



other considerations, where no rules can guide, or if they could, would not perhaps always give the right answer[...]"It is in this realm of part emotion, part thought, that the rest of the way must run, and it is at this stage that the architect steps, from the relative security of known and learnt things, into the world of intuition, inspiration, talent, gift—call it what you will, a world inside his head and far outside it at the same time—almost sub- or super-conscious. This may seem extravagant when written down but it is the unknown factor. I suppose it is here that each one of us has a separate and personal impulse—the point at which, although surrounded by the fact and reality of a project, one is alone and must make a decision to do this and not that, to do what seems at the moment inevitable."

In Poppo's own words: "Explaining architecture—the process and the building—is sometimes like wiseacring...pouring from the void into the empty... some things cannot be satisfactorily explained rationally.

I come from the School which is very practical and straightforward, where the aesthetic is developed from the material and not the other way round. Art or architecture that is not rooted in, or honest to the material and its craftsmanship—form for the sake of form—does not excite me.

My terms as an architectural recipient are: clarity in design—clear overview of design as in a single brushstroke; honesty in the structure—everything is revealed, nothing is hidden; spaces related to the human scale, nurturing the senses, giving the spirit space to breathe, and if the project allows, pointing to the spirit itself in its simplicity and playfulness. If most of these are achieved, beauty comes by itself, spreading subtly serenity and well being. Dirty corners are not allowed. All are observable elements; even brooms and tools which help manifest the spirit on the ground are, to me, sacred.

*I am not a heavy thinker or talker. Architecture, for me, is like planning and non-planning at the same time, letting the unknown come in. The New Year message of The Mother in 1969 was "Don't talk, act" and this has been the leitmotiv of my work all these years in Auroville.*

*Here, competition has no meaning for me. The project comes to me and not the other way round. Often I am just a well prepared receiving station. The ideas sometimes come early morning in the form of visualisation in the forehead while the eyes are still closed. Or it's as though the IDEA was already there from a need, the evolution of a process of solving a problem. Afterwards, a project comes where the idea gets manifested, the Quiet Healing Centre being such an example. It was the evolution of a problem that I had been trying to solve—in this case, taking the next step in working with domes and vaults, keeping intact in the background all the ideals of creating buildings that enhance health and well being. It is a to-and-fro from the inside to the outside and vice versa. The outside manifests in the evolution of a built form and the inside involves the evolution of my awareness, my own nature and the world—the creation as it is and the way I am placed in it. The whole process is a simultaneous whole—a reflection of myself and the elements.*

*Sketching comes later and as a tool to manifest these ideas aesthetically into a built form—sketching only as a search for form without ideas is foreign to me. Sometimes, ideas present themselves of their own accord in alignment with the scale, nature of material, climate, craftsmanship, functions on the site and the cosmic power of money, evolving eventually into a harmonious whole. Aesthetics is the result of the 'seeing eye' as an organiser, discriminator, discernor—simultaneously active during this creative process. Detailing plays an important role—even in the initial stages—for the totality of the design. It is again a constant to-and-fro from the smallest detail to the larger plan. Detailing is nothing but accumulation*

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The Kyudo Dojo,  
Mukuduvidu

of life experience. Models and working drawings are then only for others to visualise and build.

I still don't believe in computers, insurances, televisions, telephones... I believe rather in my fountain pen, my Leica, and health 'insurance'. You need to find the security within. You can always perform an action as long as you believe in your own force. As soon as you understand your limitations and doubts, I believe it is important to leave space to cultivate intuition and patience instead of overloading our thoughts and systems with electronic conveniences.

Hugo Kuekelhaus and Baubiologie strengthened my belief in how our senses in modern life atrophy by simply not using them. As no changes of sense stimuli are provided, our senses are subdued and our health endangered, rather than enhanced, through our built environment. This slowly affects the human organism, and in the long run, leads to physiological and psychological stress and disease, especially in the young generation, often growing up in a sensorily deprived world.

Architecture derives primarily from the human need for shelter, covering a multi-cultural span from cave dwelling to skyscraper. It has always to be seen in this existential light, not just in itself but with the whys, for whats

and wheres. If we lose this perspective we enter fashion. The result is egocentric, away from timelessness and Spirit. The Spirit is not Matter, it is behind it, within, around it.

This is not the exposition of an individual architectural philosophy, but rather a vision and the result of an evolving contact with the ever-changing world of space and matter, its natural conditions and consequences, its relativities, and its time-bound demands for absoluteness. It is a search, an aspiration, and at the same time, a dedication to the Infinite where the mundane and sacred lose their separateness."<sup>3</sup>

#### FORMATIVE YEARS AND EARLY INFLUENCES

Born in 1942 in a 200-year-old, timber-framed house, Poppo spent the first 11 years of his life in a small village, Oestinghausen, near Soest, a medieval town in north-western Germany. Life was simple in the scarcity of post-war times but full of nature's riches. It was ideal for improvisation, play, imagining and dreaming, the very environment that nurtured his unique sensitivity to nature and materials as an architect.

Poppo would spend time alone, looking for unusual pebbles, admiring the 1,000-year-old oak

tree or the willow thickets along the rivulet and climbing the bell tower of the old Romanic church in the village.

His grandparents' house was a *fundgrube*, a treasure house, where he spent hours going through the attic, old cupboards or his grandfather's painting studio where there was always something his grandmother was happy to get rid of! By the age of eight, he had acquired a reputation for collecting things that to others appeared 'useless'. His eye could appreciate the beauty of a not-in-fashion, hence discarded, antique.

Being born into a family of *maler und schlossermeisters*, master house painters and locksmiths, helped him understand the spirit of craftsmanship, and served also as an inspiration for his own forays into painting. Relationships, those that were formative, left a lasting impression. These included the pastor who ran boy scout camps in the forests; the village doctor who practised Chinese acupuncture at a time when Eastern medical systems were less known and his uncle Heinrich Schenkel who introduced him to the *Upanishads*,<sup>4</sup> the Samurai tradition, Japanese archery and Hugo Kuekelhaus.

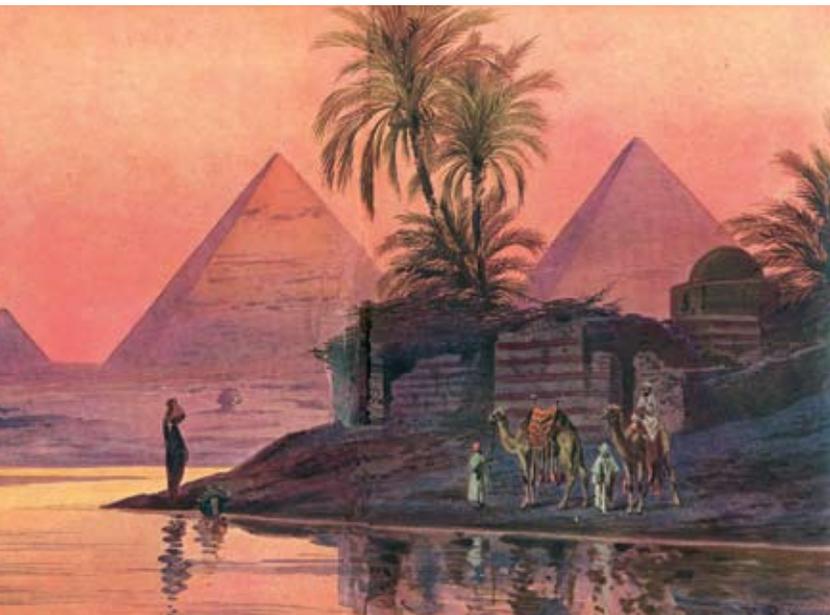
Later, he moved to Muenster, the capital of Westphalia, Germany, when his mother remarried. His stepfather was an architect.<sup>5</sup> Poppo remembers how the loamy soil there was different in composition from the clayey one of his village. A 'slow developer', as he calls himself, he was still building sand castles at 14! Yet, what was vital for him was to have a table in a room where he would create his own environment with his collection. This is a trait that has persisted: when he stays long at a place, he puts out roots and establishes his world.

#### AS A CARPENTER APPRENTICE

In retrospect, the three years—1957–60—that Poppo spent as a structural carpentry apprentice<sup>6</sup> were the most formative. Those years, tough though they were, taught him to value materials, the importance of detail, respect for experience and instilled an appreciation for the workers on site. For instance, a minor mistake in a joint one day and his attempt to gloss over it with a "No one will see it" earned him a stern look from the master carpenter. Pointing a finger at the sky, he said to the boy, "He will see."

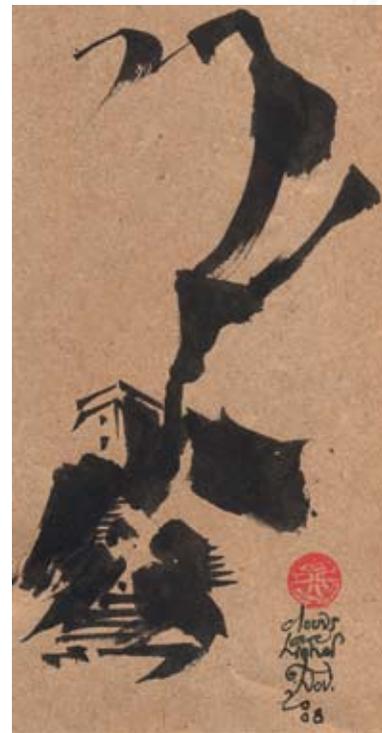
LEFT Illustration from 'Die Gartenlaube', late 19th century

RIGHT Radha and Krishna, Indian miniature on ivory



LEFT *Pink Mountains*, Nicholas Roerich

RIGHT *Istanbul*, Hans Doellgast



Brush Strokes, ink on waste paper, 2008

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Brush Strokes, ink on handmade paper, 1986

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