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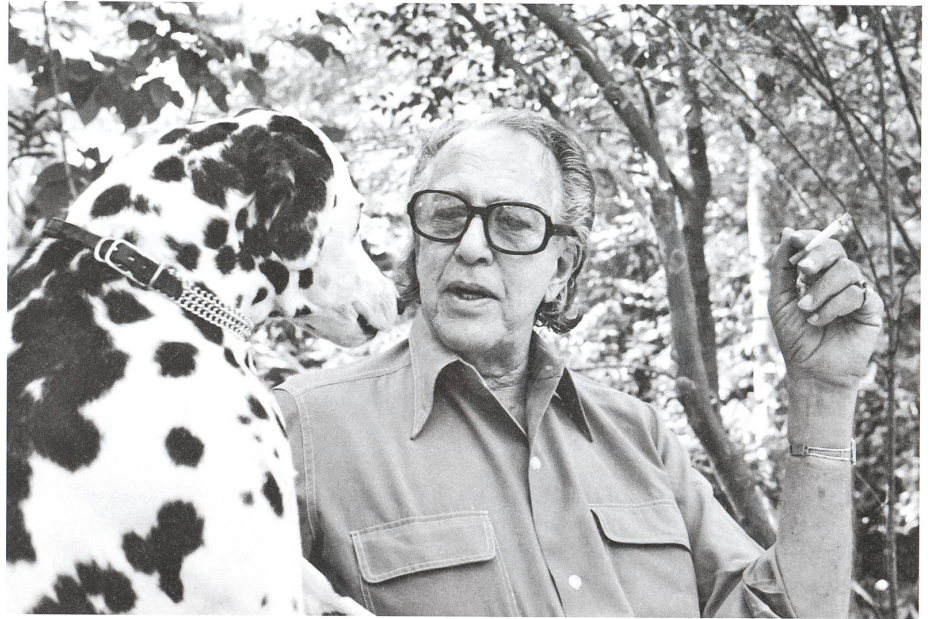
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Architecture of Happiness

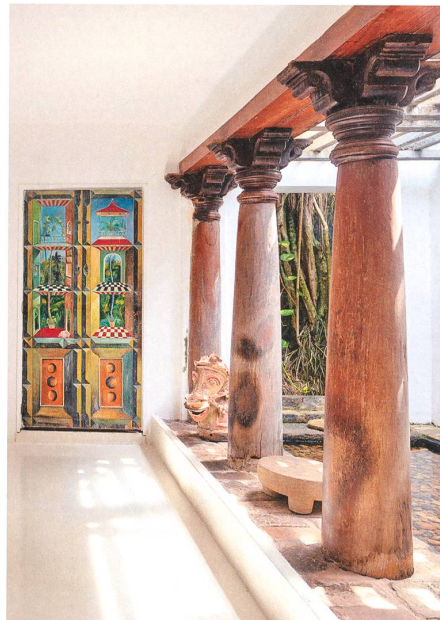
Geoffrey Bawa's Town House and the Garden Retreat at Lunuganga

Two projects occupied Geoffrey Bawa during much of his career: his garden retreat at Lunuganga and his town house in Colombo. Both illustrated one of the main principles that informed his work: that buildings should give pleasure, both to those who make them and to those who use them.

In 1959 Bawa moved into a tiny bungalow in Colombo Colpetty. Then over the next eight years he proceeded, one by one, to buy up the whole row of bungalows lining a cul-de-sac and to amalgamate them into a single dwelling. The now redundant lane was transformed into a long passage lit by tiny courtyards and lightwells. This was his space laboratory where he worked, like a scenographer, to create a moving tableau of visual delights and surprises. The final result is an introspective, almost subterranean, matrix of rooms and garden courts which create the illusion of infinite space on what is, in reality, a tiny plot. There are rooms without roofs and roofs without walls, all connected by a grid of axes and internal vistas and punctuated by works of art and pieces of architectural salvage.

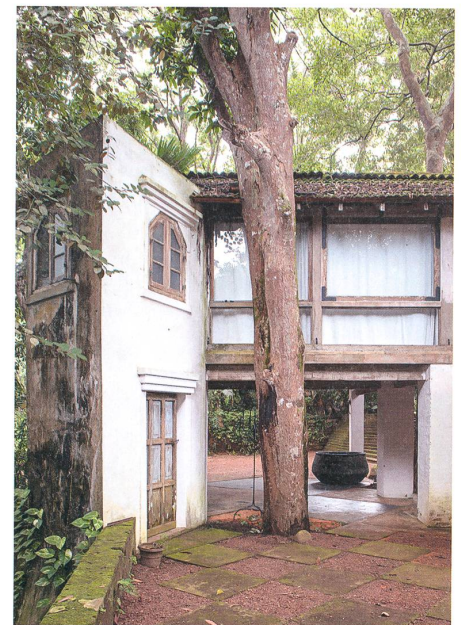
Bawa bought the Lunuganga estate in 1948 and he devoted much of his spare time and money during the next fifty years to developing it as a landscaped garden. The former rubber plantation ran across a narrow promontory that projected out into a brackish lagoon, a few kilometres inland from the Indian Ocean at Bentota.

Bawa remodeled and extended the original bungalow. The former *porte cochère* became the main sitting space and the entrance was moved to the south terrace, connected by cascades of steps to



the new entrance court. He cut a swathe through the rubber trees on the southern hill and reduced the height of its summit in order to open up a view towards the lake and a line of distant hills. The hillside on the north side of the bungalow was remodelled to create a lawn which ran towards an artificial cliff, criss-crossed with secret paths and staircases. These looked down on a long broad walk and a water-garden that ran along the edge of the lagoon.

Over the years the original rubber trees were replaced by a wide variety of mainly indigenous trees and plants and the garden was embellished with pavilions, walls and statuary. The result was a civilised wilderness: a succession of hidden surprises and sudden vistas, an ever-changing play of light and shade, a landscape of memories and ideas. —



Geoffrey Bawa with his dog Leopold 1985, Lunuganga (photo: Harry Sowden, Bon/Robson Archive)

Lightwell with Chettinad columns and doors by Donald Friend, Bawa's town-house Colombo (bottom left); the Glass House at Lunuganga (bottom right)

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Remembering Bawa

A Life in Architecture

Bawa was born in the British Crown Colony of Ceylon into a family of mixed ancestry. His career unfolded in the newly independent Republic of Sri Lanka and, though he received a Western education, in later life he developed an increasingly Asian outlook and drew inspiration as much from his native Sri Lanka as from his long sojourns in Europe. Bawa studied English at Cambridge and Law in London during the Second World War, finally returning home in 1948 just as Ceylon was celebrating its independence. Having joined a Colombo law firm, he purchased Lunuganga, an abandoned rubber estate, aiming to create of it a tropical version of an Italian garden. It was the garden project that fired his imagination and led him to become an architect.

In 1954 he enrolled at the Architectural Association (AA) in London and finally qualified as an architect in 1957 at the age of thirty-eight. Back in Colombo, Bawa became a partner in Edwards, Reid and Begg, the ghostly remnant of a former British architectural practice. A year later he was joined by Ulrik Plesner, a young Danish architect, who provided the professional expertise that he lacked.

Bawa's time in London had coincided with the founding of a new Tropical School within the AA. Bawa's first buildings – classroom blocks for two Colombo schools and an industrial estate at Ekala – were essays in Tropical Modernism, and employed simple white geometric designs, patterned brise soleils and suppressed roofs.

Inspired by the pioneering work of Minnette de Silva, Bawa soon began to experiment with the use of traditional forms and local materials. In the early 1960s he shifted to the Modern Regionalist mode that would become his hallmark. This can be seen in projects such as the *Ena de Silva House* (1961), and the *Bandarawela Chapel* (1963).

Bawa now embarked on the first of a series of magical hotels that served Sri Lanka's burgeoning tourist industry. The election of the Jayawardene government in 1977 heralded a period of economic liberalism and brought Bawa a clutch of major projects, including the new *National Parliament* (1982) and the *Ruhunu University Campus* (1984). Articles in the *Architectural Review*, and the monograph by Christoph Bon in 1986 made Bawa's work known in Britain. Now in his seventies and in failing health, he embarked on a final canon of innovative built projects including the austere *Kandalama Hotel* (1994), and the rugged *Lighthouse Hotel* (1996). In 1998, Bawa suffered a massive stroke that left him paralysed and he died in 2003. Paradoxically it was during this period that his work received wider recognition: in 2001 he was given a lifetime's achievement award by the Aga Khan, in 2002 a comprehensive monograph on his work was published in London, and in 2004 the German Architecture Museum in Frankfurt staged a major retrospective exhibition. —



South facade of the Bandarawela Chapel (top, photo: Henry Sowden, Bon/Robson Archive); Veranda of the Ena de Silva House as rebuilt at Lunuganga in 2016.

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Modern Regionalism

Ena de Silva House and Bandarawela Chapel

Bawa's shift towards a regionalist position was inspired by his compatriot Minnette de Silva, a graduate of the AA and a close friend of Le Corbusier. These ideas pre-dated theories of 'Critical Regionalism' that was advanced by Frampton and Tzonis some twenty-five years later.

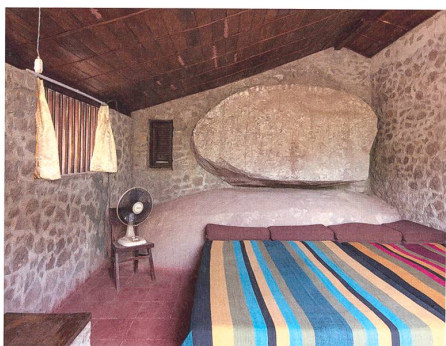
In 1960 Bawa was commissioned to design a house in Colombo for Ena de Silva, a champion of local crafts. She wanted a house that would incorporate traditional features – courtyards, verandas, a shrine room – but she wanted a modern house with

an office for her husband and a studio for her and her son. Bawa developed an introspective plan with its elements arranged around a large central courtyard and a series of lesser courts: a garden-in-a-house. The plan of the *Ena de Silva house* was wholly modern, the main living spaces flowing seamlessly around the central courtyard, while the service elements were contained in a separate side wing. But the palette of materials was traditional: clay tiles, granite floors, columns of polished timber. The design coincided with the development of a new drawing style in Bawa's office, largely inspired by artist Laki Senanayake and architect Ismeth Raheem. This way of drawing was the perfect expression of Bawa's design methodology, and was widely imitated across Southeast Asia.

The *Bandarawela Chapel* was built in 1963 on a shoestring budget and the design relied heavily on locally available materials: black stone for the walls, local timber for the ceilings and clay tiles for the roof. The south side of the nave takes the form of a long blank wall of rubble which terminates in a square tower. The granite floor of the nave follows the slope of the ground and falls gently towards the altar. The altar table is placed at the base of the tower and is lit dramatically from an unseen glass roof. The roof of the nave is made up of five angled vaults of red tuna wood.

The south wall is punctuated by a series of five arched recesses which hide slits that provide ventilation and cast an ethereal glow of light up the inside surface of the wall.

The simple palette of materials suggests a building growing out of the ground, more 'unearthed' than constructed. The overall effect is one of focused calm and sanctity achieved through the careful manipulation of space, the juxtaposition of the materials, and the control of light and shade. —



View from the Kandalama dining room towards the cliff.
Guest bedroom in the Polontalawa pavilion (bottom).

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The Genius of the Place

Polontalawa and the Kandalama Hotel

Bawa's interest in gardens led him to become an architect and landscape came to play an important role in his designs. He came to admire the classic landscapes of Sri Lanka – the vast park monasteries of Anuradhapura, the rock citadel of Sigiriya, the forest monasteries of Ritigala and Arankale. What these all had in common was a respect for topography and for natural features such as rocks and water courses.

When, in 1963, Bawa's associate Ulrik Plesner was asked to build a manager's bungalow at Polontalawa, Bawa insisted to visit the site and decreed that the proposed location was not appropriate. Instead he chose a collection of massive boulders nearby and called for 'sticks and string' and proceeded to set out a full-sized mock-up of the bungalow. A rocky pavement snakes between overhanging rocks before dropping into the open-sided main living space, which is defined only by an over-



Entrance plaza of the Sri Lanka Parliament (above) and the Science Faculty, Ruhunu University (left).

→ page 33–39

An Architect of the State

Sri Lanka Parliament and Ruhunu University Campus

Bawa managed to duck under the waves of political change and received commissions from governments of every hue. In 1979 Geoffrey Bawa was commissioned by newly elected President Jayawardene to design a new parliament building some eight kilometres east of Colombo. He proposed draining an area of marshland to create a lake with an island at its centre and produced a design which placed the main debating chamber in a symmetrical central pavilion surrounded by an asymmetric constellation of lesser pavilions, all under sweeping double-pitched copper roofs. The building is characterised by a restrained monumentality which is defined by a trabeated structure of aggregate-faced concrete.

Soon after starting work on the Parliament, Bawa received the commission for the new University of Ruhunu. The site which straddled three steep hills lay a few kilometres to the west of Matara and faced the Southern Ocean. Bawa's strategy was to locate the Science Faculty on the northern hill and the Arts Faculty on the eastern hill and to place the shared facilities between the two. He conceived of the campus as a series of rectangular pavilions connected by covered links in a sequence that ran around the contours of the two hills. He used a simple palette of materials – plastered brickwork, rubble stone and overhanging pitched roofs. The budget allowed only a minimal use of air-conditioning and the buildings had to be self-cooling. Bawa's main ploy was to make the buildings interact with the topography and the vegetation. Throughout the campus the individual pavilions form unique semi-enclosed spaces both between one another and with the landscape. —

hanging roof, supported by a massive concrete beam spanning between huge boulders. The bungalow speaks to a long tradition of hermitages and monastic retreats that were built in former times in caves and under boulders.

In 1992, Bawa was invited to design a hotel in the Cultural Triangle, close to the foot of the famous Sigiriya Citadel. However, when he visited the proposed site, he declared it to be too close to the ruins and persuaded his clients to look for another site on the edge of the ancient Kandalama reservoir, a few kilometres away to the south. The hotel was built against a cliff-face on a ridge, its two long articulated wings twisting to follow the topography. The five levels of rooms lie below the entrance level and are accessed by open decks. The facades are hung with timber slats that support thick foliage, so that the hotel disappears into the surrounding jungle: a building to look out of rather than to look at. Its architecture is robust and unadorned and is punctuated by the outcrops of rock that burst through the walls. Measuring almost a kilometre from end to end, and located far from major roads, the most astonishing thing about the *Kandalama Hotel* is the fact that it was built at all. —



Lunuganga - Bawas Meisterwerk

SRI LANKA

EINE PARADIESISCHE REISE - Auf den Spuren des Architekten Geoffrey Bawa

Die paradiesische Insel Sri Lanka bietet einen grossen Reichtum an antiker, 2300-jähriger Kultur und ein Nebeneinander vier verschiedener Weltreligionen. Naturlandschaften wechseln zwischen Trockengebieten, 2500 m hohen Bergnebelwäldern, sich wie Teppiche über das Hochland ziehende Teeplantagen sowie tropischem Dschungel, prachtvollen Gärten und kilometerlangen, weissen Sandstränden. Der berühmte Architekt Sri Lankas, Geoffrey Bawa, liess sich architektonisch von der Schönheit der Insel inspirieren. Er gilt als Begründer des tropischen Modernismus. Auf einmalige Art und Weise führte er die Architektur und die üppige tropische Vegetation zusammen. Er verstand es, Natur, Landschaftsformen, natürliche Materialien, Licht und Wasser in die offenen Räume seiner Bauten zu integrieren und sie zu einem Gesamtkunstwerk zu gestalten. Seine Ideen, Philosophien und Bauten begleiten uns auf dieser abwechslungsreichen Reise.



KONZEPT & LEITUNG: Britta Nydegger

Sri Lanka ist die zweite Heimat der studierten Touristikfachfrau und ausgebildeten Reiseleiterin. Sie hat mehrere Jahre dort gelebt und besucht die Insel regelmässig, auch während des Bürgerkrieges, der zum Glück seit 2009 vorbei ist. Nach ihrer Weiterbildung in Literatur-, Kunst- und Architekturgeschichte an der Universität St. Gallen führt sie u.a. durch die Stiftsbibliothek und das Textilmuseum St. Gallen. Sie hat die vorliegende Reise geplant und erkundet und freut sich, Ihnen diese von der Natur und Kultur reich beschenkte Insel zu zeigen.

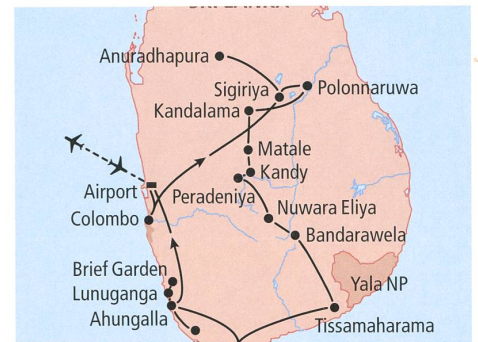
IHRE REISEROUTE:

Zürich - Colombo (2 Nächte) - Sigiriya (2 Nächte) - Bawa-Hotel Kandalama (2 Nächte) - Kandy (1 Nacht) - Nuwara Eliya (2 Nächte) - Yala Nationalpark (2 Nächte) - Bawa-Hotel Heritance Ahungalla (3 Nächte) - Colombo - Zürich

(Verlangen Sie das ausführliche Detailprogramm)

16 REISETAGE

05.12. - 20.12.2020 (Samstag bis Sonntag)
02.01. - 17.01.2021 (Samstag bis Sonntag)

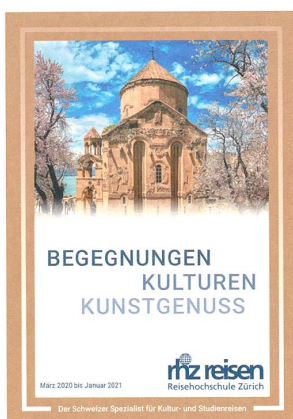


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