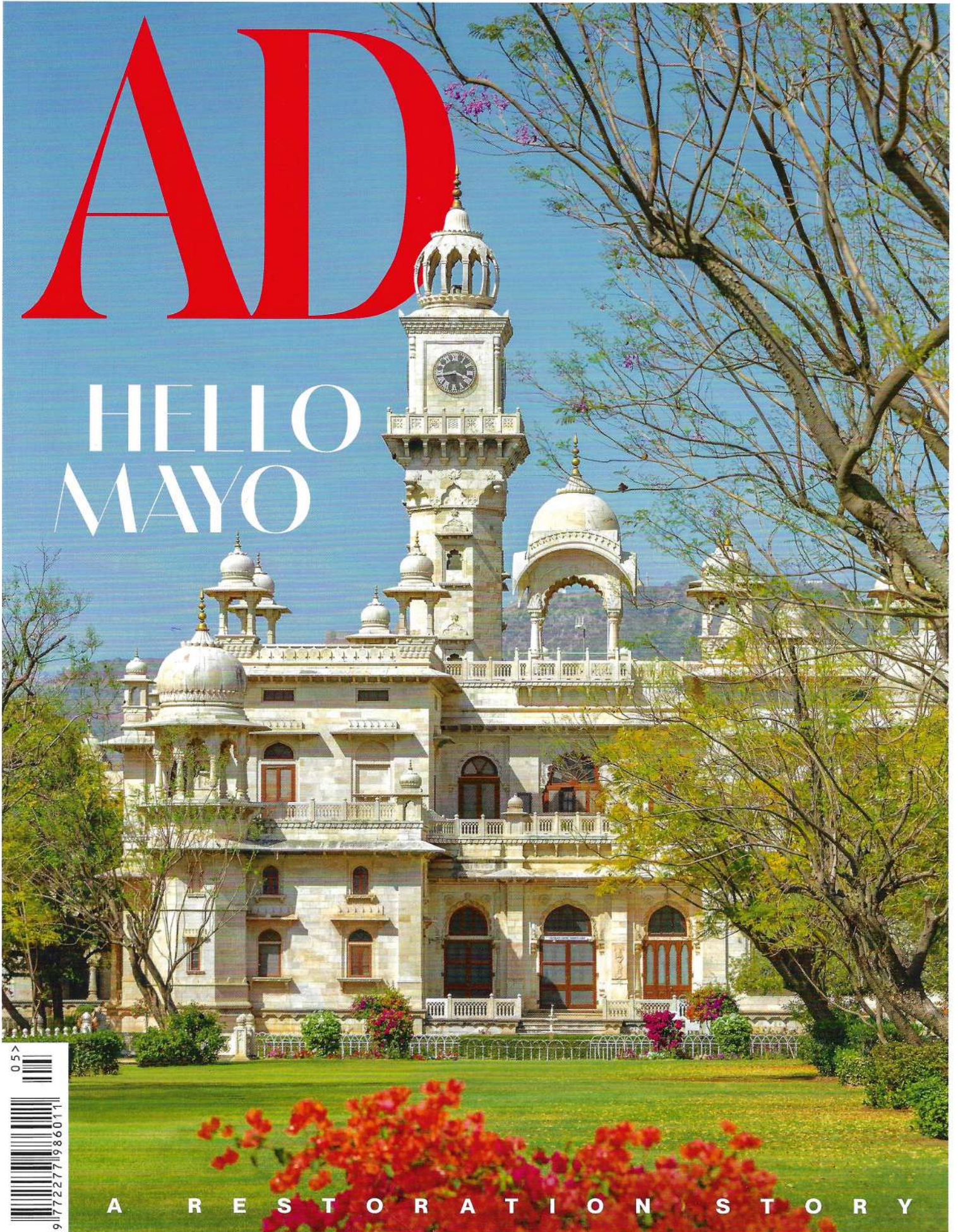


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A R E S T O R A T I O N S T O R Y



# KUNAL MANIAR

The AD100 architect's

latest project is a massive

terrace garden teeming with

native indigenous plants,

creating a microclimate of its own and

a green sanctuary for the homeowners —

right in the middle of the city.

WRITER RAJASHREE BALARAM PHOTOGRAPHER GAJENDRA MANDREKAR

**A** 6,000-square-foot terrace garden jutting out from the fourth-floor apartment of a high-rise in South Mumbai is not exactly commonplace—especially not when the green haven stands suspended like a jewel in the heart of a concrete jungle.

For landscape architect Kunal Maniar, the project was a feat of sorts and also a minor spectacle in its making. Mechanical cranes lumbered below the apartment for days to haul—four floors up—full-grown trees and shrubs of moringa, kamini (*murraya exotica*), and frangipani as well as heaps of stone boulders. Of course, by then, Maniar had already spent a couple of months overzealously studying and confirming the load-bearing capacity of the terrace with a team of structural engineers. (To put things in perspective, the planters lining the periphery alone are five feet deep and wide!) “No matter how much one talks about how we must try to cultivate a lot of greenery around us,” says Maniar, “one cannot be reckless and design a grand, water-guzzling terrace garden in a city where so many people still queue up at the public water taps for their daily needs.”

A minor challenge was also involved in persuading homeowners Shrikant and Aradhana Somani to see the magnificent possibility of their terrace. “At first, they only wanted a pleasant space to host weekend parties—basically, a wide expanse of artificial lawns and some pretty potted plants. But given that the terrace is even bigger than the apartment that it's attached to, that would have been sacrilege. Also, there are only 52 weekends in a year to host parties. In the remainder of the year, the garden had to resonate with them.”

Maniar divided the terrace into two areas: a semi-covered space with a metal pergola that eventually became the client's favourite work-from-home area, and an open expanse dictated by artificial lawns, stone boulders chiselled to form water reservoirs, and indigenous trees. “As

the terrace is exposed to direct sunlight, we decided to create a microclimate by using a lot of tree species and tree covers that could help cut the rate of evaporation. My team (Hamza Barafwala, Pandurang Patil, and Gajendra Mandrekar) planted a variety of xerophytes that store moisture and hardly demand any water. We also planted indigenous trees to compensate for the heat generated by the artificial lawns.”

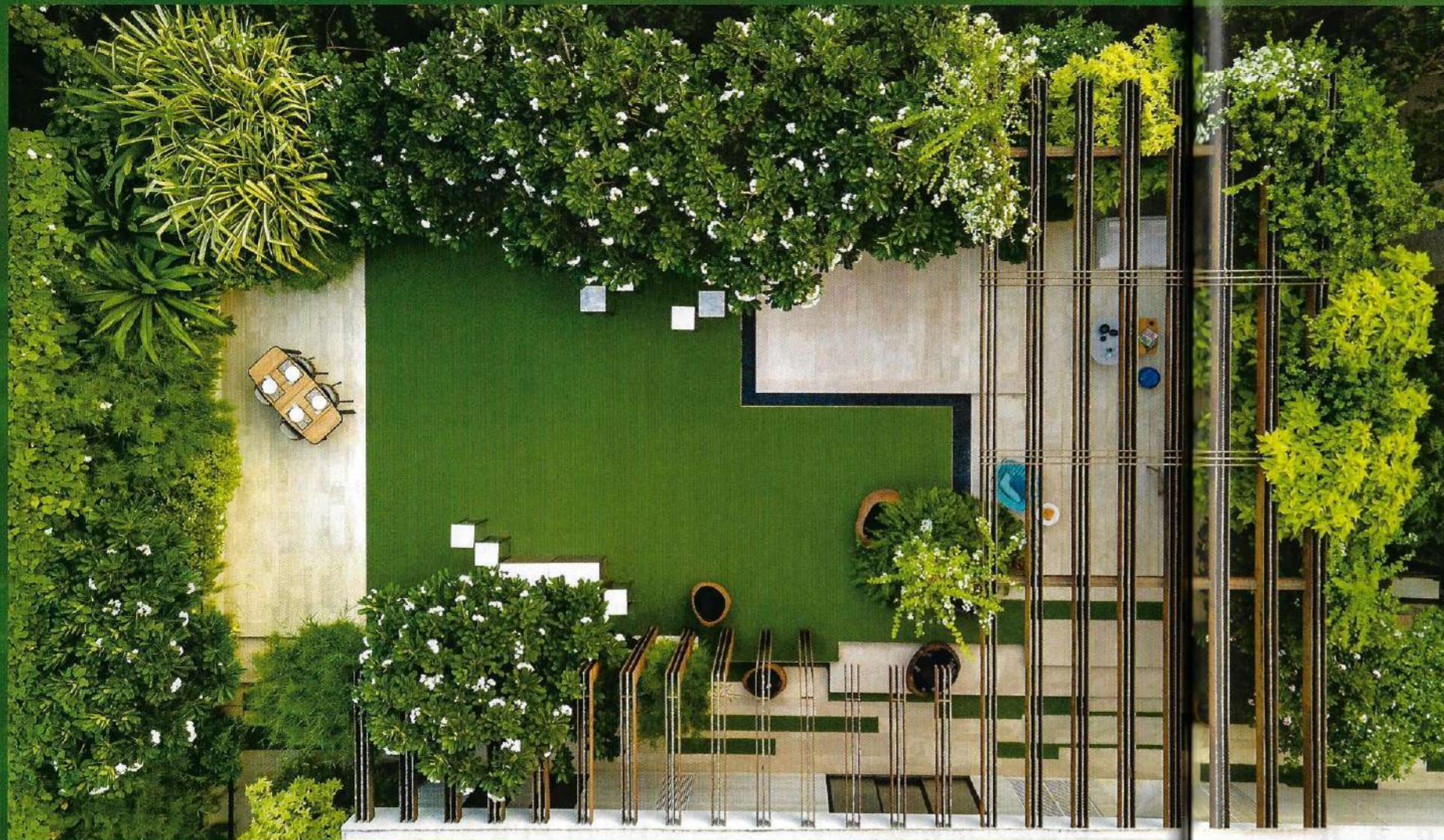
Maniar passionately advocates the use of indigenous trees and hopes that landscape architects will begin to consider their benefits. “Rather than using exotic foreign plants, one should consider trees that our forefathers relied on for their medicinal and nutritive value, such as tamarind, moringa, marigold, kamini, and so on.” He feels that by including these in urban gardens, one can encourage farmers to grow more of these plants and open up an avenue of income for them.

A mindful blend of ecology and design occupies the heart of Maniar's practice. Beauty for the sake of beauty doesn't excite him anymore. “Most of my client's interactions with the garden can only be in the night, so it didn't make sense to have a profusion of vibrant flowers. Instead, we have a lot of self-luminous white bougainvillea, and to offer a multi-sensory experience, an abundance of fragrant jasmine, orange jessamine, and frangipani.”

To prevent dehydration, he chose planters made of non-porous limestone. Even the soil mix has measured proportions of coconut husk and sand for moisture balance. As a matter of principle, he refuses to let artificial lawns take up more than 20 percent of any project as they inhibit the growth of healthy soil organisms.

“A garden is not just about pretty foliage and beautiful colours. When you spend time in a thoughtfully designed one, it can be a soulful experience,” says Maniar. He is happy to note that the terrace has become a daily haunt for scores of butterflies, bees, and birds. The stories they bring in and take out with them keep the world connected in more ways than one. ▀





ABOVE: A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW SHOWCASES THE NATURAL COVER OF INDIGENOUS TREES AND THE SEMI-COVERED END OF THE TERRACE WITH THE METAL PERGOLA. RIGHT: STONE BOULDERS CHISELLED AND "SCOOPED OUT" TO FORM WATER RECEPTACLES ADORN THE PERGOLA.



BELOW: TERRACOTTA POTS WITH XEROPHYTIC SHRUBS OF PANDANUS ODORIFER IN THEIR FULL BLOOM OF WHITE KEWRA FLOWERS MAKE FOR A FRAGRANT CORNER. BOTTOM: THE OUTDOOR DINING AREA IS SET ON A LIMESTONE FLOOR ON ONE SIDE OF THE TERRACE.

