



The Garden House

By Dulmini Perera
Photography by Archt. Sithumini Rathnamalala

A foreign couple mesmerized by the beauty of the island, their attraction to colonial period houses, their possession of over one acre of land in Habaraduwa, Galle equipped with an old house, and their need to transform it into a livable home became the starting point of an interesting venture for Archt. Russel Dandeniya.

“Although at the outset we thought the house could be renovated, upon closer inspection it was evident that the existing structure was beyond restoration,” says Archt. Dandeniya.

“But the interesting brief of the client, which gave me the opportunity to reconsider my own ideas about traditional architecture and come up with a building suitable for the current context, was tempting enough to work through it all” he adds.

Being presented with an enchanting site, abundant in natural beauty with lush greenery all around, bounded on one side by the paddy fields which seemed to spread infinitely across the landscape, Dandeniya set about creating a home for his clients. His main inspiration was the old

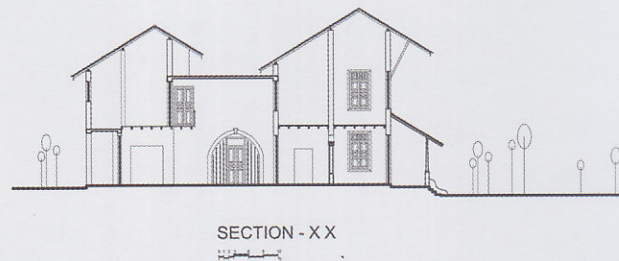
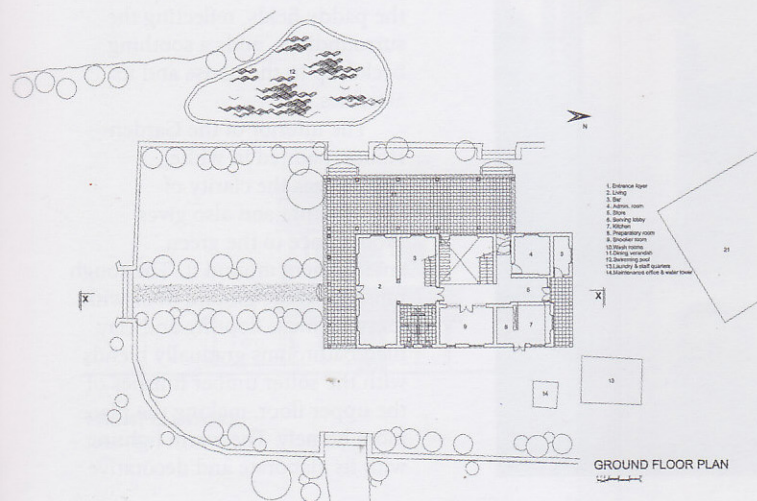




buildings in the area, particularly the one on the site itself. His attempt was not only to reinterpret the traditional forms and spaces in a more contemporary manner but also to harmonise it with the natural ambience of the site.

Carefully designed steps at strategic points in the garden highlight the entrance pathways. As one approaches the house, even at a distance, the simple rectangular form becomes visible. Its large pitched roof of half round tiles standing strong and humbly protecting the house from harsh weather conditions adds character to the composition. The verandah, a significant and much loved feature of Sri Lankan architecture, has become a characteristic feature of the design not only linking the introverted interior space to the beautiful garden, but also creating a semi public area and an environmental buffer around the private realm of the house.

In fact Dandeniya's introduction of the rear verandah, quite grand in its proportions with a fabulous view across the garden, provides the climax in the experience, giving the Garden House its unique character. Whilst all the major functions are on the ground floor, the more private bedrooms are tucked up in the upper floor





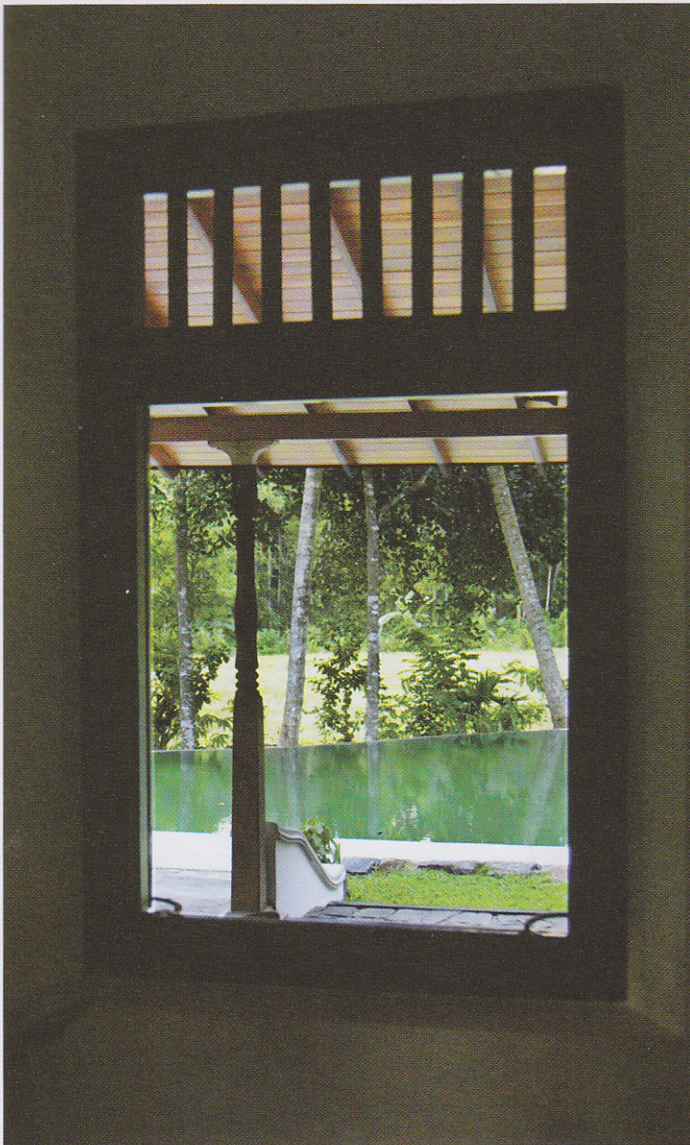
undisturbed by the activities at ground level.

“The decorative arch in front of the main doorway, retained from the old structure, effectively bound the design to the former building on this site in a symbolic manner,” says Dandeniya, highlighting the importance of the retained section of the old building.

The decorative columns, particularly in the verandahs, which are considerably tall in proportion, are somewhat unique to the Habaraduwa area. This is an interesting collection of columns, saved from demolished houses in the area, and being reused in this new structure. The intricate timber doors and windows, carefully placed in the façade, have also contributed to bringing out the character of the building. Many of these were carefully retained from the old structure while some were newly made, imitating the old design.

Small courtyards, carefully placed in between the main spaces, can be found inside the building with its interesting collection of plants and animals, which constantly comes alive with the soft chirping sounds of the birds adding vitality to the interior spaces. Streams of light, coming down from grilled windows at higher levels, makes one aware of the double height volumes animating the simple flow of spaces. The organic shaped water body which has been introduced in between the paddy fields, reflecting the surroundings, adds a soothing backdrop to the house and its activities.

The interior of the Garden House, painted in white, emphasizes the clarity of the structure and also gives prominence to the green environment around it. The rough finishes on the ground floor with its cut cement flooring and clay tiled bathrooms gradually blends with the softer timber finishes of the upper floor, making the place more homely. The warm lighting, with its elaborate and decorative



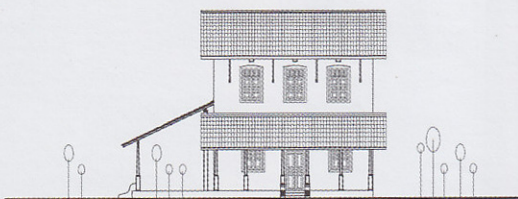
holdings, emphasises the curved and sensuous lines of the form as well as the selected pieces of furniture during the night time.

The close link that one feels with nature within a traditional house has been maintained in this contemporary piece by the creative use of strategically placed, different-sized grilled openings. This maximises cross ventilation and protects the interior from harsh weather conditions. Dandeniya's use of the verandah, the pitched roofs and the selection of material clearly demonstrates the environmental responsiveness of the structure.

Forming a marked statement in this piece of land, it has become a piece of architecture exemplifying the very ideas of reuse and sensitive and creative reinterpretation of concepts unique to us as Sri Lankans.

Moreover, it has succeeded in becoming a place much loved and close to the heart of its owners, strengthening their sense of belonging in a foreign land.

This residential project was awarded "Best Personalized House of the Year 2008" at the SLIA Annual Sessions 2008.



FRONT ELEVATION

Architect: Russell Dandeniya

Consultants:

S.C.L. Galappaththi (Structural Engineer)

G.H.M. Aponsu (Quantity Surveyor)

Site Extent: 1.25 Acres

Total Built area: 7,000 sq. ft

Project period: 21 months

Civil Contractor: K.A. Nihalrathna

Client: Peter W. Epsom & Lyn A. Sabin