

HOME & DESIGN

A TIMES OF INDIA PUBLICATION

TRENDS

VOLUME 10 NO 2

***Experience
the best of design***

ADHWA architecture.interiors

ADND

Cyril Lancelin

Dikshu Kukreja

Gadesign

LAD Studio

RC Architects

Sybaritic Spaces

The Brick Tales



**THE TIME
IS NOW**

***Benny Kuriakose
discusses sustainable
architecture with the
urgency it deserves***



19

SCULPTED SPACES Residential

26 A MELD OF CONTRASTS

Inspired by old city charm, LAD Studio creates a domestic paragon for a close-knit family by blending traditional materials with contemporary methods

30 THE CHAMPAGNE HOUSE

Aptly named, this 3,000sqft home in Mumbai by Gadesign weaves vignettes of the charming colour in all its glory

33 A COMPELLING MATERIAL PLAY

This house in Surat, Gujarat, designed by The Brick Tales, renders a striking architectural expression through a fascinating interplay of stone, steel, glass and wood

36 THE PERFECT ESCAPE

A private Eden for its residents, this three-BHK home designed by ADND is abound with sheer luxury and subtle elegance

39 A FITTING RESPONSE TO CONSTRAINTS

This affordable housing scheme in Mumbai by RC Architects hopes to inspire alternatives to the megacity's matchbox-type apartment units with this seemingly open and dynamic spatial treatment

Commercial

42 INSPIRED BY NATURE

A minimalistic style and a highly detailed execution tie together the design of this 13,000sqft, five-storey office space by Sybaritic Spaces

46 A DEFT EXECUTION

In this Ahmedabad office crafted by ADHWA architecture.interiors, wood tones and grey hues dominate the interior palette, with measured doses of colour breaking the monotony of the muted elements



ON THE COVER
Benny Kuriakose
Image: TP Naseef

06 SPECTACLE

Transformative public interventions that alter perceptions and neighbourhoods

BUILDING CONVERSATIONS

08 SPOTLIGHT

A brief look at the diverse ventures and initiatives of one of the country's leading architects, Dikshu Kukreja

19 COVER STORY

Architect, Dr. Benny Kuriakose is the torchbearer of sustainable and conservation architecture in India. In this no-holds-barred conversation, he is his candid best

THE GREEN ARCHITECT



Architect, Dr. Benny Kuriakose is the torchbearer of sustainable and conservation architecture in India. Every one of his designs is environmentally friendly and fearlessly champions vernacular design. Benny looks to create a better tomorrow by embracing design practices with roots in the past. His approach is inspiring as he is constantly highlighting the need for a sustainable today! In this no-holds-barred conversation, Benny is his candid best

Feature AVRIL NOEL D'SOUZA *Images* NASEEF TP

What drew young Benny Kuriakose into the world of design?

My primary interest was in photography and film and my dream was to become a cinematographer but my father in a typically Indian way was reluctant to let me pursue it without an engineering degree first. One day by complete accident, I met Laurie Baker at one of his sites during my final year of civil engineering degree in 1984. We just started talking and discussing various topics that interested both of us and at the end of a long conversation, I asked him whether I could work with him. He agreed to have me on board and together with him I learned my basic lessons in architecture. I was the 4th person to work with him and he was already 67 years old. He was not very popular in the field at that time and many conventional engineers and architects said that his buildings will not last more than 10 years and the exposed brickwork architecture he created is not suitable for the heavy rainfall in Kerala. Baker always questioned the status quo and the mainstream architecture that was prevalent at that time.

Your prolific journey began with basic lessons in architecture under the tutelage of Laurie Baker...in retrospect how integral were these days to your growth as a green architect?

I was very sensitive to environmental and social issues even before I joined Laurie Baker. As a student, I was very actively involved with the NGO Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) which involved itself in the popularisation of science and even spent more time volunteering for the organisation than my studies. KSSP was at the forefront of saving Silent Valley national park from a dam and reservoir. One of the main debates we were involved in the 1970s was whether we wanted to save the lion-tailed monkeys of Silent Valley rainforest or to solve the energy crisis. Even now, the same type of issue is cropping up in various fields across the world, do we prioritise the environment or do we prioritise human development. In my eyes, prioritising the environment is the same as prioritising human development because we are completely dependent on the environment however much we think we are separate from nature.

In the 1970s, nobody used the word sustainable architecture or green buildings. But Laurie Baker was ahead of his time. He used to say that if it is not necessary, do not do it. This is the basic principle of Sustainable Architecture even now about minimising our impact and being sensitive

to the context and the environment. Mainstream architecture nowadays is sometimes all about excess with total disregard for the impact it might have on the environment or even on other humans.

I believed fully in Laurie Baker's principles and started doing the buildings based on them in 1985. There I started my architectural journey.

In the past, sustainable architecture was a way of life, today, sustainable architecture is considered a trend. Do share your thoughts on this dichotomy?

I believe that there should not be a need to distinguish between architecture and sustainable architecture. Why have dichotomy at all? Shouldn't all architecture be sustainable? Should we





BEFORE

still be building architecture that is knowingly not sustainable? I do not think it's a trend but an intrinsic way in which we should view all architecture and how we should choose to design and live in the future. We should be thinking about the long-term impacts of actions on the natural environment. Obviously, there are limits to our knowledge and many things we thought were fantastic materials like asbestos or CFCs are terrible for the environment, but we should still try and design our built environment in the most sustainable way possible and society should be willing to accept nothing less than that.

To a certain extent, unknowingly, we did create

more sustainable architecture in the past, but this was not because we knew of such a concept as sustainability but rather out of the limitations imposed by our context. Due to industrialisation and globalisation, we as a society thought that we have transcended this limitation and we could impose our will on the environment and that it would provide us with endless resources but I think we are slowly, maybe too slowly coming to the realisation that this is not the reality we live in and that maybe the far past can teach us a few things about how we can live and continue to thrive in the future.

People who have influenced you along your journey...

Of course, Laurie Baker. Although he was a British-born architect, he showed us Indians how to design and build in a very sustainable way. Hassan Fathy has influenced me tremendously and I might have taken more inspiration from him than anybody else in doing an architecture that is more in tune with the vernacular architecture of a place. I admire the works of Geoffrey Bawa who showed us how we can do beautiful buildings without going after the western models.

Cheraman Juma Masjid, located in Kodungallur, in Kerala's Thrissur district is the first mosque in India. Although the Masjid is said to have been built in AD 629, historians attribute it to the 11th century. The restoration of this historic Juma Masjid is being carried out under the guidance of Dr. Benny as part of the Muziris Heritage Project.



Le Corbusier's writings influenced me a lot. In his book titled "The City of Tomorrow", he said that we should go vertically high since we have the technology and know-how to do this. He said that 85% of the land area shall be left as open spaces and only 15% should be built. What we saw later in the coming decades was that 85% of the area was built and 15% was left as open spaces. The social content of the architecture faded and the greed to make money changed the architecture of the coming decades. If you read Le Corbusier's writings, you will agree with him. We need to create a new narrative based on the present circumstances.

There are many young architects in India who are doing wonderful work in this field. The important challenge is to have the right perspective and consistency. It is not easy to withstand the pressure of the usual commercial practice.

Your passion for green architecture has inspired a whole generation...

I am not sure whether I inspired a whole generation. But my vision is to spread my knowledge and thoughts to a wider audience. I am doing what I believe in. I have gone through certain kinds of experiences, and I have learned a lot from the craftsmen and my clients. I want to share this knowledge with the younger generation so that they do not have to go through the experience which I went through. I will continue to do different

architectural projects because I am trying to explore new ideas and train many youngsters in the process.

Why should we care for green architecture?

Global warming is a reality. The building industry as a whole is a major contributor to this. There has always been a tendency in India, due to our post-colonial mentality, to look to the west and to try and imitate western modes of living. So, there has been widespread adoption of western architectural styles that we have copied and pasted across our landscape, forgetting the values of indigenous building practices.

The funny thing is that even half a century later, people don't seem to have learned that, maybe sloping roofs, built with locally sourced materials and with adequate sun shading, might be the best solution. Unfortunately, this is not what we are teaching in architecture schools and people generally think that looking to the past for ideas is not the way forward.

The fusion of modern construction techniques with traditional ideas is what we have been trying to perfect over the years.

Are we moving in the right direction?

Maybe yes. We must make a lot of changes in the architectural field. If we do not make enough changes now, we will be forced to make the

Chitra Rajan Residence in Chennai, was completed in 2018 and is a rustic, simple and rooted design, surrounded by a lush green landscape garden. The terracotta jaali walls in the porch allow air to circulate over the water body, allowing evaporative cooling to take place, lowering the total temperature inside the house. The open ventilators on the top floor and wooden windows present in this sloping roof home also help to keep the house cool.

changes. The building profession has started to take this seriously only during the last two or three years. We have been hearing about sustainable development for the last three decades. This has not become the mainstream of architecture now. If we do not take this seriously, we will be forced to do these things soon. The earth is already giving back to us with more earthquakes, floods, cyclones, etc.

We cannot blame the younger generation because they are not being taught about these ideas. The importance given to vernacular architecture and it as a knowledge system is very little.

How can mainstream Indian design adopt more sustainable methods?

We should try to avoid seeing green architecture as another way of doing architecture that some clients demand. Everything we do should be green as much as possible. We have been neglecting our history and our indigenous architecture over the last few decades. To do big multi-storeyed buildings need not be equated with development.

What we need to do with our engineering curriculum is major surgery. They are not being taught about the building materials timber, lime and earth. Both our engineering and architecture

curriculum deals mainly with concrete and steel. We know that concrete (because of the cement) has many drawbacks. Concrete is not thermally comfortable and very energy-intensive. It is very difficult to do a concrete roof faultless and many of them develop leakages over a period. At the same time, we know that many of our historic buildings have lasted for more than 100 years. The knowledge of building science has increased and now we know how to take care of termites, how to keep the interiors cool by natural methods, etc.

The wide regional variations within a state in India is something we must learn to appreciate, learn from, and adapt to a modern context and our contemporary ways of life.

What sustainability challenges do you face far too often?

General awareness has increased over the years. It is important to have teamwork with the entire team. We should be able to convince the clients and, in some cases, it might not work. There is a trade-off involved in all the projects, but the overall results in our projects are good.

Our knowledge about sustainability must improve a lot. There is a huge gap between academia and practice. Still, sustainability is practiced with a gut feeling and we still blindly follow the western model when it comes to green buildings. We think that whatever they do is great and superior. They have learned from their mistakes and the same mistakes are repeated by us after two or three decades. We forget about our history and our rich heritage. We are more western by our way of thinking and not by our way of living.

Formerly owned by the Bombay Company, the New Model Co-operative Society building is being adaptively restored into the Museum of Labour Movement in the Alappuzha Heritage Project. The society's godowns, which have since fallen into ruin, were formerly bustling with people involved in the production of various coir products. Benny is working towards restoring these structures as assets to Alleppey's heritage.

BEFORE



What is your ultimate dream for architecture in India? What are you constantly working towards?

We want the mainstream of architecture to follow sustainability in the best possible manner. Our vision is to transform and take an active part in creating a more humane and sustainable architectural landscape. It is important in a rapidly transforming country like India to take an active part in creating the built environment that is socially, economically, and sustainably viable and bettering the lives of humans as well as the environment and the ecosystem. We have always tried to do socially impactful projects and we would like to engage with more such projects in the future. Things are changing very fast, and we need to adjust and adapt to these changes as far as sustainability is concerned.

We, in our practice, are committing ourselves to do more research and development on better, more sustainable practices and usage of resources. It is a fine balance that we must strike between our needs as human beings and the needs of other more-than-human species and future generations. One of the key areas we look towards is the embedded knowledge in the vernacular architecture of different regions whether it is the design principles or the use of local and renewable materials.

Advice for designers who align themselves with your crusade?

There is no single solution for the whole of India. What is sustainable in Assam might not be sustainable in Rajasthan or in Kerala. What has been sustainable 20 years ago might not be sustainable now. Start from the basic principles considering our climate, materials, techniques, and social and cultural aspects, while designing buildings. Think that your job is not to create monuments, but to improve the life of the people through design. The approach should be towards sustainability beyond certifications which often function as checklists and tools for greenwashing. Please follow a context-driven, holistic approach that not only tries to minimise the impact of the life cycle of the building but try to think about how the building can have a net positive impact on our ecosystem.

(RIGHT) With an integrated approach, the revitalisation of the Kottappuram market aims at working with the local community to restore the lost social and cultural aspects of its past. The Kottappuram Chapel is part of this restoration project.

(BELOW) Ninan Thariyan House, completed in 2018, is located in a small village in Ernakulam district, Kerala. It is a quaint house that strives to rethink the psychological and physical aspects of designing a home.



A QUICKFIRE WITH BENNY

What do you mean by a “green” building?

By this we refer to any building that is built in response to its location’s climate, has a minimal impact on the environment and has long-term benefits.

Do green buildings cost more than traditional buildings?

Green buildings do not cost more. The running and maintenance costs of the green buildings are less. So even if they cost more at the beginning, there will be a return on investment in the long run. The aim should not be to reduce the cost at any cost or by eliminating something.

Which is better: A recycled material or a natural material?

I think it depends on the material. Some natural materials need not be sustainable while recycling material or even buildings (conserving our old buildings) is better for the environment.

Why aren’t ALL buildings built to be green?

Some of the building professionals work for short-term benefits. Ignorance is also one of the main reasons why all buildings are not green.

What are the main pillars of sustainable architecture?

Sustainability has many different dimensions. Socio-cultural, economic and environmental dimensions are very important. Now, time has become the fourth dimension in sustainability.

What is the aim of sustainable architecture?

The main aim of sustainable architecture is to make the Earth a better place to live for future generations also.

Should a building be deconstructed instead of demolished?

Designing for Disassembly has become a part of sustainable architecture now. It is very important for us to reuse the building materials rather than demolish. **H&DT**

