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WINNIE HARLOW

LEADS THE NEW WAVE OF INFLUENCE





EDITED BY MEGHA MAHENDRU

LIVING

CASA

Paradise found

Rustic and chic, Kumar Sangakkara's vacation home in Galle is a memory-filled getaway, restored with care for the modern vacationer, says Adilah Ismail

PHOTOGRAPHED BY RYAN WIJAYARATNE AND SANDUN DE SILVA



Clockwise from left: A commissioned sculpture by Prageeth Manohansa in the courtyard. The green living room with a painting by Priyantha Udagedara. The master bed with the Le Corbusier chaise longue and a collage of artworks by HA Karunaratne. The dining area with an artwork by Ruwan Prasanna, chandelier by Tom Weeks, Saarinen table and Eames chairs. Interior designer Annika Fernando





Yehali and Kumar
Sangakkara

“We never saw the house,” confesses Kumar Sangakkara, the cricket commentator and former captain of the Sri Lankan cricket team, as we sit in his holiday home in Galle. Before he bought the house on Leyn Baan Street, he’d only seen it from the outside. “But we had walked the Fort, knew the area so well and knew the location,” explains his wife, Yehali. It may have been a blind buy, but it was a serendipitous leap of faith in many ways.

The couple wandered through Galle Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, for seven years, looking for the perfect property. It had been a dream to own a house within the Fort—a natural fit for the Sangakkara family, who are ardent beach enthusiasts and love the gentle energy that hums through the area. “We love surfing—the kids have got into it too. Our favourite place is Wijaya Beach and we spend a lot of time there,” shares Yehali.

The last decade has seen a tourism boom on the paisley-shaped island. And Galle hits a geographical sweet spot—easily accessible from Colombo and in proximity to beautiful beaches along the coast. The historical Fort city is now a meeting point of the old and new, where villas, hotels, restaurants and shops filled with touristy paraphernalia rub shoulders with the original residents.

SLICE OF HISTORY

The Sangakkaras wanted their holiday home to retain its historical integrity but also stray from the archetypal villa found within the Fort. “We wanted people to be a bit surprised. We always said it would be a little like Marmite—people will either love it or hate it when they walk in,” says Kumar.

As you enter the four-bedroom heritage villa at No 77, Leyn Baan Street, the living room envelops you in a deep green hug while an ornate chandelier, a baby grand piano and striking artworks vie for your attention. The cut and polish in-situ cement flooring, seen in most Galle Fort renovations, is abandoned for honed and unfilled travertine. The asymmetry of the property adds visual depth and a sense of privacy. The decor—a mix of vintage finds, mid-century design furniture and pieces by local artists—reflects Yehali and Kumar’s predilection for unpretentious, sophisticated furnishings. Take for instance, the installation made from weathered scrap metal by Sri Lankan artist Prageeth Manohansa, which takes pride of place in the courtyard.

The 120-year-old villa, comprising a 3,500 square foot space inside and three courtyards outside, hurled a few challenges when Yehali and Kumar embarked upon its renovation: walls dramatically crumbled and collapsed, extensive water damage had tattooed mottled stains on the walls and the stylistic influences from different time periods combined with the structural changes implemented by previous owners resulted in irregularities. The renovation took six years, two different architects and a whole lot of patience. But in its final shape, the structure stands restored with a sensitivity to its history and some deft contemporary interventions.

HANDLE WITH CARE

Interior designer Annika Fernando, of Annika Fernando Design, had worked with the Sangakkaras for their Colombo home and was an instinctive choice for this project. “Working within the Galle Fort was a massive responsibility. I had to be sensitive to where we are. So I took details from strong architectural examples within the Fort to inspire or replicate details within the house,” says Fernando.

An earthy palette ties the structure together, whether it’s the sun-dappled art pavilion or the stucco-travertine-limestone bathrooms that lead to the freestanding tubs. Fernando, who brings balance and sophistication to this ruggedly beautiful space, defines her aesthetic as classic contemporary, mixing styles and fusing modern with antique, the distressed pieces creating warmth. This works well for the villa’s old-meets-new feel and its blend of past and present.

The sitting and dining area at the back of the villa is an excellent example. The sitting retains the >



Clockwise from far left: The bathroom with an artwork by HA Karunaratne. The open-plan kitchen. The master bath. Opposite page: Kumar Sangakkara against a commissioned sculpture by Prageeth Manohasa

soot- and cement-streaked wall of the villa's original kitchen to create a cosy living space fused with wood, muted batik and cane notes. This segues into a modern dining area where stark white walls are offset by a pink-purple abstract painting by Sri Lankan artist Ruwan Prasanna; the Saarinen dining table and Eames bucket chairs add to its contemporary feel. The untouched walls of the original building are a distinctive feature of the property. The worn-out patina and uneven texture are in marked contrast to the plastered walls—a reminder of the villa's past.

The two-storied structure is the Sangakkara holiday home, but is also available for rent to vacationers when the family isn't using it. Its open-plan kitchen is built for a family that loves their food—Yehali whips up delicious bakes, Kumar takes on roasts and their 11-year-old twins, Kavith and Swyree, try their hand at pancakes on weekends. You're unlikely to find cricket memorabilia in the house, but you'll find hints of Kumar's personality embedded within. His penchant for shopping and collecting mid-century classics is visible in statement pieces like the Le Corbusier chair in the master bedroom and the vintage Sputnik chandelier in the master en-suite.

ART HOUSE

The couple's love of art is evident in their expansive contemporary Sri Lankan collection. "Both of us appreciate art, design and furniture. I was fortunate to grow up around George Keyt, one of Sri Lanka's premier artists. He would often come to our house as he was a close friend of my parents. That influence was always there," notes Kumar, who has been collecting since the early 2000s.

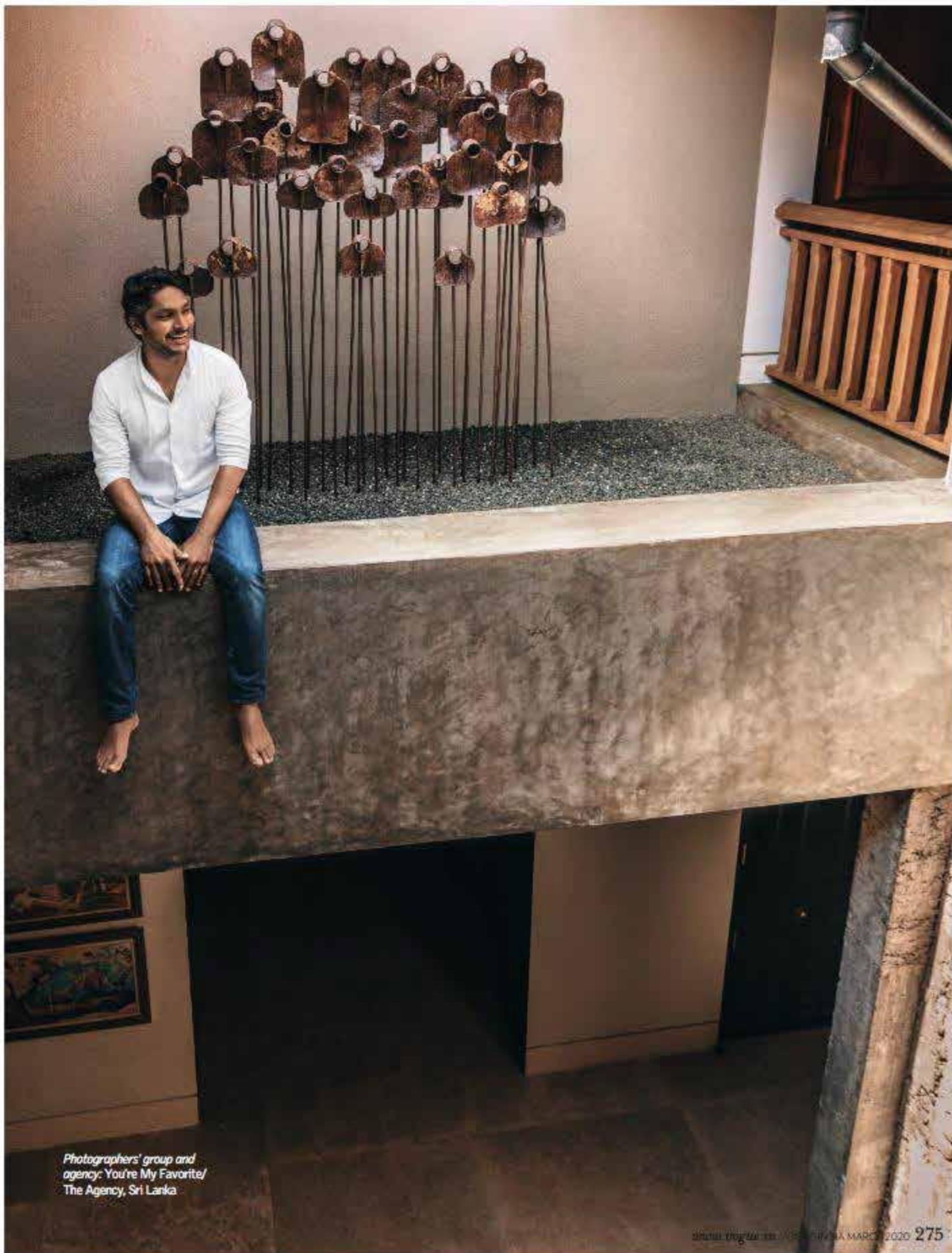
For cushions and bed spreads, Fernando worked

with batik designer Sonali Dharmawardena to create custom furnishings from natural, handwoven fabrics made by Marcelline & San in Laos. "Sonali is a friend and a talented artist. She's taken batik into the contemporary stream. Each garment made by her is a work of art," says Yehali. "We wanted to incorporate her creations into the interiors, so Annika converted them into soft furnishings." Both client and interior designer share a fondness for beautiful bathrooms, so the result is dreamy bath spaces, as spacious as the bedrooms, that allow you to linger on.

The holiday home is very much a labour of love for the Sangakkaras and is elevated by its unique location. The lounge on the terrace has a direct view of the Galle Lighthouse and sounds of the *awazn* often stream in. "If we could, we'd live here in a heartbeat. The lifestyle is amazing, as is the food. The kids love it too," says Yehali. For Kumar, the Fort's uniqueness lies in its harmony—between community and place. His favourite spot is the verandah. "The Fort has always been special to us. It is vibrant, with an old-world charm, not a showpiece World Heritage Site. You have all these old families that live here; it's a mixed community. That's the Fort, and that's how Sri Lanka should be—people of all backgrounds and religions living together." ■

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—KUMAR SANGAKKARA



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