



**A shiny Coat for Climate-  
Crisis Architecture**  
Kurt Hollander

## A SHINY COAT FOR CLIMATE- CRISIS ARCHITECTURE

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Qubidó is an urban center located smack in the middle of Colombia's largest rainforest, alongside the mighty Atrato River. Due to this geography, the rainy season lasts year-round, the city has the highest amount of rainfall of any city in the world of its size, and it is considered the wettest place in the world. The city also averages around 90 °F throughout the year, which heats up the water in the air and makes the city feel like a sauna on most days. The city's extreme weather is a force to be reckoned with and plays an essential role in the local culture and the city's architecture.



Traditional indigenous homes in the region were elevated, round, wall-less constructions with high conical roofs made from palm leaves and with floors made with local bamboo cane, designed to allow the wind to circulate freely in order to refresh the interior. The Afro-Colombian communities,

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the vast majority of the city's population, used the same construction materials as the indigenous communities but opted for mostly rectangular dwellings, adding outer and inner walls and doors to their dwellings. The walls of their homes were usually whitened by applying liyme or gympsumgypsum to the outer surface as a way to reflect the sun's rays and to keep the interior cooler. Over time, migrations of people from outside the rainforest brought bricks, concrete and metal into the city, which led to more conventionally designed urban constructions.



All of these types of constructions coexist in Quibdó today, although the modern forms of



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constructions have mostly displaced the older, more traditional architectures from the center of the city. Wooden houses have been prohibited since the 1960s, due in large part to the problem of fires, but they are still among the most common in the informal architecture of the marginal zones of the city.



Within Quibdó, wood and bamboo cane have mostly been substituted by cement blocks and bricks, while palm leaves have been replaced by zinc roofs. Zinc or galvanized steel roofs, introduced into the city in the late 19th century, were the first modern architectural element to be incorporated into local architecture. Wire screens for the doors and windows, which kept disease-spreading mosquitos out, also became an essential element of 'modern' constructions, adding a metallic shine.

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Besides protecting constructions from the rain, shiny metal became a status symbol, one that immediately and from a distance distinguished the social level of the inhabitants from a distance.



In the past few years, an even more modern, shinier element has come to define Quibdó's cityscape, distinguishing it from all other Colombian cities and giving it an extra sheen of modernity. Self-adhesive asphalt with an aluminum foil surface, imported from China, is the latest building material to make its mark on the urban landscape. This material is designed to be moisture-proof, air tight, and UV solar ultraviolet light and abrasion-resistant, while providing excellent heat insulation.



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(reflecting more than 90% of radiant heat).



This self-adhesive asphalt is easy to install and is an excellent sealant that conforms to any surface. Made with elastomeric polymers and fiberglass, this product is quite elastic, flexible and durable, resistant to traction and weathering, and it can withstand sudden changes in temperature and can keep the temperature of the exposed surfaces and inner spaces within comfortable limits.

Although marketed as insulation and protection for rooftops, these rolls of aluminum have been repurposed in Quibdó to protect the entire whole concrete and brick walls of buildings from the ravages of a very extreme climate. With its resistance to extreme heat and high levels of precipitation, and due to its low cost and easy application, this shiny coat of aluminum might very

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will become the go-to solution for climate-crisis architecture of the future.

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