

# Spatial spaces

Sunny nooks to spend winter afternoons, corners redolent with the aroma of food and spices, verandahs ringing with merry laughter of children or courtyards where grandparents sit to reminisce about old days. Most old houses had a courtyard – a special space that was the focal point of home. Courtyards were the spatial, social and environmental control centre of a house; designed to provide light, space and comfort.

*But a courtyard house was not just an architectural style. It was a way of life...*

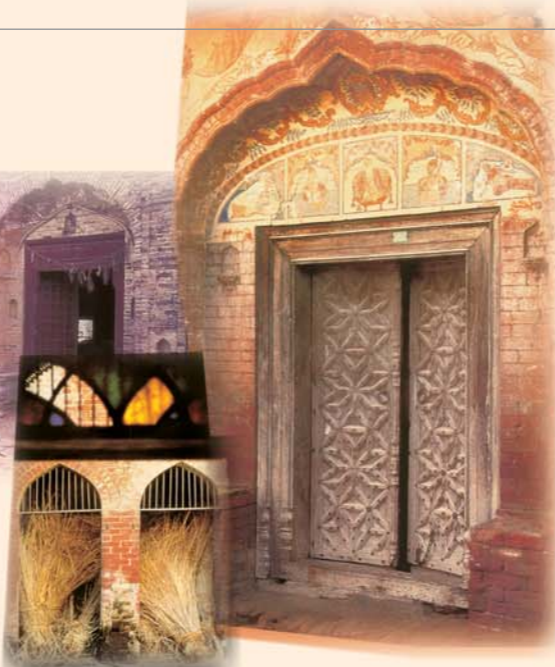
Unlike palaces, these houses almost merged with the streets, and courtyards were an usable living space through which house activities spilled into the outside world. Peddlers stopped here to sell their wares. Village musicians sang in courtyards, while barbers carried on their work. Wandering bards entered to extol the virtues of family ancestors and jugglers and snake charmers where invited to perform. During festivals, this space came alive with colour and light. Courtyards, were the most busy and bustling areas in the house.

Found across India, courtyard houses vary in structural nuances and have different names in different regions – *havelis*, *rajbari* or *nalukettu*. Take a walk around some of these. Enjoy...

## Frontier homes

*Havelis* in Punjab are robustly built but have little ornamentation. Early invaders came through the northwest of India and plundered villages, so the focus was safety, not decoration.

- They had solid gates studded with nails.
- Entrances were wide to admit bullock carts. Outer courtyards are used to keep farm equipment. Cattle was tethered here too.



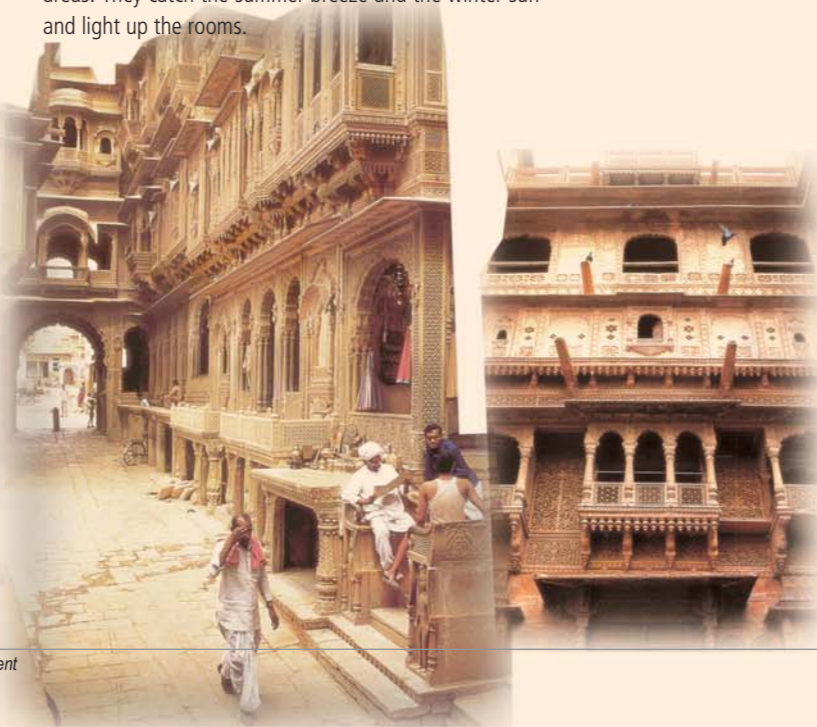
## Amidst golden dunes

Rajasthan has the greatest diversity in courtyard house styles.

### Jaisalmer

- Narrow alleys - a peculiarity of this old fort town - together with the height of buildings keep houses cool.
- *Havelis* don't shut out the street. Platforms near the entrance are used to interact with vendors and to chat with acquaintances.
- In Patua *Havelis* windows in upper floors open into air ventilation wells helping air circulation. Some courtyards here have fountains to keep the centre cool.
- *Jharokas* – window openings (made with reed curtains) act like one-way mirrors making comfortable sitting areas. They catch the summer breeze and the winter sun and light up the rooms.

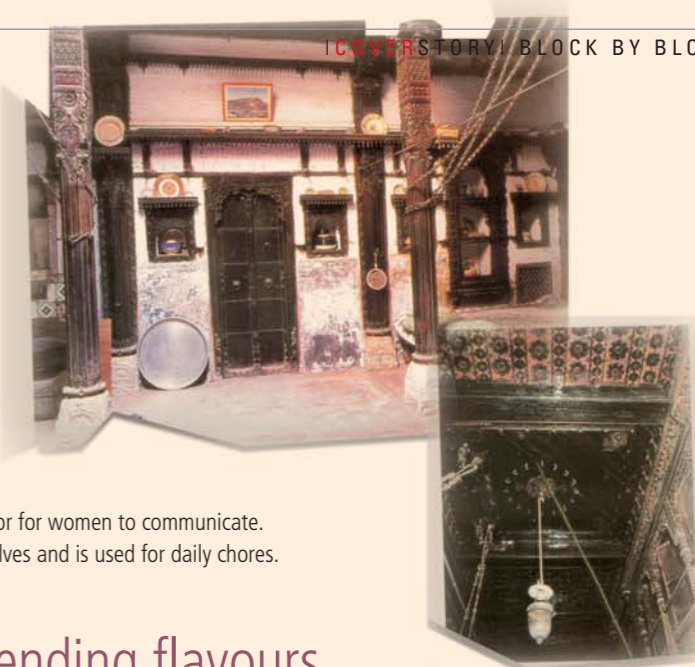
A typical *haveli* in north India has at least two courtyards. The outer one is for general use and has the *baithak* or the guest room. Dealings with traders would take place here. The outer courtyard led to the inner one around which the rooms of the house were arranged.



## Wooden expressions

Gujarat *havelis* are known for their splendid woodwork and combine Hindu and Islamic influences. They belonged to traders and merchants, so unlike the ones in north India, these courtyards were never used for activities related to agriculture.

- Cantilevered balconies and arcades in the inner courtyards protect windows and regulate breeze.
- *Sojala* or screened openings on the mezzanine floor for women to communicate.
- The area around the courtyard has niches and shelves and is used for daily chores.



## Blending flavours

Courtyard houses of West Bengal (*rajbaris*) are an eclectic mix of western and traditional elements. While the ornamentation is western, the courtyard has traditional uses.

- One side of the courtyard has a raised platform where people sit to enjoy cultural performances presented in courtyards.
- *Pujamandap* – a place for worship on one side, is often arcaded.

## Southern splendour

### Comfort corners

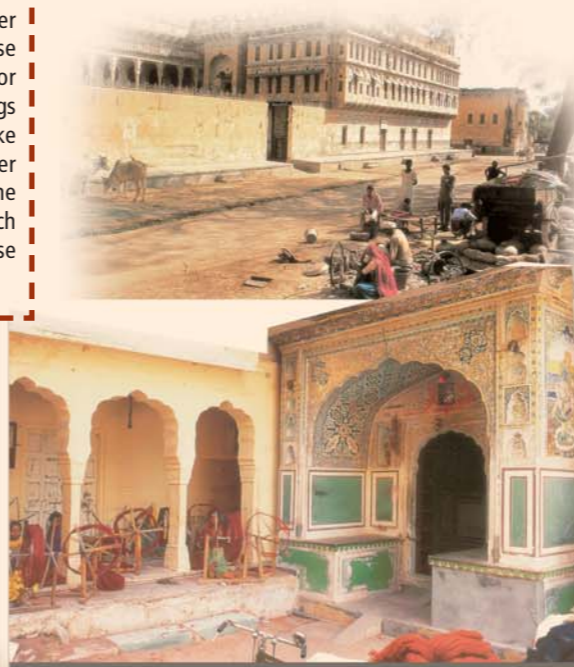
The *tharavads* of Kerala are usually of two types – *nalukettu* has a single courtyard (four corners) and *ettukettu* has two courtyards (eight corners).

- *Poomukham* or raised verandahs at the entrance have benches for guests.
- Gabled roofs have screens to ensure air circulation.
- The courtyard is small and has an impluvium or rainwater cistern in the centre.
- The spaces around the courtyard is reserved for cooking, eating or lounging around.

### Courts & columns

Massive teak columns are a defining component of the Chettiar homes of Tamil Nadu. The entrance leads to a verandah called *thinnai* to receive guests. Musicians sit here during marriages and celebrations.

A series of courtyards are laid out in a line. The first one (*muttaram*) is the grandest with a sitting platform or (*pattagasalai*).



### Shekhawati

Courtyards always have areas that are sunlit and shaded, creating temperature differences that help in air circulation.

- Many houses have a *nagaar-khana* – a small chamber above the courtyard – from where guests are welcomed by musicians beating the *nagara* (drum).
- Ties between these houses and travelling artisans are still alive as many often camp near old *havelis*.
- Courtyards are commonly used for household chores and often double as a cricket pitch. The outer courtyards are also used for cottage industries.

