



Wooden Haven

In Wayanad, Kerala, architect Benny Kuriakose designs a vacation home balancing expansive views and luxurious interiors, making abundant use of locally sourced timber. Although contemporary in appearance, traditional techniques were employed to craft the timber elements



When architect Benny Kuriakose first visited the remote site in the rugged terrain of the Western Ghats in Wayanad, Kerala, he was struck by the remarkable views to be had. A coffee estate situated on a steep slope, the site was to accommodate a two-bedroom house to serve as a vacation home for his client residing in the neighbouring district of Kozhikode. A location was chosen so that vehicular access could be from one side while the remaining three sides would afford unimpeded views of the estate and the hills beyond. One of the

first decisions was to raise the house on stilts considering the slope and the possibility of framed views.

Material choices were accorded primary importance at the beginning of the design process. To allow views, a great degree of transparency was required. Not one to use glass extensively in his projects, Benny decided to go with the material here, considering that the climate of Wayanad is mostly temperate with a distinct winter season. Wood was chosen as the main material for the interiors to introduce an aura of warmth and relaxation befitting of a weekend home. Brick walls had to be kept to a minimum.





Uninterrupted view
of the lush
landscape and the
hills beyond,
was the decisive factor
while designing this
house



In the completed home, cement tiles lead up to the front facade built with masonry walls. On entering the home, however, the gaze is immediately drawn outwards to the striking views of the lush landscape through the three tall glass walls. Though the initial scheme had the frames designed using only timber, a compromise had to be made during execution due to structural constraints. Concrete columns were employed, but only for the corners.

The client being an owner of a timber business was keen on featuring extensive woodwork in the interior details. Therefore the doors, floor, ceiling, roof and stairs, are all crafted from wood, and the glass walls comprise of timber frames.





Three different local species of wood from the forests of Wayanad were used mostly. Priced at nearly a third of the cost of teak, it is stronger and more durable in comparison. However, there are no timber grains that give teak its richness and therefore its use is restricted to rafters and timber beams where the smoothness of the finished surface is not paramount. The natural hardwood timber flooring was imported from Indonesia.

The entire timber frame, roof and timber ceiling was executed by highly skilled traditional craftsmen in Kerala. Since the structure was not a traditional construction, the

craftsmen were unfamiliar with the work which posed significant challenges, including having to increase the budget beyond what was initially planned. The height of the main hall which lends an expansive feel to the space was particularly difficult considering that the height varies from being double-heighted in certain areas and lesser in others.

All the woodworking done was accomplished using traditional wood joinery techniques and no use of bolts, steel connectors or steel sections were made. An evocative combination of wood and glass, this contemporary home strikes a supple balance with tradition.

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