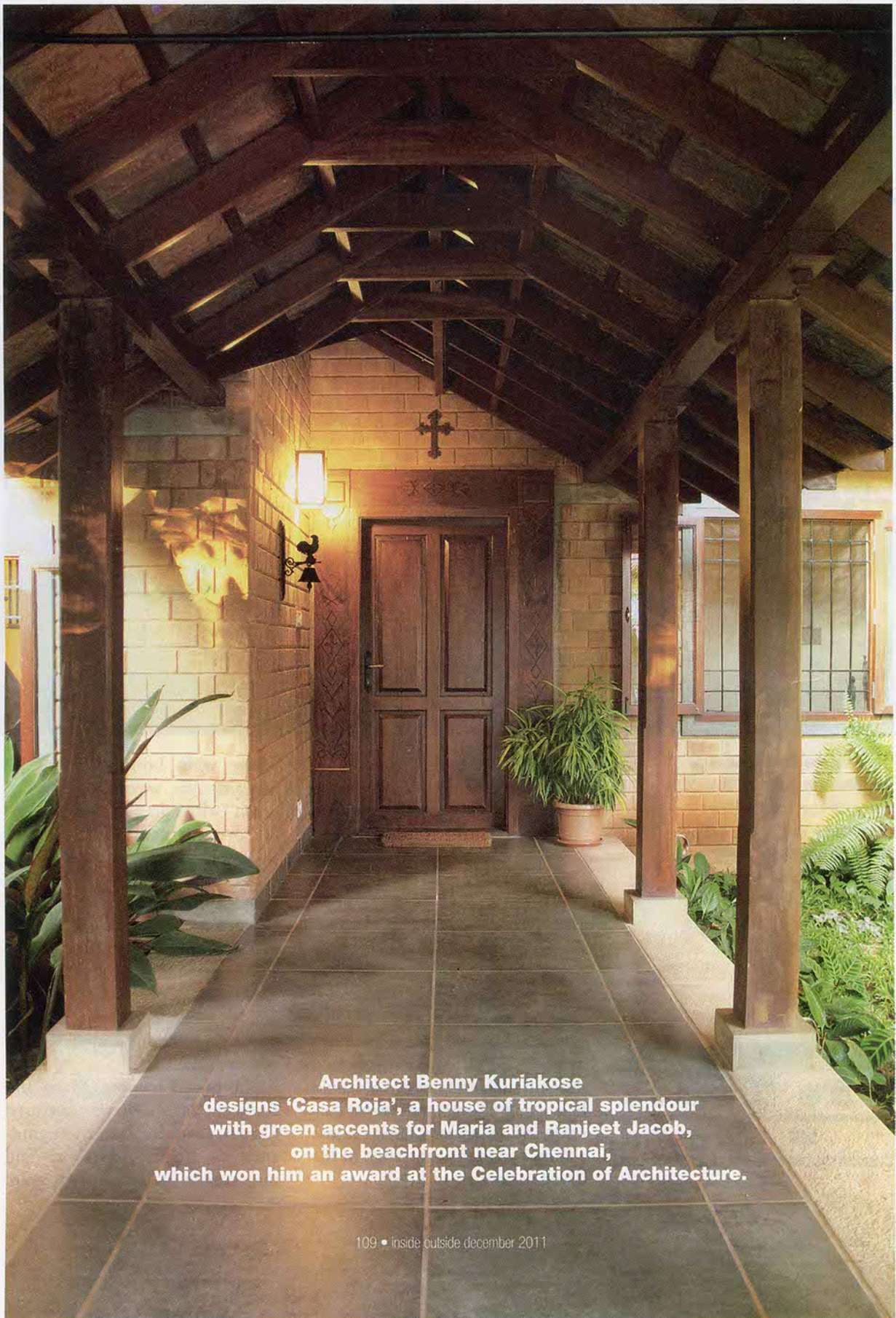


The most striking feature at Casa Rojo is the Mangalore tiled roof, or series of roofs that enclose the mottled pink brick walls in continuous creases and folds, like a collection of Origami hats. The roof looks different in every elevation.

# Green Mansion

TEXT: GEETA DOCTOR  
PHOTOGRAPHS: KEVIN BENNY KURIAKOSE

## BUNGALOW



**Architect Benny Kuriakose  
designs 'Casa Roja', a house of tropical splendour  
with green accents for Maria and Ranjeet Jacob,  
on the beachfront near Chennai,  
which won him an award at the Celebration of Architecture.**



**The wide brimmed verandah juts into the water body that is green with dragon flies hovering over lily pads and the reflection from the fruit trees of an old orchard grove.**



FRONT ELEVATION

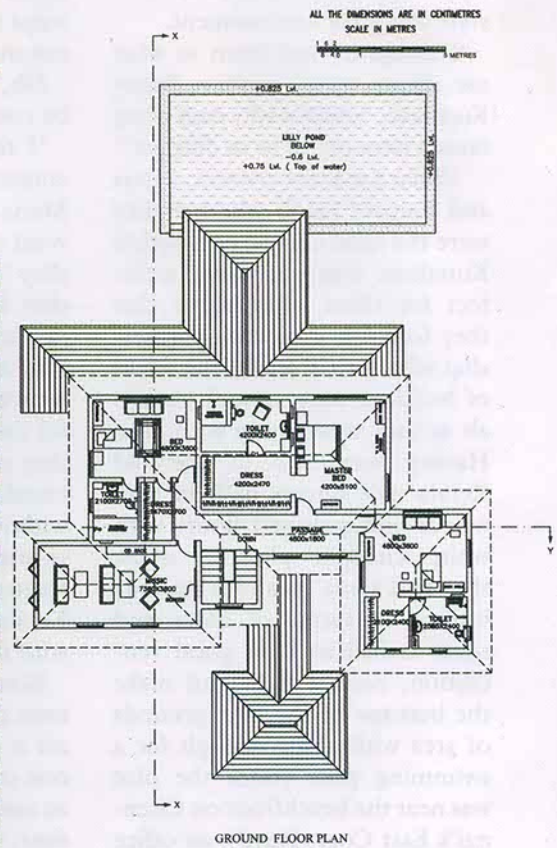
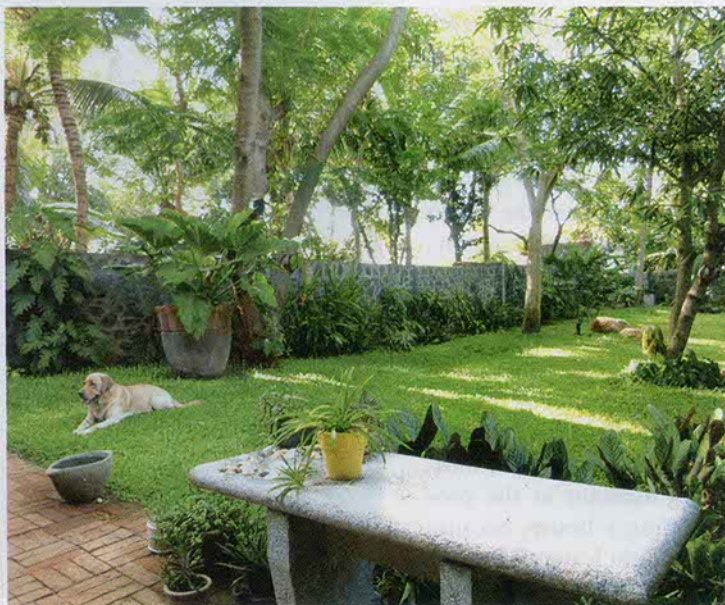
**T**here's a Spartan elegance to the entrance of the warm brick and tiled roof mansion as you enter through a covered porch into a corridor and a formal drawing room that is hardly used. Nothing, however, prepares you for the sudden splendour of the setting that awaits you as you walk into the dining room at the immediate left of the corridor and find yourself looking through a vast verandah onto a water garden at its edge. It's like being transported through time and space. You could be walking through the narrow corridors of an ancient family house and find yourself at the edge of the fabled backwaters of Kerala.

The wide brimmed verandah juts into the water body that is green with dragon flies hovering over lily pads and the reflection from the fruit trees of an old orchard grove that has been there long before the house came into being. You realise that this is actually the front of the house, facing the lily pond, the garden that has a Buddha head perched at one side, amidst a clump of ferns and the orchard providing a moving panorama at the back.

The proud owners, Maria and Ranjeet Jacob have nurtured Casa Roja under the expert guidance of Benny Kuriakose and undertaken it as an adventure



**Sun-dried brick has been used everywhere in the house. Each has a groove, so that the bricks interlock into each other neatly, without the use of cement.**





in building with cost friendly materials, massive amounts of patience to get the right quality of workmanship and a dream to create something of beauty and warmth, suited to both their life-style and their environment.

‘I always try and listen to what my clients want,’ explains Benny Kuriakose, ‘which is why each of my houses turns out to be so different.’

When I ask the owners, Maria and Ranjeet Jacob whether they were the ideal clients, or whether Kuriakose was the ideal architect for them, they agree that they found it a creative partnership where they learnt the tricks of building with natural materials as they went along with him. Having memories of the old Kerala-style houses built of dark woods and polished floors with white ‘chunam’ plastered walls, they had some idea of what they wanted in terms of space and style. It had to have good ventilation, natural light and make the best use of the nine grounds of area with space enough for a swimming pool (since the plot was near the beachfront on Chennai’s East Coast Road), an office

space, servants’ quarters, car park and enough amenities for entertainment. Being an outdoors kind of family, the Jacobs and their two grown up children aspired to a house that would fit into the landscape in a practical way that would not mean too much maintenance.

Oh, and they also wanted it to be cost effective.

‘I think we learnt a lot about construction from Benny,’ both Maria and Ranjit say. ‘We actually went to the site at Red hills where they make the sun-dried brick that has been used everywhere in the house and saw to it that they mixed it in such a way that we were able to get these beautiful colours.’ Each has a groove, they explained, so that the bricks interlock into each other neatly, without the use of cement. Of course the task requires the trained hand of masons from Kerala, who are used to working with mud bricks.

Benny smiles, ‘I find it better to train my clients, rather than initiate a young assistant in the process of building a house, because an assistant might leave after some time, while the clients have a long

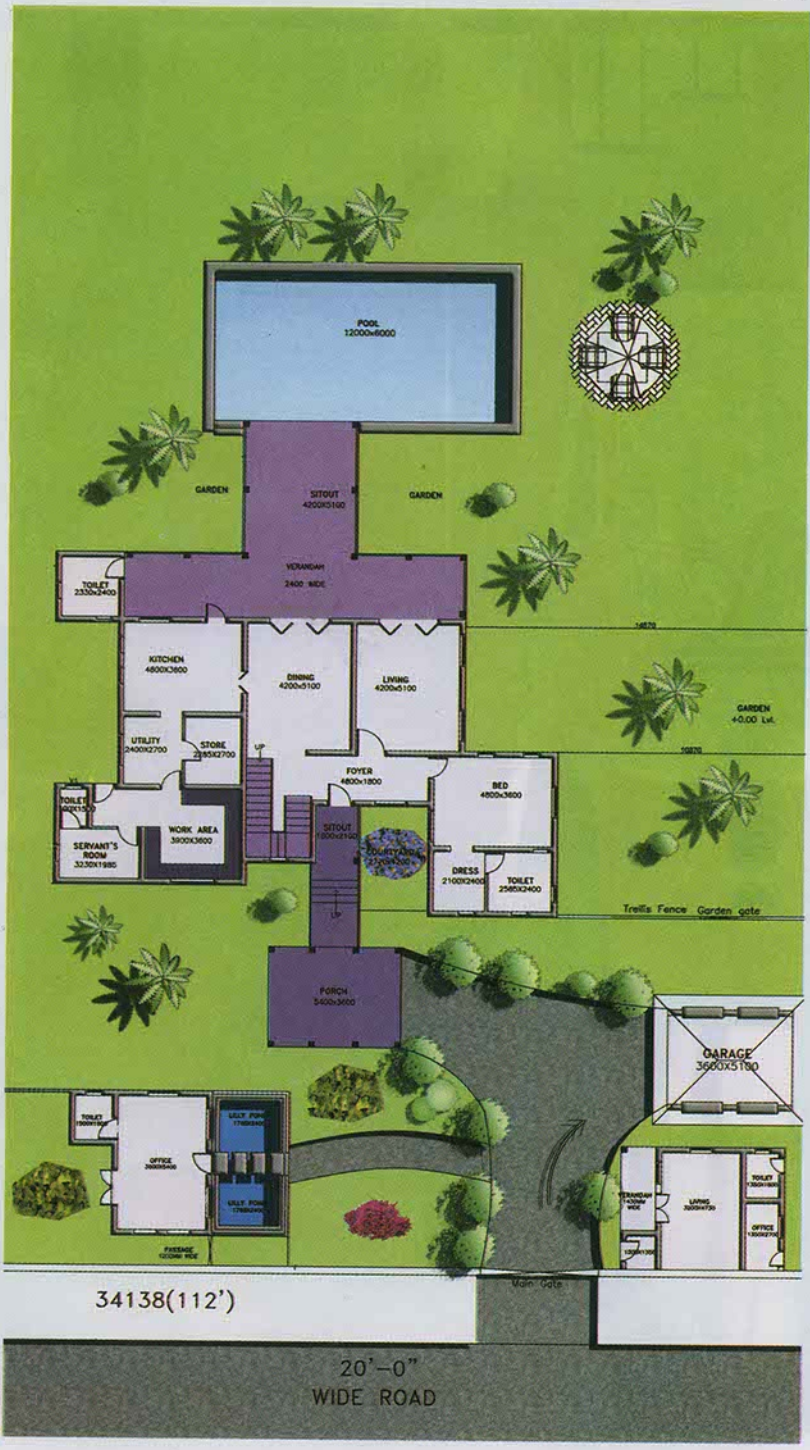


**A beautiful staircase leads to the first floor and the bedrooms. Handmade clay tiles from Mexico are used as risers in different bands of colours like ribbons and a Spanish-style handrail can be seen from the formal dining room, which is flooded with light.**



...and will give...  
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**SITE PLAN**  
 ALL THE DIMENSIONS ARE IN MM  
 SCALE IN METRES  
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term commitment in seeing that they get the best building materials for their house.'

The most striking feature at Casa Rojo is the Mangalore tiled roof, or series of roofs that enclose the mottled pink brick walls in continuous creases and folds, like a collection of Origami hats.

Or as Benny has put it: 'The roof is a predominant feature in the elevation. It is the most striking feature of the house. It is done in such a way that it looks different from every elevation. 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



## BUNGALOW

**Since the Jacobs have been collecting antique cupboards, chairs, chests, prints, table lamps and tables over a long period of time, these provide the unique flavour that they have learnt to create, incorporating the old with the new, in a serene and timeless fashion.**

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.'

A large corridor links the rear verandah with the rest of the house, providing additional space for entertaining, with a specially designed wooden bar at one end of it, a small dining area by the side, a washroom for guests and access to the kitchen area. There are at least three degrees of kitchen facilities, from an American style modern kitchen that also serves as a pantry, a 'wet' kitchen for the preparation of South Indian style foods and an outdoor kitchen. This is aside from an extensive storeroom and laundry.

The beautiful staircase leads to the first floor and the bedrooms, each one with its own bathroom and a large sprawling recreation space that opens out into their neighbour's garden, so that there is an additional vista of green on view, through the french windows. The floors are of a slate coloured tile sourced from China. The lighting is another design feature, flooding the rooms via large windows framed in wood, with very simple grills.

Maria is particularly proud of the beautiful handmade clay tiles from Mexico used as risers for the staircase in different bands of colours like ribbons and a Spanish-style handrail that can be seen from the formal dining room. Ranjeet takes credit

for the use of the warm apricot coloured wood called Pyinkado (*xylia xylocarpa*) that has been sourced from Malaysia, which has been used extensively for the timber trusses holding up roofs and the doors and the windows, some of them very subtly carved around the borders.

'Each of the rooms is unique in the sense that each one reflects the tastes of the person whose room it is, from the colour to the furnishings,' says Maria. Since they have been collecting antique cupboards, chairs, chests, prints, table lamps and tables over a long period of time, these provide the unique flavour that they have learnt to create, incorporating the old with the new, in a serene and timeless fashion. **LB**