

Inside Outside

THE INDIAN DESIGN MAGAZINE

ISSUE 322 APRIL 2012

₹ 50

**PROFILE:
OPOLIS
Architects**

**KNS
Architects
design
a small
apartment**

**Mahesh Radhakrishnan
designs for Tara Books
in Chennai**

**Urban Studio: The Rasa
tented resort in Jaipur**

**Architect Percy Muncherji's
own home in Singapore**

COVER: Good Earth Orchard in Bengaluru

The community club house overlooks the chlorine free pool that is treated only with purifying reeds and plants.



The Good Earth Orchard in Bengaluru, set up by architect couple Jeeth and Natasha Iype and partner Stanley George, is a community of sixty houses which exemplify how traditional building methods can be used in the contemporary context to great advantage.



Paradise regained the good earth orchard

TEXT: SARAH NATHAN PHOTOGRAPHS: HEMA NARAYANAN AND RAGHAVENDRA KS



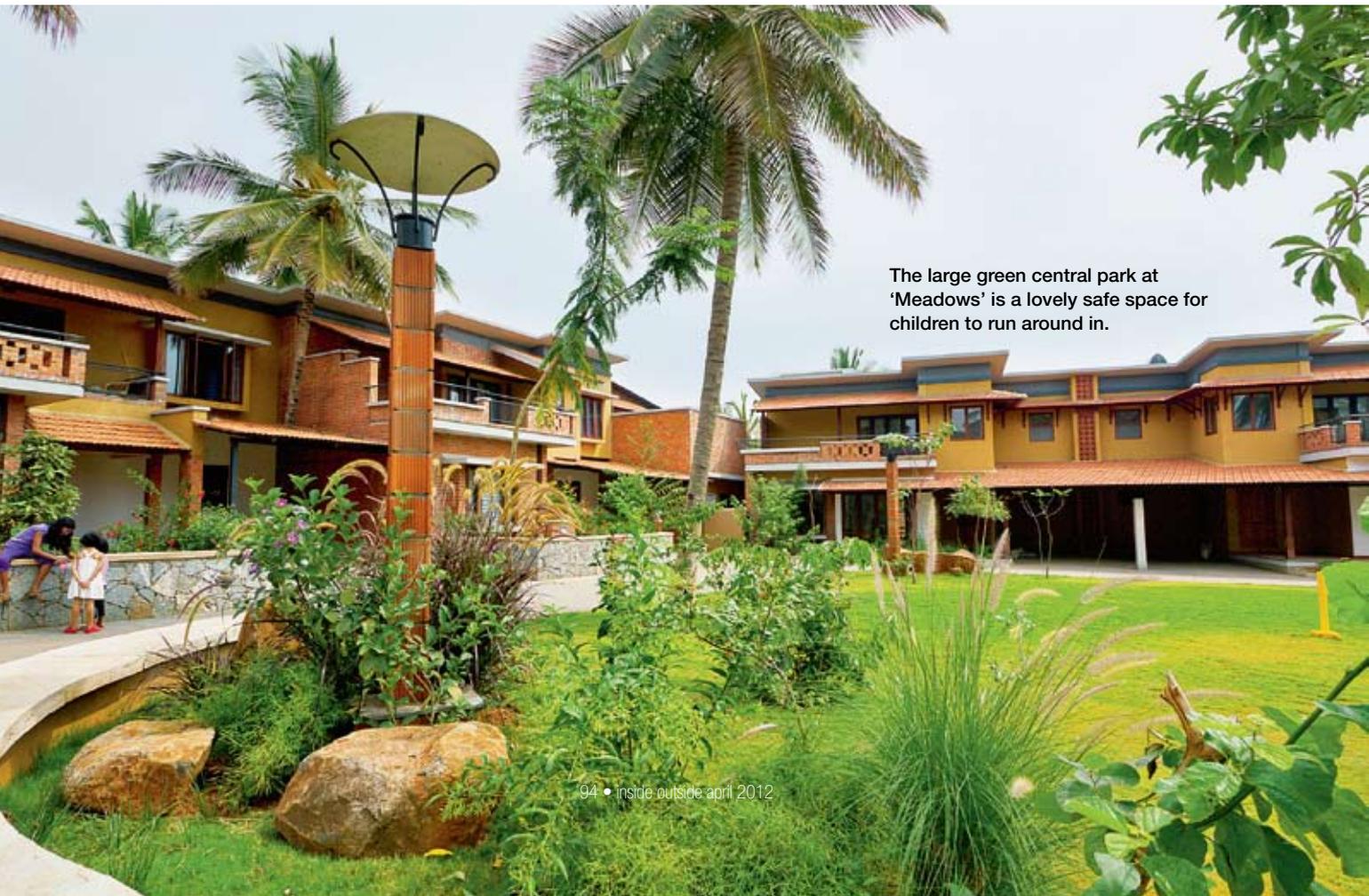
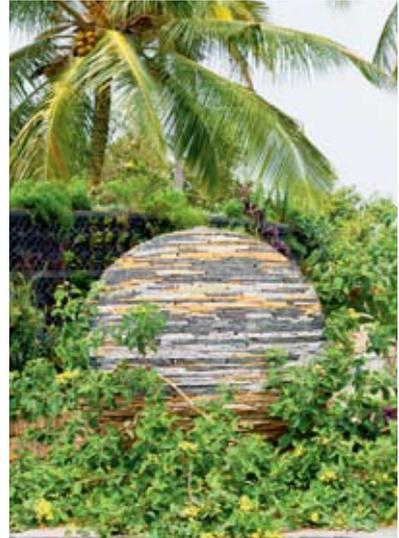
One of the murals on the wall of 'Glade' done by artist Ajopa Das.



To anyone familiar with the gracious old Bengaluru of the sixties or even the seventies, the change in the city is nothing short of catastrophic. Just off the chaotic Mysore Road in Kengeri however, one can still catch a glimpse of the beautiful 'Garden City' that it once was. This is where – in the midst of a *sapota* orchard – architect couple Jeeth and Natasha Iype and their friend and partner Stanley George have set up a community of sixty houses, designed in clusters of twelve to eighteen, that reflect exactly their own idea of what a home should be. If what you are expecting however, are posh, ultra modern mansions with designer drapes and manicured gardens, you're not going to find them here! These simply structured, semi-detached villas, built in the style of the iconic Laurie Baker, are a wonderful example of how traditional building methods can be contemporised to the best possible advantage.



The entrance to the housing cluster called 'Glade'.



The large green central park at 'Meadows' is a lovely safe space for children to run around in.



A large brass bell on the compound wall of the 'Glade' housing cluster, adds to the rather Spanish feel of the place.

What really sets this place apart however, is the amazingly profuse green cover. The landscaping was done by American landscape architect Michael Little and the planting by Lovely George, Stanley's wife. 'Bio diversity' seems to be the keyword here and they have striven to revive the fast disappearing flora varieties that were once common all over Bengaluru. There are a whole host of thriving medicinal trees and shrubs; for instance the *vitex negundo*, the leaves of which make a natural balm, mosquito repellent and excellent fumigator and the *bixa orellana*, which gives a deep brown natural dye.

Huge natural boulders have been added into the landscape to great effect and as far as possible, the builders have tried not to chop down a single existing tree in the estate, even incorporating them into the house designs, if need be. So you have 'The Grove' set among a profusion of heavily laden *sapota* trees and a great favourite with visiting monkeys; 'Boulevard' with its landscaped mounds and a breathtaking variety of flowering shrubs and trees like poinsettia, queen of the night, jasmine, plumeria, hibiscus and others; 'Glade', which resembles nothing so much as a hill resort, with its undulating spaces, bamboo clusters and houses built at different levels. There is a very Spanish feel to this cluster as well, with the mud coloured cement walls, the profusion of bougainvillea bushes in jewel colours and the painted murals.

The home of star Indian long jumper Anju and Bobby George.



Anju taking a break from her hectic training schedule on her charming little 'Juliet' balcony.





The house is somewhat reminiscent of a Kerala tharavad, though with a modern twist. Water bodies, inner courtyards, beautiful gardens both on the ground floor and terrace, huge picture windows and French doors make for a wonderful retreat to come home to after a tough day of training.



The latest housing cluster 'Meadows' is, as the name suggests, built around a large central meadow and here, there are several high coconut trees, flanking the area. It is interesting to see how all the residents have their own idea of what makes a perfect front garden. While a couple of them have opted largely for evergreens – silver oak, juniper and cyprus – others have chosen to have largely flowering plants, palms and tall shrubs. Yet, most of the gardens have a lush, charmingly natural and overgrown look. Almost all residents are keen fruit and vegetable gardeners too and use their backyards for this. And in the true spirit of community living, they often distribute the harvest – papayas, *sapotas*, passion fruit, carrots, lemon grass, limes and bananas – generously among their neighbours. All kinds of herbs and salad vegetables are also seen in abundance – holy basil (tulsi), the fragrant basmati leaf (which gives the most delicious aroma to pulaos when dried), celery, lettuce, aloe vera, soap nut, brahmi.....

Interestingly, while some say it is just a myth, a plant known locally as *naaga dbali* is often planted, as the smell of its leaves is believed to be a deterrent to snakes.

Says Natasha, 'We have not offered green technology as a selling tool here but have integrated it to blend and augment the users' lifestyle through the architecture and overall design of the place. We have been practicing these eco sensitive methods all along since we firmly believe in them and we were keen to bring together a community that truly trusts, adopts and works towards a sustainable future.'

Rainwater harvesting and a decentralised sewage treatment plant ensure that water is recycled

A view of one of the many levels at the Georges' home.





The gentle sound of trickling water at the Georges' house is peaceful and pleasant. Steps lead from this space to a little green garden area above.



A section of the rear garden with a profusion of fruit and vegetable trees.



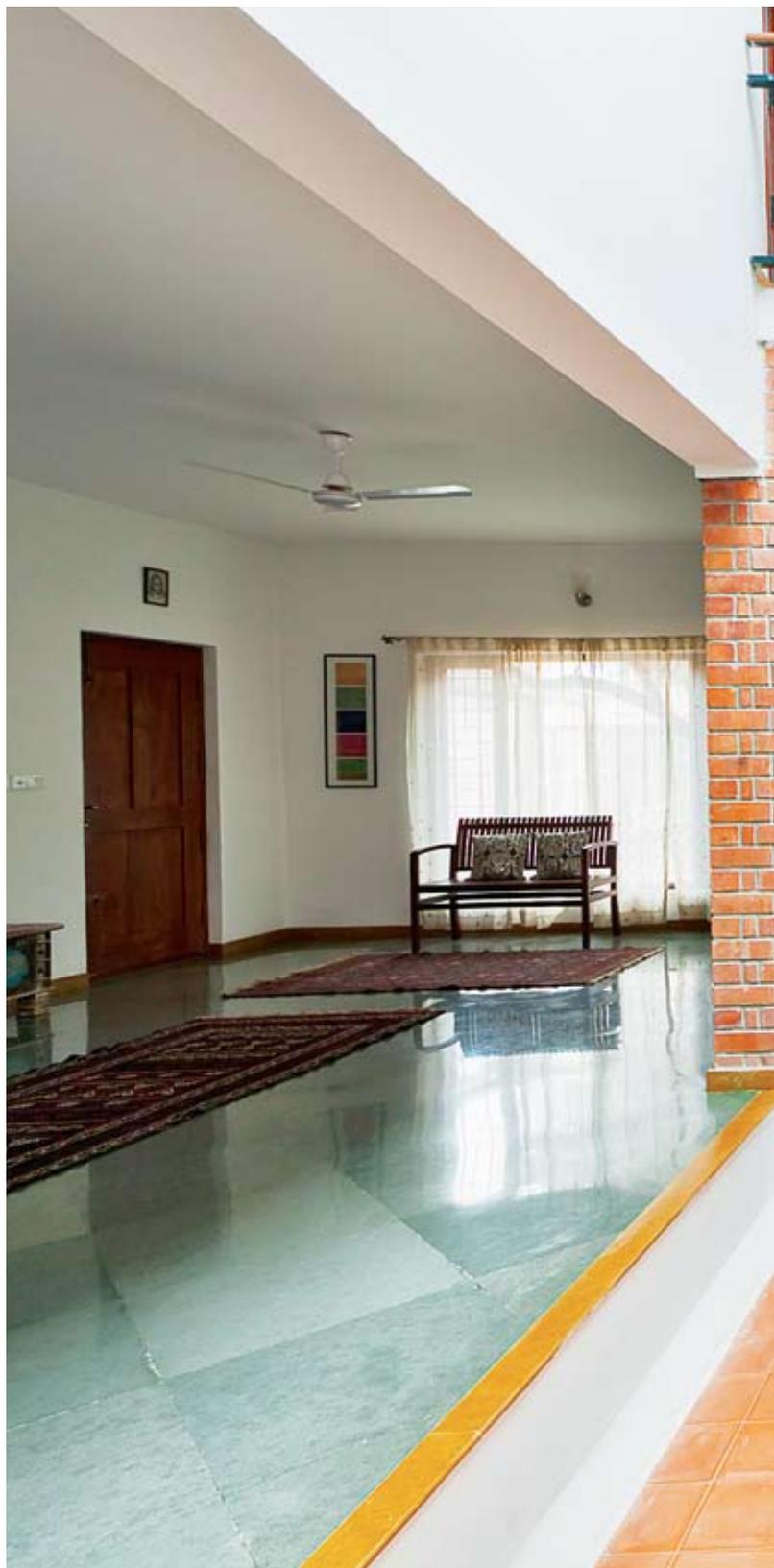
and reused for the gardens. Waste management, segregation of waste and recycling are taken very seriously here, with a lot of the residents chipping in to help oversee the process. And in keeping with their insistence on all things natural, is the picturesque community swimming pool. Designed along the lines of a natural pond, it uses no artificial treatment and filtration system. Instead, different kinds of reeds and plants are used to purify the water. A swim here is like swimming in a real river or pond, with tiny fish and even the occasional tadpole for company and no one seems to mind a bit!

There is a lovely installation art piece in the rear yard of the compound, built by Sandy, an environmentalist, who is part of the Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary in Wayanad. This has been built out of waste granite pieces, stacked to form a perfect globe and it goes beautifully with the surroundings.

Building on their experience of over twenty years, the trio (Stanley is a civil engineer) has used a blend of eco friendly and natural materials, including recycled timber, stone and wire cut exposed bricks. All woodwork has been polished with a mixture of cashew-nut shell liquid and linseed oil to enhance the life of the timber and give it a rustic look. Each of the houses has an area of 2,500 to 3,000 sq ft and in keeping with the concept of open spaces, the interiors have few walls. Double-height wooden staircases are a recurrent theme and most rooms have wooden window seats that are both good looking and functional.

There are about six or seven types of homes in the community, similar in their basic structure and number of rooms but what is really nice is that each has been given its own individual flavour. A few even have indoor ponds and garden spaces right in their living rooms, lit from above by fibreglass skylights. Some houses have picture windows, different from their neighbours; others might have a mural, a special jaali or perhaps an exposed brick indoor wall – small things that distinguish one from the other.

The spacious living room in Sosha Thomas-Pandaredattil's home with Sosha's prized collection of antique Afghan kilms and old furniture, beautifully offsetting the polished green kotah floors.





Here one can enjoy the amenities of an apartment, while staying in an independent house. So you have your shared facilities like power backup, common central parks, security, sewage management, club house, pool and gym and at the same time you have the luxury of your own little patch of green. And community living notwithstanding, you can be as private as you want to be.

Natasha says, 'We have found that semi outdoor spaces encourage interaction with neighbours and are also good for privacy. So we've offered a choice of both back and front verandahs in the houses.' The back verandahs overlook private high walled kitchen gardens and afford total privacy. The front verandahs look onto private angans or courtyards, which have low walls or hedges and look onto a common central park; from these one can chat with the neighbours. All the houses have lovely spacious terraces and covered balconies too.

The residents are an eclectic bunch – young IT professionals who have left behind flourishing careers abroad to return to their roots, designers, NGO workers, artists, writers, consultants and a huge herd of very happy, carefree children who – luxury of luxuries – are free to safely roam where they will.

This is where the famous young long jumper Anju George has set up home with her husband and coach Bobby and their little son Aaron. What do they see as the advantages of living in such a place? Says Bobby, 'Well the proximity of all our family here is a big draw but also, we come from a village and this place has that kind of atmosphere.' Indeed, their house is somewhat reminiscent of the Kerala tharavad home, of course with a modern twist! Water bodies, inner courtyards,

The Nathan residence.

Pepper and Ginger, the Nathan family pets relaxing on the terrace. The murals have been done by Sarah Nathan and are a work in progress.





The living room with an indoor pond, lit from above with a fibre-glass skylight. The steps to the pond serve as extra seating during a party. Carp, small sharks and sucker fish keep mosquitoes at bay.



The no-fuss dining room leads out into the paved back garden.

COMMUNITY LIVING



beautiful gardens both on the ground floor and terrace, huge picture windows and French doors, a cute Juliet balcony and lots of well polished wood make for a wonderful retreat to come home to, after a tough day of training at the nearby Sports Authority of India Complex.

Says entrepreneur Preeti Singhal, 'It's the tranquillity of the place I love the most. Also I've always been very intrigued by Kerala homes and this is the closest I've seen to a Kerala house in practical terms – lots of open spaces, wooden pillars, mangalore tile roofs and jaalis in terracotta. Affordability is another huge factor!'

Adds writer Lina Krishnan, who has recently moved here with her filmmaker husband Pankaj Gupta, 'It's so quiet here that you can hear yourself think. And that creates a good environment for work.' While fashion designer Sosha Thomas, whose job keeps her part of the month in Delhi, finds this the ideal place to bring up her two small girls and so, well worth the commute.

Truly, it's another world and definitely not everyone's cup of tea, being quite far from the bright city lights but for those who revel in nature and the quiet life, it is truly a haven. 

The verandah and terrace garden at Preeti and Sethu's home are wonderful places to relax.

