

ALFRED HOUSE GARDENS

A city is not defined by one street or one building, but there are always some streets that seem to capture the essence of a city - its vibrancy, its character and its very pulse. While there may never be wide-scale agreement on which street epitomises the character of Colombo, *The Architect* chose to turn its spotlight on Alfred House Gardens in Colpetty.

By Hiranthi Pathirana | Photography by Varuna Liyanage

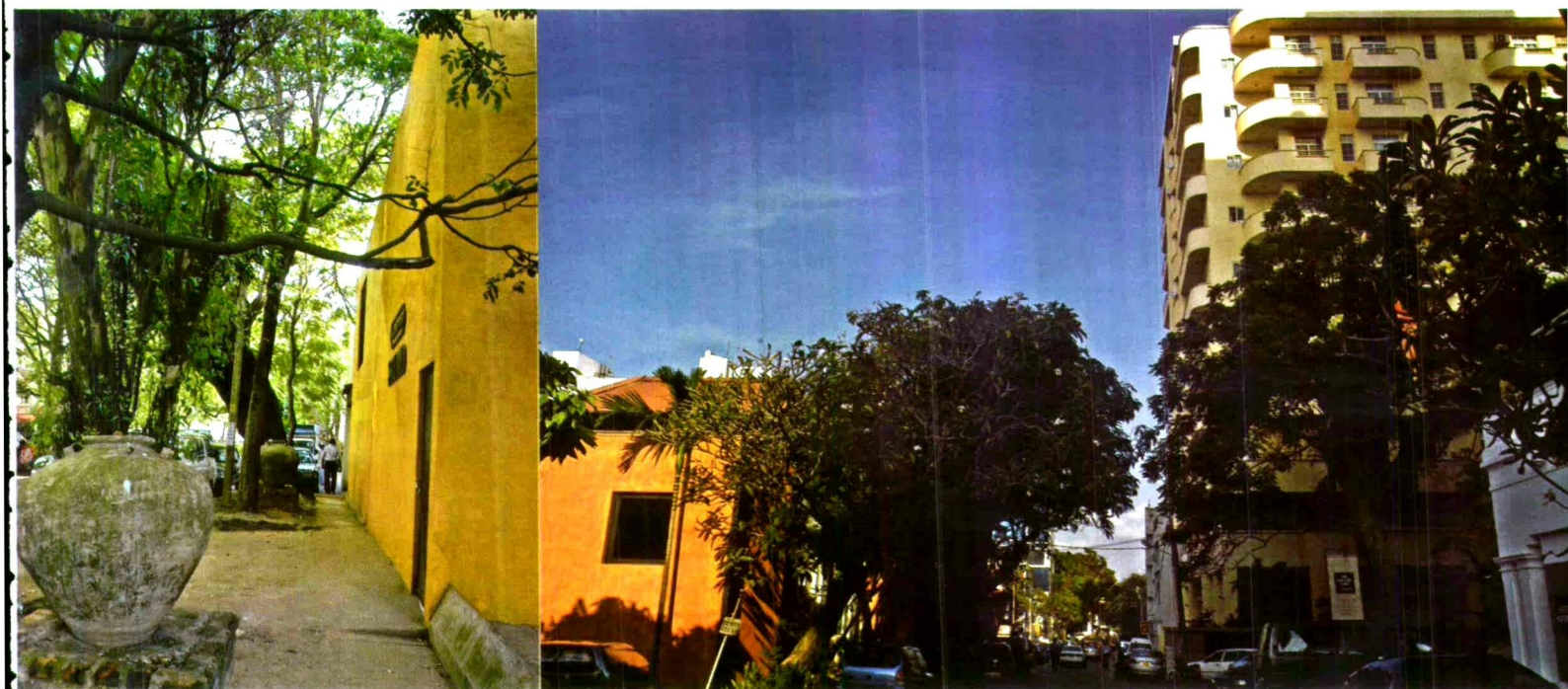
Alfred House Gardens – even the name has resonance in Colombo's consciousness, with its stately colonial sound. A street which was for decades a quiet residential area of the elite has, in the last few decades, been transformed by incorporating commercial spaces, restaurants, public facilities and condominium residences. But in this transformation, it has successfully retained its quiet charm.

Walking down Alfred House Gardens, one has the experience of a 'walled in' effect with one side having several multi-storey apartments built alongside each other. Therefore, this narrow arterial space has a unique effect of a tunnelled-in quality, having very tall buildings walled on one side and a row of independent buildings on the other, merged in with a lot of greenery in the area. Deep light wells have been created between buildings, providing infiltrated light and spatial drama during different



Each space houses different activities, whether it is a residential apartment, an individual house, a religious space, a boutique, or the British Council... created from the common integrated setting of Alfred House Gardens





times of the day. There are several natural canopies of foliage, almost a roof covering the driveway in parts, creating a pleasurable drive through.

The arterial way of Alfred House Gardens starts from the Galle Road and ends up at the British Council Building cutting through Duplication Road, having connections made with a number of deep set alleys and by-roads. It can be identified as a communication artefact mainly because it gives many facets of experiences to the urban dweller. Each space houses different activities, whether it is a residential apartment, an individual house, a religious space, a boutique, or the British Council, all giving valuable experience that is unique, created from the common integrated setting of Alfred House Gardens.

A remarkable feature of the transformation of this street has been the elegant and complementary exteriors, which have evolved in tandem. The commercial and recreational spaces in particular have shown a sensitivity in renovation that has gone a long way in enhancing the ambience of this artery. Whether they house restaurants,

art galleries, flower shops or fashion boutiques, their exteriors exude an elegance and charm that epitomises Alfred House Gardens.

This particular artery is unique due to the structural settings created by the buildings. The buildings of character and architectural interest that are found scattered amongst the newer, somewhat clinical façades, have that mystical aura that give rise to a certain ambiguity in the architectural 'feel' of the street.

One of the most significant characteristics in this particular arterial formation is that it ends up with a significant building with higher architectural importance in the area. There is a definite starting point to the experience of the space at the border of Galle Road that creates an entry point through two high rises of the Colombo Jewellery Stores and the AT Cooray Building, currently under construction.

The 'walled in' effect gives a direction towards the interior of the Alfred House Gardens. Surprisingly the cutting through of Duplication Road does not seem to have a profound effect on the experience, mainly because it is ef-

fectively carried through by the built spaces created at the junction of Duplication Road and helps to carry the same effect across. The old colonial building that houses the British Council Library, with its contemporary changes and additions, still retains the colonial architecture that has given a unique identity to other urban developments in Colombo.

Greenery is a remarkable feature in this quarter, with planned and unplanned trees and foliage, which seems to have been a well-integrated part of the built fabric in this area, contributing greatly to the overall atmosphere.

In certain parts of Asia, very competent projects have found new ways to create the best possible conditions in Asian living in which culture, environment, and lifestyle have always been the backdrops for their creations. Alfred House Gardens sets a potential seed in our urban environment that can be developed to a greater extent. If Alfred House Gardens epitomises the best of yesterday and today in Colombo, then tomorrow's Colombo City is something to eagerly anticipate.