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'House on a Cliff' - this is possibly the best description that one can summon of the Gwal Pahari residence design by M:OFA Studios. Architects Manish and Tanushree Gulati weaved in a vision of a melodramatic living space that is a compliment to the original topography of the majestic Aravalli range. Text By Kanishka Ramchandani. Visuals Courtesy The Architects.

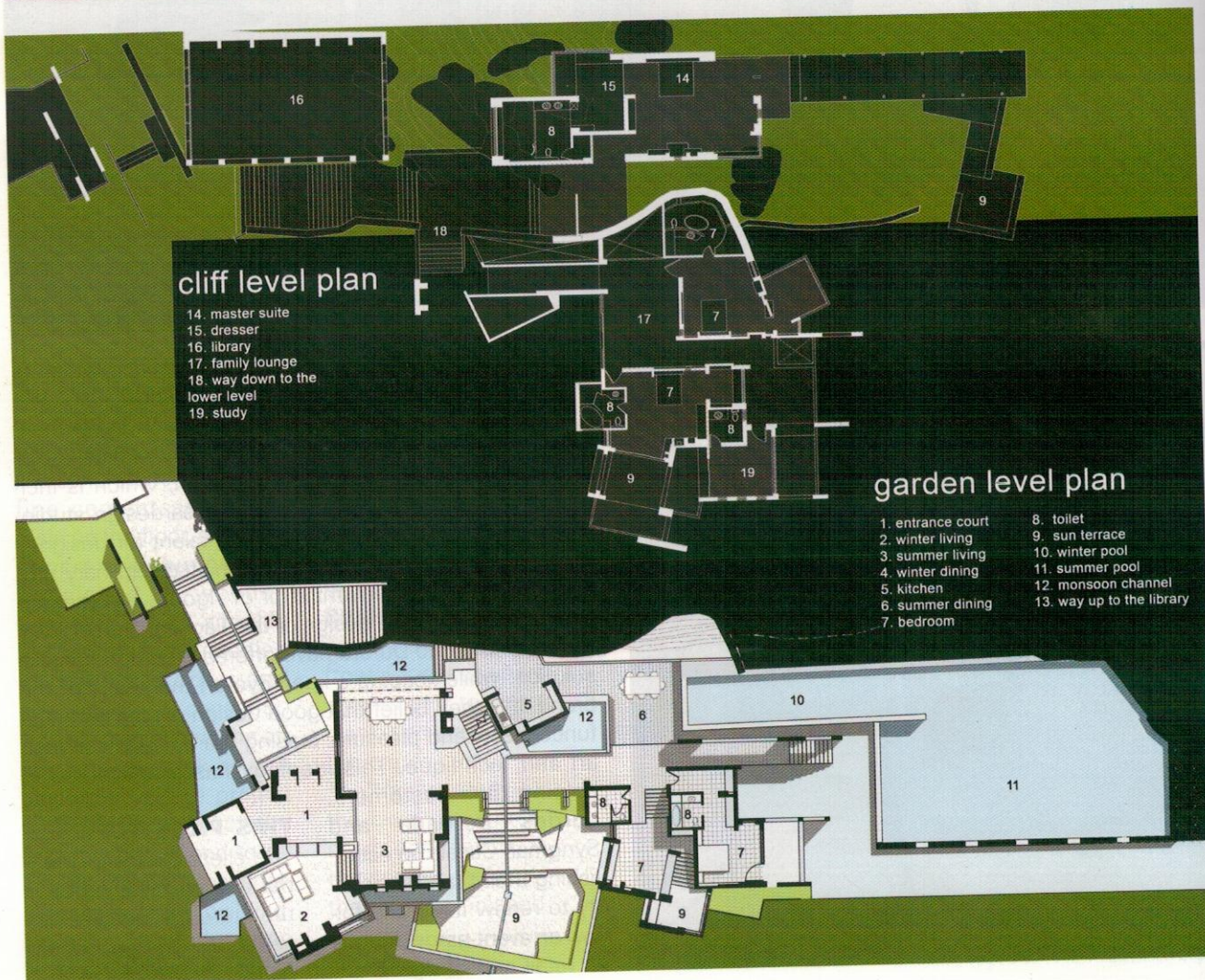
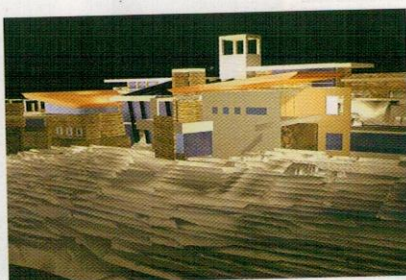
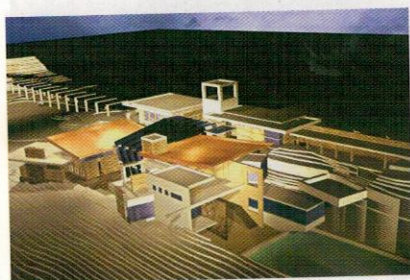
► Set against the awe-inspiring backdrop of the Aravalli range, on the outskirts of Delhi, lay an undulating piece of land. When Architects Manish and Tanushree Gulati of M:OFA Studios stepped onto the scene, their first impression was: "Gwal Pahari is not a piece of land to

be worked on but a land to be in love with."

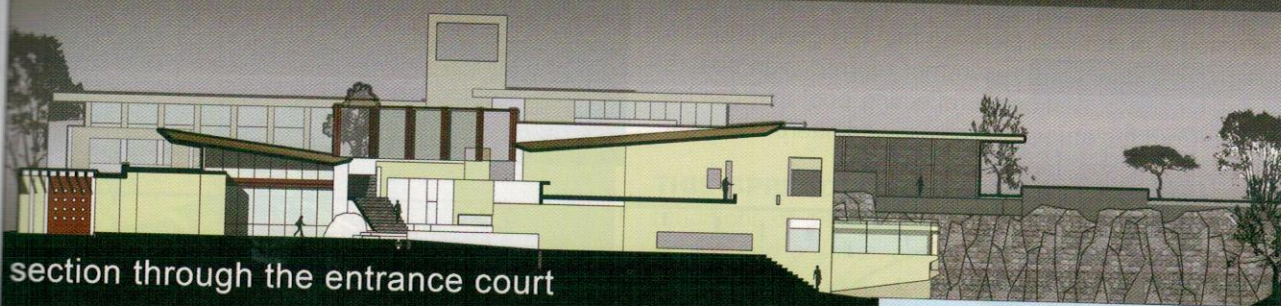
The most fascinating aspect of designing a house in this milieu was the multi-layered dimension it entailed - integrating various elements like the natural rocky strata, historical context of the place and the view of the dried lake.

The first step in design began with the vision of creating a house that embraces its surroundings

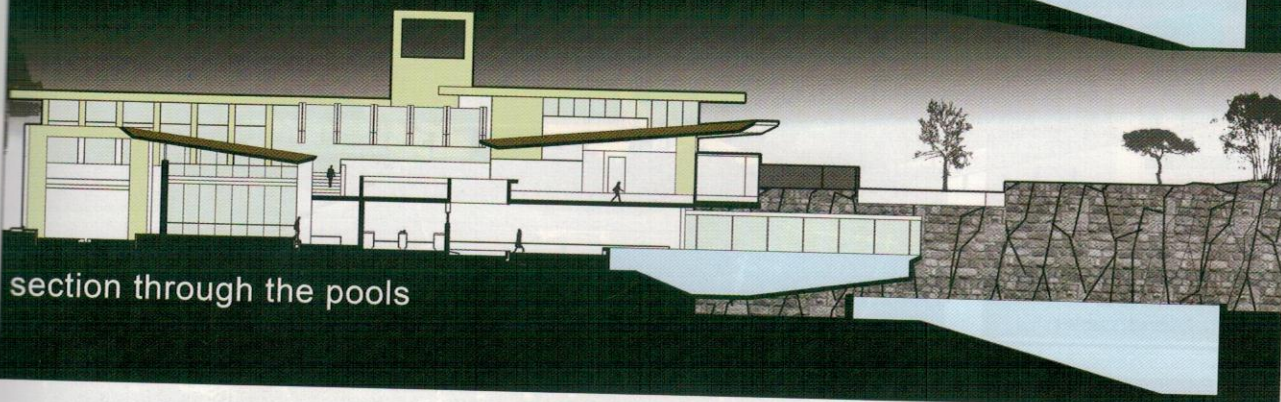
FILMSTRIP Views of the Gwal Pahari house. **THIS PAGE BOTTOM** The garden and the cliff level plan. The design divides the house into two elements, based on seasonal use. The west wing houses the winter functions, while between the west and the rocky cliff lie the summer functions.



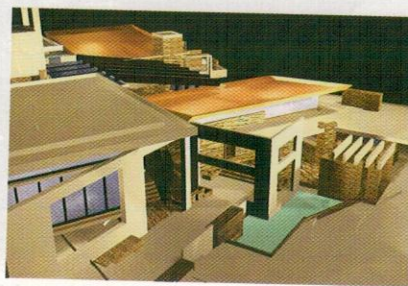
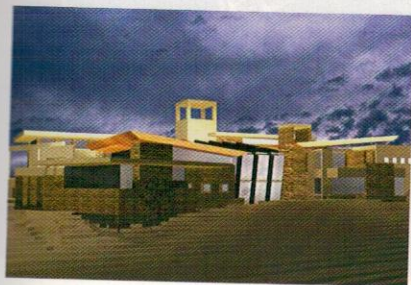
site panoramic view



section through the entrance court



section through the pools



and does not 'rip it open'. The design of the house also called for creating a space that is self sufficient in terms of natural resources and alternative sources of energy. Features such as rainwater harvesting were seamlessly blended into the main design. Rainwater flowing in small streams along the cliff would be collected and channelized towards the monsoon terrace. Finally it would be collected at the lowest level of the site for rainwater harvesting. Similarly for solar power the roof of the house was to be covered with copper sheets, thereby fulfilling hot water requirement of the occupants.

The brief for the house on two acres of undulating land included a formal drawing room with a bar, a formal dining room, a service kitchen and a guest wing

inclusive of a separate living room for the guests. The private spaces comprised three bedrooms and a family dining area. All the disparate elements of this design were connected together with the visual thread provided by the swimming pool.

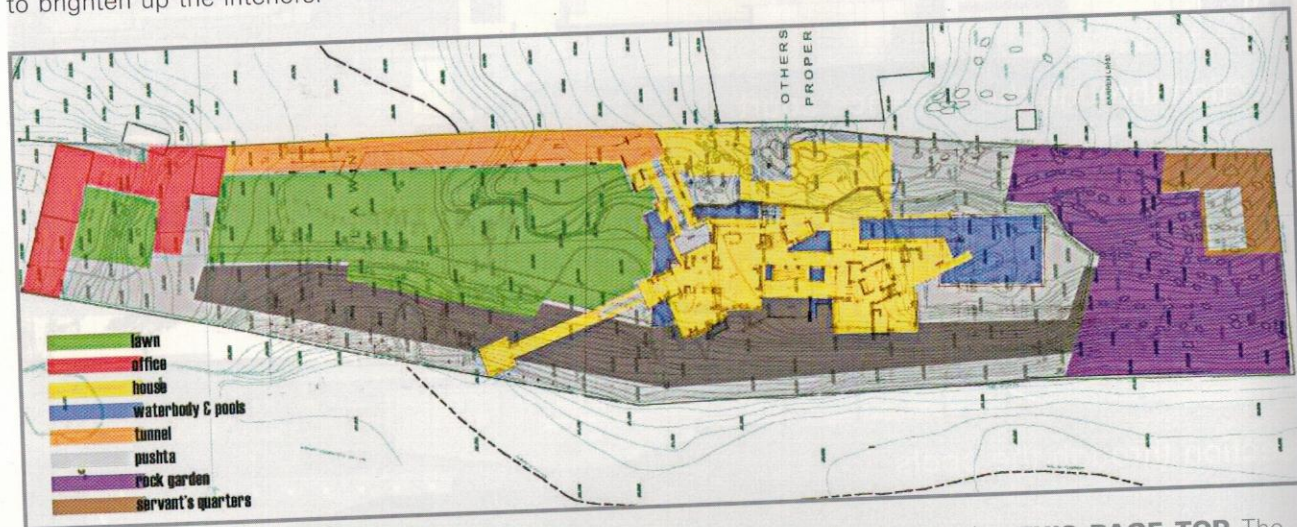
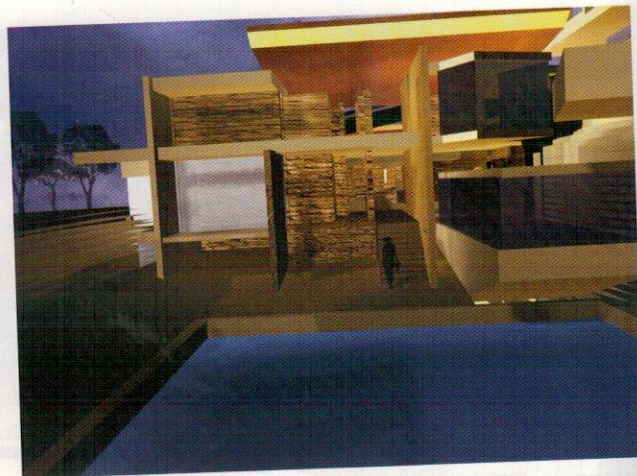
Delving more into the details of design, the architects say, "The grandeur and majesty of the British Raj architecture were taken in essence ▶

THIS PAGE TOP A photograph of the site and drawings of the sections through the house.

FILMSTRIP Exterior shots of the Gwal Pahari house - sustainable features like rainwater harvesting, a copper sheet roof that aids in solar conduction make the house self sufficient.

and the design was its interpretation in contemporary times. Since the site was divided linearly on two clear levels with a difference of more than three metres, we utilised the natural rock retaining wall to our advantage. Hence, an open to sky moat was created at the lower level."

The design divides the house into two elements, based on seasonal use. The west wing housed the winter functions, while between the west and the rocky cliff lie the summer functions. It is important to note the amount of detailed planning that has gone into this design. For instance, the summer room design boasts of a natural rock wall and a reflecting pool that can be viewed from the atrium, which allowed filtered sunlight to brighten up the interiors.



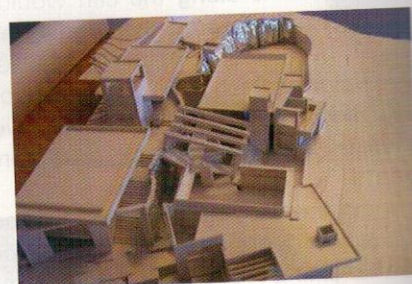
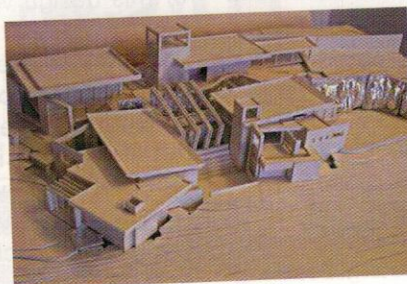
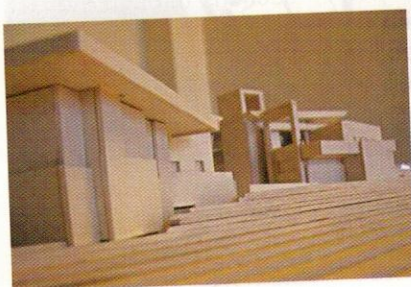
Every detail of the design involved integration with the rock formations outside. As the architects describe it, "The master bedroom looks upon the rock garden and the swimming pool with its bar-deck cantilevered from the rocks. The master bathroom is designed to be built over the existing rock formations emerging on that part of the site to form a stone bath tub overlooking a bamboo garden and a yoga chamber." The private section of the house included more bedrooms for the client's children and governess.

It is interesting to observe the creative features of the guest wing. Tactfully aligned with the private section of the house, the guest wing nevertheless stands apart, without infringing upon the retreat of the owner. To describe it in the designers' words: "A set of stairs from the dining room lead to the guest annex. Complete with their twin suites and a common room, the guest

wing could be accessed from the lawns as well, without disturbing the privacy of the house."

While the thrust of this design is largely contemporary, many indigenous elements have been incorporated to make it all encompassing. "Elements of verandahs, water channels from the Mughal architecture, courts and the rhythm of colonnades and parallel walls were used as elements in essence and reinterpreted to suit

THIS PAGE TOP The architects planned to use grey stone masonry which is readily available at Delhi. The idea was to create a space that stands apart in its uniqueness yet remains integrated with the elements of the backdrop. **CENTRE** The site plan of Gwal Pahari residence. **FILMSTRIP BOTTOM** Photographs of the model of the house located on a contoured site.



the contemporary global language of architecture."

Since the approach towards design was native, the architects had decided to use grey stone masonry available at Delhi for the construction. The idea was to create a space that stands apart in its uniqueness yet remains integrated with the true elements of the backdrop.

With an estimated project area of 8000 square feet, this design is a daring project. Notwithstanding the challenges of building a house over a rocky terrain, the Manish and Tanushree Gulati have envisaged a vision of a living space that is defined by nature, rooted in ethnicity and complements the contemporary mindset of its owner... a space called Gwal Pahari. ■



THIS SPREAD 3-D renditions of different angles and a schematic sketch of the Gwal Pahari house.

FILMSTRIP 3D renditions of the Bird's eye view of the house and the different spaces of the house.

