



AD

THE CONSTANT GARDEN

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← ANJANA VASWANI

WRITER Currently a guest faculty member at Jai Hind College, Vaswani contributes to leading publications and B2B magazines. In this issue, she reviews a new book by Ramachandra Guha (pg 33). “One aspect of the book that I found particularly enlightening was Guha’s exploration of JC Kumarappa’s vision of an ecologically balanced economy—a concept that feels highly relevant in today’s climate discussions.”



↑ ROHIT BIJOY

PHOTOGRAPHER Bengaluru-based photographer Rohit Bijoy photographs landscape architect Varna Shashidhar for this issue (pg 58). “I’m super grateful that Varna was the subject of my first photo project with AD. Though she’s not particularly fond of being in front of the camera, our communication helped her find a flow. My aim was to capture her genuine off-camera smile after our initial conversations, and I believe I was able to do that, even if just a little.”

→ VAISHNAVI NAYEL TALAWADEKAR

WRITER Talawadekar is an architecture, design and art journalist, and a regular AD contributor. She writes about “plant whisperers” Vivek Gour Broome, Bagirath Prakash and Jonas Suchanek, Adrienne Thadani, Varna Shashidhar, and Hemali Sawant for this issue (pg 58). “Covering this talented group of landscape designers, arborists, botanists, and permaculturists felt like exploring an endless Eden.”



→ RAJASHREE BALARAM

WRITER Balaram is a journalist and screenplay writer based in Mumbai. In this issue she writes about Gurmeet Sangha Rai’s ancestral home in Gurdaspur, Punjab, (pg 92) as well as a home in Alibag designed by architect Rahul Mehrotra with landscape design by Kunal Maniar (pg 98). “I felt blessed in many ways seeing Rai’s rootedness to her land, her people, and her traditions.”



← ARSHIA D

WRITER A former features editor at AD, Arshia currently works as a culture writer and editor. In this issue, she writes about artist and poet Nilanjan Bandyopadhyay’s home in Santiniketan (pg 86). “This, by far, has been the most fascinating home I’ve written about, that too in my favourite town. There’s so much heart, but also restraint in the way Kokoro is built.”

↑ PANKAJ ANAND

PHOTOGRAPHER A regular contributor to Condé Nast magazines over his decade-long career, Anand photographs field botanist Vivek Gour Broome for this issue (pg 58). “Photographing Vivek in his habitat was like interacting with a walking-talking encyclopedia of plants, trees, flowers, birds that we have almost forgotten about in our day to day life.”



The Plant Whisperers

Arborists, botanists, gardeners, landscape designers—we feature 10 specialists who work with plants, not as an afterthought in architecture but as the very origin of space making.



TAERA CHOWNA & KERMAN MADON Born into a family of gardeners and botanists, landscape architect Taera Chowna's passion for gardens began from a young age. She has been working since 1988, and is a well-kept yet legendary secret behind some of the most beautiful gardens in private homes in Mumbai and Alibag, working with architects like Nozer Wadia and Bijoy Jain. "I always want to tread as lightly as possible on a site, managing land in a sustainable way," says Chowna. Her daughter, Kerman, joined her in 2014 and their emphasis is on planting indigenous species, reinstating natural habitats, and reintroducing native fauna—bees in particular—to the property. "They are the ones who will eventually sustain the land." The mother-daughter duo recently worked on the landscaping of Good Earth founder Anita Lal's Sitara property in the foothills of the Himalayas. —*Gayatri Rangachari Shab. Photo: Raghav Goswamy.*



VARNA SHASHIDHAR While she was always passionate about nature, it took an internship with Sri Lankan architect Chelvadurai Anjalendran for Shashidhar to realize the symbiosis between built form and landscape. After a masters at Harvard University, she set up her own practice, VSLA, in 2013, focusing on creating contextual environments that celebrate a nuanced natural beauty. "Cultural landscapes in India have the power to touch the *chitta* (human consciousness), which transcends the sensorial. That is a quality I aspire to add to my work," she says. Among her achievements are an ecosystem for Neev Academy in 2015 and a one-acre urban remediation landscape for the Bangalore International Centre in 2019. She is currently working on creating a healing landscape in Katthiwada, Madhya Pradesh. —*Vaishnavi Nayel Talawadkar. Photo: Robit Bijoy.*



PRADIP KRISHEN A self-taught landscape designer, Krishen carries out long forays and rigorously documents the plants he encounters—their preferred soils, phenology and ecological niches. It is rumoured that he doesn't make any drawings; instead, his designs are carried out directly on site, placing plants while visualizing them like a cinematographer framing a shot for dramatic effect. Just like the chasmophytes he plants, Krishen thrives when between a rock and a hard place. He ecologically restored a swathe of rocky desert below the Mehrangarh Fort in Jodhpur to create the Rao Jodha Desert Rock Park, followed by the Kishan Bagh Sand Dune Park in Jaipur. In addition to his gardens and field work, Krishen's books *Trees of Delhi: A Field Guide* and *Jungle Trees of Central India* have inspired many to the wonders of the natural world. —Fazal Rasbid. Photo: Harsbita Nayyar.



HEMALI SAMANT While studying landscape architecture at CEPT in Ahmedabad, Samant's sketches resembled still-life drawings: a building encircled by trees and plants. "I was fascinated by the association between space and nature," she recalls. Two pivotal experiences—with Bijoy Jain of Studio Mumbai and English landscape architect Tom Stuart-Smith—shaped her practice. "Both opened my eyes to how, inside and outside, people, land and surroundings can become one." She established her studio in 2014 and has since collaborated with local farmers to design an ecosystem full of native species for Avasara Academy in Pune; created a tropical forest for Natural Ice Creams in Juhu, Mumbai; and undertaken landscaping for Surat's Greenlab Diamonds, among various residential and industrial gardens. —Vaisnavi Nayel Talawadekar. Photo: Harsbita Nayyar.



VIVEK GOUR BROOME A Pune-based field botanist who specializes in native trees, herbs, grasses, bamboos, medicinal plants, reptiles, and amphibians, Gour Broome lives on a farm that resembles a forest, home to over 530 species of native plants. His focus is promoting biodiversity through forest surveys and plant observations. “Some plants only grow on rocks; you’ll never get them to grow in soil. These are little learnings that can lead to amazing results,” he reflects. Letting nature take its course, he only intervenes to remove non-native species. His expertise is highly valued by landscape designers, who seek him out to help recreate evergreen or deciduous ecosystems in private gardens or industrial sites. “My dream is for people to leave room for nature. Natural vegetation looks after itself. It’s about finding beauty,” he says. —*Vaishnavi Nayel Talawadkar. Photo: Pankaj Anand.*



NAZNEEN JEHANGIR Known for her prowess with cut flowers, Jehangir has been running the Mumbai-based luxury floral boutique Libellule for close to 15 years. Her arrangements have a still-life quality—sculptural with an amorphous symmetry, working with negative space and an alternative idea of beauty. Her journey in landscape design has been relatively recent, with her first major garden at an Alibag home by AD100 firm Case Design. Her style is decidedly Mediterranean—native palms with informal clumps of flowers or grasses peppered with fruiting shrubs. Her childhood memories include “summers spent under trees, various scents of crushed foliage wafting through the air—the romanticism, however clinched, was forever burned in my memory”. She adds, “I think on some level I’m just trying to recreate that magic.” —*Gayatri Rangachari Shab. Photo: Harsbita Nayyar.*



BAGIRATH PRAKASH & JONAS SUCHANEK

“In India, arboriculture is still developing,” says Suchanek, who cofounded the Auroville-based Tree Care in 2018 along with Prakash. “Maintaining trees isn’t just hacking branches with a machete; it requires an understanding of tree biology.” Their method challenges traditional landscaping. They assess the land, map trees, and assign retention priorities based on species, age, health and other factors. They then create arboricultural reports that architects can overlay onto their designs. From serving 1,000 households in Auroville to consulting for embassies in New Delhi and Chennai, offering tree inventories for Goa’s Panaji Smart City programme, and working with corporates like TVS and Reliance, Prakash and Suchanek have a far-reaching mission. —*Vaishnavi Nayel Talawadekar. Photo: Harsbita Nayyar.*



ADRIENNE THADANI An American-born, Mumbai-based landscape designer, Thadani found her calling during a solo visit to Mumbai in 2009 at 21. She began gardening to grow her own produce and soon turned her green thumb into a career, working on private kitchen gardens, cultivating an organic farm for Mumbai restaurant The Table in 2011, and establishing Flyover Farm, a 2,500-square-foot garden on an unused residential rooftop, in 2012. In 2021, she partnered with entrepreneur Jay Mehta to launch GoodKarma Farms, an organic research farm in Alibag. They also cofounded Thriving Home, a firm focused on eco-sensitive landscapes. Their team includes farmers, gardeners, architects, and landscapers who, she says, “[use their expertise] to create spaces that balance beauty, wild nature, and productive landscapes”. —*Vaishnavi Nayel Talawadekar. Photo: Harsbita Nayyar.*