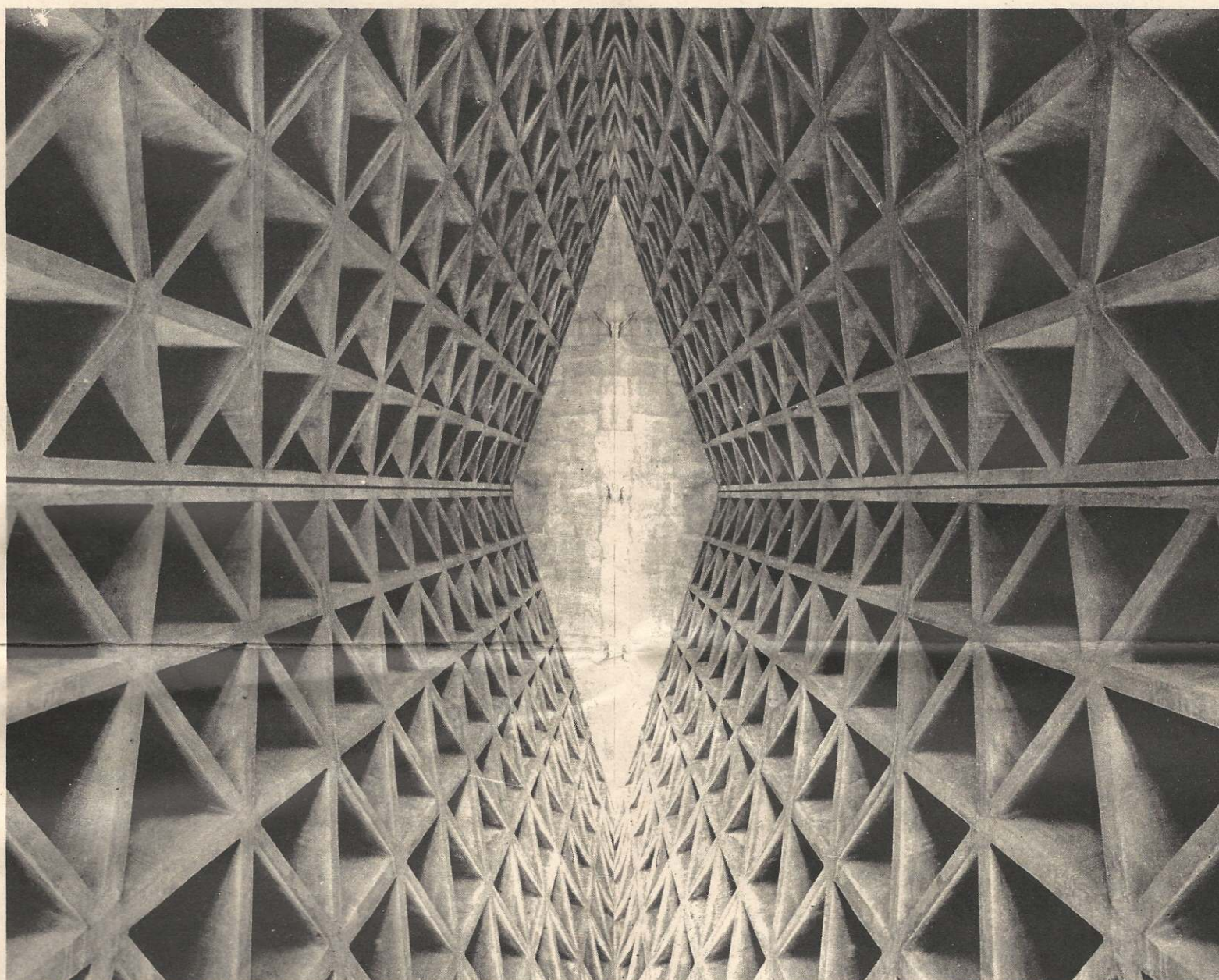


AUROVILLE TODAY

November 1991

Auroville Today, C.S.R. Office, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India

Number Thirty-Four



Detail of Bharat Nivas roof

Photo collage by John Mandeem

Architecture of the Soul

The word "architect" is from the Greek for "chief builder". But the great builders of ancient Greece, Egypt, India and China were far more than master masons. Rooted in cultures with a sense of universal unity, of the interpenetration of visible and invisible worlds, and initiated into the knowledge of subtle energy flows, of the resonance of different materials, patterns and configurations, these builders were, above all, shapers and mediators, seeking out forms to express both form and the formless, and providing doorways from matter into the kingdoms of the spirit. They understood, many centuries before modern physicists, that matter is simply "frozen energy", a temporary staging-post in a recurring process as a primal force weaves its way in and out of manifestation. And that true order, shape, beauty, comes from within, is implicate, and can only be grasped through a process of intuition, inner identification, and not through the mind. Of all the arts, points out

Sri Aurobindo, music and architecture "go nearest to the infinite and to the essence of things". Yet while music relies upon the ethereal vehicle for expression, architecture is rooted in mass, matter, palpable form. This paradoxical status gives architecture a uni-

culminate in the aching fineness at the point of the tower.

Architecture, the experimentation with form, mass and patterning, has always played an important part in Auroville. Who can forget those early images of "Last School" soar-

Auroville is richly endowed with architects representing different styles and approaches to their work. What draws them here, and what are the particular challenges associated with practising architecture in Auroville?

que role in breaking down the old oppositions of matter and spirit. It also gives it a range and plasticity of expression capable of transporting us from the most gross to the most subtle. Witness, for example, those great cathedrals of Europe, where the monumental base of the fabric soars up to

ing up above the eroded laterite like a promise and a dream, a refusal to be bound exclusively by the daily concerns of matter which took up so much of the early settlers' energy? And how many people, in those early years, were drawn to Auroville by the magnet of the 'Galaxy' design, the promise

of new forms for a new consciousness? Heady stuff! But as the funds dried up and the disputes with the Sri Aurobindo Society intensified, the first 'monumental' stage of Auroville architecture came to an end, and the exuberance and creativity was directed away from community architecture and into the design of individual homes, an early indication of a shift in community energy that was to intensify into the individualism of the next decade. In a situation where planning and guidelines were virtually non-existent, architecture became a field for individual exploration and self-discovery, and a direct expression of individual fantasies, ideals, hang-ups and megalomania. As each Aurovilian is, in some way, a representative of a different human type and problem to be solved, so many house designs became objectifications of those types and problems, and Auroville became one of the richest and most eccentric sites of architectural experimentation in India.

continued on page 2

In the past few years, as the community's inner point of balance has shifted once again towards a renewed community consciousness. There has been renewed interest in Town Planning, and a number of new community buildings have been completed, albeit in a quieter, more intimate style than the first wave of community architecture. If we are, indeed, into a "Third Wave" of Auroville's outer development, then recent designs would suggest that its key-notes are functionality, harmony and appropriateness as opposed to the soaring idealism of the first phase and the exuberant individualism of the second.

Auroville is richly endowed with architects representing different styles and approaches to their work. What draws them here, and what are the particular challenges associated with practising architecture in Auroville? Undoubtedly, one of the attractions is the freedom here to experiment on a scale impossible elsewhere where building regulations impose a strait jacket on individual creativity. And this creativity is further fostered by an ethos of experimentation and research, by the availability of land and, it seems, increasingly, by the availability of financial resources to realize innovative projects. But this is only part of the answer. Another, deeper reason, is that architecture — like everything else here — is a total activity rather than a specialization, for architects discover they must engage their whole selves in a dance with matter, ideal forms, the environment, their clients and, sometimes, a larger community process, if they are to realize something of deeper value. For architecture, like everything else here, is a field of yoga.

The necessity for a totality of commitment and a wideness of consciousness is also evident from the range of the questions facing an Auroville architect. There are, for example, the social implications. Should Auroville, for example, be involved in large and expensive construction projects while the surrounding villages languish? How far should our expertise and technology be translatable into Third World conditions? What does it mean to design for a conscious community rather than individuals? Then there are the environmental considerations. Which land is most appropriate for construction? Which designs and materials are most in harmony with the environment, the climate and the imperative need for a sustainable culture? And there are aesthetic and, ultimately, spiritual factors. Which designs can assist, evoke, the subtle conditions necessary for the growth and flowering of the individual and collective consciousness? How can the design of a house or township encompass the need for evolution and change, the progressive revelation of truth? What does it mean, materially, to prepare the ground for another order of consciousness?

The questions, the challenges proliferate. Yet as Matrimandir, the still point of this turning world called Auroville, nears completion and reaches towards the highest synthesis of inner and outer, of exuberance and simplicity, of concealment and transparency, of ascent and descent, so its vibrations will ripple out, carrying with it an essential message — that true architecture is not the product of universities, institutes and international seminars. True architecture is architecture of the Soul.

Alan.

Discovering Architecture

An interview with Poppo

We are sitting under a Neem tree surrounded by beautiful stones next to a new pond. It is a peaceful spot and it is hard to imagine that we are actually on a construction site, with 45 people building Poppo's new house. Poppo came to India in 1966 to teach architecture in Hyderabad. He was the German representative at the inauguration of Auroville in 1968. Finally he settled in Auroville in 1970.

Poppo, what does architecture mean to you?

Poppo: That is something I'm finding out myself. I can explain very easily what it is not or what it can be, but what it is takes more time. I found out, after coming to Auroville, that I had been educated in architecture in the same way as every other architect in the world. So I tried to find out the *raison d'être* of architecture and then I encountered here all kinds of contradictions, and oppositions. Because here there is a constant confrontation of disagreements and agreements, constantly, day and night. This keeps the whole thing moving. In Auroville the question of architecture is a permanent question, a constant challenge. Not of competition — forget about it, we shouldn't compete. But of constant questioning about whether we are doing the right thing in terms of building materials, matter, in terms of technique, and of what is relevant to this area. It is not architecture when we work against the human body, when we destroy the environment, when we consider 'form' as the highest priority and consider nothing else, when we use symbols as mental statements. Some people find symbols in a book and say that we have to build like that; that is just a mental transcription of some mental form to make people fit into it. That is not architecture. In Auroville today we are not building for this 'supramental business'; we still work for what is good for the body, for the upliftment of the body. You can create spaces that make you feel down without even being aware of it. It is important for the person to feel good. That's the spiritual aspect of space. Now we have the Crystal in the Chamber. Something is bound to happen. That is a space designed by a non-architect, by a visionary. It is interesting to see the effect in comparison with what we architects are doing.

Creating these spaces where people feel good sounds very nice, but how do you see this in relation to the development of the Auroville township?

In the last 20 years the whole of humanity has become aware of the global ecological disaster. In Auroville we still have the chance to act. We can already do something on a small scale with all that we know on how to produce a natural and beneficial environment for everybody. In terms of planning I would say that the 20 year old town plan is over. It is fully outgrown, it cannot exist anymore. This plan was necessary. Everybody was so enthusiastic in '68 about this beautiful 'Galaxy' model. It mesmerized everybody, maybe me too. Later, I realized it was a form only, which doesn't say anything and which overrides the natural formations, natural growth and contours of the land, ignores it completely and simply superimposes a structure which is totally alien to the surroundings and all that we have learned in these 20 years. And even if Mother made a sketch of the Industrial Zone, or the Residen-

tial Zone, it has nothing to do with the respect we owe to Mother. For me it is out. We have to revise it, to make it afresh. To petrify it is not Mother, at least not the way I understand it. People cling to something because, "Oh, Mother has touched it". Yes, she has approved even contrary things to engender the contradictions to show how they are and resolve them. Twenty years ago, when Roger was the sole figure to decide about this huge area, sure we said "Yes, Mother has said", but today I think it is foolish. I would say there is a general trend towards renewing our approach.

Do you have any idea for whom we are building the town?

Poppo: I don't know! We are working for the unknown. We are only doing the day-to-day work. You cannot plan for 10,000 people right now. Most probably that is our safeguard. Imagine that we had Rs. 55 crores waiting for us to be used! That would be such an ecological disaster and not only for the land and people. Funds should be supplied in relation to our needs of today, tomorrow, or maybe the day after, but that is all. Humanity has spent so many millions of years to reach the stage of today and we wanted to build this town of the future in 10 years! I remember when Auroville was founded, an associate of Roger, Braslewski, said: "Yes, in 10 years the township will be ready. The cost of one day of the Vietnam war will be enough for the whole township". But in those days we always said 'yes', we had no idea, and no fixed point to relate to.

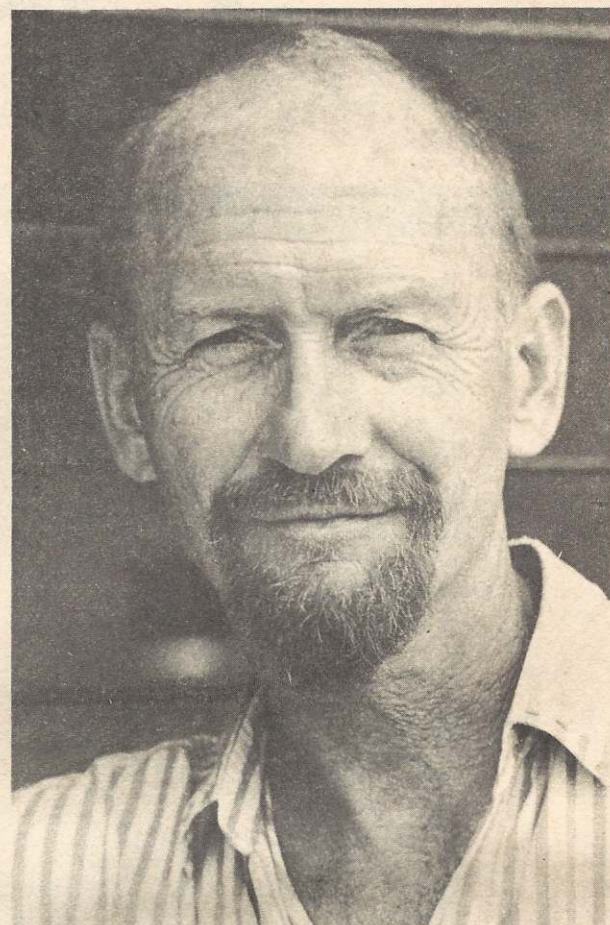
What is the biggest challenge for you in building in Auroville?

Poppo: My real challenge is this structural challenge to do things which are not known, to make a synthesis out of our modern day technologies and needs and combine it with the beauty and knowledge of what people did hundreds of years ago. By reading Sri Aurobindo you just widen and you try to put that into your work if you can, if it comes that way. That is a tremendous challenge. And it's important to have the freedom to do it without having one chief architect. We also have to learn to accept that people still have the freedom to experiment and build on their own. That also involves architecture. If you study historical town-planning you see that if a town plan does not fit anymore, it gets broken down. Then you get enough rubble to build roads etc. That's why we should build biologically, with materials which can be utilized again if the building is in the way.

I noticed that before you start building, you check out the spot where to build by dowsing. Are you convinced that by doing so you create a more harmonious space for the people to live and work in?

Poppo: I would say yes. I am quite new to it, and still studying geomantic forces, but I definitely believe there are spots on the

This issue and the next of *Auroville* to be an architect in Auroville? What our mistakes? These are some of the



Poppo

Photo John Mandeem

ground which are more positive to the human body than others. There are also bad places where there is underground water or geological faults which are not good for you. We are doing research into this and using it consciously on every new project. It is an old tradition in China, in Europe in the Middle Ages, and even in India they knew about it. In Europe they used it in cathedrals, and before that the tribals, like the Celts and the Slavic people, had the knowledge to find positive spots by instinct. These days we have lost this instinct, so we have to use a tool, a mechanical aid called a 'rod'.

Poppo, could you tell us why you became an architect?

Poppo: I always wanted to have my own beautiful environment, my own personal little room, beautiful, where I felt good. I never had in mind to become an architect, but I had these tendencies as a child when I was 5 or 6 already. When I turned 14, my father asked me what I wanted to become. I said "I want to become a technician". And then he said, "A technician is not a profession". Then he tried to explain what kind of technicians you can become, like an engineer, or an architect. My father was an architect. So I said, "I want to become what you are, an architect". But I would also say there were subtler forces at work, which I was not aware of. What architecture entails, the responsibility of an architect, I learned about in Auroville. There is a tremendous challenge, especially with the freedom we have in Auroville. I have learned tremendously from the Japanese architecture. I wouldn't call it copying, it is a part of the universal knowledge. I have learned, secondly, to follow a certain spirit. And following this spirit is another way of getting involved in it and every involvement is a new challenge. So that's why I am not tired of it.

Interview by Tineke

Today focus upon architecture. What does it mean is planned for the future? What can we learn from questions we hope to explore.

"To be sensitive to that magic of beauty and form..."

An interview with André Hababou

TOWN DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING: CREATION OF A COORDINATION GROUP

In order to focus the energies of the community towards Auroville's future, the Working Committee, with the agreement of the community, has set up a Development and Planning Coordination group consisting of 14 members. The need for such a group had also been voiced by 'Aurofuture' planning office.

The mandate of the group, which will hold office for a period of one year, is:

- to help Auroville define its collective priorities in terms of development activities.
- to ensure that the development of Auroville is in accordance with the values and ideals set forth by the Mother and that "things will get formulated as the underlying Truth of the township emerges and takes shape".
- to update the Master Plan for approval by the Residents' Assembly.
- to define and select surveys, need assessments and projects for study, according to the directions and priorities set.
- to monitor the current and future Auroville Development Scheme grants, and to allocate unspecified funds for development.
- to develop a strategy and prioritize purchase, sale and lease of land.
- to coordinate fund raising activities for Auroville's development plans and projects.

The new group is composed of people who hold widely divergent views on how to shape Auroville's future. The Working Committee decided upon this composition, bearing in mind Mother's words to Roger Anger in April 2, 1970:

"You must all agree—that is the only way to do good work." □

♦ ♦ ♦ To Receive Auroville Today ♦ ♦ ♦

The contribution for the next 12 issues of Auroville Today is for India Rs. 100, for abroad Rs. 550, Can.\$ 27, French F. 145, DM 45, It.Lira 31,500, D.Gl. 50, US \$ 22.50, U.K.£ 13.50. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International centre in your country (add 10%) or to Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: Contribution for Auroville Today. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please avoid postal orders. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.

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Auroville Today provides information about Auroville on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.

Editorial team: Alan, Annemarie, Bill, Carel, Tineke, Roger, Yanne. Typesetting on computer: Brigitte. Franz (Prisma) assisted with the final stage.
 Printed at Auroville Press.

Green Calendar 1992!

A new Auroville greenwork calendar has just been printed with full-colour photographs.

For more information, write to:
 Ed, Auroville Greenwork Resource Center, Kottakarai, Auroville 605101.

André started working on Auroville's town plan back in 1968, along with Roger Anger. Several buildings in Auroville are of his design, among others Auromodèle Atelier. Presently he works at Aurofuture and Auromodel Atelier.

Q.: What for you is the deeper meaning of architecture?

André: When I make an architectural design, my first aim is to manifest harmony and beauty. Making only cheap houses doesn't interest me. Many people can do that. I say this because in Auroville at one time this was, because of the lack of money, the only factor. But to be sensitive to that magic of beauty and form, of the relation between the inner and the outer, the integration of architecture into the landscape, is much more difficult. Sure, the other factors are also important. The building has to be functional and the price should be reasonable. We cannot always dream, and it is all right—this brings you down to reality.

How did you start practising architecture?

A.: In France I studied at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* and I worked at architects' studios. In March 1968, I wrote to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, for I had an inner quest, and to my great surprise I received, along with the answer, a brochure of Auroville in which there was a photo of the 'Galaxy' model of the town. I found it very stimulating, and I said to myself that it was exactly the place I was looking for; where I could offer what I could do best. When I arrived, a few months later, I wrote a letter to Mother who asked me to work with Roger. At first I had some difficulty accepting his personality which had a lot of vital force which symbolized for me too much the western way. But this apprehension disappeared quickly when the work began, and we went on together very well. He was very creative, loved beauty, and in all the projects he did he had an incredible thirst for perfection; he pushed and pushed to make it better. I was 26, and not very mature. I learned a lot from him and I am very grateful to him for that. At that time, an architects' study-office had been set up in Pondicherry, in a very beautiful colonial house. Suddenly there were a lot of draftsmen, architects and modelmakers. We

were all plugged into Auroville. Roger went to see the Mother about three times a week. She communicated to him, during all those years, her vision of the town. And when he came to the office, he was all charged up with that force; it was very concrete, we all felt it. In this place there was a very beautiful work atmosphere; a lot of projects were designed there. It was a privileged time, for we had the feeling of being carried along. It was simple, light, clear. This period lasted 8 or 9 years. Then there was the conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society and Roger withdrew for 8 or 10 years. The architecture and construction of 'Aurofuture' projects were completely stopped. There was no money any more for Auroville and the study office was evacuated. We were compelled to set up handicraft units to survive. I designed envelopes for Auroville incense, and helped with exhibitions for the *Agenda*, and when funds came later on from the Indian government I designed the New Creation school, the CRCP and some individual houses in Pondy as well as here. When Roger came back, I immediately joined the new team at Aurofuture.

Personally I am more interested in architecture and interior design than in town planning. Roger tried to explain his idea of town planning to his team, and a real effort was made to understand each other and to integrate all the possibilities. Of course, when I am asked to make designs for a building, I keep in mind the general plan, and the environment. It is an excellent exercise in common sense, and if certain architects think that to follow the plan for the town means losing their freedom, personally I think that you can preserve your freedom while respecting the prime vision. Anyway, certain areas have been reserved to allow those architects who wish to, to make experiments.

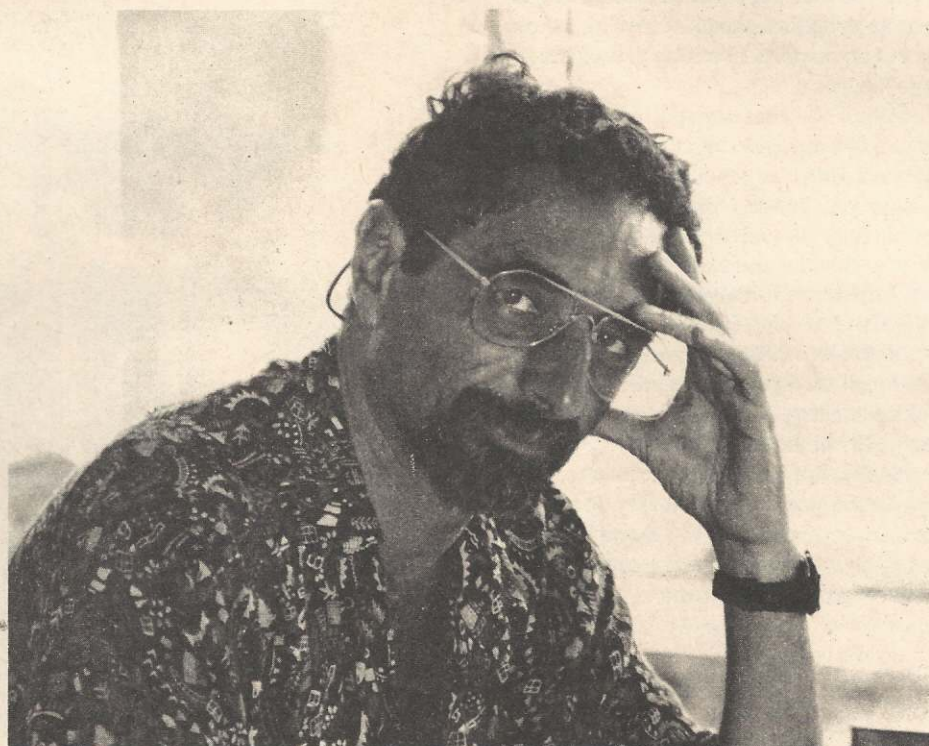
Q.: How are your relations with the other architects in Auroville?

A.: I don't have many contacts. I recognize that there are some with talent, who have discovered new techniques, but for me Roger is a visionary and has the capacity to gather people around him. Therefore I regret that all the architects are not trying to collaborate to manifest that vision. As for me, I am sure that as long as we don't accept a chief architect to coordinate the whole, whether it be Roger or someone else, we will remain in the fog.

Q.: Doesn't that bring the risk of delaying the construction of the town for a very long time?

A.: I don't think that that should be the reason which prevents the construction of the town. It is rather the lack of inhabitants. You can't make an empty town. We are beginning construction in small steps: in the residential zone for example, with semi-collective or individual residences. Aurofuture has asked many architects to design projects for this zone.

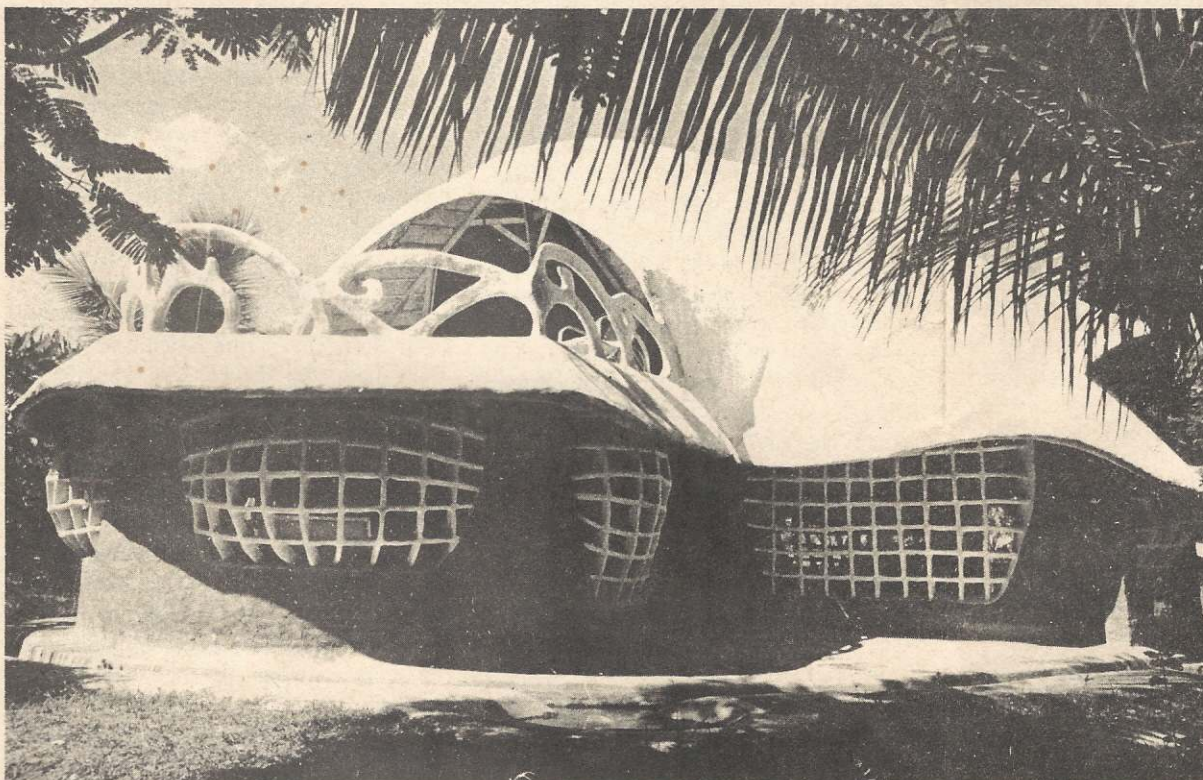
But what I most believe is that through working together we will find this new way of facing problems, a truer way of living. It is that which will make the town—not just a town, but the Town that She wants.



André Hababou

Yanne

Some Aurovilians have chosen not to use an architect but to design and construct their own house. Here are two examples of that adventurous breed, who did it themselves.



Rolf's house

Photo John Mandeen

DO IT YOURSELF (2)

Ireno

Just over one year ago, it was an open field. Today, "Sangha" has a deep well and four houses, in a variety of styles, in various stages of construction. Recently, Ireno's house was the first to be completed...

"I decided to design and construct the house myself partly because I felt it would save money, but mainly because it was an interesting challenge. I had no technical background, so I lacked confidence at first. But I asked around and got a lot of help from Auroville architects and engineers—sometimes too much! For example, I'd take a problem to three different people and they'd give me three different answers. Finally, I realized that asking too many people was a sign of my insecurity, and that often my original idea was the best. So slowly my confidence grew.

The design is very simple and functional because of my limited budget. I started with a basic concept, but this changed during the process. For example, I originally planned to put T-beams on the roof, but when the walls were already half-way up, my mason told me he'd never worked with T-beams before—but he did know how to make a channel roof. So we switched to channels! Lots of things like this happened.

As to the challenges of building in Auroville... Well, with me it began with finding a place to build. This took about 8 months, and a lot of psychological energy. The problem was the town planners and greenworkers had a difference of opinion over the use of the original place we wanted to build—and I was the meat inside the sandwich! Finally, it was resolved, but this was harder work for me than the construction itself. Next, there was the problem of finding good workers. Eventually, I found a mason

who I thought was one of the best in Auroville, and I put him in charge of the other workers. Unfortunately, he turned out to be not so good... Linked to this is the problem of quality. If you want to build in Tamil Nadu, you must accept that you cannot get Western standards of construction. The basic materials—bricks etc.—are poor, and many of the workers are not highly trained. So unless you want to go mad, you have to adjust your expectations—and be willing to run around brick-yards, choosing the best bricks from the worst.

One of the most unexpected challenges for me concerned my role in the construction. Because when you build with your own money, you become very concerned with how it is spent, and you start acting like a 'boss'—shouting at the workers and so on. In fact, I discovered in myself the same 'boss' attitudes I had been fighting against when I was in the West. And I learned that the best way to get the workers to work well was to pick up a 'chetty' and work alongside them. That really broke the barriers.

Finally, I'm happy with the house. And I enjoyed the process. I'd definitely do it again because the experience was so valuable. It clearly strengthened my vital energy level, and this was necessary to me in order to live in Auroville.

From an interview with Alan.

*Chetty = a metal pan used for carrying sand, cement etc.

DO IT YOURSELF (1)

Rolf

Behind the severe functionalism of "Altecs" workshop in "Ami" lies a surprise. Walk around the corner, and suddenly you're in a world of plastic, flowing Daliesque forms, a whisper of Surrealism wedged in among the cashew fields. You've arrived at Rolf's house...

"We built it six years ago—very fast. I did the drawings in two weeks, and the third week we started digging the foundations. In five months it was finished. After living under keet for some time, I'd had enough of the dirt. So in this house, the roof is a mixture of vermiculite, sand and cement laid over bamboo matting and strips of *pakkumaram*, and it's supported on granite pillars. The walls—which are separate from the roof structure—are brick, the windows ferro-cement.

"I'm interested in the combination of round and straight forms. My basic conception was three interlocked hexagons, because the hexagon is a very stable shape and it is a form taken from nature. This is very important to me. Because natural forms obey certain basic natural laws and they are timeless, beyond fashion. When it came to the roof, I had a conception in my head, but when we started bending the wood pieces, spontaneously other shapes emerged as possibilities in the material itself began to manifest. In fact, the whole house shaped itself in this spontaneous way. After the workers left in the afternoon, I'd sit and think about what they should do the next day. I'd try to tune in to a harmony in myself, with my surroundings, with nature, and see what would happen next. Even the garden design came organically. At the end of the building, I had a few small granite pieces that I thought I'd arrange outside. Then Pierre Legrand came by and said, 'Why not come to Vannur? We can get some big stones there.' We set off immediately, chose the stones and three hours later the lorry was here. We unloaded the boulders and they immediately fitted, their lines contrasting with the fluidity of the house.

"I feel very good living here. The house is cool, the light is beautiful, and I feel my inspiration constantly flowing. This didn't happen when I was teaching in 'The Pyramids' (an unfinished building from the early years) at Aspiration, for example.

"I've always been inspired by what Mother said about leaving behind what has been done before and marching on into the unknown. In Auroville we have the freedom to do this, to experiment with forms like this house. Whereas in Germany, I'd run up against all kinds of regulations. A German architect came here once and told me, 'This house breaks all the rules. But it works!' Architects find it difficult to change because they've been taught to think in a certain way. But art, any creative activity, has to keep breaking with the past to create something new. And this is what Auroville is for."

From an interview with Alan.



Ireno's house

KEET

One of my first physical impressions of Auroville was of an architectural battleground where the armies had run out of ammunition (cement) and gone home.

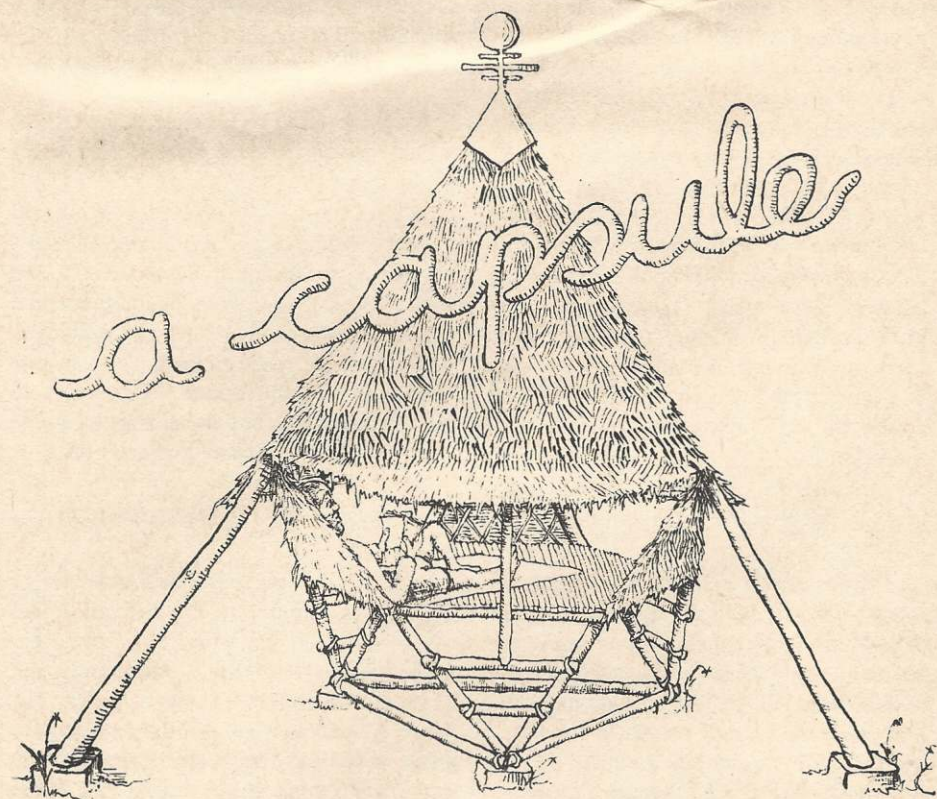
I was a pretty green architecture student with a headful of unfulfilled fantasies, mostly derived from a fascination with crystalline geometry, and pioneering Auroville was an abundant opportunity to set some of them free. Particularly since the materials were bamboo and keet (plaited coconut frond), and not only were mistakes bio-degradable, but you could wake up one morning and decide you wanted a window to watch the dawn through and within a few hours with a minimum of fuss, it was done. It meant that from a daily basic initial shape you could eventually and experimentally fashion a sort of second skin that you could, after a few years of consideration, solidify into something more permanent if you so wished.

We first lived at the beach, in what is now 'Quiet', in a fairy-tale house built for Jan by Joss and an amazing little *maestri* (maestro) and his 'big band' from the nearest village. His name was Ramu. He was exactly the same age as me and I soon found him amazingly adept at translating a sweep of the arm into a delightful surprise. So much did I enjoy this man and his skill and immediate comprehension of 3D geometry that as a regular job we would set out every morning from the beach and spend the days in the full sun climbing over skeletal casuarina and bamboo frames trying out different ideas. Those were the days!

I remember the day we built the first capsule. Actually we were making a portable *cackhuse* (lavatory) out of an octahedron inside a tetrahedron and I'd thought we'd agreed to put a triangular floor at the base, but I went off and came back and Ramu had put a hexagonal floor at the centre of the octahedron. I was amazed. I hadn't realized that that was possible. Ramu had simply thought that that was what I'd meant. Then there was a period you could've called the Age of the Capsule. I think in five years we must have built about 300, from the basic three-metre size to the five-metre one; portable ones – it took only 10 men to carry a three-metre and it could fit on a bullock cart. We built capsule complexes, capsule castles and capsule *cackhuses*. Ami was initially an all-capsule guest house with at least 10 of them.

Keet for me is synonymous with the bicycle (as concrete is with the motor-cycle). I am still gratefully astonished how waterproof it is in torrential monsoon and also cool by day. It's a tribute to village ingenuity. The fact that it's so restrictive – not less than 45° pitch and no valleys or curves – gives the village its aesthetic integrity. We haven't yet come up with an answer to its main disadvantage which is that it slowly decomposes around you, but some would still say that's a small price to pay for a roof that lets through the cosmic vibrations and harmonises your dreams.

Johnny



THE CAPSULE IS A DESIGN DEVELOPED IN AUROVILLE AS THE SIMPLEST CYCLONE-PROOF ONE-MAN SHELTER TO BE BUILT FROM LOCAL MATERIALS WITH VILLAGE KNOWHOW.

SINCE THE GEOMETRY IS CRYSTALLINE TETRA/OCTAHEDRAL ALL PIECES ARE SIMPLE INCREMENTS OF A MODULE (IN THIS CASE 6M).

THE APPROPRIATE MATERIALS IN STH. INDIA ARE CASUARINA POLES, BAMBOO, COCONUT ROPE AND PALM THATCH.

Drawing and text by Johnny



Aurovilian Auroprem (centre) and a Soviet girl planting a tree in New York City.

Ambassadors in Washington D.C. and elsewhere

The protocol was informal and the work was tough. Last year, together with compatriots from the Soviet Union, Northern Ireland, Costa Rica and the American group "Youth at Risk", the Aurovilians Rathinam, Rajaveni, Aurora and Selvaraj attacked the piles of debris, refuse and litter on a desecrated urban block in Washington, D.C. They were going to plant a park in a neighborhood with little resemblance to the White House. For far from the diplomatic cocktail circuit, a Black majority struggles to get it together in this city with a history of racial tension.

What was it all about?

The Earthstewards Network has evolved a global strategy of conflict resolution and environmental restoration. This is based on grass roots action by people who have figured out that everybody has to be involved in caring for the planet and not just governments or "somebody else". Earthstewards Network came to Auroville in 1988 with the (Teamwork'88) Peace Trees Programme in which Soviet, Indian and American youth planted 2000 "Peace Trees" in the Auroville area as part of an educational exchange. (See *Auroville Today's* No.2 and 3).

Last year Earthstewards also sponsored Urban Peace Trees programme in Los Angeles, USA, where three Aurovilians—Boominathan, Radhakrishnan and Arumugan—participated. This year Auroprem, Karuna and Perumal are just back from Urban Peace Trees in New York City where the *New York Times* photographed Perumal with his "paisam" dish, even detailing the ingredients: "milk, sugar, raisins, cashews and vermicelli". Although the *Times* focused on the gastronomic side of the programme – the multi-culturally prepared dinners—the message came through in the photo and the article: "Cooking and Sweating Together in the Kitchen and the Park," ran the headline with: "Young people from six countries planted trees and cooked native foods for the Urban Peace Trees programme ... sponsored by the Earthsteward's Network, an organization ... that promotes inter-

national understanding and environmental awareness." (*New York Times*, July 17, 1991).

Rathinam reflected on his experiences in Washington during a break in his Auroville Fund work in the Secretariat. He remarked that 'shocking' was the only way to describe the cultural gap with the Black Americans from the organization called "Youth at Risk" with whom they had to work together in the Urban Peace Trees programme. With the Soviets, Northern Irish and Costa Ricans, the dynamic was smoother, he recalled. "We were 35 participants all staying together in an international youth hostel and our major project was cleaning up and planting a park in an abandoned area full of garbage – which included even hypodermic needles!" There was even a huge block of concrete they had to break up with jack hammers. Tree planting was not the simple affair of pits, soil and saplings which we have in Auroville. Instead they were planting large, young trees with packed root balls that had to be carefully positioned to avoid electrical wires, pipes and all the urban infrastructure as well as soil, drainage and other considerations. The neighbours watched the process with unfriendly eyes, silently, and from a distance. Little by little the suspicions thawed, and by the end, the whole neighbourhood was enjoying the park and the process. Planting also took place in other parts of the city and included a trip to Delaware where small groups lived with families. Social activities and group sessions in conflict resolution, teamwork exercises and games, were all integrated in the programme.

Rathinam returned to Auroville "with new energy and many ideas". He emphasized how the programme had also provided an opportunity to experience the Auroville network throughout the U.S.A. Their group travelled extensively throughout the States, staying with Auroville related people, and they found it a special experience. Meeting recently with AVI-USA (June, Jack and Julian), Rathinam is working to strengthen and establish this network. He and others would also like to help organize future Earthsteward programmes in Auroville.

Bill



FINDHORN

This summer, three members of the *Auroville Today* team visited the Findhorn Community in Scotland. Here are their observations.

Findhorn is a spiritual community located on the North-East coast of Scotland. Begun in 1962 by Eileen and Peter Caddy and Dorothy Maclean, it first became famous for growing gigantic cabbages on 'impossible' soil – the result, it was claimed, of receiving guidance from nature spirits or 'devas'. Today, the community has about 170 residents and the main focus of its work is education: over 5000 visitors a year attend conferences and courses on topics like sacred dance, Taoist healing, the Transformation Game and intuitive leadership. Its work on group process, in particular, is widely recognized and admired.

During the past five years, the organization of the community has undergone major changes as it confronted issues similar to those confronting Auroville; issues like the relationship of individual initiatives to collective needs, and the role of business in a spiritual community. There are four main elements to the present community. The Findhorn Foundation, which is a charitable trust, has an education wing that organizes conferences and courses, and a development wing that is coordinating an ambitious building programme. Community businesses – which include a bookshop and a mail order trading centre – are run by New Findhorn Directions (NFD) which, although legally separate, is wholly owned by the Foundation. Finally, there is the so-called independent sector – individuals, organizations and businesses, like a Steiner School and a computer

consultancy company, which are not part of the Foundation but which choose to have some relationship to it. These businesses and organizations are under no contractual obligation to the Foundation, but sometimes contribute in profits or kind. Individuals in this larger 'Open Community' receive no financial assistance from Findhorn, and must purchase their own homes and set up their own businesses in the surrounding area. If, however, they are able to offer a minimum amount of work to the community each week, they can become 'associate members', and this gives them the right to participate in large community meetings.

Full members of the Foundation have been accepted into the community after an extended and concentrated 2 year entry process. They receive accommodation and, after a certain period, a small monthly stipend. The day-to-day matters of the members of the community are looked after by an Administration Group while the main function of their 'Core Group', which has no executive function, is to meet together and meditate upon topics of community importance. Major decisions are taken by the whole community based upon consensus and the concept of a 'loyal minority' – a minority of members who disagree with a decision but who agree not to block the process.

Spiritually, Findhorn has no formal doctrine or creed. But while members follow many different spiritual paths, a certain Christian ethic and outlook remains ap-

parent. The main focus is upon bringing spiritual principles into daily life through work, relationships and respect for the earth.

As for the *Auroville Today* team – they were kept busy. Annemarie attended an 'Experience Week' – which introduces participants to the community, to group building and to techniques of individual growth – and Alan and Tineke participated in a two week workshop on Workshop Leadership.

"What I experienced," said Tineke, "was an incredible outburst of creativity. Partly because we were forced to plan our own workshops, but also the whole atmosphere of the place triggered me off. And the long after-hours sessions I had with my two roommates were where many of my best ideas were born." Annemarie was surprised by how quickly a group identity was created. "I liked the light-hearted games and exercises. I also found very useful the simple group agreements we made at the beginning of the week. Agreements like being on time, respecting the confidentiality of group process and, instead of generalizing, only making 'I' statements."

But how far is the Findhorn experience relevant to Auroville?

"Group-building in the Findhorn sense may not be Auroville's purpose," points out Annemarie, "but it may have a function here for some people as research into group awareness and personal growth." "What I really found easy in Findhorn," said Tineke, "was to meditate twice a day. Since returning here, I've managed it perhaps three times! It seems that the energy is different here." Differences there clearly are. Findhorn is physically much smaller than Auroville, people live much closer together, and culturally it is predominantly Anglo-Saxon. There are no

members from India, from Africa or from the Far East. "This makes it easier for them in one sense," says Alan, "because there's more of a sense of a shared language and attitudes there than here. But I've also a feeling that sometimes it may stop them getting to the root of problems or they may evolve solutions that only work for people with a certain cultural background." "One thing I noted there," remarks Tineke, "was the emphasis upon beginning every activity with 'inner work' – with attunement and meditation. Here I find myself just wanting to get on with the work and skipping this other part."

"The energy is different here," says Alan, "and this may be partly because many people have made a life commitment to Auroville, while in Findhorn most people stay only 3-4 years and then take their experience and skills outside. This allows them an element of play, of lightness, whereas for us it's more 'Truth or the Abyss'. This makes it much harder here in certain respects, but when we make it, something else comes through. Look at the Chamber of Matrimandir. That's twenty years of almost invisible work. And the process – in Findhorn terms – has sometimes been lousy. But see the result! It's somehow a symbol of how Auroville works."

"However, there's still a lot we can learn from Findhorn – particularly in terms of how they relate to one another, how they focus group and community energies, and in their emphasis upon bringing consciousness into matter."

"I laughed so much over there," says Tineke, "and when I tell this to Aurovilians they say, 'It's so serious here. Why can't we laugh more?'"

Alan

The Findhorn Community in the 1990's

Auroville Today talked to four members of the Findhorn community who are closely involved in its development. Jill Brierly holds the focus for the 'open community' – individuals who share the aims but are not members of the Findhorn Foundation; Eric Franciscus and Angela Morton coordinate the educational and communication activities of the Foundation; and Alec Walker is Managing Director of New Findhorn Directions (NFD) Ltd., the trading subsidiary which is wholly owned by the Foundation.

AVToday: What are your visions for Findhorn in the 1990's? What will be the community's relevance to the world?

Alec: In the past, people came to the community and would say, "It's great. But it won't work back in Idaho." I think the more we can do to show that what we have here is a sustainable, viable economy that can be replicated outside without people having to join a spiritual community, the more we will have to say about the value and purpose of spirituality in the modern world.

Angela: I think our educational programmes in the 1990's will be geared a lot towards the practical applications of spiritual life.

Our 'Experience Weeks' – which we've been running for 18 years now – are about getting people to realize there's a spiritual dimension to life. Now that is well understood, and our new programmes, Experience Weeks Two and Three are about how to apply that truth in local and global ways. And we're extending our educational programmes into new areas like business, governance, health, alternative economics etc.

Eric: We're just beginning to explore if some of our courses can be officially accredited under the British accreditation system, because my belief is that in 5-10 years companies like ICI and British Rail will be

delighted to have an employee who has been through some of the training we provide, training which at present has no recognition 'out there'. And it will be very exciting to see NFD prove that businesses can be run efficiently, profitably AND be of benefit to the planet. I also think that our energy field will grow and stretch and attract more and more local people into it. Already there are many new age people living in the area. They talk a different jargon, they don't hold hands or share, but they're doing the same work. And it's this, perhaps, which will become our city of light. Because it's to do with people, not buildings.

Jill: I see that the Foundation's role in the future will be to hold the spiritual focus for the rest of the community – just like in the old days you'd have the monastery in the middle of the village. What excites me is that now we have enough people in the larger community to try out new forms of dealing with money like the LET system. It's a matter of looking at everything that hasn't worked in the past and bringing to it a spiritual impulse and new ideas so that we can become an example of a normal lifestyle but with this extra quality.

AVToday: What about the Third World? What is the relevance of Findhorn to somewhere like India?

Alec: I believe it is of considerable relevance. Many of the problems of the Third World were created by the West. If we can help change the West by getting people to

consume less and be more conscious of the planet's needs, we will resolve most of the problems of the Third World.

Eric: I agree. It's true we're predominantly white middle-class in Findhorn, and that's the sector we're appealing to. But for me that's O.K. Because although finally it would be great for the whole world to be walking in and out of here, at the moment we're dealing with an interim situation. If we can reach all the white middle-class and change them, the Third World will already look a lot better.

AVToday: Why Findhorn? What keeps you here?

Jill: It's not easy to live here as a member of the open community. It's difficult to find accommodation and work. But I came because I wanted to run my life differently, and at present to do that 'out there' is very difficult. It's very inspiring to be able to live our lives within our ideals and surrounded by people who think the same way. My dream is that one day I can go back home and that it will be the same there. But for now it isn't. Eric: On a spiritual level, this is the Beverley Hills of the world. And I feel that at the moment this is the place where I can best fulfil the contract I made with God; to work only for Him.

Alec: I find it difficult to answer. I was struck by Eric's phrase about a spiritual Beverley Hills. Whatever the truth of that, there are very few places on the planet where you can find the spiritual quality of lifestyle that we have here – and ultimately that is

contd. on next page



l.to r.-Annemarie, Alan and Tineke back in AV after Findhorn

SEPTEMBER'S BRIEF NEWS

Matrimandir

1) The Chamber:

Access to the chamber is now controlled. Aurovilians are on duty by rota at the Chamber door. Special visiting hours have been set for visitors and guests.

2) Skin cover:

A residents' assembly meeting was held on 9.9.91 in which questions were raised about possible alternative solutions for the outer skin cover of the Matrimandir. The meeting decided that one or two elements of the present prototype would be completed, and that alternative solutions will be considered before a final decision will be made.

Aurelec

The Working Committee has worked out a set of proposals regarding Aurelec's relation to the Auroville Foundation, which are acceptable to both the W.C. and Aurelec. These proposals have been circulated in the community, and a referendum has been conducted to discover the views of every resident of Auroville above 18 years. Although some reservations were expressed about the use of a referendum, a large majority of the 200 forms returned were in favour of the proposals.

Assembly of Commerce and ABC

An Assembly of Commerce has been formed which consists of all residents of Auroville who are active executives of industrial or commercial units in Auroville, or representatives of industrial or commercial units which relate to Auroville.

The Auroville Board of Commerce (ABC) has been reconstituted and consists of 8 members, chosen by the Assembly of Commerce. The purpose of the ABC is to help co-ordinate and promote commercial activities in Auroville.

Auroville Information Directory (AID)

Work is progressing on compiling a directory containing information on almost everything that is happening in Auroville—from the opening times of the Freestore to who are the members of the Working Committee. It is expected to be published in November and it is the first project of the new Auroville Communication Centre being set up in the CSR office. The next project is the creation of a computerized data-base of friends and contacts of Auroville from all over the world.

Tibet in Auroville

A group of about twenty Tibetan monks from Zonkar Chode monastery in their saffron robes descended on Auroville for a few days. They donned exotic masks and costumes to perform sacred ritual masked dances at the Bharat Nivas for a large audience from Auroville, Pondicherry and surrounding area.

The weather

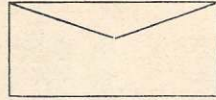
September has been moderately sunny with good rainshowers—during the whole summer monsoon 10 cm more rain than usual has fallen. Two very localized thunder-showers brought such gusts of wind that three windmills were severely damaged, and several trees fell on the roads.

Stop press...

Shri L.K. Tripathi, I.A.S., Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Tamil Nadu Government, has just been appointed as Secretary to the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. His appointment will take effect from October 21st, 1991. He will reside in Auroville.



Letters



An oversight

I would like to rectify the oversight of not mentioning the references in my article on "Form, Structure and Energy" which appeared in *Auroville Today* number 25.

This was a compilation from my undergraduate research thesis written some time ago, in which the sources were clearly acknowledged. I would therefore like to acknowledge the following sources:

Mookerjee, Ajit: *Tantra Art*

Norelli-Bachelet, Patrizia: *The New Way*

Tompkins, Peter: *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*

and two papers:

Flanagan, Patrick: 'The Pyramid and its Relationship to Biocosmic Energy.'

Gulick, R.: 'Proportions of the Matrimandir.'

Mona

Auroville, October 4th 1991

Auroville Guest Programmes

Dear Auroville Today,

In response to the article on the Auroville Guest Programme, Winter 91/92 in *Auroville Today* No.31, I would like to make the following suggestions.

To begin with, let me tell you that I appreciate very much the work the workshop organization group has done in preparing this programme. I am also totally convinced that it will be very good for Auroville to organise more and more workshops and seminars for Auroville's visitors.

However, I am puzzled, to say the least, by the activities this group is proposing for Auroville's visitors.

Do you really think that people will come from far away for such programmes which are available in so many other places? Don't you think that they might simply miss what Auroville is by involving themselves so much in such programmes?

Can't we find themes that would be at the heart of what Auroville offers, so that people would come for Auroville and learn mainly about Auroville?

It reminded me that Mother once said that we are not here to do ordinary things that others do even better elsewhere; but that we are here to do things they cannot do as they don't even imagine them possible. And that anything short of that is simply not interesting and certainly not worthy of the help Sri Aurobindo gives us.

So, to try to make it more interesting, I propose that we work at setting up two new *Awareness Workshops* that would have such themes as: "Learning to be" (for an integral development of one's being) and "An integrated approach to a sustainable future" (for the manifestation of a new world).

Obviously, the first one concerns the work we must do on ourselves, and the second one our "outside work". The workshops will have to follow each other, but could also be taken separately. Both workshops will have to emphasize the need of both the "inner" and "outer" work to be done.

For the first workshop we could seek inspiration in, among other works, the first two articles of the Charter, in Mother's text "To be a true Aurovillian" and in her words on education. Sessions could also be organized on "The aim of life", "The inner discovery", "The need of a new spirituality for the 21st. century" etc.

The second workshop could take its inspiration more from the third and fourth articles of the Charter and try to express what has to be worked on for a new world to manifest. Topics could include health care and nutrition, organic agriculture, land reclamation and afforestation, renewable energy sources, appropriate building technology etc.

What I have tried to express here obviously needs to be worked on a lot more. But if we could organise something on this line, we would have a unique experience to offer to Auroville's visitors, and at the same time, we would generate a tremendous interest in Mother's work.

Let us work on such programmes. Is anybody interested?

Gilles

The vision is coming back

The united Germanies have nearly 80,000,000 inhabitants. Some 50 of them are part of the German Auroville International Center. Not so many, compared with the considerable number of Aurovilians with German origin and also the German visitors in Auroville.

I wonder about this gap. Maybe postwar Germans prefer to realize their spirituality abroad. In fact until recently there was not much acceptance left for spiritual matters in post-war German cultural and intellectual main stream. Non-churchbound spirituality used to be rather blamed as something near to Nazi-occultism. This is true even for the Green Party and the ecological movement. So it seems to be much easier to be spiritual in India than in modern Germany. Beside this general background, Auroville in the eighties used to be a rather esoteric topic in our country. News from Auroville often looked strange, the social and political events in and about Auroville needed long interpretations — too long for most German travellers passing through Auroville.

But a few years ago there started this great Ice-Melting in the East-West world and, it seems, in regard to the self-centered and frozen Auroville situation too. So in Germany last year our AVI Center initiated a meeting with other relevant Sri Aurobindo-and-The-Mother-oriented groups and individuals. For instance we agreed to a distant, but friendly cooperation with the German SAS-branch and came in closer contact with some Sri Aurobindo publishers and centres. Some smaller groups out of the "Sri Aurobindo-scene" were just too far away for us to have contact with them, but a process has been going on since then, which let our centre double its the number of members and closer friends in one year. Fundraising for Auroville projects is successfully initiated. Once again German radio stations and magazines are covering Auroville. This time — for the first time in a long time! — in a less cynical manner. Auroville, it seems, is radiating again its creativeness, its courage, its vision....

Wolfgang, AVI Germany

Tour d'Auroville.

On 15th. September, cyclists of all shapes, ages and conditions met at Certitude sports ground to compete in the second all-Auroville cycle race for the Jack Alexander Memorial Trophy — and an enduring place in the Auroville Hall of Sports fame. After pledging themselves to uphold the Olympic ideal, and being divided into esoteric categories like "single-speed male" and "multi-speed female", the participants set off for a demented circuit of Auroville. The winner, in world-record time, was "Legs" Robi, hotly pursued by "Boy Racer" Francis on his mountain bike. Kumar was a worthy third. Last, and still unaccounted for, was Ron Jorgensen, an impromptu entry on a borrowed bike. Prizes were distributed like confetti.

Next year, Barcelona?

Findhorn

continued from page 6

what is most important to me. You see, when we talk of the Findhorn Community we can describe the organization here. But what's really important is the level of goodwill. And what we spend a lot of time doing here is not so much coming up with the best administrative structures, but rather reminding one another that what's important is our common humanity and our connection with spirituality and God. Because that's the motor that really drives everything. □

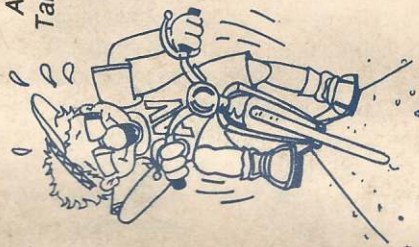
After the race
(from left to right)
Robi (winner),
Francis (second)
and
Bill (eighth).



AUROVILLE TODAY

By Airmail
Bookpost

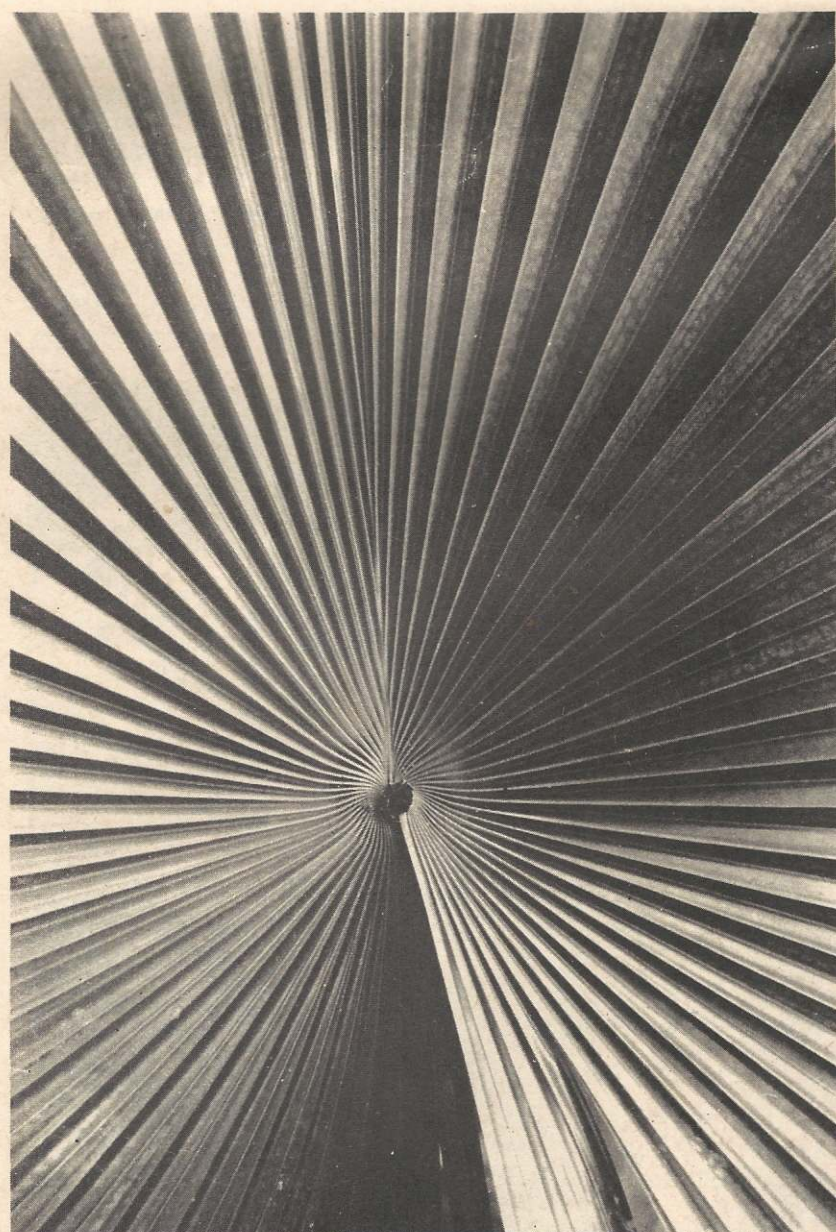
C.S.R. Office,
Auroville 605101,
Tamil Nadu - India



ANKE AND MICHAEL
BRACE
AUROVILLE

November 1991 - Number Thirty-Four

In this issue: Building in Auroville; Findhorn; letters . . .



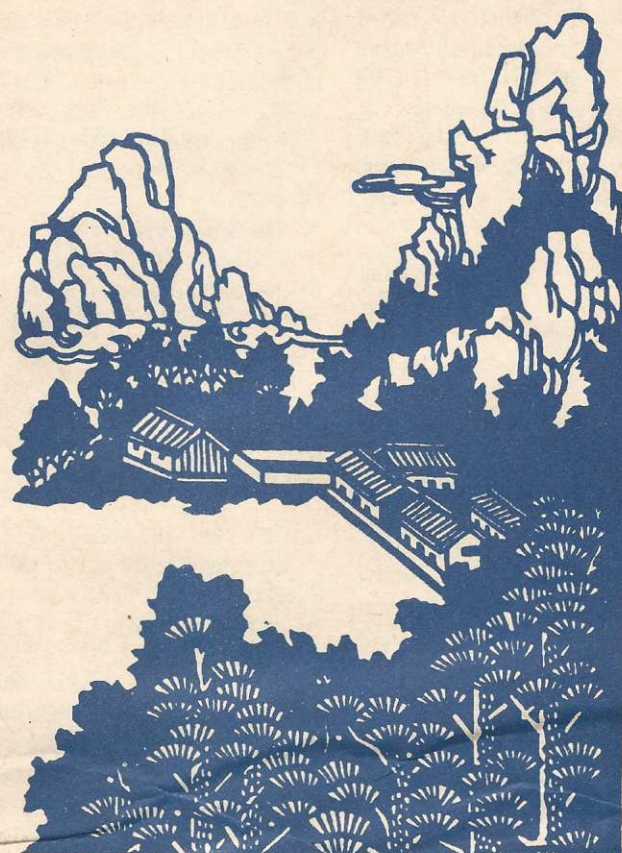
Nature as architect - detail of a palmyra leaf

Photo John Mandeem

FENG SHUI

The ancient art-science of Feng Shui has been practised for thousands of years in China and more recently in Auroville. Feng is "wind" and Shui is "water" and the essence is balance, the harmony of forces. Feng Shui has roots in the early Chinese philosophies, religions, and sciences, in Buddhism, Taoism and Confucian thought; but some experts claim the real origins are from India.

Feng Shui has numerous correctives for faulty architecture and forms that block energy or create points where energy can be lost. In his house, Murali has corrected the energy flow of the famous Auroville ferro-cement roof vault (channels) with the judicious placement of two bamboo flutes which conduct the Chi that the channel is not channelling. Mirrors, bells and plants, are also very



The awesome landscapes of craggy mountains and misty skies where a hermit crosses a tiny footbridge over a waterfall seem to be where it all started. Scrolls of the Tang Dynasty attempt to place everything in the grand scheme of the harmony and immortality of nature.

These 'galaxy models' of a universal plan reflect the Oriental pre-occupation with experiencing the balance of Yin and Yang, the forces of the universe in the macro and microcosms.

In Auroville, Massimiliano Morsiani, better known as "Murali", wrote recently: "Our environment not only affects our physical well-being, but influences our sense of comfort, peace of mind, and even our wealth. The architecture, the shape of the site, the interior design, the placement of the interior element, the furniture, the colours, the lights, the trees in the garden - all these should be planned according to the principles of Feng Shui."* These principles are based on the concurrence of worlds: the subtle world is reflected in the material world; our inner state and outer condition mutually influence each other. Energy is moving in all these worlds and is generally referred to in this tradition as Chi, which bears comparison with the Sanskrit term *Prana*. There are concentrations of this energy in the earth's magnetic fields which is a basic concern of geomancy. Feng Shui tends to be more inclusive than geomancy and can include astrological, psychological and psychic considerations. Sometimes it is called the "art of placement". Where to put the bed in your room, or where to build a skyscraper are all issues requiring proper placement.

Murali immediately points out to inquiring Aurovilians: "What is Feng Shui when you have the Integral Yoga!" But still, he adds, it's nice to know about the energies moving in your environment that may have a subconscious influence on you without you recognizing it.

useful as correctives to improve the flow.

Feng Shui is banned in Communist China but legends abound in Hong Kong and Singapore about fortunes lost due to the wrong disposition of a building site, the wrong size of door; and of fortunes gained by putting the cash register at a right angle to the door, or shielding the business from wrong influences in the neighborhood. Feng Shui is what every builder, designer and decorator must intuitively develop, at least to a certain extent, to succeed in their professions. Murali discovered Feng Shui when he noted that everyone who lived in a particular house suffered financial losses and when they moved, their financial position reversed. It happened to him also and he began to work very successfully on renovating old structures. As there was no book in Italian on Feng Shui, he is writing one.

At the beach site of the Health and Healing Project, "Quiet", Murali carefully diagnosed the problems of the site. He noted how the windmill had been optimally placed at a sharp corner of the plot to dissipate contrary energies and the need for shelter against the strong wind that blows up from the sea. This creates so much Chi that direct exposure to the wind will have a draining effect rather than a healing effect on people. He recommended a central focus for the building site and how the proposed buildings should be oriented. The village cemetery which is part of the site can be 'balanced' by the small shrine near it if a Durga statue is placed there to deal with the spirits of the deceased. Perhaps the next question we should ask Murali is what we should use for the skin of Matrimandir. If he could resolve this controversial issue, Feng Shui would become a household word in Auroville.

Bill

* "Geomancing the Site" Dr. Massimiliano Morsiani Indian Architect and Builder. July 1991, p.27.

