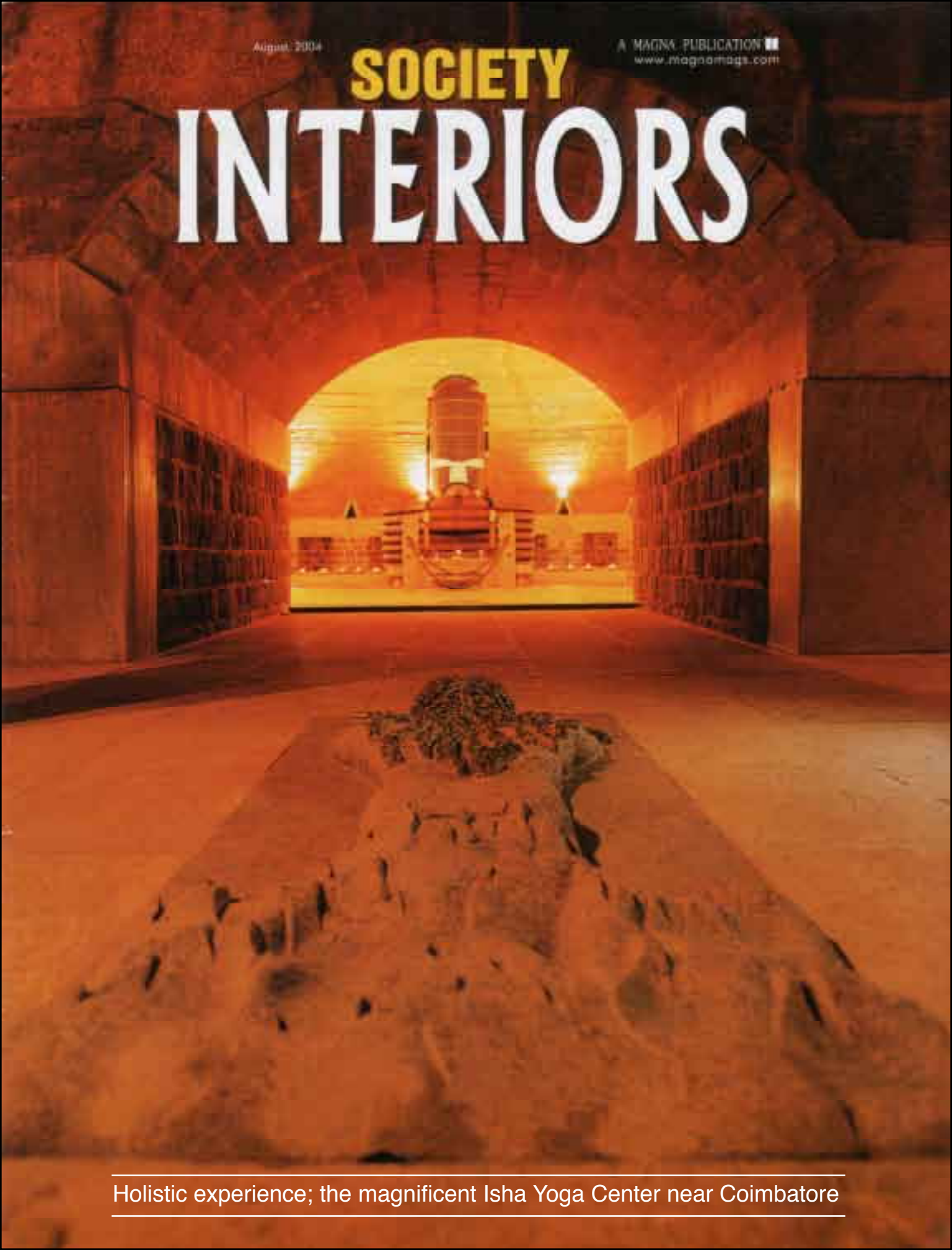


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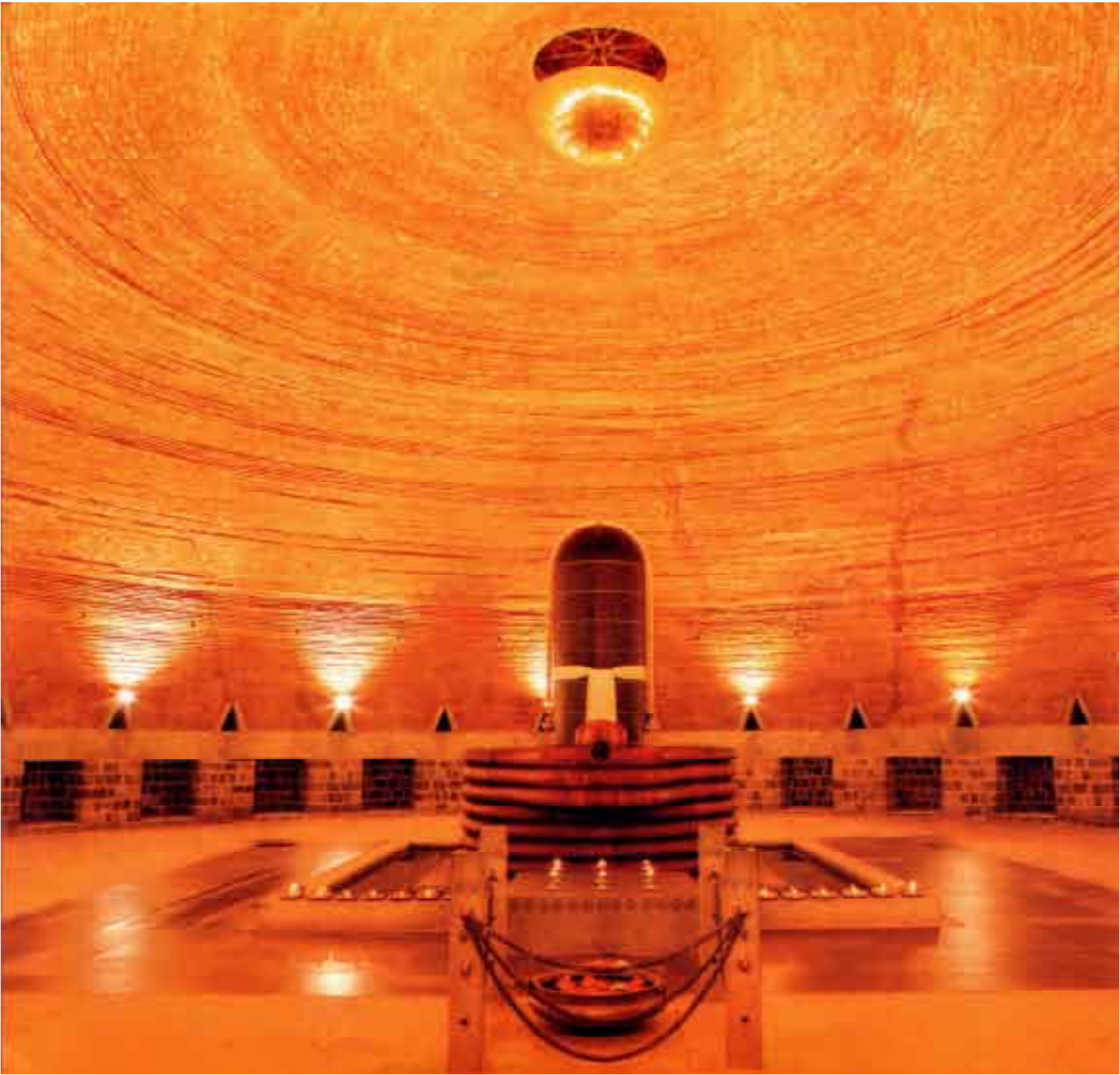
Holistic experience; the magnificent Isha Yoga Center near Coimbatore

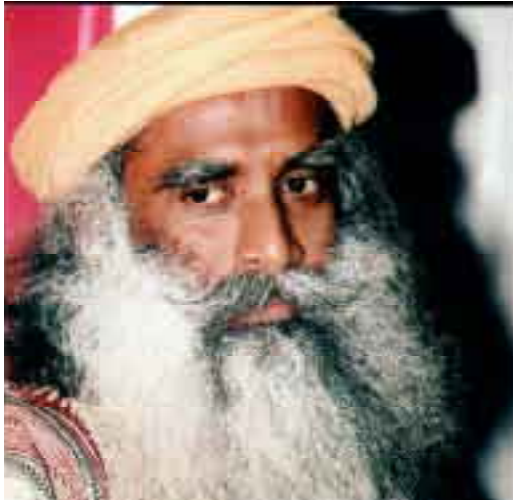
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ARCHITECTURE

# Fount of Creativity

Set in the foothills of Velliangiri mountains near Coimbatore, the ISHA YOGA CENTRE takes yoga and meditation to a higher plane, rejuvenating both mind and body.





**KNOWN** for its diversity of flora and fauna, the Nilgiri biosphere is one of the most scenic places of this country. Amidst the thick tree cover, dancing rivulets, imperious peacocks and trumpeting elephants, at the foothills of the Velliangiri mountains, is the artistic and tranquil Isha Yoga Centre, located about 28 kms from Coimbatore. Spread across 50 acres of land, the ashram comprises a triangular block for the brahmacharis, the Dhyanalinga temple, the Spanda meditation hall and cottages for visiting devotees.

The marvelously built Dhyanalinga temple and its surrounding ashram premises is the brainchild of Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, who was a builder by profession before he renounced the material

world. This background came into good use in his single-minded determination to create this one-of-a-kind complex – for consecrating a linga is no mean affair. “The Dhyanalinga is the distilled essence of yogic science. In its qualities, it is energy focusing and power generating and is not linked to Shaivite worship,” reveals Sadhguru. “In this sense, it is different from all the other lingas of Hindu tradition. Thus, the Dhyanalinga is not used for worship; rather it is created as an external manifestation of the peak form of all inner energies. History tells us about a failed attempt undertaken a thousand years ago in what is now Bihar,” he recounts. “After that one more dhyanalinga in Bhojpur, near Bhopal, almost reached the phase of completion. However, it cracked during consecration due to delay in the locking of energies. To safeguard against this eventuality, the linga that we consecrated is crafted from the highest (4200 units density) form of stone found in Asia.” To prevent a repetition of the Bhojpur fiasco, a minute crack running vertically through the linga created by Sadhguru with a single resounding clap in a state of heightened energy. The unusual sunken reception engages the visitor with the 17-foot-tall white granite



(top) Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev: the force behind Isha Yoga Centre . (extreme left) The imposing Dhyanalinga and Avudaiyar, its seven-coiled receptacle, repose in a spectacular dome made of 250 layers of bricks. Diyas and well-placed lighting impart an ethereal feel to the garbhagraha. (left) The Sarvadharmha Sthamba at the entrance of the temple represents the multi-religiousness of the ashram.



monolith - the *Sarvadharmha Sthamba*. Symbols of major religions inscribed on three sides of this *sthamba* represent the multi-religiousness of the temple. Its back bears the schematic depiction of the seven *chakras* of the human body in the form of lotuses representing different levels of consciousness. The *chakras* are flanked by flowing forms of snakes that stand for the *ida* and *pingala nadis* (right and left pulses), the masculine and feminine or the logical and intuitive energy states. The central stem connecting

(above) Created by an inmate, the sculpture of a prostrate rishi at the entrance of the Dhyanalinga temple sets the 'mood for a spiritual sojourn. (left) The idol of Patanjali is placed in a sunken shrine for immediate kinship with the visitors.



The hermitage-like look of the reception near the main entrance to Spanda hall is enhanced by an artwork of a tree done with vegetable paints, granite temple pillars and the rough-hewn rock at the threshold of the room,

all the chakras is the sushmna nadi - the key channel of energy according to the yogic science. The rising stone sun crowning the sthamba symbolizes a new dawn, while the pattern of fallen leaves beneath the sun signifies death of the past.

Beyond the Sthamba lies the stone gateway that follows the principles of traditional Indian temple architecture. To reach the open pathway or the parikrama which eventually leads to the sanctum sanctorum, one crosses three entrance steps signifying the tamas, rajas and satwa gunas, the basic qualities of the mind. The unusual height of the steps forces the visitors to press their feet firmly on its pebbled surface, thus activating the nerve centres in the body - a preparation to be more receptive to the energies of the Dhyanalinga.

The parikrama is flanked by aisles covered by six artistically sculpted granite panels illustrating the stories of six south Indian sages. To the left stands the 11-foot-tall statue of Patanjali, the author of yogasutra. Deliberately placed in a sunken shrine to establish an immediate kinship with the visitor, this black granite sculpture combining the forms of snake and man, depicts the duality of human nature. Facing Patanjali and placed at an elevation is the Vanashree shrine, a green granite sculptural relief of a Pee pal tree. Between them, the linga, Patanjali and Vanashree form a IS-degree triangle. Explaining the significance of this geometric form, Sadhguru says, "As a linga has no orientation of direction, you need something to draw the people if they are to experience the linga

properly. Therefore, a 13-degree angle has been established here for animation of energy.” The parikrama ends at a vaulted tunnel that leads into the dome. Carved on the threshold of the entrance are two snakes with a single raised hood, indicating the non-dual nature of the Dhyanalinga. Over the vault is a seven-hooded monolithic snake, symbolizing the seven dimensions of life.

The dome that encloses Dhyanalinga is a section of an ellipse—representing a section of the globe. The Dhyanalinga temple layout may be a simple fusion of geometric shapes, but it is a profound space for meditation. On the periphery are congregations of modulated spaces that subtly prepare the visitors for meditation. Raised 33 feet from the ground, the dome weighs around 800 tonnes and has a diameter of 76 feet at the base. It rests on a six-foot-high circular stone wall including a ring of two foot-tall stone lintels. The entire structure is built upon a foundation that is 10 feet wide and 10 feet deep. Nearly 2,50,000 bricks have been used to create about 250 layers, starting at a vertical angle of 13 degrees and ending at 82 degrees to the horizontal. The

The entrance to the hall is through this fortress doorway. The embedded coiled brass snake seems to direct the visitor to step over the snake sculpted threshold.



20-inch-thick base of the dome tapers to 8 inches (a single brick) at the top.

“All bricks were soaked in water for 24 hours to ‘melt’ the unburnt ones. Further, each brick was measured to the millimetre. The work was completed in a record time of eight weeks with the help of about 300 laborers and 1,000 volunteers,” discloses Sadhguru. 28 ventilators are placed atop the lintel beams with stone slabs in the shape of a triangle for natural light and ventilation. Covered by a gold-plated linga-shaped copper dome to block direct light, the central opening acts as ventilator and thus keeps the space cool. Below the lintel beam 28 energy cubicles called the aura cells, are embedded in the inner wall. Each aura cell is about 4’ X 4’ and provides an intimate space for a person to sit and meditate facing the Dhyanalinga.

Conventional building materials like cement, steel and concrete were ruled out as the life span of structures that employ these materials is a mere 100 years or so. Traditional materials like burnt brick and mud mortar stabilized with lime, sand, alum and herbal additives were used along with huge blocks of granite. “Natural materials used here are as old as the earth and will live as long as she does,” smiles the spiritual leader. “If you go to any archeological site, the first thing you find alive is pottery. Burnt earth is like that and burnt brick has the same quality. The simple technology of this dome is that all the bricks are trying to fall down together but they can’t. It’s like ten people wanting to get into a bus at the same time and nobody gets in.”

Since it is the first time ever that such a massive structure was being raised without any form-work, ring-beams, steel or concrete, each aspect had to be worked out meticulously, involving research and experiments to get a safe and viable process blending ancient and locally available materials and techniques. Brick placement was determined through modern mathematics and verified by computer calculations; while granite slabs from traditional quarries went through modern gang saws for precise fitting.

The awe-inspiring Dhyanalinga, the *raison d’etre* of Isha Yoga Centre, towers up to a height of 13’ 9” and rises out of a seven-coiled serpent receptacle, the Avudaiyar, which is the feminine representation of the lingam. The Avudaiyar has been designed in such a way that its total length is the same as the height of the linga. The Dhyanalinga is surrounded

Ideal for meditation, the column-less Spanda hall can accommodate nearly 5,000 people at a time. The yogic saga of Lord Shiva has been translated into what is claimed to be the largest mural painting in the world.



The visitor's room finds an innovative use of leftover material. Thus the flooring gets an unintentional designer pattern. Discarded rocks from the temple construction line the base of the wall adding to the cave-like ambience.



The mini meditation room where Sadhguru generally meets his guests. Fossil rock, granite pillars and the antique door speak of a decor firmly rooted in tradition.

The profound impact continues as when one walks towards Spanda hall, a space reserved for yoga programmes and Sadhguru's discourses. The innovative use of materials for construction and embellishment continues here too: the pathway leading to the hall is embedded with mechanical tools and engine parts. The entrance is a fortress door with a coiled brass serpent fixed to the ground and serpent figurines on the threshold. A huge rock with a waterbody pregnant with lotus blooms adds to the natural beauty. To the left of the entrance door is the reception housed in what looks like a hermit's cottage. Temple pillars, a tree painted on the exterior wall and uncured granite stone on the threshold add to the ambience.

by a large free-flowing space as Sadhguru wanted a direct access for the visitors to the garbhagraha. Surrounding the linga is the jalaseema, a waterbody that has a cooling effect on the linga and gives an impression that it is floating on water. The linga is made up of a single, high-density black granite stone, while the Avudaiyar is made of white granite whose density is 30 per cent less than that of the linga. The linga and the serpent are energized with the qualities of the seven charkas: the former with seven copper rings and the latter with its seven-looped coil. The resonating sound of water that drips onto the linga from the hemispheric gold-plated copper dome suspended overhead, the shimmering reflection of the oil lamps on the golden dome and the pervasive silence makes the experience ethereal. The natural draught or air and the choice of natural materials make it a cool and soothing space, which breathes through every pore.

Inside, a mural created by artistically putting together waste materials like iron rods, wood picked from the near by jungle, discarded brass lamps, etc., greets you. The dominating feature of the 22,000-square-foot column-less space which can easily seat a crowd of 5,000, is perhaps the world's largest wall mural painting. With imposing dimensions of 140 ft. x 12 ft., it depicts the yogic journey of Lord Shiva in vegetable dyes and soil and mineral extracts. "Shiva is considered to be the originator of Yoga, and hence this theme seemed apt for this space. The concept was given by Sadhguru but the style and application came from artists Krishna Mallisery and Ajthian Puthaamana of Chitra Rekha in Kerala," says Swami Nisarga, a brahmachari closely involved with the yoga centre.

(right) The reception room of the triangular brahmachari block. The use of granite slabs as seaters and the cradle-turned-centre are in sync with the spirit of innovation. (below) The guestrooms in the Chithra (visitors) block have exposed brick walls and furniture made by inmates of the ashram.





(above, left) Bamboo and leftover wood has been put to creative use and fashioned into a shelf and chest of drawers for kitchenware. (above, right) The dining table and chairs are also crafted out of leftover wood and bamboo. Tiled tabletop and untreated bamboo for footrest add to the beauty of the piece.

Near the entrance of the hall lies a sprinkling of granite pillars, pavilions and traditional mandapams. The pillared pavilion is converted into gurnkul (classroom) and serves as an alternate venue for spiritual classes from time to time. The triangular block where the brahmacharis dwell has interesting geometrical patterns. With treated wall on one side, granite seaters with cushions and dry flower arrangement, the reception room of this block is in sync with its natural surroundings.

Guestrooms for the visitors are housed in the Chithra Block, which is next to the triangular block. Each room has three exposed-brick walls, while the fourth one, behind the bed, has been plastered to underscore the rustic feel. All the furniture has been made by the inmates of the ashram.

Sadhguru's den, a space for closed audience with visitors, lies to the rear of Dhyanalinga temple. It exudes a cave-like ancient feel due to the rocks used at the base of the walls. "These are leftovers from the construction of the Dhyanalinga," reveals Swami Nisarga. The room has uneven granite slabs on the floor and a mud-plastered stone beam on the ceiling that supports the stone slabs on the roof. More rocks have been used to fashion a seating area for Sadhguru. An antique door that leads to his residence adds a hermitage-like feel to the space. "We got a lot of stone work done at Mahabalipuram, but the sculptors took an eternity, to complete our orders," says Swami Nisarga. "So one of our inmates stayed in the quarry to push the work through. He watched these people at work there and once the temple was completed, he took a chisel and carved out some pieces himself, One of them is placed in front of Sadhguru's quarters and the other is the prostrate yogi in the temple." Fossil rocks piled outside the den and temple pillars give a touch of the Mrichchakatika era.

Any work that you do, if done with sincerity and passion, takes on a spiritual hue. With Isha Yoga Centre, and the Dhyanalinga temple in particular, this process has entered a different realm altogether. The linga, so intimately connected to Shiva the destroyer, has turned into a nucleus of creation and creativity.

Text: CSS Latha

Photographs: NP Manikanten