

The Goan blueprint

Architect Raya Shankwalker's guide to restoring Indo-Portuguese homes and how he creates an interesting aesthetic juxtaposing the new against the old



Old-world charm Renovated rooms at the Assagao villa (3, 4, 5) and the Villa Ribander (6)



Remains of the day Soro - The Village Pub is a tavern conceptualised within the ruins of an old corner store (2), with (1) bold graphic cement tiles



Growing up in the *parijat*-strewn courtyard of our 300-year-old ancestral house in Panjim influenced me a lot. The house is a stunning example of a Hindu-Goan house – an under-celebrated aspect of Goan architecture. The courtyard was not only a fabulous climatic adaptation, but also an ideal private living space. I still carry vivid memories of the warmth of the space and the smell of flowers and beaten earth. These memories instilled a strong sense of belonging, which later kindled a desire to conserve this unique heritage.

My tryst with conservation began during my college days in Goa. As part of my architecture curriculum, I covered many assignments on Goan heritage and was fascinated by its sheer volume. It challenged my imagination and inspired me to research on the subject. Also, as one of the founding members of the Goa Heritage Action Group (1999), it got me involved in the field further.

First steps

Working with architect Sarto Almeida, to restore the façades of the Custom House and the Police headquarters – two prominent public buildings of historical importance – instilled a liking for conservation. I worked on several similar urban conservation initiatives before I took up my first residential project at Siolim village – converting a 150-year-old residence into a guest house. The challenge was maintaining the home's old characteristics and combining it with urban needs. A fairly low-budget project, we kept the purity of the spaces intact, retaining the old walls and accommodating the large bathrooms within the home's existing framework. The original flooring was preserved as well and we used recycled wood for the doors.

Love for open spaces

While British colonial architecture in

India evolved over time – adapting to local tastes and climate – Portuguese architecture did not do so. The blueprint for Indo-Portuguese homes was borrowed from homes in North Portugal, where they had harsh winters. So a typical home was linear, with a foyer that leads to two halls on either side, which then splits into rooms.

But tropical living calls for semi-open spaces and we introduced such spaces in our project at Assagao, which was a renovation and extension of an old Goan house. The villa is co-ocooned by paddy fields; thus a seamless connection between the landscape and the interiors became a key design driver. This was inspired by the evolution on architecture in the 18th century. One of the key ones was the wrap-around veranda and the *balcão* or the entrance portico.

Modern twist

Travel is a strong inspiration for me. My earlier trips to Portugal helped develop my approach to conservation. In India, most interventions are replicated from the past, but in Portugal, conservation is looked at with a modern perspective. I believe that not all buildings need to be restored; a few need to be evolved.

Where new meets old

Preservation refers to structures with historical and cultural value, on the other hand, conservation refers to homes that need not hold historical importance. I believe in the latter and when we take up a restoration project, we assess the home and add suitable elements. We approach each project on individual merit.

The Villa Ribander, located on the banks of the Mandovi, was originally built in the early 19th century. During its restoration, we retained its character and added a new wing. The exterior was meticulously restored, involving extensive research on the

building style of the period. For the flooring, I used terrazzo – chips of marble or granite set in concrete, which is sensitive to insulation.

Rather than emulating the design style of the original villa for the new wing, it follows a contemporary design language that introduces lightness and modernity. The intent was to create an interesting aesthetic, juxtaposing the new against the old.

Lost heritage

Building technologies and materials used in the Portuguese era were distinctive, but unfortunately, most have been lost. For example, stucco (the application of lime plaster on exteriors that prevented water seepage) is a technique that has been forgotten. Similarly, the use of broken China mosaic was a traditional element that one can't find today. Several similar techniques have been lost, as they weren't documented. In our projects, we try to understand methods such as plastering techniques, usage of flooring materials. If elements of historical importance are present in a home, we restore them.

Colour wheel

Colour played a significant part in Indo-Portuguese architecture. They used three primary colours – red, yellow, and blue – made with naturally-available pigments. We don't use natural pigments today, so for those looking at incorporating Portuguese décor at home, look for the closest shade in the commercially-available brands.

Buying local crafts and artefacts from Goa will add authenticity to the look. Goan homes are embellished with rich details such as chandeliers and China vases. Goa has a few crafts, too, which are dying art forms now, such as terracotta and cane. Using them in your décor will not only add to the aesthetics, but also help in their revival and conservation. For instance, I have used the hand-woven baskets unique to Goa, as a lighting installation in one of our commercial projects, the SinQ Beach Club.

Call for conservation

Heritage conservation holds immense tourism potential. The restoration of Indo-Portuguese homes has given the city character – not just the built environment, but in terms of natural beauty, too. These homes were depleted of their historical value before people started buying and restoring them. We believe conservation extends beyond homes and impacts the region's local art and culture.

As told to Nidhi Adlakha

RAYA'S PICKS

- **POTTERY:** For traditional pottery, head to Socorro's potter's village, where five to six potters will also customise on demand.
- **HAND-WOVEN BASKETS:** At Mapusa's Friday market, check out the wide range of handmade baskets made by weavers from across Goa. A basket that is 1.5 feet in diameter will cost you between ₹300 and ₹350. More intricate ones are available for upwards of ₹600.
- **LIGHTING ACCESSORIES:** We mostly source from Chor Bazaar in Mumbai. We also get customised lighting accessories made by New Delhi-based Imagination Light & Décor.
- **TILES:** We get most of our tiles from Mumbai-based Bharat Flooring and Tiles. They were the first in India to make coloured mosaic cement tiles. Embedded with marble chips, they come in custom-mixed bases.
- **ETHNIC FURNITURE:** We source furniture from small dealers who have their yards in the tourist belt, in North Goa – Mapusa, Parra and Assagao.
- **CRAFT:** Visit the weekly markets and fairs held across the State and keep an eye out for traditional craft items. We have picked up quite a few artefacts from the market in Mapusa.

RECYCLING DESIGN

- The three primary flooring materials used in Indo-Portuguese homes were cement, broken China and tiles imported from Europe. The walls were plastered or painted, and had elaborate graffiti. Wood was also extensively used for the roof, doors, windows and furniture.
- For my projects, I buy recycled wood and upcycled furniture from local markets. For a house in Guirim, we used a lot of recycled wood sourced from a yard in Mumbai – for the false ceiling, the doors and windows, and even part of the flooring.
- We use a lot of old objects like trunks, windows and doors as lifestyle objects. We did this in the Assagao project.

Smart route to space

Here's how Ooty's Cosmic Ray Lab uses recycled steel pipes in an ingenious fashion

● SOUTIK BISWAS

What does a sensational scientific discovery about a solar storm in the Earth's magnetic field have to do with old, recycled steel pipes that have been buried for more than a decade under a now-defunct gold mine in India? Almost everything.

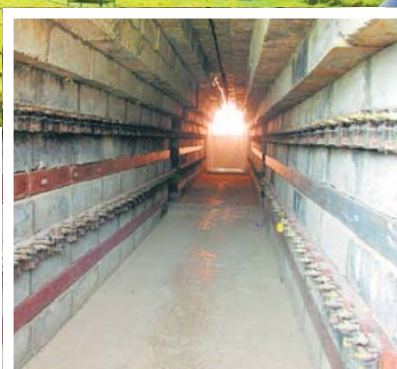
What's unearthed is as precious as gold because 3,700 such pipes are at the heart of a significant scientific finding that has been revealed in a recently-published paper by a team of Indian and Japanese scientists. The paper recorded the events that unfolded after a breach in the Earth's magnetic shield. The scientists used the GRAPES-3 muon (a sub-atomic particle) telescope made using recycled pipes – the world's largest of its kind – at the Cosmic Ray Laboratory in Ooty. They recorded a two-hour burst of galactic cosmic rays that invaded the atmosphere in June last year.

Dr Sunil Gupta, one of the scientists leading the research, says, "Solar storms of such high magnitudes can knock out satellites and aircraft autopilots, cause catastrophic power outages, and can take us 'back to the Stone Age'."

Recycled solutions

"Indian scientists have mastered the art of recycling and coming up with their own inexpensive solutions," says Pallava Bagla of *Science* magazine. The telescope in Ooty is the perfect example. It's made using four-decade-old recycled zinc-coated steel pipes. Atul Jain, a scientist at the facility, says 10 such pipes are recycled every day for experiments. "The plan was to make very sensitive sensors to detect the weakest of signals. We wanted to measure cosmic rays with higher sensitivity than ever done before."

Work on recording cosmic rays in Ooty began in earnest in 1998, when scient-



The telescope at Ooty

ists began making muon sensors from discarded pipes to research high-energy cosmic rays. Today, 3,712 steel tubes, stacked up against layers of concrete, are housed across four brown-and-white buildings, home to the world's largest muon telescope.

Home-grown innovation

A majority of the electronic equipment is designed, assembled and manufactured in-house. The software for the computer programs is also locally made. The raw data that the lab generates every day is stored and processed by a cluster of computers, which has been largely assembled in-house,

cutting costs and saving hefty maintenance fees. Old computers are stripped for parts. A locally-developed cooling system using fans saves electricity, too.

THE DIGEST



Pedal away

An 'organic' cycling rally – Pedal for Nature – is being organised by Blue Bridge Resources this weekend. Aimed at spreading awareness on the importance of saving natural resources and reviving traditional food, health and lifestyle practices, the rally will bring together like-minded individuals who are keen on promoting the health benefits of cycling. There are four categories in the rally: 100 kms (experts), 65 kms (professionals), 50 kms (intermediates), and 20 kms (beginners). The rally is from Perungudi to Mahabalipuram. Cycles and helmets will be provided on rent for all participants. Age Limit: above 16 years. Tomorrow at 4.30 am. ☎044 2489 2389 | +91 9361177767

Films on water

Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan is screening short documentaries and feature films themed on water this weekend. Within the scope of their project – Embrace Our Rivers – the film series is aimed at creating awareness on water and how we treat our rivers and water bodies. *One Water*, a documentary, and *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, a drama/fantasy film, will be screened this evening at 7.30 pm. Tomorrow, a documentary *Floods*, and *Greetings from Fukushima*, a German film, will be screened at the same time. Today and tomorrow at Spaces, Besant Nagar. The event is open to all. ☎(044) 42158062.



Inspired fashion

City-based graphic artist and designer Shaun D'Sa is hosting an exhibition – *Savage* – themed on his botanical expressions. Terrariums – miniature worlds enclosed in glass, kokedamas – plants strung up in balls of earth, and installations – air plants in quirky settings will be on display. Take home miniature desert landscapes, tiny lush rain forests, and large arresting pieces of savage art among others. Products are priced ₹1500 onwards. ☎9884274781

The event will have another dimension with fashion designer Shilpa Vummiti launching her latest collection – *Kalhoscope*. She has collaborated with photographer Sunder Ramu. Today and tomorrow at Humming Room, KNK Road.