1970, January 1st: Having had on the previous day a conversation with Satprem during which he informed her that Paolo Tommasi and Nata (Alberto Grassi) feel very strongly that Matrimandir should be built at the earliest, Mother tells Roger Anger (who had returned from France 3 days earlier) that Matrimandir should be built at the earliest and asks him to start working on its design.

1970, January 2nd: Mother has a clear vision of Matrimandir’s Inner Chamber.

1970, January 3rd: Mother describes to Satprem, who is joined by Paolo, her vision of Matrimandir’s Inner Chamber. Later that day, she describes it to Udar and asks him to produce measured drawings of it. He produces them on that day itself and hands these drawings to her.

1970, January 10th: Mother describes Udar’s drawings to Satprem and discusses these with him.
1970, January 17th: Satprem presents to Mother Paolo Tommasi’s drawings of the Matrimandir and its Inner Chamber and they discuss these.
1970, Early: Roger Anger does some studies on the future Matrimandir:
Roger studies also Matrimandir’s immediate surroundings. One can already see that he tries to bring some dynamic movement in the gardens – as he had done with the city.
1970, January or February: Inspired by the oval shape of a ‘shaligram’ he sees on the cover of a book on “Tantra Art” by Ajit Mukherjee (first published in 1966), Roger decides to reduce the height of the sphere of Matrimandir by 20%. In a 1971 interview published in the Journal of the Institute of Indian Architects, he is quoted as saying: “It is the exact projection into space of an old tantric symbol concerning Creation and Unity”. Basically, Roger understands that this volume represents the primeval egg and hence the unity of creation and he finds it very fitting to have such a shape at the centre of a town dedicated to human unity.

1970, March 15th: First meeting of the Comité Administratif d’Auroville (C.A.A.)\(^1\) whose 8 members are Mother’s appointees: Nava, André Morisset, Roger, Prem Malik, Laljibhai Hindocha & his son Suresh, Dayanand & his wife Anjani. To-be joined by Shyam Sunder for legal matters.

1970, March 24th: Roger presents to Mother 5 different models of the Matrimandir and a half model of the Inner Chamber of one of these:

\(^1\) Mother created the C.A.A. on Roger’s suggestion. He was upset that Nava had torpedoed the possibility of obtaining a substantial grant from the Ford Foundation and felt the need to try and convince him to work as a team member.
1970, March 28th: During the 3rd meeting of the C.A.A., André Morisset informs the other members of Mother’s decision to create 8 Auroville accounts and to have them operated by Nava, Shyam Sunder, Roger and André. Nava’s prerogatives, regarding Auroville, are thus reduced.

1970, May: Mother issues a message aiming at raising at least sufficient funds for the purchase of the 130 acres of land which are required for Matrimandir, Bharat Nivas and Auromodel:

*The lands for Auroville are to be bought and can be bought. The money is needed. Will you help?*

1970, June 17th: Registration, at Mother’s initiative, of a new Society: “Sri Aurobindo’s Action”. Nava will feel that it was created at Udar’s suggestion and that its field of work is part of those of his S.A.S. This will create a lot of hostility between the heads of these two organisations.

1970, July 7th: During the 8th “Aspiration talk”, Mother explains that all Aurovilians would soon join hands and build Matrimandir.


1970, August 14th: A Matrimandir “dedication ceremony” takes place around the shallow pond, which is immediately to the south of the Banyan tree and had been built for the 1968 Inauguration Ceremony. The intention is to raise awareness to the fact that Matrimandir construction will start soon and that a lot of human and financial resources will be required. On this occasion, Mother issues her first message on Matrimandir:

*The Matrimandir wants to be the symbol of the Divine’s answer to man’s aspiration for perfection. Union with the Divine manifesting in a progressive human unity.*

1970, September 13th: Meeting at Aspiration between a large group of Aurovilians and some of the 8 members of the Comité Administratif d’Auroville. This meeting was called because the C.A.A. had launched an “acquisition” procedure that would oblige the local owners of the 130 acres of land required for Matrimandir, Bharat Nivas and Auromodel to sell these and, when it became known, some local villagers threw stones at some Aurovilians...

Eventually, Mother renounces using this acquisition procedure.

1970, September: Mother issues a second message on Matrimandir:

*The Matrimandir wants to be the symbol of the Universal Mother according to Sri Aurobindo’s teaching.*

1970, October 12th: Navajata leaves on a world tour. He will return on February 6th.

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2 The names of the 8 accounts were: 1) Land acquisition for Auroville, 2) Auroville constructions, 3) Education at Auroville, 4) Auroville agriculture, 5) Auroville industries, 6) Water supply at Auroville, 7) Electricity for Auroville, 8) Maintenance of the Aurovilians. In 1980, our community will adopt the “envelop system” which derived from Mother’s system.

3 In a letter, dated 30.8.1974, recently shared with AV-Archives, André Morisset wrote to Shyam Sunder:

“According to my file, it is on March 29, 1970 that Mother decided to open eight bank accounts for receiving money intended for Auroville. These accounts were to be operated by at least two of the four people: Nava, Roger, yourself and I and she stated that at least one of each of the two groups. Nava and yourself on the one hand, Roger and I on the other were to sign.

When I presented for her signature the instructions to the banks these instructions were that the accounts were to be operated by two at least of the two persons. She refused to sign but I insisted, pointing the difficulty we would be in if Roger and I were both away from Pondicherry. Eventually she accepted to sign stating that the instructions were to be carried faithfully and that you (Shyam Sunder) were to make sure they were carried out.”
1970, November early: Roger returns from France where he sojourned for almost 4 months. He brings with him a new set of drawings for Matrimandir, which underwent a radical transformation in Paris. It has become a much larger and complex (it is now covered with golden discs and surrounded by two sets of 12 ‘petals’). Its construction will thus require a lot more time and money.

Roger may also have brought back from Paris this undated early study of Matrimandir and surrounding area. It shows already its 4 main features: Matrimandir surrounded by 2 rows of 12 petals each and then 12 gardens, the Banyan tree and the Amphitheatre.

We do not know when Roger finalised this drawing.

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4 On the horizontal section, dated March 1970, the floor of the Inner Chamber (and that of the footbridges providing access to it) are shown in dotted lines. In these 2 sections, the Chamber’s floor didn’t extend up to the dodeca wall.
1970, November 15th: Mother issues a third message on Matrimandir – this time for the *Gazette Aurovilienne*, at the request of its editor, Oscar Lässer:

*The Matrimandir will be the soul of Auroville. The sooner it is there, the better it will be for everybody and especially for the Aurovilians.*

Undated: Roger completes his plans for Matrimandir and its 12 gardens. He and his team start working on a working model of its area, which is in thermocol.

Undated: The eagerness to start building the Matrimandir is growing but it has still not been possible to purchase the land earmarked by Roger for it.

Entry in Roger’s notes:  
*Can he change the position of Matrimandir? He should move his town. That’s all.*  
(Movement of hands falling)  
*If one could move to a place where there has been no question of buying, and where people would be very happy to sell.*  
*It is a question of decisive will... of not being attached to one’s small mental combination... We will make Auroville very close to it.*  
*Me, I am sure that if I would drive up there by car and would see the place... I would find a place where one could do it and where people would be happy to sell. I am sure of it.*  

1971, January mid: Though the land for Matrimandir hasn’t been purchased as yet, Mother agrees with the proposal of laying Matrimandir’s foundation stone on her upcoming birthday.  

1971, January 23rd: Mother answers a letter from Shyam Sunder:  
*For the Matrimandir, Auroville owns only part of the land earmarked for it. We haven’t purchased any land for a long time.*  
*Would Mother like to appoint somebody to purchase this land?*  
*I don’t know anybody for this – except you – if you are willing to take care of it with my blessings.*  

1971, January 26th: Mother answers a letter from Shyam Sunder:  
*Yesterday we purchased two acres close to Matrimandir for Rs, 8,000/-.*  
*For Matrimandir itself, the land belongs to some 14 persons or families. Two of these persons have seen me and negotiations have started. The sellers are asking some 6-7,000 rupees per acre. It is a bit on the high side. Secondly, they insist that we buy at the same time their other lands at the same price.*  
*According to what I have seen, it is worth buying at this price and also the other plots which would be very important for Auroville after some months and the price would then be higher.*  
*It is indeed true and must be done.*  
*blessings*  

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5 Roger Anger’s personal archives.
6 Mother had already decided that the Banyan tree would be Auroville’s geographical centre, the inaugural Urn was already there and Roger had already completed his concept for the Galaxy’s centre area and this concept was in the process of being expressed in the “Rosewood model”. Yet Mother seems ready to opt for some other site which some villager would be willing to sell. She is demonstrating here her plasticity.
7 In a report Alain Grandcolas wrote: “Official [Auroville] sources promised and delayed, promised and delayed again [that the land for Matrimandir would soon be purchased]. The tenth of January was the promised deadline, but again nothing happened. Then, one day in January, Roger asked Mother whether the foundation stone could be laid on her birthday in February. Mother agreed. People could hardly believe it, since we did not even own the land. They wanted to see it in writing, so next day Roger came down and put a large piece of paper on the desk, which read, in Mother’s unmistakable handwriting, “February 21, 1971. Pose de la Première pierre du Matrimandir.”
8 Shyam Sunder’s voluminous and very interesting handwritten correspondence with Mother (including this letter and the following two) were scanned recently by AV-Archives thanks to his daughter, Manju Bonke.
1971, January 30th: Mother answers a letter from Shyam Sunder:

Mother,
Yesterday evening, we were able to purchase approximately 20 acres of land for Rs. 1,50,000/-. The money has to be arranged within 3 months. [= April end]
These plots include approximately 9 acres for Matrimandir and include Matrimandir’s centre.

It is good.
Blessings

Undated: Roger presents to Mother:

1. A painted thermocol model of Matrimandir’s oval Island with the Banyan tree, the Urn surrounded by the final Amphitheatre and Matrimandir surrounded by its petals and gardens.

2. A model of the Matrimandir itself with its golden discs, which Roger has taken from the as yet un-finished “rosewood model”. Mother holds it in her lap for several minutes while concentrating and applying her hands on it.
1971, Undated: Shyam Sunder’s notes of a meeting he had with Mother at her request.9

Pourna Préma came to see me one evening, early February 1971, with a message from Mother to see her next morning. It was something very important and in connection with Auroville. She knew what I will be told, but thought it would be better if I heard it first from Mother herself.

Mother had stopped seeing people from early December, and in the latter part of January, Nolini had resumed going to her and, then Madhav also. But it was just coming and going. Work was not resumed yet.

There was some natural suspense in my heart. Never before Mother had sent for me and on the way I felt its importance.

I did my pranam to her as usual and when I lifted my head, she smiled and asked, “Will you do what I say?” It was an unexpected start, but I immediately answered, spontaneously, “Yes, Mother.”

She was still very weak and her voice feeble, but clear. She first spoke of the sad state of Auroville and of the way things were being done there. She specifically mentioned the name of Nava and wanted a change.

“I have none else in view,”10 Mother said. “You are my last chance for Auroville.”

Then she spoke of the hard and difficult work that was being assigned to me, in spite of my weak health of which she would take care.

She also said, “Don’t think that I am giving you a big and comfortable chair to sit on. you will have lots of difficulties; but I will be with you. You will not give up saying that you are incapable.”

She added, “And I will hold you morally responsible for all that happens at Auroville.”

In the end she said that if I agree to do the work, she would see me daily with my report and problems, and with her divine solicitude and humility, she added, “I will try to help you.” I repeated, “Yes, Mother.”

The very next morning she asked with expectant smile, “So, what did you do yesterday?” I reported to her and for further steps suggested to wait for Navajata’s return. Mother did not like to wait, and we started full gear.

Though neither Mother, nor Shyam Sunder said it, on that day he became de facto her secretary for Auroville’s affairs. On 8.2.73, Mother will handwritten a message to make things clear to all: “For the affairs of Auroville and whenever Aurovilians are concerned it must always be done in consultation with Shyam Sunder to whom I have entrusted the responsibility of Auroville.”

1971, February 6th: Navajata returns from his world tour. He had left 4 months earlier, on October 12th. He attends today’s meeting of the Comité Administratif d’Auroville – it will be its penultimate meeting. It is probably soon after his return that Mother told him and other members that she was ‘suspending’ this committee and all other committees operating under it.

1971, February 17th: Mother signs with blessings a handwritten notice drafted by Shyam Sunder:

Q.: Should Auroville have more new committees?
Mother is not agreeing to new committees for Auroville; She says:

No more committees,
No more useless talk.11

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9 Down Memory Lane by Shyam Sunder, pp. 89-90
10 At Roger Toll’s request, Madhav P. Pandit asked Mother why, among all disciples, she had chosen Shyam Sunder. Her answer was: “André is too old for Auroville; Nava cannot understand Auroville; Roger is impossible; there is a defect in Shyam Sunder, but I can take care of it.” (Down Memory Lane, p. 17.) Roger Toll confirmed it to Gilles G. Note that, on 28.3.70, Mother had placed Auroville’s money in the hands of the 4 gentlemen mentioned by her here.
11 “Est-ce que Auroville doit avoir plus de comités nouveaux ?”
“Mère n’est pas d’accord pour des comités nouveaux pour Auroville. Elle dit, “plus de comités nouveaux, plus de bavardage”.”

11
1971, February 21st: Foundation stone ceremony of the Matrimandir:

A card was published and distributed on this occasion. It included a photo of the thermocol model of Matrimandir and area around it, the following words hand-written in French by Mother: “1st February 1971 Laying of the foundation stone of the Matrimandir. Blessings” and a message handwritten by her in French and in English; “Let the Matrimandir be the living symbol of Auroville’s aspiration for the Divine” were printed on it.

As per available records, the function (organised by Alain Grandcolas) unfolded as follows:

- The ceremony lasted from 5:30 to 6:45 A.M. 12 busloads of people came, along with private cars and bicycles.
- At 5:30 a.m. 3 fires were lit: one where the permanent amphitheatre would be built in 1973; one in the shallow pond next to the banyan tree, south of it, and one at the site of Matrimandir (though the deed of this land had yet to be finalised). As the owner of this plot had signed a “promise to sell” it with Shyam Sunder on 30th January, he had allowed Auroville to have a function there on this occasion. To this end a temporary altar (consisting of 12 brick columns of various heights) had been erected on the condition that everything would be removed the following day – and it was. It is at the centre of this altar that the 3rd fire was lit.
- From 5:50 to 6:10 Sunil Bhattacharjee’s recorded music (written especially for this occasion) was played and a collective meditation took place, facing east at sunrise, in front of this fire and altar. This recording included Mother reading her message for the occasion: “Let the Matrimandir be the living Symbol of Auroville’s aspiration for the Divine.”
- All those present then walked to the sloping trench at the bottom of which the foundation stone was to be laid. Alain Grandcolas wrote: “The foundation stone was to be laid not in the Matrimandir itself, but on the path leading up to the west entrance, so that even during the excavation it would remain in place.” The map below shows where it was laid in relation to Matrimandir and its ‘petals’.
- Then, there, Nolini-da read this text from Sri Aurobindo’s book, “The Mother”:

  “The supramental change is a thing decreed and inevitable in the evolution of the earth-consciousness; for its upwards ascent is not ended and mind is not the last summit. Out that the change may arrive, take form and endure, there is need the call from below with a will to recognise and not deny the Light when it comes, and there is needed the sanction of the Supreme from above. The power that mediates between the sanction and the call is the presence of the Divine Mother. The Mother’s power and not any human endeavour and tapasya can alone rend the lid and tear the covering and shape the vessel and bring down into this world of obscurity and falsehood and death and suffering Truth and Light and Life Divine and the immortal’s Ananda.”

- At exactly 6:30, the foundation stone was laid by Aurofilio and Nolini-da. It was a dark-coloured piece of granite, into which Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s symbols in brass were inlaid. Nava carried the heavy stone down to a platform together with Roger. Gene Maslow is also seen with them on some photos, helping Nolini-da. Prior to the laying of this stone, those who wanted placed flowers close to the place where the stone was to be laid.

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12 As Ved Prakash and his team just will manage to complete the beautiful “rosewood model” (of the same concept) just in time for the foundation stone ceremony, it wasn’t complete when this card needed to be finalised and printed.
13 The presence of three fires can be explained, according to Nolini, in two ways: in Vedic times they represented Heaven, Self and Earth; in our times they may be taken to represent the mind, the vital being and the body. Mother India, May 1971, pp. 264-65.
14 Auroville had up to the end of April to pay the agreed amount.
15 The recording of Sunil’s music and of Mother saying this message, in French & English is available at AV Archives.
16 Quoted by Ruud Lohman in his “Matrimandir Diary” in his 12th January 1973 entry.
17 Aurofilio (born on 7.8.67) was then 4½ years old. As the first Auroson (25.6.67-4.5.68) had passed away, he was the first (living) child born in Auroville.
Those present then walked to the area below the Banyan tree, where the rosewood model (which had arrived at 6:10, exactly when the meditation stopped) was exhibited for the first time, together with a model of Matrimandir’s structure and some children drawings.

Bonfire at Matrimandir’s site  
Nolini-da reading Sri Aurobindo

Map showing where Matrimandir’s (1st) foundation stone was laid (on poromboke land)

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18 Ved Prakash and his team had spent the entire night working at completing this model, which is why it arrived so late – but just in time.
Nava (holding the foundation stone), Roger, Aurofilio and Nolini-da wait while some people bring flowers.

Roger takes the stone from Nava & hands it to Aurofilio. Aurofilio and Nolini-da lay it while Nava and Roger look on.

The foundation stone held by Navajata prior to being handed to Aurofilio. Mother’s symbol is inscribed within the square of Sri Aurobindo’s symbol. Both are inlaid in brass in the (black) granite.
Pournapréma, Roger, Tanmaya and others admire the “rosewood model”

Kiran Poddar & others admire the model of Matrimandir’s structure, while Roger, Pournapréma and others look at the children’s drawings, which are also exhibited next to the Banyan tree.

1971, February 27th: Last meeting of the Comité Administratif d’Auroville.

1971, March 1st: Mother asks Shyam Sunder to go and meet the owner of the plot of land where Matrimandir is to be build and finalise at least this deal without waiting for all the others lands to be paid for. She issues this message:

For those who have some land to sell
There is a Supreme Divinity witness of all our actions and the day of the consequence will come soon.

19 Note that the dodeca wall, which is now surrounding the Inner Chamber was, at that time, also surrounding a similar volume below the equator as that it surrounds above the equator.
1971, March 12th: The sales deal of the plot of land where Matrimandir is to be build is at last registered. This plot belongs at last to Auroville.

1971, March 14th: Excavation on Matrimandir site is at last starting. Mother issues this message on this occasion. At first only volunteers from Auroville and the Ashram dug.

   The fraternity of collaboration.
   The aspiration towards Unity in joy and Light.
   Blessings

   * * *

EPILOGUE:

1971, September, early: As the excavation by volunteers isn’t progressing fast enough, coolies are hired to complete the excavation before Mother’s upcoming 94th birthday. At some point, Alain Grandcolas will be managing a team of some 400 coolies.

1972, January 1st: A collective meditation (of Aurovilians and coolies) takes place at dawn in and around the excavation (which is now well advanced) to celebrate the New Year.

1972, February 21st: A grand ceremony takes place in and around the excavation to mark the beginning of actual construction work at Matrimandir – a first concreting. Another foundation stone is laid, this time under Matrimandir’s east pillar (Mahalakshmi) by Martha and L. Ramalingam.

2008, February 21st: After 36 years of construction work, Matrimandir, its 2 rows of 12 ‘petals’ and the Amphitheatre are complete. Work continues around these...

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