

## Home Sweet Home

(by Anton Gautama)

I first became fascinated by the complexity of the home as I observed rows and rows of old Dutch colonial structures, while working on my first book, *Pabean Passage*. These old colonial structures showed a distinct East-Indies architecture, an adaptation of European architecture to the tropical climate of Indonesia, which gained its popularity in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Growing up in two major cities contributed a lot to this project. Born in Makassar, I also live in Surabaya for the most part of my life. What makes this project special is that I tried to capture those places from my experiences of growing up in the two cities.

Built in the early 1900s by Chinese immigrants and based on a European design, these buildings show distinct East-Indies characteristics on the outside, while being infused with an assimilation of Chinese and Indonesian culture.

As I entered those houses, I felt the air of familiarity, a connection with the harmonious combination of two distinctive cultures that I was brought up under. Born as a third-generation Chinese-Indonesian, I was raised under the influence of the Chinese culture that my grandparents brought from the old world, while at the same time being schooled in a mainly Indonesian setting by my Indonesian-born parents.

Walking into those historic houses sparked my interest to discover more about the roots of my own cultural heritage. I felt my amazement turned into an aspiration to comprehend the lives of these Chinese- Indonesians, along with the challenges they faced to preserve their own culture while living in a whole new world.

In Indonesia, there is this notion of family home, a place where history, culture, and tradition still live for generations. Just as the proverb says, “A house is built with boards and beams, a home is built with love and dreams,” these family homes have become a testimony of the evolution of Chinese-Indonesian cultures and traditions.

For many Chinese-Indonesians, their family home was (or still is) a place for business. Packed with merchandise, and various items collected over the years by the owners, these family homes silently tell their stories. They tell the stories about love and dreams, opportunities and challenges, laughter and tears of those who have called them home.

Home Sweet Home is a one-year journey into the evolution of the Chinese-Indonesian culture. It is the story of a harmonious marriage of two beautiful cultures, three centuries in-the-making. It was not a journey without obstacles, but it certainly was one with countless rewards. What began as a challenge to obtain the owners’ consent to photograph their homes has later proved to be a beginning of new friendships. The challenge to find the appropriate houses to shoot had presented me with the privilege of listening to countless stories that offer valuable lessons in life.

As I embarked on this journey, I have discovered that there is more to a home than what meets the eyes. Beyond the evidence of economical, functional, or sentimental hoarding. Beyond the cluttered halls or the neatly- organized storage rooms. Beyond the simplicity of aging and the glitters of luxury.

There is a story in each frame, hope and dreams embedded and encrypted beneath the layers of objects that fill the space. Walls displaying pictures of joyous achievements and traumatic miseries, the good-old days and the modern reality that stole their thunder.

A home is more than merely a dwelling place, it is a monument where stories are carved and histories are made. Whether it is an aging third-generation family home or a modern private home, there is this air of familiarity, a connection, a deep sense of longing.

A pride in calling it a Home Sweet Home.