

### Yin Yu Tang

by Dave Holbrook

Should you ever find yourself in historic Salem, Mass., skip the wacko occult shops — okay, stock up on black candles or whatever — and head over to the Peabody Essex Museum for a walk-through tour of beautiful Yin Yu Tang, an estate built circa 1800 to 1825 in Southeastern China.


This two-story merchant's house is essentially a post-and-beam structure with stone and brick masonry curtain walls. Its substantial ceramic tile roof is entirely supported by the wood framing. Surprising details include original "prefabricated" construction methods that use some truly mind-boggling mortise-and-tenon joinery to connect the structure's many timbers. Laminated beams, their layers held together by concealed joinery and wood pegs, are also used in the house, along with large, intricate latticework window panels carved from solid slabs. At the center of the building is a stone court-



Yin Yu Tang's formal entrance penetrates a stone and brick masonry curtain wall.

yard with two rectangular fish pools; the second-floor bedrooms overlook the courtyard from a common wrap-around gallery.

The house was dismantled in China and re-erected at the museum several years ago by a team of Chinese craftsmen skilled in traditional Huizhou carpentry and American preservation architects and carpenters. The project was part of a cultural and technological exchange that continues today with the preservation of several other distinctive traditional buildings in China.

If travel isn't in the cards, there's a good virtual tour of the house, including elements of its construction, on the museum's Web site, [www.pem.org](http://www.pem.org). 



All rooms face the inner courtyard, the home's social center and the only source of natural lighting. Originally, underground springs fed the courtyard's two fish pools.



Ornamental shutters carved from solid planks provide a decorative privacy wall along the open second-story gallery.