

Chennai India

# Benny Kuriakose on why he looks to pass down his learnings



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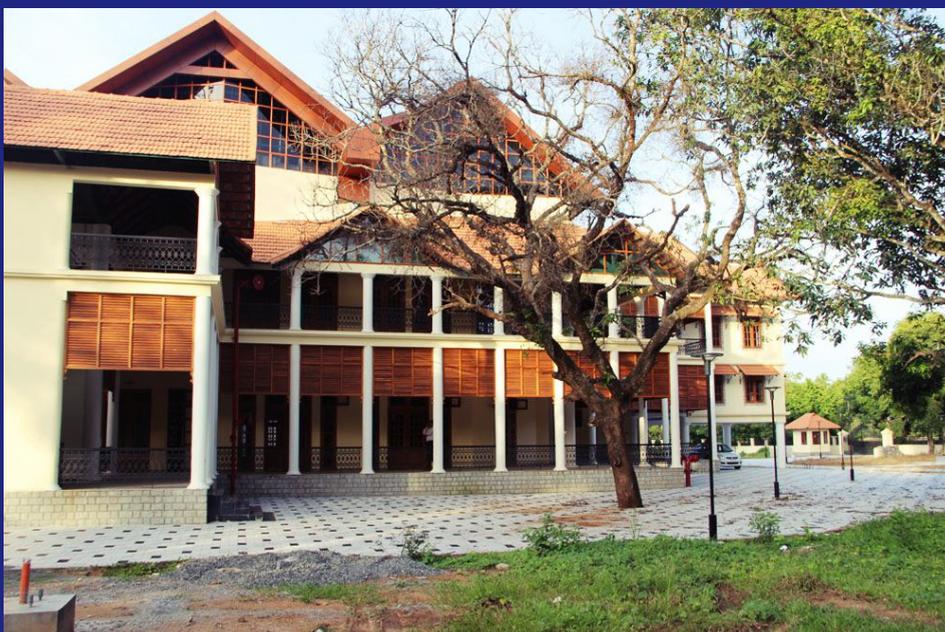
It makes perfect sense that a man who knows his roots, has the ability to branch out.

Introducing Benny Kuriakose, a Chennai-based architect who has built his practice around longevity and the use of natural and eco-friendly materials, with designs that keep the focus on natural light and air. He tends to lean on the idea that architecture should enhance the quality of the environment, blend with it, embrace it – and in doing so, reflect the spirit of the people who interact in and around the spaces he creates. He is now regarded as one of the foremost voices in the business today, which a career defined by circumnavigating what is typically expected, to bring innovative ideas to life in the public arena.

We spoke to him about the places, people and plans that he's most proud of:

**What is your main priority when starting projects? Is there something that is fundamental to your practice – your philosophy and your process?**

The primary aim is to create good quality architecture. They should be suited to the needs and requirements of the clients – whether that means physical, climatic, psychological, social, or cultural. In achieving the above aims, the process is also equally important. My practice has to be sustainable in the long run, tends to use more natural materials and take lessons from the vernacular architecture.





**Although you are now quite well established, in retrospect, what do you consider to have been a turning point for you?**

Meeting Laurie Baker and working with him was the first turning point. Winning the Charles Wallace fellowship and doing the Masters in Conservation Studies from the University of York was the next stepping stones. During those days, when the internet wasn't a part of everyday life, the studies helped me to see architecture in a much broader context.

**What's the best mistake you have ever made?**

I have made a lot of mistakes. I think I learned from the mistakes instead of repeating them. Architecture is a creative field where experience can also play a major role in getting better designs. I always try to look back at the work I have done and the feedback from the clients and friends before moving forward.



**Do you feel the spaces you work with, influence the work itself? Or do you lend yourself to them instead?**

Yes. The design process starts with the clients requirements and needs, after which there is a conscious attempt to make each design different and bring something new.

**How many of you work in the studio, and what are the types of skills that you have in-house?**

In my office, there are between 15 to 20 people at a time. We try to keep the studio character of the office. There are no office boys, managers, accountants, receptionist etc. We try to keep the office more as a creative office. We outsource the structural design and the MEP design of bigger size projects.

**How many projects do you handle at any one time?**

There is no stipulated number as such and the involvement depends on the size and complexity of the project. I try to stick to the creative part of the design. Personally, I get involved in one project at a time. But creative input required for a project is when the initial design takes shape and also when the building structure is over and the finishing works are going to start.

**Has there been one important skill you developed which has changed the course of your career?**

Doing my doctorate from IIT Madras helped me tremendously in trying to think differently and bring a research component into my architectural practice. Doing research on a project helped me a lot. I would not have been able to the Muziris Heritage Project the way it was done if I have not done my doctorate in IIT.



**What are some of your practices for staying creative?**

We are trying to do good quality work, which holds significance. We are passionate. We try to be different and question the kind of things which are normally practiced. We stay focused and work very hard towards the end product. Being talented and putting in hard work alone is not enough to stay creative. You have to be truthful and sincere about the process. Of course, it is not at all easy to do these things.



**What are you most looking forward to this year?**

I am looking forward to creating more offbeat designs and also to make the office more professional in the coming year. I am also looking forward to transferring the knowledge I have gained over the years to the younger generation.

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*Images by Benny Kuriakose.*

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