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# PERSPECTIVE

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# AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE

BY SUZANNE MIAO PHOTOGRAPHY PRASHANT BHAT STYLIST DOLLAH SHAH

Perched on a steep slope in the hill station of Khandala in western India, Infinity House was designed to make the most of the stupendous views across the landscape

The infinity-edge swimming pool and its environs are the architect's favourite elements

A small hill station located in the Western Ghats of Maharashtra, Khandala is multiply blessed. Not only is it a nature-lover's paradise, but its cooler climate also makes it the perfect weekend getaway for Mumbai's city-dwellers, thanks to easy transport access. Humidity in the region might be high and annual rainfall heavy, but the dips in temperature, especially over the monsoon season, make it a captivating destination.

Overlooking one of the hill station's many valleys, Infinity House was crafted by Mumbai-based firm GA design (*gadesign.in*), which set out to make the most of the setting's spectacular views.

The natural site contours and complex topography presented the design team with its biggest challenges. Says GA design partner Rajan Goregaoker: "The site has a valley view and the house was designed to take maximum advantage of this fact. Designing the house with all the rooms facing the view, and orienting it at a precise angle of 48 degrees – which was derived after a lot of deliberation and site visits – was the toughest task of the design exercise. The infinity pool and the areas around it were then designed to create a juxtaposition of forms, making the entire area an interesting play of light, shadow and volume."



The master bedroom is cantilevered over the swimming pool and provides shade while also taking in the views

This infinity pool and its surroundings are the architect's favourite design elements of the home, with its 9m-high portal and the 4.5m cantilever supporting the master bedroom above while providing shade and making the most of the sweeping vistas.

The home itself comprises an intricately stacked series of angular volumes and cantilevers. The complexity of the physical site guided the placement of rooms with specific

purposes, says Goregaoker.

"Since the site was contoured, we worked with the section first. The entry level would house the living and public areas, while the floor above would be bedrooms, and the floor below would comprise the entertainment area. The site topography favoured the concept of an infinity pool overlooking the valley view, which formed the key focal point of the design of this house."

**"ORIENTING THE HOUSE AT A PRECISE ANGLE OF 48 DEGREES WAS THE TOUGHEST TASK"**





FROM LEFT The GA design team, Ritu Goregaoker, Shami Goregaoker, Rajan Goregaoker and Sachin Goregaoker

A linear passage on the horizontal axis connects the rooms on the ground and first floors, forming the core of the home's spatial planning, as well as driving the layout. Khandala's extreme weather conditions were also a key factor; because of the heavy rainfall, the structure was built primarily using brick and concrete. Walls are 23cm thick with waterproof plastering, while cantilevers provide large, useful overhangs that also serve as decks; all designed to protect the inner walls of the house from both storms and the heat of summer.

"Heavy rainfall for four to five months a year is a common feature here," says Goregaoker. "The house was designed with large overhangs to protect the inner walls. This also facilitates the practical use of the open verandas and balconies, as these areas remain dry even during times of storms and high winds."

The living room, for example, is bound by a glass and wood screen on one side, while sliding glass doors create an opening 12m wide leading out to the swimming pool and garden. Panoramic views are a key element of the public zone of the house, as indeed they are from virtually every other space, including the expansive bathrooms.



Heavy weather: Concrete and brick were the main construction materials, while large overhangs form decks as well as providing protection from storms and heat





LEFT & ABOVE While most internal walls are white, a black-patterned bathroom provides a stark contrast. Furniture provides pops of colour to relieve the white palette

Khandala's climate also determined the interior design. "Heavy moisture poses a serious problem for interiors," Goregaoker says, "so the house was therefore planned keeping furniture to the minimum, using floor-to-ceiling glass to achieve a connection with the outdoors and hard materials to highlight or provide feature walls."

The result is an interior bathed in light and white, creating a striking contrast with the greenery outside, while vividly hued vases and items of furniture provide pops of bright colour to interrupt the whiteness. Other departures from the primarily stark white palette include a Brazilian granite wall forming a dramatic feature backdrop to the dining area, and a

striking black-and-gold mosaic feature wall in one of the bathrooms.

The design of the villa acknowledges and appreciates its setting via huge windows, balconies and terraces, while its sharp, boxy contours form a stark contrast to the rolling curves and contours of the Khandala valleys. Goregaoker doesn't believe, though, that softer lines could have helped the house to sit more gently on the plot.

"The villa was designed as a work of art and was never intended to merge with the landscape," he says. "The language of the white interiors and the stark walls extends to the exterior facade and its geometrical forms make the house stand out as a bold edifice in its surroundings." ■