

# INSIDE OUTSIDE

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A house that is deceptively simple yet highly sophisticated in concept, using stone, glass and concrete to create a facade that is a harmonious blend of textures and materials. Two sides are open to the greenery and view, overlooking a garden and Juhu airport, while the other two sides are almost blank and inward-turned since they only face neighbouring buildings.

Subtle and understated, or vital and buzzing with joie de vivre. We feature two very different projects by Goa-based architect Rahul Deshpande: a refined, highly contemporary house in Mumbai for Sudha and Kamalaksha Naik, and a cheerful, colourful, award-winning bus station in Canacona, Goa, designed with meticulous detail to take the hassle out of travel.



## not with a shout but a whisper

TEXT: PERVIN MAHONEY  
PHOTOGRAPHS: ALAN ABRAHAM,  
COURTESY THE ARCHITECT

**K**amalaksha Naik, chairman and MD of D-Link, had a dream – a house in Mumbai where he could feel perfectly at home. Where he could open the windows and be surrounded by greenery, where he could stroll out onto a wide balcony and look at the stars – just as one can do in Karwar, where he hails from. But there was a catch – there usually is. The house had to be in Mumbai.

But luck, or the stars, were favourable, and he found a plot next to one of the rare bits of open land in this squeeze-another-few-million-souls-in city, overlooking the old Juhu airport and facing a garden. The site is a trapezoid of 500 square metres, with two sides, east and north, facing the airport and garden, and the other two sides overlooking relatively ugly neighbouring buildings with the usual panorama of balconies festooned with



clothes drying and towels flapping.

Rahul explains, 'The brief I evolved for myself was obviously first of all to exploit the site to its maximum advantage – so we have huge openings on the two sides with the view, and two relatively blank sides to minimize the impact of the noisy neighbouring buildings.' So the east and north facades have dramatic crystal-clear glass windows and doors to ensure that there is no barrier between the built form and the exterior.

For the south and west facades, Rahul has incorporated a climate-sensitive response into the design, bearing in mind Mumbai's summer heat and monsoon rain. 'In response to the path the sun travels, we made the building skin double-walled, with minimum openings to prevent the surfaces from getting exposed to direct sunlight or the south-west rains. This concept of providing cavity walls served several purposes. The services run neatly through the cavity, the sun and rain are blocked, and interestingly the noisy neighbourhood is also further distanced, visually and physically.'

The balcony on the second floor is a favourite spot, looking out as it does onto open spaces through large glazed windows.





The driving force behind the design is a serious attempt to make the eye see the garden or open space outdoors from every room.



As the Naiks have lots of visitors staying over, both corporate as well as family guests, they wanted the house to incorporate an executive guest-house in addition to being their own residence. Rahul's plan evolved accordingly – the ground and first floors are a self-contained guest-house while the second and third floors form the family residence, and the basement accommodates a gym and parking facilities. This takes care of privacy: the guest-house forms an absolutely independent entity, with three bedrooms and a living room, dining area and pantry, with interiors as luxurious as any five-star hotel. The only shared space between the guest-house and the residence is a lobby; post-lobby, you go your own way in privacy.

**OPPOSITE:** The double-height living area, with stylishly contemporary furniture from Red Blue & Yellow, Mumbai, and IKEA chairs on the balcony.

**ABOVE LEFT:** Simple straight lines and the warmth of wood: the attractive and functional kitchen.

**LEFT & ABOVE RIGHT:** The family dining area – uncluttered spaces and minimal furniture against the clear reflecting marble floor.



The visual treatment echoes this inter-connected separation. The interiors of both spaces have simple lines, minimal and uncluttered. The driving force behind the design is a serious attempt to make the eye see the garden or open space outside from every room. Thus from the lobby, it's up two steps to the living room (both expansive, double-height volumes) where a large window opens up to the garden. Punctures into the stairwell continue the link to the views – the use of voids allows a sense of visual inter-connectedness throughout the house. Climb to the first floor, with the bedroom suites, and you again realize you get to see the outside all the time.

And so to the residence – the second and third floors – reached by stairs or an elevator. Changes in level help ensure that the feel is not like that of an apartment and of course one gets to see the outdoors throughout. Large glass sliding doors without a single vertical separator, fitted with special glass imported from Germany, ensure that no structural member diminishes the impact of the view. Even the balconies are fitted with glass rails. The neutral colour palette is emphasized by the use of Egyptian beige limestone and a real teakwood floor. The look is contemporary, with furniture from Red Blue & Yellow in Mumbai and IKEA chairs from Dubai. Every functional need has also been thought of, like the 'his' and 'hers' walk-in closets and a little study area in the master bedroom.



**From the facade to the interiors, the treatment is understated, avoiding anything that smacks of conventional 'showiness'. The finishes are so chosen that they do not shout and screech but rather whisper and merge with the landscape and skyline.**

**OPPOSITE:** Detail in designing is reflected everywhere, like the teak handrail on the stainless steel railing for the staircase, worked out immaculately on every floor.

**THIS PAGE:** The main idea was to exploit the greenery – the family living room with Egyptian beige limestone flooring, offset by real teak in the seating area.





**LEFT & RIGHT:** The living room of the executive guest-house: contemporary furniture in subtle colours, interesting openings punched in the wall connecting to the rest of the house, and large windows bringing in the outdoors.

**BELOW:** The master bedroom in the guest-house with a large window that allows one to gaze at the greenery outside.



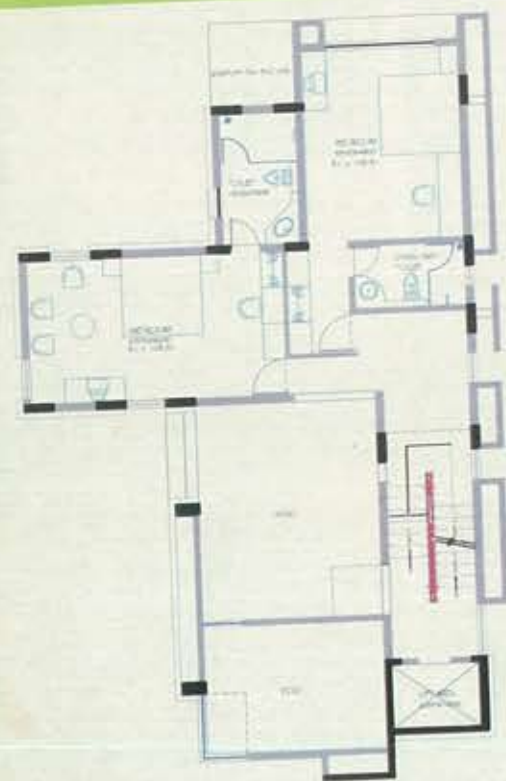
‘Simplicity and “less is more” drove the design engine,’ explains Rahul. ‘A sense of linearity and a minimalist approach are reflected through every line and detail, in the attempt to create seamless poetic spaces, perfectly synchronized to freshen the soul.’ The same approach is reflected in the landscape design, under the guidance of Amod Shewde Consultants, Mumbai, with a simple interplay of soft and hard landscaping lending a perfect harmony to the relatively small garden space available.

**ABOVE LEFT:** The executive lobby with large vertical openings on the northern walls that bring in just the right quality of light.

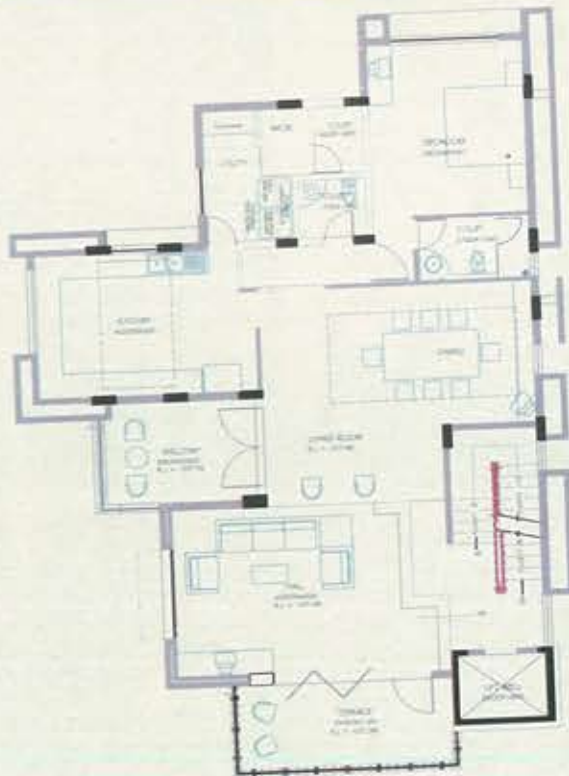
**ABOVE RIGHT:** The sleek, smart bathroom in the guest-house.

**LEFT:** The executive dining room opens out to the garden. The clear glass contrasts with the stone cladding on the outside walls.





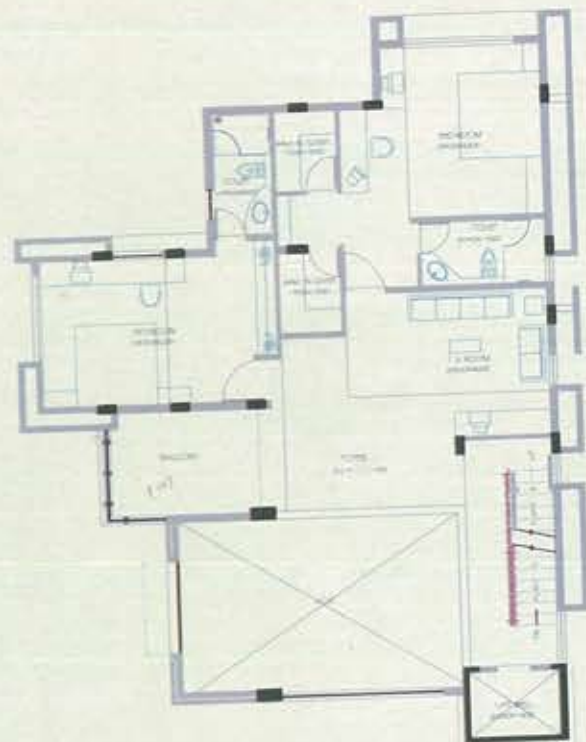
FIRST FLOOR PLAN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN



THIRD FLOOR PLAN



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

From the facade to the interiors, the treatment is understated, avoiding anything that smacks of conventional 'showiness'. The finishes are so chosen that they do not shout and screech but rather whisper and merge with the landscape and skyline. Stone cladding gently characterizes the ground and first floors, while the residence on the second and third floors has been highlighted with a sloping roof. The wood-finished jaisalmer stone is so unusual, with a 'grain' that is so like timber, that people come and ask Rahul, 'Where did you get this wood from?' Every little detail contributes to the feeling of 'lightness', like the provision of glass railings on the top-floor balconies.

Simplicity is often not simple to achieve. 'We took a great deal of time to design this,' says Rahul. 'There is no ornamentation, certainly nothing kitsch.'

We just concentrated on the sheer treatment of space and form to achieve a visual balance. The main idea was to exploit the openness and greenery, which the Naiks craved.'

The happy conclusion is that the Naiks moved in around Diwali 2004 and ever since then do not talk longingly of Karwar!



## taking a stand

Overturning the usual 'ugly India' public utilities scene is Rahul Deshpande's innovative design for the Canacona bus terminal in Goa – imaginatively conceived to evoke its beachside setting and meticulously planned down to the last user-friendly detail.



Light years away from the lack-lustre, dingy facilities that unfortunately define the public building scene, the Canacona bus depot stands out as an example of what collaboration between state vision and private creative efforts can achieve. For one senses in it Rahul Deshpande's thoughtful response to the psychology of travel and travellers' needs. No wonder the state government is considering it as a model for future public facilities.

Rahul explains, 'It takes its inspiration from the nearby beach of Palolem – known for its pristine beaches, its rows of willowy palms and its spectacular waves, said to be the highest in Goa, so it's a favoured destination for surfing. And another point of reference is the colourfully exuberant festival of Simgo, akin to Holi, which is celebrated locally.'

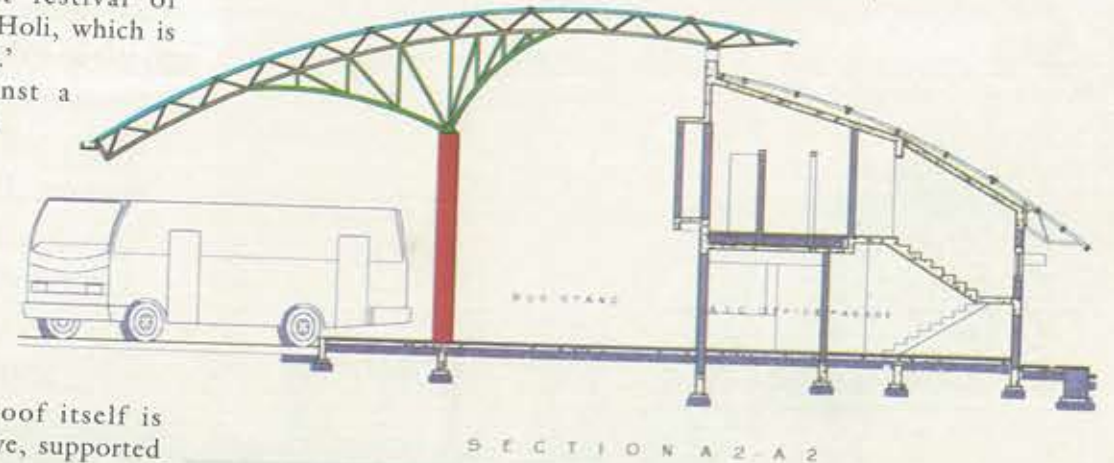
Nestling against a thickly wooded hillside, the rather austere grey and white exterior leaves one unprepared for the sheer vitality and colour of its interiors. The roof itself is designed as a wave, supported by columns and trusses representing palm trees. Different vibrant colours mark out different functional spaces: the purple balustrade of the cafeteria, the uniform grey and blue frontage of the shops, the yellow of the waiting area, and the orange of the washing facilities. At the back, the service areas on the first floor are concealed by concrete cubicles in shades of blue.



OPPOSITE ABOVE: The west facade, showing the parking bay and drop-off point. The roof is designed to evoke the form of a wave, while the grey-tiled exterior is easy to maintain.

OPPOSITE BELOW & ABOVE: Beneath the overpowering roof over the lobby, one's attention is caught by the columns and trusses, designed to evoke the form of palm-trees. The purple pergola houses the cafeteria.

BELOW: The east facade, with ample space for taxis and two-wheelers to park.



SECTION A 2 - A 2







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A view of the bus parking bays, showing the shopping arcade and large, comfortable waiting areas for passengers. The use of vibrant colours makes the viewing experience intriguing. A close-up of the roof trusses shows how they have been "expressed" as coconut palms.



Convenient waiting areas with comfortable seating arrangements ensure that commuters have a trouble-free journey. To ensure that the facility does not degenerate into the usual chaos (where everything one sees is either broken or grimy - or both!), only appropriate materials of the best quality have been used. The kota flooring is tough, durable and easy to clean, while all areas of greatest passenger density are clad in ceramic tiles.

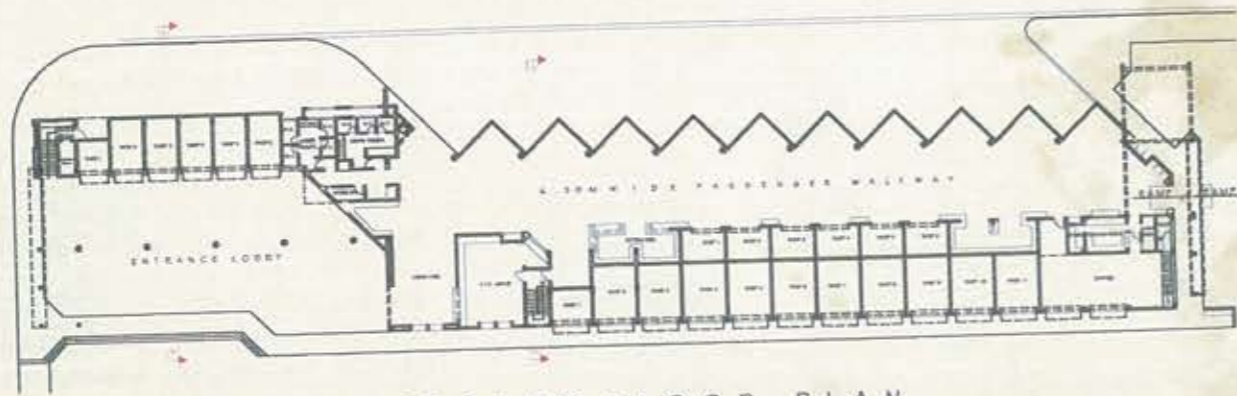
The eye registers this as a sort of blue wave, moving from the stronger blues at the end towards the more muted shades in the centre and then outwards again, an effect heightened by the generous light aperture directly above.

User need is the fundamental principle on which the design is based. 'I wanted to provide something more, both in terms of amenities and aesthetics, than that provided by the average facility of this kind.' Even though Canacona is not a major hub, Rahul felt a need to rearticulate the usual utilitarian approach behind such buildings. Through enhancing the range and quality of facilities, he has not just made bus travel a more pleasurable experience but also heightened popular expectations from public architecture.

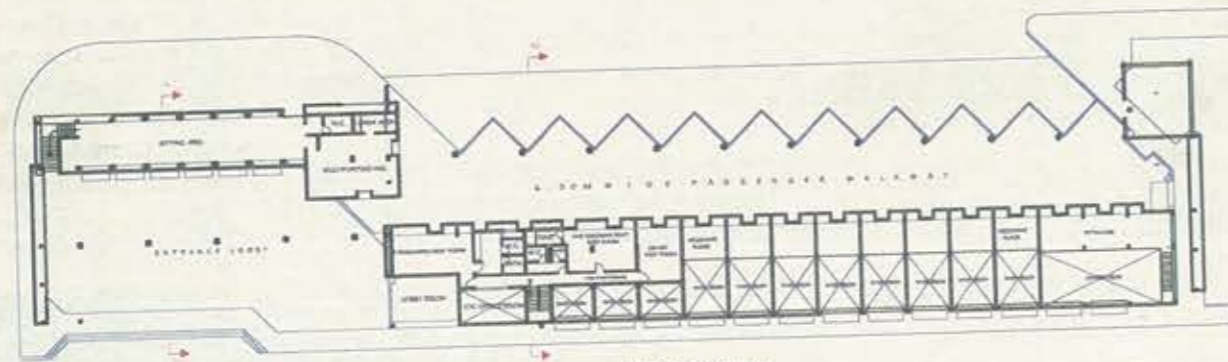
While aesthetic considerations are integral to the design, in no way do they take precedence over functionality. 'The needs of the user were considered paramount. We carefully plotted, step by step, the requirements of both incoming and outgoing passengers to ensure that the facilities are sited logically so that the traveller does not have to retrace his steps at any stage. Passenger movement is thus linear and progressive.' Bus entries and exits are separate and independent from commuter entry. The only points of contact are the alighting and boarding platforms.

The floor height in the bays is aligned with the first step of the bus for





GROUND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

From public conveniences to comfortable seating, everything has been thought of.

easier access, and this is probably one of the first facilities in India to take into account the special needs of the physically challenged. All conceivable needs of arriving and departing passengers have been evaluated, including traffic flow for taxis and auto-rickshaws, with generous provision for parking, shops, restaurants, washrooms, restrooms and pay phones. Built initially to serve the needs of a population of 6,000, it is designed to accommodate the expanding needs of the community for the next 25 years.

Another 'ugly India' stereotype that's overthrown here is that the best quality of appropriate materials have been used. There is no compromise on the quality of the infrastructure, with concrete roads, light-sensing technology, state-of-the-art bathrooms, and rest areas for staff and passengers. At the same time, Rahul consciously planned it to be as maintenance-free as possible. The kota flooring is tough, durable and easy to clean. All the areas of greatest passenger density are clad in ceramic tiles. The simple facade, of grey tiles and white concrete, is also low-maintenance.

The operation of the bus depot is designed to be controlled from one vantage point. The supervisor's room has visual access to all corners, obviating the need for multiple personnel and service centres. The shops within the complex not only serve the needs of commuters,



The floor height in the bays is aligned with the first step of the bus for easier access, and this is probably one of the first facilities in India to take into account the special needs of the physically challenged.

the revenue generated from them can be used for the upkeep and maintenance of the bus stand.

Rahul adds, 'I was asked to design this complex at the behest of the elected representative of Canacona and under the aegis of Goa State Infrastructure Development Corporation. Although the population of the area is relatively small, it was felt that they were ill served by the rather rudimentary existing facilities. In addition, Canacona is also one of the main, busy entry points for visitors from Karnataka – an important gateway to South India.

'In the tradition now regarded as accepted architectural practice for conceptualizing public buildings in many parts of the world but relatively less understood in India, we engaged extensively with all the stake-holders in the project. This included as many of the elected local bodies as possible, like the neighbouring panchayats and municipality, government bodies such the Town Planning Department, traffic police, the PWD and, above all, local inhabitants. The bus transport company operating in the area, Kadamba Transport Corporation, was also consulted.' Suggestions from individuals and organizations were encouraged and incorporated to the extent possible into the plan as it progressed. Meanwhile, Rahul also visited bus depots in Bangalore, Mangalore, Hyderabad and Hubli, noted for their creative attention to user needs. This went hand in hand with comprehensive surveys to understand traffic and density in the area.

Built at a cost of two-and-a-half crores, completed in four months as against the projected timeframe of six months, the Canacona bus depot has already acquired iconic status in Goa – a landmark for users and passersby alike. ❶

