

# CASA MANILA

Welcome to Casa Manila. The Casa Manila (Manila House) is a colonial lifestyle museum, which features the domestic life of the upper class in 19th Century Philippines. Built from 1981 to 1983, facade of the structure was inspired from a house that once stood at Japoneños street in the Chinese district of Binondo in the 1850s. In that area, the ground floor of the house is rented out to shops, so it is here in Casa Manila.

The walls of the ground floor are made of adobe or volcanic tuff which was used as the main building material in the colony during the late 16th to late 19th century. This is the same material used to build the walls of Intramuros. The upper floors that serves as the living quarters, are made of wood. They also overhang and extend outward. These features make the house resilient against earthquakes. They also help shade pedestrians during the day. Inside, the painted walls, carved traceries, crystal chandeliers, Chinese ceramics and gilded furniture show the luxury of that era.

Casa Manila is furnished with local and imported antique pieces from the Intramuros Administration Complex, a neighborhood of a total of nine period houses constructed in the 1980s, featuring the various architectural styles for homes in colonial Philippines.

photo by Ali Ongsingco



INTRAMUROS  
ADMINISTRATION

[intramuros.gov.ph](http://intramuros.gov.ph)

## GROUND FLOOR

## SECOND FLOOR

## THIRD FLOOR



### 1 ZAGUAN & PATIO

It is through the zaguan that carriages entered, dropping off passengers by the stairs which lead to the entresuelo. Zaguán is an Arabic word meaning "corridor," and is paved with granite known locally as *piedra china* or Chinese stones. The granite were originally ballasts from junks sold to locals by Chinese merchants. The fountain, meanwhile, is a feature that appeared after running water was introduced to Manila in 1882.

### 2 ENTRESUELO

Due to merciless flooding common in Manila until now, the ground floor of residences were usually elevated. This elevated floor is known as the entresuelo, hence its root word *entre* and *suelo*, which literally means *between floors*. The entresuelo features various rooms and halls, including bed chambers for guests or unmarried extended relatives, and the office of the master of the house.

### 3 DESPACHO

Upper class wealth during the colonial era was mostly sourced from revenue generated by mercantile business or provincial estates known locally as *haciendas*. The office, or *despacho*, served as the area where the master of the house conducted daily business transactions relevant to his occupation.

### 4 CUARTOS

The cuartos or rooms at the entresuelo level were usually occupied by the unmarried members of the extended family, or visiting guests.

### 5 CAIDA

The family would usually use this anteroom for parlor games, entertaining guests, or snacks.

### 6 SALA

Very important guests were received in the *sala*. This room therefore displays the finest furniture in the house, showing off the family's opulence and status. Afternoon soirees, known as *tertulias*, and traditional dance parties were held here. *Tertulias* had the young ladies of the household play music or sing. Other times, the elders would discuss the latest in politics, business, and fashion.

### 7 ORATORIO

The household would gather in this prayer room to pray the angelus or the rosary. Religious images, known as *santos*, especially if made of ivory, were important status symbols. Processional images, which were brought out for processions on *carrozas* or floats are kept in this room inside their respective *urnas* or protective cases.

### 8 BLUE ROOM

The wall paintings in this room were taken from Pompeian motifs which influenced the neo-classical style. This style began in Europe during the late 18th Century and influenced Philippine art and architecture from the early 19th Century onwards. A door links the Blue Room to the Cuarto Principal.

### 9 CUARTO PRINCIPAL

The Cuarto Principal was the bedchamber of the master of the house. It features some of the finest furniture, including an *aparador de tres lunas* (armoire with three sections), a *tremor* (dresser with swinging full-length mirror), and a marble *lavabo* (wash stand). Local customs dictated that, as an act of hospitality, the master of the house would offer his room to important guests staying overnight.

### 10 COMEDOR

The walls of the dining room were often lined with *plateras* (sideboards) to display the family's porcelain, silver and glassware. Ceramic plates often decorated the walls.

Except for the frame, the dining table is made from a single plank of narra wood.

The *punkah*, a manually operated ceiling fan, must have been brought from India during the British occupation of 1762. The *punkah* not only cooled the dining room; it also shooed the flies away.

### 11 COCINA

The kitchen is loaded with functional features. The stovetop is made of ash and water. The *paminggalan* (cupboard) was used to store preserves and leftovers. A can of kerosene was sometimes placed under each leg to prevent ants from going up. Protruding outside the window was *banggera* where dishes were washed and dried upside-down on wooden spikes.

### 12 LETRINA

The letrina is good for two and simulates a late 19th century toilet found in the affluent homes. This was a novel facility when indoor plumbing was still new. Flushing meant throwing large buckets of water down the tubes, which were connected to the nearest river.

### 13 BAÑO

The bathroom contains two large stoneware tubs. The master would sit in the tub while servants poured water. The tubs featured here are imported Ming Dynasty stoneware pieces.

### 14 AZOTEA

The azotea serves many purposes. The aljibe or water cistern that supplies water to the household is located here. Any activity requiring large amounts of water was done near the *aljibe*. Laundry, gardening, as well as butchering pigs or chickens for family meals were done in the azotea. One might have a well, instead of the *aljibe*.

Rainwater from the roof gutters was collected through the stone column -- which led to the filter of charcoal, gravel and sand -- and then to the cistern.

Various herbs used for cooking are grown in the azotea. For instance, leaves of the *tanlad* or lemon grass were used for roast pig and boiled chicken or *sinigang*. *Pandan*, a type of palm, sweetens the aroma of boiled rice.

Existing plans of late 19th century Manila houses mostly had bathrooms. Otherwise, people may have bathed on the azotea as practiced in the countryside.