

Matrimandir

November 2018



A rare Guaiacum tree at the site of the Test Pond being loaded onto a trailer for transplantation into Auroville's Botanical garden.

Work progress on the Big Test pond and the rainwater harvesting system:

Matrimandir has launched itself on the long envisioned project of creating the first full scale portion of a lake which will eventually surround the Matrimandir gardens oval.

In 1970 the Mother had written: "It has been decided and remains decided that the Matrimandir will be surrounded with water. However; water is not available just now and will be available only later; so it is decided to build the Matrimandir now and surround it with water only later; perhaps in a few years' time."

To collect water to fill this test pond the first step is to harvest all possible runoff water from the 22 acre garden oval, especially the waters from monsoon rains.

One part of this collection system has just been completed: a 7.5 meter deep sump has been built to catch water draining from the 4400 sqm surface of the main Amphitheater.

Rain water is drained away from the Amphitheater through a large concrete pipe that was buried deep in the red earth at the time of the construction of the Amphitheater in 1971. Only now are we taking the step to tap into this drain pipe and collect this valuable resource!

Water will be pumped from this sump into the second element of the collection system which is an open water channel surrounding the entire garden oval. This open channel will also be fed by storm water being pumped up from the large reservoir lying directly beneath Matrimandir.

This open channel has been dug, but will not be made water proof before the upcoming monsoon.... Time is too short for that, so we will take up this after the rains in preparation for the next season.

On the south eastern side of the Matrimandir garden oval, work is underway at the Test Pond site to clear away bushes and undergrowth so that a proper survey and marking of the Test Pond can be done. Actual excavation of the test pond, envisioned as being some 100 m wide and up to 10 m deep, will also be done after the coming monsoon rains.

In preparation, a number of special trees have been ear marked for transplantation out of the work area. Two 40 year old Guaiacum trees were prepared by bundling up their root balls for transport and then replanted at Auroville's Botanical Gardens on September 27th.

A large crane had to be called in to lift the trees onto vehicles as shown in the image above. They were then driven a few kilometers to their new home in the Botanical Gardens. Pre-monsoon showers will help them to sink their roots in to the earth at their

new home. We will observe the trees in their new home to see if they can handle the move!

Choosing a design for the Garden of the Unexpected

As announced in our last newsletter, a process is underway to select a design for a large garden located on the western side of the 360 m wide Matrimandir oval. The Architect of Matrimandir, Roger Anger, had referred to it as the Garden of the Unexpected, — a place for children, a place of discovery and exploration.

A public call had been made in June this year during which several design teams came forward expressing interest in participating. Eventually, eight design teams met the criteria for design submission. Their garden designs were first evaluated by a technical analysis team to check on such aspects as water usage, drainage patterns, use of local plants and construction feasibility. Then the designs were passed on to an "Expert Panel" comprised of five individuals known for their knowledge and quality of work with gardens and general design excellence. One of these individuals is a professional garden designer in Japan, who took the opportunity to fly to Auroville, see the proposed garden site and then make his evaluation in detail. While here, this highly trained gardener gave a workshop on tree pruning and made a presentation of traditional Japanese gardening and of his own garden works in Japan. His input was highly appreciated by all.

On October 21st, all the eight designs were presented to an Aurovilian "Public Panel". Out of the top three designs favored by the Expert Panel, one design will be selected.

Almost 100 Aurovilians have registered to participate in this final decision making event. By the time this newsletter comes to you the final choice will have been made and work can then begin on its implementation. It has been a fascinating process so far...

In our next issue, the final chosen design for the Garden of the Unexpected will be shown to you in detail!



A view of the fountain and water body in the recently completed Progress garden



Aurovilians gathered on October 21st to view the designs proposed for the Garden of the Unexpected.



The solid wood workshop bench installed in the Matrimandir workshop in 1973.

The Tale of the Workshop Bench

The story of Matrimandir can be told in many ways; — one could follow the Mother's description of her vision of the Inner Chamber, and her messages about Matrimandir which followed.

One could trace the development of the Matrimandir's design as the architect, Roger Anger, prepared model after model over the years to fine tune its many artistic details. One could read the fascinating diary notes and anecdotes written down by those who spent weeks, months, or a life time building Matrimandir. And then one could go through the thousands of beautiful photos that have been taken over the years following the stages of Matrimandir's growth.

But there is another way, much more material, much more hands on, which gives a very down to earth view of those decades of the material growth of Matrimandir. This way is to listen to the stories told by the objects, the tools, the machines which have served on site from the very first years.

Some time ago we related the story of the Cement Mixer, — that amazingly durable machine which has faithfully served the construction of Matrimandir from the very first concretings of the building's foundation in 1972. The cement mixer has done a herculean task, and the tales it has to tell are sometimes astonishing, spanning with such endurance that long stretch of time.

There is another piece of equipment which has given constant service at Matrimandir, and which

has its own collection of fascinating stories. This is the sturdy wooden workbench which stands inside the general purpose workshop of Matrimandir.

The first Matrimandir work shop had a roof made of keet and thatch which promptly got blown off in the cyclone of 1972. While rebuilding it in a more rugged fashion, the Aurovilians of the day installed a wooden work bench, — massive, solid, with two inch thick planks forming its top. This table, even today, serves as visible witness to the years of service that it has given in so many different ways to the building of Matrimandir.

The wooden surface is now covered with holes, cuts and marks of all kinds. There is hardly a square centimeter which still reflects the plane smoothness of the original planks.

Each hole, each cut, each dent bears witness to an essential job done during the construction of the Matrimandir....We can listen to a few of these tales....

Through most of the first two decades of Matrimandir's growth, the business of this bench was to support the activity of the day, which was concreting, — first the concreting of the massive foundation and then of the four rising pillars of the structure. Then from 1976-78 came the years of building the twelve-sided concrete shell of the Inner Chamber, followed for another ten years by the rising sphere of 1100 concrete precast beams made in the same workshop where the wooden table stood.

Over these twenty years and hundreds of concretings, the vibrator needles used to compact the fresh concrete would often fail. When they did, they were rushed to the work shop table where the needle tips would be unscrewed, the detached part soldered back together, loosened from the table's vice and then rushed back to the concreting underway.

Pipe wrenches, hammers, spanners and kerosene powered blow torches found their place on the silent wooden table during these surgical operations. Each of them left some mark there.

During those years, many steel clamps and fittings were needed too, but for these, a cousin of this wooden table was generally used,— a massive steel table standing outside the inner space of the work shop,—on that steel table welding works could easily be done. These jobs ranged from the simple building of the many special steel frames to the immense job of welding together the huge pipe frame structures that were to be the elements of the two spiraling ramps leading up to the Chamber level of Matrimandir.

....But back to the story told by our wooden table.

The phase of concreting slowed down as the '80s came to a close, and the more delicate phase of stone work commenced. We began to place the pristine white marble slabs on the walls of the Inner Chamber. Then, the guests on the workshop table were no longer vibrator needles and blow torches, but rather the drills and marble cutting machines that needed repair and the stainless steel marble clamps being made ready for their permanent places on the Inner Chamber walls. An impressive array of holes drilled into the top of the venerable wooden table bears witness to the intensity of the time, as newly repaired drills and saws bit and cut, usually by mistake, into the wooden surface of the table.

By this time the table top was beginning to resemble the surface of the moon, so cratered it had become! By now it was well oiled... thoroughly coated with all the greases and oils used for thousands of repair jobs done on its stable surface. And, it was spotted too with some drops of blood, as the inevitable small accidents occurred, bruising and cutting finger tips too eager and misplaced in their work.

By the mid 90's other workshops began to multiply on site with very specialized roles such as the fabrication of the golden tiles that cover the outer discs of Matrimandir, or for specialized constructions in stainless steel like the thousands of legs needed to support the golden discs. But all through, the workshop wooden table stood quietly and fulfilled its role of basic support to all the other activity around. Twice it got moved, as the general workshop housing the table was shifted back step-by-step to make space for the gardens growing up around the central building of Matrimandir.

Today, you might well see blades from our many grass cutting machines lined up on that table, waiting to be sharpened. Or you might find other diverse pieces of equipment which have come on site, being brought to the table for repair. Or one might find there prototypes of innovative light fixtures being developed for the growing gardens....

The workshop table could tell endless tales, — and the scars of its journey are a thousand and one. But each morning at 8 am, when the workshop is opened and the light over the table is turned on, it looks up at the day with a smile, remembering perhaps all that has gone before, and the many friends it has made over the decades, — and then the workbench looks to the tasks at hand and willingly lends its sturdy back to the jobs of the new day.

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Important information on sending your offerings: Contributions to Matrimandir are exempt under sec. 80G of the Indian Income Tax Act. You can send us by post your offering by DD/Cheque payable to "Matrimandir". You may also give your offering in cash/cheque/DD at the Matrimandir Office during your visit for meditation.

Postal address: MATRIMANDIR – AUROVILLE 605101 – TAMIL NADU – INDIA
Phone no for accounts : 0413- 262-2228, Email: matrimandir@auroville.org.in