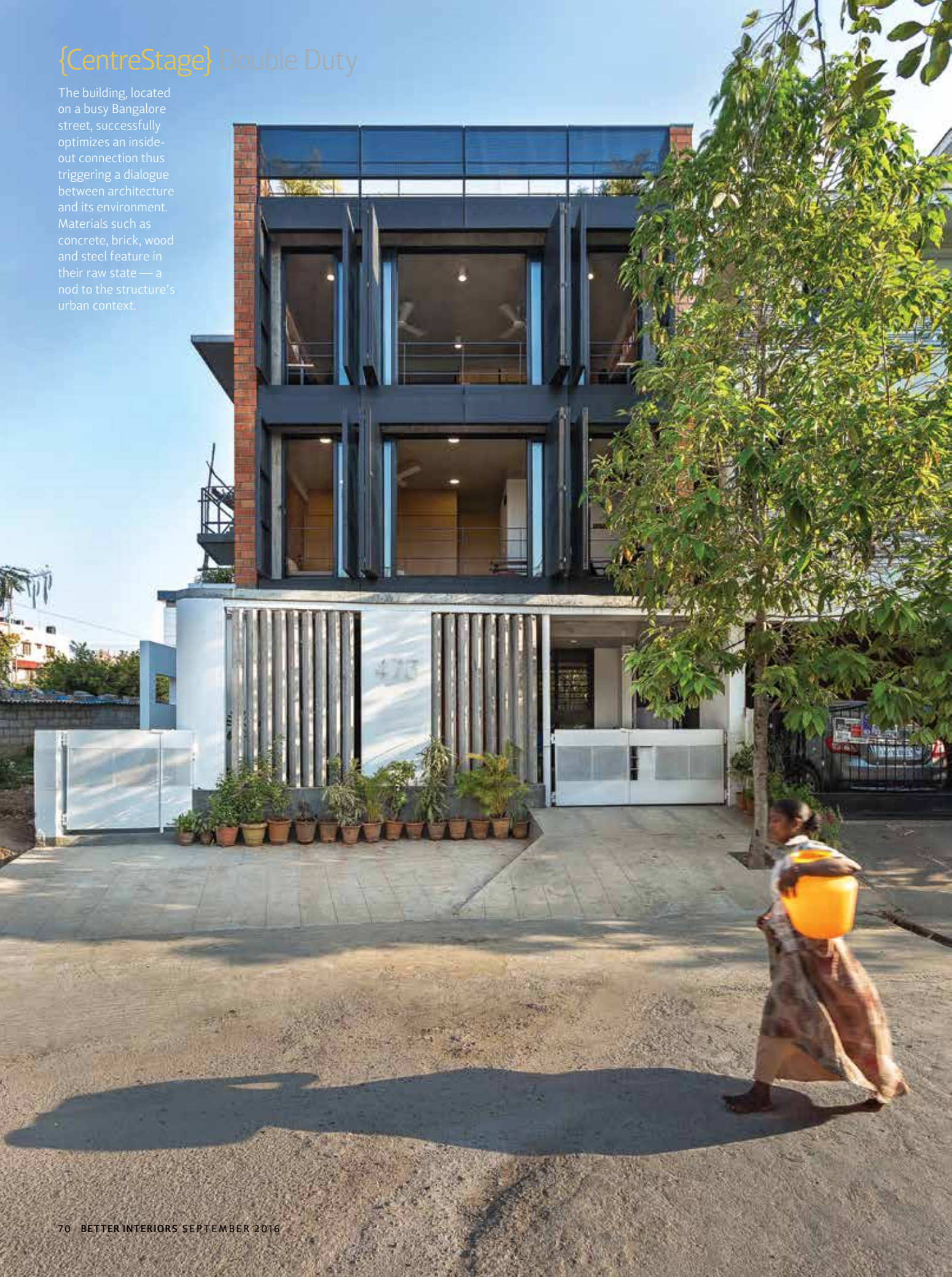


## {CentreStage} Double Duty

The building, located on a busy Bangalore street, successfully optimizes an inside-out connection thus triggering a dialogue between architecture and its environment. Materials such as concrete, brick, wood and steel feature in their raw state — a nod to the structure's urban context.



# Raw Elegance

Searching for a contemporary expression with a soul deeply embedded in natural sensibilities, architects Divya Ethirajan and Pramod Jaiswal, principals of BetweenSpaces, design a dynamic Bangalore residence, which also harbours the firm's workspace.

TEXT: SANJUKTA NANDY; PHOTOGRAPHS: KUNAL BHATIA, COURTESY BETWEENSPACES

Is it easy for architects to find a satisfactory solution when the client is none other than they, themselves? Divya Ethirajan and Pramod Jaiswal were faced with this question when they decided to build a home for Divya and her family in Bangalore, which would also house the workspace for BetweenSpaces, their young practice. The need of the hour was a design that could successfully integrate both a private residence and an architectural studio, which could mutually thrive in the same space, yet bear its own identity. Moreover, the layout had to be dynamic and open ended to facilitate easy conversion into a complete residential space in the future when the firm would outgrow the premises.

After over five years of practising with reputed firms, Divya and Pramod set up BetweenSpaces in 2010 with the agenda of practising architecture that is respectable, responsible and makes living comfortable and gratifying. Taking inspiration from the illustrious architects Peter Zumthor and Louis Kahn, the duo believes in the hard-core beauty of design. Both follow a hands-on approach to conceptualizing and planning each project they take up. They like to

handle varied scales and typologies, and their design process has always been very intuitive, exploratory and flexible in stylistic approach.

In an attempt to answer our question, Pramod says, "The scenario of being your own client is extremely challenging as well as exhilarating. Being the critic and the creator is a mammoth design responsibility — it is an opportunity to explore, without restraint, infinite possibilities, to make a product that we could be proud of having created."

The building stands on a 30' x 40' north-facing plot in Bangalore, and currently accommodates Divya's own house on the ground and first floor levels and the design studio space on the upper two levels, with separate access to the studio from the north-east corner. The layout of the studio on the second floor has been effectively planned so that it can be converted into a bedroom with an attached toilet with the central foyer and the pantry turning into a kitchenette, later. The third floor too can be consolidated into a large bedroom.

The inherent challenges of the site spurred the duo's creativity. The presence of balconies of



### ARCHITECTS

Divya Ethirajan and Pramod Jaiswal

## Double Duty



neighbouring buildings on the western and southern sides meant that privacy and access to natural light had to be achieved with some clever manoeuvring. The two bedrooms in the south-west corner thus opens out into a double height dining area with a clear storey window and skylight for natural light and cross ventilation.

The spatial planning of the house has been manipulated to take maximum advantage of the uninterrupted view of the tree-lined street on the northern side. Pramod says, “The project was an interesting exercise in understanding how the building interacts with the street. The precast concrete fins enclosing a small garden on the north-east corner and defining the entrance foyer bring the building closer to the street. For us, using exposed concrete was a celebration of the material in true faith.”

The ground floor with its entry in the north-east transits linearly into the living area followed by the dining, kitchen and the bedroom with an attached toilet at the rear end of the rectangular plot. The first floor has two bedrooms with attached toilets and a study that opens out onto a balcony. The second floor, which harbours the studio, has been designed to facilitate an open work culture with spaces arranged to encourage interactions between the team members and the principal architects. The entire width of the

**CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE LEFT** The building is located on a north-facing plot with the offices on its two upper levels; and the home in its ground and first floors. Note the external staircase which connects to the work area.

The elevation incorporates concrete fins on the ground floor that shield the living areas from direct street view while allowing copious daylight to enter. Sliding aluminium glazed windows with perforated sheet shutter panels on the upper floors allow for natural light, cross-ventilation and a view of the street.

The precast concrete fins enclose a small garden that defines the entrance foyer and a courtyard.



**ABOVE** The ground floor transitions linearly into the living area of Divya’s three-bedroom home. The straightforward material treatment with yellow oxide flooring and art- and craft-inspired wooden furniture continues throughout the interior, with the industrial qualities tempered by the natural grain of the wooden joinery.

**LEFT** In the living area, the smooth two-toned, laminate-finished, built-in furniture are in a pleasant contrast with the form-finish concrete slabs, beams and bare brick walls. The two internal residential spaces are connected with a staircase that beautifully adds a sculptural offset against the starkness of exposed concrete.

studio in the northern side has 10 workstations and has been interpreted as a covered verandah with a seamless transition from the inside to the outside. At the office level, two units on either side of the reception area demarcate the conference room in the south-west corner and the studio space on the northern side. Though these physically separate the spaces, they are visually porous and double as bookshelves and storage. The upper floor, which opens out onto a terrace has been left for future expansion.

Elevationally speaking, the space is divided into two distinct functional spaces — residential and workspace. The two levels of the studio have been visually connected with a central cut-out over the waiting area. The language of the building is simple. On the north side a sliding aluminium glazed window, with an external protective layer of perforated sheet shutter panels allows natural light, ventilation and a view of the streetscape, thus giving the elevation a minimal yet animated facade and a bold identity. The concrete fins, wire-cut brick walls in rat-trap bond and the metal shutter panels add certain ruggedness to the building and at the same time bring lightness into the structure.

The material palette too was informed by the ideologies of the duo who believe in using unfussy, rudimentary material. Locally procured wire-cut and kiln-burnt bricks, IPS flooring (at



The bedroom draws ample natural light from the sliding aluminium windows. The simple material palette is echoed in locally procured wire-cut and kiln-burnt bricks and yellow oxide flooring.

the studio), yellow oxide flooring and granite stones have been used. The smooth two-toned, laminated, built-in-furniture in the residential area is in pleasant contrast with the form finish concrete slabs, beams and the bare brick walls. The textures of the materials are contradicting, yet exhibit a certain sense of visual cohesion. The sal wood posts, for example, accentuate the relatively bland and light grained finger jointed rubber wood planks, while four-millimetre shadow gaps have been introduced between two layers of materials of same or different kind to add character to the surfaces.

“Call it our fetish for natural textures. We did not want any false ceilings or a lime rendered ceiling so we have done the roof in form finished concrete,” says Divya. Inflow of plentiful natural light suffices for lighting till dusk after which energy-saving LED lights take over. “It is our

## MATERIALS

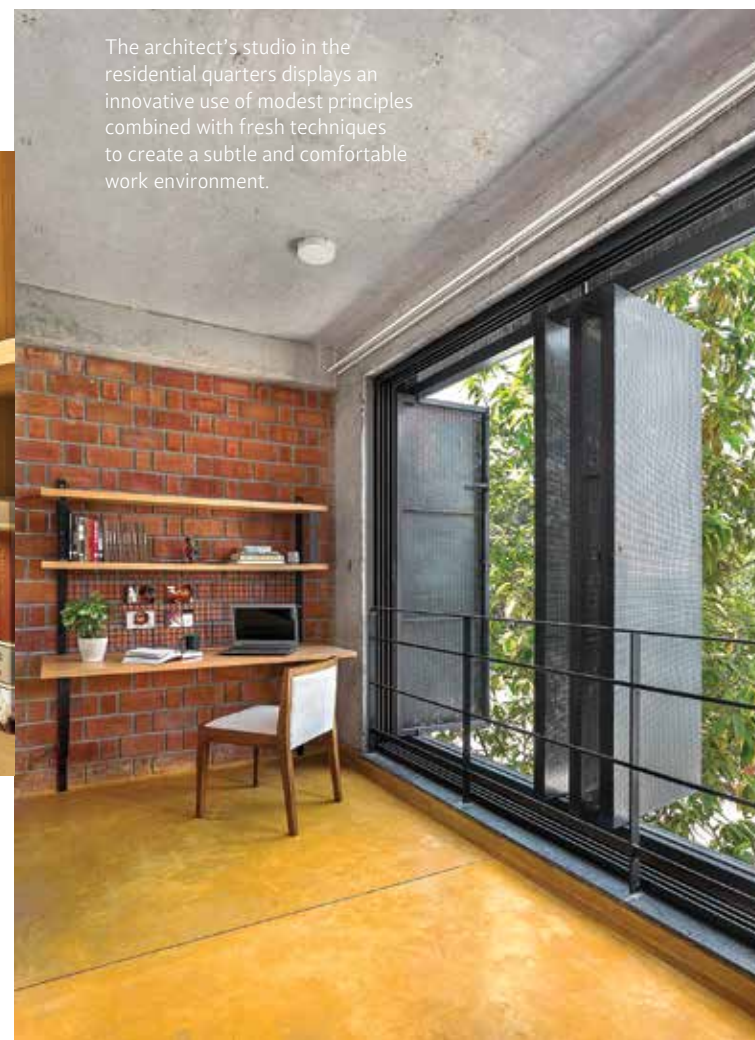
**Walls** Wire-cut bricks, kiln-burnt bricks and concrete blocks **Flooring** Indian Patent Stone (IPS) and yellow oxide flooring **Roof** Form-finish concrete **Windows** Aluminium powder-coated sliding windows **Lighting** LED energy-saving lights

**CONCEPT:** To integrate a residential and workspace with a dynamic, cohesive, multi-functional design and a natural, raw material palette.



**TOP** The dining area on the ground floor is marked by clean linear lines, an earthy palette with a double-height clear storey window and skylight for ventilation.

**ABOVE** The study in the southern quadrant of the first floor opens into a balcony, while the bookshelves become one with the wall.



The architect's studio in the residential quarters displays an innovative use of modest principles combined with fresh techniques to create a subtle and comfortable work environment.



A quiet corner in the bedroom area has been incorporated for lounging.

## Double Duty

The open layout of the workspace fosters an interactive work culture, while the lack of walls in the spatial configuration seamlessly consolidates the space into a visual whole.

Visually the space cantilevers out into the urban vista whipping up a visual connection of freedom with the inside and out. Though the units physically separate the spaces, they are visually porous and double as bookshelves and storage.

The conference room has a deep unit with flat file drawers to store large drawing sheets and stationeries.

On the second level of the workspace, the two units on either side of the reception demarcate the conference room in the south-west corner and the studio space in the northern side. Fitted cabinetry forms partitions incorporating both desks and shelving.

## Double Duty

Designed with IPS flooring and minimalistic mild steel railings, the staircase leading to the topmost level gives a poignant vertical character to the design. The space under the stairs has been utilized as the material library and server rack.



**ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT** Abundant natural light, contemporary furniture and exposed brick come together to create an organic work environment. Seen on the right is the open conference space neatly tucked away into a corner.

**LEFT** Keeping the look natural and industrial, the architects have strictly abstained from using false ceiling. Instead, form-finish concrete has been used for the ceiling with LED lights completing the look.

attempt to get a slice of that borrowed landscape from the street and a slice of sky for ourselves in the tight urban condition," she adds.

The duo expresses a conversation of dialogue between spaces, which could be bricks in the wall, mortar between the bricks, glass, water, light or air. At the core of their work is a strong desire to respond to grassroots principles of keeping it simple, engaging and blending a material palette with contemporary undertone. Through this project, they have successfully optimized the urban-scape to maintain a free-wheeling dialogue between architecture and its environment, an approach that also won them recognition at the IIID Anchor Awards 2015 for the small office category. [\[1\]](#)

**FACT FILE:** **Client** Ethirajans  
**Location** Bangalore **Area** 1,400 sq ft (office), 1,700 sq ft (home) **Principal architects** Divya Ethirajan, Pramod Jaiswal  
**Design team** Reema Dhiman, Anagha, Kevin George **Interior contractor** Rahul Associates **Structural consultant** Kalkura Associates