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ELLE DECOR brings you in-depth articles and insights into design, architecture, decor and culture. Introducing our special contributors



KUNAL BHATIA

PHOTOGRAPHER, WRITER & ARCHITECT
STUDIO KUNAL BHATIA

A spatial photographer, travel and design writer, and architect based in Mumbai, Kunal finds inspiration in cities around the world, in the people that he meets and in encounters that are often fleeting. He is passionate about design, photography and travel; and strives to explore the many intersections between them with his practice. When not behind the camera or at his desk, he's likely to be flaneuring in some corner of the world.

A fictional person I want to call for dinner...

The Dowager Countess from Downton Abbey

A meal I can eat on repeat... Miso soup and sushi

A hobby I'd like to pick up... Tap dancing

I'm currently reading... I prefer podcasts. Currently listening to The Guardian's The Audio Long Read

On my bucket list... Going back to Japan for a few months, again

In this issue, he photographs and writes about a filmmaker's dream residence in Goa designed by Ini Chatterji and designVAN, **Pg 88**



ABHIMANYU DALAL

PRINCIPAL ARCHITECT
ABHIMANYU DALAL ARCHITECTS

One of India's leading architects and urban designers, his expertise spans various domains, including residential, institutional and commercial projects. Abhimanyu also specialises in restoration and repurposing of historic buildings, comprehensive street-scaping, conservation and urban design. With a strong educational foundation, academic practice and extensive experience, he brings a unique blend of skills to his architectural explorations.

A fictional person I want to call for dinner... Hercule Poirot

I'm currently reading... At Home by Bill Bryson

On my bucket list... Follow the Silk Route

A piece of technology I couldn't live without... mobile phone

A contemporary I look up to... Medha Patkar

In this issue, he takes us through this New Delhi bungalow designed alongside Vritima Wadhwa of Project 810 that hinges on two helixes and distinct cinematic experiences, **Pg 188**



VRITIMA WADHWA

FOUNDER
PROJECT 810

A graduate of the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, with a specialisation in furniture design, Vritima's practice spans retail, hospitality and residential sectors, with a focus on interior architecture. She has served as visiting faculty at NID and CEPT, Ahmedabad. Her studio has been recognised on national and international platforms.

A meal I can eat on repeat... Vietnamese pho

A hobby I'd like to pick up... Pottery and pickleball

I'm currently reading... Peter Zumthor's Atmospheres

A movie that changed my perspective... Jojo Rabbit

On my bucket list... A trip to Peru

In this issue, she takes us through this New Delhi bungalow designed alongside Abhimanyu Dalal that hinges on two helixes and distinct cinematic experiences, **Pg 188**



SHONAN TREHAN

PRINCIPAL ARCHITECT AND FOUNDER
LANGUAGE.ARCHITECTURE.BODY

Her work focuses on the construction of relationships between narrative, environment and habitation. Shonan's studio has worked extensively on healthcare, education and residential projects. In addition to her practice, Shonan has also been an academician and published in numerous books.

I'm currently reading... The Overstory by Richard Powers

A movie that changed my perspective... The Automat: a documentary on Horn & Hardart

A piece of technology I couldn't live without... The Blackwing 602 Pencil

A place I feel most at peace... At my drawing desk

In this issue, she crafts a home out of the earth in Vadodara that appears one with the landscape, **Pg 202**



Part-garden, part-home, this biophilic Vadodara home by LABwerk interweaves indoor and outdoor spaces. At the shaded patio, a LABmake swing levitates to one side, beneath a curved roof punctuated with lighting from The Purple Turtles. Studio Covers and Gulmohar Lane fabrics enliven the cushions. An *urli* and vases from Sarita Handa adorn the table in the courtyard. The planter is from Mangalya Handicrafts. Styling by Riddhika Jesrani

GROWN FROM THE EARTH

Architect and interior designer Shonan Purie Trehan has a flair for stepping off the beaten path, as much at work as in the wilderness, and sometimes, if the stars align just so, in both together at once. “We first met while training for a 50 kilometre Oxfam walk in the wilderness,” shares the founder and principal of Mumbai-based full-service design practice LABwerk, the we in question being herself and Vadodara-based couple Shalini and Anand Raghavan. “Walking led to talking and we really got to know each other,” adds Shonan. The kinship endured long after the training was over, and beyond the course of the next year. When it came time for the Raghavans to entrust someone to build a home to their liking in their hometown in Gujarat, the compass pointed towards Shonan.

There was a reason behind the epiphany – this was, after all, no ordinary home. The Raghavans imagined it as a sanctuary disguised inside a Trojan Horse of modern comforts, a luxurious ashram that would girdle their lives in an orb of enduring calm. As for the lodestars for the design, Shonan describes the ethos as monastic, purposeful, meditative and connected to nature. “We had to really investigate where the ideas of luxury and an ashram would connect,” she reflects of the 4-bedroom, 5-bathroom dwelling measuring 5,000 sq ft, which unfurls across a single sweeping ground level. The median, it turned out, was seeded in purposeful living: restful beds, generous cooking spaces, private courtyards abloom with frangipanis and water bodies, expansive windows, a sequestered meditation area and various other spaces for this hobby or that.

As one does in an ashram, Shonan treads lightly. She saw the home as a child of the earth, giving it a soul before she did bones. She didn’t rely on convention, nor external materials. She left concrete exposed, folded in mud plaster and excavated earth from the ground for the walls, collecting it along the path from Bhuj to Vadodara, the same route followed by the artisans of Hunnarshala Foundation, an organisation devoted to building sustainable habitats, with which she collaborated for the build. “We collected pink soil from Bhuj, yellow soil from Dhrangadhra and red soil from Morbi. Place and journey became the unseen architects of these walls,” observes Shonan, whose team included in-house architects Saumin Lad, Vatsal Bharmani, Sanjana Nair and Manali Patil. She also collaborated with structural engineer Rajeev Shah and landscape design practice Studio DesignSeed for the project.

The thing about designing a multigenerational home, more often than not, is that there is a push and pull of energies and expectations. That was not the case with the Raghavans. “Each of them wanted the house to be a gift for the others in the family,” Shonan recalls. >>

Crafted from locally sourced earth, this biophilic Vadodara home by LABwerk stays firmly rooted in the landscape in both spirit and flesh

TEXT BY VAISHNAVI NAYEL TALAWADEKAR
PHOTOGRAPHS BY KUBER SHAH

HOME VADODARA



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A wall light by LABmake graces an exterior wall, foregrounded by an old family brass bell. The floor is detailed to express the movement of rainwater, an imprint of the season on the architecture as the drain emphasises the passage of rain back into the earth; Pink soil from Bhuj, yellow soil from Dhrangadhra and red soil from Morbi compose the walls; The courtyard exudes tranquillity, with a serene water feature and the soothing fragrance of frangipani
FACING PAGE FROM TOP The shaded patio, characterised by its rammed earth facade, acts as a breezy interlude between indoors and outdoors; The facade, a rustic tapestry of mud plaster and earth, is symbolic of the local landscape





A rammed earth wall hushes the dining room. Pots, vases and a lamp from Sarita Handa bedeck the credenza, while Artisan Lab candle stands take centre stage on the LABwerk dining table. The chairs are Gulmohar Lane finds. House of Things was the store of choice for the pendant lights
FACING PAGE The sun steeps one indoor courtyard in golden light, courtesy of a square skylight. Louvred pivot doors by LABmake promote cross-ventilation



“Each courtyard has a distinct character and energy. Some are solitary and private, while others encourage exuberant company”

Mind you, the others, bar two, were a peripatetic flock. “Anand and his mother live here year-round, but Shalini and the children use the home only occasionally, which really called into question how the spaces could be intimate for two and expansive for many.” The answer, she learned soon enough, was foregoing custom, as with the living room, which she replaced with an outdoor pavilion. She also introduced a sequence of seven courtyards and a panoply of volumes and voids positioned along its 70 mtr long central spine — an arrangement that suggests that she conceived the home as equal parts garden and dwelling. “Each courtyard has a distinct character and energy. Some are solitary and private, while others encourage exuberant company,” she notes.

The crown jewel of the interior, if there were such a thing, would be a title claimed by the great room, a room that lives up to its name with a vaulted brick roof, cobalt blue walls, walnut timber floors, a writing desk and an inherent warmth that makes it feel almost like a living, breathing entity. “It’s sometimes a library, sometimes a writing area. Occasionally, it’s used as a lounge,” Shonan reveals of the courtyard-encircled space. She echoed the bold approach in the children’s bedrooms, enveloping the daughter’s in deep aqua and the son’s in brooding charcoal, offsetting each with handwoven dhurries, rugs and rustic textiles. Where or whether she drew a distinction between interior and exterior is a question Shonan still contemplates. “This is a home to walk barefoot in; from floor to earth to floor,” she submits — to walk once again, off the beaten path. ♦

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP A bedroom with a view. Ikai Asai accessories paired with Ritu Kumar bedding; This bedroom epitomises barefoot luxury. A LABmake bed serves as the centrepiece, while soft furnishings from Studio Covers soften the timber finishes. To the right is the mother’s study; The home is monastic, purposeful and meditative FACING PAGE Ensconced by courtyards, the great room stars a vaulted brick ceiling and walnut wood floor. A LABmake writing desk and a work chair by JOSMO take pride of place by the window. The chairs, sofa, floor lamp and trunk are from Gulmohar Lane





Cocooned in dark tones and enhanced with lighting from The Black Steel and accessories from Ikai Asai, this bedroom is a deeply ruminative sanctuary. Altrove was the choice for bedding and soft furnishings