



Tranquility

By the River Mahaveli

Architect Russel Dandeniya speaks to the Real Estate Partner on his concepts and talks about one of his latest projects, a residence by the River Mahaveli, which was completed recently at a location just six kilometres from the Kandy town.



This unique location borders the River Mahaveli, where the waters flow across a 30-metre width. It's also the place where the last ruler of Kandy, King Rajasinghe used to cross the river while riding his horse and it's also reputed to be a corral where horses used to rest. That historic site is also clearly visible to the residence.

The meandering river and the whole environs offer a magnificent view. A key feature is the bedroom where the owner R. Bombuwala

preferred to experience a floating effect, the sense of being afloat while in the bedroom. The discussion with Mr. Bombuwala about his requirements was pleasantly brief. There were no budget restrictions whatsoever and we were given a free hand to go ahead with the unique project. Mr. Bombuwala also did not want to rush with the three-room dwelling and wanted us to complete the work with a full scope.

This is my first housing project in Kandy and when getting approvals, of course there were a

number of issues with regard to the scale and size. The initial floor area was around 12,000 square feet, but the MC wanted us to reduce it according to their regulations. It certainly was quite a tedious task because as architects we are dealing mostly with space, views, etc. I took the MC requirements in good spirit, reduced the footprint and achieved our targets to the satisfaction of everyone.

Commenting on key features, Russell said they arranged a spine of a blind wall completing



the 180-degree view of the Mahaveli River to almost all the spaces, except the garage and the quarters for the domestic aids.

The residence is in three levels. The ground level, we wanted to locate the living room at the far end of the site, because that's the climax of the site offering a magnificent view. As a result we had to create a pedestrian entrance up to the living room. This of course is not very common. Usually one enters the verandah and then the living room. That's the formal form. But here we have to pass almost all the spaces and going along a linear corridor and ending up at the living room that could be described as a journey experiencing on the right hand a solid building mass and on the left a view that

could be described as 'infinity' with the river and nature as far as the eye could see.

At the ground level is the Living, Dining and a superb Visitor Room with a unique view of the backyard. The first floor is for family living with a very large Master Bedroom with an attic. There are two other bedrooms on the first floor, one for the son located a little distance from the main, where there is a private living area and terrace. And the other room, the daughter's, is close to the master bedroom. It is open to the sky and in the night the whole sky and stars are in full view.

On the third level is the roof terrace. On the ex-

clusive fourth level, which we call the 'Mahaveli Wine Terrace', is the most exclusive space of the house. When entertaining guests, that the supreme location for that purpose, from where one could see the entire Hantana range, the Mahaweli River and the view extends to the mountain range offering a magnificent, picturesque view.

The basic principle we followed here is to protect all the trees. Not a single tree was axed and the land terrain was used as it is but we linked the spaces with tiers, steps and ramps. Tiers are very special because when walking, all the spaces on the ground floor are disable-friendly, all linked with ramps.



We didn't go for the green initiative as the whole project was already green. With regard to the much talked about 'going green', today many are trying this concept spending unnecessary money going for things like solar panels extending their pay back period spending a lot of money. And some of the green initiatives are not really green in Sri Lanka. Those are western concepts, but when applied to projects like housing, many are unaware what is actually green. In my view, in Sri Lanka we have to adopt our own systems because Sri Lanka is already green. What we did here was that in all areas it is natural ventilation and light and even at 5am, there's enough light as can be seen in some of the images.

At dusk too optimum natural lighting is there and as a result you are saving electricity and also no real need for air conditioning. However, there are many who insist on A/Cs as they are interested in more comfort. I personally like our own Sri Lankan Green because we have always been green.

Material wise, we have used typical normal wood, steel, masonry structures and modern material like aluminum. Where finishing is





concerned, some architects like to create sleek spaces for the sake of photographs and not for the people. In Sri Lanka today, most awards are offered to that type of buildings. However, we design for the people. Wear and tear, touch and sensing the space are more important in our concepts. For walls we give textures and for floors, we use different textures and as a result, in permanent places like homes, it's never boring. When you move from one space to another, there's a change and offers a pleasing sense from dawn to dusk.

We went for Miris Gal tile, cement rendering and rough-textured tiles and sometimes timber floors. So barefoot, one feels the different textures and when moving around too one feels and sees the different environs.

Commenting on the use of materials, Russell said that except for aluminum and bathroom fittings, all materials are local and flooring was done with Rossell tiles and wood was Kumbuk. Architect Russell Dandeniya, the Treasurer of



the Sri Lanka Institute of Architects and Principal Architect of RDCA, has been in the sector for 10 years. He won the Young Architect of the Year Award in 2009 and has won several other designer awards. He has already completed, amongst others, six hotel projects all around the island and three multi-story apartments including SSS Towers in Malabe. Upcoming projects are three auditoriums, two hotels in Yala – a 50-chalet resort, 12-room boutique hotel in Beruwala and Alluvien Reflective Resort with 36 floating cabanas in Arugam Bay.

The structure of the Kandy project was done by Professor Udaya Dissanayake, a structural engineer. He is giving a guarantee for the structure for 30 to 50 years. The project architects are Ms. Suranjika Ratnayaka and architect Gayani Hewage.

By Tony Jayasuriya

