

Photos: B. R.



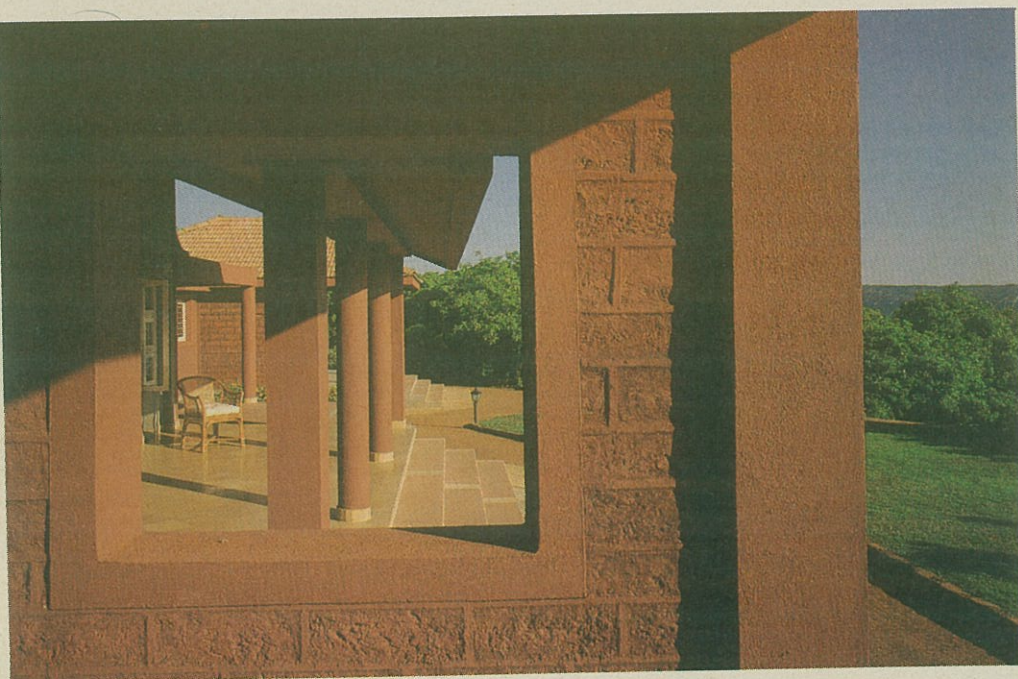
Dynamic experiences

When a house is being built, and its walls and doors, roofs and arches, and the rest are coming up, it is the spaces forming within them that intrigue architect P K Das — the areas in which people will live, grow, operate, respond to. The quality of these spaces, their effect on communication, on movement, is what his work is about. The rest, he shrugs, is decoration.

Text: Anita George

Photographs: Bharath Ramanurtham and Prakash Rao





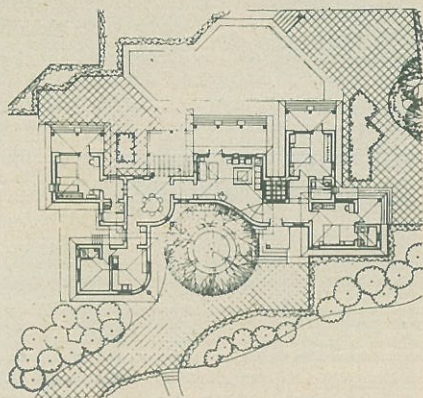
*Left and below:
From any point you
get many interesting
views; when you enter
the living room, you
can look through to
the hills, from both the
foyer and living room.*



*Previous pages:
The view of a holiday
home in
Mahabaleshwar as you
drive along the
highway. By giving
each room of the
house a separate
roof, it looks like a
cluster of village roofs
— a wonderful
planning concept. The
connecting spaces,
like the corridors,
have flat roofs.*



The many verandahs are an important part of the experience of the house.

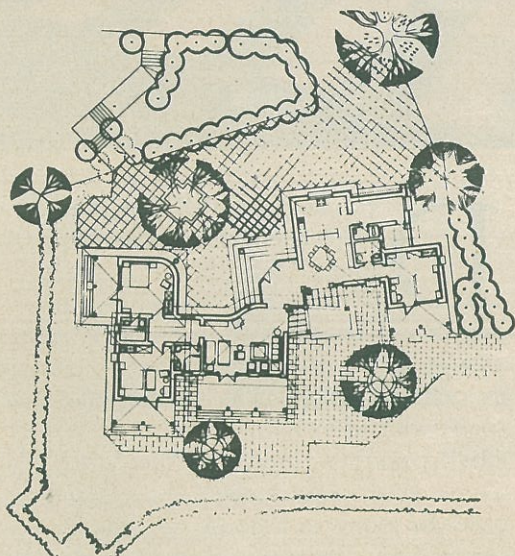


Designing, for P K Das, becomes much like feeling his way through a house, from the occupant's point of view: the surfaces that confront him, the colours, the walls that 'close in' on his view or open up to a new area, his closeness to the outdoors, wherever he is in the house. The spaces with no definite function, like corridors, thus become very important. 'These areas knit the essential requirements' — the office cubicles or rooms in a house — 'they are the common areas, the spaces for movement. Space planning is all about movement, really — like a film unfolding,' Das warms up, 'new visual experiences with every step. It is this dynamism of experience that architecture is all about.'



Left:
The entrance court and transparent foyer of a similar holiday home on an adjacent site. The entire western side, the rear side, where the rain comes from, is a blank wall. The very neatness of these houses sit rather Lego-like on the landscape.

Below:
The sit-out. The verandahs are all on the east side where the valley is, and the sun rises. All the activity is centred in this area.





*Above:
Dining area with open
kitchen. While the
elements of the style
of the two houses
— roof, verandahs,
etc — are identical,
the feeling evoked
inside is not.*



*Left:
The living room.*

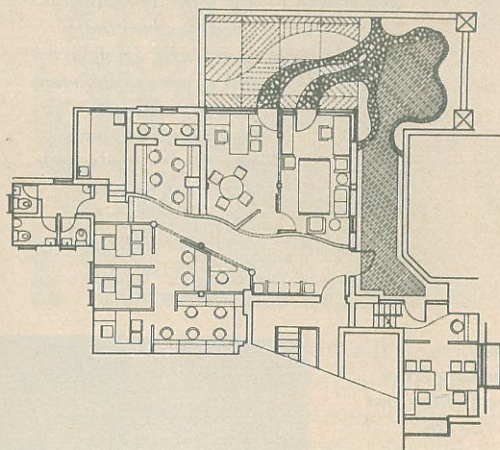
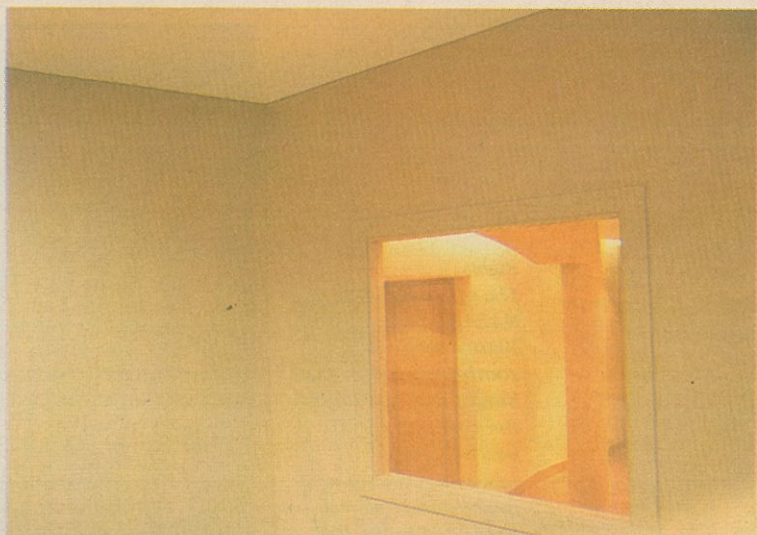


Architect P K Das



The Pan Asia office.

'My design evolves around the "spaces in transition". They form the thread between the entrance and the exit, that I plan first.' In this office, a long wall undulates along the length (below left), and tapers to the end. Leading off it are the doors to the cabins, the arches of the reception, the stairway at the far end that leads to the service area, and the window to the staff area (right). The garden (below) has a view of Bombay's High Court building in the distance. The director's cabin (left).

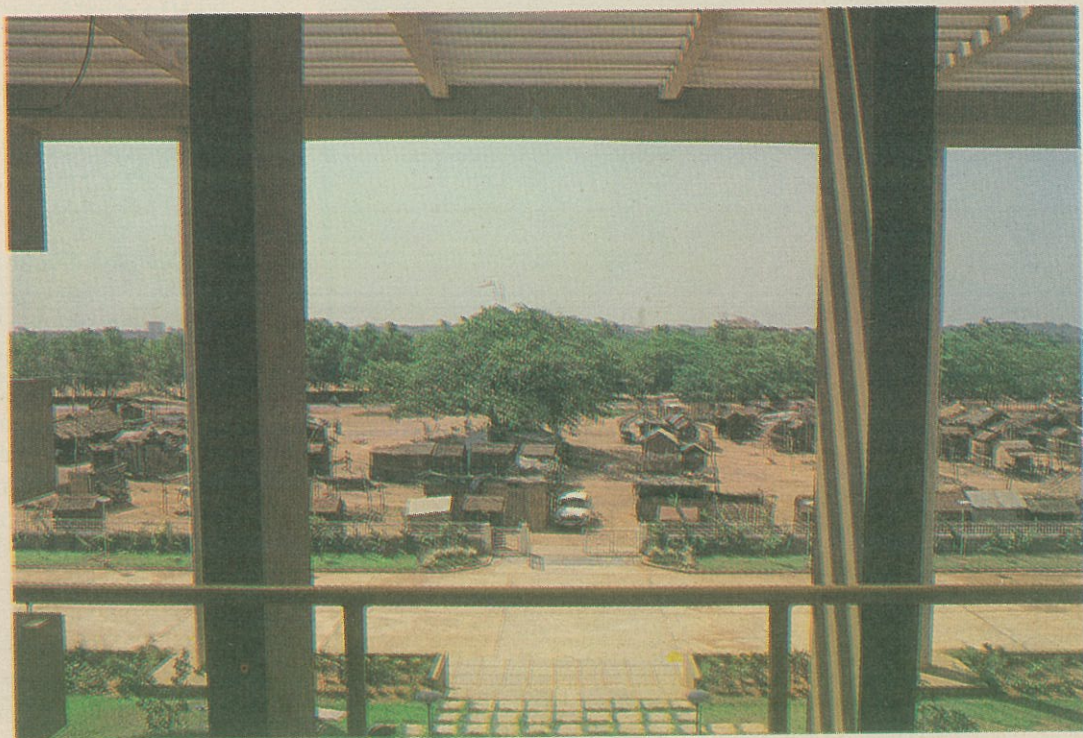


For Das, colour plays its role during the design phase itself, rather than coming last. 'I visualise colours along with the design,' he explains. 'They help me evolve the dynamism of movement — you see the light on them, differences in colour. I never use colours from the readymade charts in the market' — he hates them — 'I pick up Indian colours of the earth' — dresses in them as well, it appears — 'in all my buildings.' Das dismisses the popular trend of using primary colours in all their glaring glory: 'they do not relate to our climate or mental make-up', and convinces clients to use the colours that he chooses. If that sounds rigid, he points out that people easily take to

Right:
The office building of NABARD in Bhubaneswar is south-facing, like most homes there, to catch the constant south breeze. Large windows created a problem during the rains and in the hot summer, so a V-shape was created (see plan). The courtyard in front was covered with a pergola to cut direct sun and rain. Yet, with all main openings into the courtyard, every area has access to the view and the elements. The courtyard becomes the 'filter' — this term was used by Ken Yeang, a Malaysian architect specialising in high rise construction.



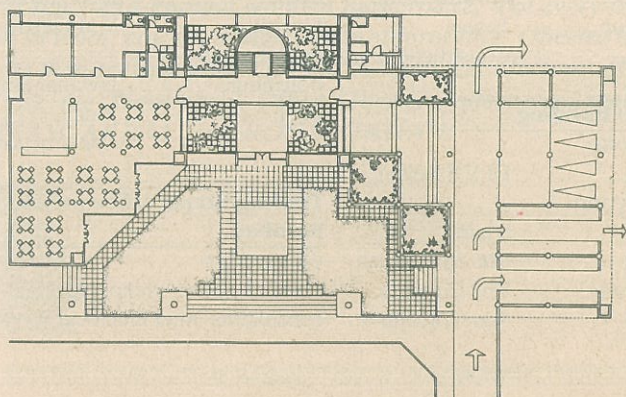
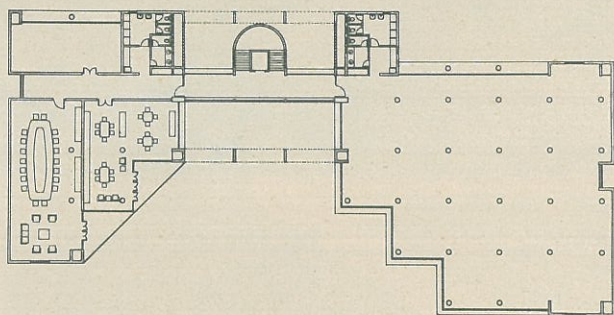
Right:
Looking from the 'bridge' out to the city.





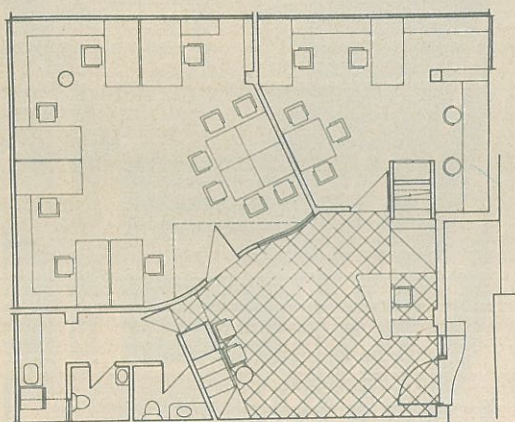
Photos: P K Das

*Right:
A skywalk covered
with a fibreglass roof,
connects the east and
west wings, allowing
the wind to rush
through.*



these earthy colours. Add to that his conscious attempt to bring the outside in — the sun, the direction of rain, the movements of the wind. 'After all, when you construct a building, you are drawing a line that decides what will be in and what will stay out. In our kind of climate, bringing in light and air in a controlled manner is what is important.'

P K Das is also busy bringing sunshine (in a controlled manner!) into the homes of the urban poor as well: as an activist, working with organisations like the Nivara Hakk Suraksha Samiti, an organisation for the protection of housing rights, and Peoples Responsible Organisation for United Dharavi (PROUD). Activism and architecture are equally important to him, each affects the other. 'One day I'm leading a *morcha* to the commissioner for slum dwellers — every ward officer is an enemy of mine! — the next day we are discussing a project for the cleaning up of the city's waterfronts.'



The reception of Rajgarhia, a trading company in Bombay. In this office, the effect sought is of 'a house with a prominent facade', and a forecourt, setting off the free-standing 'walls'.

One wonders whether this concern for living spaces extends to the domain of the builder—after all, not only are lakhs of people consigned to living in the crooked spaces they design, but their buildings are trampling all over the city and the suburbs, changing them drastically forever. There have been problems with builder ethics, Das replies, but that is an area that he says he will be involved in soon.

While he doesn't expect every architect to lead a *morcha* a day, P K Das strongly believes that every architect has a social responsibility. 'Just three or four out of three thousand architects in Bombay work in low cost housing. We are detached from public needs. We are not considered important, like doctors or engineers are.' The bitter truth. □



Project details

Holiday homes

Consultants:

Structure, electrical

and plumbing:

S Jain

Landscape:

Suvarna Sathe

Contractor:

Pawar

Constructions

NABARD Building

Consultants:

Structure:

Dr V S Kelkar

Plumbing and

sewage:

S Jain

Electrical:

Khired Pattniak

Contractor:

Unit Construction, Calcutta

Pan Asia office interior, Bombay

Contractors:

Furniture and

timber:

Ravi Furniture

Electrical:

V M Electricals

Painting and

polishing:

Jawahar Singh

Civil:

Vinay

Construction

Trading house office interior, Bombay

Contractors:

Same as above except electrical consultants: Rina Electrical Works