ucsg.edu.ec) - [cloperalta@hotmail.com](mailto:cloperalta@hotmail.com)

Professor Architect

Universidad Católica de Santiago de Guayaquil (UCSG) - Instituto de Planificación Urbana y Regional (IPUR)



## Abstract

The present investigation is about The Vinces Old Town Hall (1909), perhaps unique in the Ecuadorian coast because of its architectural and construction characteristics, where the use of traditional tools, materials, techniques and processes are evident.

The intention of this project is not only to help the Town Hall to be recovered, but also to make sure people in Ecuador finally realize the importance of heritage in our country.

Heritage that is not usually able to be preserved because of lack of funds or mainly because of the proper knowledge of the “How to”. It is pretty remarkable that in the past 30 years, Ecuador has get conscious of the importance or Heritage, but unfortunately this has focused mainly in the sierra (Quito and Cuenca) and has left behind the coastal area.

The main reason perhaps is that in the sierra examples are still altogether as living centers and not as spread as in the coast. Also in the sierra the materials used in construction (i.e. adobe) are less damaged by time and weather conditions. In the coast the situation is totally different where the use of wood was widely spread.

In the case of this particular Town Hall, through the years people in different heritage institutions have been trying to do something about restoration or at least trying to help prevent more damage on it but they have not been successful.

It is noticeable how this building has deteriorated in the past five years and is almost about to be declared a total ruin without anything else to be done.



*Old town Hall in 1911*

This document is going to be translated to Spanish and part of the campaign to save this building.

## Introduction

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ecuador was living one of its most prosperous times since the independence from Spain. This was mainly because of the exportation of cocoa seeds, considered, at the time, the best ever around the world, because of its quality was also known as the “gold pip” (pepa de oro).



*Cocoa tree with cocoa pods*

The people who benefited from this boom were the owners of the cocoa plantations, placed in the lowlands, who saw their wealth grow in a way they never imagined.

One of the mayor countries with which they had business relationships was France, which is why they travelled and stayed for months in this country.

As time went by, the cocoa plantation owners acquired European habits and wanted to reproduce them back in Ecuador.

Perhaps, the most important influence was in the field of architecture. This was noticed in the construction of the plantation houses (Casas haciendas) with elements from the neoclassical architecture adapted into wood, bringing to Ecuador a new way of composition and interpretation of the classical elements. This architecture was built by people who were used to work in timber, especially in the construction of boats, canoes and vessels, so these carpenters applied their knowledge of vessel construction in building houses with the same wood joints they used before but introducing the new knowledge in architecture language.

It can be said that this particular way of architecture, was soon spread all over the lowlands (rural and urban dwelling), bringing us an interpretation of an European style mixed with local ways and construction techniques and materials that today are known as Traditional Architecture in the coastal region of Ecuador.



*Old Plantation House*

At the same time, with the economical prosperity of the owners of plantations, they were not only interested in having beautiful houses and big properties but also in acquiring political power. One of the most important towns, close to these plantation houses was San Lorenzo de Vinces or just Vinces.

### The town of Vinces

Vinces placed in Los Ríos province (100 km. northeast from Guayaquil) was founded in the colonial times and it is believed its name comes from Vehinces, the last name of a Basque family who came from Spain and established here.<sup>1</sup> As time went by, this town grew and was the meeting point for people who lived and owned the cocoa plantations.



*Vinces River*

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, many important families established here and the town had its most important moment in its history. The influence that came from Europe was noticed not only in its architecture, but also in its people habits, such as language, (they spoke in French) and they had an important

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sica.gov.ec/agronegocios/Biblioteca/Ing%20Rizzo/agricultura/vinces.htm>

cultural activity just as they did in France. For these reasons, Vinces was started to be known as “Paris Chiquito” meaning “Little Paris”. In the following years, the importance of Vinces grew and in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its inhabitants decided to build a much more impressive building to replace the Town Hall, which was finally finished in 1909.

In the early 1930’s the “Escoba de la Bruja” pest (Witches’ Broom pest) attacked the cocoa plantations and the plants were not able to produce such a good quality seed as before. The market grew weak and Ecuador’s cocoa seed exportation was replaced by other countries. The previous wealth started to disappear and the owners of these plantations moved into Guayaquil, Ecuador’s main port.

Today, Vinces is an important town of this province, with some remaining buildings of this era, like some of the plantation houses, which are very close to town. Some wood buildings in the oldest part of town and of course, the Old Town Hall building which is now abandoned and no longer in use, still standing in the same place it was built almost a century ago.

## Background

### Geography and location



Ecuador is a country located in the northwestern part of South America, between Colombia and Peru. Although its size, is divided in three continental natural regions Costa, Sierra and Oriente, meaning Coast, Highlands and the Amazonian region; and one insular: The Galapagos Islands. The Province of Los Rios (“The Rivers”) is the only province in the coastal area of Ecuador, which has no access to the sea.

One of the main characteristic of this province is that is covered by rivers that are part of the hydrographical basin of the Guayas River. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this was very important, because Ecuador in those years did not have all year round roads at all, and the rivers were used to reach most of the cities that usually lied next to them. This specific reason meant progress and growth to this part of the country.



Vinces’ typical house



Abras de Mantequilla



Vinces river side

Today, also in this province is found one of the most important wetlands<sup>2</sup> of our country and perhaps of the world, with an important value in flora and fauna according to Ramsar<sup>3</sup>. This wetland is known as “Abrás de Mantequilla”. It is 10 km. NE from Vinces and is protected since 2003 because of its importance.

Another important aspect to be considered is that Vinces is known for its beautiful riverside, which is visited by people of this province for leisure and fun.

### Climate

Ecuador because of its position, close to the Equator line, which actually gave the name to our country, has no dramatic weather changes and only has two seasons in the year. The climate of the Ecuadorian coast can be classified as warm humid, with two well defined seasons: the rainy one, known as winter, from December until May; and the dry one known as summer, from June until the beginning of December. This change is due, mainly because to the Humboldt stream coming from the South Pole.

In the particular case of Vinces, due to its particular location (01°35' to 02°00' south latitude and 79°34' a 79°50' west longitude) the weather annual range is between 25 and 26°C. The annual average precipitation is 1 500 mm<sup>4</sup>. The region is usually affected by flooding due to its particular condition of lowland.

### Traditional Architecture in Ecuador



*Blind Windows*



*Open galleries (isla de Bejucal plantation house)*

In Ecuador, because of its geographical conditions, the architecture has developed with different materials and formal characteristics, although the room distribution is quite similar. Even now in present times, this is noticeable. If one takes a look in the 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture it can be say that there are the one developed in the Highlands (sierra) and the one developed in the Plains (Costa).

In the sierra, the main materials used are adobe, bricks, while facades actually do not have big openings, while in the coastal area wood are the main material, and lots of windows and balconies are necessary.

### Coastal traditional architecture

As it was mentioned before, wood was used in the construction of this architecture mainly in the structure and walls, but also in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were new materials that were introduced such as tin and also quincha<sup>5</sup>, the latter one used since colonial times.

People involved in construction became skilful in using different kinds of wood depending of the part of the building being designed. This is perfectly understandable if one thinks that wood is different in hardness, color and

<sup>2</sup> Intermittent streams and lakes empty into the permanent lake during the rainy season.

<sup>3</sup> Ramsar Convention Bureau. Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Ramsar: The **Ramsar Convention** is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable utilization of wetlands. ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ambiente.gov.ec/WEB/Publicaciones/Archivos%20pdf/Marino%20CosteroWEB.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Quincha: traditional construction system that uses, fundamentally, wood and cane or giant reed forming an earthquake-proof framework that is covered in mud and plaster. ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))

quality and that is very important to be considered at the moment of designing.

In the case of the coastal traditional architecture is very important to emphasize that even wood joints used in the building are important to study because some of them were adapted from the ones used in vessel construction, since they were the first carpenters involved in building construction.

Another important aspect to consider is woodcarvings and ornamentations in facades and wall interiors. Woodcarvings trying to recreate classical elements such as Corinthian and composite capitals, brackets, moldings, cornices, etc. everything enhanced with native details. The final result was a façade that reminds a neoclassical building from Europe.

In the interior of the building, the ornamentation is the same thing but here is also found the wall paintings in every important room, usually the main ones. The topics of those paintings are related or according to the use of that particular room. Also the painters of those days tried hard to recreate a marble finish look in this walls, as marble was considered an important material only used by aristocracy in important buildings in Europe. In Ecuador was very hard to find and it was replaced with this kind of work.

Is also noticeable the use of corrugated tin to shape ceilings in different designs painted in bright colors that go along with the rest of the building.

Another thing to consider in the design of traditional architecture is the importance that was given to the impact of weather in the well being of the people who occupied the building and also in the weather impact in materials used<sup>6</sup>, and how this was taken care of in the moment of construction.

That particular care was very important because the buildings were very comfortable and breezy and materials lasted longer. In our traditional architecture was customary to leave interior walls with upper openings usually decorated with wrought iron frames, so the whole building could get natural illumination and ventilation. The latter item is very important because of the high humidity existing in this region, which was harmful to the ornamentation and paintings.

Last but not least, is the use of the interior courtyard (patio) which was widely spread in Latin America since the Spanish Settlement. This courtyard provided in the interior of buildings ventilation and natural lightning, and made these rooms very comfortable.

## History of the Vinces Town Hall

### Architecture and Construction

#### Vinces Town Hall architectural characteristics

Paris at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had already been transformed under the project of Haussmann and it was the center of art and of course of architecture. When the cocoa exporters came back to Ecuador, they wanted to reproduce this French architecture in the new buildings they constructed. They brought pictures and told the carpenters to follow their request.

---

<sup>6</sup> One cannot forget that in the coast of Ecuador the humidity rates are extremely high.



*Decorated ceilings (Casa Julián Coronel)*



*Town Hall ca. 1915*

When these buildings were constructed they mixed the traditional construction known by the native builders combined with the architectural language brought by the future owners from Europe. The result was a new architecture that caused admiration and that began to be reproduced all over the coastal region.

The Vinces town hall has the characteristics of this architecture. The facades had a lot of ornamentation: classic columns usually topped with Corinthian type capitals, woodcarvings, windows made out of wood with the typical “chazas” (wood blind windows). The street level loggia was so useful to protect one self from rain and sun and avoided that the façade get the direct sunrays that warmed up the interior rooms. All of these elements were painted with bright, brilliant colors that enhanced all of these details.



*Street loggia*



*“Chazas” wood blind windows*



*Vinces town hall site*

As one went indoors, one realized that the façade was only the beginning, because the rooms inside were much more decorated. The ornamentation consisted in wall paintings, ceilings made out in embossed tin and big salons where they developed the different activities concerning the municipality.

One of the most important facts to be considered here is that this old building is still in the same place where it was built and kept the tradition brought by Spanish building town halls, according to the Leyes de Indias (West Indies regulations). In other words, is in front the main square, close to the cathedral and by the riverside. This last point was perfect understandable because in those years roads were inexistent and the most important mean of transportation were canoes, vessels and even rafts, so the first view of the city were the main buildings such as the previously mentioned.

### Important historical moments of Vinces Old Town Hall<sup>7</sup>

**1906** Vinces Council decided to build a new Town hall to replace the previous one from 1860.

**1909** Under the design of Mr. Neira the construction of the Town Hall was began.

**1911** The building was finished and started to be used.

**1912** The Town Hall decided to add a balustrade to top the building and an arch in the middle to enhance the main body.

**1918** the floor of the interior courtyard was paved and the drainage system designed. The electricity was added to the lower level offices.

**1919** the arch on top of the main body of the building was damaged by the rain and humidity and the Council decided to take it out.

**1933** the Council took out the balustrade on top of the building because it was damaged.

**1943** the lower level was rebuilt completely in masonry to avoid damage from rain and humidity

**1987** The town Hall moved out from this building to a new one built nearby

### Vinces town hall: Problems and actual situation

Around the 1930's the fruit plagues attacked the cocoa plantations, and, cocoa seeds were no longer good as they used to be. This and the world economical depression were sufficient reasons for the exportation to

<sup>7</sup> Arias Rivadeneira, Oscar; Collado Peris, Montserrat. “La Casa Municipal de Vinces, 1909. Arquitectura tradicional de la costa ecuatoriana”. Tesis de grado. Facultad de Arquitectura de la Universidad Católica de Santiago de Guayaquil, 1985.

diminish. Most of the owners of these plantations houses moved out from Vinces and its area, into Guayaquil, the main port, and established there.

The Vinces Town Hall was not destroyed and was in use for a long time until the local government decided to build a new one in concrete in a place nearby. They did not destroy the building because Vinces' inhabitants were very proud of this kind of architecture which reminded them one of the most important periods of their history.

The building has been abandoned for so long and the lack of maintenance has enlarged its problems. The most important problems are:

- Humid weather and its impact on wood (structural elements, walls, windows, doors, etc.) and ornamentation such as wall paintings, ceilings and facades.
- The presence of insects (termites, bees, wasps, xylophages, etc.), microorganisms, fungi in structural elements and ornamentation as well.
- Animals such as bats and rats that are now the frequent inhabitants of the building and are part of the big problem now.
- Leakage problems in the roof that affects structure, paintings, ornamentations, floors and even facades.
- Structural problems in the building and roof as well. Some parts are missing and some in poor shape.
- Previous intents of restoration without the proper knowledge, which have contributed to increase the damage.



*Side facade*



*Main Façade central panel*

### Technical state:

State of preservation:

Destruction of the foundation and sills, ca. 65%

Destruction of the wall construction, ca.45%

Destruction of floors, ca. 40%

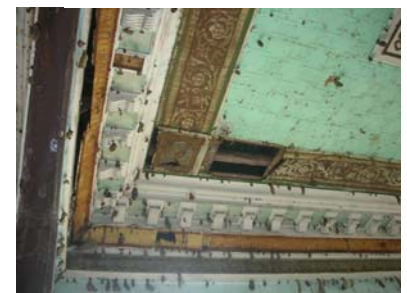
Destruction of windows, 40%

Disrepair of wall paintings, ca. 30%

Destruction of roof structure, ca 65%

Ceilings attacked by insects and bats ca 90%

Leaking roof covering ca 70%

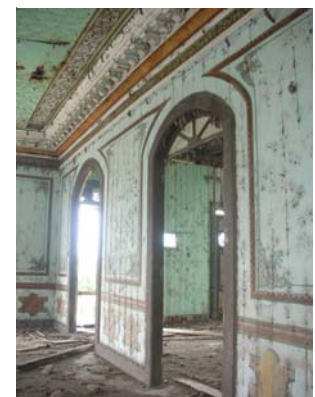


*Ceiling infested by wasps' nests and damaged by rain water leakage coming form the roof*

### Reasons why the Vinces Town Hall should be restored

The most important reasons (values) are:

- It has a unique condition, of all the town halls built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century this is the only one built in wood and tin, that remains built in site in the coastal region.
- The building is placed in the same site where the first town hall was built and according to the Spanish tradition (Ordenanzas de las Leyes de Indias) having, the main town square and the cathedral close to it.
- Architecture and timber structural characteristics represent a period in Ecuador's coastal region buildings
- It has a social significance to Vinces and this particular province and region: Identity
- Ecuadorians identified this building as a Landmark.
- Close to important ecological ecosystem (Abrás de Mantequilla) and the place known as Playas de Vinces and to an agricultural region (bananas, rice and cocoa)



*Walls covered by wall paintings*



- Future generations would be able to see and recognize heritage of this important period.

Other aspects to consider this particular building for a conservation project are, according to Icomos' "Principles for the preservation of historic timber structures"<sup>8</sup>, the following:

- *recognize the importance of timber structures from all periods as part of the cultural heritage of the world;*
- *take into account the great diversity of historic timber structures;*
- *take into account the various species and qualities of wood used to build them;*
- *recognize the vulnerability of structures wholly or partially in timber due to material decay and degradation in varying environmental and climatic conditions, caused by humidity fluctuations, light, fungal and insect attacks, wear and tear, fire and other disasters;*
- ***recognize the increasing scarcity of historic timber structures due to vulnerability, misuse and the loss of skills and knowledge of traditional design and construction technology;***
- *take into account the great variety of actions and treatments required for the preservation and conservation of these heritage resources;*
- *note the Venice Charter, the Burra Charter and related UNESCO and ICOMOS doctrine, and seek to apply these general principles to the protection and preservation of historic timber structures.*

## Method

What should be done? After visiting and inspecting the house in December 2007 it was amazing how the lack of care and maintenance have deteriorated the building even more, which is now in great danger of falling apart.

The first and immediate thing to do is trying to protect the building of getting in worst condition than it is and protecting of the now accessible interior from trespassers. Then supplementing of the missing covering of structural elements that are now exposed to climate and then preparing the real plan for a new use so the building can be conserved.

### **What are the steps to follow?**

#### **Get people involved**

The most important one: Make authorities and people (civil society), not only from Vinces, but from Ecuador, be aware of the importance of making a conservation plan for the Vinces Old Town Hall, so future generations be able to appreciate this architecture, not only because is a landmark for its architectural characteristics but also because of its uniqueness and representation of an identity from our past. This building should be officially declared an Ecuadorian Landmark protected by the national Institution of Heritage (Instituto de Patrimonio Cultural del Ecuador)

#### **Get to know Actual situation**

Once the public support is given, it is necessary to do a deep study of the present situation, as it follows:

---

<sup>8</sup> Principles for the preservation of historic timber structures (1999). Adopted by ICOMOS at the 12th General Assembly in Mexico, October 1999.

- Initial inspection to determine current condition (defects, pathology, damages, characteristics, etc.)
- Photographic and video documentation
- Architectural drawings (floor plans, sections, facades, wall paintings, ceiling design)
- Research of traditional architecture building systems (timber structure)
- Structural analysis in every part of the building (foundations, trusses, roof, walls, staircases, etc.)
- Status of installations (electrical, water, drainage)
- Preparing a research of historical documents (old newspapers, old council files, old private files, etc.)
- Taking of administrative decisions to define the formal and legal status of the building.
- Elaboration of a complete documentation (architectural conservation design) to get a building permit as well as permission from the State conservation service and preparation of an application for financial means to implement the project.
- Promotion and public support.

### **Think about New Functions**

Vinces in the present times is still an important town in this particular region where people who live nearby go to sell or buy products, and establish trading relationships. In addition, during summer time people go to enjoy taking a break in the riverside of the Vinces River, which are famous because of its beauty and size. These particular reasons have contributed in the growth of this town, which has 24.128 inhabitants<sup>9</sup>.

Another important aspect is that these inhabitants feel very proud about the importance of Vinces' past and think the building of the Town Hall is one of the last remains of this part of their history.<sup>10</sup> They do not want it to disappear but also they do not know what to do or how to recover it.

This is a two level building, in which the lower level is 652 m<sup>2</sup> and the upper level is 612 m<sup>2</sup>. The design of the floor plans is in different and independent rooms in which it would be easy to practice diverse activities.

One of the aims of this project is to involve the local Town Council and Regional Government, The Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Environment. They can adapt one of the different rooms for their local branches.

The second aim is to call the attention and involved particular Institutions or NGOs (i.e. Fundación Natura, Ramsar) that work nearby. On previous pages, it was mentioned that Vinces is very close to one of the most important wetlands in Ecuador. So, one of these rooms can be used as a permanent office to the people involved in these studies.

Upstairs is the main salon (60 m<sup>2</sup>) which can be redesign for important meetings of these departments. The rest of the rooms could be used as archives, library, storage room, etc.

---

<sup>9</sup> According to <http://www.pnud.org.ec/inundaciones/docs/VINCES.pdf>, bases on the cense 2001

<sup>10</sup> Interviews to the inhabitants made by the author of this investigation in her visit to Vinces, December 2007.

## **Conform Professional Team**

In the past years, due to their complexity the conservation projects have a participation of a multidisciplinary team in which each partaker dedicates to prepare a deep study and solution to make sure of its success.

In this particular case will be needed the participation of professionals, artisans and students of the different careers as well. This team should be as follows:

Architects and landscape architects  
 Historian  
 Conservation planners  
 Civil Engineers  
 Building contractor  
 Mechanical and Electrical engineers  
 Wood Technician  
 Carpenters  
 Master craft worker

One of the most important things is involve students for support and collecting information to professionals working in the project, giving them the opportunity of training and gaining experience. In addition, would be a great way of getting young people (new generations) get in touch with our past and be recruited for future projects.

## **What is to do?**

After the initial report, the record of the actual situation is established in detail and the design should follow with all requirements considered in conservation of a landmark.

## **Conservation Project**

As the building is in this serious state of damage, the project is going to be divided in two parts. The first one is the immediate and urgent work related to protect the building from any other damage. And the second part in doing the conservation of some of the rooms to allow the building have some income of its own and be self sustainable (self sufficient) or at least be able, in the future, to contribute in part for its conservation and maintenance. The idea and goal is to restore completely the building in the future.

### **1. Immediate and urgent work**

As it was mentioned before, the building has serious problems in its wood structure and part of the walls of the main and back façades of the Town Hall have fallen apart and left the interior unprotected and susceptible of damage because of rain, animals and dust. Another urgent work is the roof with problems of leakage, which also allow rainwater go into the building, damaging not only structure but also the interior ornamentation, ceilings, wall paintings, etc.

After doing this, the whole building should be cleaned up and get rid of its “actual inhabitants”, such as bats, bees and wasps.

The immediate work to do is protect these specific parts as follows, until the execution of the conservation project.

## Structure

In this type of building of the traditional architecture, one can talk about two different and independent structures: the building and the roof structures. Due to costs and damages, after doing the inspection it is advisable that some of the structure could be replaced with metallic elements but this should be only in extreme cases. One of the most important elements in this building is the use of traditional wood joints that were used since colonial times by our carpenters and is part of the identity of this architecture. These wood joints were used according to the parts that want to be put together. It is not the same to join two elements to give a beam structural continuity, than to put together a column with a beam. The most used wood joints are half lap, dovetail, bevel lap splice, etc.

Another problem concerning timber structure is that nowadays is not easy to get those big elements as in the past, in which the forests were around the area. Today they have to bring them from the Amazonian jungle where big, tall and ancient trees still are and this increases costs not only because of the wood itself, which is very hard to get, but also because of transportation through the jungle and the mountains to reach Vinces' area.

It is important to mention that foundations structure uses different wood than the ones used in the roofing or in carving ornamentation. So in this building one can find timber from mangrove used usually in foundations because of its resistance to humidity, Trumpet trees (*Guaiacum*<sup>11</sup> known in Ecuador as *guayacán*) used in columns and beams because is a strong wood, laurel and oak trees used for window sills, ornamentation, window blinds, doors, etc. because its timber is easy to work with.

So until the structure is replaced and reinforced is advisable to place supports in the most affected areas to make sure the building is stable.

## Fallen walls

Due to its material and reasons explained before, some of the walls in different façades have fallen apart. The most damaged is the back façade, which is totally gone. Corrugated zinc sheets were the original material. The use of this material was rather popular in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century because it was helpful as a fire retardant material. This façade today is totally gone so it should be closed.

In the case of the main façade, perhaps the most urgent work to do is in the corner where the façade is gone and leaves the interior of the main salon opened.

## Roofing

Part of the material of the roof is gone or damaged with holes produced by rust. This has allowed rainwater to go into the building, damaging the roof and ceiling structure and ceilings as well. In addition, these openings permitted animals like bats turned the attic into their "home". The big problem here is that bat's excrements are very harmful to wood and the rest of materials, not only causing losses of the material but also staining it.



*Side facade*

---

<sup>11</sup> *Guaiacum officinale* is one of the species yielding the true **lignum vitae**, a wood once used to treat syphilis. All species in this genus *Guaiacum* are CITES-listed. The other species of true Lignum Vitae is *Guaiacum sanctum*.

In this particular case, the missing parts of the roof should be replaced or at least closed and then get the attic disinfected and cleaned to take the bats out.

## 2. Conservation of the rooms

### Street level rooms



*Original Floor tiles with inscriptions*

The selection of conservation was not easy but the consideration of two aspects should be mentioned: present situation and importance of the rooms. When the first analysis was done, the original material of the walls of the lower rooms was changed in the 1940's from wood to masonry. Because of this, these rooms are better preserved. There are seven rooms of different sizes in this level. Their sizes go from 14 m<sup>2</sup> the smallest one to 172 m<sup>2</sup> the biggest one, and of course, a perfect and privileged location in town.

In most of the cases, the walls should be cleaned up and painted and do some ceiling repairs. The lower level floor is covered with its original tiles which are dirty and stained but still in good shape. In this part of the conservation project is also included the loggia surrounding the street level which is one of the most attractive characteristics of the building.

### Upper level rooms



*The hearing room*

In the upper level is where the most beautiful and important rooms are, not only because of their sizes but also because of the ornamentation used in the ceilings, walls and paintings. The original use of these rooms was different, for instance: main lobby, hearing room, meeting room, the mayor's office, etc.

It is considered that because of its cost, this part cannot be done all at once, but in steps. First, working in the bigger rooms and then in the smaller and less important ones.

The hearing room is 60 m<sup>2</sup> with beautiful ceilings, mural paintings and carved blind type (chazas) windows. In the room the conservation project should considered the following:

#### Walls

The structural elements of walls shall be retained as far as possible because of the beautiful wall paintings on their inner surfaces. Technical state of the sills however demands that they shall be completely exchanged.

The research has shown that the wood of the lower beams is in a bad condition and that they can not be used as continuous beams; exchange of corroded fragments proves to be indispensable. The beams shall be removed from the structure and their parts shall be exchanged.

#### Wall paintings

Wall paintings are an integral part of monuments and sites and should be preserved in situ. Many of the problems affecting wall paintings are linked to the poor condition of the building or structure, its improper use, lack of maintenance, frequent repairs and alterations. Also frequent restorations, unnecessary uncovering, and use of inappropriate methods and materials can result in irreparable damage. Substandard and inadequate practices and professional qualifications have led to unfortunate results.



*Wall painting in Hearing Room*

The main rooms of the building have beautiful wall paintings in which are shown the skillfulness of the artists who worked them. The topics are different and are easy to appreciate designs that go from figurative to non figurative items. One of the mostly used techniques was that of making believe wood was actually marble by painting the marble texture on top of it. This technique is not easy to achieve, but there are some artisans that still work it. These paintings are affected by stains from humidity, animals' nests and excrements, wood support damage, etc.

### **Roof structure and covering**

Most of the tin covering is to be replaced because is damaged by rust or have wholes. Conservation of structural elements of the roof frame (posts, rafters, span-pieces, laths, floor beams etc.) is to be conducted through supplementing with the new fragments of wood.

### **Floor and wall planking**

The demounting of the existing floor is advised, the conservation and later mounting of the original elements which are in good shape. The missing boards will be supplemented by new boards.

### **Ceiling**

In the main rooms the ceiling is made in embossed tin. Some of them are damaged by rust or by wasp nests or bee hives. It should be cleaned up and then replace the most affected ones and restore and paint the rest. In the rest of the building wood ceiling is found. This is also affected by humidity and by animals. The most damaged ones should be replaced following the original patterns and the rest, restored and repainted.

### **Wood structure**

As it was mentioned before, the building technique in this particular building is very important to be preserved, not only because of the timber value but also for the traditional technique employed.

### **Wood elements**

- ***Doors and windows***

These elements are made in wood, usually oak for frames and laurel which is very easy to work with and mostly easy for carving and details that were customary in decoration in those days. Most of them are in regular shape, partly damaged by humidity, insects and termites and missing elements such as locks. The main entrance has a double door which allows you to go upstairs to the main part of the building; this door has to be repaired as well as the blind windows of the upstairs rooms. These windows have beautiful carvings which include not only design but also the date of the year of the building construction.

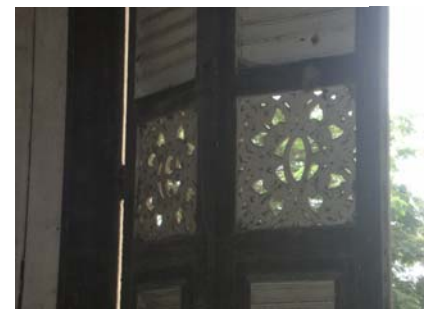
The doors of the rest of the building are easier to recover because the ornamentation is not as elaborated as the previously mentioned.

- ***Wood balustrades***

The stair railing uses wood balustrades which have lost painting, are loose and partly attacked by termites. The most damaged ones should be replaced and the rest should be polished, treated and fixed.



*Wood ceiling*



*Wood carvings in blind windows*



*Main stairs' balustrade*

- *Coat of arms*

The main door entrance had a beautiful coat of arms, which is gone. Fortunately there are plenty of pictures in the archives and documents that would help to do a new one to replace the missing one.

### **Wrought iron bars**

As in was previously mentioned, when this kind of buildings were built, and due to the tropical weather and humidity it was usually the interior walls did not reach all the way to the top and left openings to allow the air goes through the building and be permanently changed. These buildings were very comfortable not only for this reason but also because of the use of the interior courtyard that also contributed in this permanent change of air.

These openings could be left just like that or could be decorated with wrought iron bars with beautiful designs. These bars are not longer in their place but some of them are in downstairs room which can be considered a “storage room” where lamps, bars, and of course garbage too can be found.

These bars should be clean to get the rust out and be rust treated and protected against humidity. The missing ones should be replaced by new ones following the design.

### **Services**

As this Town Hall was built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is perfectly understandable the lack of certain services that in those years were not able to be found in Ecuador at all, such as electricity and water pipes. These services were added later in the 1940's. of course nowadays these are damaged and out of service. They should be replaced for new ones and also after the conservation of the building extra services should be designed such as:

- Drainage
- Internal electrical installation
- External and internal illumination
- Security monitoring and smoke detection
- Fire protection.
- Environment design



*View to Vinces Town hall from Balzar de Vinces with the summer house and pedestrian bridge that have a negative impact on the building*

### **Building site**

It is important to point out that this study is related with the building itself, but is imperative to mention that the surroundings of the Town hall have been affected by progress, changing some of its characteristics with an important and negative impact on the building.

It should be mentioned the pedestrian bridge that crosses the Vinces river from one side to the other and a concrete summerhouse that have nothing to do with the site. Both should be removed and built somewhere else.

## **Budget**

Before starting, is necessary to make a general budget, for each step of the project. Conservation projects are expensive, not only because of the materials and studies involved, but also because of the team of experts that are needed to be sure of the success of the project itself.

To make it easier to do the project has been divided in three parts, so it is possible to get different institutions to support each part.

The parts are:

1. Façades and the immediate structural elements
2. Roof and the rest of the building structure
3. Ornamentation and services

The ideal plan is to work these parts all together as a whole but get financial support from different institutions.g

## **Final Remarks**

After the conservation, the entire wood of the building shall be impregnated by a preparation against biological corrosion and fire, and later it shall be treated with coloring impregnates.

Maintenance is a must!!! It is always better and economical to keep in good shape a building than letting it damage through time.

The deterioration of this Town Hall is a result of improper and lack of care. Of course one should consider that Ecuador is a third world country with poverty indexes that are among 60% of our inhabitants and the Government is trying to solve these problems first and leave behind any cultural project that surpasses the budget they handle.

Usually the projects that have been done in different parts of our country, like some of the churches in Quito and Cuenca, and of course, the historical district, have been financed by international Heritage Programs (Belgium and Spain) after maintenance and conservation plans have been presented to them.

It is advisable to publish and this document be known to this NGOs to get financial support for the conservation project.

## **Conclusions**

As a result of the restoration and proper conservation of the building, it can be said that the benefits are not only for the Old Town Hall itself, but for Vinces, its region and Ecuador too.

For the proper conservation and management should be considered the following:

- Active participation from Vinces' people, merchants, professionals, local banks administrations, provincial, state and foreign players as the recovery and protection of the cultural identity and the active conservation of their heritage is so important

The support and guidance of the proper institutions could be the guide that legitimizes leadership, essential to avoid scattered efforts and complement



the proper actions, in accordance with conservation and municipal laws.

- Promoting cultural activities and events enhancing the new image of the building. There are traditional initiatives that take place every year, such as the celebration of the anniversary of the Spanish foundation of the city, the Easter regatta, the riverside beach, the “montubio<sup>12</sup> fiesta” (native people party), etc.

- Promotion of a policy and a plan that would benefit the emerging wave of cultural and eco tourism, considering the proximity that Vinces has with important architectural sites (old cocoa plantation houses) and being 10 kilometers away from Abras de Mantequilla, important wetland of our country. And, as it was mentioned in previous pages, the riverside beach<sup>13</sup> in Vinces which is visited by people from the town and surroundings.

In short, it is looking for tourism projects; trying to minimize the negative impacts to the community lifestyle, while being responsive to visitors’ needs and expectations.

- Introduction of several types and levels of publications to keep people informed about the different activities held in the building itself, town and in its region. Creation of a web site and having educational programs intended for young people to teach them the importance of our heritage. Documentation of the whole process should be recorded for future projects and as a reference of how this conservation was done.

- One aspect that should be mentioned is the lack of a legal framework needed to generate initiatives that lead to new uses and conservation of the building. In other words, there is no such legal reference point to establish a proper conservation of the architectural heritage of the Town Hall, under internationally accepted standards and requirements to identify certain premises or evidence necessary to take into account, for the authorities to develop a municipal ordinance for the conservation and use of the building.

Vinces’ inhabitants should demand from the Heritage Institution (Instituto de Patrimonio Cultural) the protection of this building.

Finally, it is of extreme importance to benefit from this experience offered by the Advance Training Program for Conservation and Management of Historic Buildings, to create a Maintenance Program and Maintenance Plan, to be used as a tool to promote its implementation in the conservation and restoration field.

## References

- Ayala Mora, Enrique. Nueva historia del Ecuador. Volumen 9. Capítulo “Auge y crisis de una economía agroexportadora: el período cacaotero” por Manuel Chiriboga.
- Crawford, Lois. El Ecuador en la época cacaotera.
- Feilden, Bernard M. Conservation of historic buildings. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Architecture press, Elsevier. 2007.
- Guerrero, Andrés. Los oligarcas del cacao. Editorial El Conejo.

<sup>12</sup> This is the way the coast peasant is known, having their own identity and traditions.

<sup>13</sup> In Vinces is known as “Playa de agua dulce” which literally means “Not salty water beach”.

- Robles y Chambers, Pedro. Contribución para la historia de la sociedad colonial de Guayaquil.
- El Ecuador en Chicago, 1894
- Reportes gráficos elaborados por estudiantes de la Universidad Laica “VICENTE ROCAFUERTE”, Hacienda Angélica.
- Guía Comercial, agrícola e industrial del Ecuador, 1909
- Instituto Ecuatoriano de Reforma Agraria y Colonización. Jefatura Regional Centro –Occidental del IERAC.

Principles for the preservation of historic timber structures (1999). Adopted by ICOMOS at the 12th General Assembly in Mexico, October 1999.

### **Graduation Works**

- Arias, Oscar; Collado, Montserrat. La casa municipal de Vinces.1909. Arquitectura tradicional de la costa ecuatoriana. Facultad de arquitectura y urbanismo de la Universidad Católica de Guayaquil.
- Cuesta Magallanes, Alejandro; Flores Prieto, José; y Sarmiento Méndez, Jorge “Análisis histórico de la arquitectura de la provincia de Los Ríos y propuesta para la conservación del patrimonio cultural (Tomo I y II)”. Facultad de Arquitectura y Urbanismo de la Universidad de Guayaquil. Año: 1992 1993.
- “Rescate Arquitectónico de la Casa Hacienda San Juan. Provincia de los Ríos” 1982-1990. Universidad de Guayaquil.

### **Web sites**

<http://www.sica.gov.ec/agronegocios/Biblioteca/Ing%20Rizzo/agricultura/vinces.htm>

[www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org). Ramsar Convention Bureau. Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Ramsar: The **Ramsar Convention** is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable utilization of wetlands

[www.ambiente.gov.ec/WEB/Publicaciones/Archivos%20pdf/Marino%20CosteroWEB.pdf](http://www.ambiente.gov.ec/WEB/Publicaciones/Archivos%20pdf/Marino%20CosteroWEB.pdf)

[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

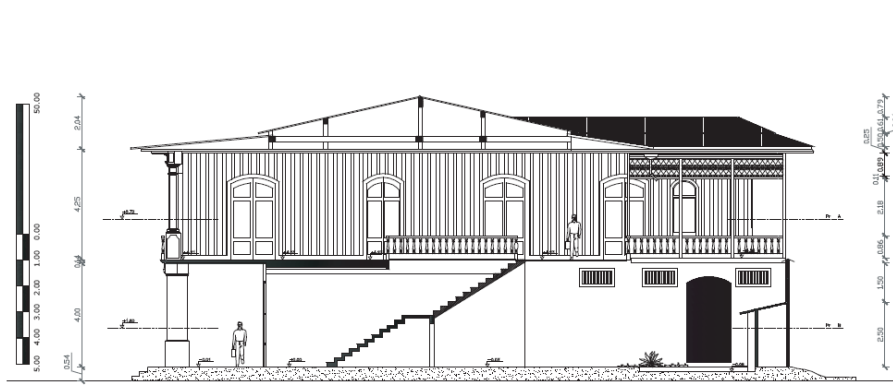
<http://www.pnud.org.ec/inundaciones/docs/VINCES.pdf>.

### **Interviews**

Interviews to the inhabitants made by the author of this investigation in her visit to Vinces, December 2007.

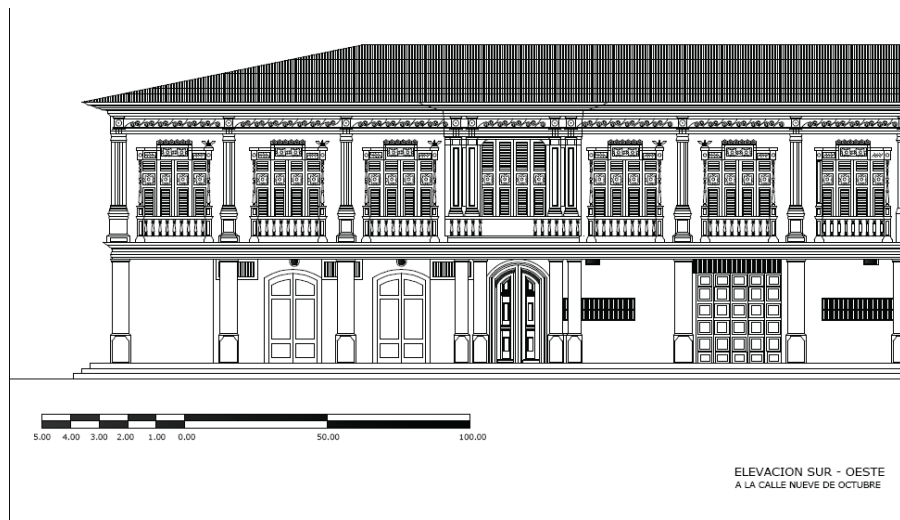
Phone interview: Mario Peralta Terán, member of the Vinces municipal council. January 2008





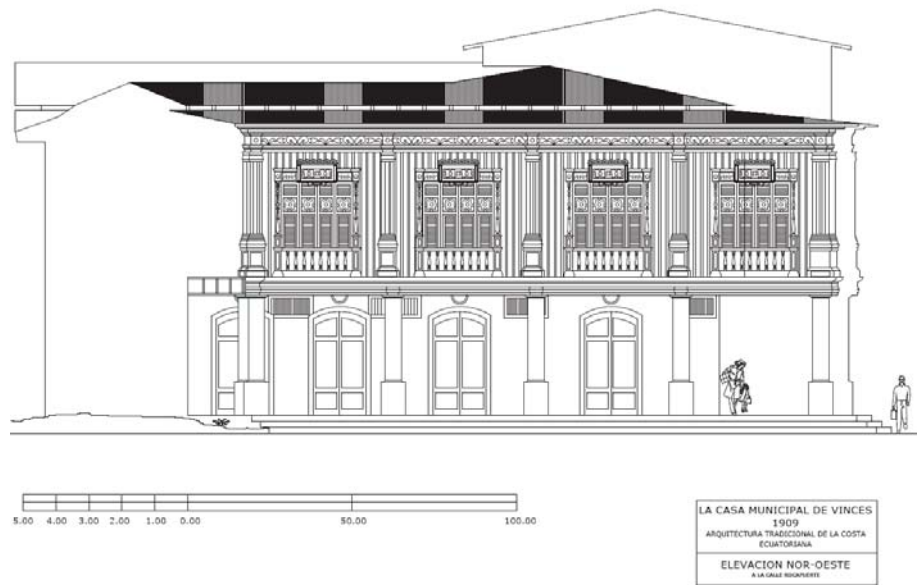
LA CASA MUNICIPAL DE VINCES  
1909  
ARQUITECTURA TRADICIONAL DE LA COSTA  
ECUATORIANA  
SECCION TRANSVERSAL A - A'  
CORTE

Section



ELEVACION SUR - OESTE  
A LA CALLE NUEVE DE OCTUBRE

Main Façade



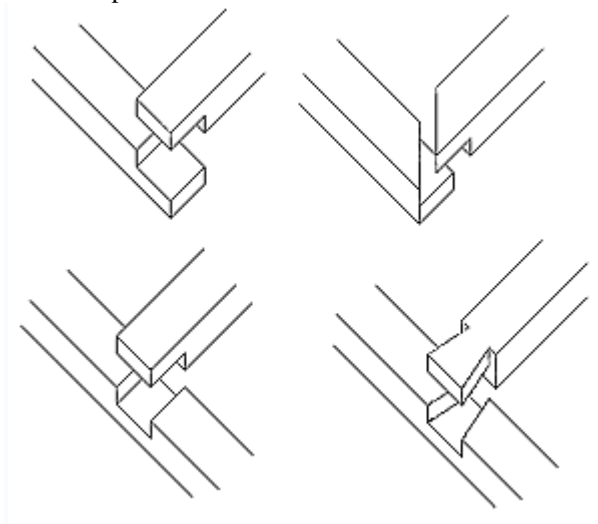
Side facade

## Appendix 2

**Tongue and groove** (sometimes **T&G**) is a method of fitting similar objects together, edge to edge, used mainly with wood: flooring, parquetry, panelling, etc. Before plywood became more common, tongue and groove boards were also used for sheathing buildings and to construct concrete formwork. machihembrado

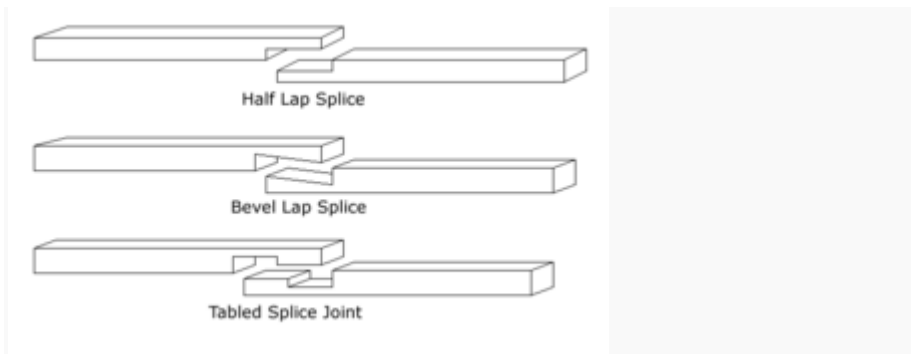
Dovetail. Cola de milano?

Half lap: media madera



Clockwise from top left: End lap, mitred half lap, dovetail lap, and cross lap

Types of splice joints



### Half Lap Splice, Bevel Lap Splice and Tabled Splice Joint

There are four main types of splice joints: Half lap, Bevel lap, Tabled, and Tapered finger.

#### [edit] Half lap splice joint

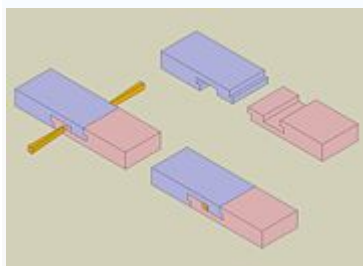
The half lap splice joint is the simplest form of the splice joint and is commonly used to join structural members where either great strength is not required or reinforcement, such as mechanical [fasteners](#) are to be used.

The joint is cut as for a [half lap](#).

#### [edit] Bevel lap splice joint

The bevel lap splice joint is a variation of the half-lap in which the cheeks of the opposing members are cut at an angle of 5 to 10 degrees, sloping back away from the end of the member, so that some resistance to tension is introduced. This helps to prevent the members from being pulled apart.

#### [edit] Tabled splice joint



### A wedged tabled splice joint

The tabled splice joint is another variation of the half lap. The cheeks are cut with interlocking surfaces so that when brought together the joint resists being pulled apart.

#### [edit] Tapered finger splice joint

The tapered finger splice joint requires a series of matching 'fingers' or interlocking prominences to be cut on the ends of opposing members. The joint is brought together and glued, with the fingers providing substantial glue surface.

This joint is commonly used in the production of building materials from smaller offcuts of timber. It is commonly found in [skirting](#), [architrave](#), and [fascia](#).

The joint is usually made by machine.

Mortise and tenon (caja y espiga)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

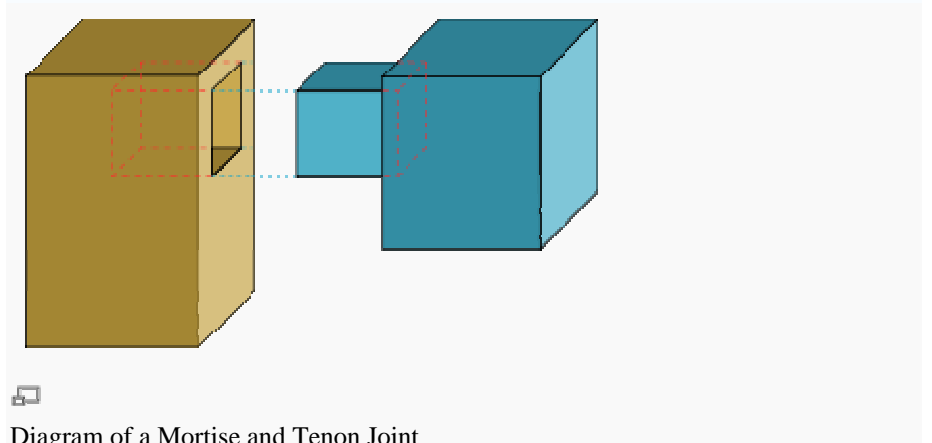


Diagram of a Mortise and Tenon Joint

Simple and strong, the **mortise and tenon joint** (also called the **mortice and tenon**) has been used for millennia by [woodworkers](#) around the world to join two pieces of [wood](#), most often at an angle close to 90°. Although there are many variations on the theme, the basic idea is that the end of one of the members is inserted into a hole cut in the other member. The end of the first member is called the **tenon**, and it is usually narrowed with respect to the rest of the piece. The hole in the second member is called the **mortise**. The joint may be glued, pinned, or wedged to lock it in place.

A **mortise** is a cavity cut into a [timber](#) to receive a tenon. There are several kinds of mortises: