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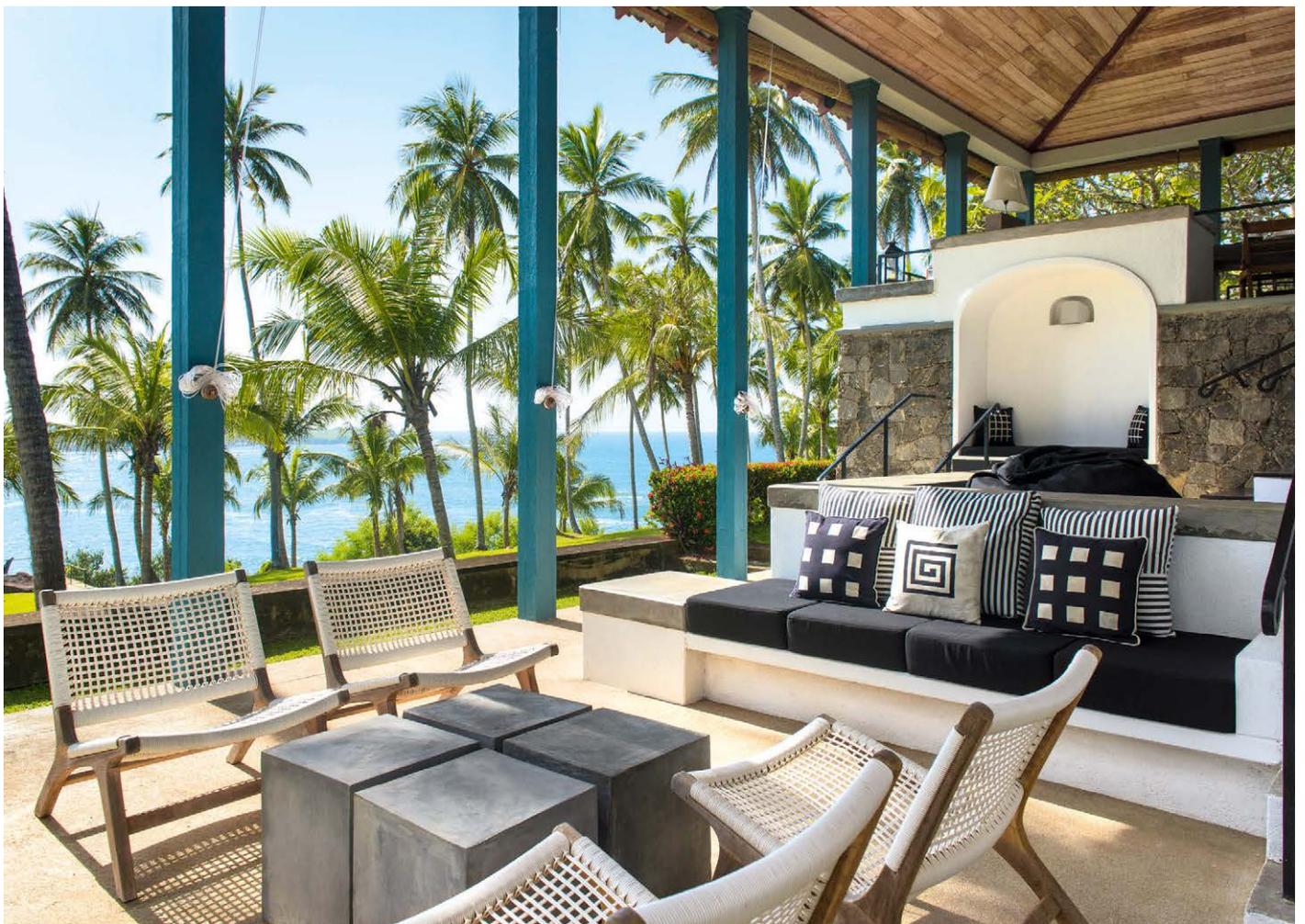
TAKE A JOURNEY THROUGH
SOME OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL
HOMES IN THE WORLD

STILL LIFE

Designed by the late Geoffrey Bawa after a period of frenetic work on large-scale projects, Cloughton House in Sri Lanka embodies a sense of calm—mirroring, perhaps, how its architect felt building it

WRITER SMRITI DANIEL

Here, Cloughton House is seen from the direction of the pool. Another architect may have chosen to place the house closer to the ocean, but architect Geoffrey Bawa chose the highest point instead.



The open living room is a place for all seasons. Bawa intended the split-level loggia under a large hipped roof to come as a surprise at the end of a long corridor. Bathed in natural light, the room offers views of the Indian Ocean. **Facing page, top:** Lush grounds form the setting for the house. Dotted with coconut trees, the lawns stretch to the edge of the headland. **Facing page, bottom:** The living room is filled with seating nooks; the furnishings offer a contemporary take on classic Sri Lankan style.



Time had stopped in Sri Lanka, financial executive Brian Brille remembers thinking. In the aftermath of a long war, many parts of the country remained undeveloped, their pristine beauty undisturbed by the frenetic development he was used to seeing elsewhere in the region. Something about this country drew Brille in. The American decided to find a home here.

In 2010, he began to scour the country, looking for just the right property. “We circled the entire island, by car and by helicopter,” he says. “We saw Kalpitiya before anybody had started developing there; we slept in military barracks in Jaffna.”

Brille knew what he was looking for. “What appealed to me were properties with elevation, and with natural beauty.” When he saw Claughton House, he knew he had found both. “It was perhaps the most beautiful view I had ever seen.”

HIGH ON A HILL

Perched on the headland of Dickwella, the villa overlooks the wide sweep of the Indian Ocean. At one edge of the property, a steep set of stairs flanked by coconut trees leads down to a narrow gate, which opens onto a secluded beach. At your feet, the ocean is emerald and turquoise, its surface broken by the lazy roll of waves edged in white froth.

Along with the property, Brille inherited a dog named Rocky. He and Rocky would wake early to watch the sunrise from the living room. They were surrounded by life: peacocks strutted across the sloping grounds, fish eagles glided along the cliffs, and monkeys chattered in the trees bordering the house.

When Brille introduced his four children to the villa, they were immediately at home, rolling down the lawn to the polygonal pool. “They absolutely loved it here,” says Brille, explaining that no matter how long the gap between visits, his kids had formed a “remarkable connection” with Claughton. For him, his family’s sense of connection now extended to the architect who designed the villa—Geoffrey Bawa had passed away in 2003, but this home carried his imprint.

Bawa began work on Claughton in 1980, around the time he was finishing up the Ruhuna University Campus. One of the biggest projects of his career, Ruhuna involved designing some 50 buildings over a total area of 50,000 square metres. “It was one of the busiest periods in Geoffrey’s career,” says David Robson, Bawa’s official biographer, and the author of the book, *In Search of Bawa: Master Architect of Sri Lanka*.

To Bawa, Claughton likely represented a welcome change in scale from the Ruhuna University. After having his fair share of difficult clients, Bawa reportedly found Richard FitzHerbert-Brockholes, the original owner, easy to work with. FitzHerbert-Brockholes named Claughton after his ancestral Lancashire home—a picture of its namesake hangs by the doorway in the house, commemorating this history.

FitzHerbert-Brockholes’s obituary notes that he was Second lieutenant in the Royal Navy when he first found his way to the island in 1944. He would return to England, but he carried his memories of Sri Lanka—then on the cusp of independence—with him. They drew him back here in the mid-1980s. He found this

property, and decided that Bawa was the man to build a house on it. After FitzHerbert-Brockholes retired, he would spend up to five months of each year in Sri Lanka. He made his final visit in 1995, the same year he passed away.

SIMPLE PLEASURES

“When you look at the plan, it is disarmingly simple; but when you are in the building, it is quite complicated,” says Robson of the finished structure. Visitors driving up to the property are initially confronted with a Dutch gable that completely obscures the headland. On entry, a narrow corridor teases you with a glimpse of the bright ocean beyond.

The plan allowed for three rooms, each with its own unique view of the sea. “Each room also looks in a different direction, so if you didn’t see the other two rooms you would never know what they were like,” Robson notes. “They had been put together like three pieces of a jigsaw around a spine, and that spine leads to the living room.”

The open living room takes the form of a split-level loggia under a large hipped roof, says Robson, pointing out that this dramatic level change matches the slope of the site. The space artfully incorporates little nooks with cement sofas and woven lounge chairs, accented with locally sourced fabrics.

“It is one of the most extraordinary residential living rooms I have seen,” says Channa Daswatte, a member of the Bawa Trust and a Bawa protégé. “When the monsoon comes, and different levels start getting wet, you can retreat slowly. When it finally pours in the living room, you can sit sulking in the dining room.”

It is a house for all seasons, and this particular space welcomes the outdoors in, all year round. Daswatte notes that, as was his custom, Bawa adopted an almost cinematographic approach to the architecture of this building. As you move through the house, it unfolds before you, leading up to the living room, which offers a kind of climax, a view designed to take your breath away. “Another architect might have put the building further down, closer to the sea, but instead he chose the highest point,” says Daswatte. “Going through the house is a process of discovering the site.”

The pool extends this exploration to the tip of the property. “One thing I find particularly interesting is that as far as I know Bawa could not swim,” says Robson, “Yet, he designed some of the most incredibly inventive swimming pools.” At Claughton, the pool is flanked by a terrace, beside which is a pavilion for living and dining. For Robson, Bawa’s philosophy here was rooted in an “architecture of pleasure” that sought to immerse the inhabitants in the beauty that surrounded them.

Today, when Brille and his family are not in residence, the property is rented out as a holiday villa. Guests arrive from all over the world, and Brille is not surprised by the rave reviews. In fact, he sees parallels between Bawa’s work and that of another iconic architect—Frank Lloyd Wright. “Growing up, the town in which I lived in Chicago had the largest number of Wright’s prairie homes. To me Bawa is as important and as interesting as Frank Lloyd Wright. I think he is becoming more and more well known in the US and Europe,” says Brille, adding, with emphasis, “as he should be.” ♦



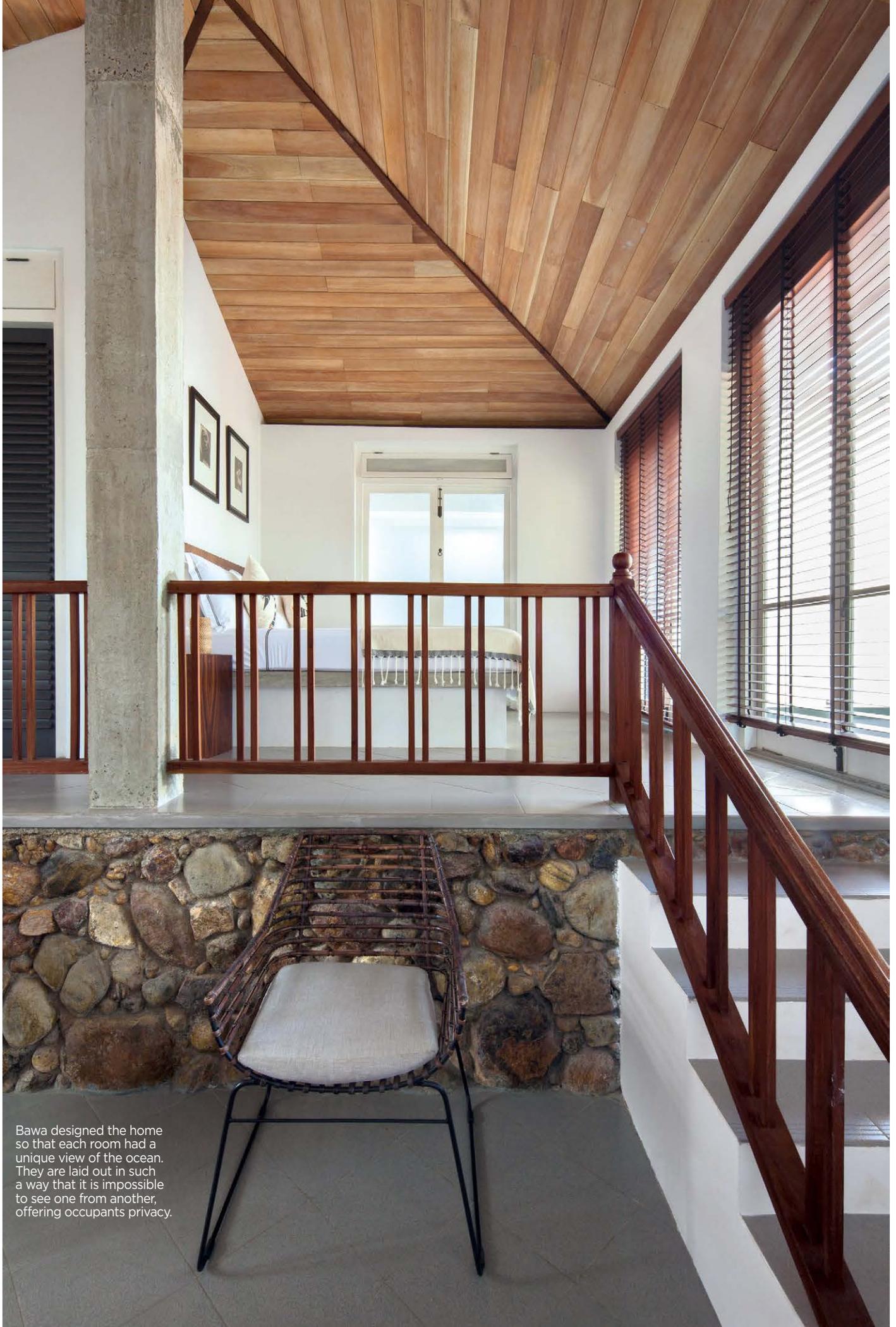
One of the photographs in this narrow corridor is of the home's namesake in Lancashire, England, which is the ancestral residence of the original owner Richard FitzHerbert-Brockholes. **Above:** The living room—cement sofas are built into nooks in the wall and furnished with cushions.



The dining room looks down on the living room and from there to the spread of green lawns beyond. This is the spot the family retreats to during the heaviest monsoon storms.



PHOTO: JAMES FENNELL



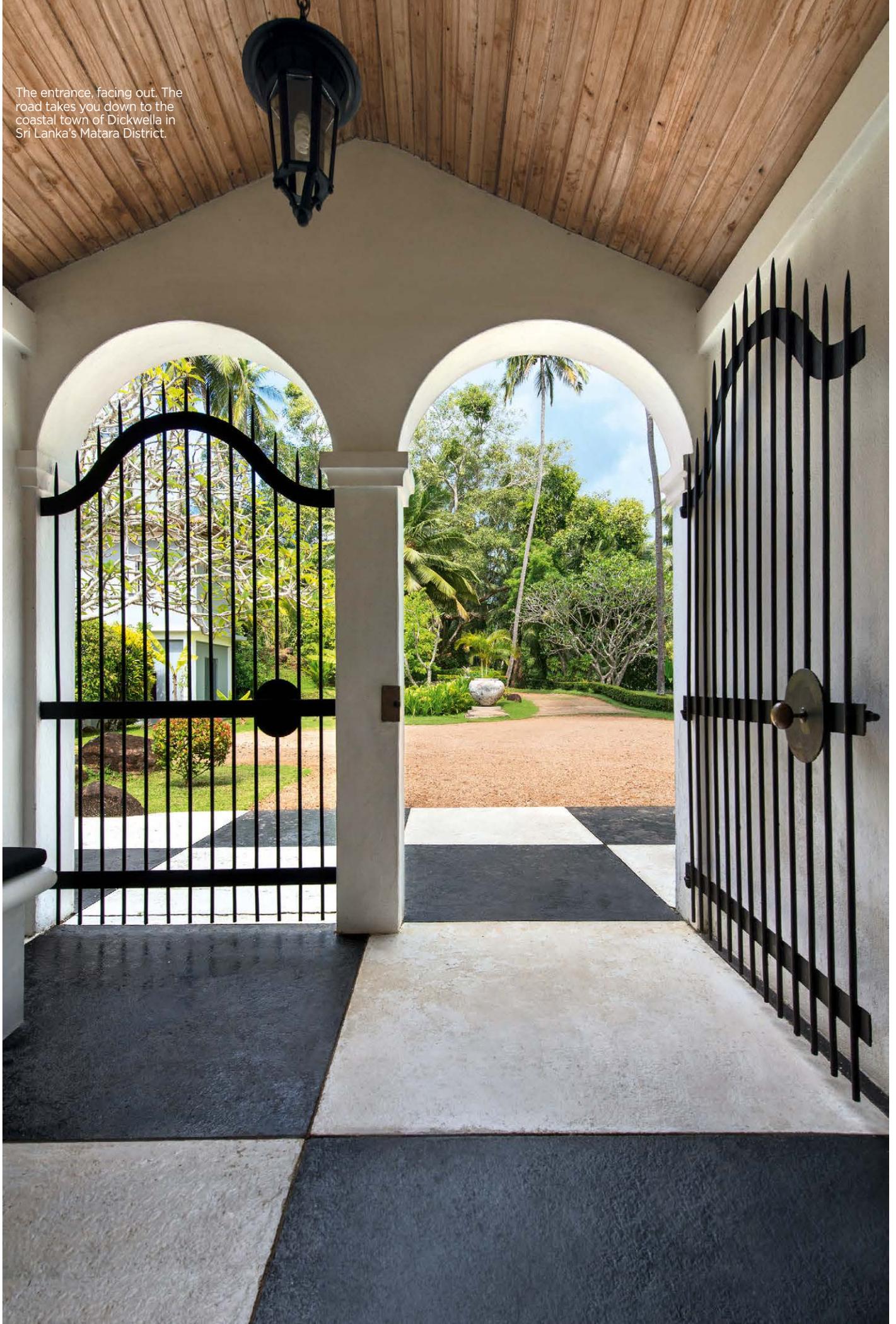
Bawa designed the home so that each room had a unique view of the ocean. They are laid out in such a way that it is impossible to see one from another, offering occupants privacy.



Filled with light and air, the en-suite bathrooms juxtapose polished cement and wood. *Above:* A room with a view of the garden—the grounds at Cloughton welcome several visitors: peacocks, fish eagles and monkeys being among the most regular.

PHOTOS: JAMES FENNELL

The entrance, facing out. The road takes you down to the coastal town of Dickwella in Sri Lanka's Matara District.



A Dutch gable greets visitors as they drive up to the house. The view of the headland is completely obscured by the structure.

PHOTOS: SEBASTIAN POSINGIS. ALL POSINGIS IMAGES COURTESY IN SEARCH OF BAWA: MASTER ARCHITECT OF SRI LANKA (TALISMAN PUBLISHING, SINGAPORE FOR LAURENCE KING PUBLISHING LONDON).

