

## **Sustainable Traditional Housing in Cyprus**

Traditional houses in Cyprus reflect the island's rich cultural heritage, blending elements of ancient architecture with practical solutions suited to the local environment. These houses were primarily built using natural materials such as stone, mudbrick (adobe), and wood, chosen for their durability and availability. The designs were functional and adapted to the local climate, with a focus on simplicity and efficiency. Below is an overview of the features and characteristics of traditional Cypriot houses:

### **1. Building Materials**

**Stone:** Stone, especially the local limestone, was widely used in the construction of walls, foundations, and roofs. It provided insulation and was easily accessible.

**Mudbrick (Plithari):** This was a mix of clay and straw, used in the construction of walls. It was a cost-effective and widely used material in rural areas.

**Wood:** Wooden beams, doors, and window frames were often used, with wood being sourced from local trees like olives and oaks.

**Reeds and Thatch:** In rural homes, roofs were often covered with reeds or thatch. These materials helped regulate indoor temperatures, keeping homes cool in the hot summer months and warm in the winter.

### **2. Architectural Layout**

Traditional Cypriot houses were designed to be practical and functional, with spaces allocated for various needs:

**The Central Room (Dihoro):** This was often the largest room in the house, serving multiple functions as a living room, dining area, and bedroom. It usually had a vaulted ceiling supported by arches.

**Kitchen (Mageiriko):** A small kitchen was often located next to the main living area, where food was prepared. It typically had a stone washbasin for cleaning utensils and other kitchen tools.

Storerooms (Tjeleri or Sospito): These were used to store food supplies such as flour, oil, and olives. They were often located near the kitchen.

Stable: Many rural homes had a stable where animals were kept, which was crucial for sustaining the household. This space was typically attached to the house.

Bathing Area: Some homes included a small room for bathing, with a stone basin used for washing clothes or bathing.

### 3. Roofs

Roofs were traditionally made from materials that could keep homes cool in the summer heat. In rural areas, reeds and wooden beams were commonly used. In wealthier homes, tiles or wooden shingles were more common.

### 4. Interior Design

Decorative Elements: Interiors were often decorated with locally made crafts, such as carved wooden furniture, handwoven textiles, and ceramic items. The walls were sometimes adorned with framed family photos, traditional religious icons, or handmade crafts.

Furniture: Homes featured simple, functional furniture. Beds were often iron or wood-framed, with decorative elements like intricate carvings. Chests and wardrobes were also common, used for storing clothes and valuables.

Souvantza: A gypsum decoration on the ceiling, featuring carved, floral, or geometric designs, was a hallmark of Cypriot folk architecture.

### 5. The "Helios" (Sunroom)

In many traditional homes, there was a space called the "helios" or sunroom, which was open to the courtyard. This room took advantage of the island's abundant sunshine, providing a warm, airy space for relaxation and socializing.

### 6. Courtyard and Outdoor Spaces

**Courtyards:** Many traditional houses had a central courtyard that served as a communal area. The courtyard was used for everyday activities like cooking, washing, and social gatherings.

**Oven:** A traditional outdoor oven, essential for preparing Cypriot dishes like kleftiko and roasted meats, was often located in the courtyard. It was a vital part of rural homes, as it provided a source of heat and was used for communal meals.

## 7. Two-Story Homes

In some cases, particularly in larger homes, the structure was two stories. The ground floor was called katoi (lower floor), and the first floor was referred to as anoi (upper floor). The second story often had larger rooms for sleeping and storage, while the lower floor served more functional purposes like cooking and working.

## 8. Preservation of Traditional Houses

Many of the traditional houses in Cyprus have been preserved as part of the country's cultural heritage. The government has designated these houses as protected buildings, and efforts have been made to maintain their original architectural features. Some of these homes have been restored and are now open to the public or serve as museums, allowing visitors to experience traditional Cypriot life.

In summary, traditional Cypriot houses are a testament to the island's rich cultural and architectural heritage. They are characterized by the use of local materials, functional layouts, and simple yet beautiful decorative elements, all adapted to the needs of the people and the local environment.

Traditional houses in Cyprus reflect the island's rich history and diverse cultural influences, combining Greek, Turkish, Venetian, and Byzantine architectural styles. These homes often feature distinctive characteristics

adapted to the Mediterranean climate. Here are some key features of traditional Cypriot houses:

#### ### 1. **\*\*Stone Construction\*\***

Traditional houses in Cyprus are typically built using local limestone or sandstone. The thick stone walls help keep the interiors cool during the hot summers and warm during the cooler winters. In some rural areas, stone houses have been constructed for centuries, and their durability has made them a lasting feature of Cypriot architecture.

#### ### 2. **\*\*Tile Roofs\*\***

Many traditional Cypriot homes feature pitched roofs covered with terracotta tiles. The red or orange tiles are characteristic of the Mediterranean region and help with rainwater drainage while providing insulation against the heat.

#### ### 3. **\*\*Courtyards\*\***

A central courtyard is a common feature in many traditional Cypriot homes, serving as a space for daily activities and family gatherings. The courtyard is often surrounded by rooms that open into it, and it may feature a garden, small fountain, or other elements that promote outdoor living. This design helps protect privacy while encouraging interaction with nature.

#### ### 4. **\*\*Wooden Elements\*\***

Wooden beams are a typical feature, especially in the ceilings. The timber used is often pine or oak, and the exposed beams add to the rustic charm. Wooden doors and window shutters are also common, with many homes using traditional craftsmanship.

#### ### 5. **\*\*Arched Windows and Doors\*\***

Many traditional homes in Cyprus have arched windows and doors, which were designed to provide ventilation and allow air to circulate naturally. This feature also adds an aesthetic element that blends the Mediterranean influences with local Cypriot tastes.

#### ### 6. **\*\*Interior Details\*\***

Inside, the walls are often thick, and the floors may be made of stone, ceramic tiles, or wood. Traditional furniture is usually wooden, with simple but sturdy designs. Many homes also feature fireplaces, as they are essential for warmth during the cooler months.

#### ### 7. **\*\*Color and Decoration\*\***

The homes are often painted in earthy tones, with colors like white, cream, and ochre being common. This gives the homes a harmonious look that blends with the natural surroundings. Decorative elements like wrought iron railings, wooden shutters, and mosaic tiles are common in the design.

#### ### 8. **\*\*Rural and Urban Variations\*\***

- **\*\*Rural Homes\*\***: In villages, homes are more likely to be large stone-built houses with several rooms. The roof may be flat or have a slight pitch, depending on the region. There is often an emphasis on agricultural functionality, with space for livestock or crops.
- **\*\*Urban Homes\*\***: In cities like Nicosia and Limassol, traditional houses often feature narrow façades but are deep and spacious inside, with courtyards and gardens in the rear. These homes may have been influenced by Venetian or Ottoman architecture.

#### ### 9. **\*\*Adaptation to Climate\*\***

The design of Cypriot homes is closely linked to the island's climate. Many homes feature overhangs, shutters, and pergolas to shield from the intense

sun, while allowing air to flow through the interior spaces. The natural materials used in construction also help regulate indoor temperatures.

### ### 10. \*\*Cultural Influence\*\*

Throughout history, Cyprus has seen many different civilizations, including the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Venetians, and Ottomans. Each of these cultures has left an imprint on the architecture, resulting in a variety of styles. For instance, Venetian-style features like large windows with shutters can be found in towns and cities, while more modest Turkish Cypriot homes may feature courtyards and compact spaces.

Traditional houses in Cyprus represent a blend of cultural history, practical design, and adaptation to the natural environment. Today, many of these homes are preserved as part of the country's heritage, while others have been modernized for contemporary living.