

## About Laurie Baker

Dr. Laurie Baker, who had his education from England, came to India in 1945 as an architect to the leprosy mission, after serving in as an anaesthetist during the world war and working in Burma and China.

He settled down in the Himalayas with his wife, who is a doctor from Kerala. There he discovered a hidden heritage in the local indigenous style of architecture. He observed how the local people used only the locally available building materials to make structurally stable buildings that could cope with the local climatic conditions and topography.

With the advent of "Development" into that Himalayan area, the Bakers decided to move South to Kerala and again they chose a remote mountain area among the neglected tribals and settlers to build another home and hospital. Baker acquired more knowledge of south Indian rural life and his architectural work showed this change.

By 1970 they handed over their medical work to friends and settled in Trivandrum, continuing unto this day their mixture of medical, leprosy, architectural and building work.

Laurie Baker has been closely associated with allied Government and quasi-government work including work with the Planning Commission and as a member of the Governing Bodies of HUDCO and the National Institute of Design, the Scientific Advisory Council of C.B.R.I. etc. He also extended his work into the industrial field and was for many years architectural consultant to a large Industrial firm. At the same time, and with these industrialists his work on alternative energy systems relating to building grew.

He has his own method of working with the masons on his building sites or training workers in their own remote territories to use twentieth century techniques while maintaining principals acquired over centuries to cope with India's own climate, materials, terrain and culture, not to mention increasing economic and population problems. He achieves this by himself laying the first course of the brickwork and explaining the masons what he wants through rough sketches on site. He also evolves the design on the site as per the soil conditions and the terrain, so as to guarantee minimum possible expenses to the owner.

After more than 30 years of relentless work and unique masterpieces, all in exposed brickwork, his name has become synonymous to this type of construction, as also with other cost effective building techniques and materials like filler-slab roofing, unfired brick and red oxide flooring, build-in furniture and frameless doors & windows.

Due to old age and ill-health, nowadays, he stays mostly indoors and his building sites are supervised by the architects and engineers at COSTFORD, Trivandrum.

Mr. Baker has inspired innumerable architects, engineers, students and masons by his work and ideologies.

He has been involved in various training programmes for masons, engineers and architects, and has produced several do-it-yourself books regarding cost-effective construction.

Dr. Baker can be given the total credit for the high quality of construction and the general awareness created in the people in Kerala with respect to cost effective building techniques and materials.

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On asking as to why the construction techniques evolved by him have not spread so widely beyond Kerala, he responded that he believes that there is nothing like “Indian Architecture”, which can be applied to any and every part of the country. As we travel, we observe that after every few miles, the local style of architecture varies tremendously. Also, this style is a result of thousands of years of experience of the local climate, soil, topography and needs. Hence, each region should try to adapt its indigenous style of architecture to fit to the present day needs, rather than blindly try to copy the other types of architecture.

Only when we find a type of construction technique or material suitable to a particular region, should one incorporate it in the design, laying stress on locally available materials.

### **Appropriate Architectural Practice**