# BLENDING IN WITH THE LANDSCAPE

**People have always built houses using the natural materials they have found easily to hand – earth, stone and wood. These materials are still used, and such traditional buildings often blend in with the landscape, sometimes to the point where they become practically invisible…**

### Tree houses

In the Indonesian province of Papua, the Korowai people live in houses built 35 metres up in the trees. Each home is large enough for a dozen people, protected on high from mosquitoes, neighbours and, it's believed, evil spirits.

### Building with bamboo

Abundant in so many countries, relatively supple and light, and easy to work without sophisticated tools, wood has been used by humans to build homes for some 35,000 years. But it's not the only natural material to serve in construction. For example, in the Pacific archipelago of Vanuatu, homes are traditionally made from palm leaves, bamboo and plaited canes, with reeds used for the roof thatch. They don't have windows, and the floor is made either of earth or of coral.







### Building with earth

Earth is the most easily accessible material for humankind, as it's right there… under our feet! Almost half of the world's population lives in homes made out of earth. This can be worked in three different ways: moulded by hand, transformed into bricks, or mixed with straw and other material to form a mix called daub or cob. Earth looks different depending on where you live, so earth houses vary in colour – and they blend in to the landscape.



### Eco-domes

In recent times, new methods of construction with earth have been developed. Some are very striking, such as these circular houses made from bags of earth piled one on top of another. Invented by the Iranian American architect Nader Khalili, these so-called eco-domes are cheap to make, very sturdy and easy to dismantle. Over the past 40 years, such homes have been constructed in various places around the world, sometimes as emergency accommodation.



### Building in stone

Harder to work with than earth, stone was often reserved for building monuments. But people did also use stone to build their homes, particularly in mountainous areas, where it was easily accessible and made dwellings that could stand up to the difficult climate.

# LIVING IN FAR-FLUNG CORNERS

**Fleeing to safety, wanting solitude for prayer, finding nature's gifts in the desert, seeking riches or knowledge, or standing guard over the sea... there are many reasons for living on the edges of the world.**

### Safely isolated

Five centuries ago in West Africa, the Dogon people of Mali took refuge along the Bandiagara Escarpment, which is 240 kilometres long and very difficult to reach. It proved a brilliant way for them to protect themselves from invaders and to preserve their identity right up to today.

### Retreating to pray

Retreating to a quiet place can be a way of finding the peace some feel is necessary for prayer. The Buddhist monastery of Phuktal in India was built in the 12th century on the side of a cliff into which it appears truly embedded. Some 60 monks live there, 3,900 metres above sea level and totally isolated from the outside world. It's a three-day walk to reach a road that is passable by car!

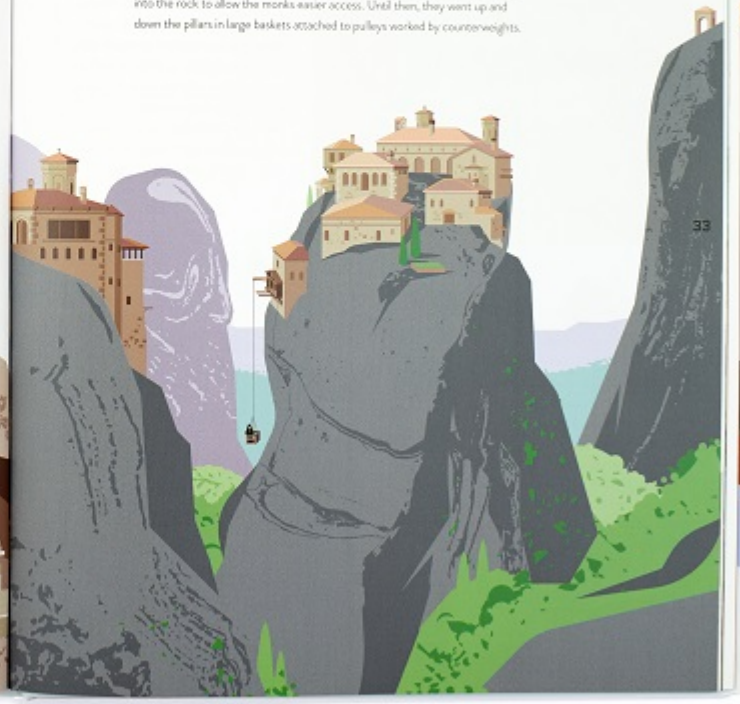




### Suspended in the sky

In the centre of Greece, near the town of Kalambaka, a series of immense natural rocky pillars rises out of the ground. Several Orthodox Christian monasteries were built on them from the 14th century onwards. They became known as the Meteora (from a Greek word meaning 'high up'), because the monasteries appear to hang in the sky. It was only in 1920 that steps were carved into the rock to allow the monks easier access. Until then, they went up and down the pillars in large baskets attached to pulleys worked by counterweights.





# RAINBOW RESIDENCES

**Yellow, red, blue, green... around the world, some people and communities paint their homes in bright colours, creating surprising, vibrant bouquets of buildings in the landscape.**

**Not just a pretty façade**

In the Middle Ages few people knew how to read, so houses would sometimes be painted a specific colour, telling everyone what was inside. For instance, in the French region of Alsace, bakeries were painted yellow (like corn), blacksmiths' forges red (like embers), carpenters' workshops blue, and stonemasons' shops cream.



**A blue town**

Jodhpur, in northern India, is known as 'the blue city'. The town was originally home to a great number of brahmins, members of the highest social group in Hinduism, their houses distinguished by their azure colour. The blue also helped to keep the houses cooler when the weather was very hot, and may have helped keep mosquitoes away, too.

**Colour at last**

In the 17th century, Dutch settlers founded a colony at the Cape, on Africa's southern tip, and brought in slaves, many from Malaysia. The slaves' descendants later founded the Bo-Kaap quarter, on a hill looking down on the city centre, and painted their homes there in vibrant colours. This use of bright colours was highly symbolic, as their slave ancestors had been made to wear only white.







**Multicoloured homes**

The Chilean port of Valparaíso surely counts among the most colourful cities in the world, for a rather surprising reason. There, the houses were traditionally built from a kind of clay mixed with straw. To protect them, the inhabitants made roofs from corrugated iron that they salvaged from the harbour. This scrap metal had the annoying tendency to rust, so the locals painted their homes using leftover boat paint. This sort of paint is highly rust-resistant... and also very colourful!





**Safe on stilts**

Houses have been built on wooden stilts, beside lakes, rivers and the sea, since prehistoric times. Thanks to the stilts, their inhabitants were protected from intruders and had simply to step outside their front door to fish. The principle behind their construction was simple: plant wooden posts deep in the ground, then span them with a floor on which to erect the house. The same process was used to build Venice in its lagoon; that Italian city is supported by a veritable forest of millions of wooden posts!

**Living on bridges**

In towns built on rivers, crossing points are very important. Bridges have often been built with shops and homes on them. In medieval London, each bridge was lined with houses, like any other street. With space in increasingly short supply in big cities, this historic practice is once again being considered right around the globe.

# WACKY HOMES

**Breaking with tradition and inventing one's own way of living is possible, playing with locations, materials, light, even vertigo! Chosen from around the world, the houses featured here prove it.**

### A hazelnut house

Resembling an enormous hazelnut, this wooden sphere conceived by Tom Chudleigh is located in a forest on Vancouver Island, Canada. It's attached to three trees by ropes, and people have to climb a spiral staircase to reach it. Equipped with a bed and a kitchenette, this home suspended in the air sways with the wind, or as its occupants move about. Those who suffer from seasickness should stay away!



### A rucksack house

If tree houses perched on high are relatively common, a hut that can be strapped to the side of a block of flats is much rarer. Yet that's what the German Stefan Eberstadt dreamed up with his Rucksack House, making an unusual extension to an apartment that has become too cramped. His design consists of a box 6.25 metres square, provided with several openings. In just a few hours, such a hut can be secured to the original building using a crane, then it's held in place by steel cables. What's more, if moving, the owner can take the hut away too!





### A staircase house

What kind of house can fit easily on to a long, narrow and, above all, very steep piece of land? Given these constraints, the Portuguese architect Álvaro Siza conceived of a building like stairs descending a slope. From the car park at the top, each room is like a big step. At the same time, all the rooms are served by an outside staircase running the length of the house.



### A tortoise house

In a Swedish nature reserve, the architects Maartje Lammers and Boris Zeisser have built a wooden house with the exceptional capability of being able to extend in summer, allowing in the sunlight, and to retract in winter, making it easier to heat.