



An Eco-friendly Retreat of Luxury

By Sharmila Chand

Sinclair's Retreat can be construed as a green haven in the Dooars Valley, which stands out as an example of how architects and interior designers have used natural materials to create an eco-friendly retreat.

The retreat, spread across 20 acres of virgin greenery, is located at Chalsa Hill, overlooking the Dooars Valley. Sinclair's Retreat offers the ideal break from the stresses of a fast-paced urban life. The property is designed to blend with the natural setting; typifying comfort in the luxuriantly abundant environment.

Here, extensive landscaping initiatives were rendered meaningless as nature itself has taken the task of embellishment. The resort is built without disturbing the natural undulation of the terrain. The entire resort has single level buildings around huge green belts. The landscaping has been done with minimum concrete structures. Overall, the pristine character of the built space has been retained.

Landscape design involved punctuating the spaces into humanly perceptible chunks of greenery, coupled with paving and illumination. Paver

blocks have been used to ensure that all rain water is charged back into the earth. The backdrop of natural green is omnipresent. Trees and hedges have been used as visual screens. Use of organic manures and leaf litters generated internally are used for soil enrichment as opposed to the use of chemicals.

One can easily infer that at Sinclair's Retreat, the use of concrete and steel has been avoided as far as practicable in the rendering of spaces while emphasising on the locally available natural materials.

The First Impression

Being the first point of contact to the property, the rendering of this area is crucial to the overall design process. The lobby opens up directly through a double

height lounge area, flanked by seating arrangements on either side. The lounge area overlooks a stunning green lawn that slowly slopes down to provide a breathtaking, panoramic view of the scenic and serene Gorumara valley.

It was felt that indirect illumination should be used and for this handmade lights were designed, so that they became a part of the paneling itself. Large glazing areas were created to bring in the natural light to the indoors.

Generally the corridors tend to be the most uninteresting place of a given property; hence here the walls are envisaged as exhibitory backgrounds for paintings, which give a colourful vibe to the place.

A Grove, a Tree and a Herd

Bamboo Grove, an eco-friendly café of the property with views of lush green surroundings, is characterised by the abundance of bamboo used in texturing the walls and the ceiling of the café. The tables and benches were designed by planks of local wood fastened by bolts in order to present a robust rustic look.

The Banyan Tree is a multi-cuisine



restaurant of the property, which offers a panoramic view of the Gorumara valley along with an exciting choice of food. The central theme of the restaurant whirls around a tree trunk, dissipating into the vibrancies of colour and liveliness of the upholstery. The restaurant is a place where a variety of people gather hence interplay of mood lights flanks the peripheral walls.

The Tusker Bar, a tranquil haven to relax with sundowners and aperitifs of your choice, along with an appetising array of fixings and mixers, is imbibed with the wildness of fauna. Elephant rules the space! A huge graphics showing a herd of the great and loveable beasts dominates an entire wall. Bamboo and straw mats are extensively used to accentuate the effect.

The resort also has an orchard, growing a variety of fruits. Exotic vegetables like cherry tomatoes, broccoli, red cabbage, red, yellow, green, and purple bell peppers, celery, Chinese celery, brussel sprouts are grown here, organically. Malabar nut, *basak*, *tulsi*, aloe vera are also grown and these are served as juice to the guests for their therapeutic properties. The twigs and leaves collected from the garden area are shredded and compost is made out of it.

Suites Suiting the Eco-friendly

Being a resort, to add character and variety to the sensory experiences, the three suites of the property draw their inspirations from different local influences.

Centrally located is the 'Burra Sahib Kothi', which is reminiscent of the exotic, quaint and luxurious lifestyle of the colonial tea planters. Embellished with period style furniture, the room décor gives a feel of the nineteenth century British interiors.

How to Reach

The Dooars valley stretches from river Teesta on the west to river Sankosh on the east; an area covering roughly 130 km by 40 km. The Dooars forms major part of the Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal. Jalpaiguri is linked by rail to all major Indian cities. You can also take a direct flight from Kolkata/Delhi to Bagdogra. Then take two hours comfortable drive through breathtaking scenery to reach Chalsa Hill, in Dooars.

Another suite is the 'Bandook Babu Kothi.' *Bandook Babu* in local dialect means the lodge for forest rangers/hunting lodge. The natural texture of raw planks and dead tree trunks graphically creates a travelogue of the place that was once a hunter's den. However, now only the cottage style is recreated, devoid of any stuffed animals, etc. The round spherical lamp in the suite represents the moon.

On the other side of the property is the 'Nouveau Ville' - a contemporary eclectic style cottage. Elegant wall paper, platform bed and furniture together endow the suite with a distinctive urbane character in its form and appearance.

Each of these suites comes with its private lawn that can be enjoyed even from the indoors.

Each of the 66 well appointed cottage-style air-conditioned Superior Rooms at the resort seems to be inspired by the need to provide simplicity and luxury along with contemporary elegance. And they seem to live up to

their inspiration really well, as they afford an unspoilt natural landscape along with functional convenience.

Facilities at the Resort

The impressive range of facilities at the resort include a large sized swimming pool, set amidst a cluster of palm trees; an expansive health club with gymnasium and massage facilities; a luxurious spa with facilities to offer massages and other therapies, both indoors and outdoors; a period style billiards table; facilities of playing cricket, including night cricket under floodlight; a host of indoor and outdoor games options; children's park and a library.

Materials Used

Great emphasis has been given to the use of local labour and handmade furniture and artifacts, thereby restricting the use of industrial or modular products to a bare minimum.

Dhoopi wood, bamboo, and a bit of *sal* for frames, rattans, straw mats, etc. have been used. All these were naturally treated at the site. Glass plays an important role in bringing harmony with the outdoors. Indoor plants are in abundance and are an essential part of the whole picture. Wallpapers are particularly used in suites to give them a soft, elegant look.

The overall design process at the resort sums up the fact that in spite of using primarily locally and naturally available materials, the resort provides the guests with all the modern amenities and facilities. In addition, they get to enjoy a rendezvous with nature, amidst greenery, sunlight and aromatic fresh air, within an environment that merges naturally with the surroundings. ■

