

A Conversation with Shefali Balwani/Robert Verrijt & Medha Sobti.

SHEFALI BALWANI/ ROBERT VERRIJT MUMBAI

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MS: How was the experience of designing in the forest hills?

SB|RV: The nature is a "giving" source. It is always a pleasure working on the hills as the setting is itself highlighted with its presence. We have provided the architectural elements of the house as abstractly reminiscent of tree branches that droop, giving Nature opportunities to peek through with a constantly animated shadow play of hide and seek.

MS: Who is vour inspiration?

SB|RV: Any work that seeks to explore the possibilities of creativity and delves into the depth of architecture inspires us. We do not restrict ourselves to certain works or ideologies; our design should flow with the requirements of the client and we should look forward to achieve more.

MS: How do you define your designing style

SB|RV: Each project is seen as a challenge and an opportunity to uncover the unique characteristics of these specific conditions, investigating which intervention has a potential for positive change and impact in the way we deal with our natural and built world. Simultaneously, we believe that architecture should remain a backdrop to life, rather than taking centre stage. In order for Architecture to have a long lasting sensory impact, it needs to evoke the urge to be discovered.

MS: How has your design "coexisted with nature"?

SB|RV: Elements and textures as parts of the structure are focused on coexistence. The monochrome colour scheme of the space along with an eclectic mix of partly restored and partly custom designed furniture pieces give the interior a bohemian vibe. The restraint in the colour palette highlights the surrounding greenery.

MS: The seamless harmony of built spaces and nature plays a vital role in design. What is your take on it?

SB|RV: The Tree Villa was conceived as a celebration of this landscape by creating a series of blurred transitional spaces with different levels of transparency and openness within this forested tropical setting.

TREE VILLA AT FOREST HILLS

The Tree Villa perches on a cliff of a 160 acre hilltop 'treesort' property surrounded by a meandering river landscape. The idyllic setting in Tala on the West coast of India is a stone's throw away from the Kuda caves. Nearly 20 centuries ago, Buddhist monks instinctively understood the qualities of this meditative landscape and made the hills their home.

Upon arrival, a timber bridge takes the visitor off the forest floor on to a large stilted deck that wraps around the house and culminates on a viewing platform. The constant reminder of breathtaking views enhances a reflective ambience that is mirrored throughout the house.

The architectural elements of the house have been carefully curated, each conveying a message of its own: the bathroom enclosure is crafted out of vertical timber slats filled in with mirrored panels that reflect the surrounding forest and the other forms occupying the space.

The horizontal openness and airiness of the large voluminous space below a dominating thatched roof is emphasized by wrapping it with a layer of operable glass. The curved corners of this glazed wooden framework display a panoramic exhibit of nature. The curves create a sensual kind of luxury and bring softness to the space. A second layer of a Tie dyed bordered sheer curtains filters the harsh light during the midst of the day and pestles three other enclosures as well

The villa accommodates 4 adults and 2 children. The functions included providing for two double beds, a loft bed for children, two bathrooms, a lounge, a place for breakfast or playing board games with an outdoor deck and a large viewing deck. Rather than compartmentalizing those activities into distinct rooms, the main space is broken up by three smaller enclosures that are positioned within it, ensuring a visual connection to the forest in multiple directions from all rooms: a pantry-cum-loft unit, a semi-outdoor bathroom and a curtained bed enclosure that act

as anchors and define interstitial zones such as the breakfast room and the lounge. The free flowing circulation in between creates visual permeability across the plan.

The enclosure of the semi-outdoor bathroom encloses and outdoor courtyard but also protrudes into the glazed interior space. An old Garuga fruit tree punctures the floor of the outdoor bathroom. One branch enters the room and exits again through the thatched roof. Other branches spread across the outdoor bathroom before exiting through multiple circular openings in the enclosure. A free standing bath tub and the indoor-outdoor feel of the space make it an ideal relaxed setting.

A spiral staircase connects to a secret lower level that is suspended below the tree villa. This guest suite is on one side backed by a rock outcrop and on the other side, surrounded by a thick forest. You can take a shower here with merely a curved glazed sheet separating you and the forest life around you. A timber floored outdoor deck and attached staircase invites you to hike in the forest.

The volumetric composition of partly white, partly reflective and transparent surfaces within a wooden framework animates and lightens up the space. It questions conventional definitions of exterior and interior, and reinterprets notions of privacy and exposure within a hospitality environment. The spatia composition in an otherwise traditional tropical roof structure lends a sense of softness, sensuality, intimacy and complexity making it a perfect setting for a retreat into the wilderness of Tala.





FACT FILE

PROJECT TITLE
TREE VILLA AT FOREST HILLS

LOCATION OF PROJECT TALA, MAHARASHTRA

BUILT UP AREA 225 SQ.M.

ARCHITECTURE FIRM ARCHITECTURE BRIO

PRINCIPAL ARCHITECT SHEFALI BALWANI ROBERT VERRIJT

DESIGN TEAM ROBERT VERRIJT SHEFALI BALWANI KHUSHBOO ASRANI

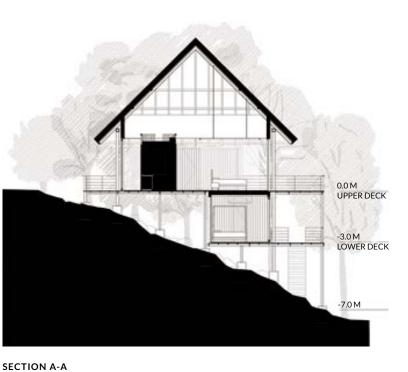
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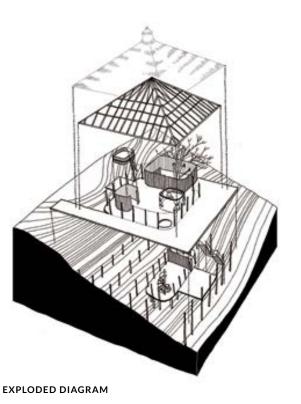
CIVIL CONTRACTOR NOT SPECIFIED

LANDSCAPE CONSULTANT ARCHITECTURE BRIO

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YEAR OF COMPLETION 2017

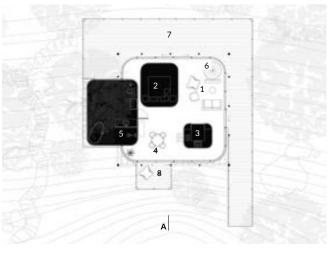


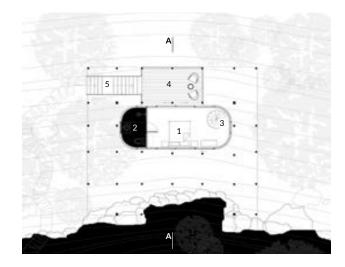






RIGHT | THE TREE VILLA IS CONCEIVED AS A CELEBRATION OF THIS LANDSCAPE BY CREATING A SERIES OF BLURRED TRANSITIONAL SPACES WITH DIFFERENT LEVELS OF TRANSPARENCY AND OPENNESS WITHIN THIS FORESTED TROPICAL SETTING.





UPPER LEVEL PLAN

LOWER LEVEL PLAN

LEGEND

LOWER LEVEL PLAN

- 1. BEDROOM
- 2. GLASS BATHROOM
- 3. SPIRAL STAIRCASE
- 4. DECK
- 5. OUTDOOR STAIRCASE

UPPER LEVEL PLAN

- 1. LIVING AREA
- 2. BEDROOM
- 3. PANTRY
- 4. DINING AREA
- 5. OUTDOOR BATHROOM
- 6. SPIRAL STAIRCASE
- 7. DECK
- 8. GALLERY

LEFT ABOVE | LEVEL PLANS

LEFT BELOW| MATERIAL SPECIFICATIONS

OPPOSITE RIGHT ABOVE | THE VILLA PERCHES ON THE CLIFF OF A 160 ACRE HILLTOP 'TREESORT' PROPERTY SURROUNDED BY A MEANDERING RIVER LANDSCAPE.

OPPOSITE RIGHT BELOW | THE DESIGN TAKES INTO THE EXISTING TREES, FORMED IN A SUCH A MANNER THAT THE TREES PIERCE OUT OF THE STRUCTURE.







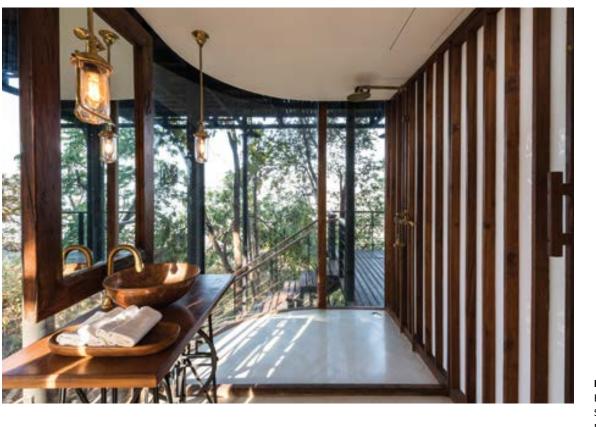




RIGHT | A SPIRAL STAIRCASE CONNECTS TO A SECRET LOWER LEVEL THAT IS SUSPENDED BELOW THE TREE VILLA.

OPPOSITE LEFT
ABOVE | A CURTAINED
BED ENCLOSURE ACT AS
ANCHORS AND DEFINE
INTERSTITIAL ZONES
SUCH AS THE BREAKFAST
ROOM AND THE LOUNGE.

OPPOSITE LEFT
BELOW | THE DINING
AREA AND BATHROOM
FORMING A CONNECTION
WITH THE OUTDOORS.





LEFT ABOVE | THE ENCLOSURE OF THE SEMI-OUTDOOR BATHROOM ENCLOSES AN OUTDOOR COURTYARD BUT ALSO PROTRUDES INTO THE GLAZED INTERIOR SPACE.

LEFT BELOW | A FREE STANDING BATH TUB AND THE INDOOR-OUTDOOR FEEL OF THE SPACE WITH THE BRANCHES COMING IN, MAKE IT AN IDEAL RELAXED SETTING.

OPPOSITE RIGHT
ABOVE | VIEW
SHOWING THE LIVING
AREA AND THE
STAIRCASE, WITH THE
MEANDERING VIEW OF
THE NATURE.

OPPOSITE RIGHT
BELOW | THE BEDROOM
SPACE OVERLOOKING
THE UPPER DECK,
FORMING A SEAMLESS
CONNECTION THE
GREENS.



