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The New

SRI LANKAN

House



Guava House

Mawanella

Architect
Ranjan Aluwihare
RA Designs

The Guava House is the romantic weekend retreat of Sri Lankan architect Ranjan Aluwihare (48), his Anglo-Irish wife Shaunagh and their two teenage offspring, currently at university and school in the UK. The family visits the house once a month from their home in Colombo. The architect, a descendent of a distinguished Kandyan family, was born in Putney, London. At that time, his father was the head of the Civil Engineering Department at the Greater London Council (GLC). Aluwihare's grandfather's brother was the celebrated civil servant and diplomat Sir Richard Aluwihare. Aluwihare recounts meeting Geoffrey Bawa in 1979, when he was 13 years old. "There was a hugely creative spirit in the air," he recalls, "with Bawa, his brother Bevis Bawa, Barbara Sansoni and Laki Senanayake all doing wonderful things. I remember my father's advice — don't become an architect!"



Nevertheless, Aluwihare studied fine art and interior design at the Chelsea School of Art in London and architecture at the North London Polytechnic School of Architecture, now the University of North London, and he graduated in 1985. He then worked in London with various architectural practices for more than a decade on a number of high profile projects that included a private residence for David Bowie, another for Lord Rothschild in Berkeley Square and yet another for Paul Getty in New York. He is now the Design Director of RA Designs specialising in restoration and interior design. He met his wife whose mother's family hails from

County Waterford in Ireland, in London and they moved to Colombo in 1999. The site, a 1.4 hectare rubber plantation at Mawanella near Kegalle some 100 km northeast of the capital was purchased in 2005 and the Guava House was completed atop a hill in 2008.

The house is approached on foot via a steep climb from the west to an entrance verandah. Looking back one can see Bible Rock in the distance. The entrance lobby is on a central axis, flanked by two bedroom cores and one passes beneath a mezzanine floor to emerge in a soaring double-height living and dining area with timber folding doors that open to a broad timber pool

deck and an infinity pool at the level of the tree canopy. A timber pergola shades the deck. A vehicle track is below the line of sight to the east of the pool and gives access to two guest pavilions — Mangosteen and Rambutan — named, like the house itself, after fruits that grow on the estate. They are located on the lower slopes with views of paddy fields.

The house is constructed with a steel frame, white painted fair-faced brick internal walls, teak beams and stairs, and mango hardwood timber cladding, with a roof of *iluk*, a reed obtained from Anaradapura that through a process of transpiration keeps the house



Previous page: The living room and kitchen extend out to a timber-decked verandah with views to the east over paddy fields. The pitched roof is clad with *iluk*, a grass from Anaradapura.

Opposite: The infinity pool running adjacent the house is fringed by trees.

Right: A view from the mezzanine level. The soaring living and breakfast area is naturally ventilated.



cool. Floors are timber throughout and there is a plank of deciduous hickory wood above the door. Ironwood is also used in the construction. Air-conditioning is unnecessary and the house is naturally ventilated with air movement assisted by ceiling fans. In the morning the sun rises over the infinity pool and mist hangs in the lower branches of the trees. The glazed upper gable of the house allows sunlight to filter to the interior.

Aluwihare is also an accomplished artist who has exhibited at the Barefoot Gallery in Colombo and several of his beautiful watercolours hang in the house.

The architect's wife, who acted as client, coordinated the soft furnishings in the house and two pavilions. Explaining their affection for the house and its location she describes it as a "21st-century Huckleberry Finn house". She continues, "We love it when we are here when it is windy and raining; living in a house like this in an April thunderstorm is great fun."

The tranquil setting of the house provides an ideal ambience for meditation and the house and two pavilions are in demand as a venue for residential yoga classes of up to eight people. Kundalini Yoga teacher training workshops and Scaravelli inspired

yoga retreats attract participants from far afield to immerse themselves in yoga, holistic food and light exercise in a jungle setting.

The Guava House was built in collaboration with the architect's cousin Rohan Aluwihare, also an architect, and in January 2014 they were both shortlisted for a Geoffrey Bawa Award. The architects have also carried out the restoration and interior design of a number of historic houses within the walls of Galle Fort that are popular vacation destinations.



Opposite: The living area is shaded from the morning sun by a timber pergola over the verandah. Air movement is assisted by ceiling fans.

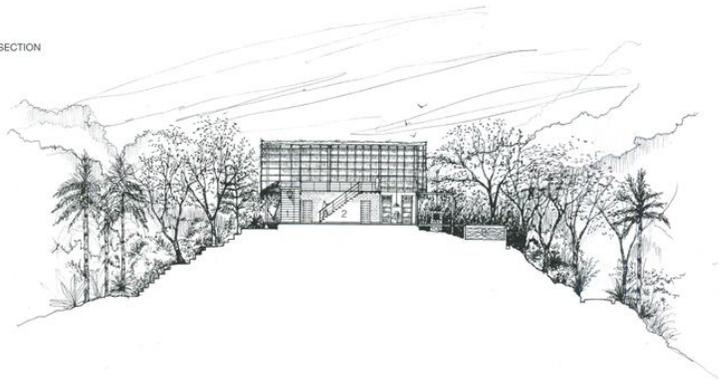
Top right: The house sits atop a hill. The entrance is reached by a steep flight of stairs.

Centre right: Timber folding doors permit a direct connection between interior and exterior.

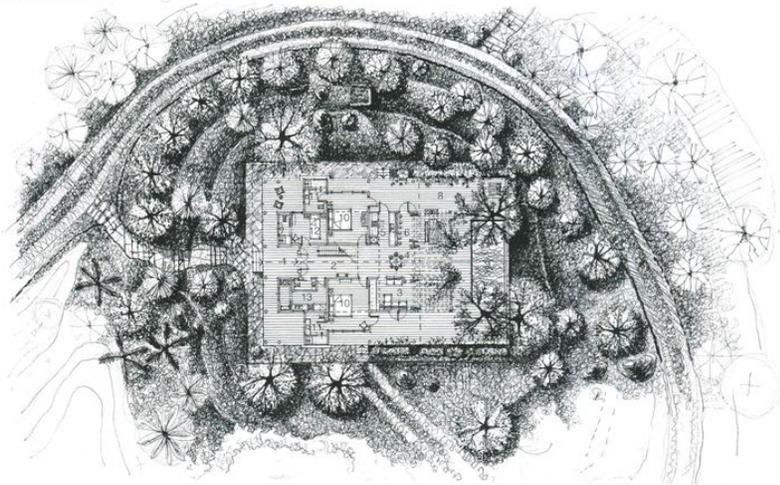
Right: A view along the verandah from the outdoor dining area beneath the pergola.

Overleaf: The house viewed from the lower vehicle access track.

SECTION



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



- | | |
|-------------|------------------|
| 1 Entrance | 8 Verandah |
| 2 Hall | 9 Pool |
| 3 Living | 10 Bedroom |
| 4 Breakfast | 11 Bathroom |
| 5 Kitchen | 12 Guest Bedroom |
| 6 Bar | 13 Laundry |
| 7 Dining | |

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