

LIFE & STYLE

Shankar's earthen living space



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With World Environment Day round the corner, MetroPlus visits architect G. Shankar's house of mud at Mudavanmugal, a fine example of architecture that is in tune with nature

If you happen to trip down a rabbit hole on the bustling, fuel-fume-filled MG Road in the city and wake up in the compound of G.Shankar's Mudavanmugal residence, you would think you are in wonderland! Tucked in the corner of the seemingly wild, sylvan land is 'Siddhartha', an earthen living space that feels like a natural extension of the lush green and brown earth surrounding it.

The first glimpse of the uniquely shaped mud house crafted with a parabolic design idiom is sure to take one's breath away. The roof has been designed to look like waves. With creepers and bamboo growing on and out of it, the whole house seems like a piece of art made by the earth on a canvas of mud with strokes of green. "Although conceived as a regular rectangular house, it evolved into what you see today from my attempt to break away from the conventions and create something organic that would come from the ground and then go back to it," explains Shankar.



Porch with bamboo grills and the front door | Photo Credit: **Aswin V.N.**

This idea of 'an organic space that is in tune with nature' extends into the cozy and cool interior of the two-storied house as well. 'Siddhartha' is crafted around spaces that exist as extensions of each other rather than as rooms separated by walls. Large windows ensure the best views of the garden and let in the breeze along with sunlight, while thick vegetation outside prevents the glare of the sunlight from reaching the windows.



Porch bench with bamboo grill on the right | Photo Credit: **Aswin V.N.**

Particular care has been shown to avoid walls while ensuring enough privacy to each space through sheer genius of design. In the front porch and the living room, the arched roof extends down to the ground and functions as the wall.

Beyond boundaries

A long verandah runs from the living room to the North end of the house with different spaces such as a dining space, library, kitchen, bedroom and a work area on either sides. The living room opens left to a dining space that is tucked away behind the arch that separates both the spaces.



The long verandah | Photo Credit: **Aswin V.N.**

“For me building this eco-friendly house, designed around open spaces that let the sun and the wind in without compromising on privacy, was a celebration of architecture and nature. This is my library-cum-reading room that has windows on two sides with a sun-lit, semi-open courtyard garden on the fourth. You can see it lies opposite the dining space, yet the courtyard and the pillars around it make sure people sitting at the table doesn't have a direct view of the library,” the Padmashree awardee explains with child-like excitement.



Courtyard with the library at the other end | Photo Credit: [Aswin V.N.](#)

A short flight of stairs, going up from the verandah near Shankar's bedroom, takes one to a spacious drawing room with a traditional swing seat and other furniture.

A small verandah from here goes to the terrace while a few steps to the right leads to the second bedroom. The highlight is a study, tucked into a narrow space to the left of the bedroom door, with a wooden writing desk and a view of the arched roof of the courtyard with creepers growing down through slits. Outside, on the terrace, a sit-out facing the Bodhi tree in the backyard is the place to laze around on a rainy day.



A view of the living room | Photo Credit: [Aswin V.N.](#)

Where the structure couldn't be manipulated, the master architect has come up with clever additions, which solves the issue at hand while blending in with the design. The bamboo grills that cover the sides of the porch proves the point.

Intelligent design

“As the porch faces the East, sitting on the benches, built into either sides of the entrance arch, in the morning would mean negotiating the glare of the sun. To avoid the heat and glare while not completely cutting off the sun or the wind, we came with this idea of using the leftover bamboo, which has been used to make partitions, switchboards and storage spaces, to build the grills that would cover the bench spaces,” says Shankar. Bamboo barrels on either side, apart from adding to the aesthetics, provide a space to grow indoor plants which would then filter the air flowing through it.



A view of 'Siddhartha' from near one of the ponds | Photo Credit: **Aswin V.N.**

Having spend more than 30 years in constructing eco-friendly, low-cost houses, he thinks the interest in brick and mud-houses is on the rise. He adds, "There are those who are interested as they find such houses a fashionable option and there are others who genuinely care about nature. Either way their numbers are growing and that is a good thing."



G. Shankar | Photo Credit: **Aswin V.N.**

In his own case, the house itself was an afterthought. True to the nature-lover that he is, Shankar's dream was to create a forest in the middle of the city.

"Located in the valley between two hillocks, this was a barren land with hardly any meaningful vegetation when I bought it 18 years ago. To fulfil the dream, I had to first make it fertile and that is why I decided to start a farm. The dung from the cattle and the water from the four ponds we dug are what transformed this place," he says.

Over the years trees and plants belonging to 140 different species were planted. As they grew, birds and butterflies arrived bringing alive the master architect's blueprint of a jungle of his own.

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