International Sustainable Development Studies Institute
Expedition Field Course

Villages: Vernacular Architecture of Southeast Asia
Design/Anthropology
Spring Semester 2015

OVERVIEW

The course studies the “everyday” architecture of Southeast Asia, and how vernacular architecture has adapted to the local ecology over generations, including the social and ecological context of their construction/design. Students will design and build with bamboo in this course.

OBJECTIVE

This course explores vernacular architecture through ethnic building designs of both Thai and many ethnic minority groups that inhabit northern Thailand. This exploration will be based on learning how homes, community buildings, and village layouts reflect the interplay of culture, climate, and resource constraints. To make this exploration possible in a field setting, students will need to develop manual, social, and analytical skills. Students will need to record what they see; inquire about building use, meaning, and materials; and interpret the buildings using concepts provided by vernacular architecture theory and anthropology of architecture.

These vernacular architecture studies are the final touchstone in students’ articulation of the sustainable design principles that apply across the very different contexts of the semester program: ancient temples, the Bangkok megalopolis, Chiang Mai, and ethnic villages.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students on the course will demonstrate competency in the following:

- Understanding of the key issues concerning vernacular architecture in various Thai contexts: Bangkok (megacity and surrounds), Chiang Mai (medium-sized city and suburbs), lowland paddy landscapes, and upland farmers of many ethnicities
- Understanding how residential architecture reflects and reinforces local culture as an adaptation within a specific ecosystem and climate
- Understanding of how vernacular architecture studies relate to the Western and other architectural canons
- Rapid architectural survey methods, especially as relates to natural materials
- Interview methods to gather evidence about how people build their homes, why they choose particular designs, and how the home fits in local ecology and climate
- Ability to identify and use natural building materials specific to the Thai context (bamboo, rattan, dipterocarp leaves, types and treatments of locally available timber)

GRADING AND ASSESSMENT

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<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<td>Seminar Week</td>
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<td>Module 1 Essay: Traditional houses</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Module 2 Essay: Contemporary sustainable housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Module 3 Project: Building with bamboo</td>
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FIELD NOTES
The essays, and your journal in general, need to be legible and neatly presented. Instructors must be able to easily read and grade it within the constraints of time and environment of the course. If the instructor can't read it, it will not get graded! Please do not write in pencil (it will smudge). Use waterproof ink in your journal.

CITATIONS

The essays, and your journal in general, need to be legible and neatly presented. It is VERY important that the instructor can read it with no difficulty within the constraint of time and environment during the EFC. If the instructor can't read it, it will not get graded! Please DO NOT write in pencil (it will smudge) and use waterproof ink in your journal.

Citing your sources gives credit to the published and unwritten (verbal, observed, experienced) sources that contribute to your writing. Just as you normally cite written sources in research papers, it is especially important in field-based course to acknowledge the people who have contributed to your learning.

Using field citations also allows you and your readers to easily trace your ideas back to their origins in specific field experiences and to locate them in your field notes. This is an essential skill to develop in every academic discipline.

Essays are to have in-text citations of written and unwritten sources. A list of works cited is not necessary.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

In order for a course like this to be a success, it requires the full participation of all members of the course. While it is true in any context, given what we are studying, the phrase “you get out what you put in” is especially relevant. Learning about sustainability in this context will be an interactive, on-going learning process. Please show your fellow students the courtesy of only contributing to discussions if you have read the material.

During class and in the field, students are expected to ask questions during guest lectures, field activities and other learning opportunities. Active learning—asking questions, taking notes, exploring new ideas and concepts, talking with local people—are all required to do well in this course. During the course, students are also expected to follow these guidelines:

- Attendance and active participation in the expedition and field activities are required.
- Students are expected to demonstrate leadership and teamwork.
- Students are expected to manage their time well. You should have completed the reading assignments before class meetings and turn in assignments on their due dates.

Rather than mediated through reading a prepared text, you will be involved directly in learning the subject matter. This will be challenging, as direct learning is more difficult—there is no author who has pre-formatted or organized the material for you. Part of what you will be learning in this course is how to collect and analyze information yourself.

SEMINAR WEEK

During the first week, seminar is 1-4pm M-Th and 9am-12pm on Friday. Please be prompt.

Monday  Introduction


Tuesday  Vernacular Architecture Theory

**Wednesday**  
**Architecture and Ethnicity in Southeast Asia**


**Thursday**  
**The Lowland Thai House**


**Friday**  
**Sustainable Houses and the Future of Vernacular Architecture**


**Need to select most relevant from above three Vellinga articles**


**COURSE LIBRARY**

**Thai architecture**

**Books with excerpts above**

**Other resources on Sustainable Architecture**
SBSE 1999 Wells checklist sustainable and regenerative design
Lots of others from the ISDSI library and online

**FIELD ITINERARY**

20 Apr to 25 Apr  
**Module 1: Traditional houses in Northern Thailand**

*Villages: Vernacular Architecture of Southeast Asia*
Using the lens of vernacular architecture, we will survey traditional ethnic houses and environments of the Lue, Hmong, Akha, Jin Haw, Karen, Lisu, Central Thai, and Northern Thai. During the survey, we will be building our ability to rapidly observe and record house designs and interview owners about how the house design reflects cultural values within climate and ecological context.

26 Apr to 30 Apr  Module 2: Contemporary sustainable housing

This module will involve surveying houses occupying diverse positions on the sustainability spectrum, from mudbrick and bamboo to condos and contemporary suburban homes. The primary question to consider is how these houses succeed or fail to embody both aesthetic and cultural values as well as optimal adaptations to ecological and climate contexts.

1 May to 7 May  Module 3: Building with bamboo

In the final module, we will work with villagers to build a traditional bamboo house or sala. We will use this opportunity to deepen our understanding of this particularly useful material that has recently gained popularity as a sustainable alternative to timber.

We will be discussing the entire life cycle of the structure with villagers from harvest, to site selection, design, construction, and maintenance in order to deepen our understanding of the communal processes by which most of the world’s structures are built.