

PORTRAIT OF A HOME



In this Chennai apartment by Build Beyond, wrestlers, village women, and swaying palms tell the story before the architecture does

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If rooms could daydream, this one would imagine an English manor transplanted to the tropics. A mural of swaying palms and a painting by Selva Senthil Kumar make a convincing case in the living room (OPPOSITE PAGE). A painting by Durga Charan Das and a cherry-red console turn the passage into a destination rather than a mere thoroughfare, adding another memorable moment to the home.

Modelled on the intimacy of an old English cigar room, the family lounge is filled with books, curios, and personal keepsakes. A mural of wrestlers by S. Mark Rathinaraj commands attention, lending the room its unmistakable personality



An expressive artwork of women carrying *trishuls* by Dhan Prasad Dhaniram enlivens the dining room, where earthy textures and handcrafted details make every gathering feel inviting (OPPOSITE PAGE). The kitchen may be built for everyday routines, but warm timber shelving and stain-resistant millwork ensure it looks every bit as considered as the rest of the home.

Guests may only stay a few nights, but this bedroom makes a strong case for extending the visit. Custom furniture and a pair of artworks by Reena D. Kochar create a room that's warm, welcoming, and full of character

Before you notice the timber coffered ceiling, you'll probably spot the wrestlers. Or perhaps the women carrying *trishuls*. Or the group of village women gathered on a dhurrie, facing a moss-green Chesterfield dotted with ivory cushions. In this 3,800 sq ft apartment in Chennai's Nungambakkam neighbourhood – designed by Kochi studio Build Beyond – every room introduces a new cast of characters. They appear in paintings, murals, and collected artworks throughout, offering glimpses into the lives, travels, and memories of its owners, Balraj and Preetha.

The artworks may be what guests notice first, but what holds their attention is something subtler: the easy conversation between a hushed Victorian shell and warm Kerala-inspired layers. “The clients didn't want anything formal or precious,” says Build Beyond's co-founder and principal architect Ann Chunkapura, who runs the studio alongside partner Dominic Tharakan. “They wanted something warmer and more personal with a real connection to their South Indian roots.” The brief itself arrived in a similar spirit: a cascade of Instagram and Pinterest saves, no formal document, just a shared sense of what felt right. For a couple who've spent a long time collecting experiences as readily as objects, that made perfect sense. “Ann reined us in,” jests Preetha, “while making sure everything we needed was incorporated beautifully.”

Step inside, and the collected influences simply settle in alongside one another, comfortable as old friends. Panelled walls and framed arches hold things together, while warm timber, woven textures, and handcrafted details soften any inclination

towards formality. Burnt orange, muted blue, and olive green move through the rooms like a shared thread: present enough to feel intentional, yet gentle enough to let the artworks do the actual talking.

The living room and family room say it most directly. In one, a mural of palm trees conjures something between a memory and a postcard. In the other – inspired by classic English cigar rooms with rich woodwork, bookshelves, and plenty of personal knick-knacks – wrestlers and village women claim the walls with easy confidence. Books, travel souvenirs, and collected oddities fill every gap. “This is where we spend most of our evenings,” says Balraj, “each of us curled up on a couch with our fur babies, Lila and Rana, by our side.” These aren't rooms that were decorated so much as rooms that have been lived in, argued over, and gradually, wonderfully accumulated.

That impulse carries throughout. A vivid painting of women carrying *trishuls* energises the dining area; a black-and-white portrait in the foyer ensures guests are met by yet another character on arrival. In the bedrooms, the mood softens: botanical motifs, block prints, and layered textiles bring warmth without fanfare. Somehow, despite the breadth of references, nothing feels out of place.

“The home is really a reflection of the family's experiences,” says Ann. And you feel it almost immediately, long before you've registered the panelled walls or the coffered ceiling overhead. It's the wrestlers that get you first. Then the women carrying *trishuls*. Then the swaying palms. Each is a small detail but together, they tell you everything you need to know about Balraj and Preetha – which, it turns out, is quite a lot. ♦ **Instagram:** @buildbeyond.in



BUILD BEYOND WAS FOUNDED IN KOCHI BY ANN CHUNKAPURA AND DENNIS THARAKAN. The studio creates homes that feel deeply personal, balancing contemporary design with the warmth and cultural richness of Kerala's architectural heritage. They are known for crafting soulful interiors layered with natural materials, artisanal details, and a strong sense of place. Their work often draws from local traditions and craftsmanship, reinterpreting them in ways that feel fresh, lived-in, and relevant to modern life.

IF THIS HOME HAD A THEME SONG, WHAT WOULD IT BE? Ulaa by The Non Violinist Project. It just has the same spirit as the home – layered, a little unexpected, and full of stories.

WHAT IS THE MOST UNDERRATED DETAIL IN THE HOUSE? The knobs and handles. They're the kind of details people interact with every day but rarely stop to think about.

WHICH ROOM SECRETLY STEALS THE SHOW? The family lounge. It's where the home's personality really comes through and where people end up gravitating to.

IF THIS HOME COULD SPEAK, WHAT'S THE FIRST THING IT WOULD SAY? "Come in, slow down, and stay a while." That's really the feeling behind the entire home.

WHAT'S ONE DESIGN RULE YOU HAPPILY BROKE HERE? Rather than sticking to one design language, we mixed semi-Victorian detailing with Kerala-inspired interiors. Some might say those styles shouldn't go together, but the contrast makes the home unique.

The first introduction isn't to the architecture but to a face. A striking black-and-white portrait by S. Mark Rathinaraj welcomes guests, setting the tone for a home where art opens the conversation (OPPOSITE PAGE) Bright yellow panelling and deep green millwork bring playful contrast to the powder room

