



The waiting area/reception is a calming space with no jazz and can easily accommodate eight people. The L-shaped bench crafted from pine veneer, and the centre table (with a wooden timber top and MS legs) were both designed and executed in-house. While the pendant lights were designed in-house and executed by a local fabricator; the artwork is a print of a painting by famous American artist Mark Rothko.



The reception counter is made in black MS with the desk behind (not seen in the picture) in pine veneer. The bespoke sofa wears a soft salmon upholstery and was made by a local artisan. A collage of frames of varying sizes display life saying and anecdotes.

A Healing Touch

Architect Kiraan Aggarwal of Studio Querencia crafts a clever therapeutic environment for Meraki Mind Care in a tight 290-square-foot space in Mumbai.

TEXT: DEEPA NAIR; PHOTOGRAPHS: KUNAL BHATIA, COURTESY STUDIO QUERENCIA



ARCHITECT

Kiraan Aggarwal

Not every day does an architect get to design a space which would aid in the healing process of an individual grappling with an illness. Unlike hospitals where numerous people are treated at a time, clinics and care centres are more intimate and personal. The design of such spaces, therefore, play a crucial part in the overall

comfort a patient feels while visiting the facility. The most challenging of these facilities would be a psychiatric clinic which is largely a calm contemplative space which lets an individual relax and be at ease... and has a warm and caring aura around it.

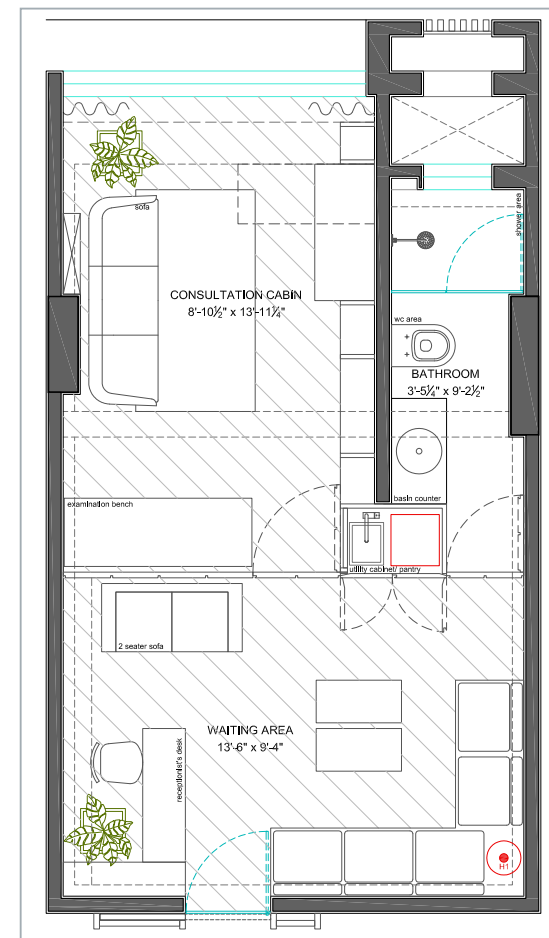
The project we feature here — Meraki Mind Care, a psychiatric clinic in Mumbai — falls under this realm. But, it came with a big



challenge: the calm, contemplative space was to be cocooned inside a tight space 290 sq ft. All these tasks were handed over by a young psychiatrist (the client) to architect Kiraan Aggarwal (the principal of the young Studio Querencia), who came highly recommended by a friend. A concise and precise brief followed... "To create a clinic for the psychiatrist to establish her practice. It was fundamental that the space be warm and inviting, to make patients feel comfortable while seeking help for their mental health issues. The client would also use the space for research and further study. An elaborate library unit and sufficient storage provisions were thus an integral part of the brief. And because she would spend most hours of the day within the clinic, the doctor also requested for a functional pantry unit along with a full-fledged bathroom," informs Kiraan.

When Kiraan visited the site for the first time, it was an existing office space which was further divided by wooden partitions into various small, rather un-optimized cubicles. The bathroom and pantry were a dingy mess with no natural light. Apparently, there were no structural changes that the space needed but civil interventions were carried out to make the bathroom and the pantry work in the overall scheme. "Given that the area was all of 290 sq ft, we didn't really have the luxury of creating multiple zones to fulfil the elaborate

THIS PAGE This is the magic wall which demarcates the therapy room, the bathroom and hides a pantry within. There are two doors which are neatly camouflaged in this pine veneer clad wall. One leads to the consultation cabin, and the other to the bathroom. The handles to the doors here are in the form of the grooves that you see recurring rhythmically on the veneered panels, thus eliminating any defined hardware on the wall.



ABOVE This image shows all the functions which lie beyond the carpentry wall. Here, the cavity created to make space for the pantry in between the consultation room and the bathroom is clearly visible. The base vitrified flooring was kept intact and a laminate wooden floor was slapped on top to complement the overall material palette.

LEFT A detailed layout of the 290-square-foot Meraki Mind Care project.

CONCEPT: To design a psychiatric clinic in a tight 290-square-foot area. A space filled with warmth, and where the patient is at ease.

programme. We consciously wanted to avoid the fragmentation of the already tiny space into smaller units. With that in mind, we broadly divided the programmes in three categories — public, private and utilities — and worked various possibilities of dividing the clinic into zones to house the co-habiting services," explains Kiraan.

For the spatial exploration, the programme was deconstructed and analysed. Possibilities of them overlapping or inter-flowing one into another were also considered. What remained constant was the fundamental organization principle for the clinic: the outside zone was a more public area while the inner one was private. This gave birth to the highlight of this project — the two modules which divide and house some of the important functions of this care centre.

The first is a carpentry wall which broadly divides the length such that the first 1/3rd forms the public area and the latter half becomes the private zone. This wall accommodates two entrances — one leads to

It's a soothing, simple, yet beautiful decor which the patient steps into inside the consultation room. The couch was manufactured and designed at the warehouse of the artisan to achieve the slender sides and light structure as seen here. While the carpet is from FabIndia, the lamp was locally bought. Large windows here bring in ample natural light into the room and add to the warmth of this space. As this space also doubles as the client's work and research space and also a spot where the client would like to spend time after hours, simple warm white recessed ceiling lights were used for general illumination, all adjustable on dimmers. Floor lamps and hanging lights further contribute to creating a mood for after hours.





TOP, LEFT & RIGHT Neatly housed inside the large bookshelf wall is a mini desk which can be pulled out to work on the laptop. When not in use, it becomes one with the shelf.

ABOVE The bookshelf unit is eight feet high with a depth as little as 12 inches, therefore it was created using aluminium sections and uses the thinnest form of partitioning system. The black boxes are MS shutters providing closed storage behind.

the consultation cabin, and the other to the bathroom. Interestingly, the pantry was snugly fit between the two aforementioned doors, strategically placed with the back near the bathroom for plumbing requirements. This module has been created using aluminium sections, employing the thinnest form of partitioning system available in order to save every possible inch. The same is finished in pine veneer from the side of the reception, in inexpensive teak veneer painted white on the side of the cabin and in tiles in the bathroom.

The second module is the wall between the consultation cabin and the bathroom which terminates at the pantry. "As much as we would have liked to introduce a thinner partitioning system here, this wall housed the internals of all the plumbing for the bathroom and the pantry and thus needed to be constructed in masonry," says the architect. The wall, however, was located strategically

MATERIALS

Floor Ceramic tiles (bathroom), laminates (rest of the space) Walls Paint Carpentry wall Aluminium sections, pine veneer, teak veneer Masonry wall Siporex Furniture Wood, fabric, MS Lighting fixtures Metal

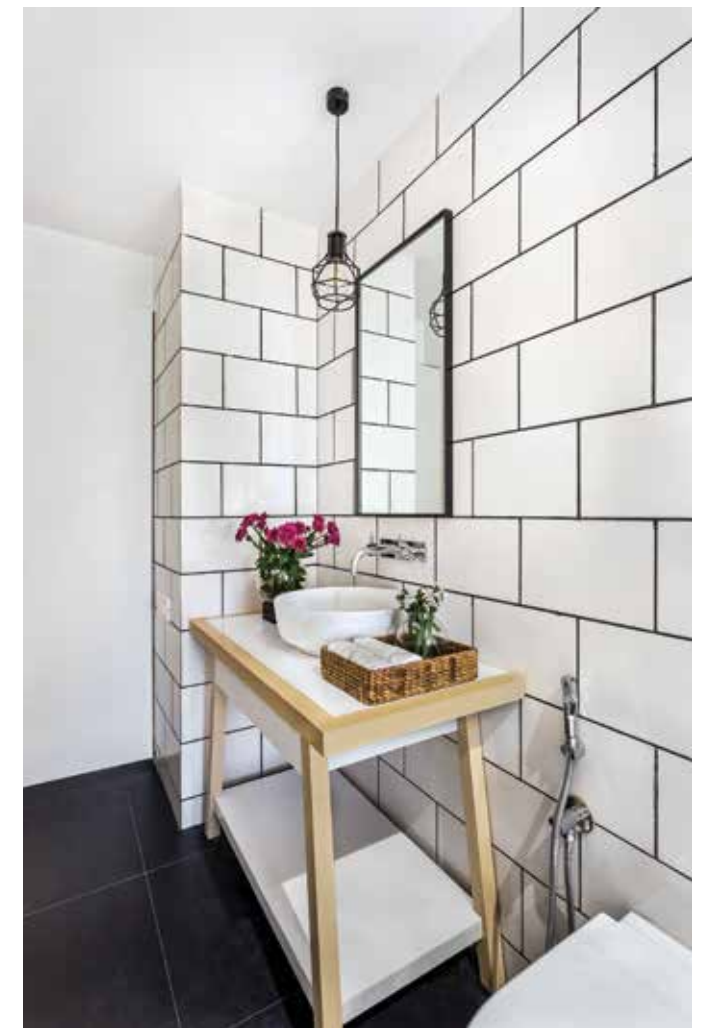


ABOVE LEFT The examination table can be hidden behind a sheer curtain in the consultation room. It was designed and crafted in-house and has built-in storage under it. It is a wooden structure, clad in inexpensive veneer and finished in matte white PU.

ABOVE RIGHT The client and architect both agreed on a bathroom which was young and interesting, whilst keeping the design language intact. As budget had hit low, old-world white tiles, which cost ₹ 24 per square foot, were zeroed in on — it is laid in a staggered format with a conspicuous black grout. Black floor tiles were chosen to compliment this move. The vanity unit is made with an oak wood frame with a white Corian top. The light fixture is a black metal cage, while the mirror is a custom made one with a black MS trim.

enough to form a little offset on the side of the cabin to accommodate the bookshelf, while keeping the bathroom optimally wide. It is finished in tiles on the side of the bathroom, while the bookshelf is done in pine veneer, coupled with the strategic use of black MS on the side of the consultation cabin.

After the walls (read modules) were in place, the clinic's various functions run smoothly. As soon as they enter, patients are greeted with a tall reception counter, which is part of waiting area that has enough seating for seven to eight people. The pantry unit, concealed in the veneer panelling that houses the doors to the consultation cabin and the bathroom, can also be accessed from this zone. As one enters the cabin, the examination table (which can be cordoned off with the help of sheers) to the left is hard to miss. Placed ahead of this is the therapy zone with a couch for the patient and a swivel desk for the psychiatrist. On the wall separating the bathroom from the cabin is an expansive bookshelf forming a composition of open and closed storage. Here, a swivel desk, which retracts to become a part of the wall composition when not in use, is a smart



furniture unit. Further, the sink in the pantry outside is also accessible via one of the shutters in this bookshelf, as an integral requisite for the client. The bathroom is a long narrow rectangle accommodating all three functions — a basin, water closet and the shower. The tiles used here are inexpensive rectangular white ones laid out in Flemish bond, exaggerating the pattern with a thick black grout.

On a parting note, Kiraan tells me that however cliched it sounds, the most challenging yet fun part of this project was to accommodate the elaborate ambitious brief into this tiny little space. That the architect is now working on a third collaboration with this client is an affirmation on how much her design prowess has impressed. Kudos! **BI**

FACT FILE: Project Meraki Mind Care **Location** Mumbai **Area** 290 sqft **Principal architect** Kiraan Aggarwal