

Anchor Ahoy!

An old warehouse next to a boat parking area is reinvented as 'Spice Harbour', a stunning boutique hotel in Fort Kochi by Stapati Architects Bengaluru and Amie Inman.

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PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY GEORGE SEEMON

Bazaar Road in Fort Kochi is a busy street on a Saturday morning. Huge trucks are parked in the narrow lane and bulging jute sacks are being loaded by workers on to the lorries. A whiff of spice hangs in the air as there are several such



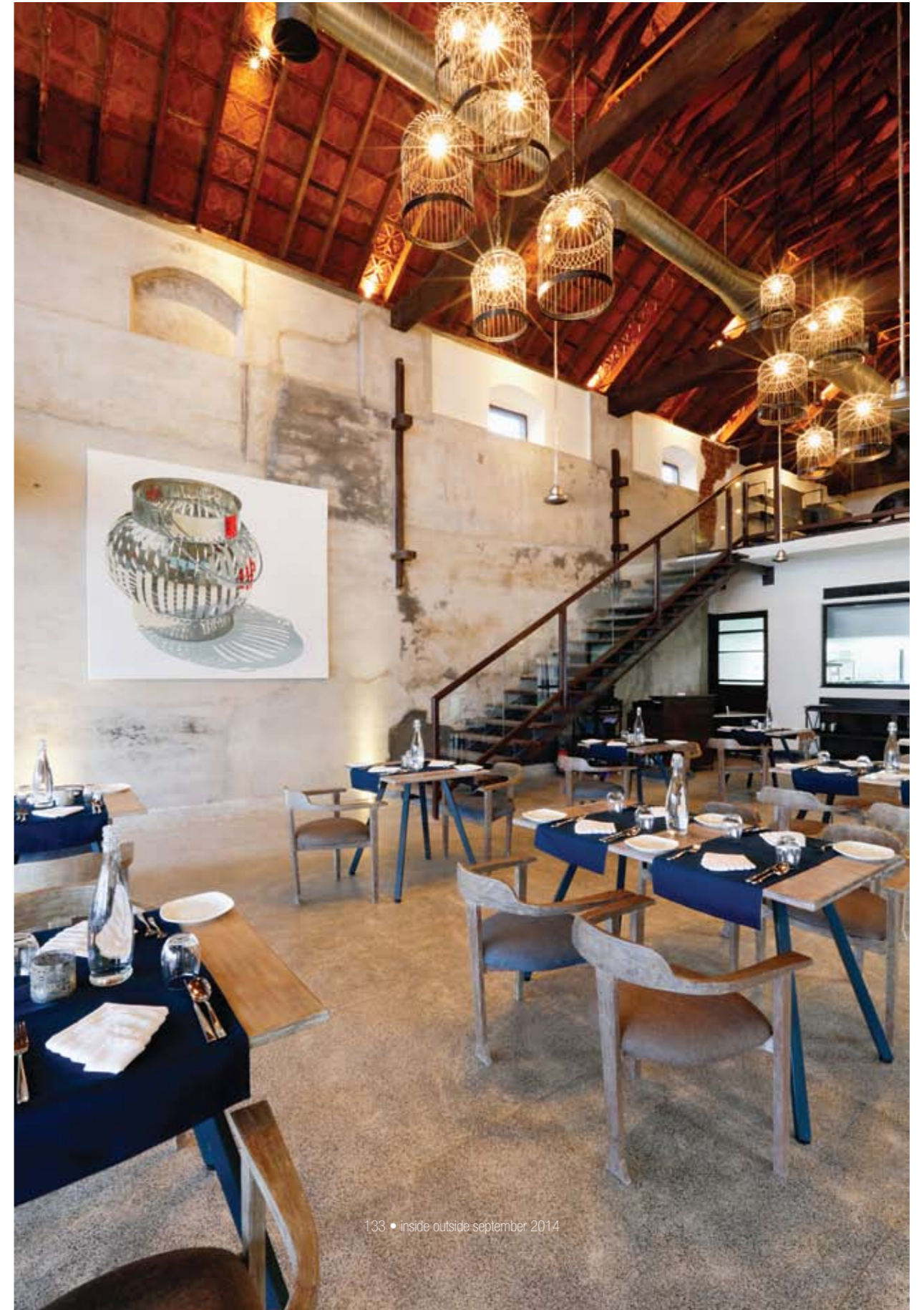
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shops all along the street with warehouses behind them on either side. Old wooden windows with paint peeling off the surface and weathered white walls of the 200-year-old warehouses are a gentle reminder that Kochi was once a busy harbour that brought traders from all over the world to its shores and influenced the culture here.

Walking along the street with my 10-year-old son in tow I notice that there is a quiet change creeping up. We passed by the doors of OED Gallery, peeped into Springr Cafe, which was just coming to life in the morning and moved along enjoying the hustle and bustle, with tourists ambling along and school girls in headscarves rushing in a group. The morning sun and brisk walk made us thirsty, so we looked for a place to get refreshments and that's when we spotted a double-storey structure painted in attractive teal blue with a red sign, '51'.

We entered a cool passage and got a complete surprise! We stepped off the cloistered street and were taken aback by the sheer beauty of the vista, for we were standing beside the white walls of an old warehouse and there was a beautiful green lawn in front, sunrays dancing off the blue water of a swimming pool and the huge waterfront of the Kochi harbour for our eyes only. 51 is the name of the restaurant housed in an old godown and is part of the boutique hotel Spice Harbour.

Spice Harbour has been designed by Stapati Architects Bengaluru and Amie Inman, Design Director of Raxa Collective. The team at Stapati comprising principal architect Tony Joseph and architects George Seemon and Anupama from the Bengaluru office conceptualised





the architectural design and interiors of the entire project while Amie designed the Presidential suite and the interior of the restaurant. Jaigopal Rao of Inspiration Architects, Kochi undertook the execution of the project.

I sat on the verandah next to the waterfront soaking in the ambience and watched the fishing boats painted in bright red and green whizz past the hotel.

The grand scale of the restaurant with its high ceiling, bird cage hanging lamps, mezzanine floor for a more private and cosy feel and terrace overlooking the awesome view has an industrial chic atmosphere. Architect George Seemon didn't want to touch the old structure and wanted to retain the original feel as much as possible, so he has made the new additions with a structure in a glass and steel framework to create the mezzanine, and tucked away the kitchen and service areas below it.

There was no mistaking the passion and undercurrent of pride as Amie spoke about

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Spice Harbour. 'We wanted to restore these godowns while both respecting history and embracing the modern Indian design aesthetic. I think the use of materials and clean lines has helped us achieve this goal. The godown that is now 51 required significant structural reinforcement, including an entirely new roof. We took great effort to maintain the large original cross beams, the smaller, vertical wooden members and all the original window pieces. Those window pieces that were in a section of wall that required rebuilding were set aside and then replaced exactly as they were in the new wall. We used recycled wooden rafters and roof members from dismantled traditional Kerala houses and used this wood in the stairs, catwalk and as much of the furniture as possible.'

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adaptive re-use




the view or bring one's laptop along and connect with the rest of the world. Across the green carpeted lawn is the pool area where deck chairs lie in a shallow area with just six inches of water, which flows into the infinity pool. The shallow pool extends all along the restaurant bringing the water-front even closer.

'The other warehouse that was converted into a residential wing was an even bigger challenge for us,' says George. It was already renovated many decades ago, first is a housing for ship captains, and later a small hotel. 'The old hotel had a corridor running in front of the rooms and the bedrooms had a small bathroom at the back, so none of the rooms looked on to the spectacular view. My endeavour was to give privacy and a view to each room. So for the ground floor, I took away the corridor and created a courtyard in its place with a wall shielding the rooms from the garden and rest of the hotel. On the first floor, I shifted the corridor behind thereby giving each room a view and more natural ventilation. The corridor is now a dynamically designed space punctuated with windows and makes an ideal place for mounting work of artists and photog-



raphers.' The interiors of the rooms have handmade floor tiles, polished concrete flooring, walls and bed back and bison board doors – eclectic materials that create a contemporary language.

Imagination and intelligent design has given a new lease of life and a new identity to the old warehouses that were crumbling with the passage of time. Spice Harbour evokes memory and nostalgia and at the same time creates a beautiful connection between trade and tourism. It expresses respect for history as well as defines the need of the changing times, for change is certainly in the air on Bazaar Road – change that carries a whiff of spices along with it. 

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