

HOME INTERIOR

A KINGDOM IN FORTY SQUARE YARDS

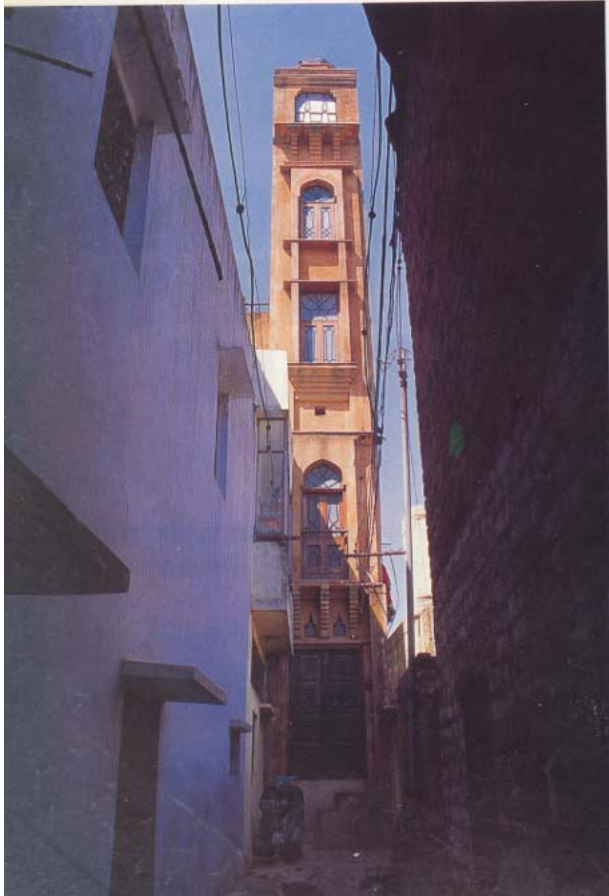
In the heart of Hauz Khas village
is one of New Delhi's most
amazing homes.

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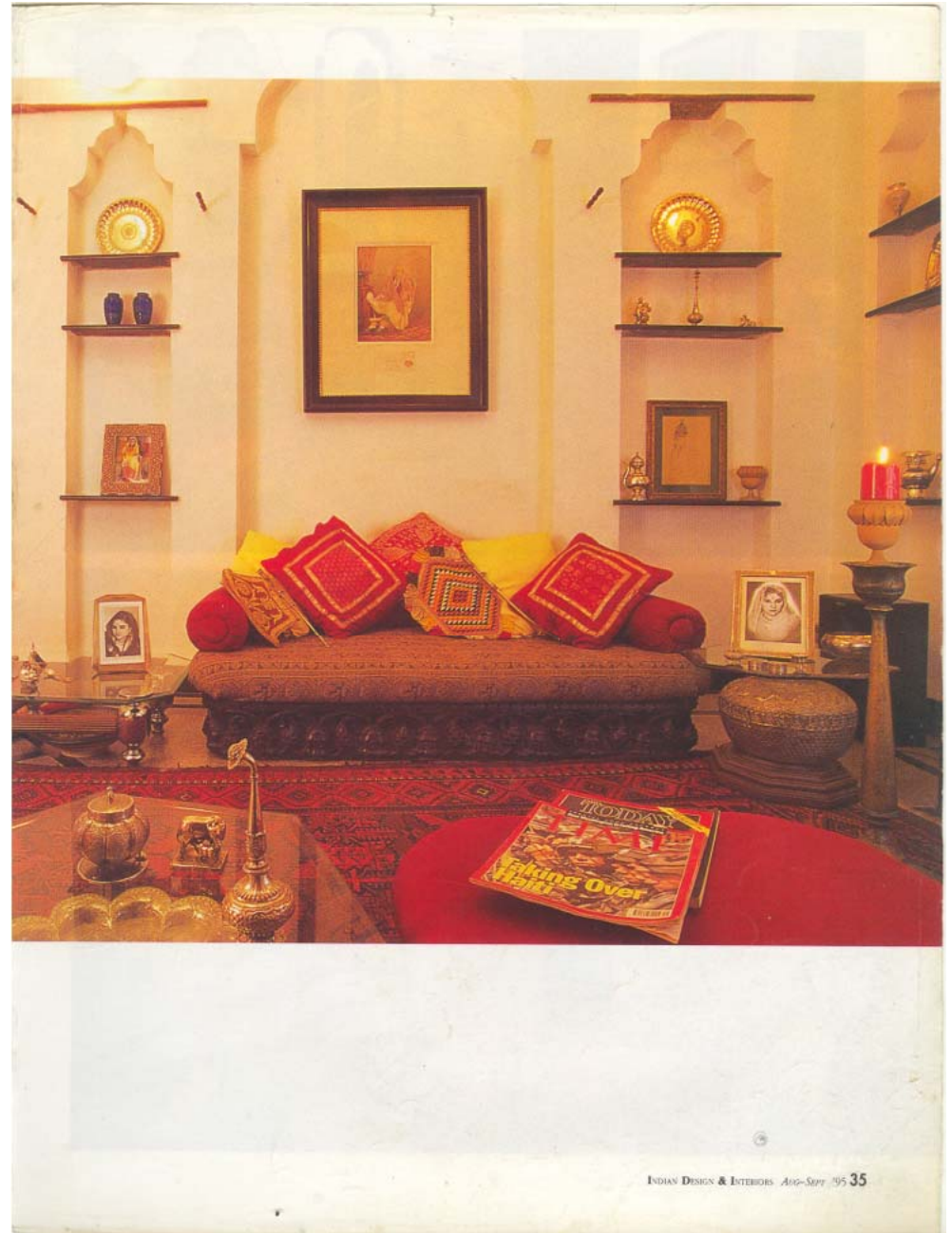
It was a dream come true for Nalin Tomar when the *subzi walla* who sat outside his shop in the Hauz Khas village, offered to sell him his plot of land. This plot was close to the Hauz Khas monument and measured all of 40 sq. yds. Nalin's brief to architect Revathi Kamath was that he wanted a practical house which had at least two bedrooms, a living room, dining room, study, kitchen, two quarters and a bathroom for the household help. A tall order considering the size of the plot.

Revathi saw the plot and knew almost immediately what she was going to do with the brief she had from her client. Her strategy was to try and maintain the ethos of the area by understanding the dynamics of the different people who lived and worked there. The house she designed for Nalin is in harmony with the monument down to the smallest cornice, column and the lines of the dome.

A view of the house from the five-foot wide *gali* that approaches it



The living room





The entrance level study



A view of the main stairwell from the study. The stairs on the right lead to Nalin's bedroom

Revathi says that while her architectural consciousness drew the lines, the culture of the Islamic neighbourhood laid the emphasis.

Nalin's home, when viewed from the park is very traditional and with its Badarpur stone plaster facade, in continuum with the architecture of the monument. Yet when viewed from the main lane of the village, it has modern, contemporary lines. Revathi says that this is exactly what she had wanted to achieve in the complete structure. She always wants to, in her architecture, express the mix of the ancient with the contemporary, the rich and the poor and in this case it was the villagers and Delhi's *tres chic* that hang out at the village. Revathi has basically worked with one motif—the tree of life and it has been snipped and used in the grills, the floor pattern, the lintels, the arches

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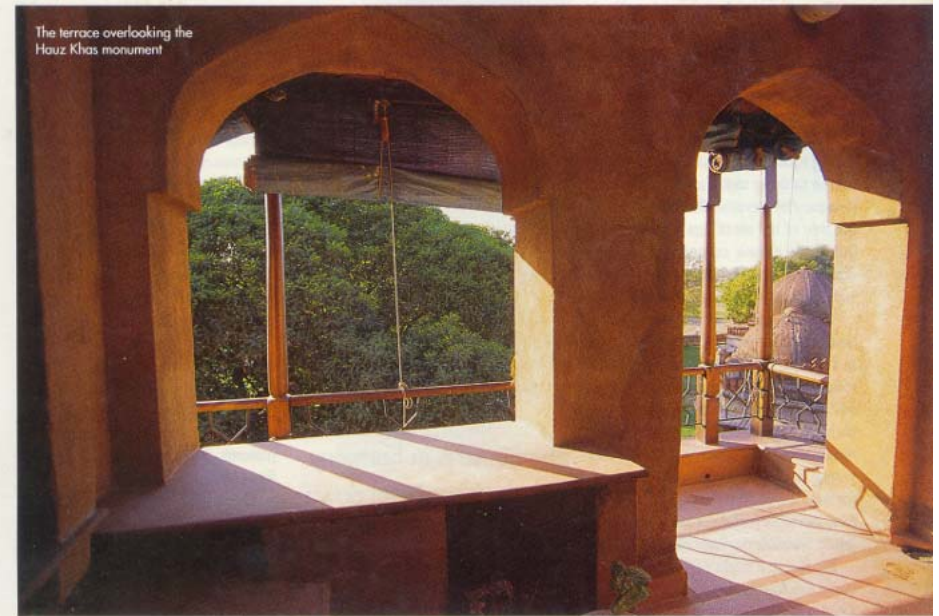
to give the whole house a totality and flow. The aesthetic function determined the choosing of the tree of life motif as it pans all civilizations. Adding that she is not terribly fond of the word "ethnic" which has been overplayed in recent times to describe almost everything, from clothes to homes, food etc. and her as an architect, she prefers that her work be seen as integrated with the urban fabric.

The building is unconventional because the only RCC used is in the

basement which is like a bowl in which the structure stands. As the rooms are so narrow, Revathi did not see the need to use concrete slabs for the ceiling, preferring to use a grid of steel girders on which were laid sandstone slabs.

The approach to Nalin's home is through a lane which is five feet wide. The entrance door is ornately carved and the only evidence of modernity is the bell with a speaker system. You enter through a narrow hallway and you immediately notice a sandstone and wood staircase, just two and a half feet wide, that runs through all levels of the house. This width then laid down the guideline for Nalin while he planned his furniture.

The entrance level has Nalin's study. A few steps up take you to his bedroom. The only pieces of furniture in



The terrace overlooking the Hauz Khas monument



On the landing up the first flight of stairs is a fountain surrounded by potted plants.

the study are an overstuffed sofa chair, a study table and an oriental stool. From the study, descend a few steps and you are in a well-appointed kitchen. Down a few more stairs you come to a dining room which has a very modern dining table in metal and glass, again designed by Revathi. She used a part of the tree of life motif again in the base but made it look contemporary. The dining room has no doors, just arches, which gives it a feeling of space.

The main staircase does not have a banister, just a twisted thick silk chord in black, running along the staircase right to the top. Nalin has used this because he needed the flexibility the chord provided, particularly when furniture was moved up and down. His young nephews and nieces love the feeling of freedom that this chord offers, and have no fear of falling, as I had while walking through his house.

Up the first flight of stairs and you come to a fountain on the landing with a collection of potted plants surround-



Every detail of the interior is in continuum with the architecture. Niches in Islamic design display Nalin's favourite artefacts.

ing it. Up the next flight of stairs and you are in the living room. This is the largest room in the house and has a breathtaking view of the monument, the park and the green belt beyond it. In a city where one normally looks out on somebody else's terrace or driveway, this is the biggest treat. The room has several niches backed with mirrors, to give the feeling of space. The shelves in the niches are made of stone. Similar niches are found all through the house and display some of Nalin's favourite artefacts. The flooring is Terrazzo, inlaid with black Cuddapah in a geometric design of Islamic origin.

The house is in harmony with the monument down to the smallest cornice, column and the lines of the dome.

The grills on the doors are painted black and are in harmony with the floor design. The doors are large and let in a lot of light. There is some stone seating in the living room and the starkness of the room is complemented by the use of rich fabrics.

The next level has a bathroom on the landing and up another flight of stairs you come to the guest bedroom. This room has a terrace with sandstone seating running around two sides. It offers a spectacular view. Up another flight of stairs and you come to another bathroom with a very high ceiling. As I look up I get a view of the dome and the sunlight filtering through the geometric grill over it, making interesting patterns. The final climb up the last flight brings you to the terrace.

One would have to be very fit to live in a home such as Nalin's with all the skipping up and down that it would necessitate, but I leave his home enchanted by the possibilities of elegant living in small spaces. ■

