

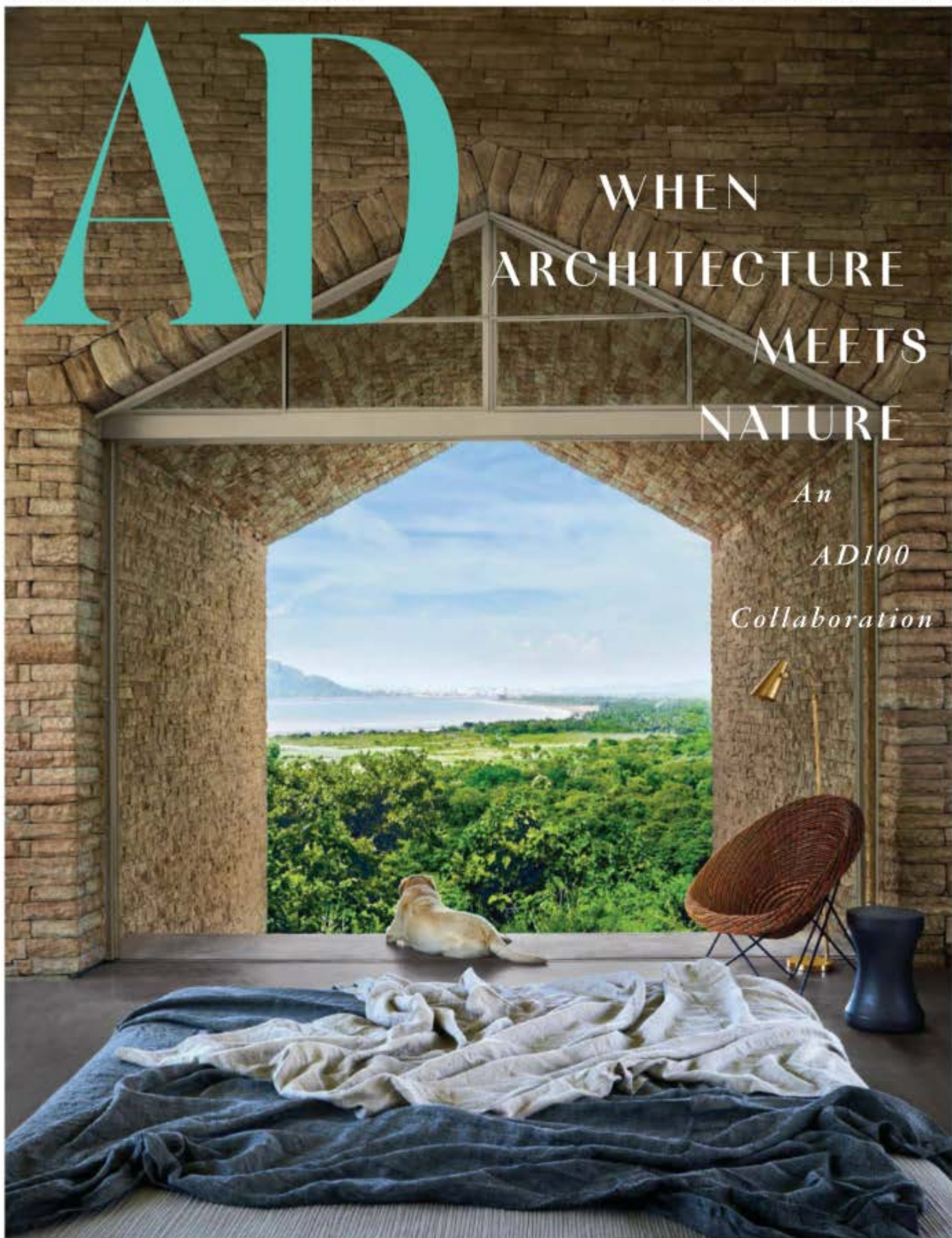
AD

WHEN ARCHITECTURE MEETS NATURE

An

AD100

Collaboration



T H E

A COLLABORATION BETWEEN AD100 FIRMS ARCHITECTURE BRIO

H O U S E

AND KUNAL MANIAR ASSOCIATES, THIS WEEKEND HOME IN ALIBAG

O N

EXEMPLIFIES HOW ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN CAN COME

T H E

TOGETHER IN A MEETING OF MINDS, HEARTS, AND SWEET ECCENTRICITY.

H I L L

THE VERANDA OF TY BHOJWAN'S ALIBAG HOME, EDGED BY THE INFINITY POOL, OFFERS A PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE BAY COVERED WITH AN AQUAMARINE STANDING SEAMROOF. IT IS SUPPLIED WITH OUTDOORBY VIBES. BHOJWAN ENTRUSTED THE HOME'S CREATION TO AD100 ARCHITECTS SHEFALI BALWANI AND ROBERT VERRILLI OF ARCHITECTURE BRIO, AND ITS GARDEN TO AD100 LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT KUNAL MANIAR OF KUNAL MANIAR & ASSOCIATES.

WRITER RAJASHREE BALARAM PHOTOGRAPHER ASHISH SAHI INTERIOR STYLIST SAMIR WADEKAR



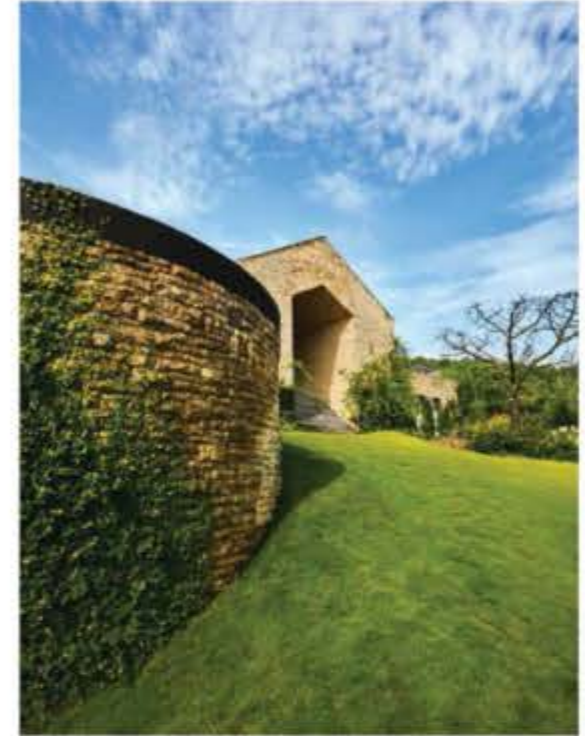


PHOTO: GIUSEPPE D. MARIANI

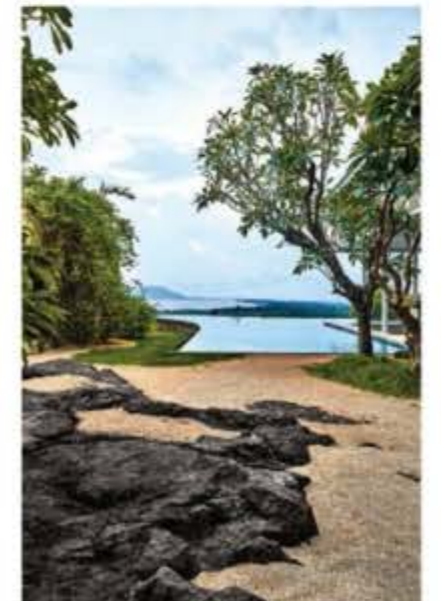
THE HOUSE COMPLEX, DISTRIBUTED INTO TWO PAVILIONS ON THE SLOPE OF A HILL, HAS NO INVIOLABLE LINES THAT ALIENATE LANDSCAPE FROM STRUCTURE



Every part of the house is designed to meet the landscape halfway.



ABOVE: THE LUSH, SLOPING LAWNS CONTINUE FROM THE AREA ADJACENT TO THE POOL AND THE STEPS DESCENDING FROM THE MAIN BEDROOM, A COUNTERPOINT TO THE STARK, SCULPTURAL LINES OF THE SILK COTTON TREE. LEFT, THE FREE-FALL WATER SLIDE—ENVELOPED BY FRAGRANT MILLINGTONIA, BAMBOO GRASSES, AND FLAT BLADES OF HELICONIA—IS DELIBERATELY OBSCURED TO HAVE A SECRETIVE PRESENCE. BELOW, BOULDERS EXCAVATED DURING CONSTRUCTION AND SPECIALLY MADE GRAVEL MINIMIZE WATER CONSUMPTION, AS OPPOSED TO LAWNS, AND ACCENTUATE THE FRAGRANT TREE AND BOUGAINVILLEA ON THE LEFT. FACING PAGE: THE NATURAL ELEVATION OF THE LAND UNDER THE POOL, CLAD WITH LIMESTONE AND A PROLIFUSION OF IVY, DESCENDS INTO ONE OF THE FEW LAWN SPACES IN THE PROPERTY. ABUTTING THE IVY ARE SHRUBS OF MURRAYA EXOTICA FOR A FRAGRANT WHIFF BY THE POOLSIDE.





CADILLAC CONVERTIBLE (1947, SERIES 02), COURTESY OF AMAL TANNA

ABOVE LEFT: THE AMPHITHEATRE-STYLE STEPS AT THE ENTRANCE ARE COMPOSED FROM RAMMED EARTH, CONCRETE BLOCKS, AND GRAVEL, SPECIALLY MADE FROM THE WASTAGE OF THE LIMESTONE BLOCKS ABOVE RIGHT. DHRANGADHRA LIMESTONE WALLS SET IN A COLONNADE DEFINE THE GAMES ROOM THAT SURROUNDS THE POOL COURTYARD. RIGHT: THE STEEL-BARRED WINDOW IN THE ARRIVAL FORECOURT, SET IN A RANDOM-RUBBLE BASALT WALL, OFFERS A VIEW OF THE LUSH TROPICAL LANDSCAPE AND A SLIVER OF THE MUMBAI SKYLINE. FACING PAGE: THE NATURAL SLOPE OF THE LAND HAS BEEN RETAINED TO FORM AN UNUSUAL COURTYARD OUTSIDE THE GUEST BATHROOM.



“I like the way Robert [Verrijt] and Shefali [Balwani] have been extremely sensitive towards the natural contours of the land.” —Kunal Maniar





FERNS AND ALOCASIA CULTIVATED IN THE TIMBER-LINED WALLS OF THE FOYER SPILL ONTO THE SIDES OF THE FAÇADE OF THE LIVING ROOM BRINGING THE OUTDOORS INSIDE. ADIDO ARCHITECTS SHEFALI BALWANI, KUNAL MANIAR, AND ROBERT VERRILL ON THE SPIRAL STEPS MADE FROM CAST CONCRETE WITH A STUNNING FACETED SOFFIT THAT DESCEND FROM THE FOYER, FACING PAGE. THE SUNKEN LIVING ROOM FEATURES A NEST SECTIONAL SOFA IN WHITE LINEN SET AGAINST A FOUR-METRE-LONG RECLAIMED COFFEE TABLE BOTH CONFIGURED BELOW BY HANDMADE PENDANTS OF IRIDESCENT GLASS—ALL BY TIMOTHY DALTON. THE OCTEN-STEEL PLANTER—WHICH HOLDS A 15-FOOT-TALL BRASSIA TREE—WAS MADE BY KUNAL MANIAR & ASSOCIATES



FACING PAGE, BOTTOM: 'BATTA PETITE' AND 'BATTA MAGNA' SNACK BOWLS, COURTESY OF IKAI ASAL



ABOVE: THE WALLS AND FURNISHINGS IN EVERY ROOM REPRESENT A MUTED COLOUR PALETTE, AS IF TO FURTHER EMPHASISE THE LUSH, GREEN VIEW OUTSIDE. LEFT: THE PEBBLED FLOORS OF THE GUEST BATHROOM MAKE FOR AN INTERESTING PLAY OF TEXTURES, IN SYNC WITH THE LIMESTONE WALLS OF THE SHOWER CUBICLE. BELOW: A LIGHTLY FRAGRANT KAMU OUTSIDE THE KITCHEN WINDOW. FACING PAGE: THE CUSTOM-DESIGNED DINING TABLE FROM TIMOTHY CULTON WAS MADE USING 100-YEAR-OLD RECLAIMED TIMBER AND HAS A CALCITE CRYSTAL INSERT IN THE CENTRE. HANDMADE RATTAN CHAIRS AND ALABASTER LIGHTS HEIGHTEN THE TEXTURAL PLAY OF NATURAL MATERIALS.

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The view from every part of the house is overwhelmingly beautiful. We wanted to ensure that we do not overplay nature. We chose foliage that does not compete with the structure.” —Kunal Maniar

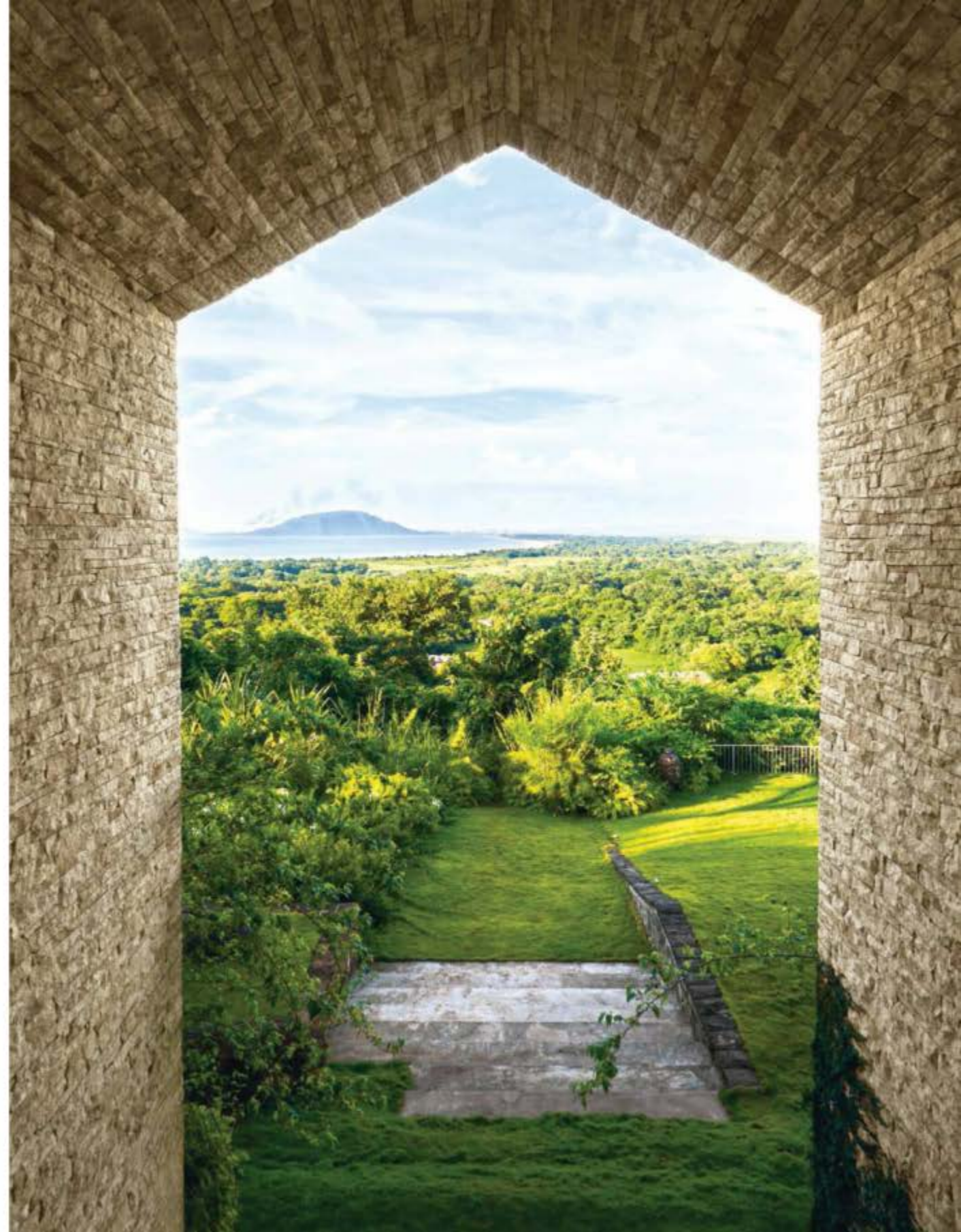


RIGHT: THE TUB IN THE MAIN BATH UNDERLINES THE SIMPLICITY THAT PERVADES THE REST OF THE HOUSE. BELOW LEFT: ROCKS EXCAVATED DURING CONSTRUCTION HAVE BEEN SEAMLESSLY INTEGRATED INTO THE ARCHITECTURE. BELOW RIGHT: THE EXPOSED BAR AREA IN THE CONNECTING CORRIDOR BETWEEN THE TWO RAVLIONS FACES AN OLD FRANGIPANI TREE, FOREGROUNDING THE INFINITY POOL. THE SLIDING DOORS ALONGSIDE OFFER A SENSE OF PRIVACY AS WELL AS OPENNESS. FACING PAGE: THE LAWN FACING THE MAIN BEDROOM IS BORDERED WITH WILD TROPICAL PLANTS THAT BLEND INTO THE SURROUNDING LANDSCAPE EXTENDING TOWARDS THE HORIZON.



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What I deeply admire about [Kunal Maniar] is how he responds with interesting landscaping ideas that can be seamlessly integrated into the architecture.” —Robert Verrijt





hen we first visit Ty and Esha Bhojwani's weekend home in Alibag, they are away on a trip. Later in the day, when the team catches up with Ty over a phone call, he admits to acutely missing his pet Labrador, and requests for a candid picture of his fur baby. The pampered canine, though, seems too distracted to face the camera; her attention is divided between the iridescent garden skink slithering on the branches of the towering brassia in the corner of the living room, the posse of showy butterflies that have fluttered in to hover over the swimming pool, and the conspicuous clique of ladybirds ambling around the fantastic glass façade of the house.

It's in moments like these that one cannot help but observe how mother nature asserts her largesse in a profusion of delightful moments throughout Bhojwani's 4.5-acre undulating home-stead. Every part of the house is designed to meet the landscape halfway—a resolute metaphor, as if, to the spectacular collaboration between Shefali Balwani and Robert Verrijt of Architecture Brio and landscape architect Kunal Maniar from Kunal Maniar & Associates. "Robert and Shefali are extremely confident architects," says Maniar. "This is the first time that we collaborated on a project, and it feels good that all three of us always worked towards the project and not once towards each other's ego." Such frictionless rapport is not easy to come by—not when landscape design and architecture are so inextricably tied in a project that has taken nearly five years to complete.

Bhojwani's brief was simple enough: to execute a modern take on a traditional, all-white plantation home. The remote site of the house—atop a hill, facing the bay—not only served as a privileged vantage point but also announced its prominence from a distance. "An all-white house on a hill could also end up looking like an enormous mansion spoiling the scenery," says Balwani. "So it was important to understand how it will be perceived from a distance." To summon

a clear reference point, she and Verrijt worked on several models and decided to use the subtle white of the Dhrangadhra limestone for the overall cladding. "We imagined a building that would be humble yet not shy away from its own presence," says Verrijt.

The land, characterized by slopes and inclines (the entrance to the house sits more than three metres lower than the road outside the gate) presented the first of many challenges. As Bhojwani wanted flat terrace spaces for parties and play areas, the team started by creating a retaining wall to encompass the raised terraces and depressions. "I like the way Robert and Shefali have been extremely sensitive towards the natural contours of the land," says Maniar. "Typically, the easier way to address such unevenness is to level it up with soil. But depleting soil by digging one part of the earth to fill up another is a rather thoughtless way to treat mother nature." Fortunately, having worked on similar topographies earlier, Verrijt and Balwani were adept at tweaking odd contours into interesting architectural interventions. For example, the slopes facing the guest bathroom and kitchen have been designed to resemble inclined courtyards that flow into these spaces. Upping the enchantment a notch higher, Maniar turned the elevation outside the kitchen into an aromatic garden filled with *brahmi* (waterhyssop), curry leaves, aloe vera, basil, turmeric, and *ajwain* (carom).

Team Brio started by building two pavilions that would be placed delicately at two strategic points: a plateau to hold the main bedroom, game room, and guest bedrooms, and a lower level for the courtyard, the infinity pool, and the sunken living room. The latter, with its ethereal, airy feel of a chapel, has high ceilings trussed with steel cables, louvred shutters, and slender metal columns. The drama is further heightened by the way the house reveals itself to a visitor. "There was enough scope to build a sense of anticipation and not disclose everything at once," says

Verrijt. Much like in a castle, a maze of pathways connects the spaces spread over different levels. The panoramic view of the bay and the hills in the distance is not revealed when you enter the gates, or the intimate foyer, or even spiral your way down into the living room, but only fully confronts you in an "aha" moment when you step into the sit-out near the edge of the infinity pool.

"We even had a dialogue with Kunal about creating a lot of dense planting before we went into the parking space. What I deeply admire about him is how he responds with interesting landscaping ideas that can be seamlessly integrated into the architecture—as if it always belonged there. This is not easy because the material he works with is organic matter that has a mind of its own. It takes amazing expertise to orchestrate its presence and growth." The shroud of foliage that envelops the water slide, which lands in the children's pool, is one such mindful landscaping intervention that prevents the slide from being seen as a jarring addition against the façade of the house.

Similarly, the amphitheatre steps co-designed by Maniar and Brio, which lead the preliminary introduction to the house, before you reach the foyer, blends intelligent sustainable design with a playful vibe. "We made those steps without using any cement," says Maniar. "Instead, we opted for rammed earth. Concrete blocks were placed on compact soil, and then the whole arrangement was interspersed with gravel to ensure that when it rains water percolates efficiently." The plants that edge these steps are strategically planted to soften the bold lines of the hardscape, and the gravel was made by crushing the remains of the cladding.

"When you have a strong line of bold architecture, you need to think harder about how you are going to approach the landscape around it," says Maniar. "The view from every part of the house is overwhelmingly beautiful. So, my team [Pandurang Patil, Pranjali Dharaskar, and Tejas Kathe] had to ensure that we do

not overlay nature. We chose foliage that does not compete with the structure. That's why the scale of leaves is tiny." Secondly, water scarcity being a major problem in the area, Maniar opted for a lot of *gulmohar* as their smaller leaves translate into lesser transpiration. "Mostly, we have indigenous, xerophytic trees, such as the natural variety of frangipani—not the hybrid ones—besides a lot of fruit-bearing trees in the lower reaches, and fragrant *kanini*."

The greatest challenge for Balwani, Verrijt, and Maniar arrived in the form of the massive boulders that were excavated at the site. "We instinctively knew that these had to be an integral part of the architecture, as such sculptural boulders are not easily found in all sites in Alibag," says Verrijt. "In particular, what we hoped for came true. We, for example, found this obelisk-shaped rock that is now placed next to the pool like a bench." As these were not accounted for in the original design, Bhojwani was initially unsure of retaining them. Much persuasion later, today he considers them among the most interesting features of his property.

Bhojwani, who is passionate about details, worked in close collaboration with Timothy Oulton for the home's interiors. Built on the principles of the brand's Noble Souls collection, which champions natural vegetable-dyed fabrics and reclaimed timber, the house celebrates simple, raw, and authentic materials rooted in natural beauty.

For Bhojwani, sunrise is his magic hour. The coolness of dawn, the warmth of the first rays of the sun, and the rustling of the tall pampas grass edging the property as the sea breeze whispers through it—all distil into a moment of unblemished tranquility. It's the same breeze that brushes against the snakeskin shed by a nocturnal visitor under one of the shrubs on the property. For Bhojwani, it's a moment defined by the joys of co-existence when it is easier to believe that all is well with the world. ■

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THE MOST BEAUTIFUL HOMES IN THE WORLD