

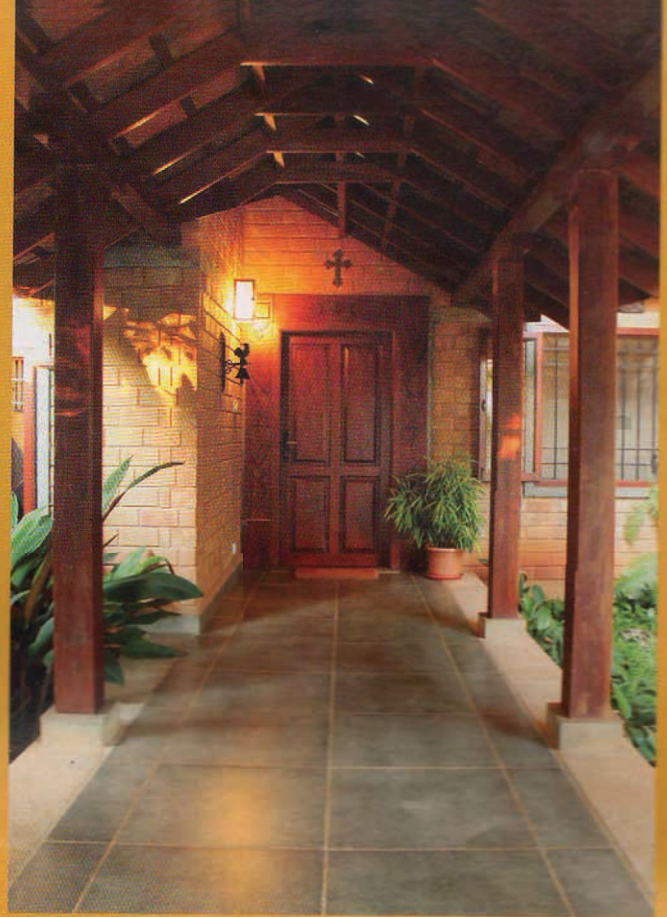
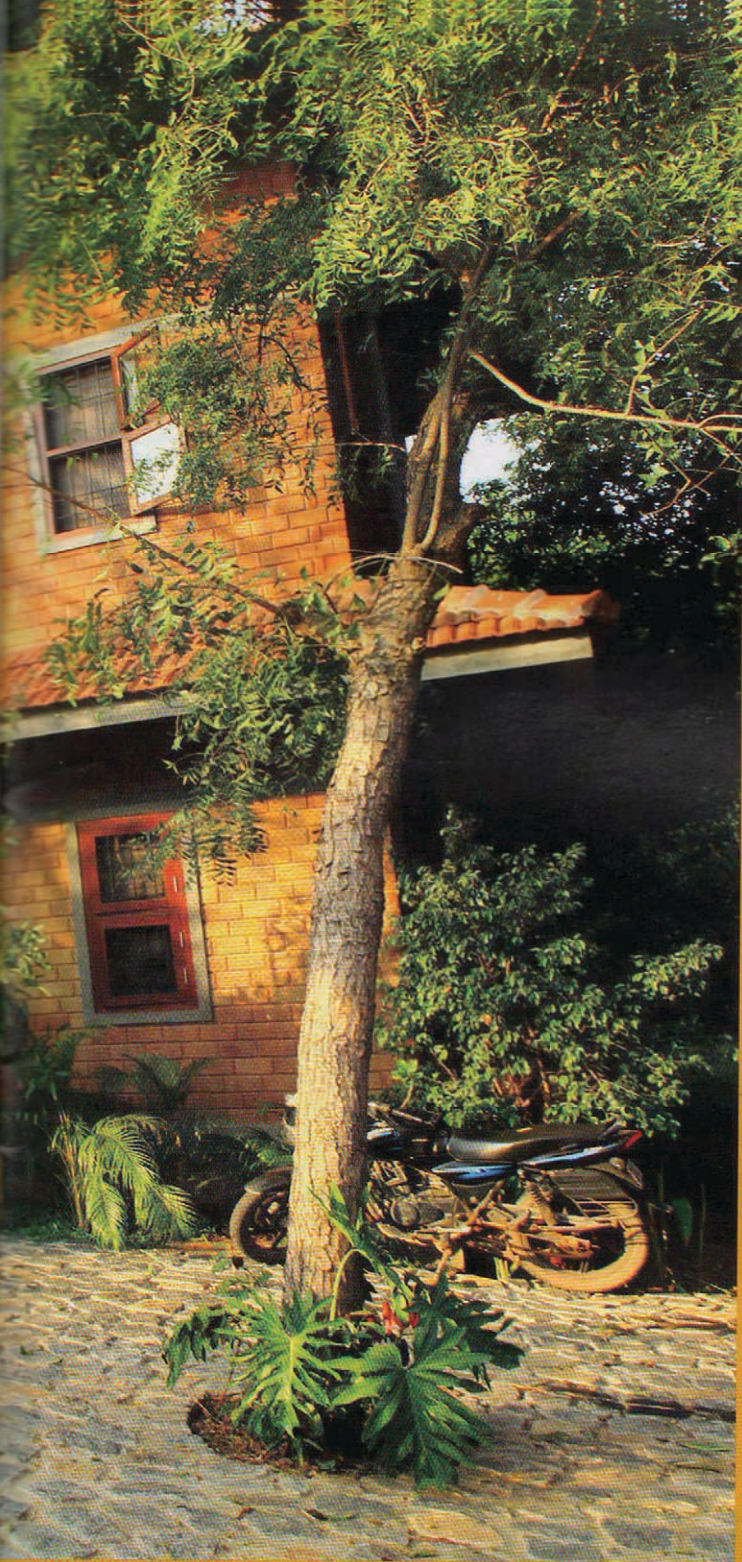
The concept of the residential project **Casa Rojo** at **East Coast Road, Chennai** by architect **Benny Kuriakose** is a blend of traditional and contemporary elements, creating a style that could be termed "timeless". Such a concept naturally encompassed the features of climatic comfort, cost effectiveness, eco-friendliness and sustainability of the building. At the same time, the plan provided for personal elements in tune with the life style and personalities of the occupants.

Text & images: courtesy the architect

The Timeless Style

**Casa Rojo, East Coast Road,
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India**
Architect Benny Kuriakose





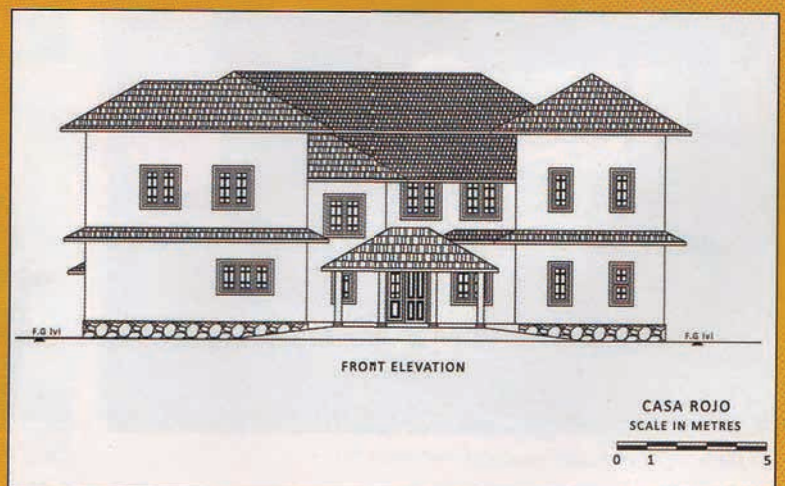
The essence of design for the residential project **Casa Rojo** at East Coast Road, Chennai, designed by architect Benny Kuriakose was of a space which would exemplify the feeling of well-being and tranquility. It was to be a place where one could work, play or socialize without disturbing the harmony of different elements encompassed within this space. At the same time, it provided for personal elements in tune with the life style and personalities of the occupants, Ranjeet and Maria.

The site is located about 15-km outside Chennai, on the East Coast Road along the sea. It was an old orchard with plenty of mango and other fruit trees. The plan of the house incorporated the existing orchard. The view from the gate is of the main house and Ranjeet's office to the left. Although the plot is long and narrow, the plan has taken care to position the house in such a way that it overcomes any feeling of constriction and at the same time, provides a spacious backyard. The positioning of the house also gives privacy to the large rear verandah. A simple, cost effective RCC tank is transformed into a lily pond with lotuses and bulrushes, which enhances the tranquility of the space.



In his quest as a creative person, **Benny Kuriakose** has travelled diverse paths and translated the philosophy of his mentor Laurie Baker many times over. A retrospective of his work reflects his perseverance to transform those same concepts of cost effectiveness, conservation and sustainable architecture, in several sequences, whether it is in his designs for personal or public spaces. BK's strict adherence to the universal principles of

architecture can be seen in the range of his work: in individual houses, resorts and institutional projects, in the Dakshinachitra project in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, in the rehabilitation of disaster sites at Nagapattinam, Bhuj or Latur and in the Heritage Project at Muziris in Kerala. Apart from being a professional with strong principles, Benny is a serious student and researcher. He readily shares his knowledge and expertise in his projects, his workshops and in his writings.



In drawing up the plan, the concept of blending traditional and contemporary elements, to create a style that could be termed "timeless" was consciously followed. Such a concept naturally encompassed the features of climatic comfort, cost effectiveness, eco-friendliness and sustainability of the building. The open plan facilitated the creation of a sequence of spaces and the organizing and use of a variety of elements throughout the buildings. This in turn resulted in spaces with varying qualities, each with an individual mood.

Thus, the sequence of the building, beginning with the entrance and the public areas leads to the large rear verandah, designed to contrast the rigidity of city life and provide a private, sheltered feeling. The breeze is allowed to move from the entrance, through the interior areas and on the verandah and back again, at different times of the day and night, keeping the house cool and well aired. The verandah, on the rear side has become Ranjeet and Maria's favorite space.

THE PLAY OF ELEMENTS:

How does the combination of traditional and contemporary elements used in the plan bring the vision into reality? It is by employing the concept of bringing together in new and unexpected ways, the various spaces, elements, materials and uses.

The roof and the verandahs, though they are traditional elements, have each been assigned here to play a contemporary role and bring the vision of these two people into a meaningful reality for them. The roof and the verandahs in Casa Rojo serve their purposes differently to what they did, in their traditional situations. The "timeless" style is therefore achieved by placing these traditional elements of design in a contemporary use mode.

A verandah speaks through its size and appearance. The front verandah at Casa Rojo is 6 feet wide and appears sufficient to serve as a



large windows and doors in the living room

welcoming space. In comparison, the rear verandah is 14 feet wide, giving it a languorous air, and with the surrounding garden it is secured from the public gaze, indicating that it is an ideal living space. It is also encircled by the fruit trees of the preserved orchard, still frequented by birds, bees and squirrels and it overlooks the lily pond and surveys the entire backyard.

The rear verandah at Casa Rojo is in fact the transition area between the inside and the outside, its elements being intimately connected to both, in terms of use and mood. The materials used are in tune with the interior and yet they are hardy to suit the weather conditions of a semi covered area, adjacent to the sea. It is bounded both by the house and by the back garden. In all, the rear verandah, with its unique message is an important focus of the house and it could be said that it takes the place of the courtyard, which was the main interactive space in traditional houses. The courtyard of olden times was open to the sky, bound on four sides by the house, often with a verandah running all round and it was the space with purpose for the entire residents.



the public spaces leading to large rear verandah



the 6 feet wide verandah is a welcoming space



the timber staircase with handmade tiles from Mexico used as risers and a Spanish style handrail

specific feature of the design. The doors and windows bring in natural light and the view of the garden outside, to add to the feeling of spaciousness of the inside, which is another design feature of Casa Rojo.

Maria and Ranjeet themselves did the interiors for the building. They have used elegant antique furniture, which they have collected over two decades and which they have perfectly blended with the stone colored floors, brilliant yet subtle furnishing, carpets and creative lighting. The timber staircase, a design feature in the dining room, has beautiful handmade clay tiles from Mexico, used as risers and a Spanish style handrail. Each of the rooms is unique in the sense that each room reflects the taste of the person whose room it is, from the colours to the furnishing.

The roof is the predominant feature in the elevation and one that is its most striking characteristic, on a first view of the house. Apart from its aesthetic value, with its multiple peaks and slopes, making it appear different from every elevation, it is highly functional. It has two layers: a flat concrete slab with a parapet wall running along the periphery, to rest a sloping tiled roof. This space houses a large attic and the water tank. The double layered roof encases a cushion of air that insulates the house from the blazing Chennai sun. Such a natural method of cooling makes the use of air conditioners incidental and greatly reduces the carbon footprint of the building. Therefore, it is explicit that the roof at Casa Rojo, also achieves a "timeless" style. It is not just an imitation of a traditional roof, but has a specific characteristic of serving multiple purposes within a single element - the roof.

The large doors and windows made of Pyinkado (Xylaxyllocarpa) are a prominent feature. They are large enough to draw in sufficient air and create currents for cross ventilation for thermal comfort, which is a

Landscaping is not about having a lawn and a fountain, but rather about blending the landscape with surrounding elements and being true to its nature. Indigenous plants, wild grass and stone sculptures are what the designers envisaged. A landscape that is easy to maintain and beautiful to look at and live in. At Casa Rojo, the backyard is a major design feature, which when combined with the pond gives it a feel of serenity and comfort. ▲

fact file:

project	: Casa Rojo
location	: East Coast Road, Chennai
client	: Ranjeet Jacob Residence
architect	: Benny Kuriakose
commencement date	: 2009
completion date	: 2011
area	: 448-sq m
cost	: 65 lakhs



the bedroom with tastefully chosen furniture



the spacious kitchen