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Preface

Some 20 years ago Geoffrey Bawa, then approaching the end of his career, asked me to help him write a monograph on his work. We started on this in 1997, but our collaboration was nipped in the bud in early 1998 when he was felled by a stroke that left him almost totally incapacitated. However, the Bawa Trust encouraged me to continue with the project and the book finally appeared in 2002 under the title *Bawa the Complete Works* (Thames & Hudson). Geoffrey survived to see the book finished and attended its launch, though we don't know what he thought of it. Although I tried to present his point of view, it's certain that, had he been able to take part in its production, it would have become a different book.

Bawa died in 2003 and his practice ceased to exist. Since then many of his buildings have been altered by their owners, some beyond all recognition, while a number have been demolished or have fallen prey to termites and the relentless cycle of tropical sun and monsoon rain.

This book was the brainchild of photographer Sebastian Posingis and is intended to complement the much larger book of 2002. It focuses primarily on Geoffrey Bawa's built works in Sri Lanka and offers a catalogue of those that have survived the depredations of two decades while issuing warnings about those that no longer fairly represent his original design intentions. They are arranged, not chronologically, but geographically, as a series of circuits: one within Colombo, one around its outskirts and one around the island.

It also seeks to address some recurring questions: who was Geoffrey Bawa? What inspired his shift in mid life from mediocre lawyer to master architect? What were the qualities that distinguished his work? It doesn't attempt to describe his unbuilt designs – many of these were featured in *Bawa the Complete Works* – nor does it speculate about his influence on other architects – this was discussed in the book *Beyond Bawa* (Thames & Hudson, 2007).

There can be little doubt that Geoffrey Bawa was a towering figure in post-independence Sri Lanka and, indeed in the wider context of South and South East Asia. It's also clear that he exercised a huge influence on succeeding generations of architects. For this reason it is indeed regrettable that so many of his buildings have been altered or lost during past decades. This book will hopefully help to draw attention to their plight and will result in at least a few of them being conserved to delight future generations.

Bawa believed that architecture could never be fully understood through written descriptions or pictures and should be experienced face-to-face. We hope that this book will encourage you to visit his buildings and explore them for yourselves.

Page 1 Geoffrey Bawa with his dog Leopold, 1985.

Previous page The staircase in Geoffrey Bawa's townhouse.

Left Donald Friend urn in the Lunuganga garden.

Overleaf The veranda of the Cloughton Bungalow.



whilst the new tower functioned as a periscope, its upper roof terrace giving views across the surrounding rooftops towards the sea.

Visitors entered via a glass door etched with a sunburst by Laki Senanayake into a car-port occupied by Bawa's two prized cars: his 1934 Rolls-Royce Coupé and his 1953 Mercedes Cabriolet. From there a long corridor led to a distant pool court where a terracotta horse-head signalled a right turn towards the epicentre of the house. Here Geoffrey Bawa would offer a welcome from his Braganza chair, a Peacock cigarette in his extended hand, like the Minotaur at the centre of the maze.

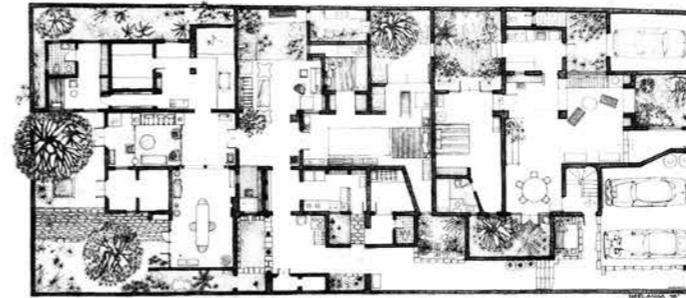
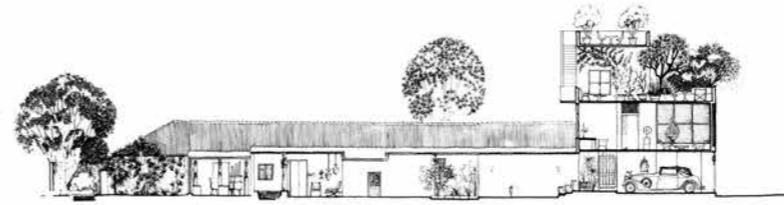
For a number of years the second bungalow served as an autonomous apartment that was

rented out to friends, but after closing the Alfred House Office in 1989 Bawa turned this into his home-office. Here, working with a team of young architects, he produced the amazing designs of his final decade.

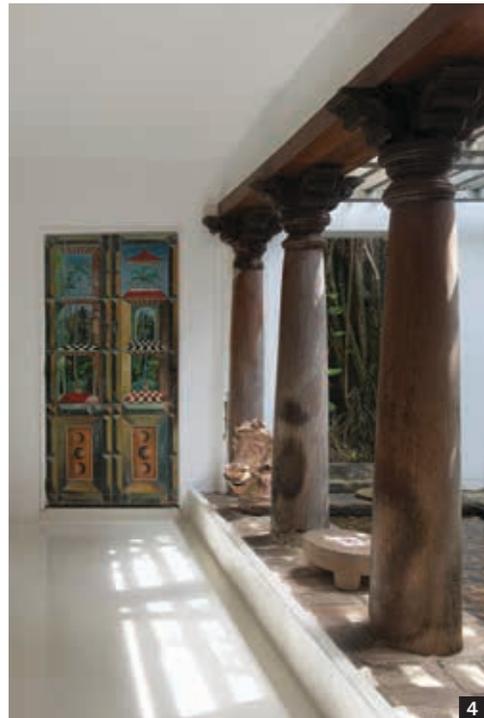
As his health deteriorated, however, he was no longer able to climb the narrow winding stair to the roof terrace and a lift was inserted into one of the lightwells. After suffering a stroke in 1998, he was confined to his bed, and the subterranean rooms became a prison, from which he would escape occasionally for brief sojourns in his beloved garden at Lunuganga.

Today the house is maintained by the Geoffrey Bawa Trust as a museum and the drawing office functions as an archive.

- 4** Painted doors by Donald Friend (the originals are now in the Art Gallery of New South Wales) and Chettinad columns.
5 Veranda and pool court.
6 The sitting room.
7 Brass and aluminium door by Ismeth Raheem with the main staircase.
8 The main corridor with an owl by Laki Senanayake.
Opposite Ground-, first- and second-floor plans with section. 1997, Bawa Archive.



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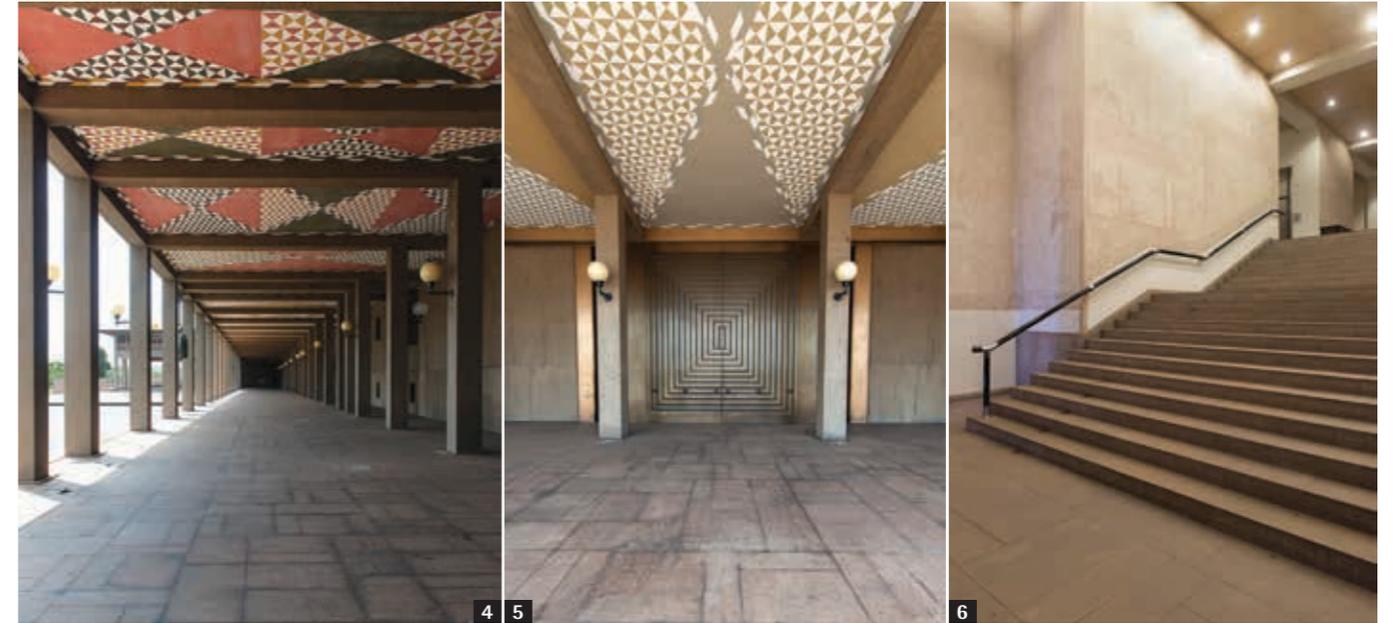


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the setting sun. However, its debating chamber was planned as a hemicycle, which suited the structure of the legislature. Bizarrely both of Bawa's designs incorporated a symmetrical debating chamber similar to that of the Palace of Westminster, ignoring the fact that Sri Lankans rarely elected two opposing parties of equal size. Bawa later justified the design by pointing to traditional audience halls such as those at Polonnaruwa and Kandy.

The central pavilion contained the debating chamber under a sweeping copper roof, but the symmetry was broken deliberately by the five ancillary pavilions, each with its own roof, that were added in a seemingly random fashion around its perimeter, creating a succession of open-sided courts. The ancillary pavilions included the MPs' dining room and a massive loggia for staging public meetings.

Bawa had intended the debating chamber to open directly into glass-sided lobbies with panoramic views out across the lake, but he had under-estimated the need for committee rooms and the idea had to be dropped. It was

planned symmetrically with opposing lines of seats facing each other across the central axis of the Speaker's chair. At the official opening of Parliament the President would proceed in state from his official residence in the city, cross the causeway to the island and arrive at the front piazza. Here a pair of vast silver doors opened to reveal a grand staircase rising up to the floor of the House. Bawa knew all the politicians of the day – Jayawardene was his brother's school friend – and it amused him that the President would appear head-first from between the serried ranks of parliamentarians.

The furnishings of the chamber were of dark calamander wood and the suspended ceiling was formed by catenaries of small aluminium bars that glittered like a tent of gold, inspired by a metal handbag that had belonged to Bawa's mother. A huge chandelier of silver coconut fronds made by artist Laki Senanayake hung above the centre of the chamber and silver *korale* flags lined the galleries, reflecting the concealed lighting upwards towards the ceiling.

- 2 The front piazza.
- 3 Terraces beside the members' dining room.
- 4 The front loggia looking east.
- 5 The ceremonial doorway leading to the chamber.
- 6 The ceremonial staircase leading up to the chamber.

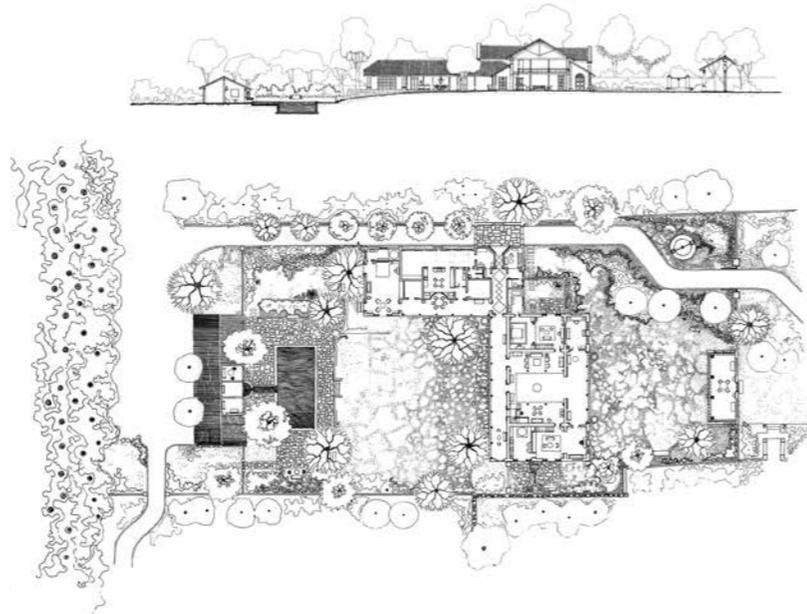
The Sunethra Bandaranaike House

Horagolla

1984-1986

Sunethra Bandaranaike, daughter of two prime ministers, was Bawa's close friend and to this day remains a leading member of the Geoffrey Bawa Trust. When she first approached him to remodel an old stable block behind the family home at Horagolla, he was initially reluctant to take on the project, but all of his misgivings evaporated when they visited the site together. Having set out her requirements, Sunethra gave him a free hand and he worked on the project for four years with his assistant Philip Fowler. The main house at Horagolla was built by Sunethra's great-grandfather and the rather grand stables occupied what had been a previous home of the Bandaranaikes.

Bawa established generous garden courts to either side of the stable block, enclosing them within high screen walls. A new wing containing the dining veranda, the kitchens and a guest suite was projected from the corner of the stables along the edge of the rear lawn. A new neo-classical *porte-cochère* was then inserted at the elbow between the two wings. Finally a line of garages and staff rooms was placed along the far edge of the lawn to form a foil against the backdrop of *hora* trees that gave the estate its name. All of these changes allowed Bawa to sidestep an obvious full-frontal entrance sequence. Instead he smuggled visitors past the side of the main house and along a walled alley to the new *porte-cochère*. There they encountered the long veranda that runs beside the rear lawn and to the entrance of the former stables.



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The stable hall has been fashioned into a double-height living space with a timber mezzanine added to give scale and articulation. Its two flanks are then given over to the principle bedrooms and the library. Beyond, like a secret garden, lies the front lawn.

The two garden courts function like a pair of grand open-to-the-sky rooms and the life of the house takes place on the various verandas that line their edges, making the magnificent stable hall almost superfluous.

The conversion was achieved with great restraint, but Bawa could not resist adding in a few witticisms – the two oculi which mark the ends of the long veranda, the ancient fan which hangs from a gallows' bracket above the dining table, the

name boards of long-deceased horses, the small pavilion on the front lawn with the door which leads nowhere, and the Art Deco bathrooms which seem to have escaped from a Hollywood movie.

Bawa treated an ancient building with respect, adding a new chapter to its unfolding story, and created an elegant pleasure pavilion for a cherished friend.

Opposite Site plan and section. 1986. Bawa Archive.

1 The sitting room, in what were former stables.

2 The garden façade of the stable block.

3 Left to right: Jean Chamberlin and Sunethra Bandaranaike with Geoffrey Bawa in the *porte-cochère*. 1986.



3



4 Where the main staircase meets the ground.

5 The lounge on level 6.

The hotel was built on a ridge against the north-facing cliff and, as predicted, it enjoys views across the reservoir toward Kasyapa's citadel. It takes the form of a long articulated slab that is faceted to follow the shape of the cliff and measures almost a kilometre in length from the eastern tip of the Sigiriya Wing to the western tip of the Dambulla Wing.

After travelling along jungle tracks, visitors are swept up a steep ramp to the hotel entrance that is fashioned like the mouth of a cave. A corridor snakes through the rock and leads them to an open lounge where they get their first view of the reservoir and distant Sigiriya. Below them, perched on the edge of the cliff, they discover the first of the hotel's three magical swimming pools.

As if on a ship, the entrance is in fact on the same level as the uppermost of the five levels of rooms. Above it, on the top deck, are the restaurant and main lounges. Below, a single side corridor that skirts the edge of the cliff serves each level of rooms. Originally each room was conceived as a bed-sitting room with a generous balcony and each had a bathroom that looked out across the tank. Ena de Silva, whose Aluvihare workshops contributed many artefacts to the hotel, once exclaimed: "Where else in the world can you sit on the loo and look out at such a view?"

The roofs are flat, and for the most part covered in vegetation, and the open facades carry a second skin of concrete purlins and timber slats that support a dense screen of foliage and a huge tribe of monkeys. The building



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6 The main stair with owl sculpture by Laki Senanayake.

disappears into the surrounding jungle. Its architecture is stark and understated, supporting the notion that this is not a building to look at, but a building to look out of – like a monumental hide or a giant belvedere. It is as if some huge ocean liner, with decks above and cabins below, has come aground on a faraway mountainside.

The detailing is robust; it matches the outcrops of rock that burst through the walls and adds to the illusion that this is, in fact, a reincarnation of Kasyapa's lost citadel.

As it neared completion, the hotel encountered fierce opposition – from the Buddhist clergy, from environmentalists and from politicians. Yet it was

one of the most environmentally friendly hotels to have been built on the island and was no more expensive than contemporary hotel developments in Colombo.

Today, the Kandalama Hotel is still very well maintained though, sadly, some of its rooms have been crudely knocked together to create suites and a rather unfortunate conference centre has sprouted from the roof of the Dambulla Wing like a giant silver cabbage. After more than two decades, it continues to surprise and enthrall its guests and stands as a testimonial to its 75-year-old architect and his team of youthful assistants.

The Ruhuna University Campus

Matara

1980–1986



1

Soon after starting work on the Sri Lanka Parliament, Bawa was commissioned to design the main campus of the new University of Ruhuna near Matara. Suddenly he had to deal simultaneously with the two biggest projects of his career. His main assistant on the University

was Nihal Bodhinayake whom he had met in Sydney and who worked on it, almost single-handedly, for seven years.

The brief called for more than 50 buildings with a total area of some 40,000 square metres; the designated site straddled three steep hills

1 Aerial view from the south.



2

covering an area of 30 hectares. The western-most hill overlooked the ocean and was separated from its siblings by the main road from Matara to Tangalla.

Bawa's strategy was to locate the Science Faculty on the northern hill and the Arts Faculty

on the southern hill and to place the shared facilities between them. He then created a lake as a buffer between the campus and the main road and allocated the western hill to staff housing.

Bawa used grids to develop the design: a structural grid of 3 metres (10 feet), a planning

Top Panorama from west. 1985. Bawa Archive.

Above left Site plan. 1985. Bawa Archive.

2 View out towards the Indian Ocean.

Lunuganga

Three kilometres inland from Bentota
1948

Geoffrey Bawa bought an abandoned rubber estate in 1948 with a view to transforming it into a landscaped garden that would evoke memories of the English and Italian gardens that he admired. He named it 'Lunuganga' or 'Salt River'.

The estate covered an area of about eight hectares and straddled two hills on a promontory that projected out into the Deduwa Lagoon, about three kilometres inland from Bentota. A dilapidated bungalow sat on the summit of the northern hill with limited views of the lake and was surrounded by a forest of tired old rubber trees.

Over the next 50 years, the garden project would take much of his free time and money. It evolved as a serendipitous journey without a fixed plan, though its progress was recorded in a series of beautiful drawings, executed at ten-yearly intervals.

"The garden evolved over a long time. The contours showed what the first moves must be. As the land was cleared a wide and splendid view of the lake emerged. Once the initial clearing was done, the main views established themselves ..."

Bawa replaced the drive with an arrival court, hidden in the trees below the southeast corner of the bungalow and turned the original *porte-cochère* at its north-western corner into what would become the main sitting area. The car court was linked by a series of terraces and broad staircases that led to an entrance loggia formed beneath a guest bedroom and then finally to the bungalow's south terrace.

He then cut a swathe through the trees to open up a vista across the southern hill towards the other side of the lake and a distant *dagaba* (stupa). The



1



2

Opposite Plan of the Garden from 1985. Bawa Archive.
1 The first view of the House and the North Terrace as glimpsed from across the lake.

2 The *araliya* (*Plumeria* sp) on the North Terrace.
Below Section through the hill looking north. 1989. Bawa Archive.

