

Better Interiors

IDEAS AND DESIGN FOR BETTER LIVING

**Better Interiors
Excellence
Awards 2007**
for details see page 117

clean-lined creativity
a home by sandeep khosla

light makeover
create stunning
garden nightscapes

asian style
12 architects show off
their designs besides the
Great Wall of China

11 smart ways to
rain-proof home appliances

10 selection tips
for that perfect sofa

do it yourself

1

Cocooned in green

Architect Sandeep Khosla uses strategically positioned windows and verdure to blur the line between indoors and the outdoors.

Text: Reema Moudgil

Photographs: Pallon Daruwalla; courtesy the architect



"NOTHING CAN PREVENT YOUR PICTURE from coming into concrete form, except the same power which gave it birth — yourself." It could have been coincidental that I was reading this line in Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret*, moments before architect Sandeep Khosla ushered me into a home that appears to be part concrete and part dream.

"None of the homes we design have screaming facades. They have nothing to prove to anyone. They reveal themselves... unspooling slowly," says Sandeep, as we take the private entrance (there's also a 'public' one that opens to the main road) to the house. Though it holds its own next to the creamy tiers of a five-star hotel, the home turns its face away from the bustling Golf Course Road of Bangalore. Even the private entrance is a discreet affair that does nothing to announce its presence.

But as we walk through the gates to reach the garden with its almost unbroken canopy of trees and a reflective swimming pool, the house rises before the eyes like a vision out of a dream. Owned by one of Bangalore's more well-known families who would rather not be named, the sense of wonder this home exudes is difficult to put into words. It is a playground of ideas, textures, organic and luxurious materials, levels, layers; solid walls and sheer glass expanses; angles and planes; limpid water-bodies and rough-hewn stone.

If the imagination is the preview of coming attractions according to Ms Byrne's book, this house is the real thing. A tree holds centre stage 'inside' the house. The trees outside are part of the interiors, framed as they are in scores of glass walls around the home. Split-levels and the glass walls enhance the flow of space.

1 The house has two entrances. This private one faces a serene, residential lane and the other looks over the hurly burly of the main road. The house is tucked away in the middle of the two and does not give away its linear, expansive, secretive beauty at first glance

2 The first glimpse of the house is dramatic. It reveals itself when you walk some way from either of the entrances and then stand next to the garden pool, drinking in an almost transparent facade with its graded layers. During the day, sheltering canopies of the resident trees create a refreshing backdrop, and at night, the house glows like a jewel in a glass box



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concept & materials

Concept

In keeping with the client's desire for a Vaastu compliant house, the placement of spaces in the house is in synchrony with the plan of the Vaastu Purush Mandala, with each function corresponding to one of the five elements. One of the biggest challenges involved in designing the house was to respond to a traditional science, extract its essence and arrive at a fresh and innovative interpretation.

Materials

Hand-dressed querra granite, exposed cement; oil-finished Burma teak for doors, windows and stairs. Exposed concrete, plastered/painted solid block column and beam construction

Flooring: Lime green slate (internal water-bodies); leather-finish black granite (dining area); polished exposed cement floor (courtyard and all verandahs); imperial beige marble (living, family, guest and children's rooms); teak hardwood (raised living area and master bedroom); timber (staircase); Vives and Tau Ceramica Porcelain tiles (bathrooms)

Furniture: Smith Interiors (custom-designed), Timber Works Ltd (custom-designed), Casa Paradox, Pinakin and Proform

Upholstery and furnishings: Atmosphere and Shades of India

Ceiling: Exposed concrete in living and dining areas, plastered and painted concrete in other areas. Mangalore tiles with Kerala tile underlay in courtyards

Paint: Asian paints: Royale Acrylic emulsion (indoors) and Exterior Acrylic Emulsion (outdoors)

Sanitary fixtures: Jacob Delafon (WCs); Gessi (taps/showers); and ArtCeram (washbasins)

3 & 4 The living area mixes up a traditional bench from Good Earth with contemporary furniture. The room opens up to welcome garden vistas and a view of the inner courtyard. The furnishings are muted with sudden bursts of blues and reds. Stark lines are softened by a blushing, playful pouffe. Trees arch outside and are part of the interiors in more ways than one

"The idea was to build a house that would be one with nature and full of light. We had many old trees around, which we decided to weave into the house. The basic energies had to be well-balanced," reveals Sandeep as he discloses that the rooms, beds, staircases and even bathroom fixtures were positioned according to Vaastu principles as per the client's wishes. Within these parameters, however, Sandeep got a lot of 'aesthetic freedom.' With his associate Amaresh Anand and structural engineer BL Manjunath (both of whom he regards as integral to the project's success), Sandeep created an intriguing mix of contemporary lines and traditional elements like the sloping Mangalorean and Kerala-tiled roof.

The garden, with the pool on one side, has an outdoor dining area with a 15-foot log serving as a table. Suspended tree-lights transform the garden into a fairyland at night. During the day, you can take in the ripe jackfruits, flowering bushes, a magnificent rain tree, a banyan and what Sandeep calls, "layers of tropical planting".

"Living outdoors is as important as living indoors," offers Sandeep. He "did not want too many colours in the landscaping," so as not to detract from the existing greenscape — a ficus here, a palm there, a sweeping expanse of hardy buffalo grass, a frangipani shedding its flowers over a water-body and a dozen other trees. The house is not ostentatious. Its over 10,000-square-foot sprawl is not that of an ungainly bully but of an intensely private

4





aristocrat luxuriating in a tropical setting, breathing in and out.

A water-body finished with green slate leads to the entrance, which frames a terracotta Buddha from Cambodia. Behind it is a solid, freestanding wall of querra granite. On the other side of the wall reposes a giant music system. Sandeep points at the Italian marble flooring and the exposed concrete ceiling and says, "I like this mix of natural and luxe materials." In one discreet corner, is tucked away the temple with its solid silver altar. The living lounge is a composite, seamless whole with bi-fold doors and fixed glass walls. Roll up the blinds, open the doors and you are part of the landscape. A corner of the lounge



5 6 & 7 Instead of having conventionally demarcated spaces, this house spontaneously responds to its surroundings by choosing to dwell at leisure upon lovely views from strategically-placed rooms. This informal lounge area connected by a small flight of stairs with the living space not only faces the inner courtyard but also enjoys a snapshot view of the garden. The furniture, the blinds and the ceiling lamp are custom-designed. The industrial roof cools the room while the wooden floor warms it up

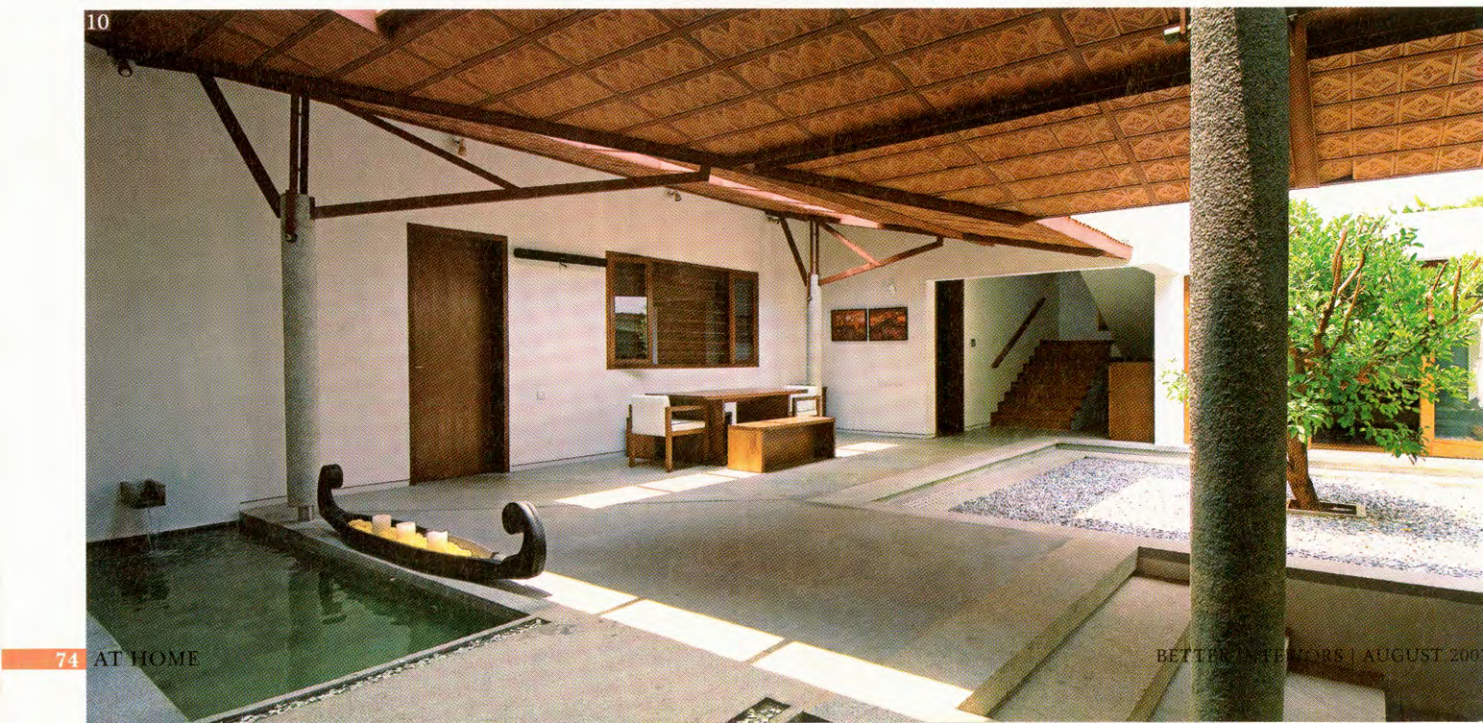


has a bar and contemporary sofas in subtle tones of sea greens and rust. An occasional pouffe in blushing pink is set off by a solid rustic bench from Good Earth, speckled with cheery cushions in Indian colours. Kilims and Kashmiri rugs define seating areas. Adimoolam canvasses create abstract pools of colour on the occasional, solid walls. The informal lounge with teak flooring, a few steps away, affords a sumptuous view of the garden and the inner courtyard, which is so intrinsic to the design of the house that one forgets to take particular notice.



Step into the courtyard adjoining the lounging spaces and you hear the tinkle of water and see a water-body split into two, running in one linear, liquid strip of motion. Adjoining it is a dining area. Propped up on stone columns, the sloping Mangalorean roof has charming sun windows. Against the backdrop of what Sandeep calls a 'neel blue' accent wall, striking red chairs from Casa Paradox congregate around a ribbed, wooden dining table from Good Earth. A raw silk overhead lamp was especially designed for the space from the remains of an old chandelier. An adjoining balcony features a wooden railing seat and a discreet powder room with smoked and etched glass detailing.

The view, as you eat at the table is a feast for jaded senses. A tree taken from a distant farmhouse and transplanted here, forms the heart of the courtyard and is visible from almost any part of the house. A guest room, children's





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suite (with a TV room thrown in), and two kitchens meant for the house staff and the family also occupy the ground floor.

A wooden staircase leads to the private areas on the first floor. Large sit-outs surround the master bedroom which has a TV nook, giant leather head-rests, walk-in closets and a bathroom that could rival five star luxury. It has distressed and ribbed porcelain tiles; teakwood alcoves; a huge skylight with a bed of pebbles underneath; an enclosed shower area and two washbasins.

As we leave the house, we discover that a home-office created as a separate wing for the man of the house, can be reached via a walk through the garden. The word 'office' is a misnomer

8 Glass walls usher the outside in wherever possible but can be sheathed at will with cozy blinds

9 & 10 The dining area enjoys soothing views of the inner courtyard (fashioned out of organic materials like rough-hewn stone and sloping Mangalore tiles) and gets a lungful of fresh air as well. The fabric lamp was custom-designed with beads from an old chandelier. One can only imagine the pleasure of dining here when the skies open up. A stunning blue wall, two water-bodies, a wooden canoe (gifted by Sandeep to the client) and a 'tree transplanted from a distant 'arm complete the dream setting

1 A flight of wooden stairs links the 'public' areas on the ground floor with the private spaces on the first

12 & 13 The master bath has a restful dark and creamy colour scheme, a skylight to itself and clean, angular lines



14



14 & 15 The office and guest space can be reached via pleasing garden pathways. The conference room of the office is equipped with high-tech paraphernalia to carry on parleys and presentations without a hitch

because in this case, it is a self-sufficient dwelling with a guest lounge done up in tones of maroon and cinnamon, a conference room, a kitchenette, a garden sit-out and more. "This 'office' space works as a noise buffer between the road and the main house," points out Sandeep. There is a water-body here where the nibble-happy, resident Chinese fish sabotaged all attempts to grow lilies, but there is much else that went swimmingly well with this project.

What Sandeep likes most about this home is its "sense of infinity". It is a home where corners vanish; space travels seamlessly from room to room; and spatial boundaries disappear to unite the outside with the inside. "There was a conscious effort not to over-clutter the free-flowing space," encapsulates Sandeep. We can see why. You don't need to adorn a space that speaks through silence, and articulates itself through its lightness of being. **01**

15



factfile

Location: Bangalore

Size: 10,000 sq ft

Principle architect/designer: Sandeep Khosla

Associate architect/designer: Amaresh Anand

Design team: Sandeep Khosla, Amaresh Anand and Lavina Taur

Structural engineer: BL Manjunath

Principal contracting: Hi Tech Engineers

Landscape architect: Sanjiv Basappa

Duration of project: Two years

Date of completion: March 2007