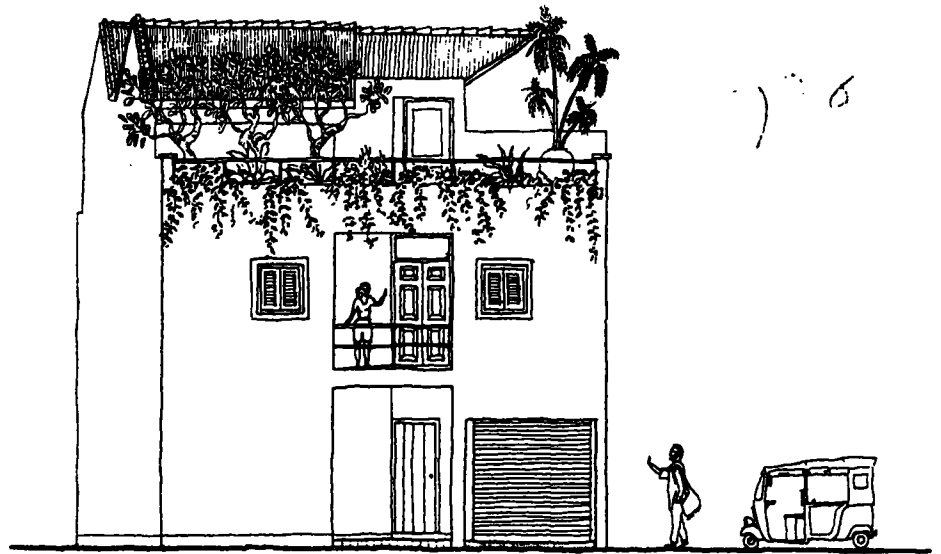


# TWO TOWN HOUSES FROM THE INNER CITY



**Project: House for Lilani de Silva**  
**Location: Ward Place, Colombo 7**  
**Architect: C. Anjalendran**

**Project: Prematilleke – Welandawe House**  
**Location: off Buller’s Road, Colombo 7**  
**Architect: Hiranthi Welandawe**

**Channa Daswatte**

Every city in the world has its own version of the town house that makes up the bulk of its urban building. With Colombo fast changing from the garden city established by the British Colonial administration in the 1860's, to a sprawling low-rise high density urban conglomeration, something akin to the town house or rowhouse is becoming a dominant morphology. This is mainly due to inner city and even suburban plots becoming smaller, no more than 10 to 15 perches on average.

The classic rowhouse or town house as seen in other cities such as London and Singapore have the simple logic of attempting to make maximum road frontage for as many houses as possible. Although the logic of Colombo and subdivision does not follow such a clear pattern, many sites allow for, and even presuppose, this kind of building. Two recent additions to the housing stock shows distinctly different approaches and therefore the potential of the simple row house. The only common things about these two contemporary variations of a traditional urban morphology, is that they are both on five perches of land and are built wall to wall on the long boundaries, and the short side looks out on the street in front and a small garden at the rear.

The house for Lilani de Silva, designed by architect C. Anjalendran is organised

on three levels around two light wells. The ground level is essentially a garage, service and a large living-dining space, the second level two bedrooms, with the third level being a covered roof terrace which could be used for entertainment or as a third bedroom. Each of these levels are arranged as static picturesque or dramatic settings organised around a series of carefully modulated vistas. The two light wells, one for the main living spaces and the other for the service and toilet areas, are used effectively for ventilation as well as for light in each of the spaces that they relate to. This is made particularly effective on the ground level where the bottom of the light well is a pool that separates the living area from the dinning. The pool reflects light onto the ceilings of this room and this combined with the all white palette gives it a luminous quality, even though it is at the bottom of three storeys and essentially surrounded by high walls.

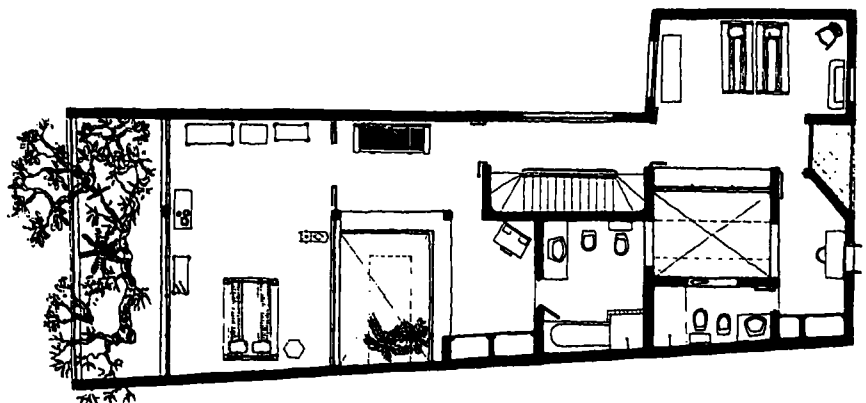
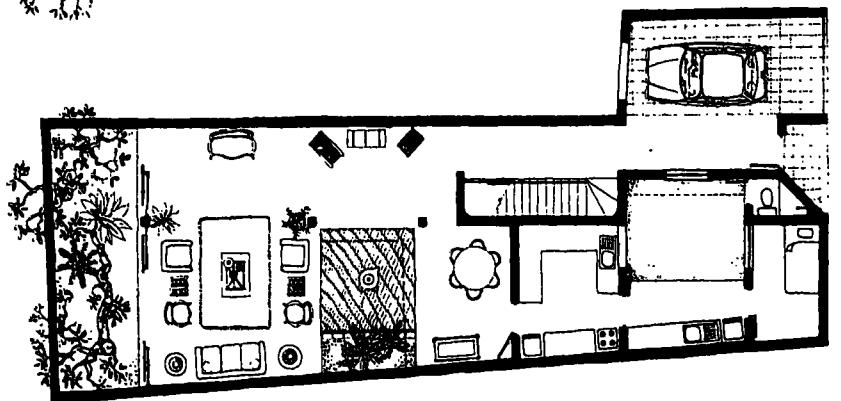
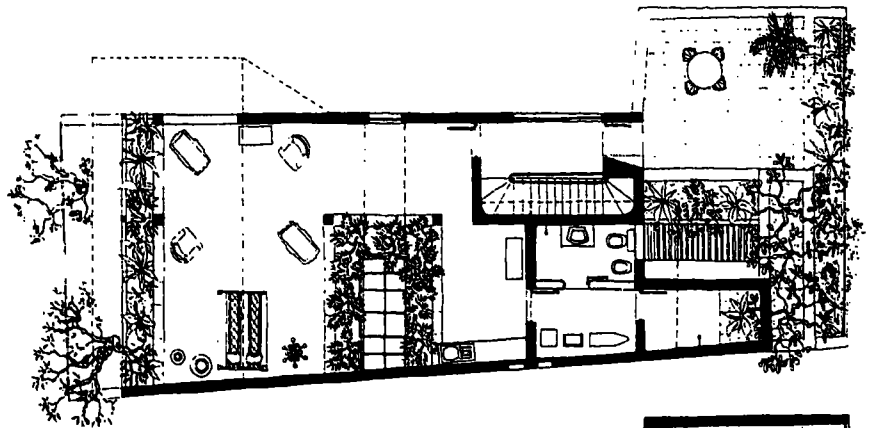
On the second level the light well is the central focus of the main bedroom with the sleeping area and the dressing area arranged around it. Cantilevered seats around it give the necessary privacy from the level below. On the roof level the main light well separates the covered area into two pavilions connected at one end. The second light well provides the pantry and kitchen ventilation and light on the ground level and the two bathrooms on the



second level open into it as does the second dressing room and the second bedroom that also opens onto the street.

A spare minimal palette of brick, cement plaster floors, lime plaster walls and timber, all painted a

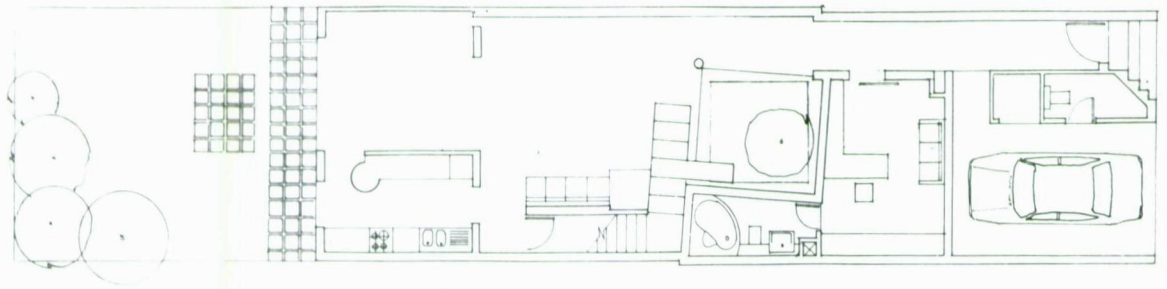
There is no particular visual connection between the floors in this house with the light wells only giving the necessary light and ventilation at the different levels. This affords a great deal of visual separation between floors and presupposes a lifestyle that allows individual privacy, even within a nuclear family. Each level is a 'stage set' for relaxed living contrived around a series of vistas, with utmost individual privacy. Essentially two completely unrelated events may take place on the ground floor and the roof terrace without anybody getting in the way. Each level is a surprise after the rather uninspired stair which starts in the entrance area itself, and seen only as a means of vertical circulation – completely utilitarian even to the use of GI pipe for the handrails, cleverly contrived to fit into this small space.



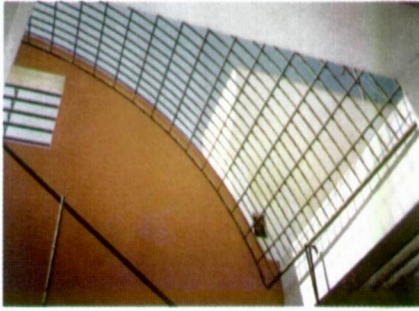
Arrival at the roof top is a complete surprise. The closed luminous whiteness of the lower floors make the pavilion room that opens out to a vista of tree tops in the surrounding gardens even more dramatic. Usable at any time of day with cool breezes wafting through this completely windowless space, this is indeed the most pleasurable part of the house.

uniform white is put to good use. The whiteness emphasises the effects of light and shade, reflection and shadow, and give the inside of this house an overall luminosity. It also brings into the house the lush planting in the rear courtyard.

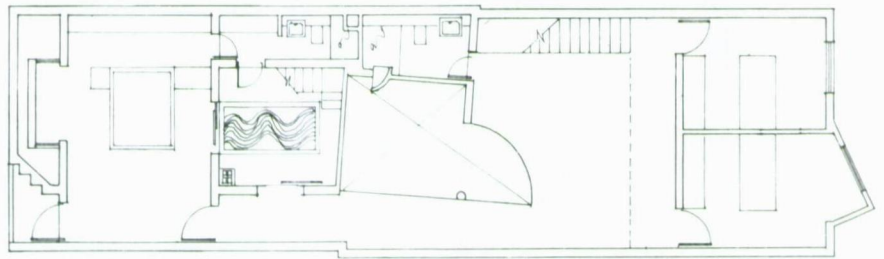




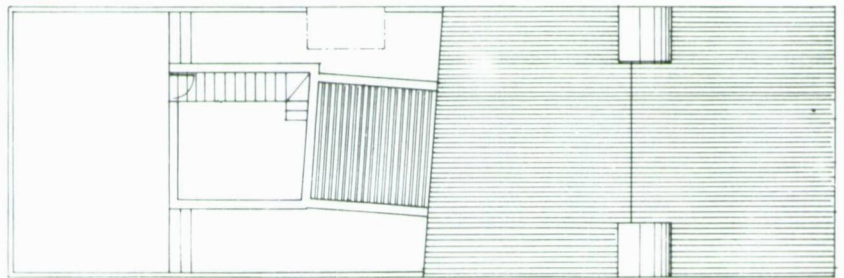
*Ground Floor*



The Prematilleke - Welandawe House, takes a distinctly different approach. Here the spaces are organised on three levels around a central courtyard space. The first level is a garage, study and living space, with a pantry behind a screen wall at the back of the living-dining area. The second level is a family living room with two bedrooms for the children attached to it, and a master bedroom above the garage and study, linked to the family room by an elegant bridge. The third level is an open roof terrace.

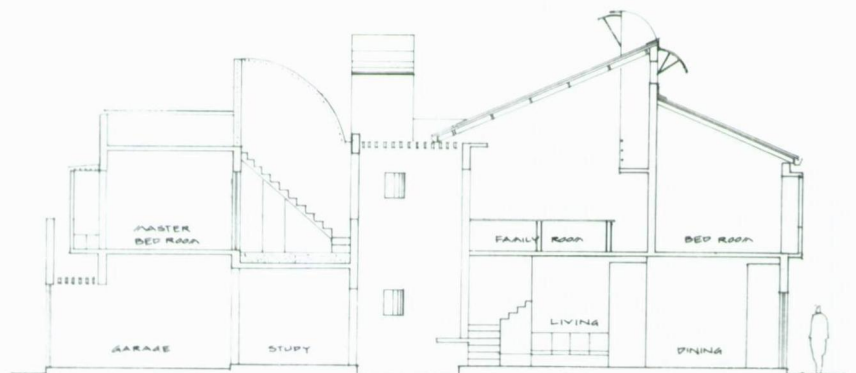


*First Floor*



*Roof Terrace*

The courtyard is the main spatial element in the house and used to physically and visually link up the different levels. By stepping back at each level, the courtyard creates a visual link that integrates the roof terrace with the ground level. The main vertical movement in the house is also in or around this space. The result is a house with a dynamic, moving, almost cinematic space. The progress from the sitting room on the ground level to the roof top garden is a sequence, detailed and modulated with event, always giving glimpses of what has been and promise of what is to be. This approach physically and visually integrates all the spaces at all levels in the house.



*Section*

The highly integrated spaces results in the young family being able to grow up without ever really losing sight of each other, except when they shut the bedroom doors. The house is meant for the contemporary nuclear family, with no intrusions from extended family or domestic help. Entertainment must surely be of close associates in tacit agreement with all the members of the family.

In addition to the courtyard, back garden and street, the almost sculptural physical form of the house is a result of various contrivances that have been used to get light and ventilation. These are made much of by clearly articulating forms such as funnels for lighting and ventilation and shading for windows. This obsession with detail is carried through to the rest of the house, where attention is paid to every thing from staircases and windows to wall and floor finishes. Each finish and element is seen as specific to place and function within the house. This creates a great deal of visual excitement which is stimulating even if sometimes distracting. This results from a harshly modernist vision taken almost to an extreme. The concern for this conceptual vision has its occasional sacrifices in comfort and convenience, but the high ideals have resulted in an extremely visually stimulating house.

However different both houses are in the particular approach to design and life, they both in their own way transcend the mere house for accommodation in the city to provide visual pleasure to the senses as one goes through the daily grind. One house by its very stillness and calm, creates an oasis from the bustle and distraction of the street. The other provides a home in a visually and socially stimulating environment that encourages close familiar contact. They both show that the small town house need not be mere dull accommodation, but can be made into a celebration of everyday life.

