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Reflections from Kannur

Architecture and the Monsoon

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Travel sketches offer a great opportunity to observe things in a more relaxed manner. I sketch as a way to take a closer look at everyday things. I subscribe to Pallasma's (2009) thought that 'Design practice that is not grounded in the complexity and subtlety of experience withers into dead professionalism devoid of poetic content and incapable of touching the human soul, whereas a theoretical survey that is not fertilised by a personal encounter with the poetics of building is doomed to remain alienated and speculative - and can, at best, only elaborate rational relationships between the apparent elements of architecture.' (The Thinking Hand, 146)

In July 2023, I visited Kannur for the second time—my previous trip was nearly nine years ago. Both visits coincided with the monsoon, but the rains here are distinct from the ones in Mysore, arriving in concentrated, dramatic spells. During this trip, we stayed in a 300-year-old estate bungalow that served as a reminder of architecture's fundamental qualities: surfaces, colors, light, landscape—both cultivated and wild—and its intrinsic connection to nature.

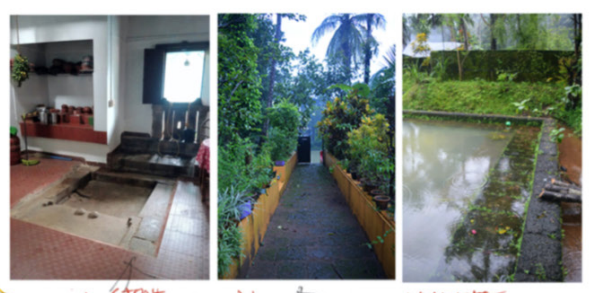
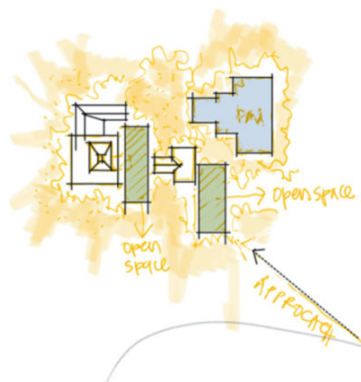
The bungalow's sloping roof impressed me with its elemental ingenuity, managing scale, views, water, and heat as gracefully as the ubiquitous umbrella—light and playful in its form. The meandering walls traversed the landscape with gentle precision, articulating the shifting topography while holding the earth with varying attitudes. The building's shape and form displayed a loyalty to the ground it embraced. Its vibrant colors contrasted beautifully with the rain-soaked greenery of the surroundings. The experience brought to mind a reflection by David Chipperfield, found in his interview with Juan Antonio Cortés in *El Croquis* (2006-2014). Chipperfield speaks of the disconnect between architectural conceptualization and realization, noting:

'The length and sequence of the architectural process isolates us from the substantial matter of the project... from the simple, physical consideration of our craft. Shouldn't the physical realization of things influence the conceptual process? As architects, our process separates conceptualization and realization by layers of professional steps. By the time a project is realized, there's little opportunity for feedback to inform the concept. If I were a sculptor, my hands would directly connect my idea to its realization, but as an architect, this process often becomes disjointed.'

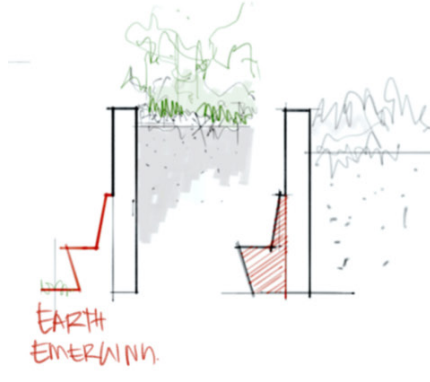
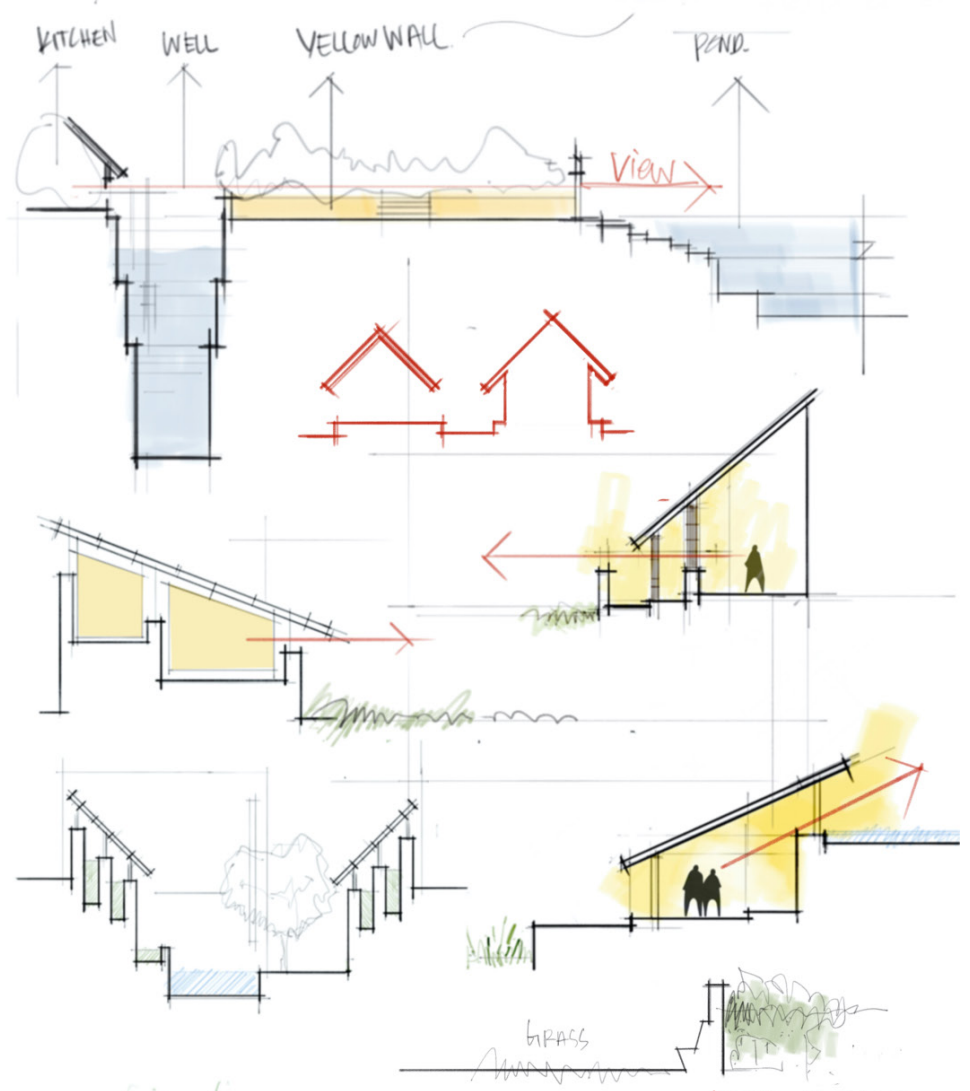
He continues to describe the envy of sculptors, whose work allows for immediate reflection and adjustment. In architecture, ideas explored solely on paper often lack the tactile feedback that reality provides. As he observes:

'Sometimes, ideas explored on paper can feel nervous or unnecessary. Yet, standing in an old building—a simple, beautiful room with a window, a stone floor, and two columns—you encounter a 'fantastical reality.' On paper, we must convince ourselves that our idea is good. But reality often reveals a beauty we couldn't fully anticipate.'

The Kannur bungalow embodied this 'fantastical reality,' where physical form and material presence enriched the conceptual ideas behind its architecture. It reminded me that the essence of design lies in its rooted connection to place, its response to the environment, and the way it fosters an intuitive relationship with the natural world.



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The author has digitally drawn and composed the images on Procreate.