



How green is your home?

Use local materials and recycled doors and windows to create eco-friendly buildings, says city architect Benny Kuriakose



AVING trained under the legendary architect Laurie Baker — who followed the Gandhian Principles of sustainability in architecture - Benny Kuriakose has a fancy list of eco homes to his credit. He studied conservation at the University of York, UK, and has been involved in eco-sensitive projects like the rebuilding of Banegaon village after the earthquake in Lattur. Down south, he helped design culture habitat DakshinaChitra and aesthetic homes of celebrities like actor Mammooty. In a brief interview, Kuriakose talks about real green homes and recycled building materials.

What is Green Architecture, pioneered by Laurie Baker?

Baker never said that he was doing green buildings. What he did was more greener than most of the green-certified buildings. He advocated the use of local materials, which are more cheaper and more labour intensive and uses less energy. He had natural methods of cooling the house, in contrast to many of our green buildings, which let in all the heat using glass facades and then use an air-conditioning method, which may use less energy compared with the more conventional air-conditioning buildings!

Are Chennai homes eco-friendly?

Rainwater harvesting has been carried out in many buildings but regarding solid waste management, even a simple



Benny Kuriakose (above) and his projects at DakshinaChitra, MRC office, and Vishram

proposal of segregating the waste into paper, metal, plastic etc is not being carried out.

Can eco-friendly houses successfully withstand the effects of weather?

The durability of a building depends on the quality of construction and some design details, more than the material used. A well designed mud building can last for more than 100 years without any problem, while a reinforced cement concrete building, badly constructed, may last only 25 years.

Can you give us lighting options other than energy savers?

In many of the software buildings, one does not know whether it is day or night or whether it is raining outside. Our design should try to harness maximum amount of natural light.

Is it eco-friendly to use wood to build homes?

Timber is considered to be an eco-friendly building material; as long as natural forests have not been cut down to source it. The main argument is that it is renewable and planting more trees can reduce the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The manufacture of most building materials will involve some kind of emission of carbon dioxide.

You use a lot of wood in your homes.

I try to use recycled doors, windows and timber for many of my projects. Using recycled materials from old buildings is a big step towards creating eco-friendly buildings. You are increasing the life cycle of a building component and the energy used is lesser. And unless the recycled component has some antique value, the cost is significantly lower too.