

# The Auroville Transit Lounge

On Friday April 15th, Auroville architects and developers presented their ideas for dismantlable houses for Auroville.

Though many apartment buildings are getting ready, the housing crisis is far from being over. A housing survey showed that apartments are required for 130 people: 42 families, 36 couples, 5 single parents with children, and 47 singles. To provide immediate relief, a number of architects are developing ideas for temporary dismantlable housing which could be located on a site near Courage. The name for this new community has already been decided upon: the Auroville Transit Lounge.

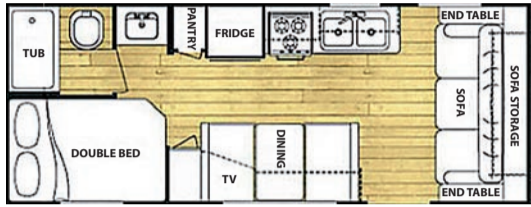
With an estimated lifetime of 10 years, the Transit Lounge would provide housing for all newcomers or Aurovilians who are waiting for permanent housing. The Auroville Transit Lounge will have a minimum of 15 units. Residents will share a common building with kitchen, a dining space and a recreational area with internet access, lounge spaces and other facilities. Another building will house the bathrooms and composting toilets. The project includes a grey-water treatment facility with resource recovery station. There is a possibility of using wind or solar for electricity generation.

The financing of this project is being worked out. One idea is that the houses would be paid for by the occupants, while Auroville would bear the infrastructure costs for the common facilities. The residents would pay a monthly contribution towards expenses/maintenance of the common infrastructure. When a resident moved to a permanent location elsewhere in Auroville, the investment in the temporary house less the standard depreciation rate of 0.4% per month would be refunded and used for the permanent house.

Interested newcomers and Aurovilians have been requested to give their feedback on the ideas and the models shown. If a sufficient number of people express interest, the layout and facilities of each living unit will be fine-tuned in a one-day co-design workshop and a group design session will detail the site plan and the common infrastructure facilities.

**L'Avenir Communication Platform**

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Container homes, designed by several Chennai based companies and EartHauz, Auroville. Materials used: Shipping container. Interior size: modular, 6 or 12 metre long, 2.50 - 2.70 metre high and 2.40 metre wide. Cost of a 12 metre container: Rs 2.6 to Rs 3.8.lakhs. The price includes six windows and grills, one door, styrofoam concrete or pvc inner skin, flooring, fans, lights, plug & phone points. The container is fully painted. Construction time: 2 weeks.

Advantages: Very versatile secure multiple floors, can be stacked 10 high and take 28 tonnes of weight; Cortlen steel is non-corrosive and 75% stronger than normal steel; earth-quake resistant. Disadvantage: Needs added insulation (styrofoam concrete) and a heat barrier (creeper wall) because of its potential to heat up. Container homes have been successfully implemented in many cities, such as London and Amsterdam.



House designed by Rolf, Kalabhumi, and Balu, Auroville Bamboo Centre. Interior size: 12 square metres. Costs: 1.2 lakhs. Time Frame to complete: 3 weeks (two units can be completed in one month). Materials used: bamboo, bolts, and nylon canvas for the roofing. Bamboo is treated so that it will not deteriorate. A model exists in Vérité community. The designer states that the feeling of the space is wonderful and light and that bamboo is highly sustainable. The model can also be executed in mud brick and bamboo.



House designed by Johnny. Fertile. Interior size: 12 sq metres. Amenities: one room with terrace. Costs: Rs 1 lakh. Time frame for completion: one day once all materials are present on site. Materials used: galvanised iron pipes, wood, bison board for structure, wood louvres and mosquito mesh on sides. The structure stands off the ground on concrete pillars and plates.



Earth house designed by Satprem Maini and Tesia of the Auroville Earth Institute.

Interior size: 30m2. Materials used: compressed stabilised earth blocks for the walls and ferrocement for the roof. Amenities: toilet and bathroom, bedroom, platform in a corner for a kitchenette wastewater system. Costs: Rs 3.5 lakhs including a solar system and wastewater system. Time frame to complete: 3-4 weeks for precasting the earth blocks and 64 hours to build with about 6 masons.



Concept house designed by Sigi. Interior size: 24 square metres, which includes a 10 square metres terrace. Materials used: timber, reapers, roof/wall sheets, Gipson board, brick floor, glass, mesh. Base: concrete beams screwed together filled with sand and kadapa stone on top. Walls: bison board inside, sheet metal or mud panels outside. Alternative: wall panels of reinforced red soil. Roof: sheet metal plus insulation - false ceiling, therefore no need for ventilation.



House designed by Eric, Auzolan Constructions. Interior size: variable. Amenities: As the house is modular, the size and amenities can be added according to the resident's choice. Costs: Rs 2.7 to Rs 7 lakhs. Time frame to complete: one house of three modules for a couple, with bathroom and kitchen, can be built in 2 to 3 weeks, a family unit will take one month. Auzolan can produce 15 family units in a year.

Materials used: Durable, dismantlable, lightweight, thermal-exposed precast concrete frame and foundations. Floor: Kadapa stones (dry fixed). Walls: ready-made interlocking insulated panels. Ceiling and overhang panels: calcium silicate board (lightweight panels, waterproof). Mounting parts, clamps, lintels: Galvanized steel. Roofs: White corrugated steel sheet (zinc aluminium coated). Innovation: Auzalan is about to introduce a first floor, which will give more dynamics to the architecture, increase the density and reduce the costs.



Concept house 'Maha Capsule' by Peter A. Size interior: 15 square metre. Costs: Rs 1 lakh. Materials used: this is a structural system which allows for many materials to be used. Frame: steel or timber frame. Walls: Bison board or light weight mud. Roof: metal sheet or fibre glass. Floor: bison board, bamboo. Extras: mesh and glass louvers. Time Frame to complete: one month once prototype is established. Also: lightweight, prefab, modular structure, allows for many applications.

## COMMUNITY

# The Auromodèle experiment

New houses are coming up in Auromodèle community on private land. The trend seems unstoppable as Auroville is focussed on acquiring the lands for the city and greenbelt and no money is available for the purchase of land in the outlying areas. Recently, house construction started on a piece of land adjacent to the cluster of houses designed in the style of Roger Anger. More constructions are rumoured to be taking off there soon and there are fears that the design of the new structures may not be in harmony with the Roger's concepts. But how did Auromodèle come into existence, and what was its purpose?

Shortly after Roger Anger was selected by The Mother as the architect of Auroville, the idea of designing and planning a settlement outside the city centre was agreed upon. It was called Auromodèle. In the words of The Mother "Auromodèle is being built to make a concrete experiment and to learn how to live in Auroville" (18.8.1969) and "Auromodèle will be developed as a first attempt at community life in Auroville". (10.4.1971)

In her book *Roger Anger, Research on beauty*, Anupama Kundoo describes the beginning and evolution of the Auromodèle community.

"Auromodèle was conceived as a settlement of 2,000 inhabitants. It was planned in the early stages of Auroville's development, deliberately outside the city area towards the Bay of Bengal, as the first living experiment to be undertaken in

the creation of the city. As the name implies, this settlement was to serve as a model of the city and to be a playing field, a laboratory for trial and error and concrete experimentation towards discovering the nature of the collective life that could be expected within the ideal city. It was to facilitate the necessary mistakes and allow their evaluation in an area outside the planned city where lands had yet to be consolidated. Data about the emerging international community life could be procured from here and used to detail the city proper. This approach would relieve the pressure to develop the final city infrastructure immediately and allow life in Auroville to emerge while providing the residents who were already arriving there with housing on Auroville land before the city was ready. Auromodèle was planned adjacent to another temporary housing cluster for fresh arrivals called Aspiration, and various related facilities for everyday life were located there such as a school campus, a grocery store, the State Bank of India... Above all it was to be an experiment in a new form of collective life.

"The plan was to build integrated houses and gardens in a collective environment. A small cluster of houses was proposed there to accommodate the earliest members of the community. However, the larger plan was subsequently abandoned, and only the initial cluster remains in Auromodèle, with a few new structures added in different styles in recent years... This group of houses is unified by a consistent vocabulary of design elements and

construction techniques. They smoothly rise out of the ground through earth-red coloured berms in low-scale and flowing forms."

So what happened and why was the plan aborted? "From the beginning people were opposed to Auromodèle, as it was a futuristic project with pucca houses and infrastructure. Many wanted a basic life and they began to build elsewhere and founded their own settlements. Auroville is a play of forces - for some people The Mother's vision wasn't important - people were forgetting the idea of the city. But this was not a drawing or vision of Roger - it was a vision of the Mother transferred to Roger," says one of the residents. "We are very individualistic," says another resident. "Because of that, eventually the whole concept of community living started to break down, the settlement took a different shape and the plan never manifested." Roger stated, "How far can a planner create collectively? He can help, but finally without a change in the consciousness of the inhabitants there can be no collectively, however well-planned a city may be."



Residence in Auromodèle

Today, the cluster designed in the unique language of Roger Anger, consists of only nine houses. This design language was not followed by later Auroville architects. One reason might be that some of these houses are not so suitable to South-Indian climate; another one that ecological concepts began to get precedence. Today, Auromodèle draws many architectural students wanting to learn more about the history of the Auroville and the architectural language of its chief architect, Roger Anger. But 'the experiment within the experiment' has never taken off.

*Elaine and Carel*

The book 'Roger Anger, Research on beauty' was published by Jovis Verlag GmbH in 2009, ISBN 978-3-86859-006-7