

MY SPACE : BIOME ENVIRONMENTAL SOLUTIONS GREEN UNCOVERED DESIGN DESTINATION : AUROVILLE

# HOME REVIEW

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ARCHITECT SHIGERU BAN'S  
JAPANESE MASTERY

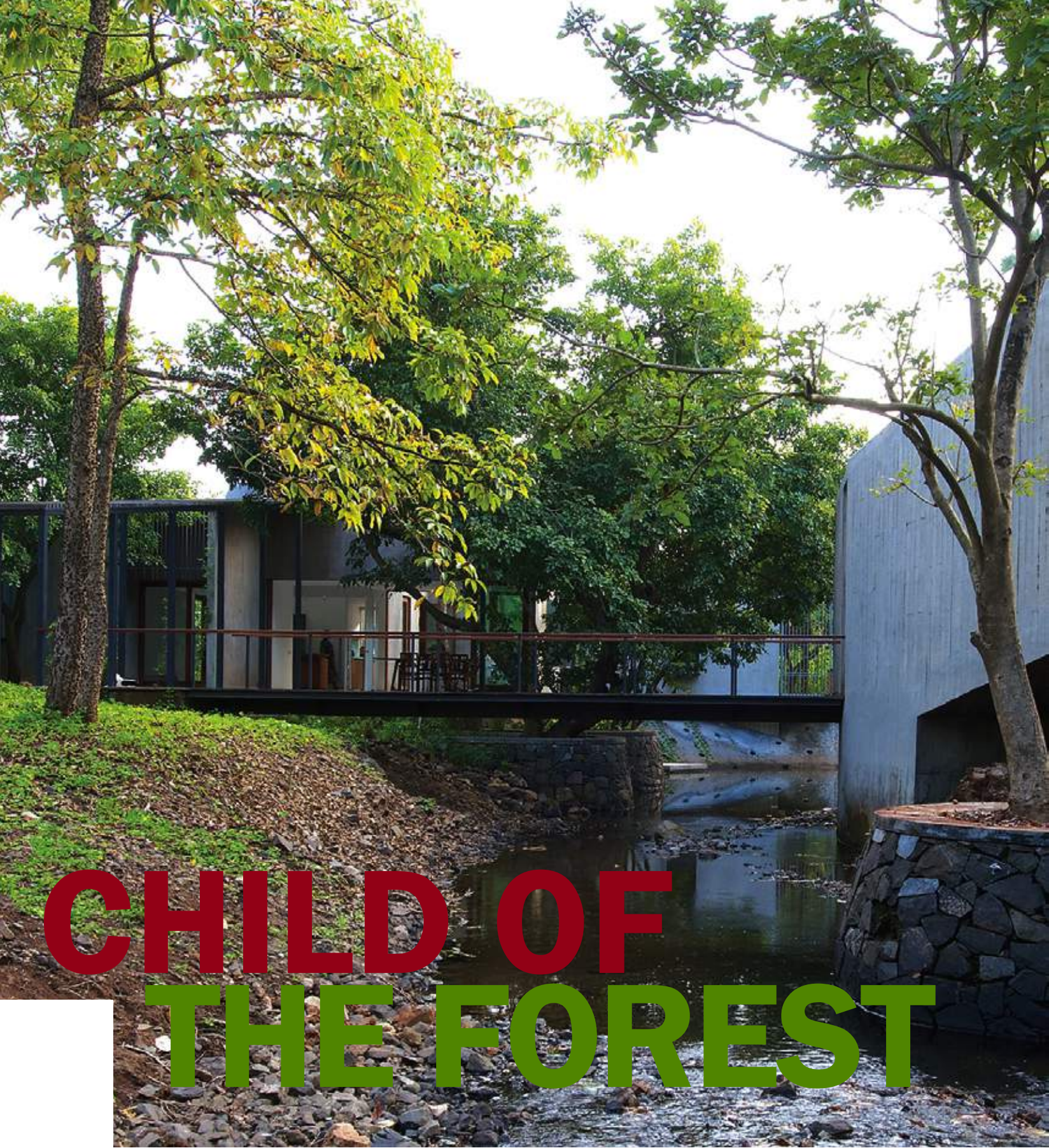
REACH FOR THE SKY  
WITH HY ARCHITECTURE

## CHILD OF THE FOREST

ARCHITECTURE BRIO'S STREAM-LINED DEMEANOUR

**GREEN BY DESIGN** FROM SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS TO GREEN CRUSADERS & MUCH MORE









*The House on a Stream in Alibaug, Maharashtra, is Mumbai-based Architecture BRIO's way of showing that concrete construction can indeed exist in total harmony with its natural surroundings.*

Text By Shruti Nambiar  
Photographs Sebastian Zachariah



Some homes exist within natural vistas, basking in jade glory, and eternally grateful for the views. Some other homes become intelligent parts of their natural setting, taking on their shades and character, and becoming indistinguishable.

House on a Stream belongs to the latter category, and is such a sublime presence in a green cove at the town of Alibaug in Maharashtra, that you will be forgiven for thinking of it as a non-human construct. Even the principals of Architecture BRIO, Robert Verrijt and Shefali Balwani, refer to the home as an “organism”, with its own limbs and wings, and a demeanour that is designed to complement and evolve with the surroundings.



The home, built as a second abode for a Mumbai-based family, was always imagined as a simple space that embraced the trees, the beautiful stream, and the shrubbery that came with the site. The architects acknowledge that the client, instead of demanding circumvention around the tricky stream-dominated landscape, asked them to take it on and make it a part of the scheme. And that is exactly how it has turned out - the grey, monolithic structure of the sprawling house imitates the general hue of the stream, and makes accommodations for its seasonal moods.

During monsoons, the stream sheds its genteel tenor and takes on elements of violence, while the home's pool reclines along it and extends its presence. When summers parch the flow, the pool dutifully fills the stream's limited presence.





To keep the sense of privacy and belonging intact in this general plan of open-ness, the house has been split into two sections. One is populated by the social areas - the living room, the dining room, and the kitchen - while the other is the master bedroom. The two sections are connected, however, by an elegant bridge that glides across the stream.



Admittedly, the kitchen became the fulcrum of movement of the spaces, keeping in mind the family's enthusiasm about cooking and food. "The living room 'wing' is lifted off the ground to have a panoramic view of the mountain range in the distance. The guest room wing embraces an existing tree to create a courtyard and just peeks across the dining room to have a view over the length of the stream," explains the duo. The cantilevered elements here act as limbs almost, with the elevation highlighting the structure's wonderful mix of girth and agility.

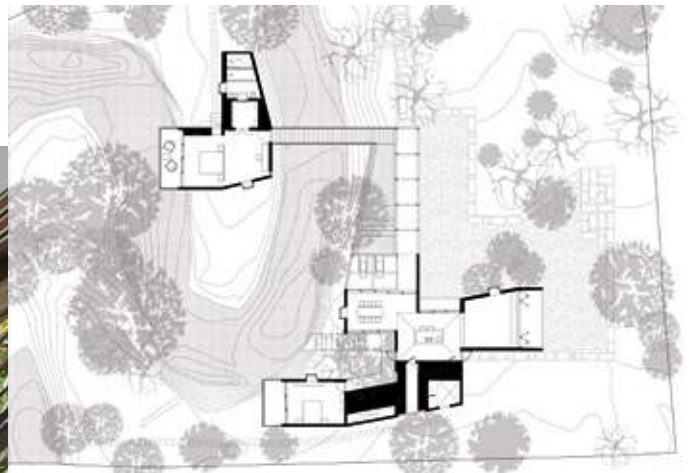


Verrijt especially expresses the happy approach the firm took with a single building material of in situ concrete, and the conjuring up of a monolithic structure; "Concrete is such a beautiful material. The monolithic character too is a stronger concept for the house, rather than different joints."

The orientation of the home is, however, key to understanding the overall design's deep sensitivity to its surroundings. The more social areas - the kitchen, the dining section and the pool - all face north.







The bedrooms are oases of privacy, facing out west. The living rooms have been given access to a large verandah, and are oriented towards the east. And as a break in the all-embracing elementality is the mostly closed-off south end of things.

The interior scheme is again spartan on the whole, with swathes of white punctuated by timber and concrete, but this is an admittedly “architectural” set-up. The spaces await the family’s entry, and the members’ unique sense of order, colour and aesthetic. But what has already been set up for them is a fantastic visual display, where courtyards have come up around existing trees, and the sky is never out of sight. The verticality of the grain of the concrete shell will also welcome natural weathering from rain, and forge a new definition of beauty from thereon.



The House on a Stream is a fresh, clean collection of spaces; the rooms are suffused with the positive energy of the sun and the wind, and the greenery has an untouched character to it that makes this home a true *l’enfant sauvage*.

Architecture BRIO set up a game of anticipation by not setting up a direct entry into the house and instead building a passageway, aligned with the pergola, to give a full peep into the “inside-outside” philosophy of the house’s design. Critical to this aim is also the fantastic central skylight, and the sweeping wall-length doors that slide and let in sheets of light. These details are refreshing additions to the beautiful structures that together make up the home.

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