

JURY
speak

INSIDE **O**UTSIDE

Designer of the Year 2001
for weekend retreats

benny
kurii**akose**



Animated discussion:
Kiran Kapadia, Dean D'Cruz and Nitin Killawala.

The INSIDE OUTSIDE Designer of the Year 2001 award this year received a wide spectrum of entries from all over India, from traditional farmhouses to contemporary getaways, with locations ranging from the Himalayan foothills to coastal groves.

Nitin Killawala, Dean D'Cruz and Kiran Kapadia comprised our distinguished panel of judges. All three have been winners in previous INSIDE OUTSIDE Designer of the Year awards — Kiran Kapadia was nominated Designer of the Year, 2000, for Small Spaces (Residential), while earlier Nitin Killawala had received a special commendation for Atul Vidyalaya, Valsad (Schools), and Dean D'Cruz for the Pousada Tauma Resort, Goa (Resorts).

Many entries were strong contenders for the shortlist. After an exhaustive, animated discussion of the features which characterised each of them, the judges decided that the award should go to BENNY KURIAKOSE for his design for an unusual ocean-side retreat near Chennai.

All the judges stressed that since a weekend retreat must be recognisably different from a city house or an urban solution, the overriding criteri-

on should be how sensitively the built form responds to the location. They commended the winning entry's adaptation of traditional forms for a contemporary context.

Dean D'Cruz noted, 'I believe the design of this retreat explores the vernacular without being over ornate and successfully exploits the varying relationships of the inside to the outside through its pavilion-like architecture.'

Kiran Kapadia felt that Benny's design is a mature response to the client's programmatic needs. 'Benny has made appropriate use of traditional architectural elements, making an interesting juxtaposition of contemporary and traditional elements. Climatically the complex responds in a positive manner to the natural environment.'

Nitin Killawala emphasised that the design satisfies the primary needs of a weekend retreat, in creating spaces which blend with the natural environment. 'Being a relatively small site, the plan is evolved in a manner where a series of structures, fulfilling different functions, opens up in the natural surroundings. Clever use of simple construction techniques and cost-effective materials enhances interesting spaces within the structures and the open spaces which bind them together.'

All three judges commented on the interesting roof of the Pond House, which goes down towards the water, and whose form is reminiscent of the roof of Padmanabhapuram Palace. In conclusion, the judges noted that since in India we are fortunate in having a climate conducive to allowing us to enjoy the outdoors, the pavilion-like architecture is an essential part of the response. **●**

The judges with the Inside Outside team:
Dean, Nitin, Pooja, Sheila, Kiran, Gauri and Medhavi.



Meet **BENNY KURIAKOSE**

Designer of the Year, 2001



The Kumarakom Resort in Kerala, the public buildings in Dakshinachitra, the design of two earthquake rehabilitation villages after the Latur and Kutch earthquakes, all show in one way or another Benny Kuriakose's exploration of an architectural vocabulary that is cost-effective and appropriate to the environment, in terms of climate, landscape, materials, techniques and idiom.

Benny started his career by joining Laurie Baker on site in 1984: 'Not joining the office, because Baker did not have an office! Here I had my basic lessons in architecture, which involved learning as well as delearning.' Then followed a stint as Joint Director with COSTFORD in Trichur, involving the construction of demonstration buildings using various cost-effective techniques.

After receiving the Charles Wallace India Trust award for an MA in conservation studies at the University of York, Benny joined the Integrated Rural Technology Centre, Palakkad, and worked with the Kerala State Nirmithi Kendra, coordinating training programmes for architectural and civil engineering degrees and diplomas.

In the nineties Benny decided to go back and spend some time in the village where he was born, trying to make some furniture. 'All designers should try their hand at furniture, working in close interaction with craftsmen, learning about various timbers... Even a centimetre makes a huge difference!'

One day, Benny received a call from the actor Mammootty asking him to design his house. 'I went to meet him on location, we worked out various details — and that's how, after a long gap, I decided to come back to architecture.' In 1994, after the earthquake in Latur, Malayala Manorama asked Benny to design the village of Banegaon, which was sponsored by them. He then shifted to Chennai to do the Kerala buildings and the Public Buildings in Dakshinachitra (a project of the Madras Craft Foundation at Muttukadu on the Madras-Mahabalipuram Road). He now decided to start an office in Chennai.

Among Benny's conservation projects are reports on Srirangapatnam, Pondicherry, Aneundi Palace (Karnataka), and the Senate House in Madras University, as well as being a consultant on various INTACH projects.

Recent architectural work includes the layout for the village of Chapredi for the Kutch Earthquake Rehabilitation Project, the layout of the Pain and Palliative Care Centre at Calicut, and the Kumarakom Resort, Kerala. Benny has lectured as visiting faculty at the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi, and has been a member on the Task Force on Urban Development for the 8th and 9th Five Year Plans, State Planning Board, Government of Kerala. He has also served as a member on the Government of Kerala's Expert Committee for examining the feasibility of adopting low-cost technology in the construction of school buildings.

His design philosophy? 'I do not want to follow any particular style, but want to design spaces which people would like to use. I do not concentrate much on the elevation, and prefer to use natural materials. I believe that the view of the clients is important and I try to be sensitive about their preferences.' **O**