

INDIA
TODAY

MARCH 2016

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ARCHITECTURE SPECIAL

RNI No. DELENG / 2006 / 20557. Not for sale. To be circulated free with India Today in Mumbai, Delhi & NCR, Chennai, Bangalore and Kolkata. "Supplement to India Today issue dated March 28, 2016"



NEW FRONTIERS

Design and architecture ideas that mirror the future

TWINKLE KHANNA'S DIY TIPS, LAUNCHES, COOL KITCHEN TOOLS

The verandah in Casa Rojo is a fusion of traditional and contemporary design

SPACES WITH SOUL

From a beautiful beachfront bungalow to a chic wooden vacation home, architect par excellence, Benny Kuriakose shares five of his favourite private residences

By RIDHI KALE



Architect
Benny Kuriakose

He believes and lives by one simple architectural dictum, that there is no such thing as traditional or modern architecture; there is just good and bad architecture. Renowned architect Benny Kuriakose began his career in 1984 and received the basic lessons in architecture under the tutelage of Laurie Baker. After receiving the Charles Wallace India Trust award for an MA in conservation studies at the University of York, he completed his doctorate from the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras. If that's not enough to get you to stand up and take notice, he is also the country's foremost conservation architects. In fact, he has authored the book *Conserving Timber Structures in India*. He is best known for his work on the Kerala Section of the craft village known as Dakshinachitra in Chennai. Recent architectural works include the Muziris Heritage Project, The Springdale Heritage Resort in Vandiperiyar and design of the tsunami affected villages. He has designed several private residences as well, we take a look at five of his favourites.



Bright hues and a skylight make this bath in 'Vishram by the Sea' stand out

LIVING IN A GREEN MANSION

'Casa Roja', designed by Kuriakose, is a beachfront property near Chennai, awash with flora and fauna. A series of Mangalore tiled roofs that look different from different elevations are one of the key features of the home. A parapet wall has been made along the periphery of a concrete slab to accommodate a sloping tiled roof over it, which houses a large attic. This double layer roof ensures that the blazing sun in Chennai does not affect the temperature within the house. The water tank is also hidden in the attic under the sloping roof. Air-conditioning is hardly ever used and this in turn reduces the carbon footprint of the building. But that's not the only feature that makes this property stand out. "The plan of the house incorporated the existing orchard. The view from the gate is of the main house and the owner's office to the left. 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 verandah. And a simple, cost effective RCC tank transformed into a lily pond also with lotuses and bul-

rushes enhances the tranquillity of the space," says the architect, adding, "In drawing up the plan, the concept of blending traditional and contemporary elements was consciously followed. Such a concept naturally encompassed the features of climatic comfort, cost effectiveness, eco-friendliness and sustainability of the building."

DESIGNED FOR RELAXATION

Another project on his list is 'Vishram on the Sea'. "This is a weekend retreat, which is recognisably different from a city house. The criteria was how the sensitively the design of the house form responds to the location. The traditional forms were adapted for a contemporary context. The design of this house explores the vernacular without being over ornate and successfully exploits the varying relationships of the inside to the outside through its architecture," says Kuriakose. The home is built on the shores of Bay of Bengal, on the outskirts of Chennai. The beach house has traditional open courtyards, aquamarine and blue age-old Attangudi floor tiles, a multi-level sloping tiled roof to keep the home cool, a huge verandah, two ponds and flashes of Mediter-



A typical padipurra or gate house (above); and brass vessels (left) give Tarawad a traditional touch



ranean yellow in the interiors. Even the bathrooms in this property are special; bright colours, skylights, designed almost like a mini courtyard. Bell metal and brass accessories complete the look of the home. “Climatically the complex responds in a positive manner to the natural environment. The use of simple construction techniques and cost-effective materials enhances interesting spaces within the structures and open spaces which bind them together,” adds Kuriakose.

TRADITION AT ITS BEST

Next is Tarawad located on Chennai’s East Coast Road. “A *padipurra* or gate house, a typical Kerala structure forms the entrance to the house. The adornment of this entrance by the antique stone pillars together with timber, stone and tiles, continues the traditional theme and then it is combined with modern settings. The other special features of the entrance are the gabled roof and the welcoming built-in seat of timber,” says Kuriakose, adding, “The courtyard is designed with elements drawn from the *nalukettu* principle (a rectangular structure where four halls are joined together with a central courtyard open to the sky). It has pillars of timber from Chettinad and the lanterns, *diyās* and brass vessels and lamps flanking the heavy door, also from a house in Chettinad. All these traditional features contribute to the warmth and charm of this house.” The



A courtyard in
Paramankheni House

A simple but elegant
bathroom in the
Paramankheni House



brehtaking bungalow with gabled roofs enhances the appeal of Chettinad pillars inside. A stunning bronze idol of Shiva sits framed in an intricately carved temple doorway mounted on the wall. "The french doors and many windows give the house an airy and spacious feeling by bringing in enough natural light and ventilation. The characteristics of this house are elegance, comfort and convenience with a natural earthiness," he says.

MAKING MOST OF THE VIEW

The Paramankheni House is another home that is part of the award-winning architect's favourite five. "The house is built by beach on the Chennai-Pondi-

cherry highway. It is designed in such a way that the view of the sea is ensured from all the beds, dining, and the living. There is a large verandah on the sea side and the major part of the garden is also on the beach side," says Kuriakose, who has used cement for the flooring and eco-friendly features like usage of recycled doors and windows in the home. That's now all, the home is airy and spacious. "Both the bathrooms attached to the beds are open to the sky. The ground floor bedroom has an enclosed courtyard with an outdoor shower. The buildings has an open plan, which brings the natural light and ensures cross-ventilation. The kitchen is also an open kitchen being part of the living dining," he says.

The interiors of the Wayanad House have been crafted from three types of local woods



The exteriors of the Wayanad House show the different roof elevations

TURNING IT INTO A WOODEN HAVEN

Located in the rugged terrain of the Western Ghats in Wayanad, Kerala, the 'Wayanad House' completes Kuriakose's list. "The house was designed as an estate bungalow. It has two bedrooms with a large hall. The open kitchen is part of the hall and there is a mezzanine floor. The whole building is done with a

timber roof and ceiling. Only one side of the building is masonry, while the walls of the other three sides are built with timber and glass. Glass walls have been used because the climate in a hill station is quite different from the plains. The views of the Western Ghats are splendid from the beds, the hall and the verandah," explains Kuriakose. Since the client was an owner of a timber business who was keen on featuring extensive woodwork in the interior details, Kuriakose ensured that the doors, floor, ceiling, roof and stairs, were all crafted from wood; even the glass walls comprise of timber frames. Mostly, three different local species of wood from the forests of Wayanad were used. The best part? The local woods were priced at nearly a third of the cost of teak, plus they are more durable and stronger than teak. The entire timber frame, roof and timber ceiling was executed by highly skilled traditional craftsmen in Kerala. With stylish wooden interiors and breathtaking views, Kuriakose has designed the perfect vacation home.

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