

Year end in Sri Lanka:

Isle of Serendipity from Buddhist Temples to Modern Masterpieces

December 16 through 26, 2005

As with so many island civilizations (along with Cuba, Sicily, Malta), Ceylon profited from its strategic position along the world's trade routes and developed a distinct and eclectic architecture that responded to the many cultural influences that resulted from its location. Being an island, however, with a somewhat focused society, these diverse influences through history have been assimilated into a built environment whose character is distinct and unique and speaks of its place whether it be a fourth century BC capital or the latest work of one of the young architects influenced by Geoffrey Bawa. The threads of influence and cross pollination from Buddhist stupas and gigantic rock-cut sculpture to the vernacular left by the Dutch and other colonial settlers extend through the late twentieth century to the present day.

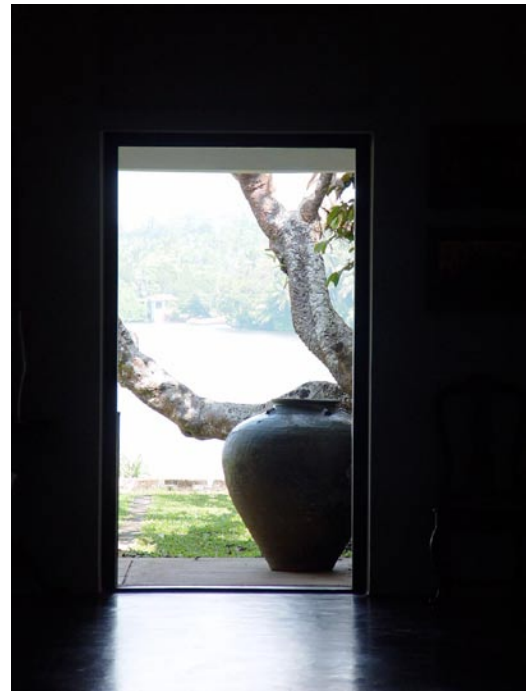
The work of modern master Geoffrey Bawa (1919 -2003) is everywhere to be seen from the parliament buildings at Kotte to the many magnificent hotels that were built in the 80s and 90s to the private houses built by the new nation's elite. We will stay in a house of his design and will have entré to the best of his houses. In the small world which Sri Lankan cultural society was and is, it is easy to trace Bawa's influence among his many younger associates who now are engaged in thriving practices of their own. A tour in the near future is particularly timely as a major retrospective exhibition of Bawa's work was held at the Deutsches Architektur Museum (DAM) in Frankfurt in late 2004. While travelers have been reluctant to venture to this Island paradise in recent years due to the strife between the Tamil separtists and ruling Singhalese majority, there is a well developed tourist infrastructure, and these tensions are thought to be calming with a political settlement inevitably on the horizon.

This ten-night sojourn will be focused on liesurely enjoyment of the coastal zone south from Colombo to Galle and beyond at the southern tip of the Island. There will be in-depth visits at a few key sites and with a few individuals. It can be preceded or followed with a tailor-made individual program of sightseeing to cover the major remaining sights like Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Kandy, Sigirya and Nuwara Eliya.

Itinerary

Day I, December 16, 2005

Arrive in Colombo (departure from US west coast having been on December 24 allowing for a stop-over in Singapore) and be met and taken to the Continental Hotel centrally located north of Galle Face Green and facing the Indian Ocean as well as downtown.

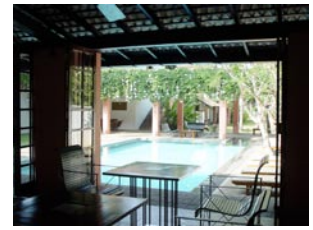


*Lununganga (above)
Jayakodi House (below) both by Geoffrey Bawa*



Day 2, December 17

Meet with Anjalendran C and Anura Ratnavibhushana, both former colleagues of Geoffrey Bawa to to see their latest works as well as several of the important Bawa houses, time and permissions permitting. Also, if possible we will visit the Parliament Complex in Kotte.



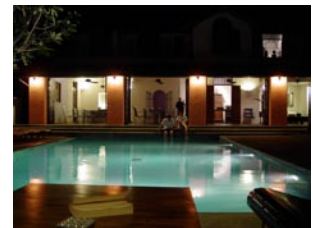
Day 3, December 18

Travel two hours south to Bentota where, for the next four nights, the Taru Villas will be our home. Taru Villas is 9-room vernacular inspired resort with individual villas set in a garden. The dining and communal facilities are arranged around a pool. A well trained and pleasant staff will look after us, and will provide us with delicious meals to our order.



Days 4-6, December 19-21

These three full days will be free to plan as we like and to divide our time between walks on the beach, swimming, touring the various nearby Bawa designed hotels (Serenib, Bentota Beach, Club Villa, Mehota Villa), visiting Lunuganga, Bawa's country estate and magnum opus, and the Brief Garden, created by Bawa's brother Bevan. Across the road is the Gunasekera House, which we will arrange to visit. All of these are within a short walk or half-hour ride by auto-rickshaw. Meals will be prepared for us to our order at the hotel, or when we prefer we can visit the adjacent Bawa designed Club Villas (which I have not chosen for our stay, because I find Taru pleasanter).



Taru Villas, Bentota

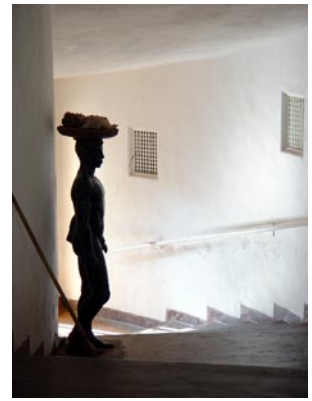


Lunuganga, Bentota, Geoffrey Bawa (below and left)



Day 7, December 22

We will leave Bentota and drive south all the way to the tip of Sri Lanka. We may make stops at Galle or Matara (to visit Bawa's Ruhunu University) or leave these for return visits later. We will arrive in the afternoon at Dickwella, site of the Cloughton Villa, designed by Geoffrey Bawa in 1985-6. This will be our base for the next four nights and it will be all ours! It is situated on a high piece of land on its own large site with palm shaded lawns sloping down to a bluff at the edge of which is our own pool. We will be looked after by the staff who will provide all of our meals. The house is described in David Robson's *Geoffrey Bawa: the complete works*: "Bawa designed the house as a mini-Triton Hotel with three suites of rooms, each with its own bathroom and private courtyard, attached like satellites to a double-height loggia that served as the main dining room and lounge. A paved staircase wound its way down through the coconut palms to a small swimming pool perched on a headland above the sea."



Brief Garden, Bentota, Bevis Bawa

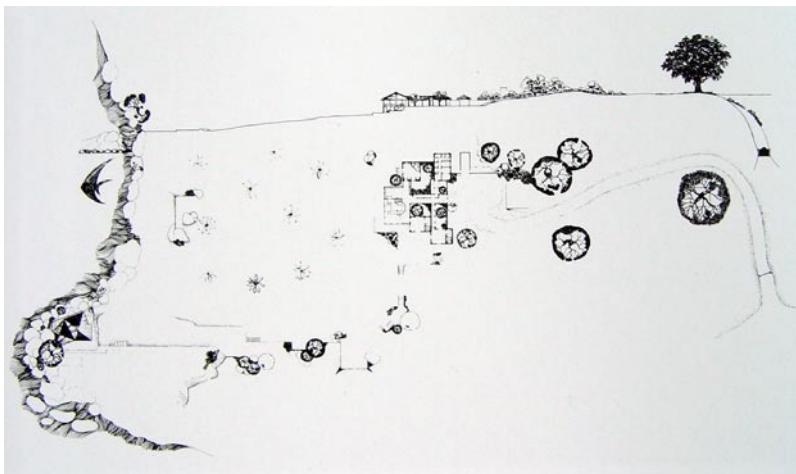
Days 8-10, December 23-25

Again, three days will be ours to draw, paint, photograph and to take day trips to wherever we fancy, including Galle or up into the mountains.

Day 11, December 26

Those who must will leave for onward travels to more pressing obligations (I will be flying from Colombo to Bangalore to lead the Society of Architectural Historians tour of south India) but others may now wish to plunge into some of the more historic and cultural sites of Sri Lanka, now fully rested and acclimatized!

Costs: This will be approximately \$1,800-2,000 per person, double occupancy, including lodging, transportation within Sri Lanka, and some meals



Cloughton Villa, Dickwella, Geoffrey Bawa

