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**CLASS STATUS AND IDENTITY:
A SEMANTIC READING OF THE TYPICAL TRINIDADIAN HOUSE**

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Abstract

This manuscript analyzes the use of ornamentation on the exterior of residential architecture, in early 20th century Trinidad, as a hybridized product of a class system developed during Colonialism. The manuscript begins with the examination of the socio-political context of late 18th, 19th and early 20th century Trinidadian society, looking specifically at how a boom in the cocoa industry in the 1870's allowed social mobility for free coloreds and blacks. As a result, this nouveau bourgeois class of cocoa planters sought to affirm their status by displaying their identity in the strongly European influenced houses they designed. The architectural details and ornamentation of the Boissière House will be discussed in depth as a representative example of these nouveau bourgeois mansions. In conclusion, the paper will demonstrate the architectural influence of the elite on other aspiring classes.

Opulence in the Era of Cocoa

In the northwest of Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, around the Queen's Park Savannah, are located some of the island's most magnificent and ostentatious mansions. These early 20th century houses are exemplars of the peak of aristocracy in Trinidad. Each mansion draws from European precedents, combining them in distinctly different ways to create an artifact that is an expression of the identity of its commissioner. The most unique of these houses, carrying the greatest signature of owner, is the Boissière House. The Boissière House stands as a physical manifestation of the elevated class position of French creole free coloreds at the turn of the 20th century, after years of subjugation. It is important to note that the term "free coloreds" is typically used in Trinidad to define a group of individuals of white and African lineage; the term is not considered outdated or derogatory in Trinidad as it might be viewed in the United States.

Arrival of the French

In 1498, during his third voyage to the Lesser Antilles, Christopher Columbus and his crew sighted and landed on the island of Trinidad and declared it a Spanish territory. Trinidad, in its early years under Spanish rule, remained underdeveloped because there was no established plantation economy and the population remained sparse. The Spanish government, in recognition of the precarious state of the colony, introduced the 1783 *Cedula of Population*, whereby the island was opened to immigration, in an attempt to attract wealthy, white, French planters. The *Cedula* was successful as an influx of white French planters soon arrived, along with their slave labor (Brereton, 1981). French immigrants comprised the largest group of land-owners and slave holders; they also had the largest accumulation of capital and subsequently superseded the Spaniards to achieve the pinnacle of the social hierarchy.

Although the *Cedula* was important for the introduction of various European groups into Trinidad, it was more revolutionary for the rights given to the free blacks and free coloreds. For example, articles four and five of the *Cedula* offered land grants and civil rights to free coloreds and free blacks who were planters and slave holders. Free coloreds and blacks were granted 15 acres of land for each member of his family and half as much for each slave he introduced (Brereton, 1981). Concurrent to the issuing of this decree, free coloreds were severely mistreated in the British and French territories of the Caribbean. In these islands, a system of apartheid was reaching its climax; free coloreds and blacks were subject to increasingly severe restrictions on economic activity and humiliating regulations. No matter how educated or wealthy they were, the legislation enforced in the British and French territories ensured that free coloreds were treated and perceived as inferior to whites. Considering the time period and social condition of free coloreds and free blacks on the other islands, the peculiarity of this decree is undeniable. Not only did the decree promote the influx of free coloreds and free blacks to Trinidad, but it also promised increased economic security and elevated social status. By 1797, the free colored and free black population in Trinidad totaled 4,476; it almost doubled the white population of 2,151 members (Brereton, 1981).

In 1784, Don Jose Maria Chacon arrived in Trinidad to assume his place as the Spanish governor of the island. Chacon was described as well-educated, enlightened, reform-minded, fluent in French and English and sympathetic to French immigrants (Brereton, 1981). Spanish colonies were already well-known for having a more lenient view on harsh laws against free coloreds, however Chacon was even more liberal in his treatment. For instance, Chacon chose to ignore laws crafted against the coloreds and spared them from any public humiliation or

marginalization. He also appointed free coloreds and free black land-owners to officers' commissions in the militia.

The milder working conditions offered to free blacks and coloreds were powerful because of the psychological effect it had on this group, especially with regard to the free coloreds. The free coloreds consisted of a social group in which the members, despite being theoretically "free", had white lineage and aligned themselves with white European culture; however they were still considered inferior by the larger society because of their African lineage. As such, they were accustomed to being dominated and dehumanized with no apparent escape from the situation. Neither education nor the accumulation of assets could alter the opinion of white planters in British and French colonies where free coloreds resided. However, after relocating to Trinidad, free coloreds were immersed in a social climate where they were granted rights and were treated with courtesy and dignity. In this new society, they could gain social standing if they became prosperous. This improved condition was symbolically important to the free coloreds who formed a powerful upper-middle income group with the promise of growing more successful and more influential in society.

The Oppression of French, Free Coloreds

With the change in Trinidad's political climate, the French colored planters were not as fortunate as the white French planters in maintaining their rank in society; as a result, they met an unfortunate fate. After the capture of Trinidad by the British, the privileged position that the free coloreds enjoyed under Chacon soon dissipated. Sir Ralph Abercromby, who captured Trinidad for Britain in 1797, named Thomas Picton, an officer on his staff, the military governor and commander-in-chief of the island. Abusing his power, Picton was given free reign to instate a regime of tyranny and terror in Trinidad. The worst treatment was inflicted on the slaves and

the free coloreds. Picton perpetuated the stereotype that the French free coloreds were dangerous revolutionaries and used this to justify his atrocities against them. He referred to them as “a dangerous class which must gradually be got rid of” (Brereton, 1981). Picton also subjected free coloreds to legal discrimination and social humiliation by torturing, imprisoning, and executing coloreds without reason or trial. Picton’s actions were deemed harsh even by 19th century, British Imperial standards and he later became the subject of British indictment.

William Fullerton, a commissioner sent to Trinidad by the British government to investigate Picton, was shocked by the treatment of slaves and free coloreds. As a result, he launched a campaign against Picton. Fullerton lobbied for a fair judicial process when prosecuting slaves and free coloreds, but he was perceived by the white elite as liberal and undermining the established system of order. Whites who aligned with Picton’s regime feared that if they gave coloreds even the most minimal rights it would thwart the structure of racial supremacy. A French white planter summed up the feelings of the general white population toward Fullerton’s compassion for coloreds when he complained that Fullerton’s actions would “undermine the basis of the colonial system of Government in a country where the Colored People are numerous and the least relaxation of subordination would produce the most serious consequences” (Brereton, 1981, p. 40). The climate of the colony had changed in terms of how the free colored community was treated. All coloreds, no matter their rank or education, were treated with contempt, causing a crippling setback to the entire group. Gone were the days of empowerment where they had the ability to ascend the ranks to be perceived as a meaningful, respectable class in society. This reprehensible and oppressive situation would not change until the post-emancipation period.

The Renaissance of the French Free Coloreds

The momentous end of the slave system in Trinidad also marked an important milestone for the island - the beginning of a formal economy for Trinidad. Two events marked this formal economy, the establishment of paid labor and the Colonial Bank. With the acquisition of wages, blacks now had money to invest; many invested their acquired capital in the newly developing cocoa economy.

A sugar economy was non-existent in Trinidad under the Spanish rule. While the French introduced the sugar industry, it did not flourish until the arrival of the British. The sugarcane economy remained an exclusive, rich, British, white man's market. The sugarcane estates that were established by the French colored planters before British capitalization of the market gradually died out as British planters bought them. British colonialists were not concerned with the cocoa industry; as a result, it provided an opportunity for both white and colored French Creoles to dominate the market. They became the capitalists for the cocoa industry, benefiting from the investments and production of the former slaves. French coloreds used the cocoa economy to form an aristocratic upper middle-class after their years of subjugation.

Undoubtedly, the quality of Trinidad's cocoa is one of the richest found in the world and contributed to the economic development of the nation. There had always been small cocoa farmers in Trinidad, usually of French or Spanish descent, but before the 1860s, they did not have a substantial market for the cocoa in either Spain or Britain. Thus, there was no formal cocoa economy on the island. However, following technological advances in cocoa processing in the 1860s, the cocoa drink became an item of mass consumption in Europe and the United States. In 1866, the Cadbury Company began producing solid chocolates in Britain (Brereton, 1981). This tremendous expansion in the British market led to a boom in cocoa production in Trinidad.

Additionally, the extension of roads, development of railways, and launch of undeveloped Crown lands for sale also helped boost cocoa production. A depression in the sugar industry after 1884 allowed for the release of labor, capital, and land that could be used towards the production of cocoa. Hence, the cocoa industry enjoyed a significant expansion from 1866-1920, thereby surpassing sugar as the island's leading export.

The trickle down structure of the cocoa industry provided opportunities for various different social groups. Though the industry was controlled by French creole whites and coloreds, the Trinidad cocoa industry was pioneered and developed by peasants. At the time of emancipation there were millions of acres of Crown lands that were uncultivated or under-cultivated, and this land was used to develop the cocoa industry. There were two ways in which these cocoa estates were established. The first method for the establishment of a cocoa plantation entailed a peasant, usually an ex-slave, buying a small portion of Crown lands with his labor wages. The peasant then cleared the land and planted cocoa trees on it. After the trees began to bear, the peasant sold the bearing trees and the land to a cocoa planter, usually a French creole, who then turned the already producing land into a large estate. The peasants then used the proceeds to buy another area of land and repeated the process (Brereton, 1981). The second method consisted of a contract system. A French creole, with more disposable capital than the typical peasant farmer, bought a large block of Crown lands, cleared it, and entered into an agreement with different contractors whereby each contractor was given three and one fifth acres on which to plant cocoa. When the trees were bearing, the capitalist reclaimed the land and paid the contractor an agreed upon sum for each tree. This method was beneficial for both parties. The capitalist was able to develop an estate cheaply and easily and the contractor could gain wages without an initial output. As a result of their privileged status as plantation owners, the

merchants and distributors of cocoa, the French creoles, dominated the plantation as well as the commercial side of the cocoa industry.

The rise of the cocoa industry was inextricably connected to the economic renaissance of the colored French creoles. With the abolition of slavery and a growing acknowledgement of civil rights around the world, the colored creoles were no longer content to accept the oppression of the past. After years of domination and marginalization, the colored French creoles had the economic and socio-political opportunity to ascend the social ladder; they were determined to obtain and maintain an elevated position. With the capital gained from the cocoa industry, and their recovered and/or newly gained social status, coloreds enjoyed a renewed period of prosperity; they also began living lavish lifestyles that were a testimony to their wealth. Thus, after years of persecution, coloreds needed to affirm their status in society. Consequentially, they invested in the asset that was most representative of their identity and would reach the greatest audience - their homes.

Pre-cocoa boom, the houses of the elite, though large in scale, were simple in design. Wealthy homes had European features such as a mansard roof, dormer windows and loggias but lacked ornamentation or any distinguishing features. The emergence of a new elite group of cocoa planters and merchants, however, brought a profound and long-lasting change to the residential fabric. With their newly acquired capital, the new elite built mansions at a level of extravagance that had never before graced the island. French creole colored planters and merchants now had the capital to live the life of a French aristocrat with “all the pretensions of a count” (Brereton, 1981). In the country, they built lavish estate houses such as the La Chance estate built in 1880 by Gaston de Gannes, one of the pioneers of the rebirth of the cocoa industry in the 1860s. At two stories, La Chance was a timber affair equipped with a marble stair entrance

and porte-cochère (Lewis, 1983). However, the truly extravagant display of the cocoa planters and merchants consisted of the town houses that were constructed around the Queen's Park Savannah in the Port-of-Spain.

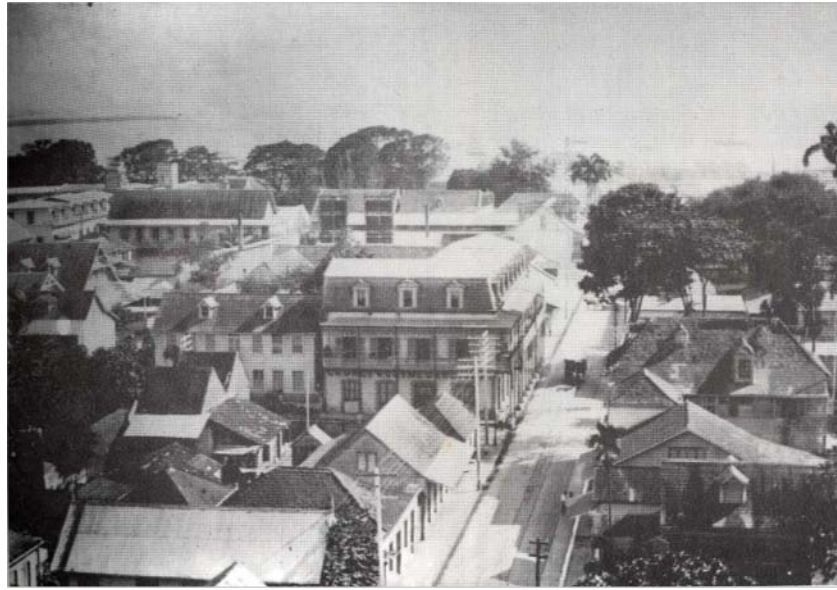


Figure 1. Overhead view of St. Vincent Street Port of Spain taken in the 19th century. This image illustrates the French style of building. Focal buildings in the photo possess mansard roofs, dormer windows and quoins. By G. Besson, 1985, *A photographic album of Trinidad*, 51.



Figure 2. La Chance Estate: One of the elaborate plantation houses of the late 19th century. By G. Besson, 2008 *Our Built Heritage*.

What the Nouveau Bourgeoisie Built

Trinidad had the perfect socio-cultural environment by the mid-nineteenth century to support the development of eclecticism. Trinidad was populated with Creoles, local-borns descending from immigrants of Venezuela, Scotland, England, Ireland, France, Spain, parts of Africa, and many other countries. With this *mélange* of ethnicities, Trinidadians described their new homes as follows:

A place conducive to a diversity of culture and expression. Indeed, the arts in Trinidad including its architecture, confirm a propensity toward the bringing together of numerous influences. It is a collagist expression bringing together multiple parts, reconciled in a cohesive “whole”. This is the nature of its people and the inclination of its artistic production. (Cazabon, 2011, p. 12)

It is from this collagist culture that the mansions around the ‘Grand Savannah’ were born.

Trinidad’s ‘Grand Savannah’ or ‘The Queen’s Park Savannah’ as it is now called, has been a hub of cultural activity since 1828. Approximately 260 acres of formerly agricultural land was sold to the *Cabildo*, the colony’s governing body, in 1817 by the Peschier family. For many years, the site remained the grazing ground of cattle for the citizens of Port-of-Spain. However, by 1828 The Grand Savannah became a playground for ladies and gentlemen as well as the “place to be seen”, with sports matches, horse races and tram rides. Thus, it became the perfect location to build a grand mansion to represent an individuals’ success to the world. The land around the Grand Savannah was coveted because it offered a relief from the densely growing city. The elite clamored to obtain a bedroom window that would overlook the socially active park and to have their houses cooled by the cherished, Savannah breezes. It was not surprising then that by the turn of the 20th century, some of the islands’ most successful cocoa planters and merchants built their magnificent residences along the western side of the Savannah.

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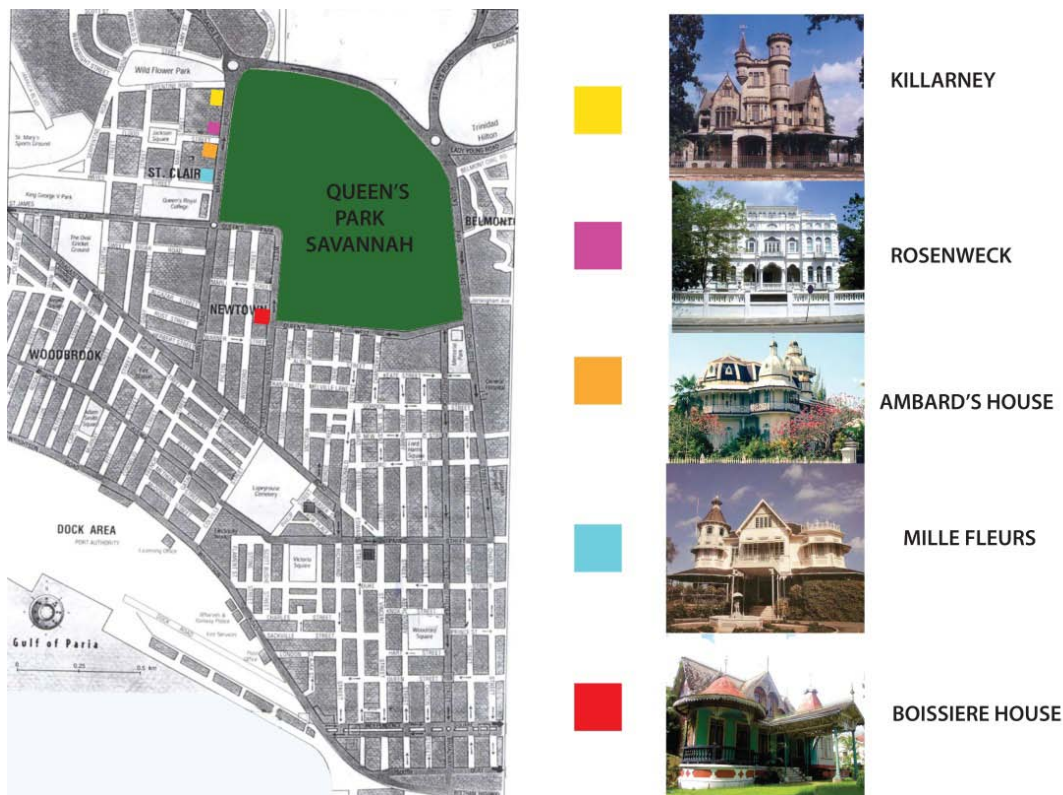


Figure 3. Map of Port of Spain showing the location of mansion of the elite along the Savannah
 Source: Composition by author. Pictures used by G. Maclean, 2011, *Residential*.

By 1904 the land to the west of the Savannah along Maraval Road included a series of mansions characterized by randomly assorted European styles. To design these luxurious homes, architects reproduced European designs (mainly British and French but also Italian, Dutch, and Moorish designs) and complemented it with indigenous peasant design. Each house had its own distinct style intended to outshine its grand neighbor. Killarney, or Stollmeyer's Castle, commissioned by Charles Fourier Stollmeyer, was the first house to be built bordering the Savannah. Designed in 1904 by a Scottish architect, Robert Gillies, this turreted residence was reminiscent of the German Romantic style and was fashioned after a wing of the Balmoral Castle built by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in 1856 in the Highlands of Scotland.



Figure 4. Killarney (left) and Balmoral Castle (right). Killarney was designed in 1904 and the first of the mansions around the Grand Savannah. Balmoral Castle in Scotland was the inspiration for Killarney. By G. Maclean, 2011, *Residential*.

Following the construction of Killarney, Joseph Leon Agostini built the Rosenweck house (known as Whitehall today) with white coral limestone from Barbados; this style was reminiscent of the Moorish Mediterranean architecture of Corsica, a French island in the Mediterranean Sea from which the Agostini family originated (Watterson, 1998).



Figure 5. Rosenweck (left) and La Tunisienne (right). La Tunisienne, was a villa in Hyeres (a seaside French town) influenced by Moorish architecture. Architectural works like La Tunisienne influenced Rosenweck. By G. Maclean, 2011 *Residential*.

The Ambard's house (or Roomor as it is now called) was also designed in 1904 by a French architect for Lucien F. Ambard, a rich merchant (Watterson, 1998). The flamboyant house was inspired by the French Baroque style, with most of the materials imported from France.

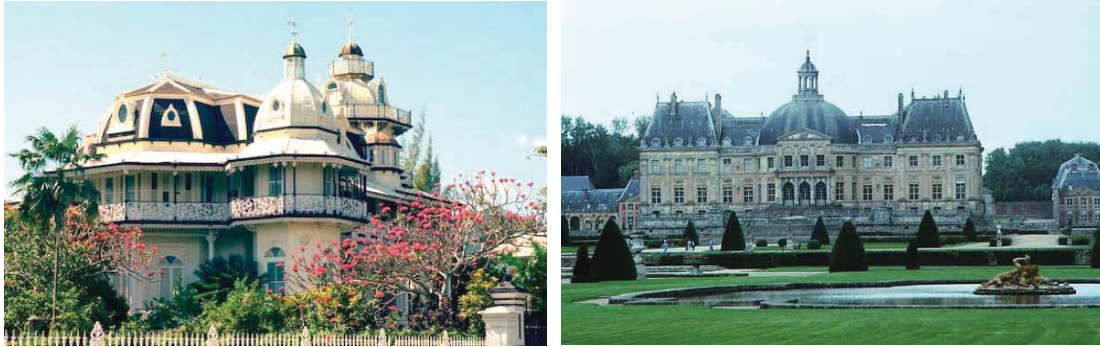


Figure 6. Ambard's House (left) and The Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte (right). The Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte is a baroque French chateau located in Maincy, French. Architectural works like this influence Ambard's house. By G. Maclean, 2011, *Residential*.

Finally, in 1904 Mrs. Prada commissioned 'Mille Fleurs' as a gift for her husband, Dr. Enrique Prada (Watterson, 1998). The house was designed by local architect George Brown; Dr. Prada also took a special interest in the design. The house, designed like an English country house, was very conservative compared to its neighbors.

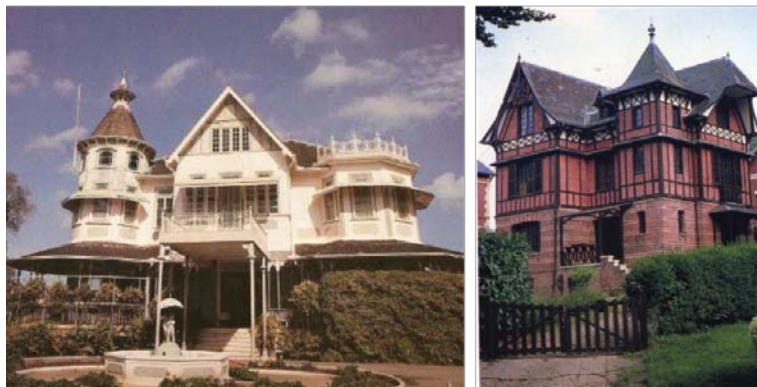


Figure 7. Milles Fleurs (left) and A villa in Forges-les-Eaux (right). The villa in Forges-les-Eaux, is designed in the French country house style that influenced Milles Fleurs. By G. Maclean, 2011, *Residential. Architecture in France 1800-1900*, 36-4.

The Boissière House

This agglomeration of ornate Euro-inspired mansions along Maraval Road was certainly a grand affair, and it was here, in 1904 that colored cocoa merchant Charles E.H. Boissière commissioned his statement piece the Boissière House (Watterson, 1998). Charles Boissière descended from an African slave and a rich French Creole planter who settled in Trinidad in the late 18th century. After acquiring wealth in the cocoa industry, Boissière traveled to England in the 1890s and observed the Grand Exposition in Britain. One of the features of the exhibition was the fashionable *Chinoiserie* artwork (Besson, 2011). *Chinoiserie* is a French term signifying “Chinese-esque”; it referred to the Chinese influence on European art and architectural designs at the time. Boissière recorded the Chinoiserie exhibition and returned to Trinidad with this inspiration. Along with his friend, builder Edward Bowen, he designed the Boissière house as a surprise for his wife, Alice (Besson, 2011). As a summary of his life, this house was an opportunity for Boissière to reflect his personal history, aspirations, local roots and travel abroad in his home.



Figure 8. The Boissière House. By L. Welcome, Jan 2010.

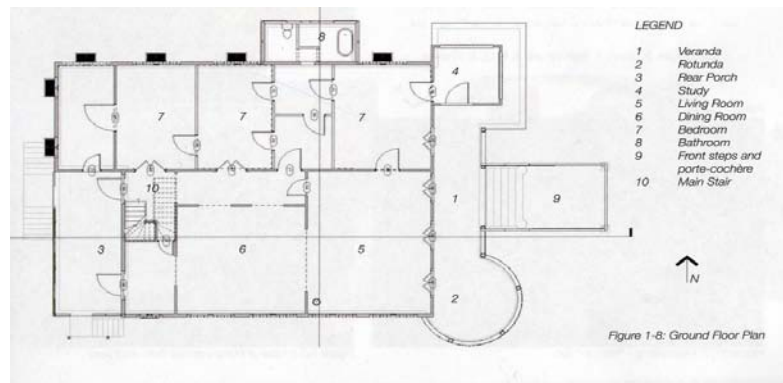


Figure 9. The plan of the Boissière House. By Cazabon & Ottley, 2011.

The house at No. 12 Queen's Park West, located at the southwest corner of the Savannah in New-Town Port-of-Spain, was modern for its time. Like other homes of the 1900s, the Boissière House possessed intricate fretwork, steep gables, complex roof forms with slate roofing, a central veranda, and cast iron fencing. However, the Boissière House combined these elements in a more picturesque and playful way than the others. For example, it was built using a technique called nogging, whereby a timber-studded frame was built, then in-filled with lime-cement and rubble, and finished off with a lime plaster. On the side façades of the house, the plasterwork was textured with aggregate and fashioned to resemble natural, cave-like, stone textures. Courses were scratched into the plasterwork to imitate a historical and authentic look. This façade treatment that imitated stone was not simply a fashionable addition; by imitating a more exclusive and expensive material counterpart, the status of the concrete- and its owner- became elevated.



Figure 10. Side façade of the Boissière House. In this photo some of the plasterwork is removed to show the use of nogging below. By L. Welcome, Jan 2010.

On the front façade, the concrete plaster was not altered to imitate stone but was instead left smooth and painted in colors that were meant to catch the eye and give a magical appeal to the house. The basic form of the house was a rectangle, with the street façade along one of the shorter sides of the rectangle. From the street façade, a study projected on the right side and a rotunda on the left side.

Between the rotunda and the protruding study was a porte-cochère, a porch-like structure, typical of 18th and 19th century mansions, that protected occupants from the elements as they dismounted the carriage. Above the porte-cochère loomed an exaggerated gabled dormer-window, which was one of the most defined components of the exterior image. The projecting volumes of varying shape, height and size brought great depth to the façade, giving it a sense of animation. All of these features were meant to draw an audience for admiration.

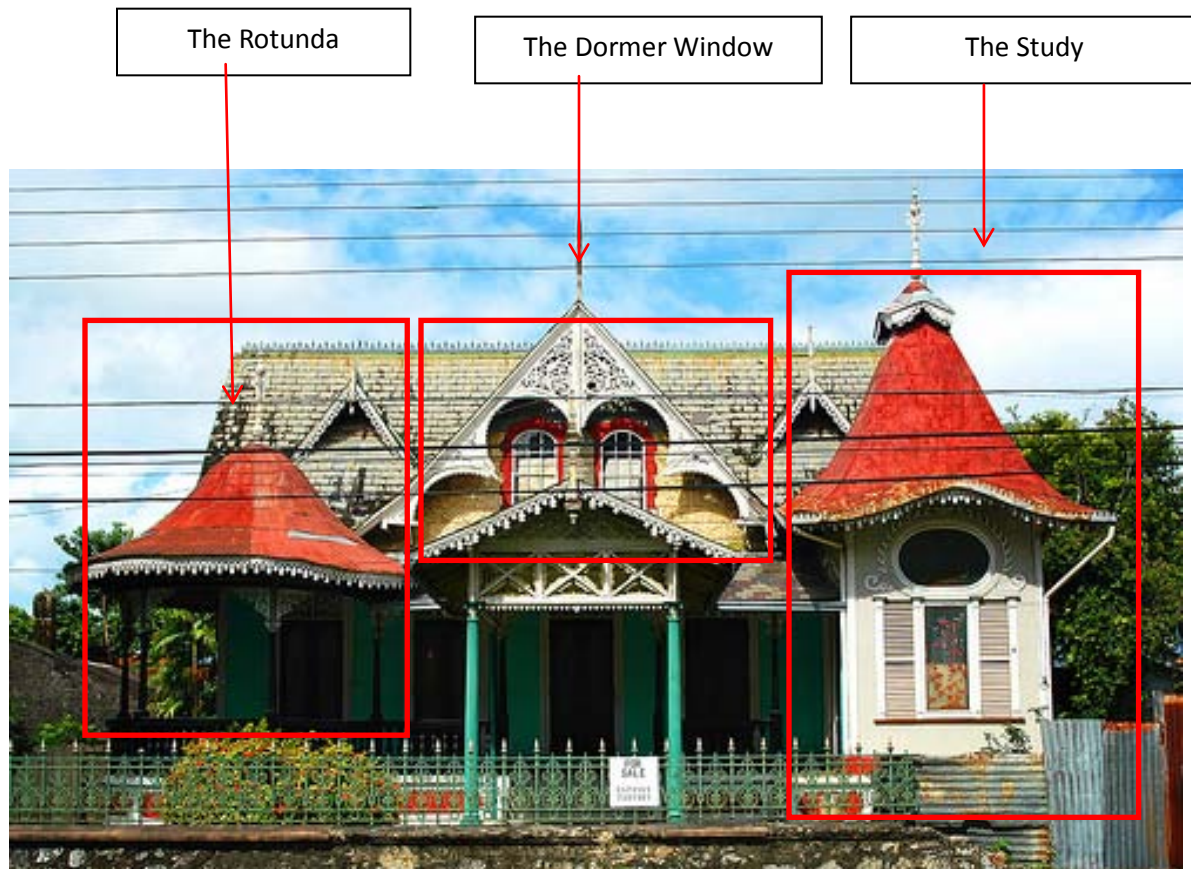


Figure 11. Front view of the Boissière House. By G.Maclean, 2011, *Residential*.

The main roof that capped the house was a steeply pitched gable form with wooden ridges running east to west and covered with green slate. The steep pitch of the roof accommodated an additional floor and cast-iron decorative crestings capped the ridge of the roof. Intersecting the main roof was a large dormer window; its rafters run north to south, perpendicular to the main roof. The large dormer window was flanked by smaller, non-functional, gabled roof projections on each side that added visual interest to the roof. The large dormer gable was decorated with fretwork; a decorative feature formed from intricately carving wood, using a jigsaw, to form a lacy pattern. The smaller dormer windows were also capped by lacy wood-work. The fretwork not only served as a decorative motif but also had practical functions; for example, it filtered harsh sunlight, thereby allowing a cooler interior with a soft

glow. The fretwork also created a magical lighting effect at night as it diffused the light of the lantern on the interior, creating a visual experience of twinkling lights on the exterior. The use of this fretwork was meant to directly reference a European heritage as it was popularized in Europe during the Victorian era and could be seen in works such as ‘Les Dunes’, a villa in Chatelallon-Plage, France (Lemoine, 1998).

Beneath the larger dormer was a porte-cochère; a feature of many late 18th and 19th century European mansions. The 14-foot wide porte-cochère had a functional aspect to protect one from the elements as they disembarked from a carriage ride and proceeded to enter the house. The porte-cochère was a symbol of class, implying the need for protection of the prestigious from the elements, a luxury that was not afforded to the servants. In the Boissière House the porte-cochère was reinterpreted to give it a lighter and daintier effect than traditional European houses. Heavy columns were replaced by thin fluted cast-iron posts. What would have been a dense architrave was instead a series of intricately carved, thin wood panels. The rafters that comprised the roof of the porte-cochère were exposed on the underside, and again, the rafters were capped by decorative wooden fretwork. All the features together contributed to a light and airy feel.

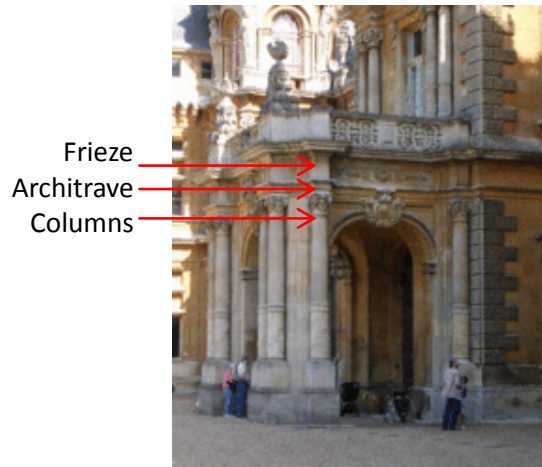


Figure 12a. Porte-cochère in a European context. Source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/471059/porte-cochere>



Figure 12b. Porte-cochère in a Trinidadian context. Source: Welcome, Jan 2013.

During this time, most of the land was owned by the Crown Colony. With the uncertainty of the time period of which they would have possession of the land, a resident would build his house supported off the ground on concrete blocks. The house did not touch the land and, subsequently, could be transported off the land as necessary. The use of a concrete foundation, with its implications of longevity, meant that one owned land, and, by extension, one had a certain economic level to afford the land. Therefore, the concrete base of the Boissière House was a status symbol. This message was further reinforced by the exaggeration of the depth of the base and the red decorative detailing placed against a white backdrop. The meticulous detailing of the base attracted attention and alerted the viewer that the ornate jewel, which was the Boissière House, was a permanent fixture in its landscape.

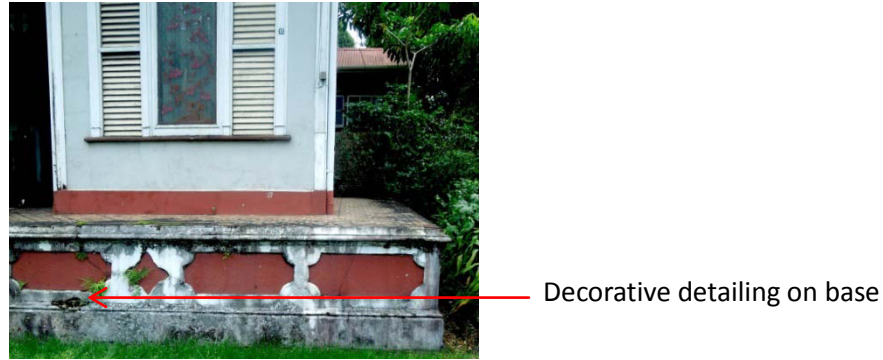


Figure 13. Base of the Boissière House. By L. Welcome, Jan 2013.

The veranda was placed at the front of the house, reflecting Trinidad’s Spanish and French heritage. The French and the Spanish had a preference for verandas located in the front, facing the street, because of their preference for public interaction. The stairs leading up to the veranda were made of large single slabs of marble imported from Italy. The floor was decorated with multi-colored, ceramic tiles from England with an ornate, geometric pattern.



Figure 14. Veranda with geometric floor tiles. By L. Welcome, Jan 2013.

The importation of fine, foreign materials from Europe was yet another way to set oneself apart from the average person. To cover the veranda, a shed roof supported by thin cast-iron columns was used. These columns were topped with decorative, floral, fretwork capitals, made

of wood, which were a reinterpretation of Classical language. The veranda and the rotunda located at its west side were enclosed by a concrete balustrade, painted black, of Classical influence. The rotunda and the projecting study were capped with pagoda-like roofs of sheet metal inspired by the *Chinoiserie* exhibits C.E.H Boissière visited in Europe. The apex of the roof was covered with a cast-iron finial reminiscent of art-nouveau finials. Overlapping the oversized dormer, these unique pagoda-like rooflines, flanked by mini gables, all back-dropped by the main east-west running gable, came together to create a complex and dynamic roof silhouette.

The doors and windows of the Boissière house presented another opportunity to add more decorative flare. At the front of the house there were four sets of double doors each of same height and width (9'6"x 4'). Each door had an inset, arched, frosted, glass panel engraved with art-nouveau inspired, decorative floral patterns. Around the doors were six-inch wide wooden moldings painted white to stand out against the natural wood palette of the doors. Above the doors were ventilation panels called 'fanlights' constructed with intricately carved wooden panels. There was a single, side-door that led to the protruding study; inset in this side door was a stained-glass panel painted with a floral motif also inspired by *Chinoiserie* artwork.



Figure 15. Main entry door with Art Nouveau detailing. By L. Welcome, Jan 2013.



Figure 16. Study door with Chinoiserie artwork. By L. Welcome, Jan 2013.

The typical windows of the house consisted of central double hung windows with frosted glass in a wooden sash. The glass was surrounded on both sides by jalousies (louvers). The glass and the jalousies were separated by wooden trim, painted red and fashioned to look like stone coursing. Below the sill was a wooden molding painted white. The window of the over-sized dormer was an inversed composition of the typical window of the house. In this window, the arched louvered panel was placed in the center, with arched glass window panels at its sides. Again, the wood trimming was painted red and imitated stone coursing.

On the front elevation, the study also had two signature windows. The first window, like the others, consisted of three vertical sections, a central stained glass panel with a similar Chinese inspired, floral motif, painted on it to match the motif on the door, and louvered panels on either side. The vertical panels were separated by wooden moldings painted white and carved

to look like engaged pilasters. Above this window was an oval shaped window of stained glass also decorated with a floral motif. The window was framed by a white molding above which were offset wooden, decorative eye-lash details. The curve of the eave of the pagoda-like roof that capped the study framed the oval window. The pagoda roof of the study and the oval window provided an interesting visual juxtaposition. The eave of the roof resembled the brim of a hat, and this metaphor was reinforced by the eyelash detailing added to the top of the oval window connoting an eye, that gave an anthropomorphous quality to the protruding study volume. The hat reflected another status-reinforcing symbol of the era. Diana Crane theorized that until the 1960s, hats were the most important article of clothing to indicate social distinction among men in Europe and North America (Crane, 2000). According to Crane, hats were less expensive than other clothing articles of distinction, so they provided the ideal opportunity for visually blurring traditional class boundaries. Certain hats became associated with specific social strata, thereby making hats an important marker of class boundaries. This meant, according to Crane, that men could use hats to claim and maintain social status. The steep pagoda-like roof of the study with its hat-like image functioned in a similar way to the hat worn by men of the 19th and early 20th century. It is a timeless indicator of class and distinction that sat on the head of the study volume.

At the front of the property was a short fence that allowed visual connectivity from the veranda to the Savannah. However, it demarcated boundary, acting as a physical and visual division between the interior elite and exterior “others”. The fence consisted of a stone-faced, three-foot high wall that was two feet wide, the top of which had a beveled edge. Running the length of the wall, above the layer of stone, was a layer of ornate cast iron work approximately three feet high. The iron-work was light and transparent and contrasted with the heavy, solid

stone wall. At the end of the fence were two six-foot high plastered piers, topped with capitals that served to support the grand double cast iron gates.

Upon examining all of the disparate features of home exterior, it becomes evident that this playful collage-like work cannot be tied to any specific style. There were references to the growing movements in Europe that represented renewed appreciation for the decorative arts. Two of the most influential were Arts and Crafts in Great Britain and Art Nouveau in France. The Arts and Crafts movement combined finely crafted simple forms with applied decorative details. Art Nouveau deviated from the classical idea of ornament as an applied component. Instead, the style embedded a nature-inspired ornament within the limits of the structure so that it became an essential part of the design. There were also references to High Victorian and Oriental precedents in the Boissière House. This house is described as elegant because it was the culmination of a marriage between local building techniques and European architectural influences. It is thus a fine exemplar of the early 20th century, Trinidadian house condition that sought to embody class status and recognition. Though it is one of the smallest of the houses that line the Savannah, it sought to compensate through ornamentation. No surface of the house was left unadorned, and it married these different accents to create a fanciful showpiece, which vied for attention on the grand stage of competing mansions. Practical components were fashioned to become ornate. For example, simple materials such as wood and concrete were textured and transformed to imitate extravagant stone. Color was used in a strategic manner to draw the eye to specific details. All elements were combined in an intelligent way such that they complemented each other, leaving new details to be discovered with every glance.

Although these five mansions were constructed in the same year, they differ radically from a stylistic perspective. John Newel Lewis, in discussing the reason for the occurrence of

these diverse hybridized mansions, each grander than the next, developed the 'Queen of the Bands' theory (Lewis, 1983). Carnival was introduced to Trinidad in 1785 with the arrival of the French Creoles. The festivities include the parade of various bands throughout the street, consisting of costumed revelers. Each band had a Queen, a person dressed in an extravagant costume, leading the band to dazzle spectators. The various 'Queens of the Band' sought to be more magnificent than the next as they were placed against each other in competition on a single stage. They were judged according to craftsmanship, color and originality. According to Lewis, it is the spirit of the Queens of the Bands that is contained in the mansions around the Savannah. Each mansion competed against the other in terms of craftsmanship, décor and originality for the title of most magnificent on the Savannah stage.

Influence of the Nouveau Bourgeoisie Mansions

As opposed to the isolated plantations on the outskirts, these Grand mansions allowed the elite an opportunity to flaunt their wealth to an audience. The audience did not only consist of elite competitors but also of an emerging stratum of middle-class coloreds and blacks aspiring to obtain a similar status. People of all classes traveled everyday along the Maraval Road and partook in the leisure activities that occurred in the Savannah. Also, the then working-class neighborhoods of Woodbrook and Belmont were located in close proximity to the Savannah. As this middle-class group came in contact with the ostentatious mansions, they became enthralled by their mesmerizing grandeur. As a result, their stylistic influences extended beyond the homes of the nouveau bourgeois to the homes of the humble as the middle-class emulated aspects of the mansions in their own houses.

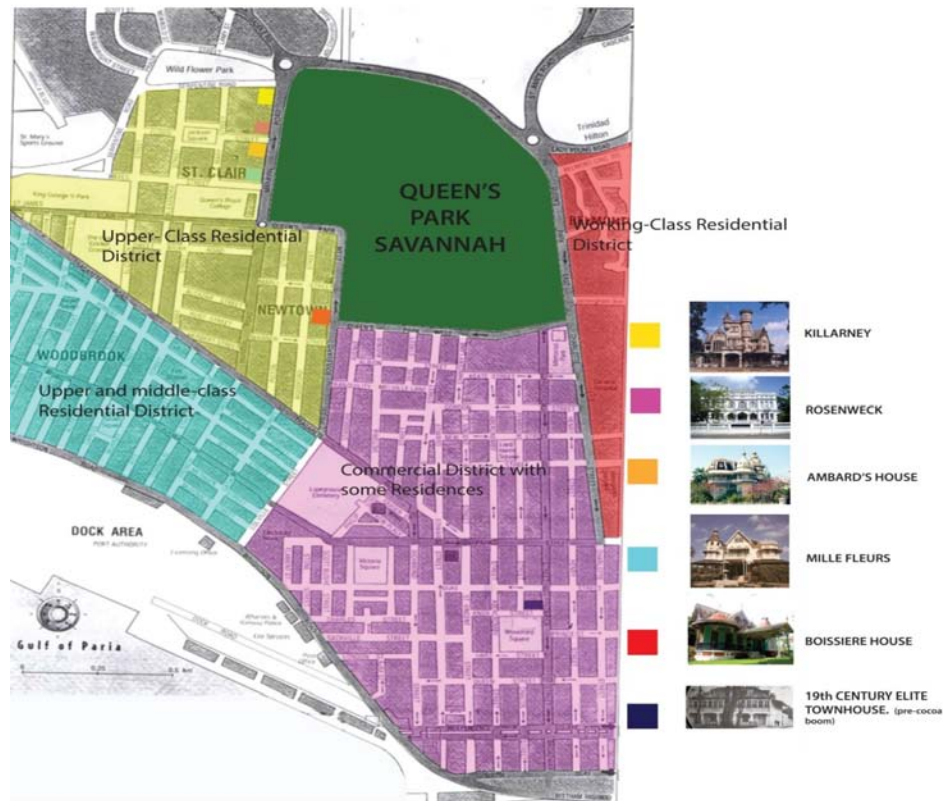


Figure 17. Map of Port of Spain showing the class distribution. By L. Welcome, 2012.

After emancipation, the middle class expanded due to newly liberated, ambitious coloreds and a few blacks rose up the social ladder through their concerted efforts to become educated (Brereton, 1981). They did not have the advantage of skin color like the white creoles nor did they have a legacy of wealthy slave-owning ancestors as did the French creole coloreds. If these newly liberated people wanted to attain respectability, it was to be self-made. Many ex-slaves moved to Port-of-Spain and other urban areas where schools were more readily available so that their children could be educated. The education system developed in Trinidad after 1838 offered an escape from “the harshly restrictive world of the manual laborer” (Brereton, 1981). By 1870, an Education Ordinance was passed that set up a dual education system of state-aided denominational schools existing side by side with government schools in every ward of Trinidad (Brereton, 1981). Both types of schools at the elementary level were open to any child

regardless of race, wealth, or religion. Black children, especially in the urban areas, obtained an education, thereby allowing them to rise above wage labor jobs to become artisans, small shopkeepers, minor civil servants, and store assistants, and achieving a lower middle-class economic status. While secondary school education remained an institution exclusively for the upper-middle class and the elite, there was one opportunity for children of the lower economic status to attend this institution. Every year, the secondary schools had an 'exhibition' whereby a scholarship was offered to a lower-income male from the government-funded or government-aided primary schools. This scholarship system opened up secondary school educational opportunities to a small number of black and colored males of lower-income families. This education offered them the opportunity to vie for white-collared jobs such as teaching, journalism, the civil service, as well as minor positions in business such as sales clerks within commercial cocoa stores. The white-collar jobs also reflected western-cultural values and norms and, hence, helped them gain the respectability of their former masters.

With their new jobs, the middle- and lower-economic status men acquired property upon which to build their homes. However, they began to wonder what their houses should look like. While the white-collar jobs did not afford them much disposable income to build the elaborate mansions of the elite, it was also no longer sufficient to live in a simple chattel house if they wanted the respect of the socialites that lived around the Grand Savannah. Thus, the newly liberated men had to find a new aesthetic that would signal their new position in society.

In analyzing the houses of the elite, the men deciphered that the things that made these houses special, the reason they caught your attention and stood out among all others, was the attention the designer paid to ornate details. Thus, it was the ornamentation that took the house from the realm of the ordinary and transported it to the realm of the fanciful and grand. While

middle-income families could not build expansive houses of stone with turrets, they could, however, emulate the ideas of class and beauty reflected in the elite mansions on a smaller scale. To design these houses, they borrowed from architectural expression of the elite to create culturally conscious designs mimetic of grander urban houses like the Boissière House. The typical house of the urban middle-class was a one-story, wooden dwelling with a simple, thin, rectangular form within the dense urban fabric. At the front of these houses was usually a veranda and porte-cochère directly referencing those found in the grander mansions. With the simplicity in form, it was the detailed accents that brought complexity and charm to the house. Decorative wooden fretwork, originally promoted by Scottish architect George Brown, became a prominent stylistic trend and one of the most commonly used forms of ornamentation of the middle-class house.

George Brown's most important contribution to Trinidadian architecture was his use of standardized prefabricate in the realm of residential architecture. He standardized and mass-produced doors, windows, railings, jalousies, window units, crestings, finials, balustrades, cornices, skirtings, and fretwork barge boards (Lewis, 1983). These functional components were given an aesthetic quality so they would have both practical and ornamental functions. Under the direction of George Brown, many workshops opened in the Port of Spain area and mass amounts of standardized building components were prefabricated. With the invention of the jigsaw in 1865, the process of making intricate fretwork out of wood was revolutionized; as a result, these workshops produced miles of fretwork (Besson, 2011). The mass production of these standardized building components meant one important thing; members of the middle-class could now afford designed components that brought an aesthetic quality to their practical needs. These functional, yet decorative features soon became essential to the composition of the typical

residential house, eventually becoming institutionalized. The term ‘Gingerbread house’ was coined to describe these houses. The fretwork, crestings, finials, cornices, and skirtings together decorated the simply designed house, providing a sense of respectability that its owner craved. When referring to the Gingerbread house, Lewis described it as “a unique combination of decoration and practicality” (1983, p. 201). Though these houses were small in scale, their intricate detailing made their stature un-mistakable.

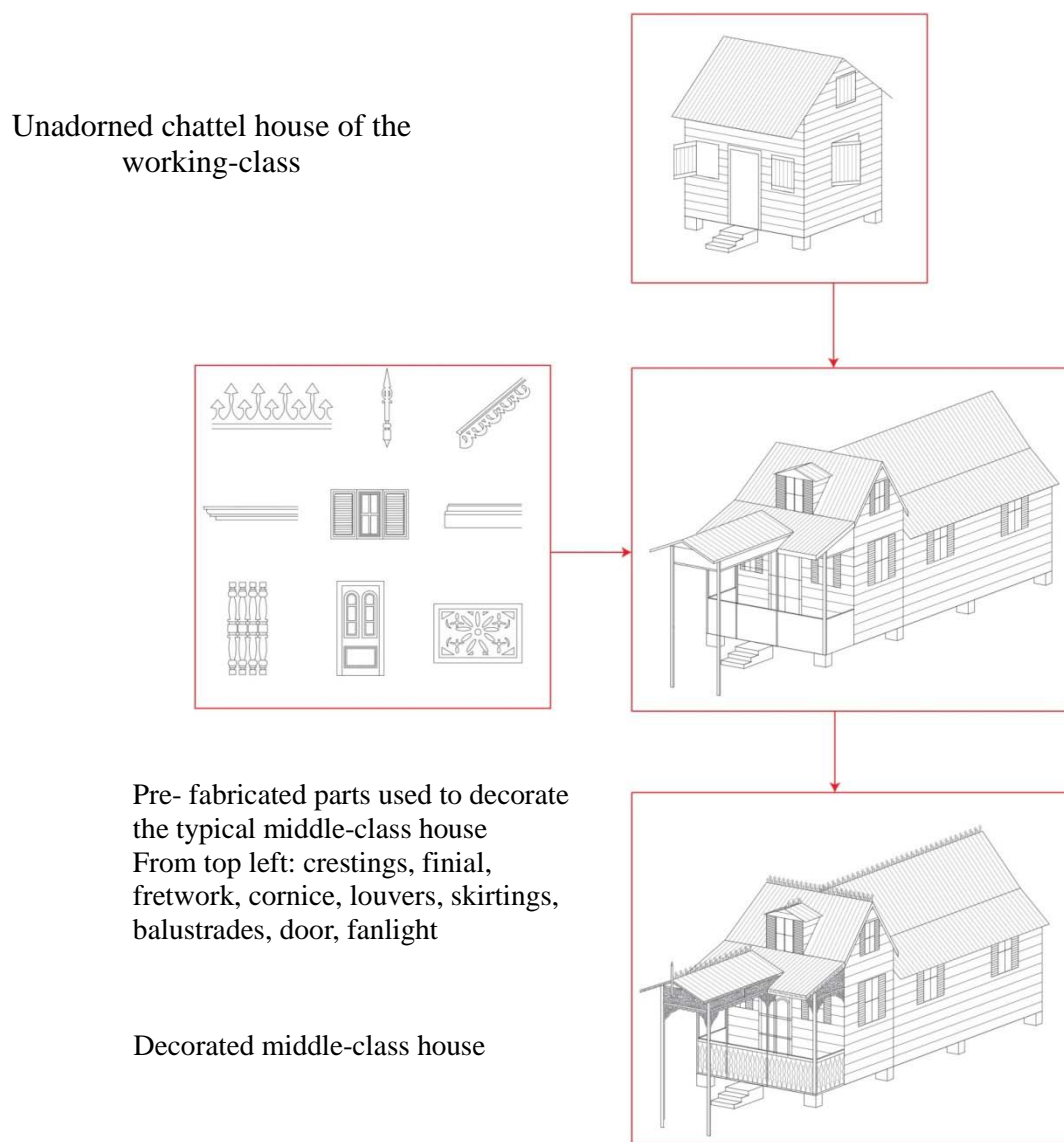


Figure 18. Diagram showing how the use of ornament transformed the middle-class house. By L. Welcome.



Figure 19. Typical early 20th century middle-class houses. By L. Welcome, Jan, 2013.

Although the houses of different class levels, at the beginning of the 20th century, were visually different, they were of one architectural lineage. The influence was a cultural one rather than a purely stylistic one. The houses across economic class levels all borrowed from external precedents, but combined them with local traditions and ornamentation to transform them from the realm of the banal to the realm of the respectable and enviable. Each house shared in a common goal - to create an artifact that spoke of its owner's elevating position as they strove to differentiate themselves in the growing classist and capitalist environment that was early 20th century Trinidad.

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