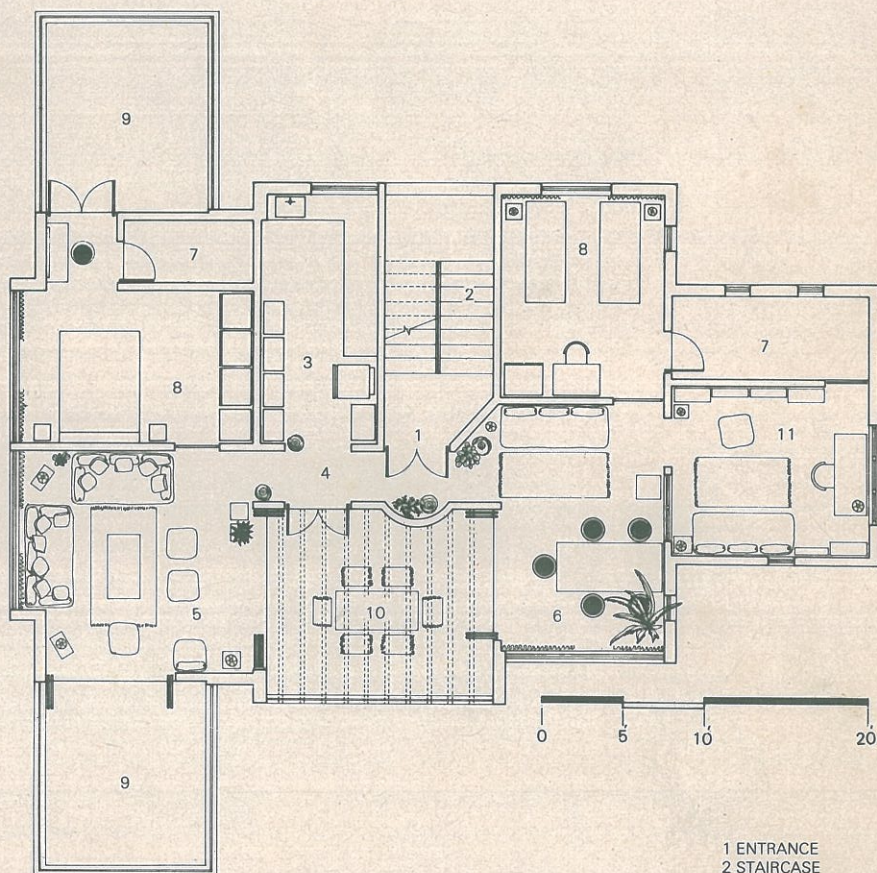




Simplicity – An Affordable Style

At a time when interior design has reached the over-opulent stage, architect P K Das goes back to basics. Dispensing with ornate artefacts, rich carpets and plush furnishing, his interiors bear the stamp of simplicity, specially suited to congested metros where all one acquires in the guise of a living space is a skeletal frame: a set of walls, a floor, ceiling and a few openings. Indeed, Das' design concepts seem to touch the golden mean – not oppressively formal and yet ornate in a quiet way, as he feels



FLOOR PLAN

- 1 ENTRANCE
- 2 STAIRCASE
- 3 KITCHEN
- 4 PASSAGE
- 5 LIVING
- 6 DINING
- 7 TOILET
- 8 BEDROOM
- 9 TERRACE
- 10 TERRACE BHAIKAK
- 11 STUDY

'over-designed interiors suffocate the relatively restricted space available in a city'.

Simulating a courtyard

A visit to his house at the Juhu-Vile Parle Scheme, Bombay, speaks volumes about his views. With a carpet area of 97.55m², and terraces totally measuring 32.52m², this three-bedroom flat combines simplicity with a rustic beauty, as Das, liberally borrowing from traditional roots, has created a distinctly Indian ambience.

As an admirer of vernacular

architecture, which emphasises the concept of a central courtyard, the flat's central terrace, seeks to symbolically simulate this traditional courtyard, with the other rooms surrounding it. A canvas roofed wooden pergola covers the courtyard offering protection to the numerous strategically placed potted and hanging plants, giving the feel of a garden 'through which the house breathes'. But this is only a temporary arrangement as Das plans to construct a sloping tiled roof over the courtyard, enclosing the open side with a timber

Above left: The living room: Mattresses and cushions placed on the 'chattai' matting create the traditional ambience, while the Mithilia painting and artefacts ornament the otherwise simple style.

Photographs: Swapan Mukerji



trellis overhung with creepers, so that it becomes 'a green island within the hall – informal and fresh, without being either conspicuous or commonplace'.

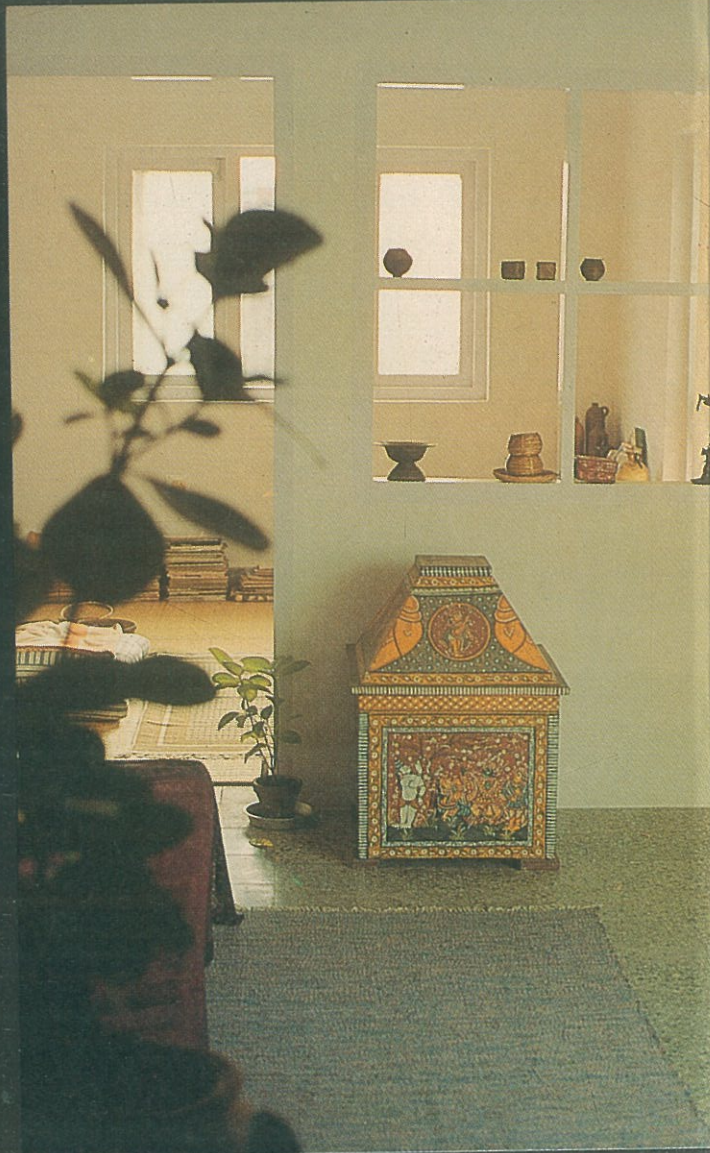
It is the courtyard which connects and separates the adjoining living and dining rooms. As Das is greatly influenced by traditional Japanese concepts of openness, fluidity of space and the use of minimal furniture, the glass-topped tables, mattresses, cushions and 'moodas', which furnish the living room, are all kept deliberately low, so that the upper volume of space is left

uncluttered. But this almost inconspicuous furniture is well complemented by various exotic ethnic artefacts as Das is an avid collector of the works of master craftsmen.

Artefacts

Earthen pots and ceramic jars of all shapes and sizes, the creations of renowned artists like Alibag's Ralli and Perin Jacob, Delhi's Jannah and Bombay's Pandit Bhyandar and Ajit Vaidhya, are interspersed between the sparse furniture. Besides these, a rich mosaic of tradition-

al artefacts, which include Rajasthani terracota pieces, stone sculpture and papier mache masks from Orissa, brass from Kerala and Bastar metal work, lend to the ethnic charm. These are augmented by a Mithilia painting by the award-winning master craftsman Satya Narayan Sinha, in the living room, and a Kalamkari painting by the renowned Guruppa Chetty in the simple dining room. Two pattachitra paintings, traditional Orissa artwork using lac on paper, add to the colour. However, Das is quick to point out that



these objets d'art have been selected to enhance his collection and not simply to decorate his house.

Practical and inexpensive

Except for the entrance, kitchen and dining areas which are mosaic tiled, floors in the rest of the house are covered by 'chattai' matting which adds to the overall rustic effect. Costing a mere Rs 2.50 per sq. foot inclusive of fixing, these can be easily maintained, claims Das, needing only a weekly brushing or vacuum cleaning, and are not sus-

ceptible to termite attack or dampness, contrary to popular belief. Added to this, the bamboo 'chick' blinds over most windows, except those facing west, play a visual hide-and-seek with the light.

The textural weave and pattern of the handloom fabrics used range from smooth and soft to rough and ribbed for curtains, cushions and mattress covers. It is not the price and durability of the textiles, which Das buys from Fab India, Contemporary Arts and Bombay Swadeshi Stores, that influence his choice,

Facing page: The central courtyard seen from the living room provides an openness and continuity of space from one end of the house to the other.

Above left: The living room opens onto the terrace strewn with strategically placed hanging and potted plants.

Left: The dining room is simply furnished with a glass-topped, low-level pine wood dining table and large cushions in place of chairs, with the pattachitra painting and 'Jagatha Pedi' lending a touch of colour.

Above: Traditional artefacts lend to the rustic effect



but rather the textural feel and quality.

The blue and white dhurries and upholstery form a complementary colour scheme with the blue-grey and white oil-bound distempered walls, which create a visual balance by using soothing muted shades that contrast with the vibrant colours of the paintings and artefacts.

Wooden furniture, like tables and cabinets, are made from carefully selected pine packing cases chosen for their veneer and knots, and varnished, while doors are hand-picked from the

seconds bazaar at a phenomenally low price of Rs 3,000 for 16 doors!

Lighting

Except for the spot light at the entrance, there are no ceiling lights, while ceramic lamps light up the lower spaces leaving the areas above relatively less lit. The entire wiring was redone so that electrical outlets would be below 1.5m.

The bedrooms and study (a renovated bedroom), which are separated from the other rooms fulfilling the need for privacy,

echo the basic design concepts of the other rooms. Here, too, low minimal furniture has been used and bulky beds replaced with piled mattresses while cabinets are half the normal height. Brightly coloured bedspreads from Gujarat and Orissa add rustic colour to the bedroom interiors which are otherwise devoid of artefacts, as Das felt these rooms were colourful enough.

The kitchen is a utilitarian area with nothing more than a cooking range and low cabinets. Tucked away to one side, and so separated from the rest of the



house, the kitchen has no door, so that it seems to merge with the rest of the house.

"Style is not necessarily expensive," says Das, corroborating his claim with an estimate of expenditure:

Civil work	Rs 20,000
Painting	Rs 7,000
Electrical work	Rs 6,000
Carpentry	Rs 10,000
Chick	Rs 1,000
Chattai & Mattresses	Rs 10,000
Total:	Rs 54,000

The clean lines, visual continuity and transparency which

are Das' forte, lend a subdued elegance and rustic simplicity to his interiors. But better still they impart a sense of belonging.

Sarayu Ahuja

Facing page: Piled mattresses covered with a colourful bedspread and low cabinets furnish the otherwise sparse bedroom, while the dim light of the ceramic lamps create an interesting pattern of shadows on the wall.

Above: The view through the window between the study and diningroom: Muted lights give a mellow glow to the house.