

**MYSPACE**

hema vijay

# A sense of space and grandeur

R. Shankar and Tamil Selvi's house in Neelangarai combines the best of both Indian and European styles

**Location:** Neelangarai  
**Architect:** Benny Kuriakose

The *mutram* is usually an outdoor space carved into the heart of a home, in traditional houses like the Chettinad mansions. The European portico or the 'verandah' as we term it, is a threshold space preceding the façade of the house, transitioning the house from the indoor environment to the outdoor environment. Architect Benny Kuriakose has cleverly morphed these concepts and added a privacy element to it, to create a split courtyard or *mutram* in the backyard of R. Shankar and Tamil Selvi's house at Neelangarai.

The yellow-hued rising façade of the house faces the West, and this blocks the heat of the sun from scorching the garden at the back. The *mutram* runs along the entire length of the house in the North-South direction, with an arm extending into the backyard. The *mutram* sports a split, sloping roof with terracotta tiles and is lined with wooden beams on its underside. The fact that the *mutram* is floored by beautiful, sea-green Athangudi tiles makes the transition of this threshold space into the spongy, green lawns of the garden even more seamless.

"We enjoy spending time in the *mutram*. It is a play area, study area, and relaxation zone all rolled into one", says Shankar. A lot of natural stone in the form of granite has gone into the building — this includes solid granite pillars in the courtyard, window frames, privacy



barriers and even carved granite *jaalis* in the walls.

As for the house itself, its walls diminish in view, dominated as they are by huge windows. This gives a freeway for natural wind to ventilate the house exquisitely. The high ceiling space (12 feet, in most places) of the house adds to a sense of space and grandeur to the house, besides accentuating the air-conditioning effect. A mix of European artefacts that Shankar collects during his business travels in Europe, sheer curtains and gleaming antique furniture create an eclectic décor for the house.



**ECCLECTIC DÉCOR** (From top left) huge windows make for great cross ventilation; *mutram* in the backyard; a threshold space merging the indoors with the outdoors; a sunny yet solid facade; Tamil Selvi with daughters

