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WEEKEND HOME
Dipen Gada's bungalow in Vadodara



Where the Mind
is without Fear...

Experimenting and breaking norms, Dipen Gada has pushed the boundaries in this weekend home for himself. Not being answerable to a client has resulted in surprising solutions, contrary to the expected...but resulting in a beautiful home away from home which family and friends delight in.

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A Zen garden on the side of the bungalow has a symmetrical grid on the ground, created by stone slabs with grass filling the gaps between them. A skeletal white tree in metal is impervious to the seasons, sitting on a sea of white brick. A few feet away is a mini pond on one side and the open air 'temple' on the other, meant for connecting with one's inner self in the benign presence of nature.

Niraant. That means relaxation,' says Dipen Gada, translating the name of his weekend getaway for me. 12 km outside Vadodara, the 4,400 sq ft home sits on a one-acre site near a river bank. A high degree of customisation has gone into this home. Even as the walls appear to unfold like the pages of a book, life-size human figures in fibere strike poses in various areas, infusing the space with a 'come hither' drama. Lolling in cut-outs, leaning against walls, perched precariously on ledges, they have a strong sculpturesque pres-



Dipen Gada

ence. 'The body language of all the figures is relaxed, indicating the winding down and rejuvenation that takes place here whenever we visit. Away from the bustle of the city, it is a calm, meditative experience,' says Dipen. 'A designer from the office actually struck poses in various spots, which we photographed and then created the fiber figures, modelled on the pictures,' he adds. 'Since the land was not flat, we had to do quite a bit of landfill, although we've maintained some of the dips and mounds. The main concern was soil erosion dur-



A long, low cavity wall faces the fierce western sun, defying it to flex its muscle.



The front door is actually a three-in-one affair, with doors of different sizes built into each other, each one individually openable, depending on the need. Carrying an inscription of Tagore's famous poem, 'Where the mind is without fear,' it declares the philosophy and intent of Dipen's architectural practice.



The home theatre has blue IPS flooring with glass strips inserted at intervals, so that the flooring doesn't develop cracks. The ceiling is made of Shera ply, an innovative product which is resistant to water, fire and termites. This area has sliding glass windows which open onto the pool, giving the option of connecting or disconnecting with the outdoors on this side of the house.



The dining table with informal benches is meant to seat eight, but invariably ends up seating 12, when friends and family get together. The ceiling is exposed concrete. There are no noise absorption materials anywhere – so to subdue echoes of human voices, acoustical panels on the ceiling have been clad with fabric in vibrant Indian colours – rust and indigo.

ing the rainy season, which has been taken care of,' says Dipen. A Zen garden on the side of the bungalow has a symmetrical grid on the ground, created by stone slabs with grass filling the gaps between them. A skeletal white tree in metal is impervious to the seasons, sitting on a sea of white brick. A few feet away is a mini pond on one side and the open air 'temple' on the other, meant for connecting with one's inner self in the benign presence of nature. 'On a full moon night, this space has a truly magical ambience,' says Dipen.

The house has an introverted plan. Generally adopted when there are no external views, this home

offers a long, low cavity wall to the fierce western sun, defying it to flex its muscle. When average daytime temperatures hover around 45°C, this wall acts like a spine with narrow punctures on the west welcoming the fast southwest wind. Air vents on skylights at the east corner provide an escape for the hot air. Thus, effectively channelled air movement cools down the indoors, supported by the green landscaping on the terrace which acts as a great buffer for the house. 'Instead of trying to blur the boundaries between inside and outside, we decided to just shut off the west...although we have landscaped lawns and a great view on that side



The IPS flooring has an embossed pattern on it.



In the living room, brightly coloured cushions accentuate the white palette. The white lamp in the corner has been designed by Dipen. The single-seater chairs were also designed 12 years back by him for a store. When the store was recently renovated, Dipen bought back the chairs and refurbished them for his own use.

too,' says Dipen. This green concept and the extensive use of passive cooling has resulted in sparing use of the air-conditioners, even in the scorching summers.

The front door is actually a three-in-one affair, with doors of different sizes built into each other, each one individually openable, depending on the need. Carrying an inscription of Tagore's famous poem, 'Where the Mind is without Fear,' it declares the philosophy and intent of Dipen's architectural practice. Intending to highlight only that which was necessary, even door jambs have been painted the same colour as the walls. Made of Jodhpur stone, they are impervious to termites, which



The master bath has a neutral palette with a skylight through which light pours into the space. The ceramic leaves from the bedroom wall are echoed here in the shower area.

Everywhere, colour is used only in easily replaceable accessories and soft furnishings.



Life size human figures in fibre strike poses in various areas, infusing the space with a 'come hither' drama. Lolling in cut-outs, leaning against walls, perched precariously on ledges, they have a strong sculptural presence.



are an issue on this site. 'In fact, we've used only 20 per cent of the wood which we would normally, most of it in loose furniture,' says Dipen. All the walls have been painted with an exterior grade paint, resulting in a textured finish rather than a highly polished one.

Within, the IPS flooring has an embossed pattern on it and most of the ceilings are exposed concrete. There are no noise absorption materials anywhere – so to subdue the echoes of human

voices, acoustical panels on the ceiling have been clad with fabric in vibrant Indian colours – rust and indigo in the dining room and a postbox red in part of the home theatre. In the living room, one of the chairs was designed 12 years back by Dipen for a store. When the store was recently renovated, Dipen bought back the chair and refurbished it for his own use. Seems like we're looking at an enduring classic. The square dining table with informal benches

is meant to seat eight, but invariably ends up seating 12, when friends and family get together.

The house is replete with art. While some is serious stuff like the ceramic plates by Daroz, the rest is by students. 'I just buy what appeals to me,' says Dipen,

with so much to choose from due to the famous Sayaji University in Vadodara, alma mater to many famous artists. The home theatre has blue IPS flooring, created by artisans from Auroville, Pondicherry. 'They created a dozen different shades for us to choose from. Glass

strips have been inserted at intervals, so that the flooring doesn't develop cracks,' says Dipen. The ceiling is made of Shera ply, an innovative product which is resistant to water, fire and termites. This area has sliding glass windows which open onto the pool,

giving the option of connecting or disconnecting with the outdoors on this side of the house.

The master bedroom has a four-poster and is flooded with light. Ceramic leaves from Jaipur climb a wall behind the bed, echoed by the same motif in the en



The guest bedroom has a platform bed created in situ with brick, the blue IPS of the floor flowing upwards to clad the brick.



The master bedroom has a four-poster and is flooded with light. Ceramic leaves from Jaipur climb a wall behind the bed. The aesthetic is Mediterranean, with blue and white dominating the light-engulfed space.

suite bath. The aesthetic is Mediterranean, with blue and white dominating the light engulfed space. Dipen prefers to call it 'contemporary, with a vernacular twist.' The guest bedroom has a platform bed created in situ with brick, the blue IPS of the floor flowing upwards to clad the brick.

With its fortress-like façade on the west, this house has sharp demarcations between inside and outside. 'In fact, it doesn't even look like a home when viewed from this side,' says Dipen. 'But since I wasn't answerable to a client, I was able to experiment.' While this is a place to commune with one's inner self and attain peace of mind, it is also a source of personal joy and a labour of love for Dipen Gada.



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SKEWED HOUSE

With a wall veering off plumb and even a ceiling defying the horizontal plane, there is enough that is skewed in this house to merit the appellation. But the departure from the norm

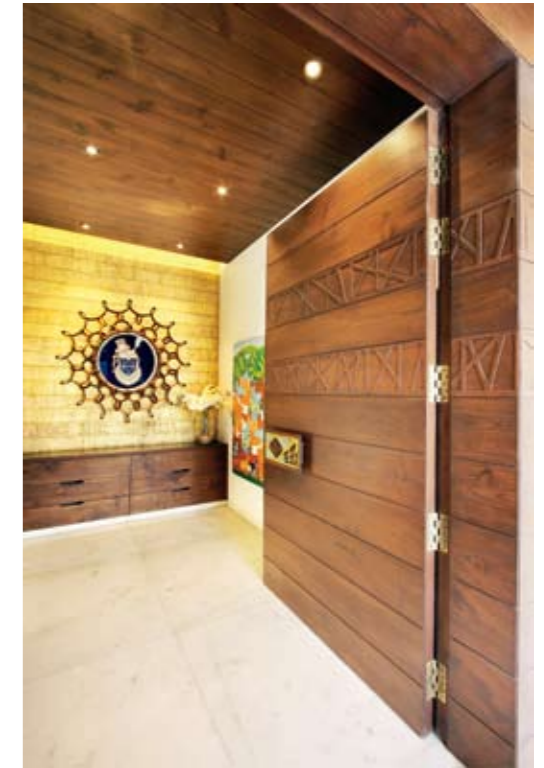
is not some mindless variation. Aesthetics and function come fluidly together in this bungalow in Bharuch.

'Distinctly slanted' is what strikes you about one block towards the rear of this

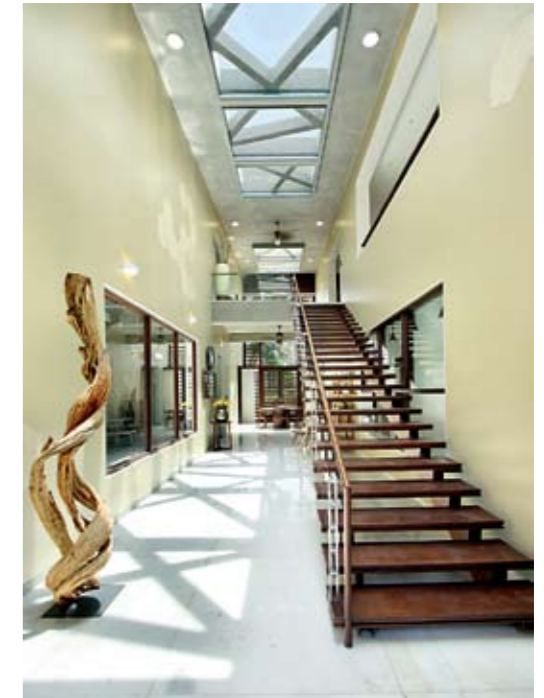
bungalow, when viewed from the outside. Rather nice, aesthetically. But functional too, as Dipen Gada explains. 'It permitted a larger floor plate on the first floor, making for

more space,' he says. The exterior is partially clad with vitrified tiles which resemble the rust-orange hue of corten steel. (Corten steel is a group of steel alloys which were developed to

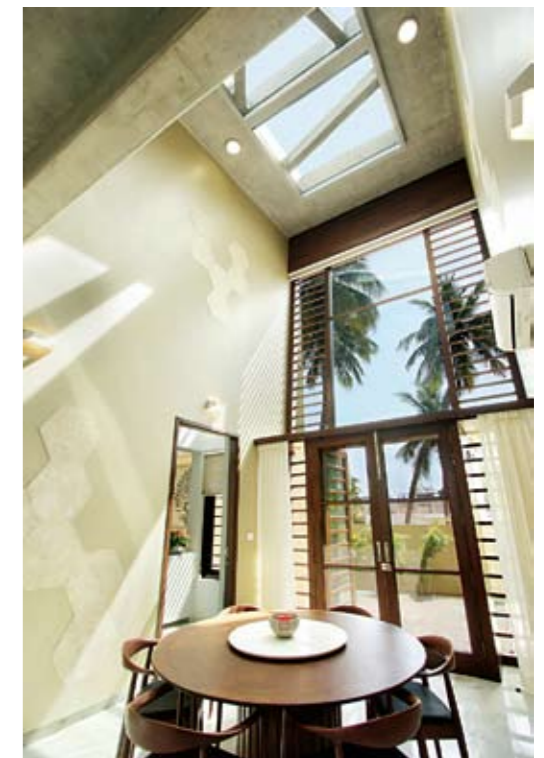
eliminate the need for painting, and form a stable rust-like appearance if exposed to the weather for several years. This patina protects the steel from additional corrosion.)



In the living room, the lighting is divided into distinct linear segments. A row of cone shaped pendant lights are strictly for ambience, with their 1 watt bulbs. Parallel to this, two tracks provide functional lighting which can be in warm or cool white, as desired. The puja room is at the far end of the living room, its doors in the intricate 'thikri' mirror work native to Udaipur. Like an art work in themselves, they draw the eye with the traditional craftsmanship and detailing in their rendition.



In the courtyard which connects the two blocks, a staircase hugs the wall but is as transparent as possible, with the space between the treads – where the riser would be – left empty. Designed at a low angle, it makes for an easy climb but makes a visually bold statement in the space.



'We've celebrated light in this design, with all its variations and the patterns which it casts through the dining area.'

'The triangular plot was not convenient to build on. The solution we arrived at was to design the house in two blocks, with a central space which gave the feeling of being outdoors, although it was an indoor space.' The first block houses the living and puja room, with five

bedrooms, a library, home theatre and kitchen spreading out through the rear block. The kitchen cabinets were fabricated on the site to save costs, since a modular kitchen to fit the requirements would have been exorbitant. In a clinically white palette, colour comes unexpectedly,

from the bookshelf under one counter.

The dining room sits in the space between the two blocks, with its ambience of being an outdoor space. The sloping ceiling has large cut-outs in an abstract geometrical pattern, through which large swathes of light

cast shadows on floor and walls alike...moving imperceptibly with the changing direction of the sun.

'Motorised curtains enable the sunlight to be cut off when required,' says Dipen Gada. The ceilings in most of the spaces are RCC. 'We've avoided false ceil-

ings as much as possible. In general, we are going back to basics and avoiding superficial treatments in our practice,' he adds.

In the living room, functional furniture enhances the space in an effortless manner, without looking forced. 'This way, the home can



'The priority in this home is the natural elements, with the energy and freshness with which they enhance spaces. And the sunlight, of course, is everywhere.'



In the room of the daughter, a young adult, a two-poster bed holds centre stage. A photograph rather than a canvas artwork is mounted on the wall behind the headboard, with a soft aqua and blues – picked up by the carpet and the upholstery on the settee – making up the colour palette.

breathe and there is also scope to add more pieces at a later date, or change the look of the space,' says Dipen. Colour comes through the upholstery, easily changeable without having to spend too much money. The lighting here is divided into distinct linear segments. A row of cone shaped pendant lights are strictly for the ambience, with their 1 watt bulbs. Parallel to this, two tracks provide functional lighting which can be in warm or cool white, as desired. The puja room is at the far end of the living room, its doors in the intricate 'thikri' mirror work native to Udaipur. Like an art work in themselves, they draw the eye with the



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bungalows

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bath is bathed with light from a skylight, the shower area a step up from the rest of the space. The master bedroom has wooden panelling for the headboard, its top aligned with the windows on both sides of the bed. Floating bedside tables are visually light and in tried and tested manner, conspire to create an illusion of a larger area, by freeing up floor space.

‘The priority in this home is the natural elements, with the energy and freshness with which they enhance spaces,’ says Dipen. ‘And the sunlight, of course, is everywhere. We’ve celebrated light in this design, with all its variations and the patterns which it casts through the dining area.’ 