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LAKE VIEW

AISHBAGH ON DAMDAMA LAKE IN GURGAON, HARYANA, IS THE WEEK-END COUNTRY COTTAGE OF ARCHITECT & DESIGNER Kohelika Kohli. With most rooms overlooking the lake on one side and the Aravalli Hills on the other, it's a house with clean geometric lines, functional and contemporary, but rooted in culture and traditions

A little over an hour from their New Delhi city home, Aishbagh and its locale are contrasting residences. Because their weekdays are spent in the city, focused on work and the grand-children, the occupants of this cottage cherish it for its seclusion, simplicity and unaffected charm. It is a serene retreat, which discreetly blends into the surrounding Aravalli Hills. On two sides, its lawns slope down to the lake's edge. "The Aravallis are arguably the oldest surviving geological features on this planet. They were once tall mountains, possibly as high as the

Himalayas. These low eroded rocky ridges are holding out against an onslaught of Gurgaon's modern buildings. Sadly, these ancient hills are now being destroyed by indiscriminate (and illegal) mining," quotes Kohelika's mother, Sunita, from Sanjeev Sanyal's delightful *Land of the Seven Rivers—A Brief History of India's Geography*.

Kohelika's parents have had this property for almost two decades. When they bought it, it was just a sandy patch of land with a rambling old building existing on it, very different to the present green lawns with its indigenous trees and bamboos.



(Images: On this page)—1. Kohelika's ground-floor bedroom overlooks the Damdama Lake. It has artworks by Irena Vezin, Akbar Padamsee and A Ramachandran. A block of petrified wood, two-million-years-old, is used as a table between the two Wenge armchairs. 2. The bedroom of Kohelika's niece and nephew, overlooks the Aravalli Hills and the swimming pool



The painting studio of the children's bedroom has the MOMA award-winning chalkboard table and chairs. Old stuffed toys, belonging to two generations, are hung from the clay tiled ceiling and are an integral part of the lighting arrangement



And, one also witnesses her passion for rocks! The gardens have sculptural petrified wood placed around, reminiscent of Isamu Noguchi's 'Garden Museum' in New York, a Kohelika favourite. Elsewhere on the grounds is an enormous granite bath-tub, hewn out of a monolithic boulder and shipped from Bali. Whilst it awaits its final placement, it reminds her "of the Sun Boat, excavated and displayed near the Great Pyramid of Cheops in Egypt".

The cottage is painted a greige/taupe on the outside so that it melds with the countryside. The fenestration is in white with grey granite surrounds and the inside walls are all white. The bedspreads are also white and cushions textured. There is a graduated colour palette, in a calming monochromatic scheme.

The generous sized living and dining room of this four bedroom cottage has deep bay windows that overlook the lake on one side and the Aravallis on the other. One bay has a Mies van der Rohe-inspired day-bed and the other a contemporary chaise lounge. Narrow L-shaped custom-designed book shelves, clad in a combination of light and dark veneers, line either end of the room. The reflective surfaces, of the large mirrored contemporary armoire in this room, seem to enlarge the space. Creativity is also in evidence in the twin staircases that lead up to the two first floor bedrooms. On the focal walls of the two landings are photographs, in simple white frames, of family and

(Images: Clockwise)—1. The massage room. 2 The multi-roofed 'Aishbagh on Damdama Lake' cottage, as seen from the pool deck. 3. The entrance with an open-to-sky pavilion made of teak wood columns from Kerala and mild steel beams

friends. "My memory walls", states Kohelika. Each of the two bedrooms has an attached converted balcony—one into a small study and the other into a small art studio.

The cottage reveals many visually captivating insights into Kohelika's career with its diverse projects. Extensive travels have allowed her to accumulate an enviable collection of rocks, large wood pieces and baskets. Contemporary Indian paintings are mixed with naive Indian art on the walls. Underfoot are tribal kilims and dhurries sourced from Turkey, Pakistan and India. Making furniture decisions for the house was easy. 'K2India', their umbrella company, has a reputed 40-year-old furniture manufacturing division. Kohelika's eclectic mix of furniture fuses her own line of stylish and comfortable classic contemporary collection with inherited vintage pieces and some modern items, imported by 'Suryaveer Kohli Home' from Europe. 'Aishbagh', in its sylvan surroundings, is suffused with light and luminosity and is imbued with an intrinsic calm. It is reflective of the varied interests of the occupants. "Each of us comes here to do our own thing and yet to be together," says Kohelika.

