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GOOD DESIGN CHANGES EVERYTHING

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with this gorgeous landscape
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AN ENCHANTING GETAWAY

Blurring boundaries between the indoors and outdoors, Kunal Maniar creates magic with a sea of green at 'Mirrabelle', a weekend home in Thal, Alibag

FEATURE **NEERJA KAPADIA** PHOTOGRAPHS **GAJENDRA MANDREKAR AND SUMER MEHTA**



(FACING PAGE) An aerial view of the inverted C-shaped property displays the synergy between the house and the landscape. (THIS PAGE) The house opens up into the lawn, giving visitors a sneak peek of the garden from the gravelled driveway.

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Current landscaping trends implemented in this project are xeriscaping and planting indigenous species. People are consciously shifting away from imported and high-maintenance, water-intensive, exotic species. . . something I couldn't be happier about!

Kunal Maniar, Principal Architect, Kunal Maniar and Associates



(FACING PAGE) An abundant lush thicket of ferns envelopes the jacuzzi, providing the feeling of optimum serenity, as well as privacy.
(THIS PAGE) A narrow serpentine path guides you through a wonderfully dense boscaje of tropical planting.



KUNAL MANIAR

Principal Architect, Kunal Maniar and Associates

Holding degrees in horticulture and landscape architecture, this University of Melbourne graduate established his practice, Kunal Maniar and Associates in 2002. Environmental-conscious solutions with a strong flavour of tropical wilderness form the ethos of Kunal's practice. Over two decades, the South Mumbai-based firm has executed a wide spectrum of work, ranging from luxury hospitality projects, city houses and cosy weekend homes among others. Their esteemed clientele includes prominent personalities such as the Ambanis', Shah Rukh Khan, and Mahendra Singh Dhoni among others.

Enormous calathea lutea leaves act as a filter between the wooden gazebo and the pavilion, lending a sense of intimacy to the space. Every element of this landscape has thoughtfully been executed by Kunal along with his valuable team members, Aayushi Pendhari, Pandurang Patil and Tejes Kathe.



Sprawled over two acres, this landscape haven in Alibag takes inspiration from the ideals of tropical living. Landlocked, there was nothing interesting about the immediate surroundings, offering Kunal Maniar the challenge of forging a symbiotic relationship between the landscape and the home, a feat he took on excitedly.

With the architecture being moulded by Kersi Kapadia and the interior design being helmed by Kavita Trivedi, this house is constructed in the heart of the property. Divided into two halves, organically giving way to a straightforward layout, it has a front and back garden, both planned with individualistic themes, plush with tropical planting of mostly native species.

"When I first saw the property, I knew I would modify the existing hardscape, such as the jarring sharp-edged tarred driveway. We changed it to gravel, which reduced the sharpness, and made the path blend seamlessly with the softscape," says Kunal about a key design element.

An old water tower was refurbished, giving it a new identity. This provides viewers a vantage point from which they can observe the entire property. A curtain of ivy crawling up the towering structure lends it the charm of an old Bavarian castle. Greeting visitors with a riot of colours, the driveway is lined

with a vibrant palette of mixed plantations, from where they can see a sun-kissed lawn interspersed with native trees. Gradually leaving the colour behind, a sanctum of sweet-scented white flowers encompasses the back garden. Mature indigenous frangipanis stand tall around the pool, providing shade to the jacuzzi. A day bed is tucked on the side to form an open lounge area, while a gigantic plant envelopes the entire pavilion.

To combat the harsh Alibag sun, sufficient shaded spots that could be enjoyed in any weather have been incorporated. Water scarcity, another geographical challenge was sensitively tackled by maximising permeable spaces.

When talking about the planning perspective of the bungalow, Kunal said, "Flat-roof terraces at different levels with seating areas awarded unscathed vistas of the surrounding gardens, which made me focus on the bird's eye view whilst planning their landscape, owing to the fact that these views would be seen a lot from above."

While the whole property is a showstopper, the frangipani trees win hands down. Minimising challenges by turning constraints into opportunities, Kunal has shown exemplary landscape architecture expertise in Amit Sabharwal and Gayatri Khanna Sabharwal's holiday home. ☐