



Newsletter - August 2023

From Our Desk

BK&A On Traditional Architecture Conservation

Old buildings are not given enough care. Most owners regard them as a burden, and no maintenance is carried out. They are demolished without giving any serious thought to their possible importance. Old buildings are considered 'old-fashioned'. Besides those buildings, which can be put in the monument category, there are thousands of ordinary buildings which form an integral part of the culture of the people. A large number of these buildings, some of them qualitatively much better than the protected monuments, are being demolished at regular intervals. Quite simply, nobody thinks about conserving an old building in general.

There is not a good example of a timber-framed building known to the equator, which has been conserved by incorporating modern facilities. The most important problem in conserving the traditional architecture is that modern engineers and architects do not generally know about the traditional methods of construction. However, the hopeful sign is that there are craftsmen who can still build in a well-trained way. A heritage bill to protect our monuments is highly advisable for India.

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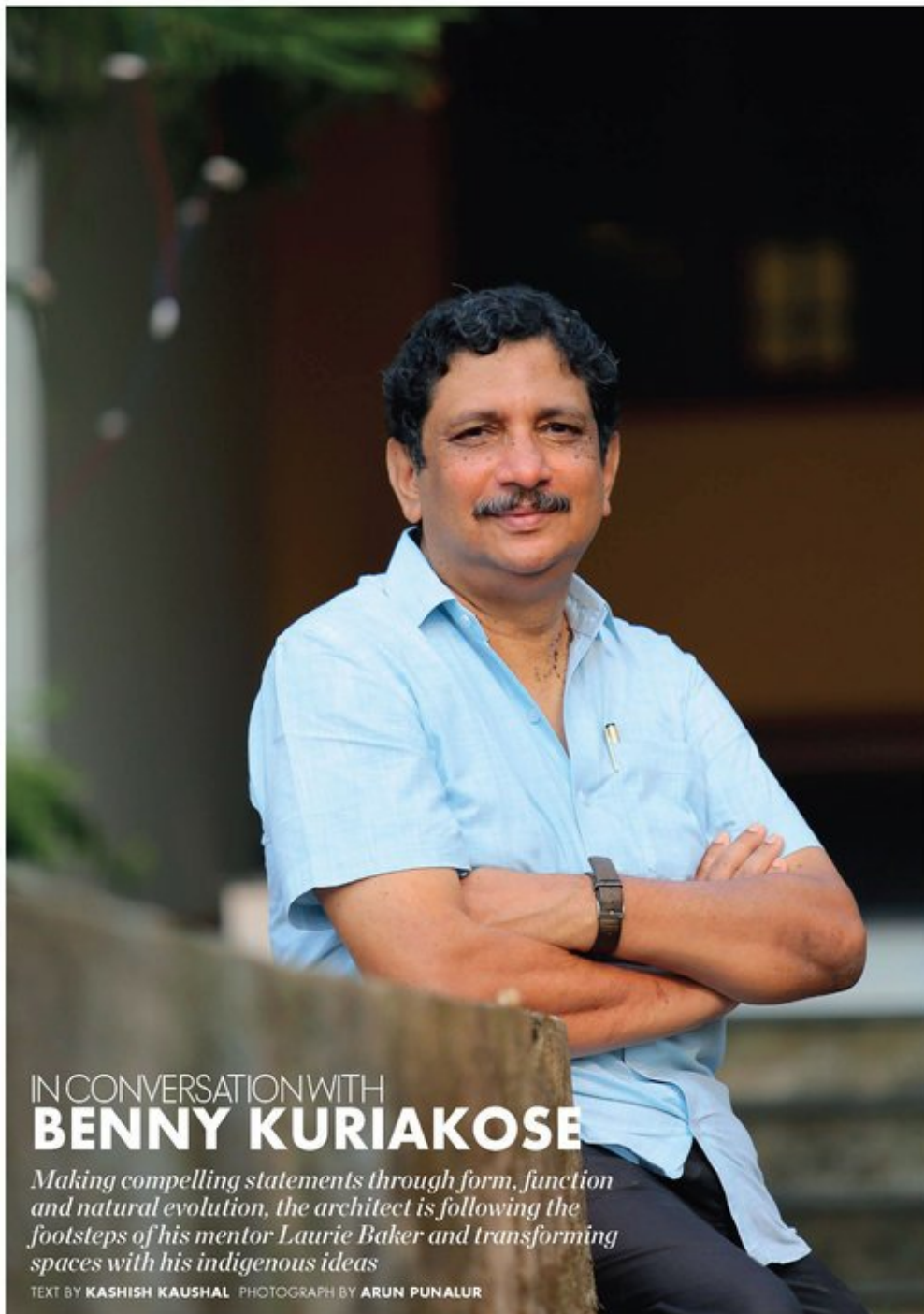
Recent Highlights

Elle Decor - Decor People : In Conversation with Dr. Benny Kuriakose

Elle Decor - India's leading design magazine, featured Dr. Benny Kuriakose in their Decor People Segment for the June - July edition of their magazine. This is the third time Elle Decor sits down with the designer to talk about architecture and his work in the field. In this article, you can read

about Benny Kuriakose's view on Sustainability and Vernacular architecture. The article glosses over his design philosophy and attributes his success to designing for the client and their needs. He also fondly reminisces about his mentorship under Laurie Baker and how that impacted the designs we see today. Also, it gives a sneak peek into some of the works done over the years such as the Dakshinachitra, Chitra Rajan Residence and more executed by Benny Kuriakose and Associates, that bring together a holistic approach to design and architecture.

DECOR PEOPLE



"MY AIM WAS TO BECOME A CINEMATOGRAPHER. BACK THEN, THERE WASN'T ANY FORMAL EDUCATION TO BECOME A PHOTOGRAPHER. THAT'S WHEN I OPTED FOR CIVIL ENGINEERING"

When one dares to think the impossible and imagines a decaying commercial space as a thriving public environment conducive to social interaction and creativity, forgotten buildings and communities get a new lease on life. Dr. Benny Kurukose, a practicing urban planner for the last three decades, begins our discourse by revealing an unlikely attitude about himself. "I am an introvert," he chuckles. Born and brought up in Kerala, Benny made a name for himself in architectural restoration and building design by taking cues from South Indian traditional architecture. But was becoming an architect always the plan? He begs to differ. "I wanted to be a photographer," Benny tells, talking about his formative years. "My aim was to become a cinematographer. But, there wasn't any formal education to become a cinematographer and my father insisted that I get a degree. That's when I opted for civil engineering. It laid the foundation of design, construction, and maintenance of public works such as roads, bridges, structural components of buildings, etc." Even though architecture and design weren't his preferred choice of careers, Benny stumbled upon design by accident after a chance encounter with the legendary British born Indian architect Laurie Baker at one of his sites. The way God is to me," he fondly reminisces about his mentor. For over three decades, Benny followed his footsteps and implemented the Baker philosophy using natural and eco-friendly materials with designs that play with natural sunlight and air.

MA in Conservation Studies from the University of Kent. After completing his masters, he returned to Kerala and started his eponymous practice Benny Kurukose & Associates in 1991. Embarking on his journey as an architect, he designed and drafted over 17 projects in the first year itself. "While sketching the projects and making initial blueprints, I spent a whopping ₹10 on a Picta 1635 camera and had Baker review them. He gave me honest feedback and taught me how I could make it better," he reminisces. "I did not have any style and I think my success has been that I designed for the people."

He implemented ecological materials even in the Malayalam superstar Mammootty's Chennai residence. "Mammootty had told me that he had bought two plots together - one behind the other, so the plot was very narrow, and the only land I received from him was that he wanted a house to be built with natural materials. I do not want much concrete," divulged Benny. He went on to use exposed brickwork throughout the house, traditional Kerala floorings, and the doors were made of teak. Looking towards the future and learning from the past, Benny arrives to be ahead of his game. With all that he has accomplished, and all that he aims to achieve, he makes a conscious effort to follow the footsteps of his 'great master' and yet create something exclusive. An avid traveller, he keeps up with the latest social media trends, and enthusiastically declares getting back to his first love-photography. "You must explore our Instagram account to get a first hand account of our latest works. I did not make the reels but you can credit some photographs to me," he concludes cheerily.

ON SUSTAINABILITY

"I go beyond realisations which often function as generalised ideas and look for generalising. We take a holistic approach based on the social and environmental context for sustainable solutions that flow out of these realisations."

Dr. Benny Kurukose, Chennai
Website: www.bennykurukose.com

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SNEAK PEEK INTO

Some of his works that bring together a holistic approach to design and architecture

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY: BENNY KURUKOSE & ASSOCIATES



DAKSHINACHITRA GUESTHOUSE
Located in Chennai, the Dakshinachitra guest house is a new winged space situated within the Dakshinachitra Museum. It spreads across 182 sq m and is made in exposed brick with a traditional cement concrete roof. The property as a whole is a living heritage museum that is designed to showcase lifestyles and stories of people from South of India. The houses that were originally abandoned have been transported from their original location to Dakshinachitra, recreating the older days through architecture and landscape.



BEKAL RESTAURANT IN DAKSHINACHITRA
The Bekal Restaurant in Dakshinachitra is known for its traditional South Indian architecture and decor with semi open verandahs designed to act as a hub for various cultural activities and programmes. The curved timber stair and Chittali pillar elegantly demonstrate the vibrant craftsmanship of its time.



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BIHARATKALASH-EXTRAM
Originally designed by Shri. Appabudhan Thari, Bharat Kalashasthane in Chennai is a temple shrine where various traditional art forms are performed. Benny Kurukose stepped in to rebuild the shrine in spirit. The auditorium of the Bharata Kalashasthane is designed keeping in mind the ideals of Nurtys Shastri, that adhering to the core principles of traditional architecture. The elegant cane chairs replace the typical fixed seating in auditoriums, a unique aspect of the interior design.

NEW MODEL COIR SOCIETY
Formerly a part of the Bhandley Company, the New Model Coir Society in Alappuzha is now converted to house a museum. Spreading across an area of 224 sq m, this society was once used to exhibit specimens used in the Lathum Tharamela Exhibition organised by the Kerala Museum Board in 2011. The galleries will now be used to represent the history of the coir industry in Kerala.



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KERALA STATE COIR CORPORATION
Also located in Alappuzha, Kerala, Kerala State Coir Corporation is an old factory building that has been converted into an exhibition space. Spreading across 370 sq m, it was founded by Valluvar Brothers in 1988. Benny Kurukose and Associates took up the project and converted this space into a museum that speaks about the history of the coir industry.

QUICK WORD

A QUOTE THAT HAS STAYED WITH YOU...
"Whoever do not talk about architecture they speak" by Hassan Fathy
IF NOT AN ARCHITECT/DESIGNER, YOU'D BE...
A photographer
A TRAVEL DESTINATION THAT INSPIRES YOU...
Turkey, Vietnam, Egypt, Chile and Brazil
WHAT WAS THE LAST MOVIE THAT YOU WATCHED ON THE BIG SCREEN...
Parasite (South Korea)

QUIET BY THE RIVER

Located at the confluence of the Malayattoor River, the Periyar river, and the mountains, Quiet By the River is a resort built with subtle economy and timber along the site's natural contours. Curved overhalls the across swimming, tennis and courts providing a serene experience to the visitors and epitomise harmony with the local community and ethos of its region.



CHITRAJIAN RESIDENCE
Located on the outskirts of Chennai, the property features wide open spaces, open sitting areas, still waters and changing roof. The terracotta, jali walls and Mangalore tile roofs help in maintaining a comfortable temperature as sunlight enters its way through beams to naturally illuminate the interior.

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Heritage Walk with Dr. Benny Kuriakose

On July 01, 2023, Dakshinachitra hosted a Heritage Walk with Dr. Benny Kuriakose at the Dakshinachitra Museum. Participants from various parts of India, actively participated in the walk. It was an enthralling session that began at Puthupally House and ended at the new ongoing transplantation work of Coorg Kodira House, which helped people understand more about traditional South Indian architecture. Benny Kuriakose was asked many questions, and he answered them all and cleared up any confusion. He also shared his knowledge and memories with the audience.





Meet Our Designs

Tharavad

Tharavad, which translates to a traditional ancestral home in Malayalam, weaves together the nostalgia and soul of Kerala architecture. This 25-cent plot of land on the Bay of Bengal coast captures the glory of the past with an open courtyard supported by Chettinad stone pillars, a spacious back verandah overlooking a private garden, and a built-in timber seating called "Charupadi" that allows for much-needed comfort in the company of nature. "Padippura" or gatehouse, a typical Kerala architecture feature forms the entrance to the house. The adornment of the entryway by authentic stone pillars brought from Calicut, together with timber, stone and tiles, continues the traditional theme. The central courtyard or "Nadumuttam" is designed with elements drawn from the design of a nalukettu house. The tharavad house exudes elegance, comfort and convenience with a natural earthiness.

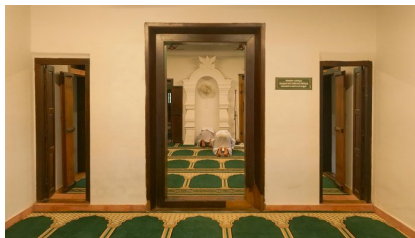




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Blog Spot

Latest Blogs to Explore



The Kerala Mosques That Have Been Restored To Their Past Glory

This blog written by Naseef T.P details the importance of preserving historical heritage and talks about the four mosques which has been conserved to its past glory.



Design Consideration For Differently Abled Students in Schools

It is important for the school layout to be sensitive to the differently abled, and implement some techniques into space planning, catering with their needs. This blog talks about the design considerations involved in planning the layout such as ramps, entrances, door widths, corridor widths, window sill heights etc.

Plumbing and Sanitary Fittings Workshop By Jaquar

On July 28, 2023, The team attended a workshop on plumbing and sanitary fittings held in the office. The presentation led by the Jaquar Team coordinated by Mr. Parthasarathy. This workshop was an insight into the various plumbing and sanitary fittings, shower cubicles, water heaters and the modern technologies in details. The team got to understand how to make the selections for each section of the toilet based on the design and functionality of the products. The workshop concluded with a question answer section where all the doubts were clarified in detail by the Jaquar team.



Ecogradia Sustainability Forward Podcast with Dr. Benny Kuriakose

Benny Kuriakose joins Nirmal Kishnani in the third season of Ecogradia Podcast, which is full of rich, varied, and all-encompassing audio episodes. The discussion captured on July 12 delves deep into topics including what it truly means for a structure to be energy efficient, how modern and traditional design differ, and whether or not home goods can absorb carbon from the environment. The trailer has been released and is available on Apple podcasts, spotify and Google Podcasts.

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ecogradia™

Sustainability forward

with
Nirmal
Kishnani

S03T



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“There are thousands of ordinary buildings which form an integral part of the culture of the people”

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