





Mona Doctor-Pingel

ADDRESSING THE FIVE SENSES

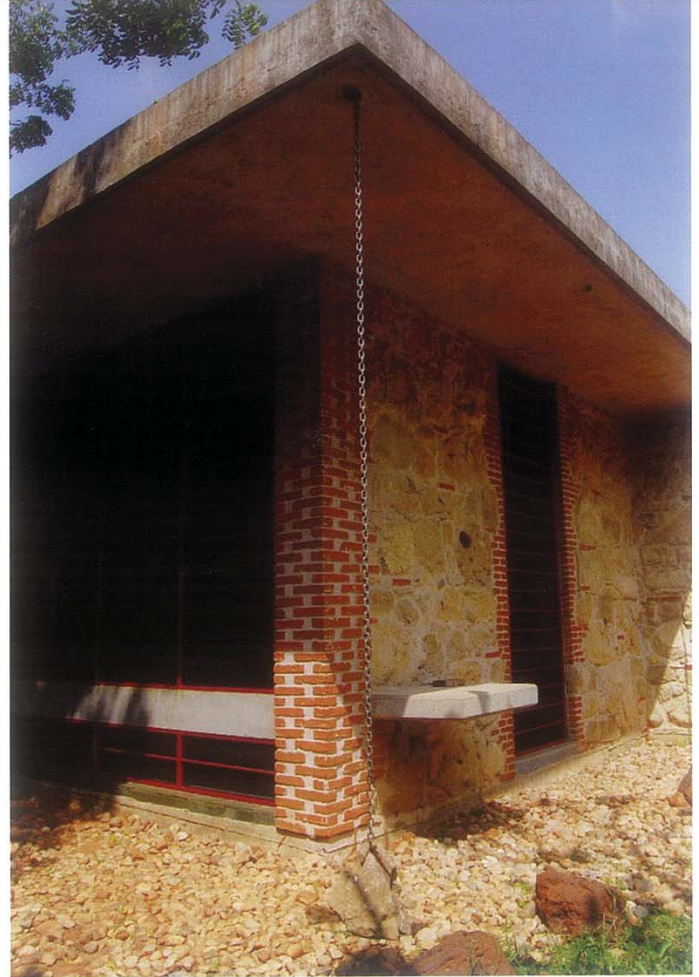
By Nandhini Sundar

Her buildings use natural materials in abundance, with stone, terracotta blocks and bricks finding their way along with the exposed concrete columns and beams that blend smoothly with the copious greenery that is omnipresent in all her spaces.

She is totally carefree, simple, almost childlike in her intense passion for being close to nature, keeping her footprints low. To her, 'slow is sustainability'. She will not be hurried or harried. Her buildings reflect her persona, tuned as they are, totally to nature, with a sense of gay abandon, bringing in an energy that is hard to miss. Time comes to a standstill in the serenity exuded. A walk through her structures literally uplifts you, the rustic elements arrestingly aesthetic, the designs astounding in their simplicity yet displaying an astute crafting of the functional spaces. Be it the sight of greenery, sound of water, feel of natural stone under the feet, the smell of trees, flowers, fresh mud, her spaces pack them all effortlessly to offer a stunning piece of work that is effective yet uncomplicated.

For architect Mona Doctor-Pingel, of Studio Naqshbandi, Auroville, a building is a space that effectively addresses the five senses. Her seamless integration of the outdoors with the indoors make the demarcation of the spaces totally fluid and undefined, keeping a three dimensional angle in perspective while designing. Influenced by writer, philosopher, artist, Hugo Kuekelhaus, Mona firmly advocates studying the impact of built environment on the health of the occupant and applying this knowledge in design.

The Temple Tree Retreat guest house is a classic example of her design inclinations, the expansive spaces flowing seamlessly into the outdoors, the insulated tiled roof, cuddapah floors and exposed concrete fusing naturally with the ample greenery and water bodies. To beat the heat of Auroville, the precast concrete rafter and Mangalore tile roof has been insulated with bison board, thermocol and GI sheets. This not only insulates but also keeps away pests that might invade through the tiled roof. The central courtyard along with its water body and greenery holds pebbles

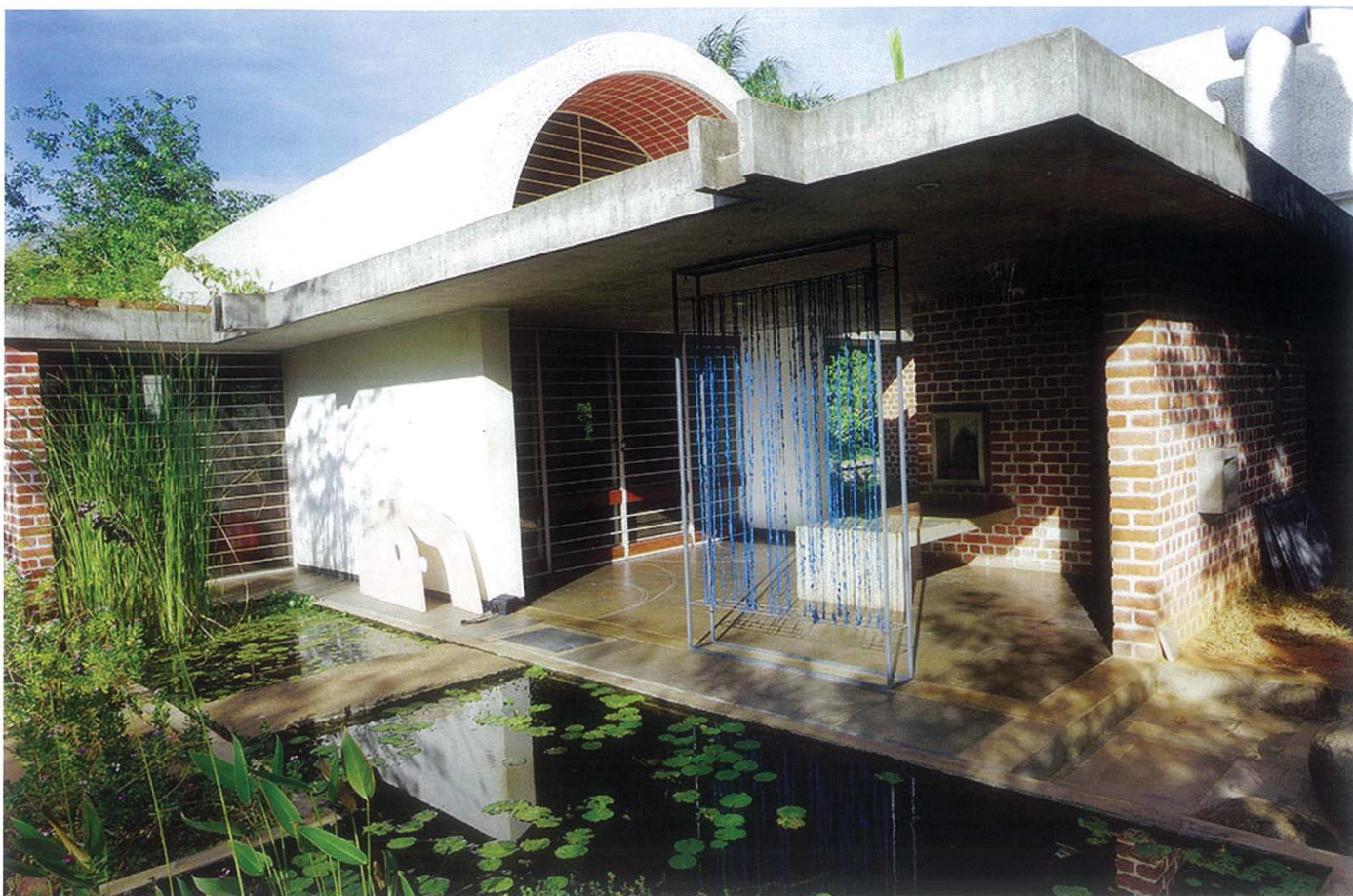


and rough granite to give a natural feel to the bare feet. Given her principle that nothing should be wasted or left behind in the construction site, Mona recycled and used all the waste that usually gets transported outside the building site.

Her studio Naqshbandi is a semi-circular brick vault, the North-South oriented structure effectively cutting out the harsh sunlight while ensuring infusion of abundant natural light and ventilation. The open structure fuses in the outdoors, the interiors spilling out both visually and physically into the greenery and water bodies, making it hard to mark where the interiors end and outdoors begin. The exposed brick structure with its rough cuddapah stone flooring, ferro-cement tables and cupboards has a sense of surprise in its design as well as an openness in the interiors, bringing in abundant positive energy while keeping the temperature many notches below in the warm humid region that it is located.

Her project Cottage Restaurant in Pondicherry city speaks volumes of her inclinations, the eatery having to be designed in a tight space of 320 Sqm and create a built up area of 600 Sqm, where the spaces are totally open yet closed to accommodate functionality. Mona achieved this in a spectacular manner by merely using exposed concrete columns and beams, white plastered walls in a small part of the structure, the rough cuddapah flooring teaming charmingly with the copious intermingling of yellow bamboo trees and rocks. Though the elements featured are remarkably simple, the structure emits such





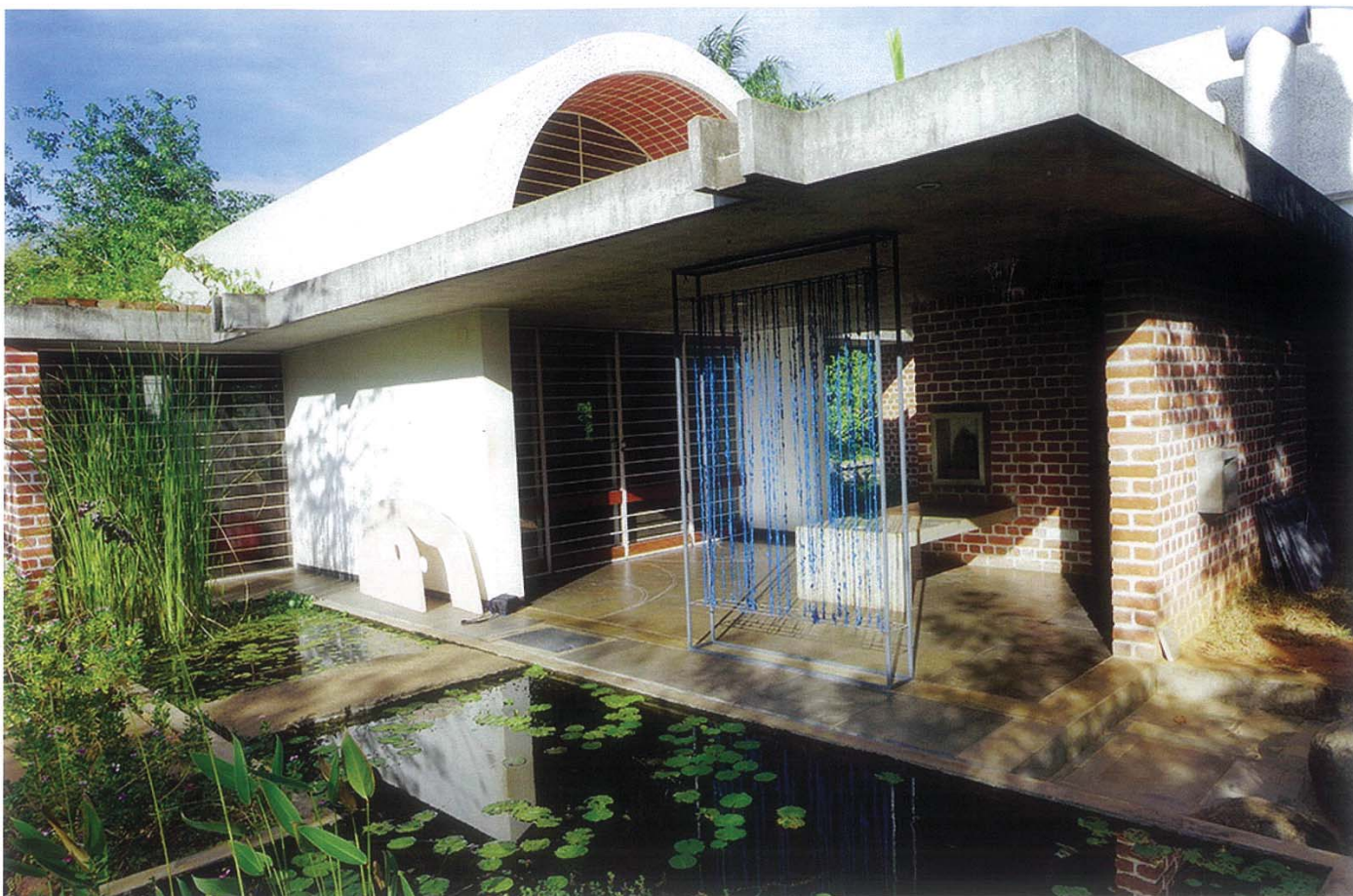
positive energy with its simple décor, openness and greenery that it is hard for the visitor to part from the spaces. When confronted with an existing neem tree that prevailed on the line of the boundary wall, Mona decided to save it by creating a courtyard around it.

Yantra, which incidentally is her first project, abundantly displays all the principles she believed in. Minimal use of concrete, exposed mud brick walls, mud brick domes, deep overhangs in verandas, solar power, retention of existing trees, intensive landscaping with plenty of water bodies, pebbles, laterite rocks and boulders, find their way into her project, setting the tone for her future designs.

Speaking about her design ideology, Mona says, "The idea is to use local materials on simple practical lines that are not garish and achieve a balance between my inclinations and the occupants' requirements. Each building is an evolution of your inner self." She firmly believes "sustainability is not just recycling but the way you consciously care for environment in terms of addressing wastage and conservation."

Mona has also been experimenting with Vaastu Shastra as she contends that it permits you to scale your structure. "It is mathematical and part of our ancient science, so it cannot be all wrong. We have to delve deeper to understand the finer details", she says.

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Mahesh Chadaga



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Designed by Architect Mona Doctor-Pingel of Studio Naqshbandi, the resort, which essentially functions more as a guest house given its limited number of rooms, is craftily planned on simple lines to keep the temperatures in this hot place several notches below while affording the therapeutic feel and view of lush green spaces intermingled with cooling water bodies. Open straight lines that flow seamlessly into the exteriors, mark the general language of the structure.

The reception of the guest house is designed as a large lounge coupled with the dining. Exposed concrete walls and roofing elements mark the space that flows seamlessly into the exterior water bodies and greenery. Completely collapsible glass shutters open the internal seating spaces to the exteriors to enable the interiors to flow freely on to the prevailing water bodies. A part of the roof is green, to keep the interior temperatures down.

The entry to the reception is certainly dramatic, boulders serving as picturesque pathways over the surrounding lily pond, the abundant aquatic life cheerfully greeting you as enter. Lounge in the comfortable seating with a drink in hand and you certainly feel all the stress draining away; the ambience and the energy of the space so peaceful,

the ever-present sound of water soothing to the senses.

The interesting part is the simple lines used in this totally contemporary space, completely lacking in pretences, the expansive interiors toned down with pastel shades, with just a spot of colour to lend a charming contrast to the tasteful decor. Exposed concrete beams and columns bring in a rustic flavour, complementing the abundant presence





of water and greenery. Yet the feel of positive energy in this straight lined interior is palpable.

The reception area further opens on to a dry sunlit courtyard that hosts greenery, pebbles and rough granite, giving a natural feel to the bare feet besides bringing in sunshine and ventilation while the presence of greenery acts a cooling factor. "Plenty of pebbles and natural stone find their way in as it is important to feel the nature as you walk bare feet in these sections", says Mona who firmly believes architecture is for the five senses.

A cheerful lap pool prevails next to the reception area, again surrounded by copious greenery, inviting the visitor to dive in with gay abandon. The presence of greenery and







water bodies is ubiquitous around the individual rooms too, with each cluster hosting their own distinctive green spaces along with quaint seating. The result is plenty of natural light and ventilation sans the harsh sun besides offering a green feast for the eyes.

With Auroville being a fairly hot region, Mona decided to adopt measures to cut the heat ingress, keeping the interiors several notches below the outside temperatures. Thus the tiled roofs offer deep overhangs that shade the windows and doors, the large verandas surrounding the rooms serving as buffers, preventing the heat from pervading into the interiors. Further, the precast concrete rafter and Mangalore tile roof is insulated with bison board, thermocol and GI sheets to keep the internal temperatures down. "This also keeps pests away that may try to enter through the tiled roof", says Mona.

The totally white interiors come with a splash of colours in the form of cushions, blinds, the colours coordinating with the theme of the space. The large contemporary interiors display a deft handling of the spaces, with the bathroom and dressing area craftily tucked behind a clever demarcation.

The entire resort is visually interconnected, the structure strategically placed, interspersed with the waterbodies, courtyards, pebbles and greenery. While the Bamboo and neem along with the temple trees exist in abundance through the acre of space in the resort, the floral plants visually find their presence into all the rooms, serving as a relaxing factor.



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