

AD

TAERA
CHOWNA'S

*Secret
Garden*





LANDSCAPE LEADS
AND ARCHITECTURE
FOLLOWS AT
THIS **BOUTIQUE
HOTEL IN KERALA
DESIGNED BY
MADE WIJAYA.**

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The road bends almost imperceptibly before it yields to green—dense and alive with the quiet insistence of the tropics. Coconut palms tilt towards the sky, their shadows dissolving into undergrowth where jackfruit hangs heavy and the air carries the sweetness of ripening fruit and damp earth. The landscape feels full, inhabited, already complete. And then, somewhere within this density, a house begins to emerge, revealing itself in fragments—tiled rooflines glimpsed through foliage, a jackwood column catching light, a veranda appearing like an oasis.

Indian Summer House, both a private residence and a boutique hotel in Muvattupuzha, carries within it a layered narrative—of memory, of encounter, of a way of living that privileges air, shade and time over enclosure and display. For owners Don and Mini

van de Pol as well as Mini's parents, Thankam and Menon Parameswaran, the project began with a moment of recognition. In 2008, Mini and Don had encountered Bali-based architect Made Wijaya's work in the pages of *Architectural Digest*—a home in Alibag shaped by Southeast Asian and British colonial influences—and that vision stayed with them. They eventually met Wijaya in Sydney and the conversation found its natural rhythm.

"We wanted something tropical and relaxed," says Don. "We carried strong memories of Mini's father's home, Kalathoor—which has since been featured in a well-known Malayalam film." This house would carry that same generosity, shaped around comfort, privacy and an intuitive connection to the outdoors. Kerala's traditions of landscaping provided a clear starting point.



“We didn’t want a decorative garden that felt separate from the land,” says Don. “You’ll find coconuts next to pepper vines, fruit trees mixed with shade trees, medicinal plants near the house, and everything growing quite densely. We worked with a professor of horticulture to maintain this harmony,” he adds. Indigenous species thrive within this framework, creating natural cooling through canopy while withstanding the demands of monsoon and heat. Pathways remain gently irregular, the paving elegant yet relaxed, allowing the greenery to spill over and remain in a state of constant movement.

The architecture moves in close alignment. The house is organised as a constellation of pavilions, each with a distinct function—from the main house and guest quarters to kitchens, staff areas and the restored ancestral home, connected by long, covered walkways that extend the experience of being outdoors. This dispersed arrangement draws directly from Kerala’s vernacular traditions. At the centre, a large quadrangle gathers these elements into a cohesive whole, offering both openness and enclosure, framing views while creating a sense of inward calm. “One of our requirements was that we wanted to live outside under the fans,” Mini explains. “When people visit, they spend very little time inside their room.” Life comes together in these transitional spaces—along shaded corridors, beside the pool where coconut palms lean into the water, under the steady rhythm of air moving through open volumes.

Over time, the landscape has continued to settle into itself. Trees have thickened, shade has deepened and the garden has grown into the vision first imagined. What stays with you is a space that moves with its surroundings—guided by the land, shaped by climate and held together by a quiet understanding of how to live within it. ▲



Above: The outdoor shower is anchored on a single large stone slab edged with pebbles for drainage—a simple, climate-responsive detail designed to withstand Kerala’s heavy rains. *Top:* Deep verandas stretch along the edge of a quadrangle, echoing the memory of ancestral homes. *Facing page, left:* The garden retains its original character. The house sits within the landscape rather than on top of it. *Facing page, right:* One of 138 seasoned jackwood columns on the property. It speaks to the skill of the carpenters involved.