

## **Traditional Architecture in Romanian Philately (II): the Case Study Regarding Households from Chiojdu Mic, Curteni and Curtișoara**

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### **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author BVC designed the study, performed the literature searches and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author ALP managed the analyses of the study. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

### **Article Information**

DOI: 10.9734/SAJSSE/2021/v11i1130273

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Complete Peer review History: <http://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/66996>

**Original Research Article**

**Received 15 March 2021**  
**Accepted 20 May 2021**  
**Published 26 May 2021**

### **ABSTRACT**

As the traditional Romanian architecture is little known abroad and sporadically threatened with major changes due to the incursions of various neo-modernist architectural currents, it is appropriate to bring back to the attention of the general public, the image of what was and still is there. In this context, this study aims to emphasize the beauty and uniqueness of traditional architecture in terms of the tools offered by Romanian philately. Knowing that philately is an ambassador of promoting Romanian cultural values locally, but also abroad, the present study tried to outline this aspect in relation to the ethnographic and architectural specifics. Thus, the architectural specificity of three areas is desired, this time from the localities of Chiojdu Mic (Buzău), Curteni (Vaslui), and Curtișoara (Gorj), using stamps, illustrated postcards, and other philatelic effects. The results of the investigation, carried out through the consultation of sites with predominantly philatelic content (on platforms such as Colnect®, Delcampe®, PicClick®, StampWorld®, etc), confirm the preoccupation of the Romanian thematic philately for the local architecture; at the same time, indicate the availability of the community towards the promotion of the cultural heritage.

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*Keywords: Traditional architecture; peasant households; philatelic issues; community.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the current architectural context, as a consequence of modern techniques and workshop practices, architects and implicitly the community of which they are part are increasingly distancing themselves from the world of lived experience [1], from the village world with their own architectural style. Thus, the architectural culture is decontextualized, making the architectural image of the community deprived of most of the original meaning. In these conditions, there is a rupture between the vernacular architecture, implicitly the traditional one, and the current configuration of the community. In essence, the social space, which until recently was judiciously exploited by the craftsmen who kept the tradition of the local architecture, came to be transformed into an abstracted world.

If vernacular architecture was called both rural and urban architecture, made without an architect, not designed, made directly by the person who was to live in it [2], possibly with more or less specialized labor, current architecture in Romania no longer ticks the same principles. It could be said that the current notion of architecture is not synonymous with what is considered traditional architecture.

Vernacular and implicitly traditional architecture is the expression of the culture of a community, it is the creation of time [3], it is the relationship with the land, the adaptability, and the expression of the diversity of the cultural world. Equally, it is the natural way in which houses communicate with each other. It is an ongoing process that includes the necessary changes and continuous adaptation of the community in response to the context and constraints of the environment [4].

Today, in the first quarter of 2021, Romanian architecture can rarely be classified as vernacular or traditional [3], and this is because it is built a lot, "in hell", without any inspiration and/or vision. The communities seem to lack a landmark, they seem to deviate too much from what was natural, from what manifests itself as a local tradition.

To withdraw part of the architectural image of the Romanian community, in the present study, it was proposed the indexation, analysis, and

description of three households, this time from Chiojdu Mic (Buzău county), Curteni (Vaslui), and Curtișoara (Gorj). For each of these sites, we tried to present the specific elements from a philatelic perspective [5-6]. Thus, the philatelic effects (postage stamps, illustrated postcards, and other materials) were exposed to anticipate the discussions regarding the dynamics of the local architectural current. This current is a particular case of the existing one at the national level, being met and exploited tangentially and on the occasion of other studies [7-8], in the reference area of the Village Museum.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Having as a starting point a series of studies undertaken in the period 2018-2020 [6-8], we set out to review and analyze, through the prism of the existing philatelic material at the level of different sites, the architecture traditional from Chiojdu Mic (Buzău), Curteni (Vaslui) and Curtișoara (Gorj). The documentation on the elements of traditional architecture was made through the consultation of specialized materials (including museum descriptive notes), in particular publications on the three areas considered. At the base of all were the specialized information provided by the platforms dedicated to the Village Museum, which harmoniously summarizes the entire history and memory of the places under study.

Starting from the analyzed philatelic pieces, the knowledge regarding the presented subject was improved by the method of direct access to related information sources. These are hosted by websites, encyclopedias, or specialty books. Philately itself offers a start to knowledge and completes, in some places, the missing information, putting together events, facts, and places in a single story. As such, the description of the zonal specificity, in terms of thematic philately, was made by referring to the material exposed on philatelic catalogs and to sites with philatelic content, such as Colnect®, Delcampe®, eBay®, Okazii®, PicClick®, StampWorld®, etc. The identification, indexing, analysis and description of the philatelic pieces was made taking into account the information available on the respective sites, associated with the description made by the seller of the pieces, or with the existing description on the back of the pieces. In addition to the exhibited pieces (in the form of postage stamps, the first-day covers -

FDCs, maximum postcards, simple postcards, entire covers, and so on), the discussions with other philatelic collectors were also of real use. All these elements bring by themselves not only information, but also a touch of color on what was once philately, but also on what Romanian traditional architecture meant and means.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 The Household from Chiojdu Mic (Buzău County)

In the Carpathian area of Buzău, a monumental folk architecture crystallized between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. With specific features, it is deeply illustrated in the Village Museum in Bucharest by a house, rebuilt in 1936 after a copy from the eighteenth century [9]. A scattered settlement with a tendency to gather towards the center, Chiojdu Mic village is placed in a corridor-shaped depression, located on both banks of the river Bâsca Chiojdului. In ancient times, the forests that covered the surrounding hills and mountains were an important source of income for the inhabitants. This aspect is also noticeable in the local architectural conformation, as can be seen in Fig. 1a-c [10-14].

Fruit growing, another dominant occupation in this area, is reflected in the traditional architecture by the appearance of the two-story house. On the first level, there are large cellars, functionally delimited for keeping fresh fruits and barrels of brandy and upstairs are living rooms. For example, the house on display at the Village Museum is accompanied by a high-capacity "stonecutter" - a container made of staves (Fig. 1d) [15], provided with a shingled roof, supported on pillars. Here, the fruits were stored for fermentation.

The house is built on an imposing river stone masonry foundation, as seen in Fig. 1d [15], in which the cellar and the tool room are housed. The walls of the house are made of round fir beams, with a small diameter, placed in horizontal wreaths, "cut". The ends of the beams exceed the line of the walls, remaining visible at the corners of the house. A beautiful open gazebo, on carved wooden poles, advances over the entrance of the cellar, protecting it (see the images reproduced in Fig. 1).

The four-pitched roof has a small shingle cover, placed in "fish scales". The access to the upper floor is made through an external stone masonry

staircase, located on the main facade, asymmetrical (see Fig. 2) [20-25]. The main decorative elements, made by carving and notching, appear on the beams and pillars of the gazebo and the porch feathers, provided with perforated boards. The house has in the plan: the porch ("hall"), the "big room", the "small room", and the porch with a gazebo ("balcony") on the facade. The porch is narrow and dark, with the ground floor glued. It was used as a passage room and storage place for household items. From the hall, the entrance is made in each of the side rooms, respectively in the guest room and the living room.

The organization of the interior of the house is individualized by using woven wool carpets and cotton towels. They are adorned with ample decorative compositions, chosen or embroidered. In the porch and the "small room" are presented many objects specific to pastoral life: containers needed for milk processing (shale, milking bucket, crinta), horns "tied in cherry peel" (traditional signaling tools used by shepherds), squeezed curd.

#### 3.2 The Household from Curteni (Vaslui County)

The village of Curteni, in Vaslui County, is located in a small depression surrounded by high hills in the area of the Moldavian Plateau. The household in Curteni, inhabited by peasants from the vineyard area, was built in 1844 and transferred to the National Museum of the Village "Dimitrie Gusti" in 1959 [28].

The household includes the house, the wine cellar, and the chicken coop. The house, made of burnt brick is an exception to the technique used in the area of multi-material walls or raised only from the ground in various forms. The technique of using burnt brick was very uncommon during that period. With a free porch on the main façade, with four wooden pillars, the house is built on a stone foundation. The roof, with clogged eaves at the main façade, has a reed roof, made according to the local technique, called "la cheptene" or "in scale"; this was an improved technique compared to the so-called "prey" technique.

In the first-mentioned technique, the reed is placed in partially overlapping rows over very thick acacia wood ties and is arranged with a special tool. The ridge of the roof is marked by the weaving of the last row of reeds and the

consolidation of the tops of the house. Furthermore, the thickness of the reed is different from that of the reed used in the piles, place them next to each other and fasten with rods.

The house is developed in depth and has a plan characterized by symmetry, with a median room and two rooms on each side. The interior space is remarkable for the following plastic elements: the shape of the openings between the room -

arched openings, shelves attached to the walls, at the top, shaped from the ground, the volume and shapes of the ovens, the color of the wood from the ceilings and door frames of windows, wood painted with natural pigments, as well as the pillars on the porch and the ends of the exposed beams on the outside. The earthen floors complete, in a warm tone, the interior of the house.



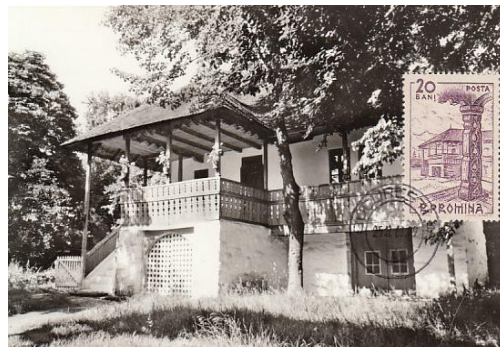
(a) exterior view, from a distant plane, without applied philatelic elements [10]-[12]



(b) exterior view, from a distant plane, the supporting illustration is stamped with a stamp of 20 bani from the philatelic issue "Village Museum" (LP #575a), 25.12.1963 [16-17], and obliterated with the special poststamp from the Philatelic Exhibition "Architecture and Traditional Costume", 25.09.-05.10.1985, Bucharest [13]



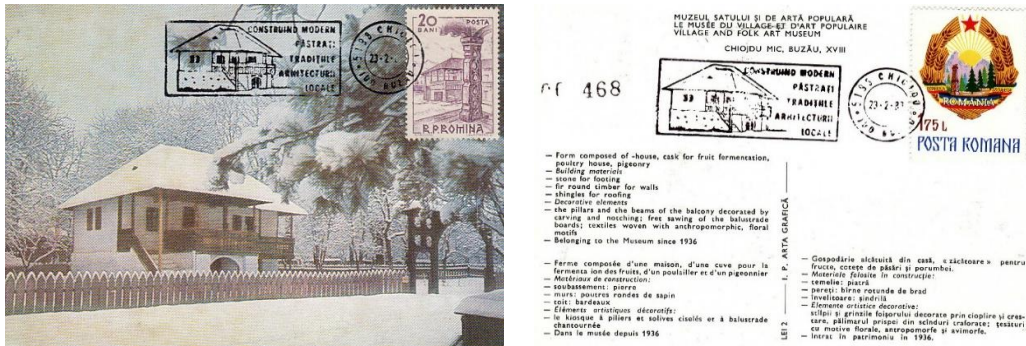
(c) exterior view, from a distant plane, the support illustration is stamped with 3 lei stamp from the philatelic issue "Traditional Architecture" (LP #1215d), 18.02.1989 [18-19], and obliterated with the special poststamp from the Philatelic Exhibition "Architecture and Traditional Costume", 25.09.-05.10.1985, Bucharest [14]



(d) exterior view, from a close-up, the supporting illustration is stamped with a 20 bani stamp from the philatelic issue "Village Museum" (LP #575a) [16],[17], 25.12.1963, and obliterated with the day poststamp, 25.12.1963, Bucharest P.O. no. 32 [15]

Fig. 1. Illustrated postcards representing the household from Chiojdu Mic (Buzău)





(a),(b) exterior view, from a distant plane, the supporting illustration is stamped with a stamp of 20 bani from the philatelic issue "Village Museum" (LP #575a), 25.12.1963 [16],[17], and obliterated with the special poststamp "Building modern keep the traditions of local architecture", 23.02.1987, Chiojdu (Buzău) [20]-[23]



(c) exterior view, from a distant plane, the supporting illustration is stamped with a stamp of 2 lei from the philatelic issue "Romanian folk costumes" (LP #1189c) [26-27], 07.11.1987, and obliterated with the special poststamp "Building modern keep the traditions of local architecture", 23.02.1987, Chiojdu [24]

(d) exterior view, from a distant plane, the supporting illustration is stamped with a stamp of 2 lei from the philatelic issue "Romanian folk costumes" (LP #1189c) [26-27], 07.11.1987, and obliterated with the special poststamp "Visit the Museum of Folk Art in the ethnographic area Buzău", 05.05.1988, Râmnicu Sărat [25]

Fig. 2. Other illustrated postcards representing the household from Chiojdu Mic (Buzău)



(a) exterior view, without other applied philatelic elements [29]

(b) exterior view, without other applied philatelic elements [30]

Fig. 3. Illustrated postcards representing the household from Curteni (Vaslui)

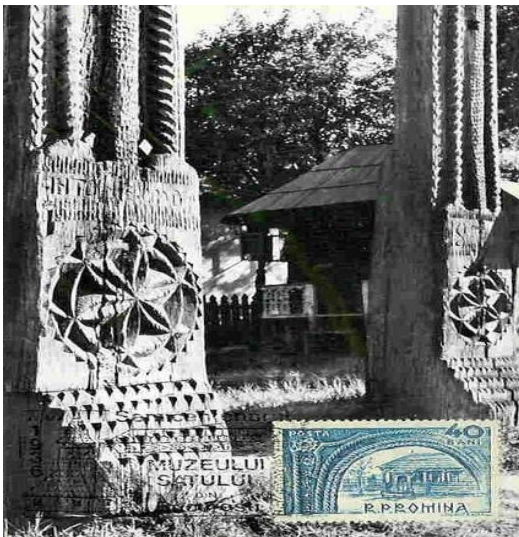
The winery, the second important construction of the household in function and architecture, presents a plan consisting of two units: the entrance to the slope - the "gargoyle" and the cellar with a straight floor. The winery is built of rock and tied to the ground [28]. The resistance structure of the building is a characteristic element.

The floor consists of thick oak trunks split in half with hand tools, supported in an inclined plane on the longitudinal walls and a central beam. The composition of the frame and the ways of supporting the elements of the ensemble - beams and rafters reflect the use of archaic techniques taken from the huts. On the round and short pillars, fixed in the ground along the long sides of the construction, thick beams are supported on which the rafters are fixed at the lower end. The round shape of the birdhouse made of wicker, glued to the ground and covered with reeds, is distinguished in the household. The fence of the household, made of wicker from hazelnut twigs, with a skeleton of pillars, was covered with straw. The access to the household practiced through the wooden gate with three

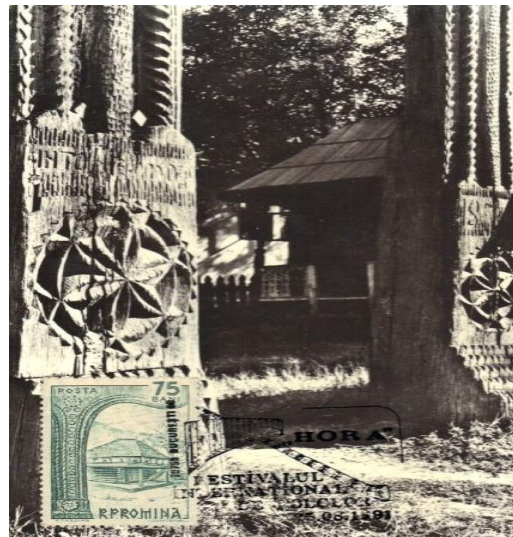
carved pillars is an important work for the unitary ensemble.

### 3.3 The Household from Curtișoara (Gorj County)

Curtișoara, an old settlement whose location has changed over time due to repeated floods of the Jiu, now stretches along the road leading from Tg. Jiu to Petroșani. The geographical location of this village, located in a depressed region rich in pastures and orchards, determined the occupations of the inhabitants: raising animals (especially sheep and goats), fruit growing, and, to a lesser extent, agriculture and forestry. The unit brought to the museum in 1936 dates from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century [31]. Although of small proportions, it is representative of the type of tall houses spread in the sub-Carpathian area and illustrates the popular version of the fortified house called "culă", with a widespread in Oltenia of the XVIII-XIX centuries. The entrance gate is monumental - a real "rustic triumphal arch" (see Fig. 4) [32-33], decorated with geometric ornaments: spirals, rosettes, stars, etc.



(a) exterior view of the decorations on the gate pillars, the support being stamped with a stamp of 40 bani from the philatelic issue "Village Museum" (LP #575a), 25.12.1963 [16],[17], and obliterated with the special poststamp illustrating "The Semicentenary of the Village Museum in Bucharest" [32]



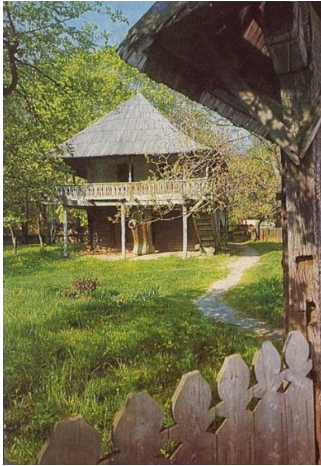
(b) exterior view of the decorations on the gate pillars, the support being stamped with a stamp of 75 bani from the philatelic issue "Village Museum" (LP #575a), 25.12.1963 [16],[17], and obliterated with the special poststamp illustrating the "National Folklore Festival" [33]

Fig. 4. Illustrated postcards representing the household gate of Curtișoara (Gorj)

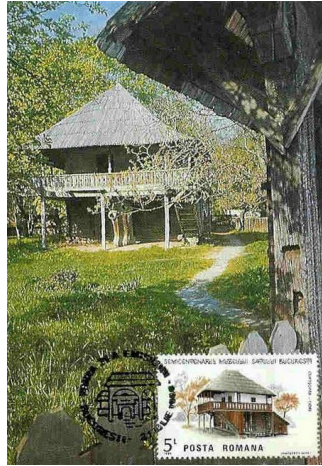


The house, built of beams on a boulder foundation, is covered with fir shingles. The "cellar" that makes up the first level of the house is used as a warehouse for food and tools. An exterior staircase leads to the house itself and to the wide gazebo that dominates

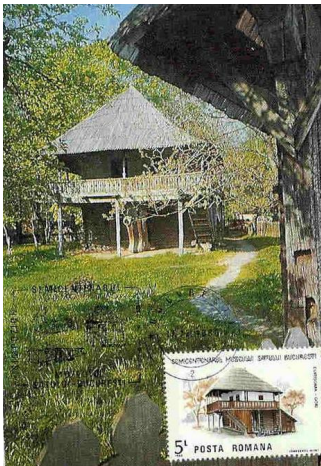
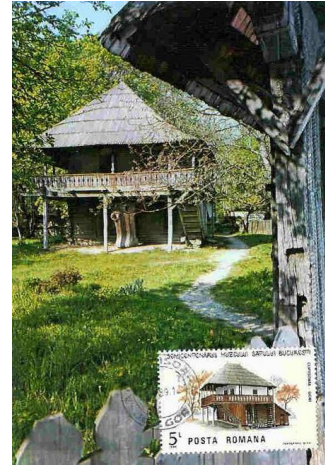
the surrounding landscape. The porch, called "târnaț", borders the floor of the house on three sides. The pillars have a great artistic value, being shaped in oblique grooves, with rings and capitals of various shapes.



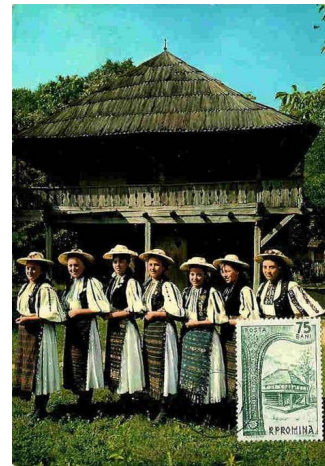
(a) exterior view, distant plane, no applied philatelic elements [34-35]



(b) exterior view, distant plane, the support bearing the stamp with the nominal value of 5 lei from the philatelic issue entitled "50 Years of Bucharest Village Museum", 21.07.1986, Bucharest [36-37], and obliterated with the "first-day issue" poststamp [38] or with the another undeciphered poststamp [39]



(d) exterior view, distant plane, the support bearing the stamp with the nominal value of 5 lei from the philatelic issue "50 Years of Bucharest Village Museum", 21.07.1986, Bucharest [36],[37], and obliterated with an undeciphered poststamp [40-41]

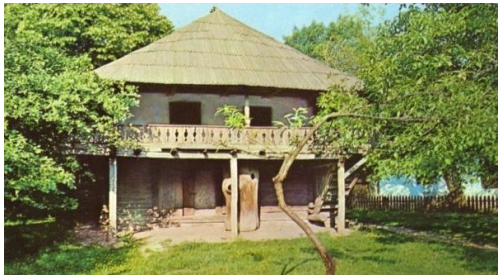


(f) exterior view, the support were stamped with a stamp of 75 bani from the philatelic issue "Village Museum" (LP #575a), 25.12.1963 [16],[17], issued only in 1974 [42]

Fig. 5. Illustrated postcards representing the entrance to the household from Curtișoara (Gorj)

The floor plan of the house comprises two rooms: the room with the hearth for cooking, called "by the fire" and the bedroom whose stove is fed from the first room and which is simply called "by the stove". Beechwood furniture: cabinets, dowry boxes, as well as household items are richly decorated with engraved or

carved ornaments. Geometrically decorated wool rugs (rhombuses and lines), curtains with stylized anthropomorphic motifs, garments of remarkable decorative finesse, as well as long and delicate borangic scarves give the interior a special charm, proving the artistic fantasy of the creators of this ethnographic region.



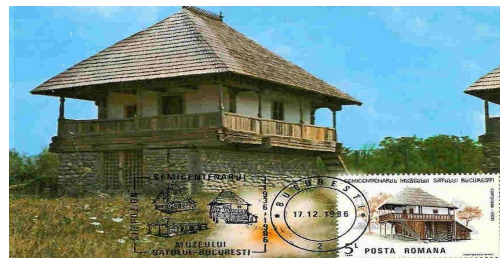
(a) exterior view, distant plane, and no other philatelic elements applied [43]



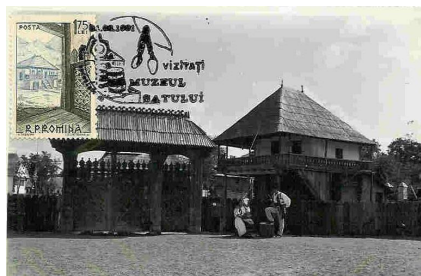
(b) exterior view, distant plan, the support were stamped with a 75 bani stamp from the philatelic issue entitled "Village Museum" (LP #575a), 25.12.1963 [16],[17], and canceled with the special stamp "Visit the Museum of Popular Architecture", 21.10.1981, Curtișoara [44-45]



(c) exterior view, distant plan, the support were stamped with a 75 bani stamp from the philatelic issue entitled "Village Museum" (LP #575a), 25.12.1963 [16],[17], and canceled with the special stamp [46]



(d) exterior view, distant plan, the support being stamped with a 75 bani stamp from the philatelic issue entitled [47]



(e) exterior view, distant plan, a unique postcard mark with "Visit the Village Museum" poststamp [48]

Fig. 6. Other illustrated postcards representing the household from Curtișoara (Gorj)



As can be seen, vernacular architecture is a contemporary architecture, but also an architecture that holds and retains the history of society. It is also an ongoing process that includes the necessary changes and continuous adaptation in response to the context and constraints of the environment. Although modern architecture has replaced the vernacular, late traces still exist. On the other hand, there is a problem; it has become visible that the vernacular is struggling to survive in an environment dominated by modern architecture, made without any responsibility.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The modern metropolis is not free from the vernacular but is sometimes subjugated by it, the problem of modernity is precisely that of "myth". The architectural creativity of our century faces some challenges, but it should not abandon 1000 years of vernacular culture. We can even hope that in the future there will be a revival driven by a nostalgia for the old ways of building and inhabiting - nostalgia for the essential values of the human being. A nostalgia that we tried to capture through the (quite numerous) pieces exposed through this study.

The traditional architecture in Romania is in a continuous development, both from the perspective of the influences of those who return to the country from foreign lands and who want to build according to another specific and not local one, as well as from the perspective of altering traditions over time. In the context of modern architecture, the first step in preserving the local specificity is to bring back in the memory of the youngest, what was once, what traditional architecture meant.

Thematic philately also contributes to this approach, which shows us and shows to those interested what it once was, and has been kept unaltered at the level of postage stamps, views or other philatelic effects. In such a context, it is more than necessary to use the benefits of thematic philately, to use philatelic resources for documentation, information, and decision-making in favor of preserving the local architectural specificity. Philately is itself part of the cultural heritage, all more so as it promotes the styles and good construction practices of the past.

#### DISCLAIMER

The products used for this research are commonly and predominantly use products in our

area of research and country. There is absolutely no conflict of interest between the authors and producers of the products because we do not intend to use these products as an avenue for any litigation but for the advancement of knowledge. Also, the research was not funded by the producing company rather it was funded by personal efforts of the authors.

#### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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