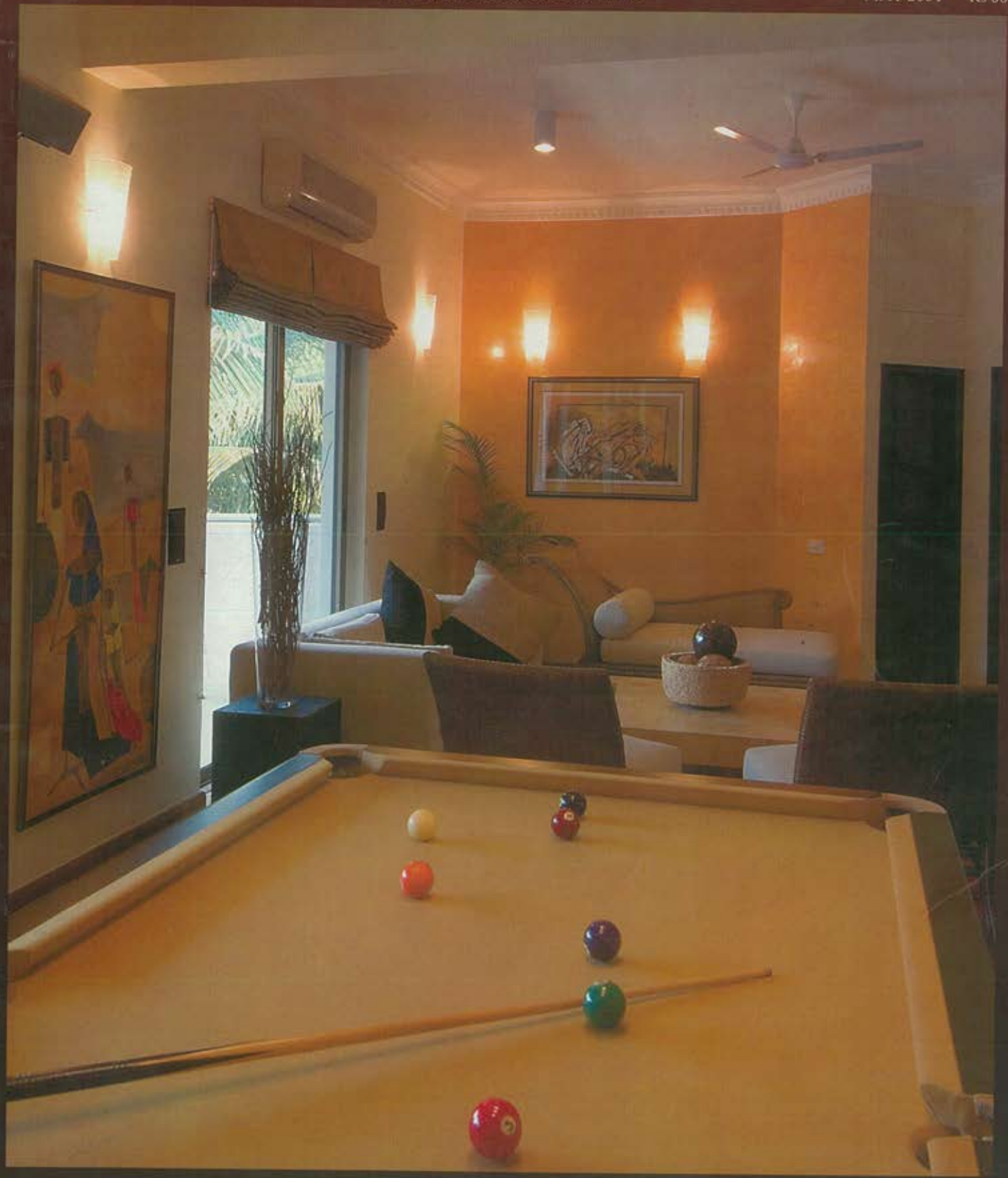


INSIDE OUTSIDE

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a simple strength

It's not easy to label or categorise his work. Goa-based architect Rahul Deshpande integrates a sensitive understanding of vernacular architecture with a deep appreciation of Western modernist styles. As we see in these three projects: an island hideaway, the D-Link corporate facility, and the architect's own office.



TEXT: SUBUR AHMAD

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY, RAHUL DESHPANDE



From the shining glass and metal landmarks on Verna's hill-top industrial estate to a family home nestling amidst paddy fields on an island in the Mandovi River, the transition is seamless. Making the conceptual leap from industrial design to restoration is all in the day's work for Goa-based architect Rahul Deshpande. The principles that he brings to his varied projects are an unwavering sense of vision, a heightened sensitivity to context and use, close attention to detail and, above all, a sophisticated and uncluttered design simplicity. Added to this is a healthy respect for deadlines and a genuine commitment to engage with the needs and aspirations of his clients. The results of this endeavour, spread out across Goa, include industrial facilities, private homes and more recently, forays into urban and tourism infrastructure.

Rahul's distinctive style is difficult to categorise and he resists any easy labelling. His thoroughgoing understanding of vernacular architecture goes hand in hand with a deep appreciation of Western modernist styles, a result of many years of work and study in America. Over the last ten years, he has worked hard to integrate and give expression to the divergent architectural and aesthetic styles that excite him.



Warm ochre hues and encircling masonry arms at the entrance invite one into the island getaway, while the small gable roof emphasises the point of entry. The front elevation was re-vitalised with traditional sloping roof and slender columns to revive the European influence that most Goan houses exhibit.





ABOVE: Light cane furniture in the wide verandah is the perfect setting for a refreshing cup of tea.

BELOW: The carpentry work was exquisitely crafted by traditional craftsmen. The detailing is very typical and has been done in specially treated sal wood.



BENEDICT VILLA

Rebuilding an island getaway whose melon-and-white charm conceals a serene strength.

Rahul's first meeting with his prospective clients for the restoration of Benedict Villa was less than auspicious. For them, the purchase of the property was the culmination of a 15-year-long affair with Goa. The special appeal of the house was its location on Chorao island (reputed to be a bird sanctuary), its unspoilt rural flavour and, above all, the charm of the house itself with its grand, if somewhat decrepit, colonnaded front verandah.

Unusually for Goa, the columns supported a flat roof, which village lore held had been the scene of many balls and soirees in years gone by. The client, a jazz enthusiast, already had visions of jazz evenings on the terrace, with the music wafting across the fields down to the river. Rahul emphatically declared that the columns were structurally unsound and would have to be done away with. With the columns went the terrace as well. It was only Rahul's firm but patient espousal of his cause and the fact that he came with warm recommendations

from friends that prevented a fatal rupture! There ended the first and last disagreement that Rahul was to have with his clients.

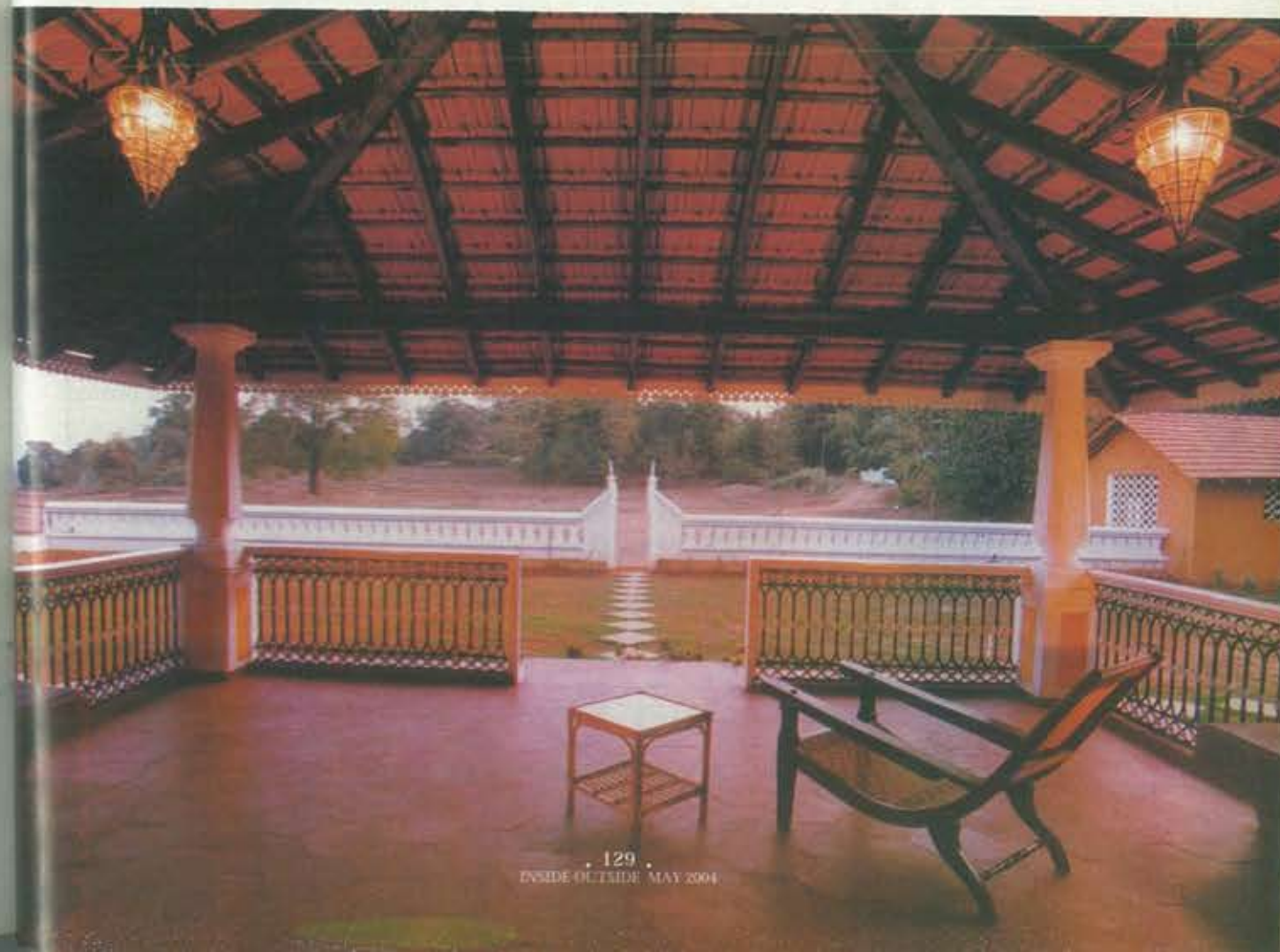
During the course of the next year, a new house began to emerge from the shell of the existing one. While retaining the plinth and the basic inner structure of the older Portuguese house, Rahul introduced two predominant perpendicular circulation axes, along which the house evolved. He added a new front verandah, created a double tiled roof which not only covered the verandah but provided the opportunity for a mezzanine at one end, designed a generous alfresco area overlooking the back garden and the fields beyond, a sit-out for the kitchen and master bedroom, and reorganised the rabbit warren set of innumerable small rooms into four spacious bedrooms. The former kitchen, bordering on the size of a small ballroom, was cut down to more modest, contemporary proportions to make way for an informal bar and dining room. Five bathrooms were added in place of the austere communal bathing facilities. In the public areas and in one bedroom, the full, original height of the ceiling was maintained. In the other half, the creation of the mezzanine not only facilitated more effective air-conditioning of the three bedrooms there, but also allowed for two studies and a small guest bedroom nestling under the eaves.

At about the time that the changing contours of the house were taking shape and being formalised, the former owners discovered an old



ABOVE: The rooster on the roof signifies the house belongs to the *bhatkar* (landlord) and points in the direction of the property.

BELOW: The spillover from the dining room is the alfresco, a perfect spot to be amidst nature, relax and be 'sosegado' in typical Goan style. The intricate detailing of the cornice, eavesboard and railing has been beautifully executed by local craftsmen.





ABOVE: The grandeur of the *casa de jantar* is enhanced by the high ceiling. Corrugated sheets fitted below the mangalore tiles prevent leakage during the monsoons.

BELOW: The *quarto de dormir* is simply yet elegantly furnished. The inlay of mosaic tiles set like a carpet into the honey-coloured jaisalmer stone floor, is typical of old Portuguese homes.



plan on crumbling parchment which turned out to be the original plan of the house, from which substantial deviations and omissions had been made in the actual implementation. Notably, the new extended roof that Rahul was planning was startlingly similar to the one envisaged there and never actually built. Thus the clients and Rahul found that, quite by accident, they were about to restore the house to its unrealised, original plan.

The design and planning stage of the house took almost an entire year, running parallel to the efforts to secure the plethora of permissions needed before construction could begin. Rahul was unwilling to commit any brick to cement until every detail of the house had been thoroughly researched, sketched and agreed upon. This included not just the organisation of the spaces within, but the design of every column, window and eave. To develop a feel for the details, he visited many old homes in different parts of Goa. The columns along the garden facade of the house are inspired by Goan Hindu temple architecture whereas the columns of the front verandah bear a Portuguese impress. The eaves and the verandah grills were specially designed by Rahul for the house, as were the cornices and the dramatically simple compound wall. A terracotta rooster was ordered for the roof as befitting a Goan *mundkar* or landowner. The small figures of saluting soldiers that are mounted atop both the front and back gates are also an

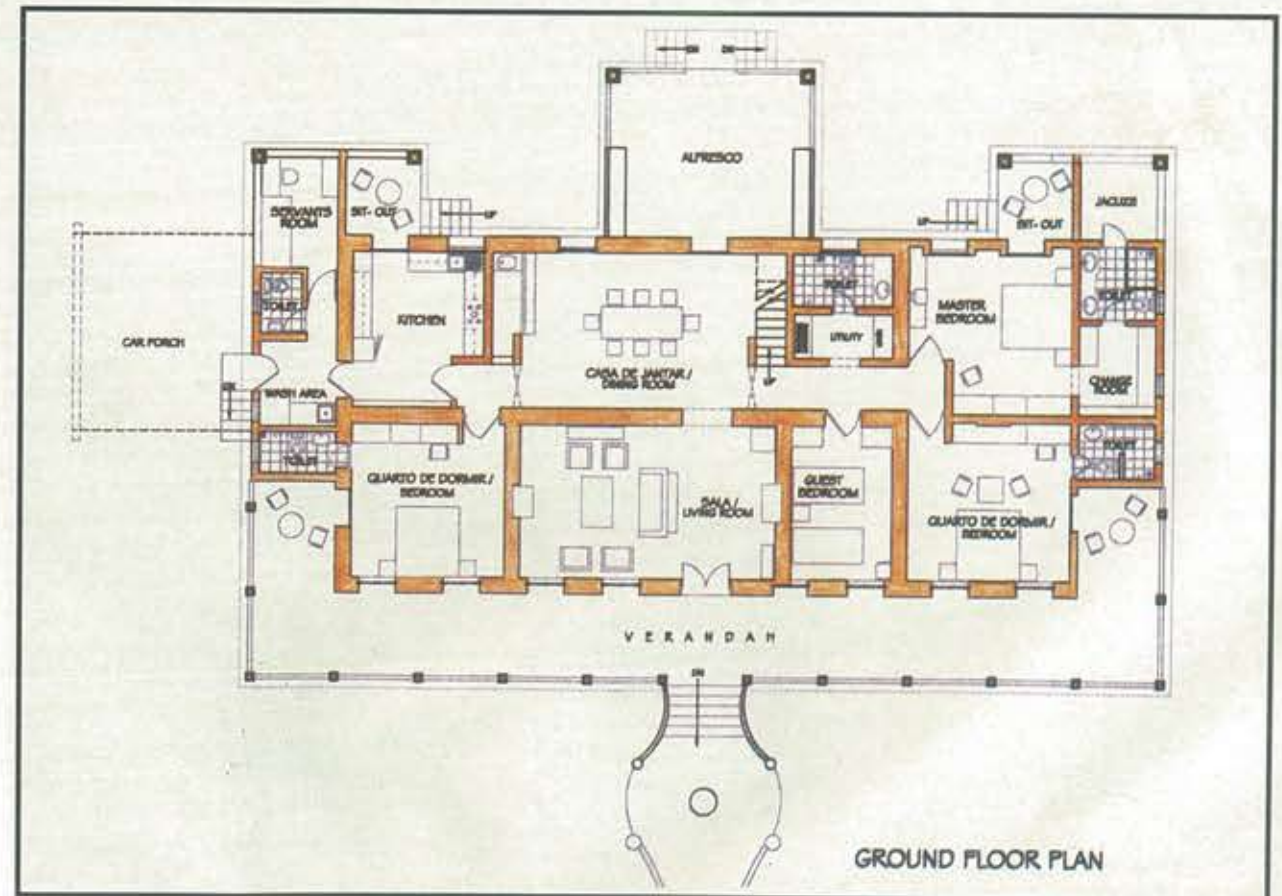
essentially local touch. Keeping in mind the clients' aversion for marble, honey-coloured jaisalmer stone was used for the flooring, and its golden expanse is broken by small carpets of coloured tiles in each room, typical of old Portuguese homes.

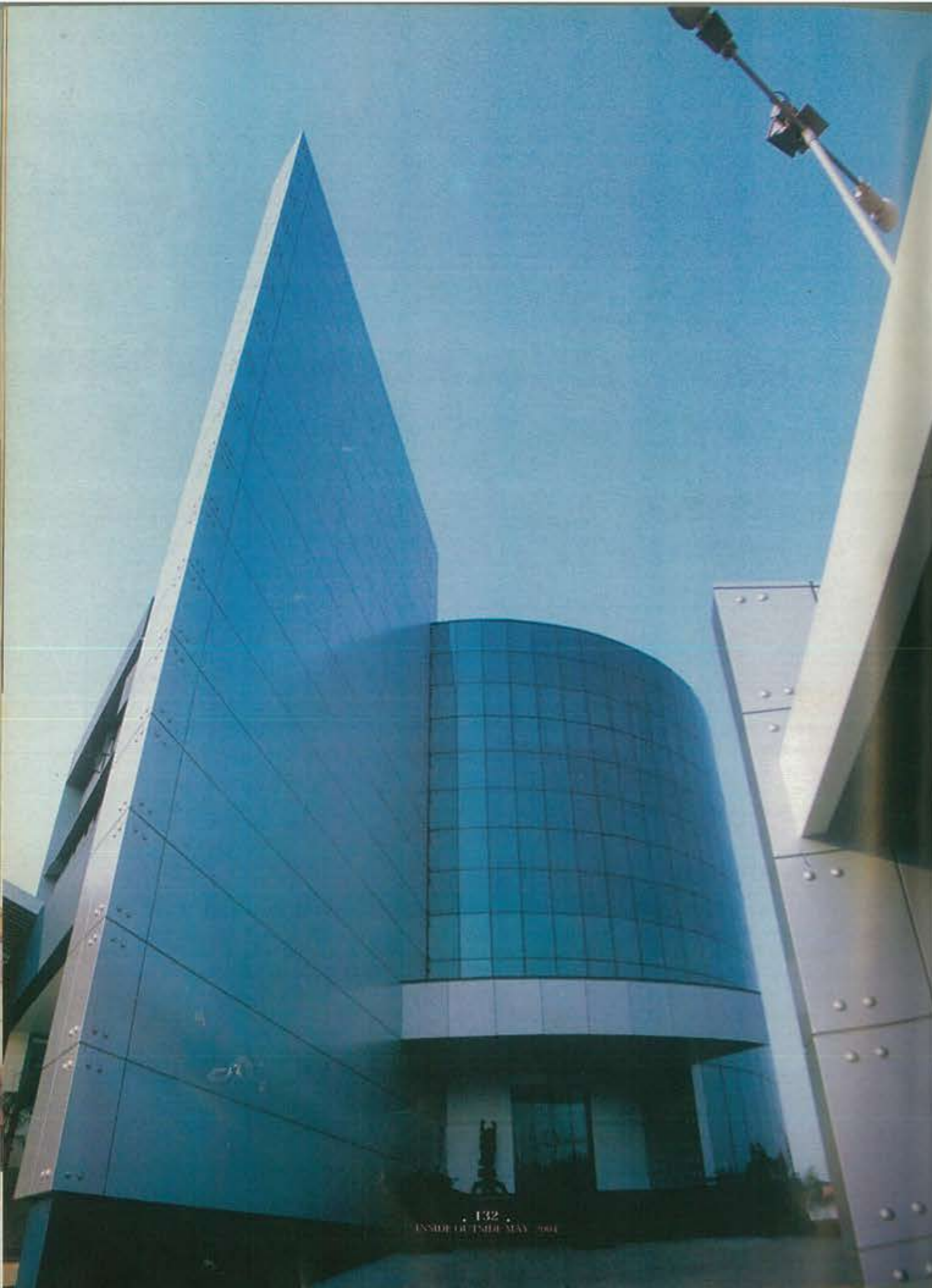
In contrast to the deliberations of the planning stage, the civil work, from demolition of portions of the house to the final finishing, took only six months. It helped that the contractor hired for the job had had some prior experience of restoration. The fast and furious pace was dictated by the clients' desire for a major gathering of their friends and family at the house at a fixed date. Typically, in the final weeks of the countdown, all the small hitches expected cropped up and it looked as if it might prove to be a bridge too far. But Rahul's dogged persistence paid off and in the first week that it was habitable, the house played host to a 120 people.

The home that emerged from 18 months of intense collaboration between Rahul and his clients surprised both of them. While both had a very clear sense of vision for the house, its sheer simplicity and serene strength exceeded their expectations. Its melon and white charm, evident at a distance through the lush foliage, is a welcome addition to the edge of the village football ground. The clients are thinking of allowing their front verandah to be used as a spectators' gallery for the important football matches of the season, just as it was in days gone by.



As part of the research for the detailing, Rahul visited many houses in various regions of Goa. After meticulous sketching, the verandah railings, eaves and cornices were exquisitely crafted by local craftsmen.





D-LINK

The intelligent design for this corporate and manufacturing facility is meant to symbolise the progress of D-Link from strong Goan foundations onto the international arena.

Having successfully completed two earlier projects housing their main manufacturing and administrative offices, Rahul was the natural choice for



OPPOSITE: The inclined ACP plane leading to the entrance of the administration block emerges from the glazing. The horizontal cantilevered slab breaks the monotonous verticality of glazing to create the entrance porch.

ABOVE: The accurate interplay of geometrical forms and varied materials gives the built mass a sense of sophistication, distinguishing it from the usual boring factory sheds.

LEFT: Green ceramic tiles on the terrace create the illusion of a natural environment and greenery, blending the built with the unbuilt.



ABOVE: The lobby of the administration block overlooks the lush lawns in front. The glazing acts as a physical barrier between the interior and exterior while allowing visual transparency.

BELOW: In attempting to be one with nature a new dimension has been given to conventional corridors.



the further expansion of D-Link. One major challenge of the new project was the site itself, a disused laterite quarry in Verna, Goa, with its uneven topography, and the second was the philosophy of the building. On the one hand, it obviously needed to conform in some basic respects to the architectural vocabulary of the earlier buildings of D-Link. On the other hand, having received unusually wide latitude as to its design from the clients, Rahul wanted to do something infinitely more ambitious with it, something that, as he puts it, 'reflected D-Link's anchorage in the hi-tech electronic world'.

As in Rahul's other buildings, the requirements of design and the claims of use were not allowed to compete with each other. Instead, they were made to work in harmonious collaboration to maximise both aesthetic and use value. Rahul analysed the space requirements, segregated them into distinct functioning units – the manufacturing unit, administrative block, recreational area and utility block – and assigned a geometric form to each unit. He explains that the four zones are designed as independent entities connected to each other by corridors and pathways, many of which traverse green areas created within the building itself. The natural gradation of the land divides the manufacturing and associated functional sites into two levels and the utilities are at the rear of the building, well away from the manufacturing and administrative areas.

The novelty of the building, of which Rahul is justifiably proud, is that it has been designed as an 'intelligent' building. The roof is clad in sheets imported from Australia designed to decrease absorption of heat.

Aluminium composite panels covering the facade serve the same purpose, while the Belgian glass in the glass tower is heat and splinter-proof. Besides controlling the flow of heat into the building by the use of special materials, the entry of natural air has also been maximised. The deliberate grading of textures – from local rustic laterite in the basement to plastered walls, imported glass and metal in the upper floors – reflects the progress of D-Link onto the international arena from strong Goan foundations.

The quality of light and air, enhanced by the clever juxtaposition of inside and outside, coupled with muted colour schemes and simple geometric metal and glass furniture designed by Rahul himself, are in fact the abiding characteristics of the building. Belying its dramatic exterior on the Verna skyline, the interiors are human in scale, with the possible exception of the foyer, a veritable double-height modern cathedral. Walking in from the searing heat of a Goan afternoon, it envelopes one in the shaded calm of gentler climes. It also evokes an irrepressible desire to whisper! The heart of the business, its manufacturing activity, goes on in climate-controlled rooms, bare except for the gleaming machinery and windows which bring in the lush vegetation outside. Given the culinary inhospitability of Verna, a canteen has been very sensibly incorporated into the design: delicious meals in a large, airy room with quirkily designed furniture overlooking a sunken pool against the backdrop of a creeper-covered wall.



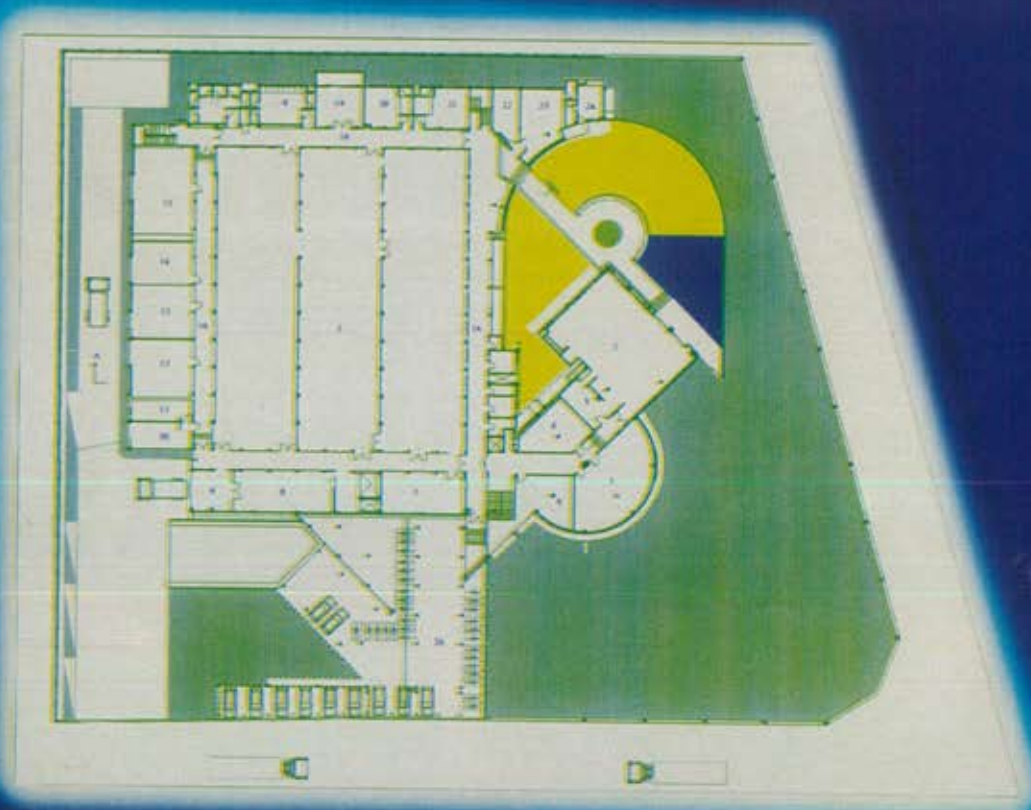
ABOVE: In the recreational block, with its refreshing courtyard, the restored natural environment stands out against a white backdrop and the use of the local architectural idiom.

BELOW: The clear glass panes of the canteen give diners a view of the tranquil, cool blue water body, in harmonious contrast to the rough texture and opacity of exposed laterite walls.



Ultimately however, the final arbiters of success are the employees of D-Link, from the technicians on the factory floor to the managing director in his spacious office upstairs. If the warmth with which Rahul is received as he walks around the building is any indication of the staff's respect for the spaces he has created for them, approval seems generally universal.

PLAN: D-LINK



Lower Ground Floor Plan

- | | | | | | |
|------|--------------------------|----|------------------|----|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Manufacturing Plant | 11 | Electrical Store | 20 | Ladies Changing Room |
| 2 | Canteen | 12 | DG Room | 21 | Gents Changing Room |
| 3 | Kitchen | 13 | Panel Room | 22 | Doctor/Ladies Changing Room |
| 4 | AHU Room | 14 | Compressor Room | 23 | Gents Room |
| 5 | EDP & UPS Room | 15 | Chiller Room | 24 | Executive Restroom |
| 6 | Record Room | 16 | Corridor | 25 | Recreational Area |
| 7, 8 | Raw Material Store | 17 | Ladies Restroom | 26 | Staff Parking |
| 9 | Loading & Unloading Dock | 18 | Gents Restroom | 27 | Water Body |
| 10 | Electrical Repair | 19 | Foyer | | |

RAHUL DESHPANDE'S OFFICE

The architect's own domain illustrates the principles dear to his heart.

You normally know the strength of Rahul's visitors for the day by the footwear outside his office! A clear rule operates, broken only by the unwary or the unusually brave. Rahul's office is at the edge of Panjim, on a meandering village road bordered by tall palms, set amidst paddy fields. On one side, the fields, when full of water, attract a motley collection of seasonal birds. From his own room, the Mandovi river and the islands beyond are discernible in the distance.

The office is a clear example of Rahul's aesthetic preferences. Less is more. The entire space seems crafted out of an off-white mass, evoking a minimalistic and monochrome feel. The plan is seemingly simple with clearcut



The harmonious blend of colours and material is conducive to a creative mind. The cantilevered table (above) forms the basis for a myriad designs, while the tall table in plywood, glass and steel (right) enables the receptionist to view the main entrance while camouflaging her workspace.





lines throughout. A reception area connects to a meeting room, and the other end of the meeting room opens into Rahul's work space, which has an adjoining library. The design studio for the architects and engineers is a completely independent entity at the other end. The overall ambience is set by the honey of the wooden veneers and the white of the walls. Carefully planned illumination adds to the quality of light streaming in from generously proportioned windows. Warmth is provided by the colour of the chairs and the vibrant shades of the work-stations. Thoughtful planning of the work and storage areas makes for a welcome sense of spaciousness and a lack of clutter unusual for a busy office. Simple glass doors lead from one room to the other, joining rather than demarcating space, infusing a sense of metaphorical and actual transparency and openness. Privacy is provided by dove-grey vertical blinds.

The spaces that those who create for others create for themselves are probably the best guide to their first principles. Here, unhindered by any other constraints except that of the actual space itself, it is possible to have full authorial control. Only in this context is it possible to narrow the gap, to the extent plausible and desirable, between theory and practice. **❶**



Transparency is the underlying statement. The use of glass gives lightness to the office and enhances the sense of space. Built-in shelves contribute to the lack of clutter, while a basic continuity in geometry, tone and details makes for efficiency and a sophisticated, minimal ambience.

