

# ATHOME

A CONTEMPORARY SPACE THAT IS INNATELY INDIAN, WITHOUT BEING ETHNIC OR OVERDONE IN ANY WAY. IN THIS stylish Mumbai apartment, architect and designer Nitin Killawala has crafted an airy, open haven in the midst of urban chaos by using a carefully selected palette of natural materials...





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THE skyline of Mumbai's western suburbs is fast changing because of incentives and concessions given to developers by the city's Municipal Corporation. Not too long ago Juhu Scheme was one of the best residential neighbourhoods of the city. Today, it's testimony to a sad transformation, where free balcony areas, planters, shafts and so on, are encroached and enclosed to get that extra square feet of space.

In this scenario, sensitive addition and renovation comes like a breath of fresh air. And that's exactly what architect Nitin Killawala did when called upon to design an extension over an existing 40-year-old bungalow in the area, for a family that needed more space due to expansion of the family structure. The extend-

ed portion—an additional one-and-a-half storeys—sits atop the existing ground and first floor structure, with a thin vaulted slab enveloping the entire building.

The plan is very simple, because the requirements of the users were basic—a living, dining and kitchen area, plus two bedrooms. What transforms this basic need into special spaces is the large volume created by the vaulted slab, a deck cantilevering out into existing peltophorum trees and abundant use of natural light penetrating the entire house.

Nitin strongly believes in the dictum less is more, with his own add-on—that less certainly need not bore. The use of materials, details of furniture, placement of artefacts—each of these are



A striking copper cladded wall, set at an angle between the dining and kitchen areas makes a strong dividing line

design tools in themselves in his work; they are kept simple and fuss-free but highly appealing due to their innovative use.

Before you actually enter the homescape, you come upon an old ceremonial foot-wash made out of 'old thala' in copper, that welcomes you with floating rose petals and shimmering candles. All of a sudden you arrive in a large volume of whites, where a striking copper cladded wall between the dining and kitchen areas makes a strong dividing line at 150. In fact, the tilt of this wall is a starting point for the overall layout at the lower level—from sitting angles to positioning of the dining table to even the placement of beds. To substantiate this dynamic angle, white mosaic cement tiles are laid parallel to this tilted wall.

There is an innate Indianness in this interior, yet the influences are subtle, design strikingly contemporary in its look and feel without the blandness of European minimalism. As you go through the spaces, you realise that the Indianness is probably due to the selection of materials—the white mosaic tiles, presence of copper in strategic locations, chattai covers for windows, jute weaving in the dining chairs, all complemented with lots of whites on the floor,

walls and ceiling. The end result is one of vivid simplicity.

The architect also firmly believes that whether the home is small or large, one should enjoy each and every corner of the space. Size is subjective, but you cannot get away with creating a space without any justification.

One of the most striking features of this design is the deck jutting out of the dining corner. "Not a typical drawing board design, it is one of those elements which is improvised during site visits and you suddenly wonder, why didn't I think earlier?" laughs Nitin. It was originally planned as a normal verandah of 12' x 7' parallel to the dining space; the dimensions remain the same but it has been rotated to become 7' x 12', thus projecting out of the building line, creating pockets for planters and embracing the tree. "I find the level of the deck just perfect at the second floor level,

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The staircase has been used to innovatively create storage space—the face of the stairs is a huge colourful storage area

where you not only see tender leaves and yellow blossoming flowers at their crown but you are totally cut-off from the neighbouring buildings”, says Nitin. Interestingly, the deck has now become one of the striking features of the home even when walking past it on the street.

Visually connecting these spaces at the upper level is a ‘library lounge’ (over the kitchen), which becomes a quiet space for not only browsing of books but an intimate space for the family to spend time together, watch TV or a space for morning workouts, and listening to music. This small space of about 150 sq ft is flexible enough to accommodate various needs. The lounge is connected with a bridge made out of solid MS bars leading to the services and utility areas on top of the existing stair cabin.

Needless to say, the internal stairs connecting both levels is strategically located. Storage space has been innovatively created—the face of the stairs becomes a huge colourful storage unit including the bar. The space under the first flight houses a rack for shoes; under the quarter landing is linen storage and a larger area under the second flight is for kitchen related items and all the extras that

a home routinely seems to accumulate!

The two bedrooms with attached baths have been completely designed around the specific needs of their users. At the lower level is a ‘master’ bedroom, though there is nothing imposing about its treatment. An elegant but simple bed is placed at a 150 angle with a bent frosted glass headboard that detaches it from a long picturesque window. The bathroom showcases an abundant use of whites, with large picture windows abutting a prummeria tree to create an open, airy feel. The upper level bedroom next to the library lounge is for a teenaged daughter. One finds a continuity of design vocabulary in this room as well, with the addition of long lengths of shelves to keep the daughter’s collection of some 150 teddy bears and soft toys!

The architect, who clearly reinvents himself as a designer with each project, has nevertheless managed to create a space that epitomises his essential belief in simplicity, freshness and accentuating the personalities of the actual users. If one designs around these elements, he believes, you will be able to make a space that is a calm sanctuary no matter what your surrounds.