

Building a home away from home

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NEW DELHI: Ancestral homes always come with beautiful sepia-toned memories attached to them. For the younger generation, they bring back images of summer holidays spent playing with siblings and for the generation that has spent almost its entire life living in it, there is a story to tell about every room. Good times or bad, a home has been a part of every family's story.

However, the growing trend is to break down these houses and build modern structures or sell them because a family is unable to take care of the house. Pradeep Sachdev, an architect from the city, chanced upon one such traditional house in Kerala that was over 300-year-old. The family was unable to maintain it and wanted to sell it to someone who would preserve it. The first floor of the house, which was a granary, was made of wood. They were afraid that people were interested in the house only for the timber.

Pradeep bought the house and took it upon himself to transport every beam, rafter and tile of the original house to Haryana and rebuild the wooden structure of the first floor on a plot of land neighbouring the Sultanpur bird sanctuary.

The entire process of transporting the house has been documented in a



THEN AND NOW: A nearly 300-year-old traditional house in Kerala that was purchased, dismantled, transported and re-assembled in Haryana. – PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

film directed by Sudhesh Unniraman titled *A house from Kerala*, which was screened at the India International Centre on Thursday.

As iron nails were not used over 300 years ago, the wooden structure was built like a large jigsaw puzzle. Each part had to be dismantled with care, labelled, transported and re-assembled.

Over the years, a few tiles had been damaged, but over 80 per cent of the wood was fit enough to be reused. A traditional carpenter who understood the craftsmanship had

to be employed to knock, shake and cajole every rafter out.

Pradeep wanted to make his house a living space, and therefore made a few changes like incorporating a toilet in one of the rooms and building a spiral staircase.

The film echoes sentiments of various people who have seen their homes destroyed and the timber used to make either furniture or burnt as firewood. The discussion that followed after the screening of film saw people praise Pradeep for his efforts, but it also raised many

important questions about whether the wood would survive in the new ecosystem.

On how expensive the process was, Pradeep said the cost of transporting the house was less than that of constructing a modern house of similar size in the same location.

Pradeep says although many in Delhi at first thought he was mad to transport a house, many in Kerala have done the same to preserve a part of their heritage and let the memory of the house and the craftsmanship live on for a few more generations.