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## Return of the interior courtyard

By Sangeetha G. Sep 22 2010

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Remember the interior courtyard? What a luxury they used to be, and how nostalgic the memory of them still is! Having a piece of the sky and share of the rain inside your home was a luxury, indeed.

Today, of course, the sprawling courtyard flanked by rooms is a thing of the past. Or is it?

Surprise. According to Dameem Ansari, principal architect, Ansari Associates Architects and Interior Designers, city-based customers are now asking for interior courtyards.

"Interior courtyards are fast gaining popularity as one of the popular 'green options,' allowing you to get as much natural light as possible inside the house. An interior courtyard is an enchanting combination of openness as well as privacy," he said.

There are two popular types of interior courtyards — one that is at the centre of the house and another an inner garden in the side setback of the house.

"The interior courtyard comes in the middle and is surrounded by the rooms which open towards it. The inner garden is an extension of the house. It comes in the sides of the room with the other side covered by an exterior wall. Inner garden will be easily accessible from the rooms," he said.

Typically, interior courtyards can be accommodated in houses sized 3,500 sq ft and above. An 8x8 ft or 10x10ft space can be set apart for the courtyard. The inner garden can occupy the entire length of one room or two rooms and have a minimum width of three feet.

"You can have an interior courtyard in premium apartments which are on the top floor of the building. Duplex flats on the top floor also can enjoy the luxury of a common courtyard," said Ansari.

One can either go for a drylandscaping with pebbles and stones or design the courtyard as a garden. Plants which grow in shade are largely preferred for the garden. According to Ansari, some of the owners wish to cover the top of the courtyard with polycarbonate sheets so as to let the light in while restricting the rain.

"The main challenge in open courtyard is managing the water and moisture. Mosquito menace is a problem, too. Proper drainage facility is a must for an open courtyard," he said.

Those with a traditional bend of mind would like to have a stone structure for the basil plant in the middle of the courtyard and mural paintings on the side walls.

Landscaping can cost Rs one lakh to Rs three lakh and the polycarbonate sheets cost Rs 300 to Rs 400 per sq ft.

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While daily watering of plants has to be done by the owners themselves, there are specialised agencies that take up other regular maintenance work in the courtyards.

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