



The pagoda-style cottages with bare-brick façade.

Powerful Simplicity

Designed by Bharathi Prem Associates, the cottages and the cafeteria at the Pyramid Valley International in Bengaluru exude a raw and rustic appeal, perfectly complementing and highlighting the majestic meditation Pyramid housed in the same site.

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Images: courtesy Bharathi Prem Associates

Usually, architecture brings into play a wide variety of feelings on the part of the observer. Subconsciously, it appeals more on a spiritual level than on the actual. This is reflected in the instant liking or dislike of a certain structure; somewhat instinctively. The Pyramid Valley International in Bengaluru is one such place that invokes instinctive calm and serenity. Regarded as one of the 7 Wonders of Bengaluru, the Pyramid Valley International is one of the largest meditation pyramids in the world catering to individuals who are on a quest for self-realisation and spiritual wisdom. If meditation within the 102ft tall pyramid, that can accommodate 5000 people at a time, drenches the mind in a new-found sense of freshness and enthusiasm, spending time at the pagoda-style cottages and the bare-brick cafeteria simply invoke awe and astonishment at the sheer simplicity of the structures, with an intense eye for detail.

The conscious effort to highlight the pyramid and all that it has to offer seems to be the basic guideline for the design of not only the



Unplastered walls of the cottages, with wooden doors for the entrances.



Landscaped gardens and the cottages overlooking the grand meditation Pyramid.

The deliberate raw and rustic feel of the interiors is a conscious effort in an attempt to express the materials in their truest forms.



Stone steps leading to the cottage blocks.

built structures such as the cottages and the cafeteria, but also for the landscape. The cottages are as simple and basic as can be, while providing all the essential amenities that would be required by guests. Each block has two cottages separated by a common wall. These blocks themselves are separated by landscaped gardens. The cottages are designed so as to be let out individually during peak seasons, maximising the facility's capacity to accommodate guests.

The spaces within the cottages are devoid of anything that could invoke a sense of attachment, one of the basic requirements for those seeking spiritual enrichment. The interiors are done up modestly, against walls of exposed bricks. The large windows that help maximum sunlight to seep in, and frame the pyramid help maintain the focus on to the pyramid, reminding the guest that the cottage is only a temporary abode. The cottages have a bedroom, a living area with a soaking pond, a kitchenette, and two toilets within a semi-enclosed verandah. This verandah is an ingenious design that helps to



The yin and yang pattern in the garden made with grass and pebbles.



The cottage window frames the majestic Pyramid.

keep the cottages comfortable even during summers, providing an efficient buffer for the heat. The verandah also facilitates introspective time for the meditator, looking out into scenic greenery, and the pyramid in the distance. Split level ventilation and double-height spaces that support conventional current make these cottages independent of artificial air-conditioning. The pagoda-style roof, one of the most celebrated designs in architecture, is almost instinctively reminiscent of a structure associated with spirituality. Apart from being a visual delight, the roof adds to the character and ventilation of the cottages.

The architecture treads very lightly on the ground on which these cottages sit, bringing into focus the minimalism of the structures, while also being



The interiors spell out serenity, with unparalleled views.



Bridge over the rainwater channel on the way to the cafeteria.



Tensile structures frame the entrance to the cafeteria.

comfortable and aesthetically pleasing. The structures establish a dialogue with the surrounding land and nature without imposing on them. The material palette ranges from wire-cut bricks, shahbad stones for flooring, local granite as well as ferrocement slabs, reinforcing the sense of simplicity; devoid of anything pretentious. The deliberate raw and rustic feel of the interiors is a conscious effort in an attempt to express the materials in their truest forms.

Outside the cottages is a central courtyard that is designed as a dry and green space. For the steps, local granite has been used while grass has been interspersed in between. The 'yin and yang' pattern in the manicured landscaped area, made using green grass and white pebbles, is a refreshing change from the raw appeal of the cottage bricks and granite steps. The yin



The cafeteria against the meditation pyramid.



The semi-circle shape of the cafeteria that appears to be clasping the lake it overlooks.

and yang pattern, too, is in accordance to the basic design fabric revolving around spirituality that has been woven across the site. In addition, Bamboo poles have been used to define the area around.

The cafeteria block is pleasantly located overlooking a lake and the gigantic meditation pyramid. This block can be accessed going through a small bridge over the rainwater channel built with clay jaali blocks. White tensile fabric structures at the entrance contrast sharply with the exposed bricks of the cafeteria, adding an interesting touch to the contemporary yet rough character of the building. This structure welcomes visitors to go through various volumes of the cafeteria within, making them feel the structure interact with nature to exude a sense of tranquillity.

The semi-circular shape of the cafeteria dictates the site, such that it appears to be clasping the serene lake. The design for the dining space allows for three levels of interaction — an open, semi-enclosed and a covered dining areas. One end of the cafeteria has an opening that frames the majestic pyramid, appearing metaphorically as a constant reminder of the visitor's actual destination.

The material palette, once again, is characteristically simple. The simplicity, yet again, comes across as a conscious attempt to be in sync with the



The basic interiors of the cafeteria, with one side framing the pyramid.

cottages and the minimalist surroundings, and not distract attention from the grandeur of the magnificent pyramid; exposed brickwork and unplastered concrete ceilings further this endeavour. As with the cottages, the verandahs, split level and filler slab roofing keep the building comfortable all year round. The filler slab technique here is adapted with clay hollow blocks and clay pots as fillers.

It is said that pyramids are storehouses of energy as their basic geometric design collects, stores and subconsciously radiates cosmic energy. Meditating with one is therefore thrice as powerful; thrice as effective in achieving an altered sense of consciousness. Designing abodes in a complex that houses such a mighty, powerful structure, without disturbing the equation that the pyramid has with its surrounding has been efficiently mastered by the architects. The structures at the Pyramid Valley International are simple; even plain, or so to say. However, what is striking is the aesthetic value that has been extracted out of this simplicity by the architects. The cottages and the cafeteria blend effortlessly with the relaxing surroundings, highlighting and complementing the flamboyant pyramid in the process. Without affecting the balance of power, or compromising on aesthetics or functionality, the architects have clearly designed masterpieces in the most subtle manner, without imposing on the serene, tranquil yet unimaginably powerful site. ■

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FACT FILE:

Project	:	Cottages and Cafeteria at the Pyramid Valley International
Location	:	Bengaluru, Karnataka
Architect	:	Bharathi Prem Associates
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Contractor	:	R Aruvelu, Arya Constructions
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