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IN DEVELOPMENT



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Contemporary Residences
Bangas — Self-Built Houses in Mayotte
Architecture in South-East Asia: Malaysia
Istanbul Guide

Himalayan House, Himachal Pradesh



Project Data

Site: Manali Valley,
Himachal Pradesh,
Northern India

Client: Kranti Singh,
Cristina Singh

Architect: Romi Khosla

Engineers: Raina

Project construction: Local
craftsmen

Project commencement: 1985

Completion: 1987

Building in the Himalayas is a very delicate act and I suppose that this would be true to all mountain country. Apart from the powerful presence of nature, the building itself can be extremely exposed, visible from afar and hence aesthetically vulnerable within the environment. The choice of materials and the building form therefore become extremely critical and for this reason only stone and timber were used here to create a form that is in continuity with the prevalent tradition.

Domestic environments, because of their smaller size and intense relationship with the occupiers, are often more successful if they are constructed within the broad stream of the craft tradition with the use of local materials. The sensations that need to be evoked in a remotely located house such as this are somewhat special and spiritual. The site, a narrow strip, barely wide enough to contain the 8.5 metres width of the base, is located in the midst of the rice fields of a village near Manali in the Kulu Valley. The spectacular view on all sides immediately suggested a symmetrical building. The local building tradition in the village is specific to this valley and has a clear architectural identity. The two dominant elements of the local house are the cove of stone rising up and the overhanging timber balcony under a sloping roof and it was the use of these two elements that emerged as significant in the house. The effort, throughout the design and building process, was to transform the traditional architectural elements and

form them into a contemporary reality. By contemporary reality one means not only the changed housing needs of a contemporary user but also the changed status of the building skills.

The plan consists of a square of 8.5 metre sides where the rooms are stacked vertically. Traditional houses have their cattle stables on the ground floor while all the living takes place at the level of the balcony. In this case, three levels have been provided using thinner timber joist sections and brackets for support. Originally, the design proposal had indicated gables. However, the craftsmen would not accept this major intrusion into their tradition and rejected it outright. They also insisted that such a gabled form would blow off in the snow storms that hit this area in winter. No amount of persuasion would change their minds. Eventually they insisted on designing the roof themselves. They also designed the infill panels in the balconies. Working with the craftsmen here, one needs only to define the parameters of the building structure in the drawings. Much of the delicacy and intricate detailing need only be discussed and finalised, and hence never committed to a drawing.

Left: The local house in the Kulu Valley where cattle are stabled in the ground floor, domestic storage in the intermediate floor and living at the balcony level.

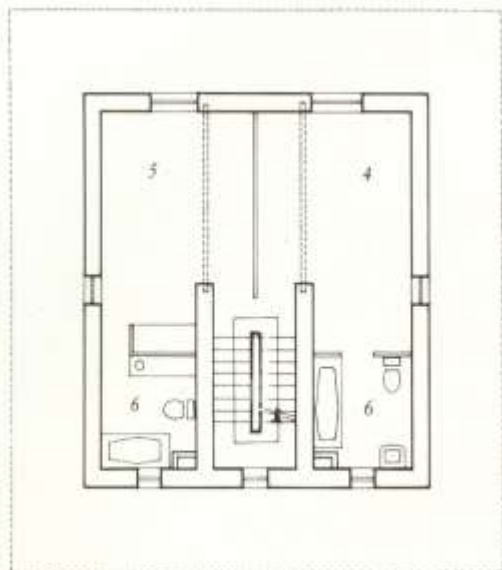
Below: The house is surrounded by spectacular mountains on all sides.

Right: South side view of the house showing its remote location set in the midst of rice fields.

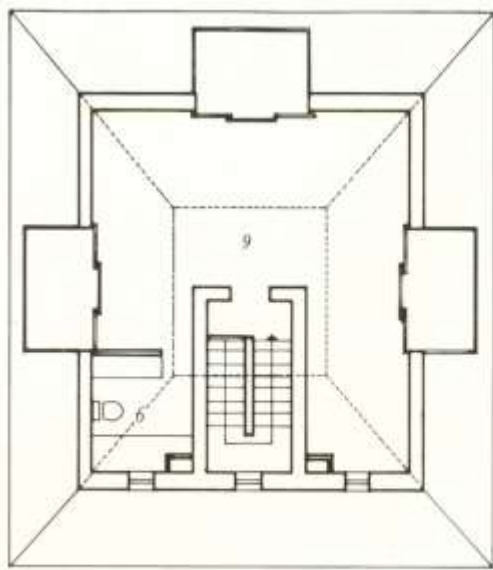


Text by Romi Khosla.
Photographs by
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Drawings by David
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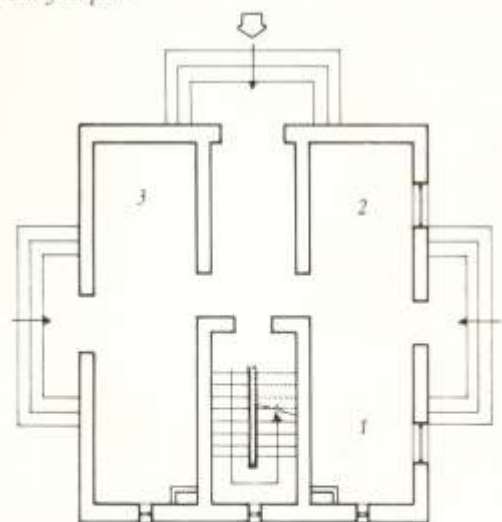




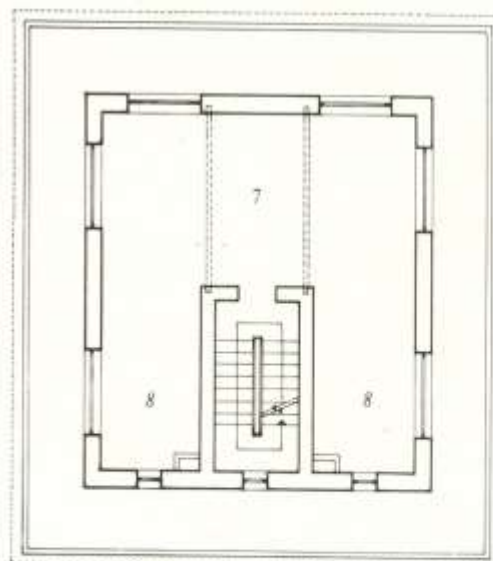
First floor plan.



Third floor plan.

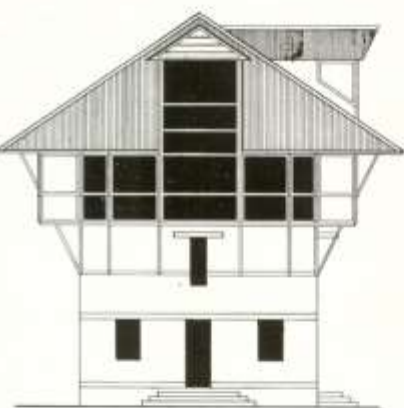


Ground floor plan.



Second floor plan.

- 1. Room
- 2. Kitchen
- 3. Store
- 4. Children's bedroom
- 5. Guest bedroom
- 6. Toilet
- 7. Living
- 8. Study
- 9. Master bedroom



Above: The original design proposed three gables (see plans) but the craftsmen refused to accept this intrusion in their tradition.

Right: Balcony details.

Far right: Pinewood door and dressed stone excavated from boulders of a nearby stream — the two materials that compose the architecture of the valley.

