



PROJECT 2: CASA ROJO

Plot Area : 19 36 sq.m.

Built up Area : 476 sq.m.

FAR Achieved : 0.25

Architect : Benny Kuriakose

Contractors : Thomas, Joyce Associates

Year of Completion : 2009

Casa Rojo is a beach house, just outside Chennai. It has been built with cost-effective materials such as sun dried bricks, concentrating on getting the right quality of workmanship. Built amidst an old orchard, on nine grounds of area, it includes a house, swimming pool, office space, servant's quarters and amenities for entertainment. Casa Rojo is an example of developing a union of needs of contemporary lifestyle with vernacular systems of construction.



1. Main House 2. Lilly Pond 3. Office Block 4. Servant's Quarters 5. Proposed Garage 6. Outdoor seat



DESIGN CONCEPT

The essence of the building was to be a space which would exemplify a feeling of well-being and tranquillity, a place to work, play and socialize without disturbing the harmony of the different elements encompassed within the space.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

THE SITE

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.

SITE PLANNING

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 Western edge of the plot. The servant quarters and garages are located to the eastern edge. 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 veranda. And a simple, cost effective RCC tank transformed into a pond with lotuses and bulrushes enhances the tranquillity of the space.

THE LANDSCAPE

Some designers forget the importance that a landscape lends to a space. Landscaping is not about having a lawn and a fountain, but rather



▲ *Front veranda*



▲ *Alcove*



blending the landscape with surrounding elements and being true to its nature. Indigenous plants, wild grass and stone sculptures are what we 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.

DESIGN OF MASS AND VOLUME

THE ROOF

The roof is the predominant feature in the elevation and also 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.

HOUSE PLAN

In drawing up the plan, the concept of blending traditional and contemporary elements, to create a style that might 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. At the same time, the plan provided for personal elements, in tune with the lifestyle and personalities of the occupants, Ranjeet and Maria. The open plan facilitated the

▲ *The living area of the house*



▲ *Intricate pattern design used in the staircase*



creation of a sequence of spaces and the use of a variety of elements throughout the building. 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 veranda, 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 veranda and back again, at different times of the day and night, keeping the house cool and well aired.

THE PLAY OF ELEMENTS

So, 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 verandas, 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. The roof and the verandas 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.



THE VERANDA

A veranda speaks through its size and appearance. The front veranda at Casa Rojo is six feet wide and appears sufficient to serve as a welcoming space.

In comparison, the rear veranda 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 veranda 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 hardly suit the weather conditions of a semi covered area, adjacent to the sea. It is bounded

▲ *The veranda and the sitting area at Casa Rojo*



▲ *The rear veranda at Casa Rojo*



▲ *View of the veranda*

both by the house and by the back garden. In all, the rear veranda, 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 old courtyard was open to the sky, bound on four sides by the house, often with a veranda running all round.

DOORS AND WINDOWS

The large doors and windows made of Pyinkado (*Xylia xylocarpa*) 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 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, another design feature of Casa Rojo.

INTERIORS

Maria and Ranjeet themselves did the interiors for the building. They have used elegant antique furniture which they collected over two decades and perfectly blended with the stone coloured 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.