

IN CONVERSATION

Martha Thorne, Executive Director, Pritzker Architecture Prize

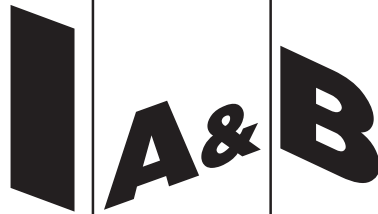
ARCHITECTURE

Sattva Galleria, Sudhakar Pai Associates
5 Element House, Studio PKA
Rhizome Residence, matra architects
The Kumaon, Zowa architects
Lanka Learning Centre, feat.collective

INTERIORS

Resq, Studio Osmosis
MuseLAB Office, MuseLAB



**IN CONVERSATION**

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The whole that is greater than the sum of its parts

5 Element House, Pavana, Maharashtra

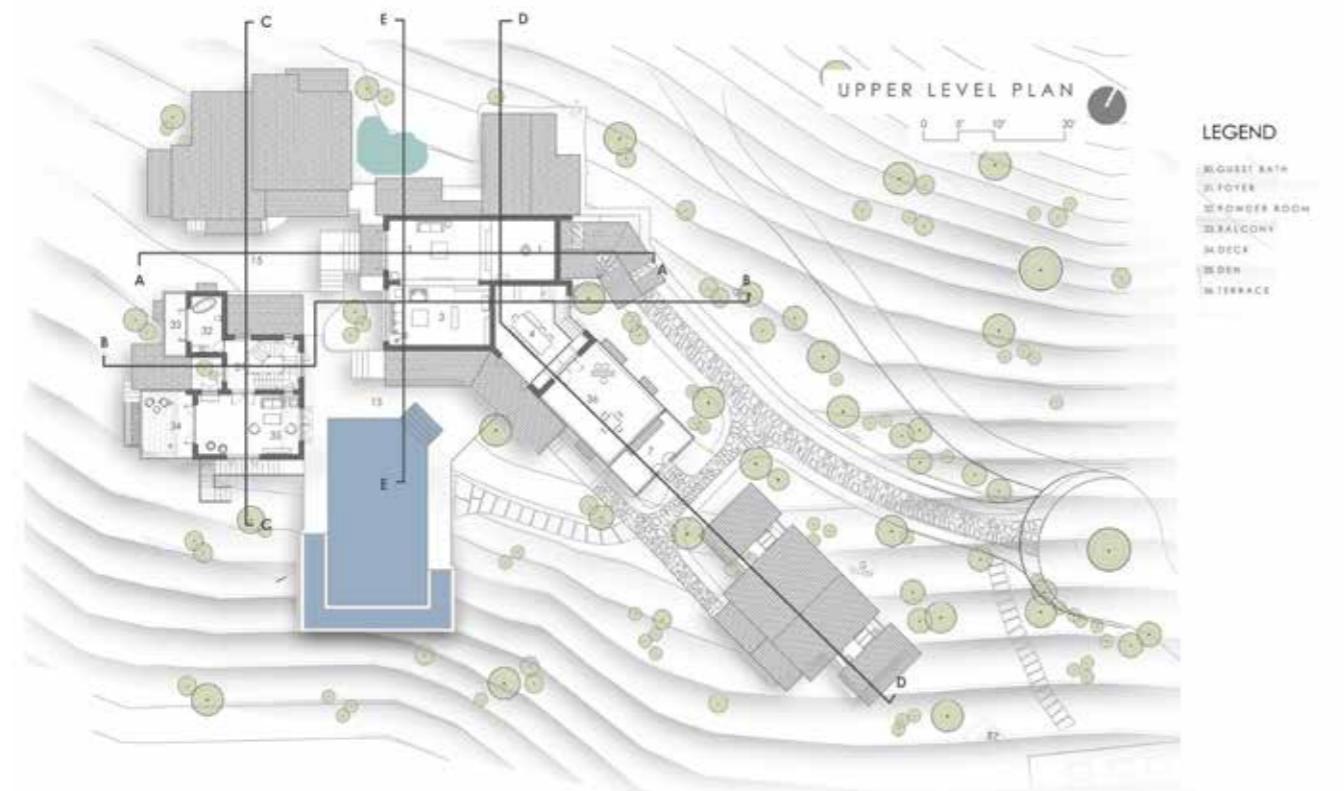
*Text: Shriti Das
Images: Amit Pasricha
Drawings: Studio PKA*

Form and space can be shaped and navigated, defined and labelled. It is easy to control built-form and endow it a language as desired. But it is the void, or the absence of space, the navigation and reading between the lines that speaks the loudest. What becomes of the undefined, the nothing, its evolution and the meaning it takes on?

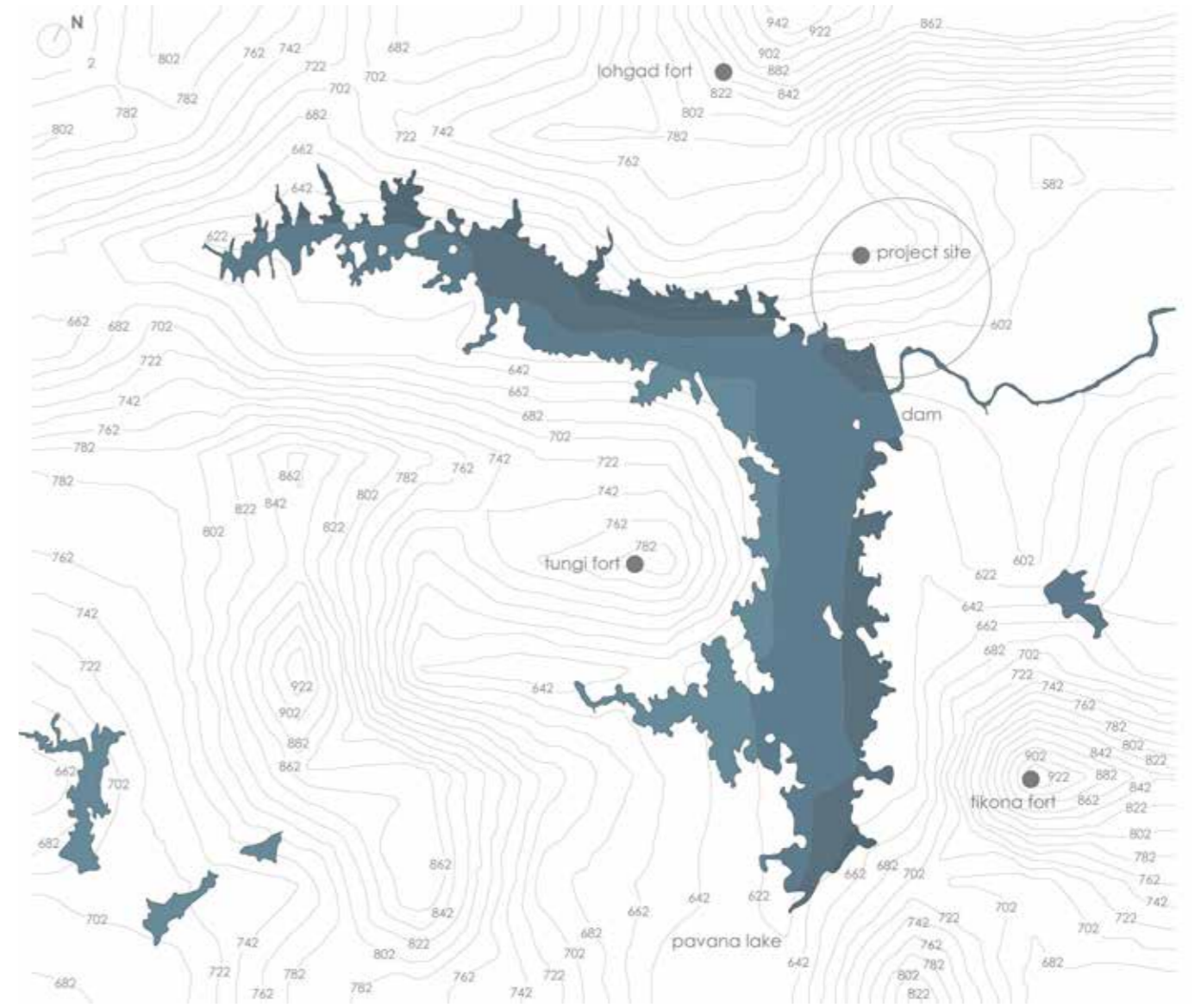




↑ Lower Level Plan.



↑ Upper Level Plan.

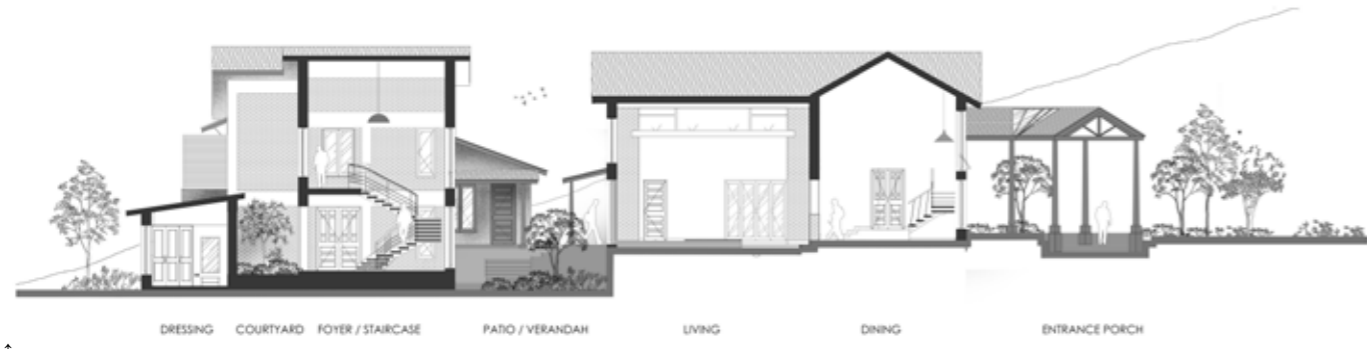


↑ Context Plan – With an overview of the precinct – the Pavana Lake and the overlooking forts.

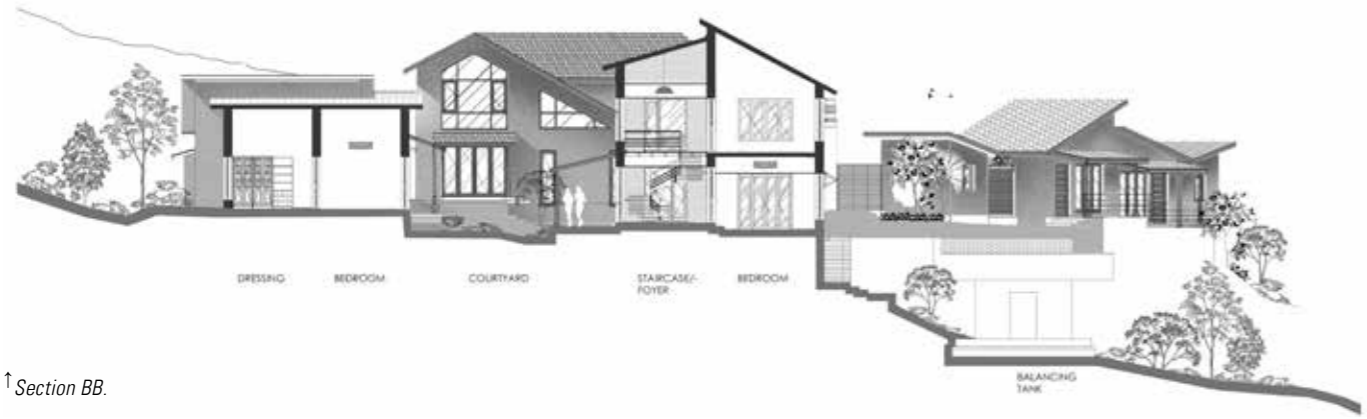
Cities like Mumbai are criticised as impressions of apathy and real-estate driven pursuits. When this city is perceived as an organism, one comprehends the maze of sky-rocketing structures, brimming boundaries; the mishmash of built-form, infrastructure and human densities. While the role of cities in nation building and economic progress is irrefutable, the quality of life they offer to their citizens is laborious and taxing. The individual's being is a balance sheet where their time and real estate is constantly evaluated against the capital they generate. This citizen is a consequence of the city; of a place that was initially shaped by the people that thereafter shapes them. And there is always a hold that the place commands over its people, perhaps as a matter of habit or subconscious pattern that evolves even when opportunities arise to break away from set routines. For instance, holiday homes that are emerging in the Sahyadris are an interesting case in example to study how people produce places and then how the place shapes its people.

The Sahyadris Ranges of the Western Ghats is an oasis to citizens that has evolved as an antithesis to Mumbai and its likes. While Mumbai mushrooms and manoeuvres as a big mass of commercial development, the Sahyadris have witnessed slow and gradual growth, almost akin to an emergent system where weekend holiday homes have thrived in its diverse landscapes. But on evaluating most of the buildings, they exhibit an inherent similarity to homes back in the city.

They are enclosed homes that host large openings to frame rolling hills and greenery yet confined to the notion of space as subsisted in the city. The idea that home or shelter must be all-encompassing, family must reside in close quarters and a roof must continue across the built-form stays inherent. Perhaps it is a deliberate choice or the 'city' that expends a hold over its citizen. Nonetheless, the homes are functional, aesthetic and aspirational.



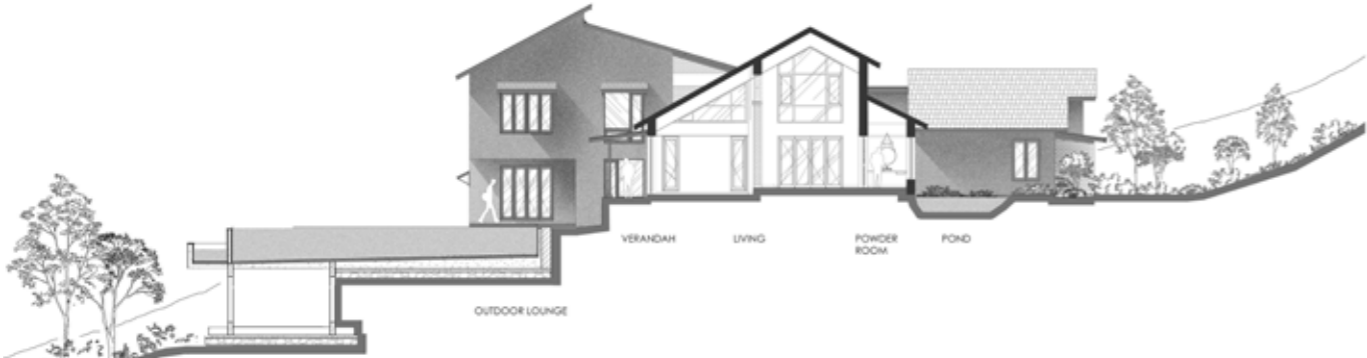
↑ Section AA.



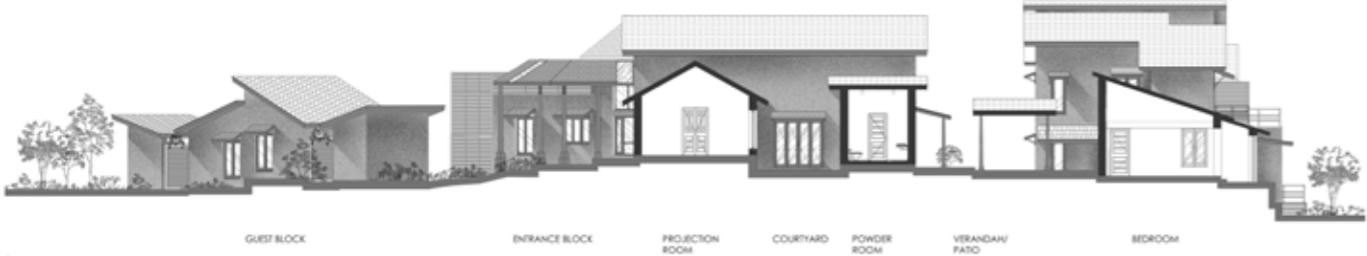
↑ Section BB.



↑ Section CC.



↑ Section DD.



↑ Section EE.



↑ The project in its precinct.



↑ The main entrance.



↑ *The Guest Block.*



↑ *The Guest Block overlooking the Sahyadris and the Pavana Lake.*



↑ *The Living Block.*



↑ *The inside-outside connect.*

The 5 Element House by Studio PKA is not a reform or a rebuttal to the aforementioned. The project set out to create a second home at the picturesque precinct of Pavana Lake. The home has evolved over an extensive course of time, progressing manifold on the architect's drawing board and then some more before it moved to site. Its unhurried pace and timeline, the refusal to abide by norms of 'shelter' and the restraint in its built-form is a refreshing departure. Unlike a single roofed structure, the 5 Element House is a cluster of 4 units oriented to frame the faraway Sahyadris into vistas and encompass the Pavana Lake into the built-form, albeit visually. The home designed for a family of 4, a couple and their children, was formerly designed as a single unit on the contoured plot. A few years later, the design was revisited to translate to working drawings and implement the project on site. At that juncture, given the passage of time, for retrospective and intuitive reasons; it seemed logical to rework on some aspects of the design. It may have been an attribute of personal growth, larger aspiration for the project or something beyond at the architects at the studio. The plan was devised, altered and modified. It then dawned upon the architect that the children were transitioning to grown-ups and perhaps the concept of 'under one roof' can be done away. This allowed the design to split away and saunter, but in a disciplined fashion. The 5 Element House intentionally restricts opulence in form but brings the vantages indoors. The units – an entrance and Living

Block, the Master Block, the Kid's Block and the Guest Block constitute the 5 Element House. Each unit were initially composed as a single structure under one roof. The singular form was split and detached to create independent structures entitled to each block. Each responds to the natural contour, rising and falling as it follows the play of levels that the site offers.

The structure sits on a nestled crevice, flanked by the rising land, hidden from view as the user approaches it. The structure consciously and inconspicuously emerges from the land. It meanders and follows the natural terrain, mirrors the shades of earth. In such locales, architecture can eclipse the landscape and become the context of the place rather than borrow from it. As the user approaches the Living Block from the main gate, they walk alongside the Guest Block. The offset between the two structures allow the vision to astray towards the expansive lake and mountains. A trail emanates from the 'offset space' that leads the user to the pool and deck area. This path celebrates the panorama and expanse of the Sahyadris and allows the user to revel in the spatial qualities of the built-form. At this connexion, the house is no longer 'emerging' or blending into the landscape but is set against a backdrop of bright blue skies. It is here that the architecture builds a strong context, independent from the landscape. Yet there is connect with the landscape.



↑ View of the Kid's Block and Master Block on either side with the Living Block.



↑ The living Block - The central alignment of the living block captures the Tikona Fort in a frame.



↑ View towards the Master Block.



↑ The Dining Area.



↑ *The built-form and the un-built unspoken voids that navigate within it.*



↑ *View from the Master Bedroom.*

The swimming pool is cantilevered that extends towards the lake. The edgeless pool merges with the lake and renders the mountains visually closer to the home, almost within the grasp of an extended arm.

On the other hand, the formal entrance foyer and lounge are aligned on a straight axis that continues outward to lead to the Master Block and Kids Block. Each of these blocks spills onto decks and patios. Here the pathway that commences from the entrance lounge frames the lake and the mountains, but in a controlled fashion. They appear afar, almost provoking the user towards itself. These un-built open spaces that nestle and emerge amidst the blocks convey the polarity of space. They bring together the units as unabridged entities and bring the expanse and scale of the sprawling structure to a humanised scale.

The scale comes in play when the user manoeuvres within it, as one tends to lose track of where the structure commences and concludes. This is particularly true of the living room, where central alignment of the living block captures the Tikona Fort, almost in a larger than life canvas. The line-out plan was tweaked and altered at various occasions to achieve the configuration and maintain minimal cut-and-fill in the contours. The structures reveal similar frames and focal points at various junctures. Inevitably, the place never appears to cease. Beyond movement, the 'splitting' of the unit allowed air to penetrate the voids. The Living Block and the Master Block are double-height structures. It allows the sun to intermingle and cast shadows across the home throughout the day.

This relationship with skies, air, earth, water and sun was not deliberate but a reflection that emerged as the architect built, lived and worked

through the project. There is a 'split' amidst the masses, a void that appears to separate function and lives. But this void does not exist in vacuum or isolation. The 5 elements emanate, imbibe and immerse the void. They weave together the units into a home as each space does share a common connexion with the 'Elements'. The implications of rain, privacy and safety are perhaps debatable but are in fact ruminations of residing in boxed apartment homes. Wherein buildings are clustered in inhumanly close proximities, the poetics of sun and rain are forgotten and life is contained in built and un-built boundaries. 5 Element House breathes and allows the user to breathe, live and grow with the precinct. One can only hope, that such 'places' thereafter shapes the 'person' who heads back to the city rejuvenated, to shape the city back to something more habitable and fulfilling. ■

FACT FILE:

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Location	:	Pavana, Maharashtra
Architect	:	Studio PKA
Design team	:	Puran Kumar, Preethi Krishnan, Sonali Nimbalkar, Revina Soni (Cannot be disclosed)
Client	:	(Cannot be disclosed)
Project Area	:	10,000 sq. ft.
Structural Engineer	:	Ranavat Buildcon
Civil contractors	:	Mehta Associates
Carpentry contractors	:	Jaswant Enterprises
Electrical contractors	:	Vora Electricals
Initiation of Project	:	January 2014
Completion of project	:	October 2017
Photographer	:	Amit Pasricha