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# ELLE DECOR

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GETAWAY RAIGAD



# INTO THE WOODS

*Cloaked in a blanket of foliage, the secluded villa imagined by Robert Verrijt and Shefali Balwani of Architecture BRIO is a city dweller's dream retreat*

TEXT BY **NISHITA FIJI**

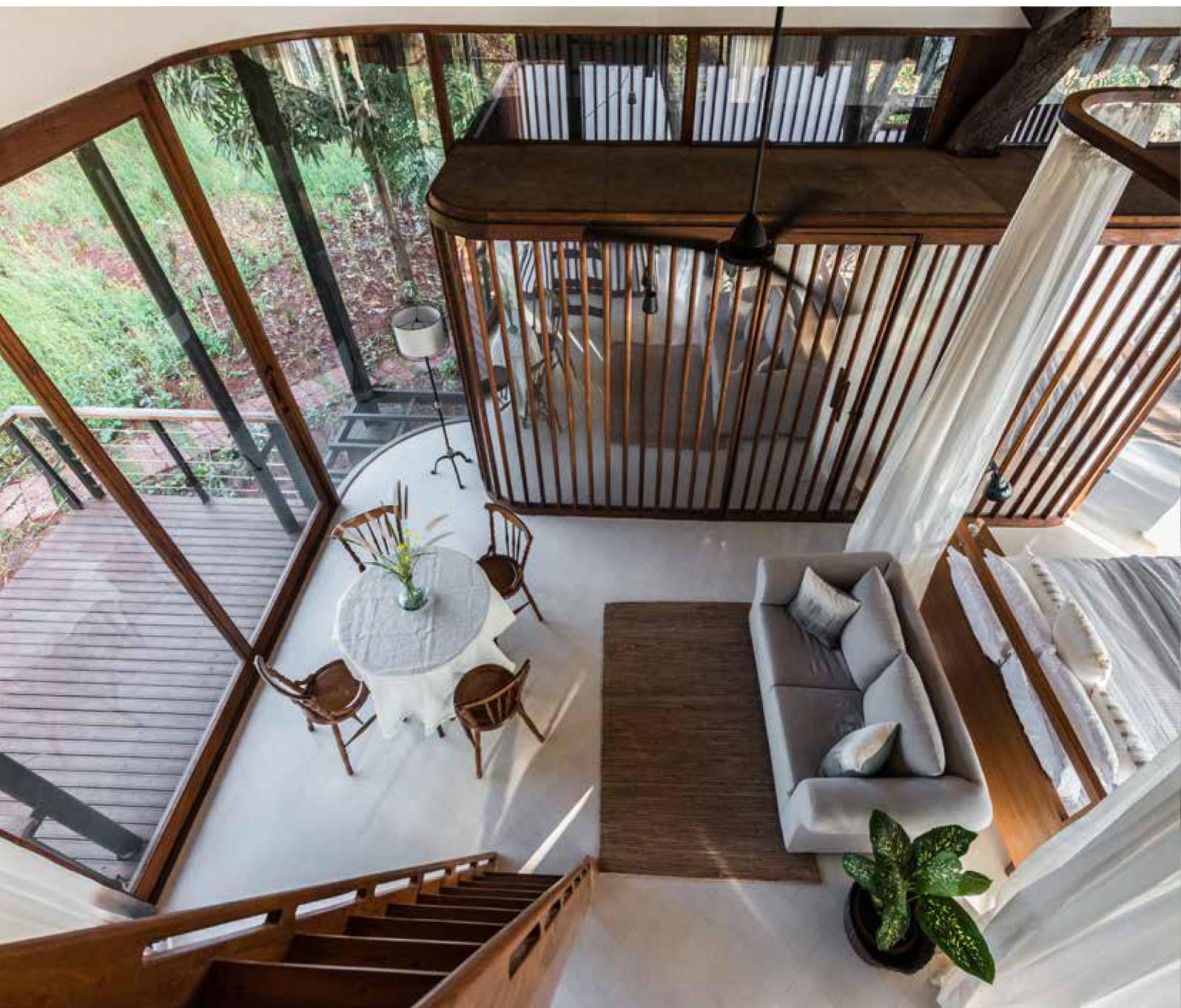
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **SEBASTIAN ZACHARIAH and IRA GOSALI/PHOTOGRAPHIX** COURTESY **ARCHITECTURE BRIO**



Clockwise, from Above Left Located atop a hill in Tala, Maharashtra, the weekend home overlooks an estuary from three sides. From the outside, the thatched roof cottage seems to be a single storeyed stucture, however, once inside, visitors discover a lower ground floor, accessible through an internal staircase. Guests enter the remote property through the

upper level of the bungalow; Outside the main bedroom, a sit-out in merbau wood offers scenic views of a river and valley beyond. All columns and railings were painted black so that they seem to disappear into the forest when it gets dark; Steel staircases with timber risers on the lower level lead to a forest trail, urging guests to take a hike in the 160 acre woodland

## GETAWAY RAIGAD



**P**erched on a hill in Tala, a small town in the Raigad district of Maharashtra, the Tree House doesn't look one bit out of place in its surroundings. Its facade of glass and mirrored panels reflects whimsical leaf patterns, while thick branches appear to be casually entering and exiting parts of the house. To a passer-by it may almost seem as if it sprouted from the earth just like the lush foliage that envelopes it. But architects and partners Robert Verrijt and Shefali Balwani of Mumbai based Architecture BRIO, who designed the stunning villa, will assure you that it wasn't that simple.

The pair had to undertake an uphill hike to access the remote site with a meandering river landscape serving as a scenic backdrop. Here, they found that they had to build around an already existing framework. Once work began, almost a year was spent converting the 2,500 sq ft space into a warm weekend home and perfecting every little aspect of the carpentry intensive project. Now, the two storeyed structure gleams with pride as one of the finest among its sister bungalows under the firm Forest Hills, Tala. The creative duo tells us more about the dreamy resort they crafted.



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Clockwise, from Above Left  
Ebony spiral staircases made of mild steel lead guests from the lower level of the house to the main floor; In the earthy main boudoir, the butterfly chairs are from Home Glamour, Jodhpur, while the rug is from Pride Furnishings, Mumbai; Matching furniture can be found in bedroom on

the lower floor Left The living area has a small dining table clad in linen from Nicobar. The staircase leads to a "crow's nest", a hideout with a small mattress where kids can sleep and play

# GETAWAY RAIGAD



**ELLE DECOR:** How did the verdant surroundings inspire your intuitive design?

**Robert Verrijt:** The transparent exterior was chosen to make guests feel like they're living in harmony with nature. A similar openness is reflected in the interior layout – since there are no walls, all the rooms seem fluid. Only light curtains segregate the space, so the outside becomes a significant part of the ambience inside.

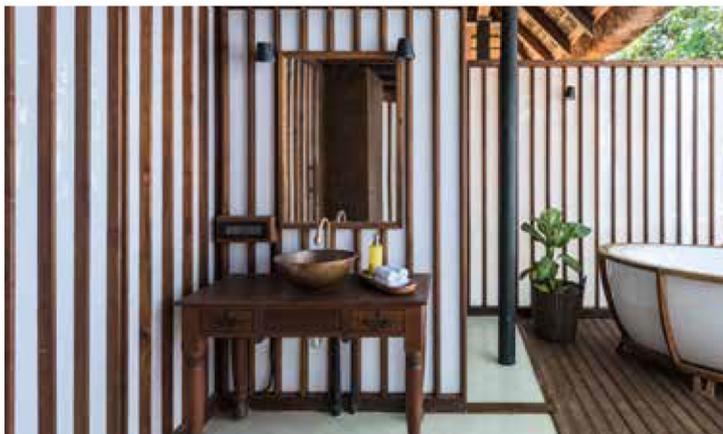
**Shefali Balwani:** We also chose a neutral colour palette and breezy fabrics like linen and cotton to complement the cosy atmosphere. As most components like the floors and walls are white, we played with different textures.

**ED:** How is the property sensitive to its location?

**SB:** The structure is very light, made of slender columns. We left the vegetation untouched so the footprint is minimal. Instead, a garuga tree was incorporated into its architecture – it enters the home and pops out of the roof.

**ED:** You refer to this villa as a luxury retreat although it's very different from a traditional opulent hotel. How would you define "luxury"?

**RV:** There is only one such offering in the area. So when you visit, you feel like you have arrived in a unique world. Every detail blurs the boundary between the inside and outside. It's just you and the surrounding wilderness. ♦



From Above Branches of a garuga tree are integrated into the open to sky bath area and serve as an unusual seating option. The tub set with a timber frame was custom designed by Architecture BRIO; The striped panels were crafted with white acrylic infill and teak wood frames

shower behind Left In the cosy bedroom setting on the lower level, the chequered throw is from Shift by Nimish Shah while the cushions and bedside accessories are from Nicobar. A retrofitted vanity counter from Chor Bazaar, Mumbai forms part of the master bathroom with a sheltered