

PRISMA: filling an information gap

PRISMA is a commercial unit located in a small office in the Aurelec compound. It does graphic design, photography, text editing and Desk Top Publishing (DTP) work, as well as the printing of books and brochures. Recently it has begun to branch out into other ventures.

While PRISMA dates from the late 1980s, the core team has been working together for more than 25 years. Franz, a graphic designer, Tim, the 'text man', both of whom have a background in advertising in the West, and John the photographer first worked together for Aurelec, Auroville's computer manufacturing unit. Franz and John were doing the design and advertising work, Tim was running the company's in-house journal. "I call us the dream team," says Tim, "because we have so many different skills which complement each other. The team has grown even stronger in recent years because now we've been joined by Janarthanan who looks very capably after all the DTP work."

However, it has not all been smooth sailing. When Aurelec broke up in the late 1980s, the original team suddenly lost their main source of work and income and had to decide if they would continue. "In the end we decided to carry on," says Franz, "because it's something we like doing and we were almost the only people in Auroville doing this kind of work. However, we very quickly realized that we could not generate enough income by just doing letterheads and other one-off jobs for Aurovilians. We had to start generating our own publications."

transparent about what is happening here and not to project some kind of image," explains Franz who, along with John, put the exhibition together.

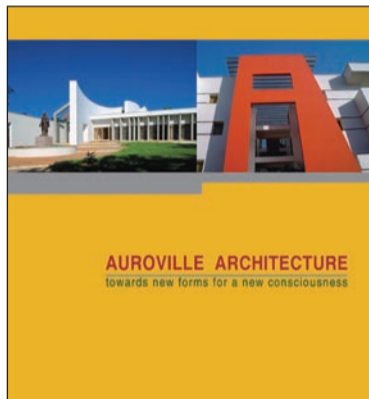
But for a creative photographer, isn't this kind of documentary work rather uninspiring? "No," says John, "I have more freedom here than I have in some of my other work. Besides, it's something I do for Auroville, it's my contribution. And I like meeting the Aurovilians."

Documenting Auroville has become an important part of PRISMA's work. The latest, very successful, venture is a book which documents the history and variety of Auroville's architecture. "Nobody else in Auroville is trying to do this," says Franz. "When you put something together like this, you're amazed by what has been done here. Normally



PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN

From left, John, Tim, Janarthanan and Franz



there is an Auroville style. Rather, there are a lot of different styles here, which is what you would expect in such a creative community. I think what is most characteristic of Auroville is the high quality of the work." "That's also what we're striving for in PRISMA," adds Tim, "perfection in every detail. And that's not easy in this environment."

But PRISMA is not only producing books, pamphlets and exhibitions. Recently it broke new ground by coming out with *The Mother's Flower Blessings*, the proceeds from which go to Matrimandir Gardens. These are two sets of 64 flower cards with Mother's com-

person. But in this office I make myself concentrate fully on the work, otherwise I couldn't get it done. Besides, the work is always interesting. I'm always learning something different."

PRISMA projects like this come out of the personal interests, growth and enthusiasms of the team. "We're fortunate," says Franz. "If we have an idea we can easily transform it into something and make it widely available assuming, that is, we have the financial resources. We have never received grants, so the proceeds from our existing publications have to finance new projects."

The indispensable link in this chain is Janarthanan, an oasis of calm in the busy office, who looks after the DTP work for PRISMA projects and deals with the countless Aurovilians who drop in with pleas that he do 'small jobs' for them as soon as possible. Doesn't the pressure get too much for him sometimes? Jana laughs. "Wherever you work there is pressure. But here it's good pressure because Tim and Franz try to make sure I have the time to do everything." But how does he keep so calm when other Aurovilians are hassling him to finish their work? "I'm not naturally a calm

person. But in this office I make myself concentrate fully on the work, otherwise I couldn't get it done. Besides, the work is always interesting. I'm always learning something different."

It's a feeling that Franz shares. "In PRISMA we've experienced the whole history of printing in a few years. When I



started, we were working with printers using letterpress and block-making, then came offset presses and today everything is computerised. As a graphic designer, for each new step I had to learn a whole new process. The same is true for John with his photography. But that's also the story of Auroville. This is a place where you can never stand still."

From an interview by Alan

For more information contact prisma@auroville.org.in

we're all so much involved in other tasks we don't see the bigger picture. But it's really impressive." But, for Franz, there's more to this than simple recording. "For me, it becomes more and more urgent that people change their way of seeing things if India is not to be turned into a wastebin. Mother created Auroville to work on many levels, but on the physical level she wanted it to be beautiful. If we can show something of what we have achieved here in terms of beauty, its effect can radiate out. We show that things can be different."

"When you look around India most of the buildings are functional," adds Tim. "At its best, Auroville shows that you can go beyond functionality into another dimension of beauty."

Other projects on the drawing-board include a book on Auroville's farms, forests and Botanical Gardens and one on the style and design details of the



ments upon their significances. "The cards can be used as an invocation or a blessing for the day or even as a memory game," explains Franz, whose brainchild

AUROVILLE HISTORY

Erratum



Early Aurovilians starting the excavation.

A mistake was made in the composition of the front page of the March issue of Auroville Today. The bottom photo, with the caption *Early Aurovilians starting the excavation* was accidentally switched with another photo of the excavation.

We apologize for the mistake and publish here the correct photo. The correction has meanwhile been made in the pdf file of the page, which can be downloaded from Auroville.org.

Editors

PASSING

Tenzin Dolkar

Tenzin Dolkar, who met with a road accident on April 22nd, passed away on April 27th in a hospital in Pondicherry after suffering a cardiac arrest following brain surgery. She was 31 years old and mother of two young sons, Ragdol and Samsone.

Tenzin, born in Nepal and of Tibetan origin, came to Auroville in 2003. Many will remember her from the Deja Vu restaurant which offered a Tibetan take-away and momo-delivery service. Her body was cremated on April 29th, at Adventure's Farewell grounds.

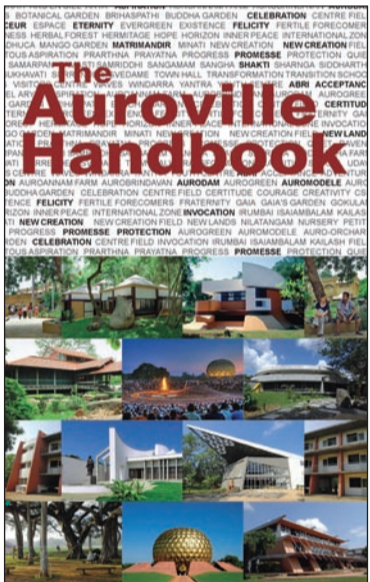


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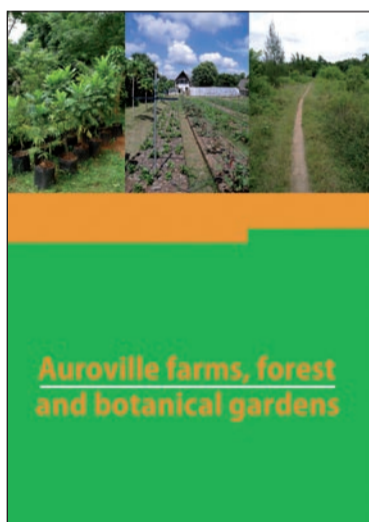
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ALL COVER PHOTOS COURTESY PRISMA



"One of the first projects of the new unit was the *Auroville Handbook*," remembers Tim. "We felt there was an information gap, that Auroville had grown too big for many Aurovilians to understand what was going on, so this was intended as a quick introduction to all the units, services and groups as well as major areas of activity. As it turned out, it was used much more by visitors and guests and Auroville International Centres than by Aurovilians: the Aurovilians obviously felt they know it all! It has been reprinted six times and remains one of our most successful publications."

The *Handbook* was followed, some years later, by *Auroville in a Nutshell*, which tries to provide short answers to all the fundamental questions visitors ask about Auroville. Both of these books are sold at the Visitors Centre which, over the years, has provided more and more work for PRISMA. At first it was introduction leaflets to Auroville and its activities, but then PRISMA was asked to create a photographic exhibition on Auroville. "We tried to document and be



Auroville farms, forest and botanical gardens

buildings, gardens and products of this community. So is there an identifiable Auroville style? Franz pauses. "A little bit, yes, there are certainly things you find here that you don't find anywhere else." John is less sure. "I don't think

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