

A Slice of Chettinad

Chettiar houses were functional, yet treasure-troves of ornate carvings and imported glass. **Krithika Sukumar** meets architect **Benny Kuriakose**, who offers some handy hints on how to add a touch of Chettinad opulence to your home...



- Traditional Chettiar homes were usually built with materials from foreign lands. They often used glass from Belgium, marble from Italy, and teak from Burma. Concurrently, Chettiar homes are often an amalgamation of styles. For instance, Chettinad homes have high ceilings that are similar to colonial styles of architecture.
- Red and black oxide tiles were extensively used. The best of

these tiles are still made in and around Athangudi, using traditional artisan methods. Some outlets in the city also manufacture such tiles.

- Brass and bronze ware were common possessions of the Chettians of yore. Adding brass and bronze bric-a-brac and vessels will give the interiors a more Chettinad look.
- Chettinad home usually have exquisitely carved wooden

doors. Floral motifs are common. Some antique doors are available in the market.

- Making a new door and trying to replicate the design, is not a viable option. It would cost close to the same amount as buying a door in the antique market.
- Chettiar houses are usually very well-ventilated and have many windows.
- The Thinnai is a very common

feature of Chettinad homes. These raised edges along the entrance and courtyard, work both in keeping the rain out of the home and as a sitting option.

- A typical Chettinad home will always have an open-to-sky courtyard in the middle (that will be surrounded by rooms.) Originally, these courtyards were used for marriage ceremonies, and for rainwater harvesting purposes. They make pleasant sit-outs.
- Stone and timber columns are

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- Brass and bronze ware were common possessions of the Chettians of yore.
- Stone and timber columns are another common feature of Chettiar homes.

another common feature of Chettiar homes. Today, an authentic Chettinad door bought in the antique market can cost anywhere over Rs20,000. However, sometimes long-standing Chettinad houses are demolished merely to have their columns sold in the antique market. To avoid encouraging this practice, it's best to replicate these stone and wood columns.