

LOVING AND LIVING WITH PLANTS

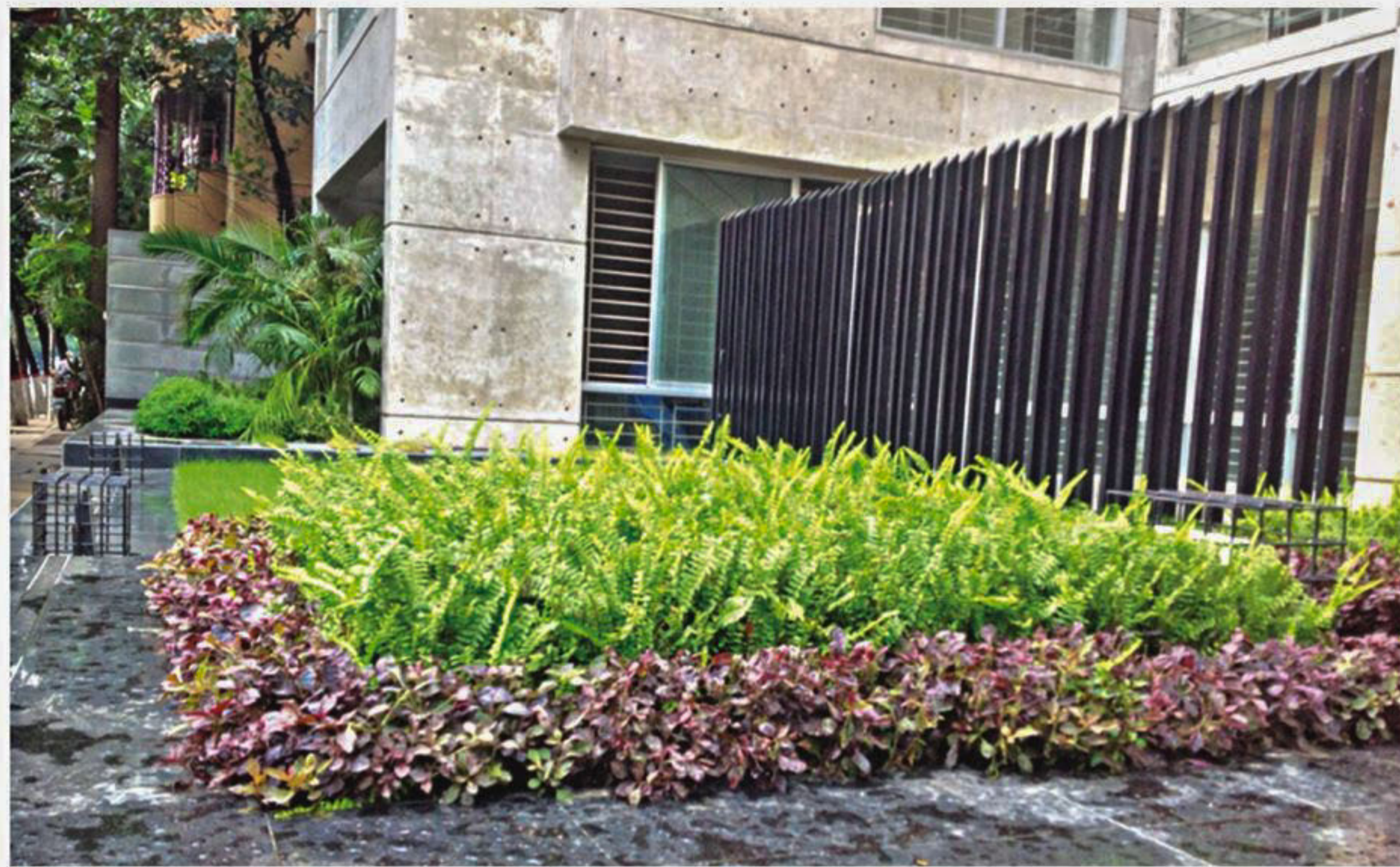
BY LAILA KARIM



Buildings - with or without walls

For past few years, I have been observing a change in the building code as many builders/owners have started thinking about greenery. The new buildings look smart, with futuristic plans, and many of the big buildings sport some empty spaces, especially on the frontal side. In my neighbourhood, I have observed that some very special architectural designs are adopted where privacy as well as distance from the neighbouring-building has been created through the plant walls. These plant walls not only have presented a new dimension to the look of those houses, but also speak to the taste and choice of the people living there. These houses are cool – offering a green touch to everyday life. It is also a matter of coping with reality – as every inch of our space is so valuable (across the country)- that we need to make the best use of it. Most of our houses in Dhaka city are almost quilted into each other (I purposefully avoided the word a city of concrete slums!), with privacy maintained by putting walls in the middle. It is high time we incorporate a major shift in the builders' thinking.

Although back in the day, no house was complete without a garden in front and a patch of kitchen garden in the back as well as and a few essential big trees – like a pair of coconut trees to meet household consumption, along with a spattering of guava or lemon, one or two mango trees and even a jackfruit plant. Then the time came when the price of land surpassed that of gold many times over, and the race to fully grab all habitable land space grew, every inch being cordoned off from the rest. These walls spoke about the owners. We have seen walls that totally block the view from a house. So the purpose of these outer boundary walls, in most cases, was to mark ownership as well as take care of the security issue. The low height walls of old times were not to block the views of the onlookers, but to make the whole building aesthetically pleasing, added to by well nurtured gardens, manicured lawns, as



well as the children playing in them. Then the fort like houses invaded, taking over almost the whole city, marred by boundary walls up to 7-10 feet high!

For the recent move towards a greener outlook, the credit lies with the new generation architects who are trying to bring the change. I have observed this change in the newer buildings – irrespective of their location and nature, be it residential or commercial, like hospitals or new school campuses, a patch of green is usually mandatory. While writing, the view of the tall building in road number 11 of Banani came into my mind. The building was built with green pockets



over its outer walls – through all 12 floors or so. It is a commercial building made on a small piece of land, but the architect gave a new dimension to it quite successfully, making it thoroughly attractive. In our school days, we read about 'the hanging garden of Babylon!' Now we have hanging gardens in our neighbourhood!

Coming back to our lament of high walls, perhaps you noticed the shift away from those, especially in the newer buildings which forgo the boundary wall completely. The attached photos are proof, where we can see that building with the exterior boundary walls made scope of an upright



horizontal garden with minimum maintenance needed. We can see that the layers are created on the body of the wall to accommodate plants – currently flowing creepers are planted in the pockets. But if the owner wants, these pockets can be filled with a variety a seasonal flowers too. We can well imagine that scene! So, both options have been accounted for in the structural design. The other image is of a building that has no wall in the front – instead it has beds of grass and easily available plants. I have seen another building with a patch of grass – looks like a green carpet that instantly soothes the mind. All these are good signs, with simple but inspiring ideas, especially for a suffocating city!

Please feel free to send me email to share your thoughts, feedback, and photos of your garden, or to tell your story; or ask a question on the garden issue. Email: lifestyleds@yahoo.com

Photo courtesies: Laila Karim

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