

farmhouse

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RESEARCH STUDIO

Weekend Revelry

Megha Patel-Vadodaria and Keyur Vadodaria of PVDRS (Patel Vadodaria Design Research Studio) design the interior and the pool area of a farmhouse in Ahmedabad for a large extended family comprising three generations, thoughtfully creating a design which is appropriate to their lifestyle and needs.

After 10 years in London, Megha and Keyur were really not immersed in the architectural concerns of a country such as India. 'Using low impact materials would only get one a very niche practice there,' says Keyur. However, he has been awarded a PhD degree by Loughborough University, his research relating to energy efficiency and thermal comfort in buildings...which has translated well in his response to the hot, harsh climate of Ahmedabad in this project.

At the top of the clients' wish list was a pool, so Megha and Keyur decided to make it an interactive space, rather than one where the residents would just have a dip and then get back into the house. The designer duo were also charged with designing the interior for the existing bungalow on a site which has an 18-hole 'Nicklaus Design' golf course, (by 18-time Major Champion Jack Nicklaus) created with an understanding not only of quality design and playability, but also a respect for construction and maintenance requirements. If there's one thing that



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could eclipse Jack Nicklaus' legacy as a player, it's his legacy as a course designer. This is one of the greenest and longest cart courses in India. With its characteristic rolling contours, sand and beach bunkers, water bodies and 'island greens', the site and its surroundings present a rather special backdrop to this project.

The challenge was to design a swimming pool, draw in the tranquil and idyllic space of its surroundings and create an inviting place for the family to spend time together on weekends. The living room was designed to offer the flexibility of creating multiple seating layouts based on what 'event' it housed. The elderly grandparents may want to just sit around and talk, the par-



ents may prefer to watch a sports event on a large screen and the children could want to play. The seating can be configured to facilitate the type of activity as well as the number of people involved.

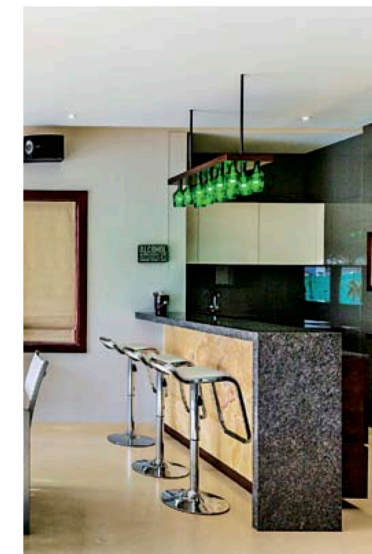
To provide a place that can be used for partying, recreation and retreat by the diverse age group, a multitude of spatial experiences were created. The verandah leading from the living room to the pool and garden

was extended to provide a shaded place for gathering and relaxing. The wooden deck, an extension of the verandah, was designed such that it can be used for al fresco dining as well as a 'swim-up bar' where mojitos can be enjoyed together with a swim in the Ahmedabad summer. River washed granite and the ultra-durable, dense Brazilian ipe hardwood with an oil finish has been used in these spaces.

This 'swim-up bar,' consists of four, round swivel stools at the periphery of the pool, which swimmers can sit on, while getting served their choice of drinks from a kind of 'service pit' in the deck outside. The pit, normally concealed from view, is revealed by removing some slats from the deck, which have been laid over the hollowed space below. The person in the pit is at the eye-level of the swimmers whom he is serving while they are

in the pool. The 'floating' gazebo was placed centrally at the far end of the pool, framing the golf course and the horizon beyond, while it provides a place for a 'break-out' group and simultaneously defines the pool area for the children.

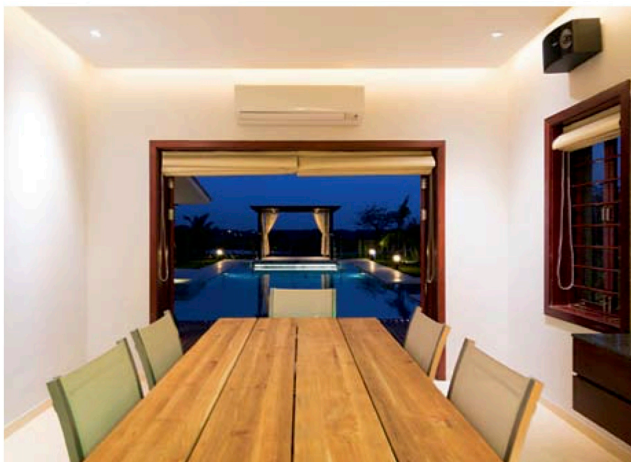
Cues were taken from the physical context, even from the angle of the sunset, with a view to bringing the expanse of space within the bungalow. In response to the immediate surround-



ings, spatial elements have been used to create axial relationships between the inside, outside and landscape beyond. The pool, the swim-up bar and the gazebo in the pool form an axial relationship between the dining room and the 9th hole on the golf course in the far landscape. To strengthen the connectivity with the outside, the windows in the dining room were replaced with doors. With an extremely strong axis such as this, a more human scale has been introduced for balance by the diametrically opposite axis formed between the Baja shelf and the champa tree in the pool.

The Baja shelf is usually an oversized second step in a swimming pool that allows for a standing area covered

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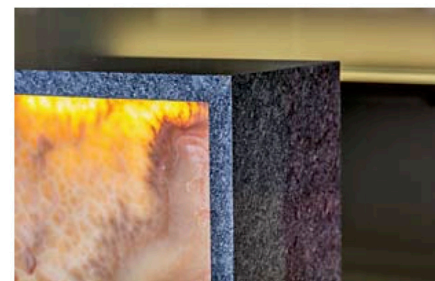
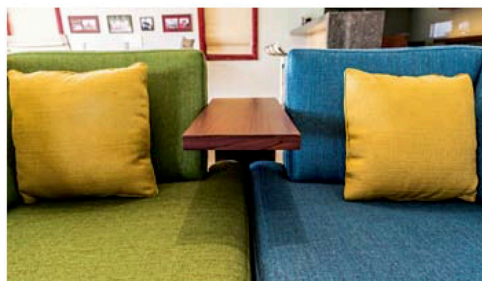


by a few inches of water, just enough to get your feet wet. The shelf lets you sit with children, without full immersion in the water. Some even set up lounge chairs on their Baja shelf with an umbrella to protect from the sun. 'Here, however, this shelf is not large enough to accommodate several people, as it would have reduced the area of the pool significantly. We also abandoned the idea of using hot water jets, as they would have added to the cost and maintenance significantly,' says Keyur.

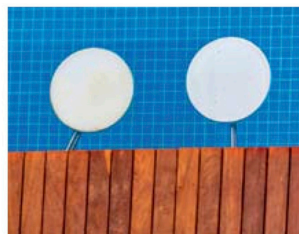
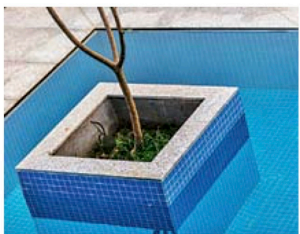
The perimeter overflow channel in the pool was designed such that the water appears to float at deck level. Known as the Lautner Knife Edge, it creates an experience that is unmatched in pool design. Named for John Lautner, the architect and Frank Lloyd Wright, his protégé who initiated the concept, this is the

most popular of the perimeter overflow types, and one of the most challenging. In this detail, water flows to the edge of the pool at deck level and spills into a slot right at the edge of a dry deck. But when you approach a knife-edge perimeter-overflow pool, you look down inside the pool to the full depth of water and your feet remain dry. It's an attention-getting detail, because it mystifies, intrigues and delights those who know nothing about how these systems are made.

However, creating a perimeter overflow pool is not for beginners. In addition to tremendous skill in developing clear and explicit plans, it requires expertise in configuring plumbing systems and pouring concrete. They're also expensive, so if you miss the mark in either design or installation, your nightmares are only just beginning. Setting things straight after the



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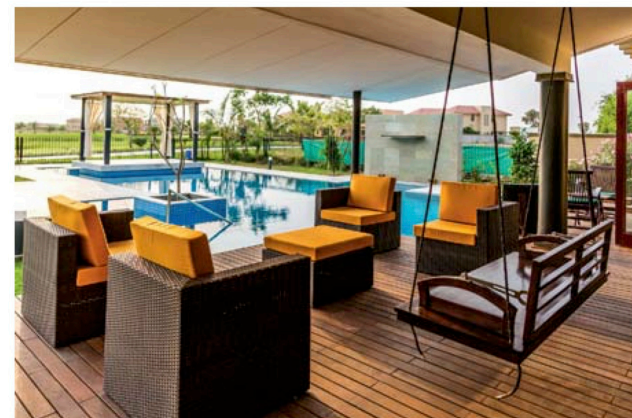
A human scale has been introduced for balance by the axis formed between the Baja shelf and the champa tree in the pool.



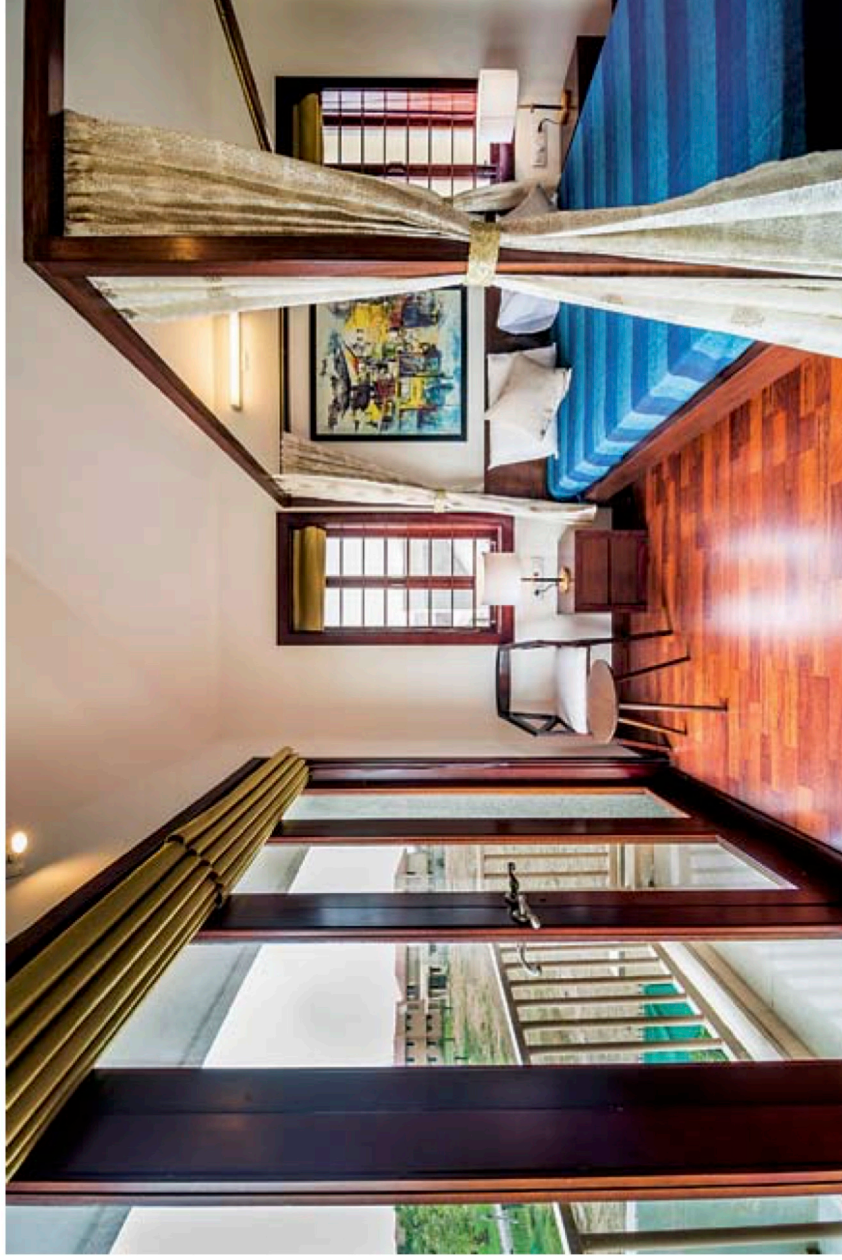
fact can be supremely difficult without starting over again entirely. 'We're happy to say that we achieved all this with local contractors,' says Keyur. In the west, this is a speciality installation and as one manufacturer puts it rather succinctly, 'These pools must be done correctly on initial installation because the consequence of getting it wrong are almost too grim to consider.'

The internal layout of the bungalow was modified to create and strengthen spatial relationships between the

inside and the outside. The living room was designed such that it doubled as an entertainment zone. Natural materials (hand polished teak wood, granite, back lit onyx stones and hand-woven fabric) were used to create spaces with a distinct character. Every attempt has been made to reduce glare, including using a pale grey for the walls and an extra layer of white curtains on the windows. A drop down screen at the end of the deep verandah shields it from solar gain on the southwest aspect



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of the bungalow. 'There is attention to details in this project, with a "crafted" feel to it. We were able to add bespoke elements because labour is affordable in India,' says Keyur.

'We adopted a participatory approach where the client was made a part of the design team. The "wall tattoo", bearing a quote about family relationships, was designed in collaboration with the client, while a collection of artwork by budding artists from the Baroda School was carefully used to give an identity and scale to each space,' says Keyur. Adds Megha, 'I even ask clients what they do when they get up on a Sunday morning...where they have their coffee.... In fact, the first three meetings we have are usually at the home of the client, rather than at our office, so that we can get a better feel of their needs and aspirations.' The

exercise has evidently been hugely successful here, since Keyur says, 'We were able to photograph the place only two months after handing it over, because it was constantly in use.'

Megha and Keyur assert that they are happy to work at any scale, ranging from the design of a door handle to buildings and their surroundings. With a research-led design approach, they address a multitude of issues that include client requirements and aspirations, place, culture, materials, texture, light and wind. Central to their approach is the focus on sustainability, with the aim of reducing the environmental impact of their intervention. **15**