



The designers were able to ingeniously carve out functional interiors from the available space

## *Sujatha Shankar Kumar on how a derelict building became the new InKo centre.*

Rathi Jafer first came across designer Anuradha's artwork when she walked into a showroom where a wall was painted over with autumn leaves. Rathi had been struggling with a few shades of bluish-white that her contractor was offering her, and this mural came as a breath of fresh air. "There were so many textures in that mural," she recalls. Anuradha enjoys the thrill and challenge that a new space offers. "I go to a new project with a blank canvas," she says.

For the new InKo Centre, Jafer located an unused, old building (4,000 sq.ft.) spread over four grounds on Adyar Club Gate Road. The building required extensive renovation, but she was on a tight budget and her turnaround time was only four months. She immediately contacted Anuradha and her husband/partner Vijji Cheyyur, who together run Antar, a design firm. "They are musicians at heart who became designers," says Jafer, referring to the couple's long tryst with jazz music. Jafer sought harmony and rhythm within the centre, and the Cheyyurs delivered, even though there were some practical constraints.

"Everything here is about creating a sensory experience — the gallery, the calligraphy, the craft shop, and the taekwondo. Working with the Cheyyurs was like having a conversation," says Jafer, who is against formulaic approaches. The designers broke down the compound wall in order to remove boundaries. A floating gateway with a door greets the visitor with bamboo plants on either side, but no fence. As the building was lower than the street level, wastewater used to seep in earlier. So, the designers raised the ground-level within the compound and created a garden with winding stone-paved paths. The entire building was then waterproofed and painted white; the old plumbing was reworked. The existing mosaic floor was replaced with ceramic tiles, leaving the original mosaic on the stairway and the chequerboard mosaic in the pantry room.

A number of temporary structures were designed with extruded steel sections for cladding, such as the 750 sq.ft. taekwondo classroom and the gallery space in front. Jafer had a clear idea of all the required facilities, which included multipurpose rooms. The designers ingeniously carved out functional interiors from the available space. They converted the large sit out with an awning on the ground floor into a café. In the sit out on the first floor, a classroom for calligraphy was designed. In the main hall, nicknamed the 'kinetic room', lectures, film shows or a workshop can be held. Anuradha and Vijji created continuity using a restrained palette of khaki, grey and dun. In the stairwell, a diagonal white texture created with a roller and spatula gives relief. Korean style wallpapers in gold and beige are also placed in-between. Instead of conventional borders and patterns, Anuradha introduced patterned tiles in an abstract composition in the bathrooms. An important part of the brief was to use crate wood from the Hyundai and TVS factories. "We wanted to start designing with recycled materials. Hyundai makes and supplies school furniture with crate wood in Sriperumbudur," she says. The smoothly-finished, bleached crate wood makes up the façade of the reception table and café counter. The wood is also used to make a suspended ceiling lamp with bare light bulbs. Quirky take offs include a mirror set inside a tyre and entrance plaques made with discarded plates from cutting metal at the Hyundai car factory. Bamboo planters were converted into lighting fixtures.

Art is innate to the layout, as can be seen from the glass shelves and niches that are created in an understated manner to display Korean ceramics and sculptures. A beautiful twisted white knot in the conference room window ledge was a gift from Busan, South Korea. Yong Hoon, a specialist in Hanji (a Korean paper art form), makes exquisite paper, and a roll of this was combined with wire gauze for a panel behind the reception. In the craft shop, exquisitely packaged Korean gift-wrapping, jewellery and paper products are laid out.

Many of the grill windows were replaced with large, plain glass windows, allowing an unobstructed view of the outside greenery. From the French windows in Jafer's room, you can see the Krishna tree in all its glory. Jafer says, "All of us are happy to work here. The space brims with positive energy and emanates peace. This is a place of transformation."

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