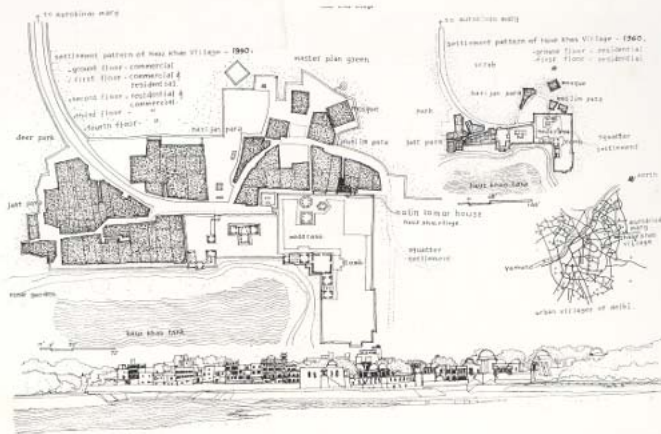


Nahin Tomar House  
New Delhi, India  
1992  
Revathi Kamath

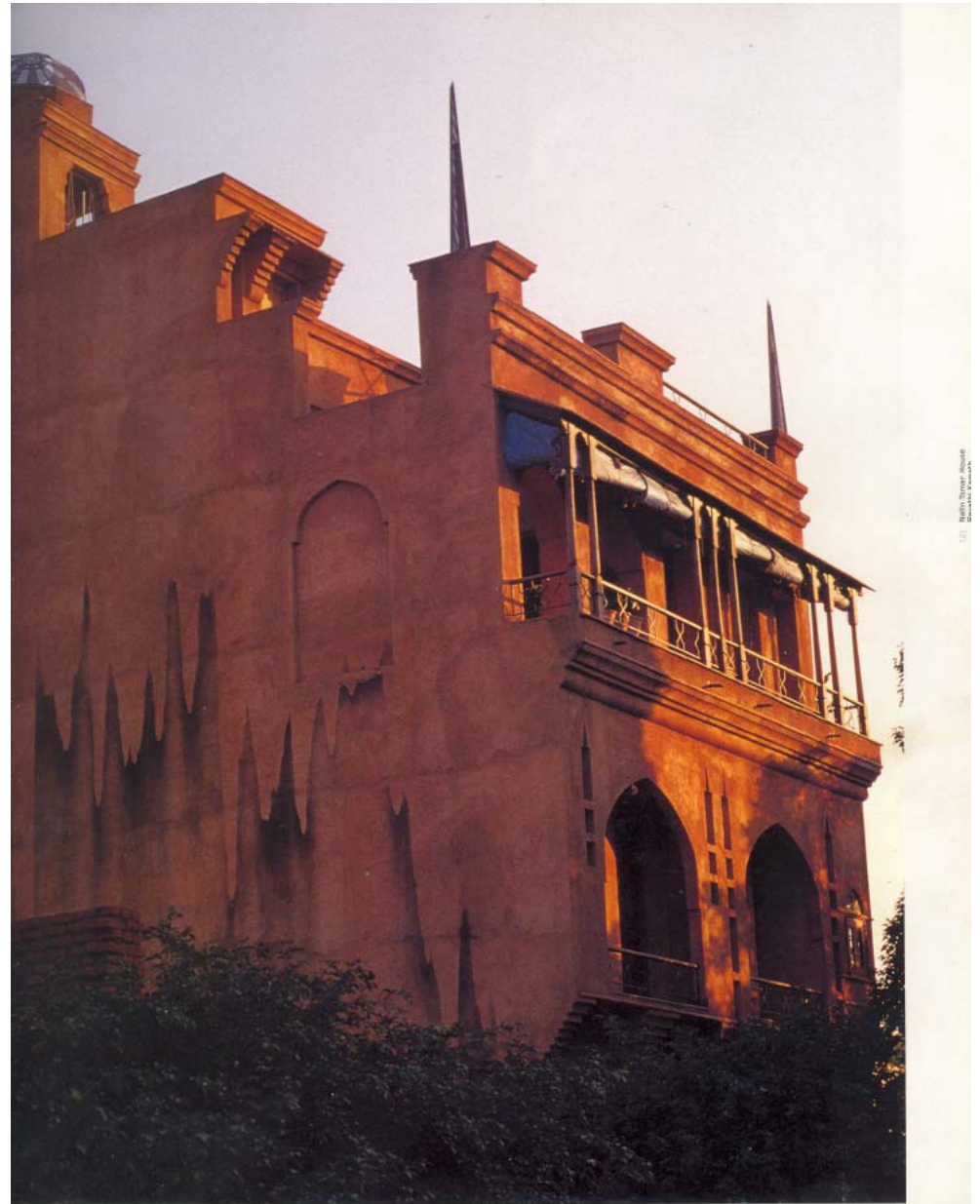
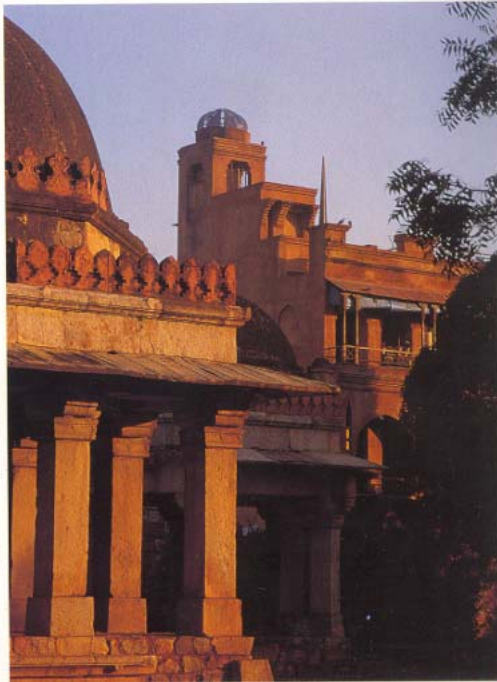


The site plan shows the location of the historic Muslim quarter of Hauz Khas in close proximity to the historic site dating from the thirteenth century. Elevation, facing towards the mosque, how the profile and detail of the facade into the historic context, overly traditional elements such as chhatras and domes neighbour.

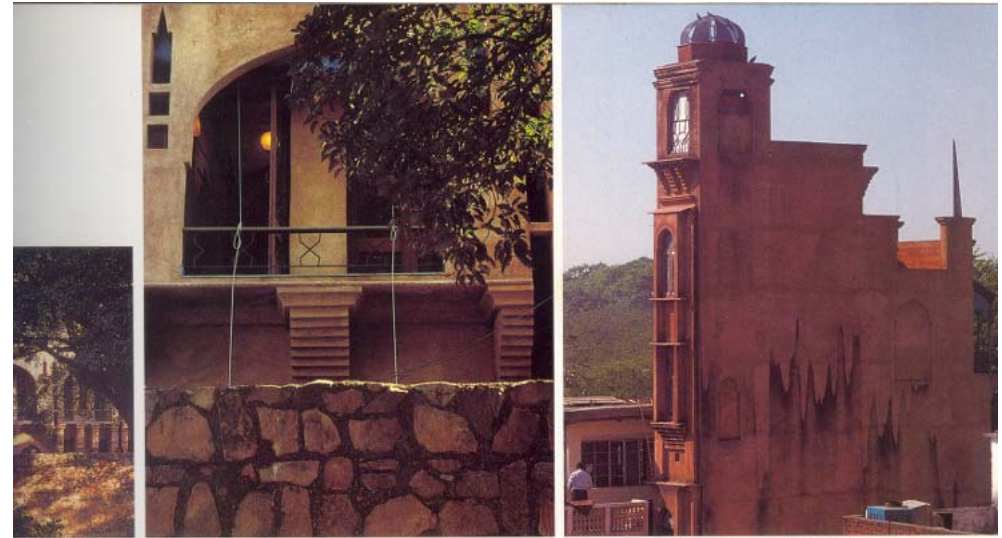
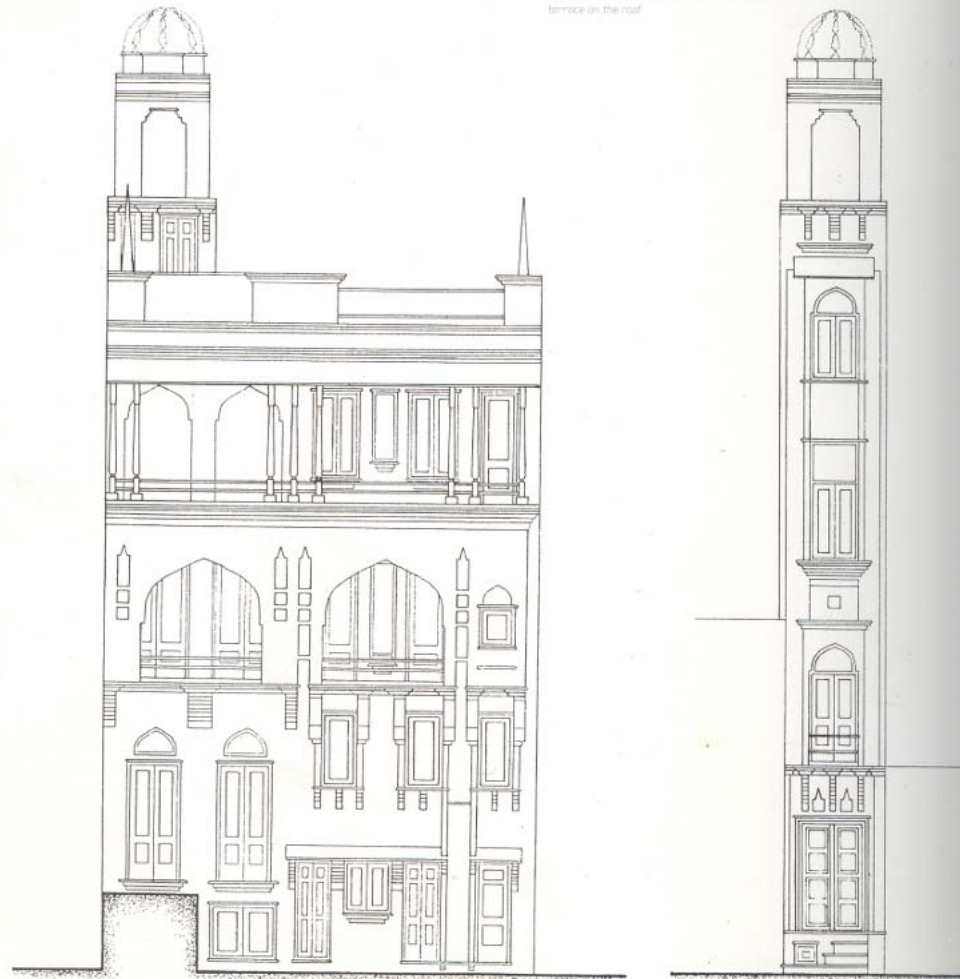
The opportunities for architects to build on a small scale in the historic quarters of most of the major developing cities of the world are scarce and tightly regulated. Land values are high, and planning policy is entrenched in a type of conservatism which is essentially aimed at serving the interests of tourism in whatever form that might be. As a result, it becomes impossibly expensive for ordinary working people to live in the central areas, leading to ever-increasing pressure on the urban peripheries and transport networks.

In the very rapidly developing cities of Asia, and elsewhere, these issues are of particular concern. Revathi Kamath's design for a new house for an art dealer in the historic Muslim quarter of Hauz Khas, New Delhi, addresses the complex problem of forging sound urban, architectural and environmental principles for the development of the historic city in the face of rampant commercialism and an unthinking importation of Western models of urban modernization and associated lifestyles.

At the heart of Hauz Khas lies a thirteenth-century theological college and reservoir. The monuments are surrounded by the village which grew up during the eighteenth century, and which is now itself 'engulfed by the modern city', as Kamath puts it. But the village itself has undergone a transformation into a chic quarter of restaurants, art galleries and boutiques selling expensive handcrafted, 'designer' garments and crafts, frequented by the fashionable set of Delhi and tourists keen to purchase high quality, 'exclusive' Indian goods. One of the most obvious effects of this process of urbanization has been a hike in land prices and the realization of a new high-density development which Kamath describes as 'not only crassly commercial but also hideously ugly and without syntax.'



The entrance elevation (below right) is an extremely narrow tower, fronting onto a narrow alley, and containing a staircase serving rooms on eleven different levels. By contrast, the back of the house (shown in elevation, below left, and viewed from the boundary to the monuments, top left and centre) has a sociable character, being a generous width, with coin balconies at each level looking out over the monuments, and a terrace on the roof.



In a sense, Nalin Tomar's commission to Kamath is glaringly representative of the process of urbanization and displacement of the poorer sections of the population by an affluent, educated, cosmopolitan elite. A wealthy, unmarried dealer and restorer of antique textiles and jewellery who ran a gallery in Hauz Khas, Tomar bought the L-shaped site for the house from an elderly vegetable seller who occupied an area of pavement outside his premises. Although it measured only 40 square metres, and was accessible only from a narrow alley terminating at the entrance to the property, it enjoyed an enviable position in close proximity to the historic monuments, with open views across them to the tank beyond – precisely the advantages which could make it, in the words of one Indian magazine, 'one of New Delhi's most amazing homes.'

However, Tomar embarked on the project with the express intention of 'setting a new precedent of building a contextually appropriate architecture in the area', as Kamath puts it. Kamath herself runs an architectural practice with her husband Vasant Kamath which produces work informed by an explicitly environmental agenda – including a new ecological house in the countryside for themselves, built of mud brick. They sum up their approach as the 'creative synthesis of attitudes and technologies into an aesthetic habitat and way of life', applicable not only to individual houses, but also to groups of homes and communities in urban, semi-urban and rural contexts.

In the case of Nalin Tomar's house, Kamath expresses regret that passive climate control, renewable energy, and sustainable waste management could not be on the agenda because, 'in dense urban situations ... they



The side profile of the building (top right) shows how it steps down towards the monuments at the rear. Pointed arches (above and left) are used to root the architectural language in the vernacular and create a sense of space and amness within the house, despite the constraints of the site.

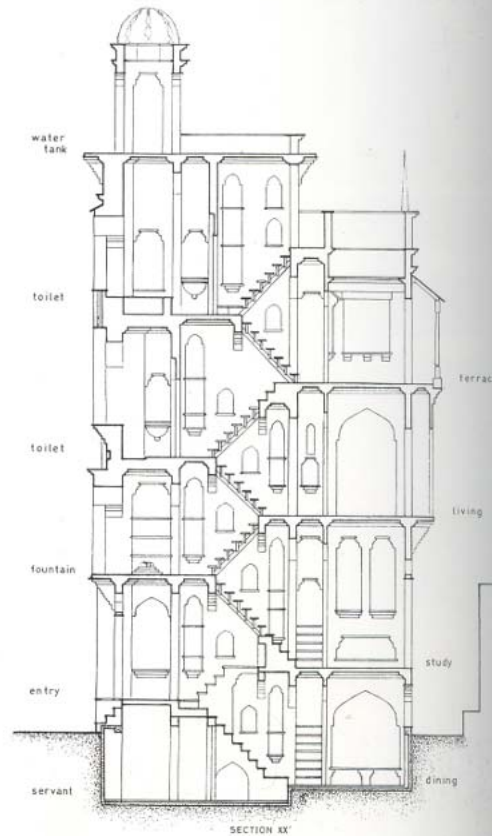


necessitate the conceptual, social and physical clustering of household units.' This was beyond the scope of Nalin Tomar's project. On the other hand, it represents part of a larger body of work by the architects which aims to integrate traditional architectural wisdom and practice into contemporary design, and vice versa. Both the client and the architect saw the project as an invaluable opportunity to explore how a harmonious aesthetic continuum could be established between the house, the monuments, the village, and the disparate elements introduced by the process of modernization: 'continuously establishing links and connections between seemingly contradictory realities through architecture.'

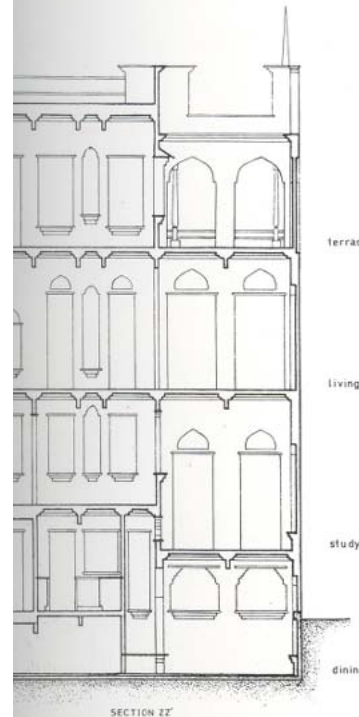
The recognition of the need to acknowledge the new conditions of 'daily living in contemporary time-space' without devaluing the traditional was of crucial importance to the project. The first impression of the new house is, indeed, confusing, since it is far from clear that it has only been recently built. It is constructed out of load-bearing brick walls, plastered with a local coarse sand and unpainted cement plaster, and the doors, windows and balcony elements are made out of recycled timber. The architectural language appears to be rooted in the vernacular, using pointed arches, a small dome, prominent corbelled cornices and wrought-iron metalwork designed around the motif of the tree of life. The intention was to produce a composition combining fairly simple, recognizable elements that could be copied and reinterpreted by others building around the monuments, especially traditional masons, even where no architects were involved.

The most striking aspect of the house from the outside is the narrow, towering entrance elevation onto

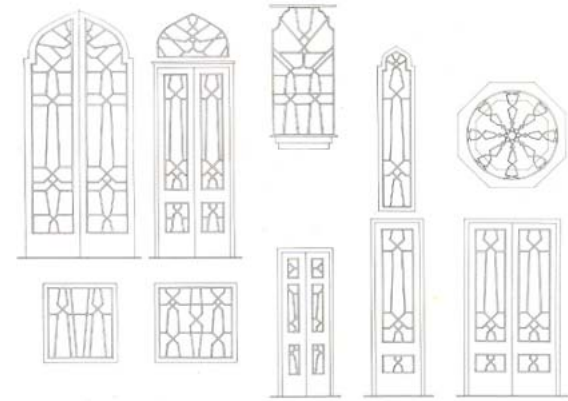
The long section from front to back reveals the relationship between the different levels accessed off the central staircase, the backstore of the built house (opposite below) demonstrate spaces open out behind the narrow tower. The steel grille and beading of the stone, doors and windows (opposite) part of the architectural vocabulary. Kamath has developed as an alternative lack of 'vistas' manifested by other development in the neighbourhood.



SECTION XX



SECTION ZZ



the alley, four storeys high, and only slightly wider than the doorway leading into the house. This narrow section forms the front arm of the L-shape, while the wing of the house at right-angles to it is twice the width, with generous open balconies at each level looking out over the monuments, and a terrace on the roof. The key to the planning is the stairwell immediately beyond the entrance hall which gives access to the rooms behind it on each of eleven different levels. The most public room is Tomar's study, on axis with the entrance, where he often receives clients. Otherwise the house has a quality of privacy and intimacy, deriving from the way in which the living spaces are folded into the awkward angles of the site.

The client has said that the house has 'made his life'. Kamath explains that he sees the house as 'an extension of himself and totally identifies with it'. The house is, then, the direct result of a close engagement with a personal agenda and the desires of a particular individual, but the architect has also deliberately worked through that process to reach a meaningful understanding of the dynamics of an urban society under the impact of dramatic cultural change.



# MODERN HOUSE 2

CLARE MELHUISH

# MODERN HOUSE 2

Following Phyllon's *Modern House* (published 1993), *Modern House 2* is a survey of the world's most innovative contemporary houses. Organized thematically within chapters focusing on ecological awareness, changing patterns of living, and building in both urban and rural environments, the author examines approximately thirty houses from Europe, North and South America, Australia, Asia and the Far East. A final chapter also discusses recent international competitions and commissions for concept houses, offering a view into future possibilities for domestic architecture.

The architects featured include among others Marcos Asyaba (Brazil), Günter Behnisch (Germany), Thom Craig (New Zealand), Foster and Partners (UK), Herzog & de Meuron (Switzerland), Glenn Murcutt (Australia), Office for Metropolitan Architecture (The Netherlands), Patkau Architects (Canada), Gabriel Poole (Australia), Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa/SANAA (Japan) and Williams and Tuten (USA).