Village artisan’s self-built house

Pedro Vizcarra’s house, Arequipa, Peru, provides a measure of how far, given the opportunity, one man’s skill and resource will reach in housing his family.

This is a house in a small, scattered village near Arequipa, in the valley of the River Chilli in Southern Peru. It has been built over the past 32 years by the owner and occupier, Señor Pedro Vizcarra, a local house-builder, working on his own as he always does.

The site was a sandy slope that needed levelling before building could start. His wife helped him build the first rooms in 1931 when he had a job in a factory. In those days he would work on the house from 4 a.m. until he left for the factory, and again when he came home until it got dark, carrying stone for the foundations and walls on his back one mile to the site. The first rooms took a year to complete.

The white-plastered roof (techo forrado) of the house is traditional to this part of Peru, where rains are very moderate. Señor Vizcarra reckons that he has spent altogether five years building the house; it is the only property he owns.
The John Turner Archive:
Village artisan’s self-built house
Dwelling resources in South America, Architectural Design 8, August 1963

Right: interior views of living-room roof and walls

Left: detail sketch of constructional system

Key: 1. horizontal mud rendering  2. slat wood down to bamboo  3. return of acacia trunk  4. stone and mud wall