MY SPACE : BIOME ENVIRONMENTAL SOLUTIONS  GREEN UNCOVERED  DESIGN DESTINATION : AUROVILLE

# HOME REVIEW

VOL 13 ISSUE 2 FEBRUARY 2014 TOTAL PAGES 164

RS 100 HOME-REVIEW.COM

ARCHITECT SHIGERU BAN`S JAPANESE MASTERY

REACH FOR THE SKY WITH HY ARCHITECTURE

## CHILD OF THE FOREST

ARCHITECTURE BRIO´S STREAM-LINED DEMEANOUR

**GREEN BY DESIGN** FROM SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS TO GREEN CRUSADERS & MUCH MORE

*Landscapes*

# SERENITY IN GEOMETRY

*With only 5000 square feet, angles that challenged geometry and a public thoroughfare in the premises, landscape architect Kalpak Bhave took on the challenge of designing a serene outdoor space for the Dawoodi Bohra Jamaat in Udaipur.*

Text By Chryselle D'Silva Dias
Photographs Courtesy The Architect

The lifeless compound is a sorry sight before the designers took it up and energised it with clever touches.

If before-and-after scenes captivate you, this one is worth looking at. About a year ago, landscape architect Kalpak Bhave was hired to design the grounds of the Dargah-e-Luqmani Dawoodi Bohra Jamaat in Udaipur, Rajasthan. The shrine is an important place of pilgrimage and prayer for the Bohra community. Built in the heart of the city, the building is surrounded by busy roads and a bustling city. In the middle of all this chaos, creating a calm and prayerful atmosphere through effective landscaping was a challenge.

"The old images are important because they place the surroundings in the context in which we began the design.
The authenticity of the space was not maintained. There was an improper match between the structure, which is of great importance, and the landscape which was utilitarian at best," says architect Kalpak Bhave.

The shrine itself is about 400 years old and is decorated with traditional inlay work peculiar to Rajasthan. With the roads on either side of the shrine, passers-by often used the courtyard as a thoroughfare and this had to be factored into the design. The area available for landscaping was just 5,450 square feet which was another challenge.

The once decrepit courtyard has now been transformed into a space filled with flowering trees and evergreen shrubs.

Elucidating on the design Bhave adds "The entire area had no plantings and we had to design every square foot from scratch. The structure is special and significant and the landscape had to complement it. We had to design a space that would not overpower the main shape of the building. In addition, the paved areas had to be retained for use during events, so that ruled out big stretches of green lawn. In the end, we came up with a subtle planting scheme with patches of greenery limited to small stretches."

The plants used were ones that added colour and structure to the area along with being easy to maintain. Plumeria Acutifolia (Champa) blooms in the courtyard while shrubs like Ficus Nitida, Lantana, Heliconia and Asparagus Foxtail dot the pebbled grounds.

On the sides, Quisqualis Indica (Madhumalti) climbs over the brackets and the pergola. Native plantation that too kept limited becomes a green feature as water requirement is kept at a reasonable level and the survival rate of the plants being high will keep replacement costs down.

Another major factor that influenced the design was that the shrine was not parallel to the road and the geometry of the design had to be worked out accordingly.

"We created the inlay patterns in such a way that the difference in angles is not easily discernible," says Bhave. "We also used creepers in a wider formation tapering towards the back, to identify the angles. The shrine was on the same level as the pathway on which people walked and we felt that this needed to be corrected to maintain the purity and sanctity of the space," adds the landscapist.

The architects had to design a space that would not overpower the main shape of the building. In the end, they came up with a subtle planting scheme with patches of greenery limited to small stretches.

Lowering the level of the pathway not only automatically put the shrine on a higher level, but also helped the passers-by as they now had to climb up and down a mere two steps. The pathway was separated and given a distinct identity. The "dead wall" running along the boundary of the site was upgraded with projecting brackets and pergolas to cut down the height, as it was not in proportion to the floor space.

The structure is decorated with inlay work typical of Rajasthan and Bhave used that as an inspiration for the inlay work in the courtyard as well.

"We cut down costs by using locally available red and green stone for the inlay work, as the process itself was expensive. Such an element was required to upgrade the area and make it visually more pleasing and to cater to all the outdoor needs of the area." Though the use of local stone brought down costs, workmanship was still kept at a high level. The trust that manages the site also provides lodging and boarding facilities next to the shrine.

As a result, this is a busy space with Indian and international pilgrims visiting it throughout the year. The new design caters for this influx with plenty of open space which is also well-lit at night.

Concealed electrical fixtures direct beams of light at the shrine and around the courtyard leading to a pleasant atmosphere at all times.

In the end, Bhave feels that "the ambience and the feel of the space have been upgraded to a better level. Now people come here to not only pray but to also just sit in a peaceful space and read."

✉ kalpakbhave@rediffmail.com
www.kalpakybhave.com

The simple geometrical patterns keep the paved areas intact; the abundant plantings have created a beautifully shaded and serene space.