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PRODUCT DESIGN: NELLA JONGERIUS

MY SPACE: STUDIO AMITA VIKRANT

# HOME REVIEW

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## THE TREE CONNECTION

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*Designed by Aangan architects, this charming farmhouse in Dumas, Surat, far away from the city's chaos, is designed to bring in whiffs of fresh air from its ambient orchards. As its moniker 'Nirant' aptly suggests, this is a perfect place to discover serenity and peace.*

In coastal Dumas, around twenty kilometres away from the heart of Surat city, there exists a quaint world. In this tranquil world is a farmhouse that was constructed way back in 1937. Surrounding the farmhouse is thick vegetation comprising of mango and chikoo trees, and beautiful orchards bearing other delicious fruits. The setting seems to present an Austenesque ethos customised for Indian sensibilities.

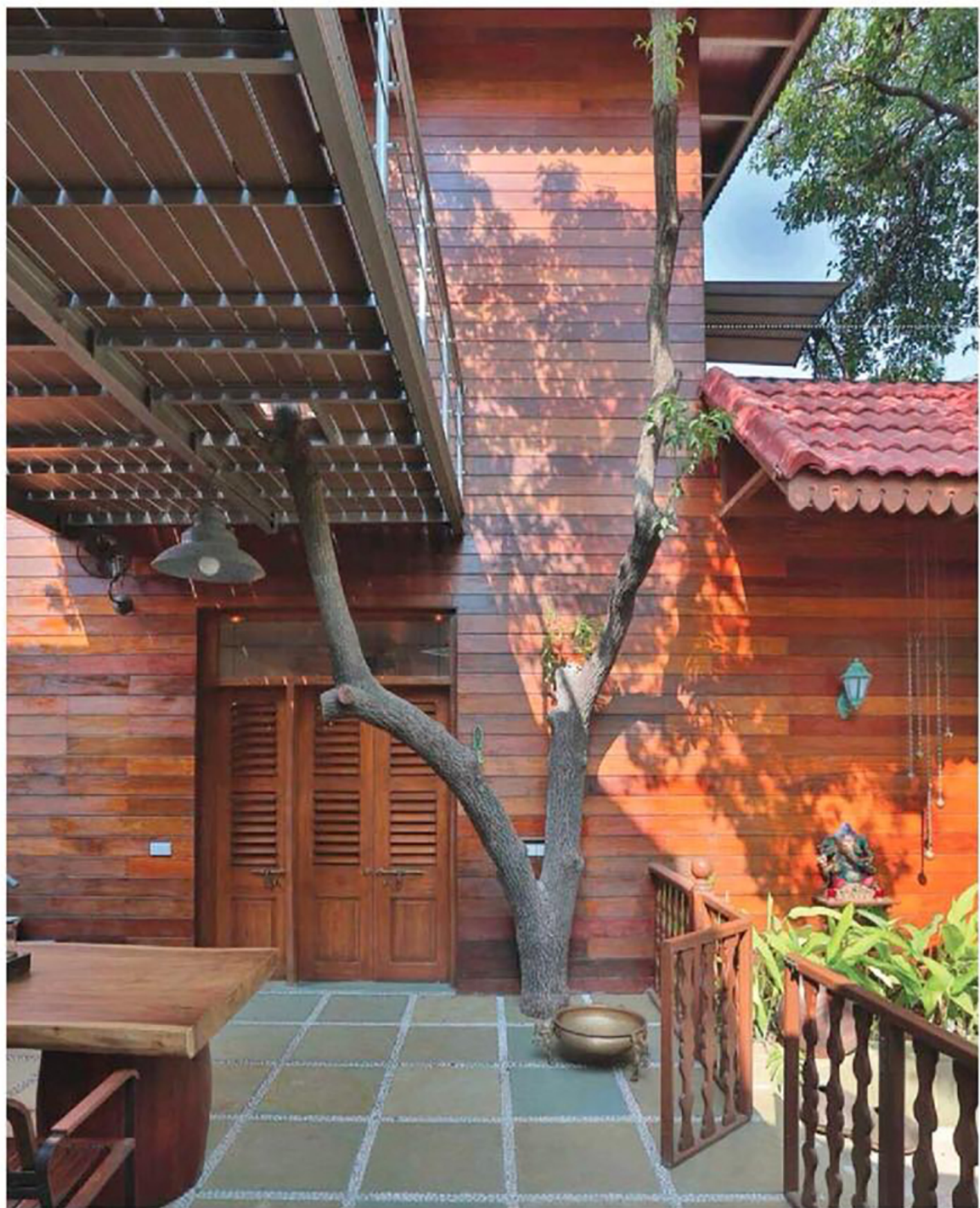
## OF AUSTENESQUE ETHOS



Text By Ramya Srinivasan  
Photographs Courtesy Tarak Shah



To retain the authenticity of the 1930s farmhouse, none of the trees have been cut; instead they have been neatly integrated into the construction. One can see them popping out of the roof in many places.



"What originally began as an effort to renovate the existing structure soon turned into a project to extend the space with an additional unit," explains principal architect, Vishal Shah. As the client set about using the farmhouse as a weekend retreat, there was an organic need for more space, to be able to spend more time here and to also socialise. And thus began the design and construction of Nirant.

To retain the old-world charm and heritage value of the previous building, it was decided to leave it undisturbed, and instead extend it with a new unit. The old and the new are connected by a metal bridge, and this partially covered common area makes for an ideal setting for relaxed meals. This space at the ground level leads into the new unit, welcomed by an expansive living room, attached to a kitchenette and bath areas. The first floor above houses two bedrooms with the old unit topped with a bedroom of its own.

"The clients are a lawyer couple in their forties with children in their teens. They prefer to socialise a lot, and use Nirant for parties and gatherings during weekends, or to even just come and watch a cricket match or a movie on TV," says Shah. To provide the perfect platform to entertain guests and relatives, the living room opens up to the outside backyard. Here, an open court paved with concentric circles of Kota stones works as the party hub. When cleared of furniture, this makes for a dance floor, too.

A gazebo here not only adds to the aesthetic charm, but also lends itself as a great spot to convene and have lazy laid-back conversations over a cuppa. "Due to Surat's hot and humid weather, it was always important for us to design ample covered spaces. But we also wanted to take advantage of the natural breezes, and hence we went with a semi-covered gazebo," explains Shah.



There is a modern touch to the farmhouse, too! Beside the pool, tall metal doors lead into a spa area with steam and sauna rooms, and a small gym space.





The open court in the backyard, paved with concentric circles of Kota stones, doubles up as a spacious party hub



One of the challenges in designing this project was to carve out separate identities for the old and the new structures, and to still make them appear as one cohesive unit. Various elements in the new block have been inspired by the 'heritage' theme of the older counterpart.

The wooden decking on the bridge and the engineered wood cladding on the exteriors along with a sloping roof without any concrete slab is a brilliant example of deliberately imparting an ancient appearance to the new part. "This gives a rustic look and also makes sure that the farmhouse does not stand out like a sore thumb amidst the landscape. We wanted to keep it easy on the eyes," says Shah.

Louvered doors at the entrance of the living room are another facet inspired by the old-school coloured glass windows with wooden frames. These doors along with large glass pane windows have their functional value as well, along with maximum vision to the outdoors and a way for breezes to seamlessly flow inside.

The interiors have a chic design, and the furnishings are in a vibrant mix of finishes, colours and styles from various eras. Colourful, elaborate floor rugs with intricate weaving patterns rest on top of terrazzo tiles lined in concentric squares with characteristic grey lines.

There is a minimalistic approach to the interiors because the focus is to have a huge space that is set for leisure, and not for everyday use. The idea is to leave a lot of open and flexible space for people to even spread out a mat and relax on the floor. However, this minimalism is balanced by murals, colourful accessories and fabrics that see a dominance of floral patterns.

There is a deliberate attempt to retain the 'heritage' theme – intricate patterned rugs, poster beds, armchairs and the sloping roof all come together to tell an ancient story.



*Describing his favourite aspect of the farmhouse, principal architect Vishal Shah says, "The best thing about this place is the effortless connection between the indoors and the outdoors. The lush green lawn, paved party space, gazebo and dining area all come together to provide a feeling of freedom."*

*In the process, it lends a sense of abandon stripping out pretences and making you feel one with the surrounding nature.*

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