



## The Great Indoors

Architectural theorists have from time to time used the idea of the primordial hut - sometimes referred to as Adam's hut - as a mythical foundation-stone for their profession's genesis and intellectual pedigree. This hypothetical edifice and its dynastic legacy has allowed architects to position themselves at the epicentre of philosophical discourses on nature, art, technology, humankind and society. Never have so many - or so big - words been lavished on such a humble construct of wood and void.

Regarded as the seminal, definitive and first-ever man-made dwelling (after natural abodes such as caves) the primordial hut is one of the most basic architectural units imaginable: four tree trunks for columns, with some kind of roof formed above, and, in more sophisticated models, walls around the sides. In one single simple physical format this design provides the basics of a house: physical shelter from the elements, security from humans or predatory animals, and privacy. (To this architectural construct, the resident needs only add their own sense of identity, and personal possessions, to call it 'home'.) Strictly speaking, a lone Adam in the biblical Garden of Eden might not, as it happens, require much privacy

or security, since there were no other inhabitants in the Garden, at the time of his creation, other than animals, who were then all vegetarian.

But we can fast-forward the story from Adam (or whatever human origin we choose) to imagine any primitive human society, where for such to be called a society, there must be some kinds of rules about who is related to whom, who may sleep under the same roof as whom, and who is allowed to see who else's bodies naked. At this point we can recognise how the basic social functions of a house - in addition to the physical ones of climate control and keeping out carnivorous creatures - are satisfied in the physical form of a hut.

In such kind of a wooden hut, on an allotment out on the edge of a northern town, we find Marc Simian, shipwrecked mariner and honorary Frenchman, finding himself alive, well and safe in his newly adopted home.

The hut is rather spartan - it was not, after all, intended for living in. It has a single chair for sitting on; a box that acts as a table; a collection of tools and various other objects, including a mug, some plant pots and some rags. On the wall there are pinned some sheets of paper with lines and symbols, and an iconic image of a female human in a florid landscape.

### A new sub-urban life

Like any shipwrecked individual, Marc has several psychological adjustments to make. He has to overcome the trauma of the destruction of his ship

and the loss of his companions; to come to terms with having survived the wreck (and, as it happens, a hazardous first encounter with the natives); and now faces life alone in a possibly hostile foreign environment. From having been part of a civilised world on board *Le Gaspard* - where he is accustomed to receiving good food and lodging in return for a fair day's work as the ship's Monkey - our hero the suave Simian is now facing a life of sub-urban subsistence.

A 'hand-to-mouth', subsistence existence is one sometimes regarded as having a noble, romantic quality - at least by those who are not forced to adopt it as a means of actually subsisting. True, it has a raw simplicity about it, that makes life seem perhaps immediately real and precariously vital in a way that is often masked in modern societies: where abstract concepts such as 'residence', 'consumption' and 'calorific intake' seem to be lifestyle choices rather than animal necessities; where life as a person is that of a cultural, political, economic and social animal, rather than a merely biological one; where artificial things like money and credit exist and flow invisibly from place to place, only occasionally showing up as paper sheets or metal coins in the hand; and where the natural world hardly ever makes an intrusion, other than as an invited landscape of consumption.

In short, the modern human, used to being sheltered against extremes of the weather, seasons, even night and day, could easily imagine living a satisfying human life in a completely human-made environment (like a cosy room, full of books, music, computers,

television, toaster, microwave and minibar) compared with inhabiting a completely wild environment, without any of these human conveniences (nothing for company but the wind, rocks and mud, perennially soggy vegetation, cold, dark, shadows smelling of the breath of wild beasts). In other words, if one had to trade one habitat for the other, many would gladly choose the indoors and lose the outdoors.

After the human company and creature comforts of his ship, Marc is used to inhabiting a complex, completely man-made, socially constructed indoor world, but he now finds himself in the most limited indoor abode imaginable - a rude wooden hut, with no bed, no minibar and definitely no room service. Of course, it is better than nothing; but sooner or later he will have to venture out again, for some supplies. After all, he is now getting hungry - and craving a cigarette.

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