

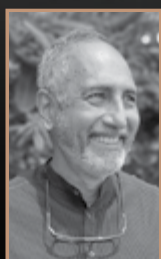
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Biophilia in Workspace



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WALK THE TALK

The Malabar Hill Elevated Nature Trail in Mumbai by Ar. Rahul Kadri, IMK Architects, Mumbai



AR. RAHUL KADRI

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Photographs: Courtesy IMK Architects

Hungry for a patch of green in the concrete jungle that Mumbai is, Mumbaikars are flocking to the newly opened (and much over-booked) Malabar Hill Elevated Nature Trail! Designed by Ar. Rahul Kadri of IMK Architects, the project was commissioned by the BMC and supported by the JSW Foundation, as well as the Nepean Sea Road Citizens Forum.

Founded in 1957 in Mumbai, IMK Architects is an architecture and urban design firm, with a second base in Bengaluru. Helmed by architects Iftikar and Rahul Kadri, the firm remains focused on architecture rooted in culture and civilisation, serving community needs. With social consciousness, sustainability, and robust design at its core, IMK continues to blend legacy with innovation, shaping people-centric, inclusive, and ecologically sensitive spaces.

In an age where sustainability has become a topic of coffee-table conversations in well-heeled elitist crowds lounging in airconditioned clubs and cafés, Ar. Rahul Kadri is refreshingly different. The phrase “walking the talk” comes alive on this wondrous walkway in the woods that he has created for Mumbai. How many of us, even those living in Mumbai, were even aware of this natural gem tucked away beyond the urban chaos? The Malabar Walkway, thus makes it real; and fun to discover.

The Malabar Hill Elevated Nature Trail – already dubbed as the Malabar Walkway – is a winding wooden path inspired by Singapore’s Tree Top Walk. Starting on Siri Road, near the Kamla Nehru Park, it meanders its way through the forested hill, loops back and ends in the Doongerwadi woods. The Nature Trail takes visitors to explore the flora and fauna, and the biodiversity that is unique to this forest.





Architecturally, the walkway has been designed with a conscious effort to minimize disruption of the natural environment, and well as to celebrate a harmonious human-nature interaction in an urban core. While not a single tree was cut in the process of building the walkway, lifting it up ensured minimal disturbance to the forest floor and the creatures that call it home. As Rahul explains, “The idea was to allow people to experience and enjoy the forest. But how do we make sure they don’t disturb it? Considering this is a hill slope, another concern was to not disturb the flow of water. The third was the reptiles. We wanted to avoid interactions between humans and snakes. So, we decided that the best approach was to lift the path off the forest floor.”

Sleek epoxy-coated steel columns with low-impact pile foundations support the elevated walkway, and the deck is lined with planks of Merbau wood – a material chosen for its durability and aesthetics, and also sourced sustainably.

The elevated walkway includes features

like a birdwatching zone and a glass-bottom viewing deck, enhancing the visitor experience while building awareness of the forest’s biodiversity. Here many of the native tree species – Banyan, Gulmohar, Mango, Coconut, Raintree, Jamun, Bael, Ber, and Jackfruit – are seen thriving. And with the trees, come the birds, the bees, the squirrels, and the snakes – all together creating an ecosystem. Visitors have spotted or heard a variety of birds such as Kingfishers, Bulbuls, Parakeets, Indian Grey Hornbills, Golden Orioles; as well as lizards, chameleons, and pythons while traversing the walkway. Kiosks along the trail display panels, providing visitors with information about the forest and its ecosystem.

The minimalistic design and the wooden treatment ensure that the walkway merges beautifully into the environment, notwithstanding the structural intervention. Strategically placed lights emanate a soft, warm glow; illuminating



the walkway for visitor safety, whilst ensuring minimal disturbance to the fauna. Moreover, the undulations in height (2m to 10 m) based on the type of trees surrounding it contribute towards creating a more wholesome experience of traversing the 482 m path.

For Rahul though, on a personal level, a walk in these woods began very early in life; and he has fond memories of exploring it with a loyal companion – his pet dog. While this sounds like a paragraph out of a Hardy Boys novel, for an eleven-year-old Rahul to grow up to be an architect and get an opportunity to actually build a nature trail in the same forest, seems surreal. “I enjoyed my time in the forest, and being with myself,” he explains. “I love to find pathways, and I intuitively know the way.”

But then childhood gave way to adulthood; and excursions were replaced by expectations. In the lockdown during the Covid pandemic one day Rahul with his architect wife Shimul Javeri Kadri climbed over the fence and once again started walking through the woods. “That was the day it all began,” says Rahul. “I sensed that the people of Mumbai needed to enjoy this forest...”

So, when this project started shaping up, Rahul once again walked up and down the paths, trying to read the site, and listen to the forest. “I believe in understanding how the site works. I spend a lot of time imagining the structure and the space around it. I love to be on the site alone. It is when I get a deep, intuitive sense of how things need to unfold.”

Finally, the Malabar Hill Elevated Nature Trail has shaped into a reality. Thousands of people are queueing up for a dekho! Interestingly, Ar. Rahul Kadri – a well-established, widely respected figure within the fraternity has suddenly become a ‘popular’ name amongst Mumbaikars! The adulation must be certainly exhilarating; but for Rahul, the greatest satisfaction came when his work got a nod of approval from his 97-year-old father, the very famous architect I. M. Kadri. Rahul smiles as he recalls his father’s words: “Everyone is talking about your work, everyone is loving it. You have done a good job.” And this good job is one that will leave its imprint on the history of Mumbai for many decades to come. ■

1. The elevated walkway at Malabar Hill, Mumbai

2. The lit-up loop of the 482 m walkway weaves through the rich forested area

3. The walkway overlooks the forest and the city beyond

4. Mumbaikars enjoying the new public green space in the city

