

Gurage Sauer-Bét House Construction

Among traditional house designs in Ethiopia, the Gurage thatched roof round house stands out. After winning a Swedish design competition in 1955, these houses went on to receive appreciation by residents and visitors alike. Shown below is a series of images involving the construction of the residence of Abba François Marcos (1909-1989), principal priest of the Emdeber Catholic mission. Such houses typically can last more than 50 years, given the wall construction of a mix of red and white eucalyptus that resist termite infestations. As to the roof, a thatched roof can easily last 20 years without a full replacement. And as to climate control, these houses have interior temperatures that easily can be 15 to 20 degrees lower than the exterior ambient temperature. Some of these details are found in P.LeBel, *On Gurage Architecture* (Journal of Ethiopian Studies, 1969), as attached to the series of images on construction.



After tracing a circle for the wall, posts are placed in the circular trench, with eucalyptus siding strips woven together with local vines. Special posts mark the door with window framing cut out once the wall is complete. The next step is to installing scaffolding for the installation of the center post.



Construction materials often are gathered over a period of time, with local residents then joining in the construction process.



Abba François Marcos, standing inside the house as construction proceeds



Ato Shoa (looking up with straw hat) worked as chief architect and builder.



Ato Shoa acknowledges an observer presence



Hauling in the centerpost (wofincha) requires a team of workers.



View of workers hauling the centerpost in place.



Raising the centerpost with wooden levers.





Given the weight of the centerpost, many workers are needed.



The centerpost is lifted above the circular wall.



Lifting continues.



Abba François jokes that he is lifting the post himself.



The centerpost is lifted above the walls





Workers atop the scaffolding pulling the centerpost to vertical position.

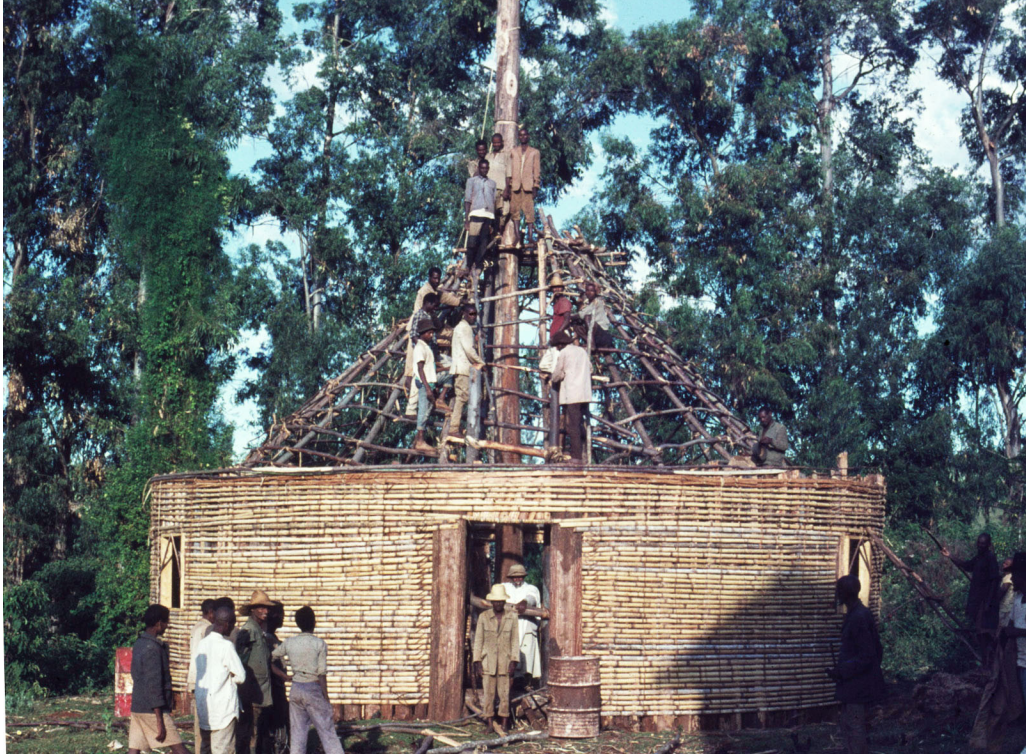




Initial success almost complete.



Closing the gap.



Celebrating the centerpost installation



After a brief setback, the centerpost is re-installed.



View of the house behind the Emdeber Church.



Once the centerpiece is lashed in place, the framing of the thatched roof is undertaken to give a bulbous shape to the roof.



Thatching the roof is a spiral weaving process in which grouped thatch is woven to the roof framing.



Progress in thatching the roof.



Save for the outdoor latrine, the house is finally complete.