

# Architecture Magazines | Kerala

My first (unrealised) architectural project was when a family acquaintance approached me to design his “dream home”. The brief was an aspiration with its origin radiating from and success converging into the same point- a popular architecture magazine printed in malayalam (the language spoken in the southern state of Kerala). Hailing from the most literate state of India, malayalis collectively have one ultimate ambition—building their “dream home”. A dream they feed by sifting through dozens of glossy magazines with images of houses and ear dog the ones that come closest to their ‘dream’. While my proposal of the architectural plan was accepted right away, my client wanted the “elevation” to be improved, in other words, imitate one of the images of a magazine. Later on, I would work on a kazillion options to render him a climatically and contextually sound design only to be shut down by the demand for an exact replica of the magazine references.

A dissertation based essay on the topic “An Exploratory Study on B2C Architecture Magazines of Kerala”

The small state of Kerala has 7+ Malayalam B2C (business to customer) architecture magazines and the print order is approximately 30,000 copies for one of the popular magazines. In every little store, booth and roadside stall, one can find a couple architecture magazines, ‘dream homes’ swaying on a twine. While the English architecture magazines of India like Inside Outside, Home Interiors etc. portray largely an architecture of luxury, the malayalam magazines focus on addressing the common man, someone whose average household income is close to the median of the state. The common man, an aspirant of a home, is the typical buyer, the ideal dreamer where the dreams are easy replicas of other dreams, creating a notion of them being within reach. By the same token, magazine covers displaying houses sell more on stand sale.

The writers of the magazines are journalists or literature graduates with no background in architecture. Editors often deliberately choose to hire non architects with a presumption that a layperson would understand their hot takes on architecture better, staying clear of complex architecture jargon, but at the same time missing out on design insight and nuance. Consequently, a gratifying use of the regional language communicates to the readers about the superficialities of architecture. The only columns written by architects are therefore occasional contributions. Project content is not necessarily based on an actual experience of a space or a site visit.

“Details when they are successful are not mere decoration. They do not distract or entertain. They lead to an understanding of the whole of which they are an inherent part”- Peter Zumthor. The virtues of design are highlighted through elements of deco-



Caption- “Elevation engine thayyaaraakaam?”  
 Source- Veedum Planum. 2017. “Elevation Engine Thayyaaraakaam”, , 2017.  
 Caption- How to create an elevation- An article on how to create an exterior facade in various architecture styles and render the best first impression.

ration. Renovation projects are expected to be skimmed through as face lifting, ignoring to document the changes in its structure or plan or conservation and reuse techniques. Although a 50:50 ratio of photographs and content is ideal for magazines, it is seen that in many English Indian architecture magazines, the ratio of photographs exceeds that of content, focussing more on the aesthetics of magazine design. Thereupon, the opportunity of serious design discussions and conveying intricacies of the design is missed, even if just at an aesthetic level. Malayalam architecture magazines, on the contrary, maintain this ratio. Even if the photography is basic in terms of lighting or angles, the visual and textual references complement to communicate an overall idea. The print image quality of photographs are seen to be poor and low quality images from the internet unabashedly occupy the less popular magazines.

Apart from architectural and interior design, these magazines are the primary source of information for malayalis giving an awareness on building materials, real estate, artists, architectural events, vastu shastra, new technologies, landscape design, financial schemes etc. This enables the people to be engaged in design discussions, passively as opposed to the field largely gatekeeping these conversations within the profession. People are also growing to accept and follow alternative building practices like mud construction and steel construction when successful projects get featured. Articles on public projects and social movements foster an environment of social commitment and a macro level design awareness. The Kerala Model of Development torch borne by the Communist Party of India-Marxist and alternately by the Congress (the state being a government-by-coalition), informs the culture of collective discourse into all forms of media.



Caption- "Mwonj kooti mittayi theriv"

Source- Veedu. 2017. "Mwonj Kooti Mittayi Theriv", , 2017.

Caption - SM street gets beautified: An article on the renovation of SM street by the Kerala Government, focussing on the transformation of Calicut's oldest commercial street after urban redevelopment.

While analyzing the various architecture magazines of the state, it can be understood that the knowledge imparted to the layperson is also largely manipulated; people are often steered towards being enamored by aesthetics over evaluating design efficiency to set trends that are blindly copied, to aspire for anglicized homes or worse, desire "modern" homes with replicas of traditional Kerala architecture elements. All of these conversations insist on a superficial focus on the appearance rather than the essence, and that is the biggest lament. Interior design need not be restricted to a superficial collection of pretty images but an opportunity to experiment with material, reuse and recycle what is being stripped off and contextualize the interiors of spaces with their primary users and their unique needs.





Caption- "Keraleeyam".

Source- Veedu. 2017. "Keraleeyam", , 2017.

An article on contemporary residences engaging Kerala style architecture elements

As much as a source of information the regional architecture magazines are, they also involuntarily establish a mental mould of how architecture should look. "What is the trend now?" - is the big elephant in the room question that architects despise. "Is it the box projection, fin wall or laterite cladding?" Surprisingly, there is a typical image of a house etched in everybody's mind when this question is asked and that is where the "trend" has already proved its mettle. A trend today is no more a trend tomorrow and yet the question on trend never leaves a conversation. "The on-trend look, like many other motifs, is a marketing ploy. It is selling itself as current, fully in the now. It is fast fashion, in built form"<sup>1</sup>. Architectural magazines play a major role in establishing trends.

<sup>1</sup> Verma, Neena. "5-100346." Urban Omnibus, January 13, 2022. [https://urbanomnibus.net/2022/01/5-100346/?mc\\_cid=d0ab9a3783&mc\\_eid=6d4554697e](https://urbanomnibus.net/2022/01/5-100346/?mc_cid=d0ab9a3783&mc_eid=6d4554697e).

As a malayali who has grown up in a household buying architecture magazines for leisure, it is to be acknowledged that they instill in the people a dream. People are inspired to not build a house for barely existing, but to live in a home that connects them. The idea of personalisation of homes predominantly began when architecture magazines started being more easily available and accessible in the local language for a reasonable price. In Kerala, contractors and engineers have devised a system where houses are built by fitting a typical plan into any site, altering just the facade to stand out in a neighborhood. The dream of breaking free from those closed & congested box houses invited more architects in place of convenient underquoting contractors. It is a common platform for local architects to publish their projects through which their clientele grows. Even with the popularity of youtube channels and pinterest inspirations, malayalis continue to rely on these magazines.

Thorough restructuring of the system, initiating ground rules and insisting on interventions by architects at various stages of content creation is advisable to do justice to the power of print media. As the regional architecture media continues to address the changing needs of its audience, let's vouch for contextually, environmentally and climatically sensitive reshaping of the society's built and unbuilt culture.