

SUN KISSED retreat

A Chennai beach house with an unusual blend of Mediterranean and South Indian decor

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The muted sound of waves crashing on the shore, the gentle rustle of coconut leaves combined with the languid atmosphere of the seaside lulls the senses as one enters the beach house. About an hour's drive from Chennai, off the East Coast road, is this unconventional seaside home far removed from the chaos of the city.

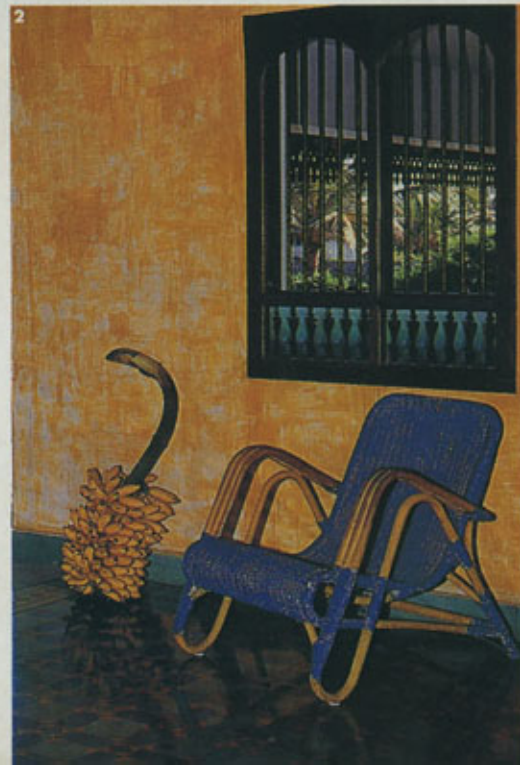
Visalakshi Ramaswamy together with Benny Kuriakose, an architect known for his traditional and conservationist style, worked

on the planning, execution and interiors of this getaway to create something truly unique. Visalakshi has been involved in the revival of the crafts and traditions of India, that of Chettinad in particular, and has also co-authored a book titled "Chettiar Heritage". Undertaking the project was a reaffirmation of her desire to conserve and bring to the fore the heritage of Chettinad.

With a free hand and no blueprint to follow, Visalakshi and Benny evolved their designs for the house as it was being built.

1. In the garden, a Kerala well house called "Kulapura" enclosing a step well. On the granite bench is an old coconut scraper

2. In the front verandah, the distressed yellow paint on the wall and the blue and yellow hand painted floor tiles bring in the Mediterranean flavour





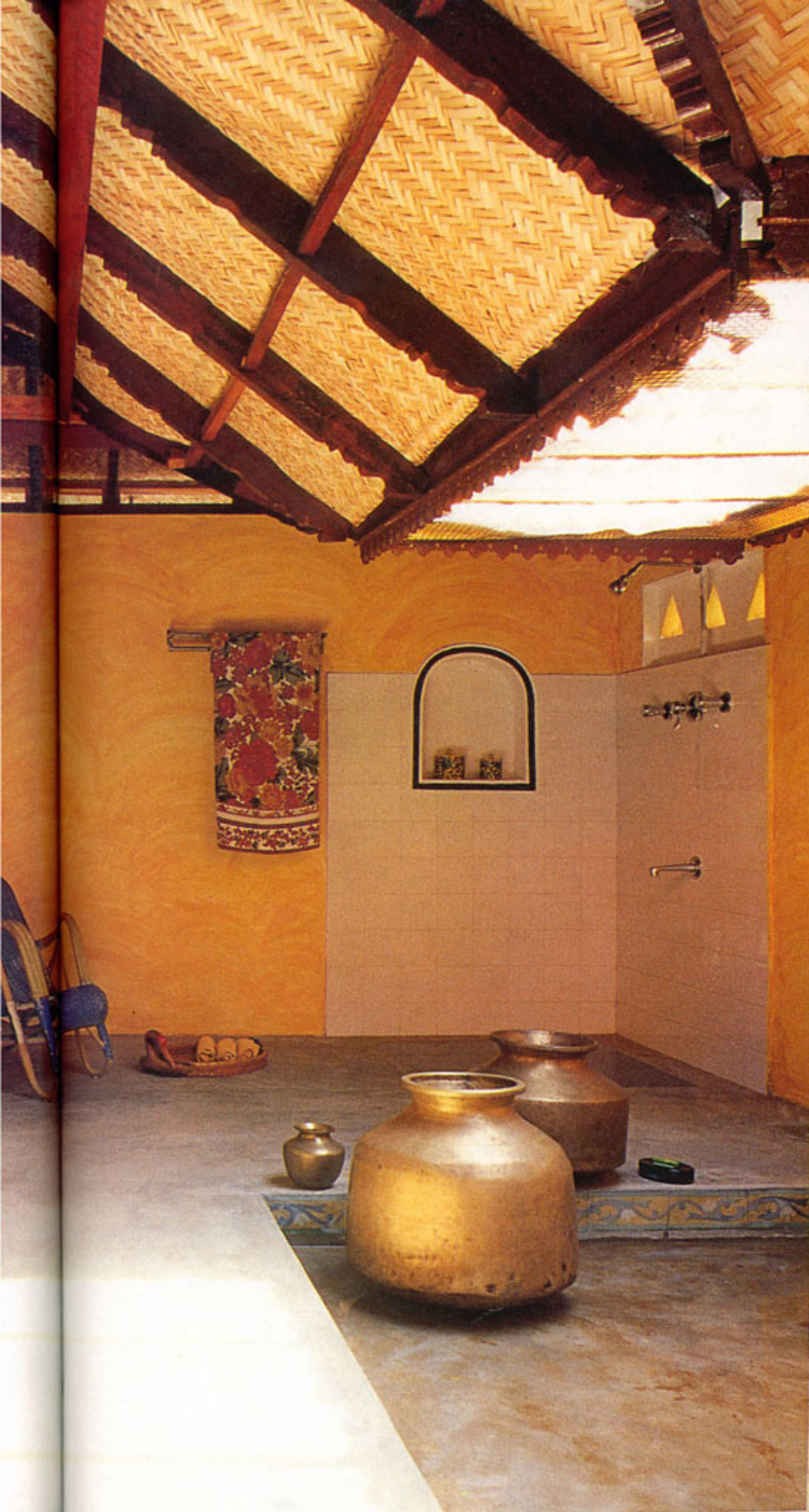
The verandah lined with Chettinad granite pillars. The sloped roof is supported by beams and rafters salvaged from a Chettinad property. Restoration has been done by Kerala carpenters who have introduced Kerala style carving and embellishments. The Mediterranean floor tiles are by Attangudi craftsmen. The tiles have a natural gloss that is the result of a unique process

A photograph of a traditional courtyard. The scene is dominated by several large, cylindrical stone pillars with decorative bases, supporting a wooden roof structure with intricate carvings. The walls are a warm, earthy tone. In the background, there are arched windows with black frames and white grilles. To the right, a wooden bench with vertical slats is visible. In the foreground, a stone ledge runs across the frame, with a pair of dark flip-flops resting on it. A small, vibrant green plant is in the bottom left corner. The lighting is warm and directional, creating strong shadows and highlights. The overall atmosphere is one of traditional, rustic elegance.

A WONDERFUL FUSION OF CHETTINAD AND KERALA
ARCHITECTURE WITH MEDITERRANEAN MAGIC







The bathroom is open to the sky. The front dividing walls conceal the plumbing and are embellished by Mediterranean style scrolls. Big brass pots from Chettinad are used for storing water. A basket from Karnataka is used for the laundry. In the corner, an old cane chair, painted blue and yellow blends with the decor. The triangular openings on either side of the mirror and near the shower faucets, known as madams, were traditionally used in front of houses and in temples for placing small lamps



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1. A view of the dining room from the verandah. The low tile table in front of the bench is a *manai* from Chettinad. This is traditionally used as a seat for the bride and groom during the wedding. The carved fretwork above the door is from Thailand. The lampshade is an inverted basket
2. The bedroom is minimal and uncluttered. Kerala carpenters have modelled the bed along traditional Thai lines. The side tables are *manais*
3. Section of the front verandah overlooking the Kerala step well

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The dining room. The baskets in the alcove are from South Africa and the one on the table is from Turkey. Traditional Chettinad four shutter windows frame the alcove. Since each of the shutters can be operated independently, closing the lower shutters provides privacy when needed



They had to reorient the contours of the land to suit Vaastu principles, which involved the Herculean task of raising the level of the land in one corner and determining the location of the well. For both, this was a project that came out "just perfect". Visalakshi's forte of using colours in unusual and effective ways and of using locally available material, also contributed a great deal to the pleasing outcome.

A house that, at the outset, was conceived as a Mediterranean villa, somewhere along the way was transformed into a wonderful fusion of Chettinad and Kerala architecture, whilst retaining some of the intended Mediterranean magic.

The drawing and dining areas open out onto a long L-shaped verandah lined with granite pillars

salvaged from an old Chettinad property. All the bedrooms, with full length windows, are located on different levels, giving an overall ambience of space and uncluttered living.

A beach house involves high maintenance because of salt and water corrosion. Visalakshi has partially circumvented this problem by keeping the use of metal to a minimum. An annual coat of black enamel paint for the window bars, varnishing of all woodwork and painting of both the interiors and exteriors is what it takes to maintain this bungalow.

Despite the somewhat unusual combination of bright Mediterranean hues and traditional South Indian decor, the end result is a tranquil and harmonious home. ♦

