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# Countryside home

Dramatic and simple at the same time, the Ibrahims' holiday home in Alibaug is all about communing with nature

**FEATURE** SEEMA SREEDHARAN **PHOTOGRAPHS** MRIGANK SHARMA AND BHARAT





The bedroom, on the upper floor, has three viewing decks and it is the only completely enclosed room in the Ibrahim house

**F**arooq Ibrahim's 4,000-square-foot holiday home in Alibaug gives new meaning to the word radical. The main structure rises out of the landscape, a scattered erior which seems to have been ved by the wind. The house is not an closed cube from which to observe ure, rather, the breezy, wild and controllable weather outside seems to ess and saunter through its spaces. where else have I seen the architecture rge so well with its surroundings. ooq certainly is a lucky man, for at he calls his holiday home is an itectural masterpiece almost akin to ionment.

Members of the Ibrahim family have nt most of their lives in the suburbs of mbai, surrounded by the lights and se that come as part and parcel of city. They needed a vacation home that vided respite from their fast-paced an life in Mumbai. This need was

answered by Mahesh Naik's open-plan, modernist house; one that truly interacts with nature. It's a whole other world just a couple of hours' drive away from the city. "It was very important to the Ibrahims that I make something totally different for them. For them that meant a structure that conversed with nature, and for me it meant experimenting with forms and shapes. I think it worked out fine for both," concedes the architect. "The only brief we gave our architect was to create something startlingly different, and the design that he came up with was certainly different enough! We liked it right off," Farooq explains with a smile.

To arrive at the house, one travels through a landscape of warm, earthy colours and once you reach it, it leaves you amazed. The house seems to rise and fall, and then rise again, like a giant wave. The roof emerges from the ground and stops in mid air to give way to the open-air swimming pool, which separates the informal lounge area from the



### house fact file

**OWNERS** The Ibrahims  
**PROPERTY** A double-storied villa  
**LOCATION** Alibaug, Maharashtra  
**BUILT** 2003  
**ROOMS** 4  
**AREA** 4,000 square feet



The floor art at the entrance is the likeness of a tortoise and is made of coconut shells and stone slabs



living room. "In all my projects, I strive to integrate the architecture with the landscape. The architecture itself should vanish from sight and leave you with a balance between the interior and the exterior. And that's what I've tried with this house too," says Mahesh.

Farooq chooses to describe the interiors as monastic, and the only decorative elements are the built-in light fixtures, which, incidentally, are made of coconut shells and earthen pots. Surfaces are pared down for reasons of cost and efficient maintenance; hence the stone, the bare-bricked walls, and the Mangalorean-tiled ceilings. The house's design is an open-plan composition of brick walls and large openings, creating a play of planes and surfaces visually reminiscent of the area's geography.



The absence of doors in this house helps the owners to commune with nature without any obstructions. The house is a great way to experience nature as it is





ahesh's approach as well as the raw materials used—rough bricks, stone slabs and wood—and the rich openings which allow plenty of natural light, merge the house with the surrounding landscape.

The open spaces present countless opportunities for over-the-top embellishments, but instead of succumbing to such temptations, Farooq chose to steer clear of any sort of ornament. "Our family has been in the interiors' business for over 10 decades," informs Farooq, the owner of Kondor, a furniture showroom in Bandra. "It wouldn't be wrong to say that we've inherited a sense of aesthetics. But when

it came to furnishing this house, we decided to leave it sparse. The house in itself is so beautiful that it requires no embellishments." So while the living room has no formal seating, the lounge has a single built-in granite slab that serves as the seating area. "The idea is to make yourself comfortable wherever you want to. What I like about my house is that it allows you freedom of movement."

The house is designed keeping in mind the region's hot and humid climate but surprisingly, in spite of the fact that the weather here can be quite intimidating, there's no artificial source of cooling. "There are no fans or ACs. Not

## IN SYNC WITH NATURE...

■ No artificial colours have been used in the house. The architect chose materials that lend their own colour—Mangalorean tiles, bricks, wood and steel

■ Sloping roofs prevent the stagnation of air and increase its flow

■ No fans or AC have been installed in the house

**What I like about my house is that it allows you freedom of movement"**



The oblique panels in the open bathroom provide a great view of the outdoors while also guarding privacy





The cantilevered roof shields the structure from the vagaries of the weather

result, cools the rest of the house," explains Mahesh.

The cantilevered roof too shields the structure from the vagaries of the weather. The roof covers and extends much beyond the structure. "I deliberately designed a sloping roof to increase the flow of air," says Mahesh. "If you have a horizontal ceiling, air stagnates, so I shaped the roof to get the air to move. At the same time, the roof protects the house during monsoons as the sloping design prevents rainwater from entering the premises. These are very basic principles of architecture." Seemingly simple, but a lot more complex than one might imagine. To make the house as environmentally friendly as possible, rainwater from the roof and grey water from the drains are used for irrigation.

The subtle undulations of the surrounding topography are reflected in the dwelling's design, which encourages constant movement from one space to another, from interior to exterior. This freedom is promoted by another striking feature of the house: the almost-total absence of doors. "There's so much to see and experience in Alibaug that here you ought to feel one with nature. The absence of doors allows you to convene with nature without any obstructions. This house is a great way to experience nature. Before this house was made, I hardly ever came here despite having a farmhouse on this site. But now this house inspires me to come here more often," says Farooq.

One doesn't even notice the absence of paint on the walls, the



because we didn't want them, but because there simply was no need for them. The way the house is constructed allows for plenty of air circulation. Even when the temperatures are soaring outside, in here it's perfectly cool and pleasant." The lounge area and the living room are separated by the open-air swimming pool. And one notices that the living room is much cooler than the lounge. "That's because of the water body that separates them. Because the breeze touches the water, it drops in temperature and as a



At night, the house presents a beautiful picture. Interestingly, the light fixtures are made of coconut shells and earthen pots





The mosaic-tiled swimming pool separates the lounge area from the rest of the house



exposed bricks only accentuating the earthy feel of the home. "I don't use colours. Instead I choose materials that lend their own," says Mahesh, explaining the use of stone, bricks, Mangalorean tiles and steel. There's something interesting about almost every component in the house: even the door separating the living room from the bathroom and kitchen. "We haven't used any adhesive or screws to put this door together. These are just wood panels intertwined around a steel rod," he points out.

There are still more surprises around the corner. The open bathroom in this house has its own little pool, complete with rain showers and strategically-placed oblique brick panels which provide the required privacy. "Essentially the bathroom is an open one," says Farooq, "but the landscaped gardens outside shield it from prying eyes," he assures us.

The purity and sheer simplicity of it all

belies the amount of thought that has gone into the planning of this domicile and reveals the genius of its creator. Out with all the ostentations, the flash and the pomp, and in with what is fresh, pure and simple.

On the second level of the house you have the bedroom, the only completely-enclosed area in the structure, and the wooden flooring in this room beautifully complements the whole rustic feel of the house. The bedroom is flanked by three viewing decks offering a great view of the scenery outside. "Those mountains there, can you see them? We didn't even know they existed till we came up on this viewing deck," says Farooq pointing out towards the valleys in the distance.

Ask Farooq what his favourite feature of this house is and he immediately replies, "The outdoors of course! After all, that's the reason we built this house: to frame this beautiful landscape."