

HOME GOA



# A SECRET SEASHELL

*An intricate cocoon that reveals a hidden universe of treasures in myriad hues, patterns and textures*

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A view of the main porch. Hand-cut and brushed brown kota in a herringbone weave is from Jaipur and forms the flooring. An antique, Chinese opium bed from Indonesia is made of foldable irongate with perforated leaves and holds cushions that boast a custom made shell blackprint. **Left** The al fresco dining is bright and happy. A scraped teak table is covered with an old yet vibrant kantha quilt that brings the limewashed walls alive. Foldable teak chairs in different colours make for casual seating. The painted metal door, adjoining the kitchen, in the background is salvaged from an old factory and reveals cemented, cuduppah shelves that store china, silver and utensils

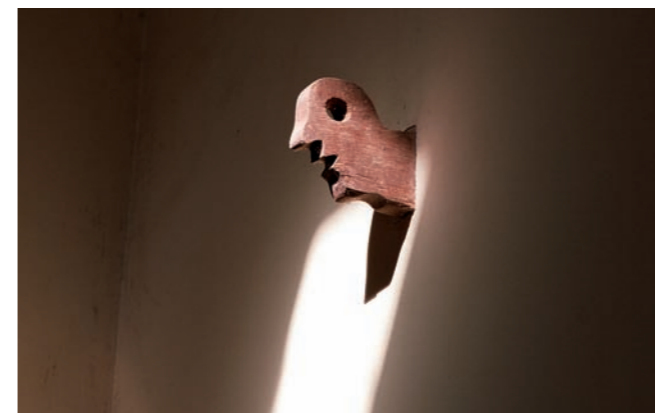
Alice von Baum's house in Goa has that magic quality of a seashell: As you travel through the whorl of quiet rooms the more beautiful it becomes. You enter the house through a small metal gate and ascend a laterite path flanked by bougainvillea, a profligate purple in high summer. The red cement coat on the long rectangular porch has visceral calm, and on either sides are rescued beds, carefully re-matted in muted tones of green and blue. On the beds are a dazzling array of quilts and pillows, from von Baum's personal collection (outside of designing this magnificent home she also is a genius with fabrics, creating quilts and cushions for exclusive boutiques in Europe). You step onto a white flooring embedded with tiny marble chips made all the lovelier by a faded imprint of red earth that has come sweeping through the years. A giant floating day bed – in teak with cane matting – dominates the passage (testament to the curatorial brilliance of the iconic but now defunct store San Golda, from where it was acquired). At the base of the walls, on either side, are an inlay of marble pebbles; at night these marble tributaries come alive with fairy lights running their length: This further accentuates the house's dream-like quality and harks to mind Gregory Crewdon's shots of fireflies.

Two big bedrooms are to the right of the passage. The first room has a dramatic custom bed fixed with hand carved balls in different sizes serving as four-poster. Antique kantha quilts and applique cushions from Gujarat are strewn across the bed. Right behind the bed is a window with handmade grills in an intricate tree-of-life design – this runs for all the house windows – and on the wall, an oil painting depicting a Bavarian child from the 1920s. The other room, connected to the first room by a door and also approached via the passageway, has a bed with a gossamer mosquito netting that drapes over the bed like a wizard's hat, conjuring a vision of safety as well as enchantment. Exiting the second room you are met by the dining room and kitchen.

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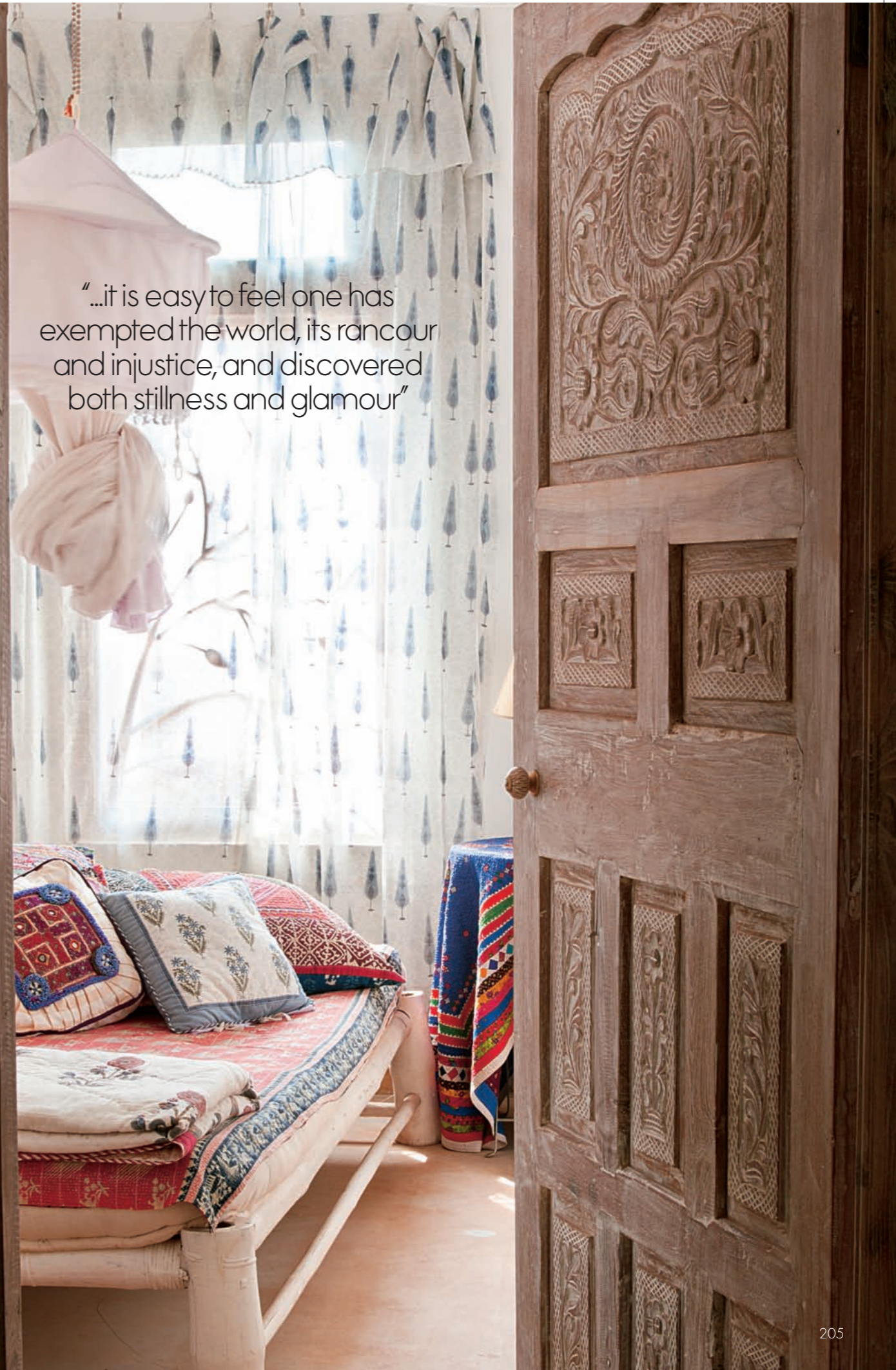
**Clockwise from Top Left** A stone wall in the kitchen has inset shelving lined with crystal decanters and Chinese ginger jars; Cemented niches hold containers from Ikea and metal glasses. Steel *thalis* double up as trays; A teak daybed contrasts with the cement floor and handmade tree of life window grill; An original feature of the Indo-Portuguese part of the house, a wooden profile of a face inserted above the doors and windows in the front lounge **Left** Large arches draw attention to the double height ceiling in the front lounge and main dining area. Graiche cement flooring and a wooden table from Jaipur complement Art Deco chairs. An old, carved cabinet and a serene Buddha head adds a touch of grandeur



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**Clockwise from Top Left** A cushy, bateau-shaped couch with a block-printed, block striped loose cover adds a burst of colour and pattern to the otherwise muted area. Khaki and white flooring creates a neutral base for mint tree trays from Morocco that were given wrought iron bases and turned into tables, a spiral Tom Dixon sculpture and decoration dummies displaying Alice's hand-blockprinted garments from previous collections. A large wooden tray with collected shells sits pretty in the centre; A white washed, mahagoni chest of drawers in the mauve bedroom rests on off white cement flooring with marble chips and holds a driftwood sculpture by Alice mounted on a chunky bit of wood; Another one of the bedrooms. A custom made bed is framed by hand carved balls in different sizes that serve as four posters. An antique *kantha* quilt and applique, cutwork cushions from Gujarat with madder and indigo make for vibrant linen for the sleeper. An oil painting depicting a Bavarian child from 1920 and two leaf designs framed by a student from St.Martins in handcoated, copper leaf wooden frames adorn the walls **Right** The predominantly blue bedroom. The *chanderi* curtains with blue cypresses, matching cushions and antique, embroidered pieces are all designed by Alice. A modern acrylic bowl lamp lends a delicate touch while the heavy door from the roadside adds intricate dimension, after having been white washed, sanded several times and waxed



"...it is easy to feel one has exempted the world, its rancour and injustice, and discovered both stillness and glamour"

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From Top Alice at her work table wearing her own handprinted outfits surrounded by all that she loves – a 17th century Chinese bodhisattva, Hermes boxes, her drawing equipment and a collection of Ganesh bronzes; Inserted stone peacock pegs from Rajasthan pepper a wall in her studio Right Another view of the studio on the first level. The cement jaali painted white lets the breeze in and creates a play of light on the charpoy and block striped floor



An eight-seat dining table in wood, with a hint of distressed white, is part of the kitchen that has niches to act like grooves for a gleaming installation of steel thalis (one is reminded of Subodh Gupta). The kitchen leads into the massive drawing room where paintings done by von Baum, sculptures from Tom Dixon, a grand Buddha, antlers from Bavaria, a cluster of hand-picked seashells all haunt the air with serenity. The drawing room houses a row of mannequins draped in von Baum's beautiful bespoke clothes; these busts lend the room companionship and wayward decadence. This room has direct access to two further bedrooms.

One is a small guestroom with a single bed and a chest over which is a lamp von Baum created using local vats that were off-white. The other bedroom, which leads out to the verandah, is a masterpiece of understated elegance. And it is here that the seashell quality of the house finds full realisation: Painted dusty white, two separate traditional shell screens divide the low bed from the bathroom and the verandah. At daybreak, the East facing room receives a filtered light that casts a moody glow making it easy to believe one is floating in an underwater light. Stepping out outside this room is a verandah also shared by the drawing room.

The verandah floor is hand-cut brushed brown kota in a herringbone weave. On this stands an antique Chinese opium bed from Indonesia. One can hide in its snug confines and gaze out at the garden, or at the circular lime washed teak dining table that seats six for an al fresco experience. The first level of the house is von Baum's expansive studio. Here is a table she works from, surrounded by a miscellany of inspiring objects – a 17th century Chinese bodhistava, Hermes boxes, small Ganesh bronzes and all her drawing equipment. The room has flooring cemented in huge block stripes in cream and beige, and a pantry done in white by a local vendor. Against the pantry is a crossword of cemented boxes to house fabric and clothes, and behind this a fine cane sleigh-bed designed by von Baum (who plans to extend her extraordinary interior design skills professionally). The room leads into a terrace with low seating; from here you gaze out at palm fronds and red paths, and it is easy to feel one has exempted the world, its rancour and injustice, and discovered both stillness and glamour.

Many years ago, Alice von Baum wandered the beaches of Goa, scouting for seashells; today, she offers the world one of her own. ♦

