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AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2022, ₹150

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A TRANQUIL TREAT

reD Architects transform a cluster of apartments into a palatial home for close knit family of four in Delhi

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All architects dream of building structures from scratch to garner appreciation for their functional and aesthetical brilliance, but sometimes (mostly always), life has other plans. Today, The Watercourt House is a singular, spanking residence of a family located in the quiet bylanes of Vasant Vihar, Delhi, but that is not how it was when we first saw it. Myself, including Rajiv Parekh and Maithili Raut met with it as a three-storey apartment building on stilts, with a four bedroom home on each floor and its floor plates abutting the compound walls. Sometimes as we did in this home, architects have to put on the cap of a skilled negotiator and mediator, finding hacks along the way.

Our foremost concern was establishing a connection between all floors—the basement, the stilt level, and the top three storeys. Given the buckets of light, the capital city of Delhi offers, puncturing a skylight through the floors established a visual and almost ethereal connection between the levels. However, with bright sunshine comes scorching heat, and to beat it, we built a water trough along the aperture of the skylight for insulation. The six inches of moving water in the trough created a ripple effect of light and shadow in the central courtyard as the sun changed its direction throughout the day. Furthermore, to prevent evaporation of this water and eliminate the glare, a motor-operated translucent blind closes out this opening during extreme summer.

Next, we took on the case of making the compound wall pleasing to the eye. We built a concrete wall on top of the existing one and covered it with vegetation thriving on drip irrigation. The menial gap of six feet between the floor plate and the wall would also provide sufficient light to the green wall. A home is successful not only when its interiors are spatially well-planned, but also when the exterior is integrated within the soul of the indoor spaces. Now, the premises enjoyed a staggering green wall and the context of a garden across the road. Taking it a notch further, we switched standard glass railings with a Ficus hedge to blur the boundaries between the outdoors and indoors to facilitate uninterrupted, breathtaking views from the living room balconies.

Once we broke down rigid exterior boundaries of the home to create soft thresholds for a seamless flow, we began working on the interiors. The family—parents and two sons—had divided the floors amongst themselves. The floor directly above the stilt belonged to the parents, and the remaining two belonged to one son each. They are well into adulthood and would require separate homes soon. The floors remain connected via service lifts and staff staircases to balance private and service spaces. Adjacent to the home theatre on the entertainment floor in the basement, we designed a lounge enveloped by vibrant wallpaper. With a spotlight on the casual nature of the space, we even matched the seating to the wallpaper's vividity. Following this transitional space, a long, mild steel dining table stands just a sliver away from the atrium. A pantry, concealed behind a curved fluted partition, serviced the area.

Standing under the atrium, as one cranes their neck to marvel at the spatial volume, a wooden bridge at the stilt level surprises. This bridge leads to the main entrance of the house at the stilt level, giving the entrance an interesting spin, since it happens to be at the centre of the home. The atrium space in the basement has ribbed limestone cladding on the columns, forming a series of arches braced with a thin mild steel plate. This industrial-esque edge condition and eye-grabbing work by Remen Chopra W Van Der Vaart keep up with the youthful nature of the rest of the floor. Beyond this, a bar made of thin mild steel fins boasts a motor-operated cabinet shutter. >>

Framing the Flos floor lamp sourced from Firefly Lighting are the arched portals clad in ribbed limestone and outlined with a fine mild steel edge detail that has been crafted on site. Remen Chopra W Van Der Vaart's artwork takes centre stage in the basement courtyard, illuminated by the slab-cut skylight above. Enveloping the opulent home is a sea of greens glimpsed by the picture window above the artwork



A textural delight, the custom made poker table with its flaming red Mascheroni chairs procured through Sources Unlimited forms a focal point in the basement bar. Overhead magnetic track with hanging lights from Flos available at Firefly Lighting lend symmetry. Flanked between a barcode-inspired black stone wall and a curved fluted partition, the ribbed mild steel bar anchors itself at the far end of the basement

With a custom designed basin, the first floor powder bathroom in copper finishes is furnished with sanitary fittings by CEADDESIGN from C Bhogilal FACING PAGE, FROM LEFT Treated with textured paint from Colour Coats, the first floor passage flaunts a concrete finish with clean copper highlight strips that blend in with the copper finished powder bathroom hidden behind a concealed door. In the foreground are old Delhi map prints—a heightened point of interest of the family; Set against a backdrop of fluted wood and mirror panelling is a Flexform bed with coordinated side tables, all from Sources Unlimited. Paired with achromatic bedding from Pottery Barn, the guest room follows a minimal and neutral palette

A custom-made poker and pool table complete the entertainment zone, set against a black three-dimensional limestone wall. The stilt floor is a car parking with motorised boundary walls in the front, and as a secondary area with access to the service road, flank the home at the back. The parent's floor's living room flaunts classical elements of painted mouldings on the wall and period furniture pieces that match up with their acquired taste for all things conventionally royal. Combined with the concave pane of the window that brings in concentrated light and hazes visibility, the living room embodies the stardom of the dated eras—soft but persistent. The pièce de résistance here are the dynamic, fabric and mirror-clad fins which separate the living room and dining area.

In bringing the conflicting lifestyles of an early riser and a night owl at a confluence, the primary bedroom has separate his and her suites, each complete with bathrooms and walk-in wardrobes. Vast, moving partitions and a lounge in between present the ideal mid-ground to the couple's dilemma. On the other hand, the sons' floors have a more contemporary language since they appreciate a sleeker and modern style. Although in both the units, the living rooms are at the front of the house, the attached balconies on different sides set them apart, all while making the volume of the home fascinating. Each floor also has a guest bedroom with a walk-in wardrobe and bathroom—it is up to the sons to decide its function as a future kids' bedroom or something else. The primary bedrooms for the sons have a traditional layout compared to their parents, yet it does not skip the grandeur. A lounge, notionally segregated by a pivoted TV screen from the bed, and sizeable bathrooms with his and her wardrobe space and basins brew luxury generously.

We even accommodated a garden on the terrace since the street level had no give. A few trees planted within four ft bedding of soil with the view of the garden across the street created a stimulated oasis—a zen garden, if you may call it so! This floor coalesces tranquillity with amenities like a gym and massage room. The guest bathrooms of the home were stacked one above the other on each floor in the original plan, so to add a fun twist, we played with the materiality in one. This spirit of experimentation and exploration governed us throughout the project, leading us to make one zealous and successful intervention after the other. We started with one goal in my mind, and by the end, the result reflected our vision and catharsis—a home for the family to share love and laughter and create memories! ♦

