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"To me, a building – if it's beautiful –
is the love of one man; he's made it out of his
love for space, materials, things like that"
– Martha Graham

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Interior designer Niki Fairchild's love for Sri Lanka is exemplified in the sensitive restoration of manor house in Tangalle dating back to the late 19th century and now a boutique holiday villa

TEXT: SUZANNE MIAO
PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF MAYA



To describe Maya as a labour of love would not be a stretch, for it took owner and interior designer Niki Fairchild the best part of a decade to realise her vision for the old *waluawa* (house). Situated in the rural village of Aranwella, eight kilometers from Tangalle in the island's lush southern interior, Maya – named for the Sanskrit word meaning illusion or dream – was built by one of the ruling elite of Ceylon, whose family presided over the village for generations.

Previously known as Aranwella Walauwa, Maya is set within a rich landscape of tropical gardens and coconut trees, surrounded by paddy fields. "I had travelled a lot to Sri Lanka in the late '80s and early '90s on holiday, but it wasn't

until 2002 that I went to Tangalle for the first time for a wedding," says Fairchild. "That was when I realised that the further south you go on the island, the more beautiful it becomes."

Setting up a company in Sri Lanka to take advantage of a two-year window which allowed non-residents to purchase land, she had originally targeted coastal areas for her dream home when friends stumbled across Aranwella. "It was so beautiful; I just fell in love with it – it certainly wasn't what I expected," Fairchild says.

Still occupied by the family which had lived there for decades, the house had fallen into disrepair as they were unable to maintain or sustain the upkeep required. Fortunately, all the buildings had solid 'bones', requiring minimal

structural repair work beyond the roof, all of which was entirely replaced.

"It is much harder to restore a building than to build a new one," Fairchild says. "But Aranwella was in such good shape that it wasn't as difficult as we initially thought it was going to be. You do have to go in completely prepared, of course, otherwise you're going to find yourself rapidly out of your depth."

Working with Sri Lankan architect Pradeep Kodikara, she set about creating interior spaces which acknowledged the property's Dutch and British period features, while also introducing contemporary living with clean lines and open expanses. A new wing was constructed to house additional bedrooms, and the centre courtyard transformed into a swimming pool.

"Pradeep is very low-key, and he's prepared to turn down work because he doesn't want to change the way he operates... That takes a lot of guts," says Fairchild. "At first, he turned me down when I approached him with this project – his style is very contemporary, so when I showed him pictures of this old house, he said 'no, this is not what I do'. But when I explained that I didn't want to create a cliché, that I wanted it to be modern, he accepted the challenge."

Maya's five suites all afford 25-foot ceilings, some with four poster beds and private courtyards, and are individually named after trees in the grounds. Thekka and Kumbuk are situated in the Old House; Amba, Ehela and Kohomba are within the new wing.

The concept was to keep the house true to its original architecture, as evidenced through the restoration of all the woodwork and latticing. Some of the original lattice work designs from the Old House are used to frame the beds in the new wing, while contrast is provided via polished cement flooring throughout, binding the white contemporary framework of walls and surrounds.

Each of the original items of furniture was designed by Fairchild, who worked with local craftsmen to create pieces using locally-sourced materials. The use of teak wood with a natural finish retains a light and modern feel, and even the cement dining table and sofas in the pavilion appear weightless as a result of the clever application of holes cut into the design.

Added to this were items which the designer had collected over the years, as well as "some lovely old antique pieces to make the place feel warm and comfortable".

"I thought really, really hard about everything right from the beginning – I wanted space, not clutter, so that guests would have room to put down their own things on desks or cabinets or even in the bathroom," Fairchild explains. "This project challenged me, pushed me to take a different approach to design... There were a few dark days, of course, but I have really enjoyed it. Everything I imagined has turned out exactly as I hoped."



錫蘭古香

室內設計師 Niki Fairchild 熱愛斯里蘭卡，
細緻地把唐加勒一間十九世紀末莊園活化
成假日精品別墅

撰文：SUZANNE MAO
攝影：由瑪雅度假酒店提供



若說瑪雅度假酒店是愛與誠的成果也不為過，酒店東主與室內設計師 Niki Fairchild 花了近十年時間，才把古老大宅活化成心目中的形象。酒店位於斯里蘭卡南部碧草如茵的鄉郊地區，就在阿曼薇拉的農村之中，距離唐加勒只有八公里。瑪雅在梵文中的意思是幻像或夢境，前身由錫蘭時代其中一位出色的管治者興建，其家族世代都管治著這農村。

瑪雅的前身為 Aranwella Watuwa 大宅，坐落一片繁茂的熱帶園林與椰子林之中，被稻田包圍，恬靜怡人。Niki 說：「八十年代末至九十年代初，我時常來斯里蘭卡旅行，但直至二零零二年因參加婚宴而來到唐加勒，才發現現在斯里蘭卡越向南走，風光便越見明媚。」

Niki 在斯里蘭卡設立了一間公司，好使不是公民的她能有兩年機會在這裡買地。她起初想在沿岸地區興建夢想居所，但後來她的朋友偶爾發現了阿曼薇拉這個地方。她說：「這裡美得很，我瞬間便愛上它，完全是在我意料之外。」

管治農村的家族在大宅居住了數十年，由於未能持續負擔所需的保養維修，房子日漸失修。幸運的是，房子的實木骨幹結構相當扎實，除了

更換新屋頂外，就只需簡單維修。

Niki 說：「修繕舊房子比建新房子要難得多。但是，Aranwella 大宅的狀況相當良好，修繕起來比我們原先想的來得輕鬆。當然，你要有足夠的心理準備才動工，要不然中途便會發現自己很快就吃不消。」

Niki 與斯里蘭卡建築師 Pradeep Kodikera 共同設計大宅的室內空間，尤其注重大宅於荷蘭與英國統治時期的設計特點，同時又加添當代家居的簡約線條及寬敞空間。他們亦加建了新翼來增設額外睡房，而中央的庭園則改建成游泳池。

Niki 說：「Pradeep 為人低調，最初他不想接下這份工作，因為不想改變自己的作風：這需要很大的勇氣。我找他承接這個項目時，他也曾拒絕過。他的風格很當代時尚，所以當我給他看這間古老大宅的相片時，他就說『不，這不是我會做的工作』。不過，當我解釋我並不想耍陳腔濫調的設計，而是要富時代感，他才答應接下挑戰。」

瑪雅度假酒店的五間套房全部樓底高達二十五呎，佈置四柱帷大床，外面更有私人庭

院。五間套房都以樹木命名，「Thekka」及「Kumbuk」位於大宅內，而「Amba」、「Ehela」和「Kohomba」則在新翼內。

修繕概念是要讓房子繼續忠於原建築設計，所以木工部分及格子窗結構都經全面復修。大宅一些原有的格子窗設計亦特地應用於新翼睡房的大床框架之中，與拋光石屎地板形成對比，把空間全白的框架繫在一起。

酒店的每件原創傢具都是出自 Niki 的手筆，她與當地工匠一同以當地物料製成傢具。柚木傢具配上天然的潤飾，散發輕盈的時尚韻味；而就算亭內的飯桌與沙發是由石屎製成，但設計巧妙加上開洞，看來輕巧無比。

除了這些原創傢具外，還有一些 Niki 多年來的珍藏品及一些古董，讓空間更窩心愜意。

Niki 解釋道：「打從一開始，我便真的很用心從多方面構思設計。我希望空間不會雜亂無章，讓客人能在桌上、櫃上甚至在浴室內有空間擺放私人物件。這個項目挑戰我的極限，促使我去用不同的方式設計：當然，過程中也有不甚愉快的日子，但我真的是很享受其中。我所想的都終於如願以償了。」