

PROPERTY PLUS

Bound to the earth



APRIL 02, 2011 00:00 IST

UPDATED: APRIL 02, 2011 04:03 IST

Maria and Ranjeet Jacob's mud block house connects with Nature both in design and materials used

Architect: Benny Kuriakose

Location: Akkarai

This is a house that celebrates its connect with the earth, by way of both design and building material. Maria and Ranjeet Jacob's mud block house on the ECR happens to be both down-to-earth and flamboyant at the same time.

Rather than bricks, the house has been built with interlocking stabilised mud blocks, with no cement mortar to glue them together. So, you don't see unsightly cement trails between the blocks and the un-plastered walls look great by themselves. And then of course, Ranjeet and Maria have experimented by adding pigments to the mud block mixture, so that the mud blocks are not monochromatic, but flaunt an irregular gradation of colour, like the visual equivalent of a natural rhythm. These mud blocks were compressed from red mud, cement and sand into blocks of dimensions 4.5"X9"X9". At about Rs. 12 per block, the mud block doesn't appear to be an expensive proposition, even while being an eco friendly, climate-friendly and energy-conserving building material.

"We wanted a house that complemented the grounds, not a mansion", explain Ranjeet and Maria Jacob. Furniture in the house has been restricted to the antique type furniture collected piece-by-piece over two decades, and the numerous black and white sketches and paintings that the couple has collected does look dashing against the backdrop of rustic hues of the mud blocks.

Slabs supported on steel rafters have been used to form the roof of the two storey house, and there is a three-and-a-half foot high space between the concrete slab and the sloping tile roofs atop it. This space not just insulates the house, but also serves to house unsightly AC units, electrical conduits and water pipes. Cross-shaped holes in this space allow for ventilation, and the space can be reached into, through a step ladder from within the house. A small area here has been left open to seat a solar water heater.

While the building façade looks magnificently solid, relieved by its complex array of sloping roofs, the backyard of the house sports a diametrically opposite conceptual design. An open design takes over here, and the house meets the backyard through a courtyard along its entire length, which in fact enlarges in the middle into a huge, open living space (with no walls, but just pillars to hold up the sloping roof) right inside the garden. And yes, there is a pond right next to this courtyard.