

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



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



INSIDE VIEW

And the meeting begins now...

What happens before, during and after one of those meetings



BY KHYRUNNISA A

'Let's start with a silent prayer,' announced the compere at a meeting and the hall livened up. With much scrapping of chairs and shuffling of feet, not to mention grunts and gasps, the audience got up, quite loath to abandon contact with their seats. The more generously endowed were unable to abandon contact, stuck as they were to their chairs as they rose and needed discreet help to be freed. The hall had barely fallen quiet when a lady's handbag decided to pitch in with a loud prayer. Jolting everyone out of their piety, it broke into song in a piercing female voice praying for her lost love to come back. The owner dug her fingers frantically into her cacophonous bag, but couldn't locate the mobile. That's the charm of a lady's handbag. Its innumerable compartments

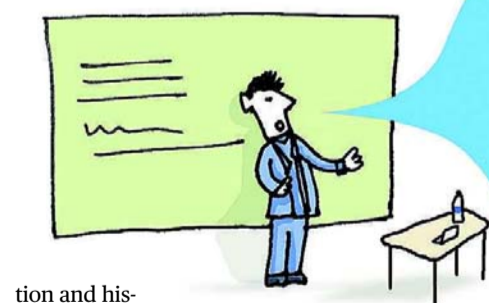
have been cleverly crafted to convert every simple search into a complicated detective game. The puzzle regarding which section would yield the desired article is solved, like any good mystery, only when the intensive search is complete. Inevitably it is discovered in the last pouch examined. No woman can complain of boredom as long as she owns such a bag.

All eyes on her, the embarrassed lady decided to escape, hugging her handbag, and never returned. The audience, mostly middle-aged or elderly, had probably been attracted by the topic which was very close to their hearts and their neuromusculoskeletal systems. But it was no different from an audience at any other meeting and had already begun adopting survival techniques.

Someone coughed, another sneezed and as if in answer to some of the prayers, the compere asked everyone to be seated. More shuffling, scraping and sighs followed and when peace was restored, the speaker was welcomed.

The topic was physiotherapy, the speaker was too soft-spoken and the fans overhead, too loud. I strained my ears to listen to what the young, competent physiotherapist had to say on this interesting subject.

The vastness of the topic and the novelty of giving a speech in public made him jittery and he began to race through the defini-



tion and history of physiotherapy, mumbling earnestly into his shirt collar.

Survival techniques

I gave up listening and looked around. The audience, mostly middle-aged or elderly, had probably been attracted by the topic which was very close to their hearts and their neuromusculoskeletal systems. But it was no different from an audience at any other meeting and had already begun adopting survival techniques.

Many, including the few young who had strayed in, were completely absorbed in playing with their mobile phones, reading or sending messages, watching videos or checking out the innu-

merable options a smart phone provides - it is a single-instrument entertainer.

Some had sunk into gentle slumber, some into deep sleep - one man almost fell off his chair. A few looked plain bored, some annoyed, staring with hostility at the speaker, while a few others were obviously in another world.

Some conducted private conversations in stage whispers, others took calls when their phones rang, rudely loud, making life more stressful for the speaker, while a minuscule group in the front row was actually listening.



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

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 Assagio, which was a renovation and extension of an old Goan house. The villa is cocooned 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



Cultural heritage

The churches and convents of Goa, particularly the Church of Bom Jesus, which contains the tomb of St Francis-Xavier, made it to UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1986. According to the citation, it's because they 'illustrate the evangelisation of Asia.'



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 Assagio.
- **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.

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

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 Assagio project.



BY SREEJITH R KUMAR

Many were completely absorbed in playing with their mobile phones, reading or sending messages, watching videos or checking out the innumerable options a smart phone provides

I tried to identify those who must have come with the express purpose of asking a question, or, in the guise of asking one, enumerate their achievements to the audience.

Eventually, the speaker buzzed to a close, wiping the sweat from his forehead. Poised for flight, he asked formally if there were any questions. Imagine his shock when almost

everyone, now miraculously revived, responded with eager nods of their heads, struggled to their feet and ambushed him!

The bewildered physiotherapist quickly got the picture - they had all come for a free consultation. An old man began to describe in halting detail his acute back pain that came and went. What should he do?

He was cut off midstream by an impatient lady. 'I want to get rid of the swelling on my feet,' she snapped, sticking them out as proof. Someone promptly trod on them to get closer to the physiotherapist and ask why he couldn't bend his right knee fully. He demanded an immediate demo of the appropriate exercises to rectify that.

Another wanted to know if it was true that physiotherapy would assist people with asthma, diabetes and high blood pressure. 'If it is, please help me,' he wheezed.

A young chap sounded outraged that he should have got tennis elbow after playing badminton and insisted on an explanation. I wanted to ask about exercises for my rotator cuff tear, but was pushed out of the reckoning. The real meeting had just begun.

A fortnightly column by the city-based writer, academic and author of the Butterfingers series