Mahatma Gandhi lived at the ashram on the bank of the River Sabarmati between 1917 and 1930. It is from here that he commenced his historic march to Dandi — a milestone in his campaign of civil disobedience which eventually led to Indian independence.

Correa was asked to design a memorial museum and study centre in 1958 to house a treasure of some 30,000 letters written to and by Gandhi (some on microfilm), photographs and documents including several hundred volumes edited by his secretary Mahadev Desai.

The collection continues to be added to and is the major repository of memorabilia on Gandhi. The commission was the architect's first important work in private practice.

In order to reflect the simplicity of Gandhi's life and the incremental nature of a living institution the architect used modular units 6 metres × 6 metres of reinforced concrete connecting spaces, both open and covered, allowing for eventual expansion.

The modular simplicity of the structure is continued in the use of basic materials: stone floors, brick walls, wooden doors and louvered windows devoid of glass, and tiled roofs. The units are grouped in a consciously asymmetric manner to be analogous to the Indian village with its pathways and seemingly randomly placed buildings and its meeting points, in this instance the central water court. The initial construction consisted of 51 modular units. Some of the units are enclosed by walls; the exhibition spaces so created counterparted by areas for rest where the visitor can sit and meditate. Since its completion the Sangralaya was inaugurated by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1963 and the units have been added to, extending the existing pattern.

In this early work Correa demonstrates the uncompromising execution of an idea as a powerful statement of form — an approach found in many of his works such as the ECIL Office Complex and the later Kanchanjunga apartments — where single overriding concepts become the major organising element of the architecture.

Gandhi's possessions on display.
Right: The entrance courtyard to the ashram.
Section-elevation, modular units.
Open modular units around the water court.

Enclosed space overlooking the water court.

Overleaf: Shaded areas for meditation.