

# White Temple and Black House of Chiang Rai

I've recently written an article about 'Baandam' the Black House which was designed by Thai National Artist Thawan Duchanee. The Black House is located 10km north of Chiang Rai. In point of fact, in Chiang Rai there is also a White Temple (Wat Rong Khun) created by the Thai architect Chalermchai Kositpipat. Thus, White Temple and Black House form a strange juxtaposition to each other since they are both located near Chiang Rai.

## The White Temple and Black House in Contrast



**White Temple and Black House** in Chiang Rai

*(photo credit: southeastasiabackpacker.com)*

The Black House can be described as dark, macabre and mysterious whereas the White Temple seems to be ethereal, pure and even other-worldly. Thus, the White Temple and the Black House are indeed opposing buildings. In addition, another peculiar coincidence is that the White Temple was built by Chalermchai Kositpipat who was the student of Thawan Duchanee who built the Black House.

In order to demonstrate the juxtaposition of these two places to you, I'd like to show you the following videos:

Here you see a video of the art installation of 'Baandam', the Black House in Chiang Rai. I think it captures the macabre glory of the Black House very impressively.

The following video captures the spirit of the White Temple, it shows how visitors pass over sculptures representing the desire to reach the main building of the temple in order to pay their respects to the Buddha image. Adorned with sparkling mosaics, the structures gleam in the sunlight. There are also other areas which allow visitors to make merit and write their wishes and hopes on medallions to hang around the White Temple.

Which one of the two places do you find more appealing? The White Temple or the Black House?

I find both, the **white temple and black house**, are very impressive and fine examples of Thai architecture. What is more, they also reflect aspects of Buddhist art in different ways and that is what makes them so special in my opinion.

Yours, Sirinya

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## **'Baandam': The Black House Museum by Thawan Duchanee**

*"In my imagination and dreams, time and space become one; they vibrate with an irrational quality attributable to the dream although I know they have the original beat of reality.*

*Artwork is my love made visible; it represents everything in the infinite universe materialized through my imagination"*

*(Thawan Duchanee)*

'Baandam' is the **Black House Museum** designed by Thai National Artist Thawan Duchanee (1939-2014). 'Baandam' is a complex of over 40 houses which are situated 10km north of Chiang Rai.



*Picture of the artist Thawan Duchanee, from his site*

Thawan Duchanee is a prominent representative of Thai and Asian art. He started his artistic education at the Poh Chang Arts and Crafts College. Thawan Duchanee then studied at Silpakorn University under the Italian painter Corrado Feroci (Silpa Bhilasri) who is known as the father of modern Thai art. Thawan Duchanee is also familiar with Western artistic traditions since he also studied at the Royal Academy of Visual Arts in Amsterdam.

Returning to Thailand, Thawan Duchanee developed a signature style of artistry using predominantly black and red tones. This is based on the styles of traditional Buddhist art and is supposed to symbolize the darkness immanent in humanity.

## **Black House Museum**



White Temple and Black House  
in Chiang Rai



*'Baandam' main building\**



*'Baandam' tiered building\**



*'Baandam' tiered roof house\**

This tendency is also reflected in the Black houses of 'Baandam' in Chiang Rai. Thus, the Black Houses are designed in different styles and what is special about them is that their colour is predominantly black. Hence, there are also some white buildings but their only function is to bring out the Black Houses even more distinctly. Most of the Black Houses of the 'Baandam' Museum serve as a kind of 'showroom' for various artefacts, curiosities and oddities.



*'Baandam' cylindrical white building\**

In fact, Thawan Duchanee's estate is an interesting collection of bizarre, surreal structures including a zoo's worth of animal skeletons □



*'Baandam' collection of hides and*



*eggs\**

*'Baandam' On skeletons\**

Nevertheless, 'Baandam' a special kind of museum because the objects and artefacts of the Black House Museum are all related to death, mortality and impermanence. In other words, one may also say that they highlight the negative side of nature.



*'Baandam'*

*snake*

*skin\**



*'Baandam' skull and egg\**

Hence, there are many skulls from different animals as well as skins (e.g. snake skins), hides, eggs and carvings of more traditional demons. In addition, 'Baandam' also has interesting furniture and special collectors' pieces to offer.



*'Baandam' carved façade\**



*'Baandam carved pillars\**

(\*Photo credits: **Anandajoti Bhikkhu**)

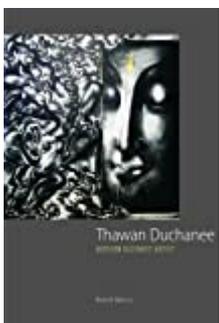
I am very much impressed by Thawan Duchanee's art and the Black House Museum in Chiang Rai, in particular. I think it is

the mixture between traditionalism, curiosity and oddity and makes it so special. Considering Western artists, I think the Swiss surrealist artist **H.R.Giger** would have loved 'Baandam' and its oddities!

Finally, I'd like to close this article by inserting this short video about 'Baandam', the Black House museum in Chiang Rai so that you can get some more impressions. In this video, Thawan Duchanee's son Doi-tibet Duchanee explains something about the art and the intentions of his father. It's worth watching! □

Have you been to 'Baandam' and do you like this museum complex?

There is also a comprehensive book about Thawan Duchanee called 'Modern Buddhist Artist' written by Russell Marcus. Perhaps you'd like to check this out and my review to this book □



Have fun exploring! And if you have the chance, visit 'Baandam' □

Do you know that there is also a White Temple (Wat Rong Khun) in Chiang Rai that serves as a kind of juxtaposition to the Black House museum? If you want to learn more, check it out **here** □

Yours, Sirinya