

Inside Outside

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Featuring:

The restored bungalow of the
Indian High Commissioner in Singapore
Eye-popping office design
by Edifice Architects
Architect Rohini Mani brings the desert
alive with a vibrant office in Bhuj

Architect PK Das shares his colourful home in Mumbai



PRIMARY COLOURS

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PHOTOGRAPHS: PRASHANT BHAT

ARCHITECT'S AMBIENCE



Colour, with its power to evoke emotions and transform spaces, plays a pivotal role in the home of PK Das, one of Mumbai's top architects. A 4,000 sq ft duplex apartment with a double-height courtyard, it uses simple materials which are appropriate to his lifestyle and design philosophy.

But there is no vanilla vision here — instead, large sweeps of vibrant colours predominate, used as an integral part of the design itself, to create a look which is discreetly contemporary.





Colour has been integrated into the planning and construction of spaces, so that it embodies the space itself by holding together the activities in the home.

For those who appreciate honesty (for lack of a less compromised term) in design, there is a readily apparent common sensibility running through the home of Mumbai-based architect PK Das. Located in the plush suburb of Juhu, it has the feel of a private bungalow, with a central idea unifying its design –

there is a oneness in its look, furniture and concept. 'The four members of our family are separated in work and study, so my home reinforces the family unit as an important part of social development...and the living spaces do everything possible to facilitate that. Through the double-height central courtyard, all the parts of the house can interact

with each other,' he says. Courtyards are traditional elements all over the world in hot, temperate climates. Through them, sunlight is regulated and ventilation is enabled, permitting the house to breathe. Like multiple points of engagement, all spaces are located around the courtyard, which serves to integrate the home.

The living room has a terrace sit-out facing a flaming gulmohur tree in bloom.



The lower level of this home has the living room with a terrace sit-out facing a flaming gulmohur tree in bloom, the dining room and the kitchen. A staircase leads from the courtyard to the upper floor, which houses the college-going son's and daughter's bedrooms, as well as the master suite, which appears to be almost the size of



The courtyard contains a water body and a large ficus tree. The play of light and shadow from the foliage of the tree varies with the time of day and angle of the sun, as also the vagaries of the wind, creating different moods.



an independent apartment. Overlooking the courtyard, it incorporates a sitting room which can seat enough people to have a small party, a walk-in closet, and the master bedroom with adjoining bath.

The courtyard in PK Das' home is a nuclear area which

joins and separates spaces in multi-functional configurations. It expands into the transition spaces of corridors, ending in the bedrooms, which lie at the periphery. As you move away from the courtyard, you traverse the space from areas of common use, to the individual, private





In spite of the densely hued colours, there is a sense of propriety in this home – there is no visual noise or inappropriate stylistic tics, because the colour itself functions as a basic syntax.

spaces. 'If you open the doors and windows of the bedrooms which overlook the courtyard, you can be standing anywhere, and yet look right through the house to the other end, making it one large interactive space. But simply shutting the same doors and windows enables individual privacy,' says PK Das explaining

this ingenious interplay of privacy and openness.

The courtyard also contains a water body and a large ficus tree with many aerial roots – both are a cooling sight, physically as well as metaphorically, serving to reduce the stresses of city living. There is a play of light and shadow during the day and

when the sun has set, uplighters take over, to cast delicately lacy yet dramatic shadows from the foliage onto the walls. 'I look forward to going back home, because I know that I am going to have a fresh experience and see an engagingly new picture with every shift of the light,' he says, treating lighting like the-

The dining room has a wall in deep orange which serves as a backdrop for the dining table. When the sunlight falls on this wall, the fiery glow brings the space to life.



atre, in which spaces can be transformed by how they are illuminated. So day to night marks many transitions.

Most architects worry first about the shape of the design – the colour comes later, usually only in carefully pared down doses. Besides, reserving bright squirts solely for accessories



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The master suite appears to be almost the size of an independent apartment. Overlooking the courtyard, it incorporates a sitting room which can seat enough people to have a small party.

makes it possible to change the look quickly and inexpensively, as your tastes and lifestyle evolve. But this home takes a high spirited jack hammer to this notion. It will have none of the sterile white-washed colour palette of many contemporary homes, and has been used as a life-size canvas, its large spaces infused with inviting, saturated colour. Reds, blues, greens and yellows, all beckon enticingly. 'Colours play a very important role in my home and have been used as a structural aspect of the architecture – they are not just a superficial veneer or embellishment, nor a makeover or facelift. Colour has been integrated into the planning and construction of spaces, so that it embodies the space itself by holding together the activities in the home,' PK Das explains.

The dining room has a wall in deep orange which serves as a backdrop for the dining table. When the sunlight falls on this wall, the fiery glow brings the space to life. The colours in this home are not static either. The dhurries which are used as sliding sunblinds, create new configurations depending on how they are moved. But the safe, commonplace method of incorporating colour in a home is not used at all – there are no paintings on the walls. 'I don't want any borrowed decorations. Someone else's achievements don't embellish my walls,' asserts PK Das. But in spite of the densely hued colours, there is a sense of propriety in this home – there is no visual noise or inappropriate stylistic ties, because the colour itself functions as a basic syntax. Using such large volumes of it

can veer perilously close to kitsch, but PK Das walks that tightrope with insouciance.

There is a good deal of particle board used in this home, such as in shutters of wardrobes and cabinets. 'There are no high class finishes, in keeping with my conviction that high cost does not necessarily contribute to great design. I even wear handwoven linen for its innate qualities – a simple fabric whose price escalates only because of marketing costs,' he says, in a 'back to basics' philosophy which seems to permeate his lifestyle. Break the bank solutions, in his reckoning, are no indication of resourcefulness.

'My generation was one in an ideological transition, caught between the romance of nationality and the thought processes of the post modern. The younger



Courtyards are traditional elements all over the world in hot, temperate climates. Through them, sunlight is regulated and ventilation is enabled, permitting the house to breathe.



generation are fortunately not fettered by this web of contradictions – they carry no baggage. Today's architects are doing extraordinary work, exploring different directions and expressions. Their work does not necessarily manifest only one philosophy or commitment,' he says.

'Awards tend to iconise an individual, rather than a body of work. I am more in favour of a process itself being iconic, so that others can draw inspiration from the collective. We should not undermine the values of this kind of learning. Architecture is not just about design. We are not simply making a product...architecture has many dimensions. Architects have to create an environment which facilitates the flourishing of life's experiences. But instead of providing a

liberating experience, architecture is often sadly reduced to the level of packaging.

'The only place which I applied to for admission after schooling,

The son's bedroom sports a cheerful yellow, with collages and a Pink Floyd poster on the walls.



ARCHITECT'S AMBIENCE



was the JJ School of Architecture. I was good with art, crafts and pottery, and interested in science and technology as well. Architecture seemed to be the best marriage of these various fields.' Ask PK Das about his professional practice as an architect – whether he is able to live up to his own lofty ideals, and his answer is, 'Architecture often suffers because of business considerations. So I make sure that at least half of the work which I undertake consists of public projects which are not commissioned, but bear social significance. This may be connected with public spaces and amenities such as leisure, education, health, landscape and environmental issues.' Pretty irrefutable, unshakeable convictions, these, as he refuses to be a

victim of his own success. Good design goes beyond the port-manteau excuse of clients' demands and architects wringing their hands about their own financial needs. Evidently, architecture has been more than just a profession for PK Das....It has been a vocation. **16**

'There are no high class finishes, in keeping with my conviction that high cost does not necessarily contribute to great design,' says PK Das, in a back-to-basics philosophy.

