In 1993 when I decided to relocate our 110 year old wada situated in the heart of Pune to a suburban location the thought uppermost in my mind was preserving the heritage and the feeling of well being and serenity that I got from living in it. My architectural training and experience of carrying out repairs to the timber structure of the older part of the wada (which was more than 200 years old) had made me aware that the structure was amenable to dismantling and being re-erected elsewhere. These members were dowel jointed. This made it possible to pry them open with a crowbar without much difficulty and re-assemble them. And that is exactly what I did systematically and with careful planning to create my new home.

The new-old house, 2000sq.ft in area, is much smaller than the wada and is more compact. It is, in fact, a contemporary house with modern conveniences which uses traditional method of timber frame construction. It retains individual rooms as they existed before which are now arranged in a different layout designed to suit my present needs and life style. The old, well seasoned teakwood members of the wada were in perfectly good condition and were re-assembled on the new site. In addition to posts, beams, joints and boarding I have re-used old timber windows, doors and the staircase as well. The total quantity of timber used for the new house is approximately 550cft. Since the timber members were re-used in their original form (keeping the old joints) the labour that was needed was mainly for re-assembling them except where small modifications were required to suit the new layout.

The old construction is based on a module called khan. Each khan is a space spanned by two adjacent timber beams supported
by timber posts at both ends placed 6ft (centre to centre) apart. The wada was a two storey structure and so is the new house. Timber posts on the ground floor are 6” X 6” in size and on the first floor 5” X 5”. Timber beams are 8” X 9” or 10” deep depending on the span they support (10’6” in some rooms and 14ft in others). The ceiling height is 9'9”. The beams have joists (3”X 4”) placed across them 12” apart which support the boarding on top. The boarding is flat on the side that is seen from below and rough on the other as it is made of pieces left after fashioning posts and beams from timber logs. The teakwood has been treated with a coat of a mixture of linseed oil and turpentine.

A noteworthy feature of wadas is an internal courtyard. It helps good cross ventilation and admits mellow light in adjoining rooms. Narrow, vertical traditional windows with a low sill, just about 12” from the floor, facilitate air movement at body level even when sitting and let adequate amount of light inside. Two sets of shutters, lower and upper, make it possible to control better the flow of air.

What was originally an endeavour to preserve the heritage has, I now realize, contributed to the protection of the environment. The recycling of old timber structural members, doors and windows has meant that no trees have been cut afresh to procure the teak. Re-using timber has reduced considerably the use of energy intensive materials such as cement and steel as no reinforced cement concrete (RCC) columns, beams or slabs have been cast. The use of cement and sand has been further reduced by leaving the external walls un-plastered from the outside as they were in the wada. Instead of thick walls built in mud mortar, rat trap bond has been used to construct external walls. This has not only performed the same function of reducing the heat transfer, it has also cut down the number of bricks used as the bricks are placed on edge (making each brick course 4.5” high instead of the usual 3”) and there is a cavity in the wall. Above all, the earthy look provided by exposed brick walls and clay tiled roof is enhanced by the warmth and gentleness exuded by the teakwood.

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