



THOUGHT LEADERS IN ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN



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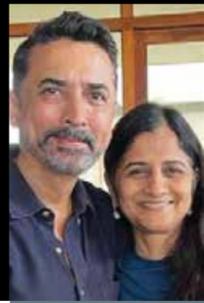
THOUGHT  
LEADERS IN  
ARCHITECTURE  
& DESIGN

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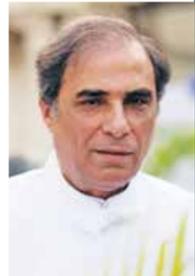
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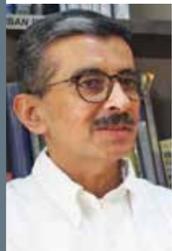
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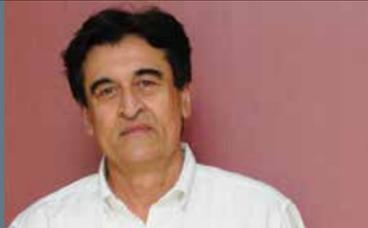
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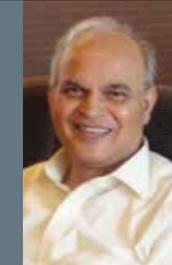
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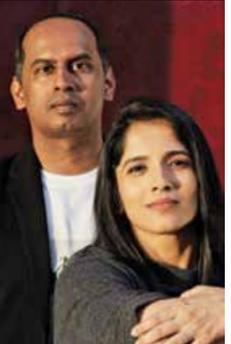
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Hettich Forum at Kirchleugern, Germany



Hettich Manufacturing Plant at Indore, India



Hettich Manufacturing Plant at Vadodara, India

## About Hettich

The world's largest manufacturer of furniture fittings and hardware, with annual sales exceeding 1 billion euros, the Hettich Group is a 130-year-old German brand, based in Kirchleugern, Germany. The company has a global presence in over 120 countries, worldwide.

In India, Hettich operations commenced with the dawn of the new millennium. The company attained a powerful leadership position in the Indian furniture fittings and hardware industry, within a short period of time. Hettich product portfolio comprises an impressive repertoire of furniture fittings and door hardware made with cutting-edge German technology and quality. This is complemented by wire products, aluminum profiles, shelving systems, built-in appliances, quartz stone and furniture lights, thereby providing holistic fitting solutions for all major segments from residential to commercial.

Hettich has state-of-the-art manufacturing capabilities in India, which enable it to manufacture and supply world-class products to both domestic and international markets. Its manufacturing facilities include two plants at Vadodara, Gujarat in the West of India, and one at Indore, Madhya Pradesh in Central India. The company is firmly committed to the clarion call for Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) by pursuing the philosophy of 'Made in India. Made for the World.' Along with this, its robust distribution network ensures that Hettich's cutting-edge quality products are available across the length and breadth of the country.

A pioneer in many fields, Hettich India has spearheaded the concept of Application Centre as a place where furniture fittings are manifested in their functional form. This enables the customers to get a touch and feel experience of its products and an understanding of the range of solutions offered. Apart from this, Hettich provides value-added services such as free design services, free doorstep consultation and technical support services among others, to provide a one-stop solution to its customers.

Small wonder, that Hettich is loved by its customers and widely awarded by industry experts.



## Innovative fitting solutions for cutting-edge designs

With numerous innovations and never ending new ideas, we have driven forward trends that help to shape the flexibility & multi-functionality of today's customer requirements.

Choose from our extensive range of Furniture Fittings, Architectural Hardware, Wire Products, Built-in Appliances, Shelving Systems, Furniture Lights etc. to meet practically any design requirement of contemporary spaces.



## Foreword

“Space & Light & Order. Those are the things that men need just as much as they need bread or a place to sleep.” said Le Corbusier, the Swiss-French architect, designer, urbanist, writer & painter, who is famous for being one of the pioneers of what is now called modern architecture as also the man behind the first planned modern city of India, Chandigarh.

At Hettich, we cherish this very thought as we bring out this compendium, that portrays work of select architects who have worked painstakingly on each of their projects.

This book showcases a comprehensive profile of select architects, their work philosophy, their firms & their awards that speak out their focused approach of bringing space, design & technology together to create architectural masterpieces.

Last but not the least, I would like to express my heartiest congratulations to Hettich India for their efforts in bringing out this labor of love, which I hope will be appreciated by readers & treasured by industry stalwarts.

**Dr. Andreas Hettich**  
Chairman & Global CEO  
Hettich Group of Companies





**TopLine XL**  
sliding door system



**WingLine L** with push/  
pull to move mechanism



**SlideLine M**  
sliding door system



**AvanTech YOU**  
drawer system with lights



**ArciTech** drawer system



**InnoTech Atira**  
drawer system



**Sensys** hinge



**ComfortSpin**  
rotating shelf



**CargoTech**  
wire products



## Award winning products for landmark designs

We have always been at the forefront of creating innovative products to enable our customers translate their vision into reality of creating landmark designs.

No wonder, that our products have been awarded by experts & loved by customers!

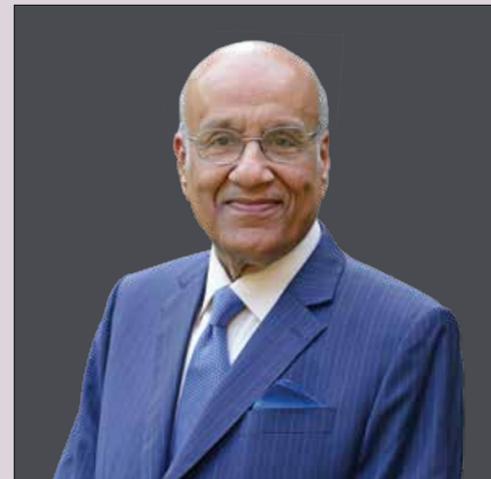


## Foreword

It gives me immense pleasure to present this special edition, a curated coffee table book showcasing a very select group of stalwarts from the architecture and design space. These are visionaries who have used their creativity and acumen to create architectural and design marvels, that have transformed the landscape of the country and world at large.

This book illustrates landmark projects of these creative geniuses who are the masters of neatly binding together art, science and technology. The focus of the book is on highlighting the distinguished approach of each one, which has led to the genesis of major architectural masterpieces.

It was an absolute honour to have such luminaries associated with this compendium and am confident that this book will find a place in our libraries.



**Mr. Saroj Poddar**  
Chairman  
Hettich India Pvt. Ltd.



## Ar. Alan Abraham

### Vision :

To re-connect architecture with nature, make optimum use of space, natural materials, lighting & landscape to reinvent and transform living environments and urban spaces.

## To the practice born.

The environment at the Abraham John household centered around creativity and art, with the patriarch a prominent architect himself. Alan Abraham says, "We were always in and out of his office, the same way that my kids, today, come to my office. We grew up in that environment, and in many ways, those offices were more exciting, with huge drafting boards and a lot of hand sketching, so it was a far more interesting experience growing up. Now, all the work happens on computers, so it's much more sanitized." That wasn't all. Going on site visits and experiencing the profession created an architect in the making, at a very young age. "It was never a formal decision that I would grow up to be an architect, but I was always moving in that direction. It was ingrained."

Bombay-based Alan Abraham studied at Bombay Scottish School, went on to studying at Mithibai College, and later joined Rachana Sansad (School of Architecture). He says this didn't quite work the way he had expected. "I dropped out of college after two years, to travel and work and finally, after 13 years, got my license, graduating directly through the IIA (Indian Institute of Architects). He says the methods of teaching were almost bureaucratic and questions not encouraged, adding, "I didn't expect them (teachers) to know everything, but I did expect them to point the way to the books that would answer my questions, and that didn't happen."

Wandering the by lanes of the metropolis of Mumbai, the young explorer learned a lot; about the city, how it moves, its architecture and infrastructure. This influenced his thinking and his work, particularly the Bombay Greenway projects. "We know the city very well, and the little tweaks that could improve it. That's what we are trying to achieve," he says.





*"A city should afford you everything; when you want to travel, you should have access to good public infrastructure without the need to possess it."*

#### Early work and later milestones

Alan Abraham says the practice focuses on smaller, bespoke projects, which are largely residential. He says their approach is very individual and dedicates focused attention to the client. Residences apart, their bespoke work includes a range from a restaurant in New York, a villa in Switzerland and a 'villa-like project' in Himachal that is actually a waste collection center. While the client balked at that, fearing the expense, Abraham says, "Good design does not have to be expensive, you need to think more about value than pricing."

Abraham says he recalls a sort of progression in the work he was given when he started working with his illustrious father, in 1995. He says, "I remember my first job was to work on a septic tank, then a pedestal for a statue, then a public toilet, then a school. Starting at the bottom made a difference, because you really start to understand how things work."

Habitually low key despite the power of their work, he says they are proud of the post-earthquake work they did on school and community buildings in Latur and Bhuj, and post-tsunami work in Karaikal, near Puducherry; none of which was photographed or published, despite being milestone projects.



He says the residential project they did for his brother John was well covered in the press, "That work was full of details and a lot of effort went into it, so that was definitely a milestone project." Alan Abraham is passionate about the public space and green space projects they have developed. "The mother project we developed for Project Greenway (Bombay Greenway), our pro bono side, was to build green spaces over the railway lines – the main aim was to prevent the 10-12 deaths that occur every day on the tracks. We won international awards for it, though it was unbuilt and never really covered

in the local press." Anca Abraham, his wife, an activist and a part of Love Your Parks Mumbai, was instrumental in the St Stephen's Steps project; a vibrant rejuvenation of the space. He also mentions VEscapes, Goa, which was based around the trees on the plot, making it memorable.

Their current work is centered around outdoor spaces : redevelopment of the garden outside Mannat, (Shah Rukh Khan's house in Bandra), redevelopment of Princess Street and a complete re-design of the Bandstand area in Bandra, with a continuous cycle track.

**Design philosophy**

Abraham John, his father, believed design should be very simple, very functional; Alan Abraham says, “We have just amplified that. We also happen to make it good-looking, but that’s a natural outcome of the process. We’ve always been pro-environment and conscious about the type of materials we use and encouraged ourselves to build less. Thought-wise, I don’t think we have changed over time. The new dimension is that we look at urban projects and we’re surprised that no one else is looking at them. We want more people to be proactive about the environment in urban spaces. We have the power to design, so we are proposing change through design.”

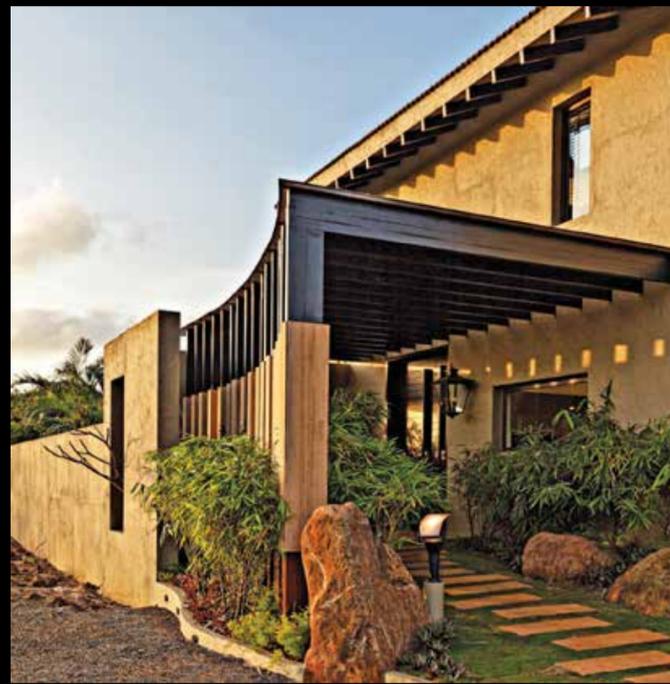
**Outdoor spaces in the cityscape**

Passionate about his city, Abraham says, “Mumbai’s geography is special; we’re blessed with a good landscape and environment. It’s got a west coast and an east coast, we’ve got a peninsula, so we have this feel of an island. We’ve got a mainland that feels like an island (e.g. when you go to Alibag, you feel like you’re going to an island). We’ve got hills and lakes, a river and a national park that’s the biggest of its kind within a city in the world. The problem is of access and of maintenance.”



He says India’s model of public architecture is anachronistic, with blind adherence to the Western model of 50 years ago, where everything was oriented around the car. Much has changed since then, with a reorientation to being more environment-friendly; reducing flyovers, building more parks, and cycling lanes, that benefit a larger universe. Alan Abraham says, “That’s what we should be doing. That’s what design is about – benefiting everyone!”

Alan Abraham says his focus is on the parked vehicle, pointing out that it takes up more space than the per-person allocation of space in an SRA building flat of 250 sq ft. and that the space of a parked vehicle is wasted space. He says, “Cars should actually disappear and reappear only when you need them.”



This is just one issue, he says there are several that need attention. "Starting with the basics, you will realize the quality of air affects everyone, rich or poor, so air is important. Cities are planned around the working population, the 25-to-60-year-olds, so everyone pre-25 and post-60 is not catered to. There is no infrastructure for the wheelchair or the pram. Issues of mobility are of paramount importance. We need to realize the car is not the solution, and move in other ways. We need to start designing the urban environment the way we design our houses. Everyone has fabulous interiors in their homes, but when you step out, the infrastructure is terrible."

Abraham adds, "A city should afford you everything; when you want to travel, you should have access to good public infrastructure without the need to possess it. When you go out in a city, you should be able to get a garden, a coffee, the space, the art; the city should be full of life. We live in matchboxes in the city, so how long can we stay inside a box? We have to live out there, and if we have to do that, we need good outdoors."

**Present day architectural practice**

Abraham says that while India has a lot of talent and is developing in the space, the broader concerns are ignored, with diminishing public spaces and no public architecture. He says, "Except for corporate villages, cities have no public spaces. Banks are dead, the post offices are dead, libraries never took off in India, museums are dead. So, you've lost out on all these public structures that define a town center."



Modern community spaces often center around shopping. Abraham says it is the high street rather than huge behemoths that add character to a city, despite the pivot to on-line retail, during the pandemic. He says, "If you want to meet people beyond your friends, family and colleagues, you have to do that in public spaces, however, once public spaces are diminished, they become unsafe."

**Life and legacy**

Speaking of the legacy of the firm, Abraham says, "I think the answer would be good work. We have old clients who come back to us, and that is always good. We are a small firm and we do good work, we have a focus on design and we apply the same principles and thought processes to everything from furniture to an interior, a home or an urban space."

The avid photographer still enjoys the craft and says lifestyle choices advise their design. "It basically comes down to the lifestyle, how do I want to live? If I want to live with music, art and sport, that's what I am going to look at."



**OUT OF THE BOX**

**3 urban public space categories you see dying out in the future:**

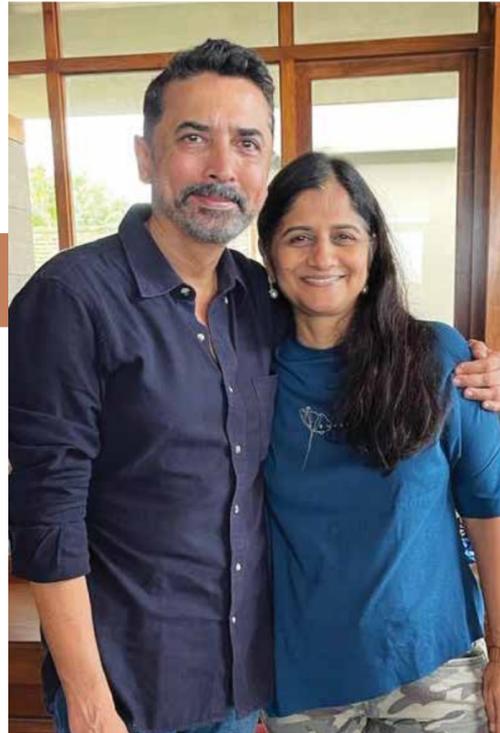
Post offices, banks, even retail might be dying, and libraries never took off in India.

**3 public space projects you love:**

Oval Cross Maidan, Paris Plages, The High Line.

**3 livable cities:**

All the smaller European cities are very livable. Like Copenhagen-their bicycle lanes and gardens are very good.



# Ar. Kapil Bhalla Ar. Jayashree Darda Bhalla

**Vision :**  
SE-ARCH, The Studio For Environment & Architecture  
Is dedicated to providing comprehensive vision of  
spaces, which make them instantly livable.

The confluence of pragmatism and puritanism.

The partnership SE-ARCH was founded by two very disparate architects, united by a common dedication to creating livable spaces, with a comprehensive vision. Their path and stories are not as dissimilar as their personalities.

Kapil Bhalla says he was intrigued even as a child, by how things were built, watching trolleys carry material at construction sites, and being fascinated at the entire process. He says, "Even now, as a practicing architect, I remember those images and love to be on site and see things happen. Engineering is a vast, complicated and dynamic field and

there is always something new to learn. I am still as fascinated by new things as I was as a ten-year-old child."

The Bombay boy studied at elite South Mumbai schools : Campion, Bombay International and Cathedral & John Connon before joining the Sir J J College of Architecture, saying he had an artistic bent of mind. He learned more than architecture at college, "I grew up in a cocooned, elite atmosphere but when I joined the JJ College of Architecture, I was exposed to simplicity and a different palette of individuals around me. That taught me a lot. I never knew what it was like traveling for two hours by a local train.

I could see different layers of society which I feel is an important thing in architecture; as a student this exposure had a greater impact on me, than the education itself. As an architect we have to interact with a laborer as well as the chairman of some big company and my days at JJ were certainly a great experience to learn to interact with everyone around. That was a big turning point in my life."

Jayshree Darda too had an elite South Bombay experience, filled with travel with her sister and fond memories of her teachers, growing up. "I had an impactful childhood and it has determined what I am today. I was





given a lot freedom as a child and went to Queen Mary School, which was known for its discipline. And these two contradictory forces made me what I am today.”

She says her decision to be an architect was not planned. “I happened to be an architect by a chance. I wanted something different and was good at art and found architecture close to it.”

The partners say they got better acquainted at college. Jayshree Darda says, “I was very clear about my career and wanted to go to the US for further studies. I nudged Kapil too. He was always an excellent student who often stood first in the class and everyone was in the awe of that.” Despite family concern, the couple won

scholarships to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and were off to the USA as husband and wife. They later rounded off their design education with executive programs at the Graduate School for Design, at the prestigious Harvard University.

Their responses to the new environment differed. While Jayshree Darda embraced the adventure, Kapil Bhalla says he was ready to leave in a month. He says he appreciated the different learnings he gained, saying, “More than the design, I learnt to observe and understand several new concepts and ideas during my stay there.” While Darda immersed herself into the new environment saying they had fantastic teachers, several of whom she is still in touch with.



*“As architects we have a responsibility to society and need to address deeper issues (social, psychological) rather than merely constructing a structure.”*

She too speaks of different learnings, “I got clarity of thought there. I went in to do my masters in landscape architecture and that introduced me to the intangible part of architecture.” This informed her design process, as she describes, “Architecture is very tangible and revolves around the form, structure, price, cost etc. But eventually in any experience, it the intangible that matters. You may use a product worth INR 300 or INR 3000, the money is not important, but the intangible experience, is. And that is why it is important to look out of your window. The view of what is outside there, is going to come into your room.”

**An unusual partnership**

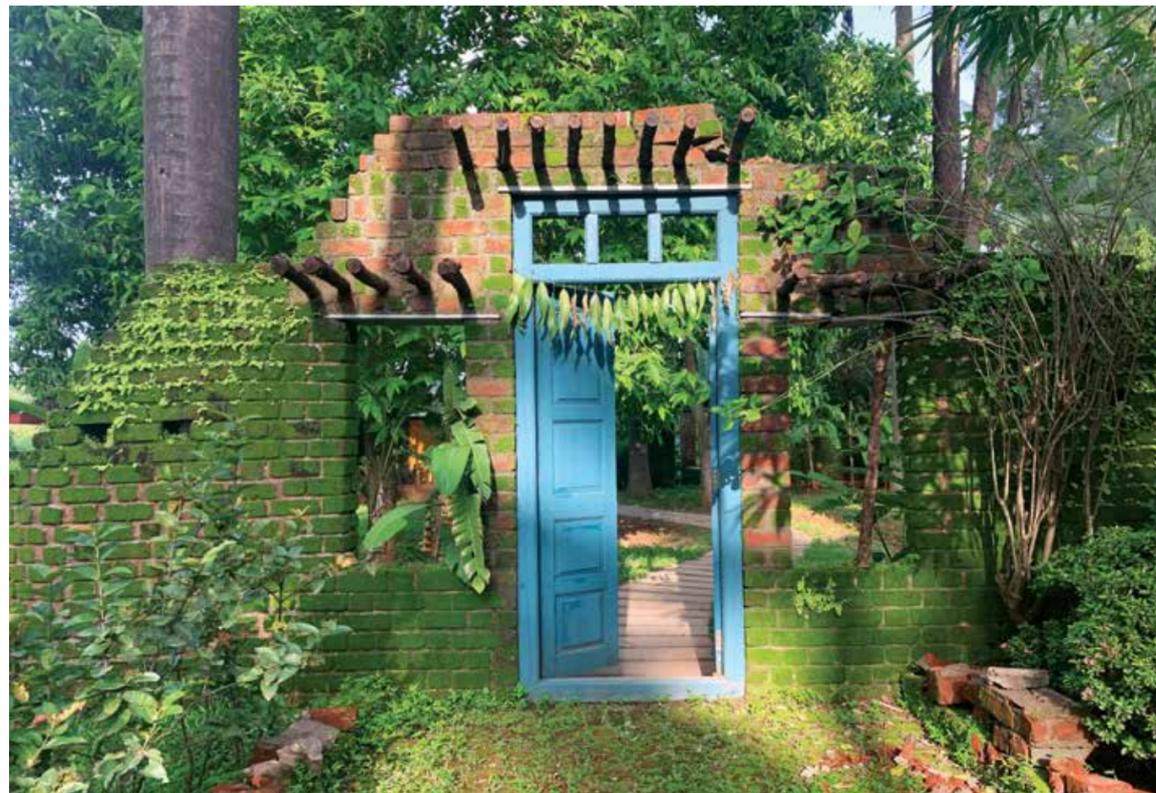
Darda Bhalla says working together was fun because it was “like a puritan and a pragmatist coming together” adding that clients were bewildered because they often received two alternatives for the same plan, but always one solution. Design is multilayered and includes orientation, light, geology, material and myriad other features, the partners brought diverse viewpoints to the table to offer innovative solutions.

They had a subtle but strong influence in the form of Jayshree Darda Bhalla’s father, the late Jawaharlal Darda, a freedom fighter and later a cabinet





minister in the Maharashtra government. She says he offered strong but silent support, “My father influenced us both of us. When we started our practice, we set up an office in an extra bedroom and remember him coming with us to buy three office chairs. His simplicity was imprinted on us. Whenever influential people came to see him, including the chief minister, he would proudly show them our little studio. It meant a lot to us then. However as far as work is concerned, there was not a single reference from him. We never did any government project. Our repertoire is clear. We felt good but not privileged.”



**Design philosophy**

“Time and design go hand in hand,” says Jayshree Darda Bhalla, “A design cannot be processed unless it is given time.” She credits well known senior architect Uttam Jain with teaching her much in this area, when she worked with him for a couple of years after the architecture course. “We were a team of about ten people working on the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) building. The care and detailing that went into the design and the feeling that one got upon its completion, was a different experience. That is rare now because too many projects are happening at the same time. Timelines are shrinking, there are too many projects, and they are getting larger.

They say SE- ARCH was formed with a desire to address environment and architecture, and through this search for new solutions. “As architects we have a responsibility to society and need to address deeper issues (social, psychological) rather than merely constructing a structure.”

The importance of the intangible ‘feeling’ of a place is paramount. “It is easy to lay some expensive Italian marble, or place an exquisite dining table, but the value and intangibility of the space designed is more important. That was taught to me by landscape architecture and has been the focus of my design philosophy,” says Darda Bhalla.



Their large body of work includes work for family and friends such as Kapil Bhalla's brother's home and most of their family members for years. Clients too become family. "Most of our clients are with us from day one, like one of our clients from Kolkata who we got through a small newspaper advertisement by Ganapati Greenfields. We responded to it as we did not have much work in hand then and they wanted an architect from Mumbai. This was a couple of decades ago and we have been designing several of their projects, to date. Most of our clients have reposed their faith in us over a long time, one of these is Harsh Neotia from Kolkata and all the Lokmat Publishing company's offices.



#### Pandemic thoughts

"This past year has been unique and it's been difficult, but it has proved one thing that as a collaboration of people, workers, architects, subordinates, we can certainly work if we have a positive attitude," says Kapil Bhalla. He says the period of the pandemic has given us pause and an opportunity to sit back and rethink. "We all were caught up in the routine, deadlines and schedules, the lockdown period has been a breather to many... this has been a disruption and unless there is a disruption, there is no innovation," he concludes.

Adding another insight, he adds, "As a creative person I feel that in any art form, be it painting or poetry or a novel or even architecture, the element of pain and hurt makes it better. It gives you a different angle because you get to soul search and can come up with better solutions."



#### OUT OF THE BOX

##### Architects you love:

Kerry Hill. Frank Lloyd Wright.

##### In your free time:

Jayashree paints and reads.  
Kapil listens to music and sings.

##### Outside of architecture, I would love to be:

Kapil : a farmer or work with food, might still take a break and do this !

##### Technology surprises I don't like:

Jayashree : I am taken aback by ppt presentations and other visual presentations where I cannot touch and feel the product I want to procure.

Kapil : We are surrounded by a lot of clutter, especially, the clutter of information on social media is too much.



## Ar. Khozema Chitalwala

### Vision :

My logo states my design vision. It is a brick over a swastika symbol which signifies ethos and stability. It is most difficult to be simple in design and I believe that simplicity is the core of our designs.

## Fortuitous meetings and a charmed journey.

Now one of the best-known names in hospitality design in the country, Khozema Chitalwala looks back to his roots with pride. One of two children of a middle-class family, the Bombay boy studied at a vernacular school and later joined the well-known KC college, Mumbai. On graduation, the young Chitalwala was unsure of his path, not keen on being either an engineer or a doctor, which were the choices his family saw for him. He says that it was a chance encounter with a new friend, Dilip Patel, during the post-examination vacations, that started a fascination with architecture.

Patel, a student of architecture often spent time drawing, which interested and attracted Chitalwala. A visit to the Academy of Architecture Mumbai, sealed the deal and Khozema Chitalwala decided that this was the life for him. He says the visit to the Academy of Architecture changed his life. He reminisces, "The campus was five sheds with an administration block, classrooms and the library. There was a banyan tree right in the middle and some fish ponds. That ambience triggered a different thought process in me as it was like a Gurukul atmosphere. I filled the application form and sought admission!" Despite a misplaced admission form and considerable trouble in tracing this, the young Khozema Chitalwala was soon enrolled in the architectural program which started his long and successful relationship with design.





**Learning a profession, finding oneself**  
Architecture school was a revelation and a time to bloom. From being shy and unsure of himself in school, Chitalwala says, "As soon as I joined architecture college, I realized that I needed to enjoy what I was doing. It was necessary to come out the shell that I had imposed upon myself." While the initial exercises at school seemed almost trivial such as simple tasks like making cardboard blocks and joining them to make designs, he says a teacher of basic design, Prof. Dilip Purohit, helped develop his aesthetic sense and understand spaces at varying angles. He says, "My journey became exciting and I began to enjoy it thoroughly. From an introvert, I turned into an extrovert. As a child I never even dreamt of becoming a class monitor and here I was campaigning to be the secretary of the student council!" The newly minted extrovert made numerous friendships, many of which have lasted to this day, decades later. He says, "We were a strong group of Shivaji Park boys and are still in touch with one another, often sharing all those

beautiful memories, including fighting NASA elections. The leadership qualities in me began to develop during this phase. Out of total three hundred students at the Academy, I knew over 250 personally by name. Ours was the batch of 1987 and almost everyone from that batch has achieved success as a professional. I think those were the best days of my life and my transformation from a timid caterpillar, content in its own cocoon into a butterfly."

**A young professional**

Khozema Chitalwala worked with architect Taufiq Talib from the third week of joining the course. He speaks fondly and gratefully of the relationship which continued through his college days, right to the last six months when he worked on his thesis. "Taufiqbhai was a great teacher who taught me how to hold the pencil and draw! Says Chitalwala adding that Ar. Talib kindly helped with the first year's tuition fee as the Chitalwala family finances were in flux for a time. Those were days of challenging time management, of which he says, "I used to get Rs 72 per

*"Buckminster Fuller says 'The best way to predict the future is to design it.' Hence, we as the responsible creative community of architects & interior designers must be very sensitive in carving the spaces which will leave their mark for future generations."*



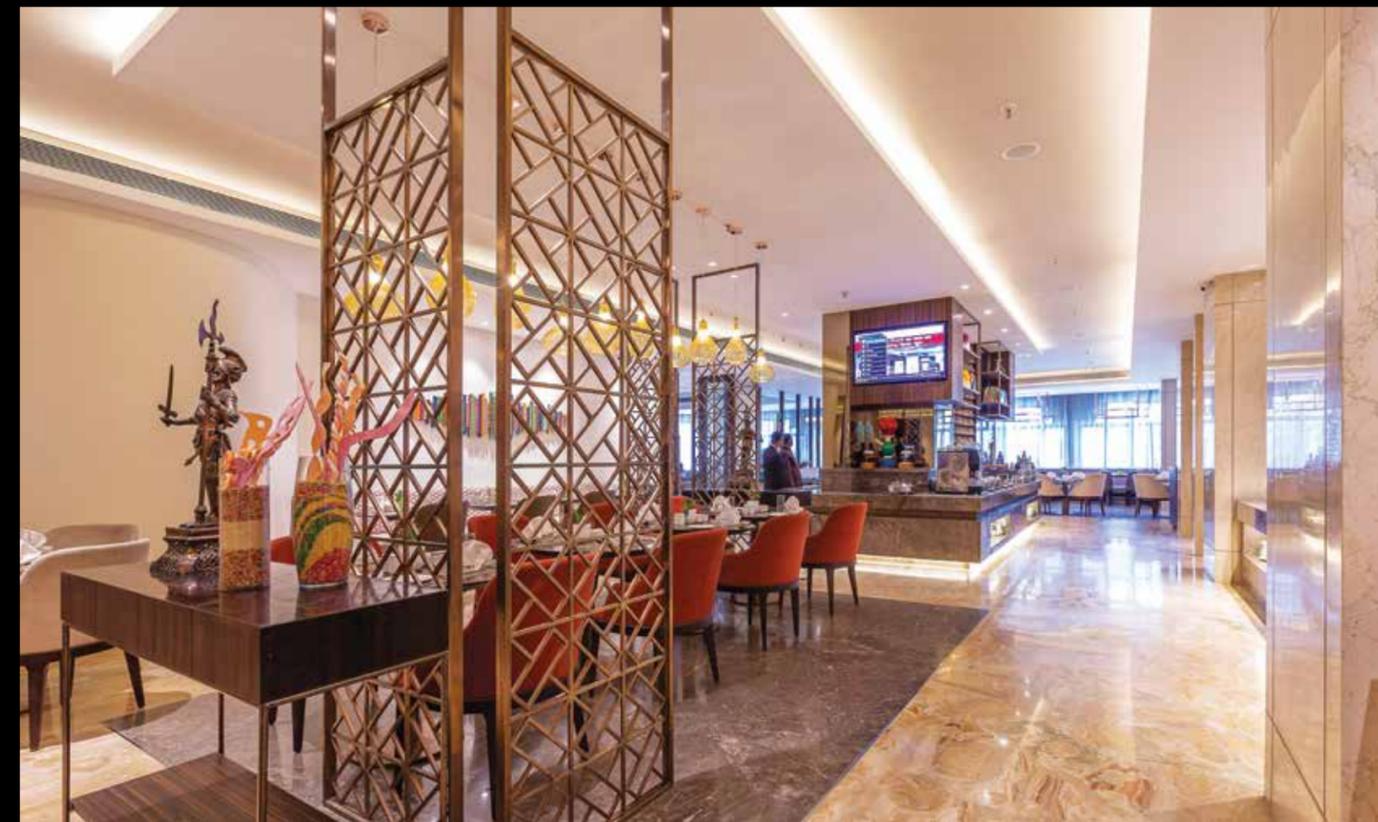
month then and would be at college from 7 am to 1 pm. The worked from 2.30pm to 7 pm or even later in the evening, then come back home to finish college assignments. This was my routine for four and half years." Khozema Chitalwala also worked with Ar. Russi Khambata of Bhosle Khambata Architects when he met Ar. Raja Aederi, who shared the studio premises with them. He started work in his office too and was completely won



over by his ideas and the several hospitality projects he handled. He says, "The seed of my passion for hospitality design was sown then."

This was not just a period of professional evolution, he was soon to meet a young interior designer, Sujata at Ar. Sunil Sadekar's practice, who asked the young architect to join her on an independent project. This was the start of 'Designers Group', when Chitalwala was still in the third year of the degree. They continued working on small projects and by the time the course was completed, they had five active sites working solely on interior design, as he did not yet have his architects license.

On completion of the architecture course, Chitalwala worked with Ar. Dipak Mehta and looked after his Kalbadevi, Mumbai, office, while Sujata Chitalwala joined Master and Porus group. He says his time with Ar. Mehta was "a great opportunity to learn." Despite holding down full-time jobs, the young couple continued working on independent projects after regular office hours. Speaking of this time, he says, "My day would start at 7 am and end by 10.30 pm. I was always energetic and enthusiastic to work and enjoyed every moment of it. Sujata and I began to work together as Designers Group from 1984, and officially from 1987. We complemented each other well."



#### Growth and specialization

A landmark in Khozema Chitalwala's journey is his meeting and subsequent working with well-known builder, Mohammed Lokhandwala in 1989, starting with the design of his office. He reminisces fondly of this relationship and the learning, saying, "He is another mentor in my life who taught me how to run the business as an entrepreneur." Lokhandwala invited Chitalwala to join him as a design architect, which led to the designing of his first building in Mumbra, which was a huge confidence-booster. It was during that period that they designed several showrooms for garment exporters and when he happened to meet Asgar Khorakiwala, the owner of well-known retail store, Akbarally's. He too invited Chitalwala to work on some interior design projects including his office as well as all three retail outlets in Mumbai by 1994. Through the Khorakiwalas they also did some good work for Wockhardt hospitals till 1997. Other important retail store projects included a prestigious assignment to do around 200 showrooms for Titan watches, all over India by 2008.

All this success notwithstanding, Chitalwala was keen to do hospitality projects, which were still elusive at the time, despite pitching for several. He then had a fortuitous meeting with Sampath Kumar, V P Projects at Wockhardt, who he calls "my Guru and best friend" and who gave him the opportunity

to work in hospitality design. Kumar had worked as chief engineer on several hospitality projects including the Oberois and later took over the portfolio of President, Projects for the Hyatt at Vakola. Recalling an old conversation he had had with Khozema Chitalwala some years ago, about his dream to design hospitality projects, he invited the architect to see the mockup of the new project and ask his suggestions. On conclusion of the conversation, Sampath Kumar told Chitalwala that it was time for him to fulfill that dream! This resulted in almost fifteen projects for the Taj Hotels over the span of the next two years, where Chitalwala's role was that of a local consultant or an independent consultant. Of this, Khozema Chitalwala says, "That was the beginning of my journey into hospitality design and I am thankful to Sampath Kumar for the opportunity. Today more than 95 per cent of our projects are in the hospitality segment."

Starting with a broad spectrum of projects, Designer's Group narrowed down and specialized in their preferred field after designing the Taj President, their first hospitality project with Hirsch Bedner Associates, in 2000. He says they consciously and exclusively focused on such projects, thereafter.

**Continuous evolution**  
 Passionate about updating his skills on a continuing basis, Chitalwala says, "Learning is very important and I have been attending all the major conferences, events and exhibitions all over the world for last several years. Learning never stops and the day you think you have learnt everything, you are dead!"

He adds, "Due to the digital media and increase in international travel, ideas are being exchanged and discussed globally. Earlier, this was not possible and India was far behind the latest international



trends and most of the big hospitality projects in India were designed by international firms. Now this has changed."

He says the nature of hospitality design forces a constant evolution of ideas and understanding of new trends and design. He learns by seeing what the world has to offer in terms of hotel design and innovation. He says, "Whenever I travel around the world, I make it a point to visit the best hotels and learn from the experience. Evaluating such experiences is important in my own design process."

The Chitalwala partnership is a meeting of complementary minds. Speaking of his partner and wife, he says, "Sujata has been the most important person in my personal life as well as in the successful professional journey. Without her, we wouldn't have come so far. We

totally depend on her for the soft finishes for our hospitality designs. She is a trained textile designer besides being an interior designer. Her administrative skills are phenomenal and she often handles everything independently without my interference."

The legacy continues at Designers Group with the next generation joining the practice in the form of their daughter Alisha, a trained lighting consultant which inspired the setting up of their newest vertical in lighting design.



**OUT OF THE BOX**

I love and pursue photography. I like to photo shoot my own sites because it gives me another dimension to look at the space which cannot be seen by the naked eye and one can find errors if any.



## Ar. Krishnan V. Ar. Parvez Charania

### **Vision :**

KPa follows a holistic approach to design merging the exteriors with the interior spaces. With a minimalist and contemporary approach to design, KPa looks forward to creating an environment, which integrates nature with the built form and its tectonics.

Simplicity in thought and design.

The architectural and design firm, KPa, offers comprehensive design services for architecture and interior spaces. Principals Krishnan V. and Parvez Charania have had five years of academia and professional practice from the L.S. Raheja School of Architecture, University of Mumbai, where they were classmates, and are registered with the Council of Architecture. They have been the recipients of prestigious awards such as the Louis I. Kahn trophy being awarded to Ar. Krishnan V (National) and the G Sen Design Trophy and a nomination for the Best Designer of the Year award for Ar. Parvez Charania.

Since its inception in 2002, KPa has worked to create quality architecture and urban interior spaces, ranging from industrial architecture, corporate offices, residential architecture and hospitality, evolving a design principle that lays stress on the fusion between aesthetics and functionality. They say, "Our design process involves understanding the client, the subject matter of the development with reference to the context and subsequent research in the field. arriving at a completely functional design."

KPa follows a holistic approach to design merging exterior and interior spaces, within a minimalist and contemporary approach to design. They say they enjoy creating environments which integrate Nature with the built form and its tectonics.





*“One must understand the essence of the space and what you have to deliver within the context. Also, how you behave with the environment and respect it, is important.”*

helped a lot. Ar. Ravi Shankar who taught us then was not just a mentor who did little hand holding and taught me to identify problems and find design solutions on my own.” He goes on to acknowledge the role of his uncle, Gautam Desai and father Suleman Charania who influenced his thinking. He says he learned a lot from his mentor and first employer, Ar. Ravi Shankar and later Ar. Kamal Malik, with whom he subsequently worked.

and laughs, “They did not know what architecture was all about...they still don’t know!” The friends shared their college mentor Ar. Ravi Shankar, but Krishnan V mentions his art teacher at school, who was a strong influence. “I had a drawing teacher, Ravi Chandran, who I learnt drawing from and he brought out the best in me. Architecture opened new avenues for me and I began to enjoy my drawings even more, because earlier what I drew was not as vast. I realized that boundaries are huge and vistas are really huge. Architecture taught me that design is not limited only to a certain aspect but is universal and limitless.”

His partner Ar. Krishnan V shares quite another memory of the early days, saying, “We are a family of engineers; there wasn’t any architect in my family, but I was very good at drawing and that’s how I got drawn towards architecture.” The alumnus of Modern English School, Chembur says his parents always gave him a free hand in choosing his career

He too worked with Ar. Ravi Shankar after which he joined Ar. Kamal Malik, with friend Parvez Charania after which they started joint practice in 2003.



**Early influences**

Looking back at his early inspiration, Parvez Charania says it was his architect father who helped develop an interest in architecture while he was still at school at St. Andrew’s. He says, “My father had a small office and I loved to see him and others drawing. After I completed the higher secondary in science at the National College, I joined L S Raheja School of Architecture which was known as the Bandra School of Art then.” He follows in illustrious footsteps; his father was also an alumnus of the school where he himself now teaches as visiting design architecture faculty.

The decision to be an architect wasn’t a simple one. Despite enjoying helping his father’s team with their drawings, the young Parvez Charania was more interested in joining the IT industry. He says, “I later analyzed my thought process and decided that architecture was the best option for me.”

Charania Says several mentors inspired him while still a student, saying, “We had a lot of hands on experience while we completed our course and that



### Stepping into design

Interestingly, the first project the young firm undertook was an aircraft hangar. They say it was both interesting and challenging with wide learnings starting from an understanding of the aircraft, its maintenance and how the architecture around an aircraft should be. They add, "It was an expansive learning experience with engineers, maintenance and other ground staff. There were other senior consultants too, (Shirish Patel was the Consultant on the project) and that taught us how to address every aspect of design and how to communicate in professional practice."

The partners say the scale of the project or the design is not important because the thought process of designing even a small project is the same as one that's larger. They describe the enjoyment of a project designing furniture for a company in the US, saying, "It was very exciting because it was a real hands on experience! We did mock up models, there were several tests and the entire process was engaging. On the other hand,

when you design a large project like an aircraft hangar the scale is different but the excitement is the same. Whether it is a residential project or a restaurant design, the output and effort are same. The attention detail is also same."

With the excitement come the challenges. KPa architects say every project has its own challenges. In residential projects, the client wishes to represent himself through the project and quite often, multiple family members are involved in design inputs. At other times, the client leaves it entirely to the designers, this pulls up the challenge of understanding the client and their specific needs for their space. They say the satisfaction lies in delivery. "When we are given a completely free hand and when the project is complete, the client is happy that we gave him something new."

The more technical a project is, the larger the area of challenge. They describe the design of airline catering units saying, "The kitchen is totally different from the normal restaurant



kitchen, and (in this case) the issue was the limited space. Earlier, they always had expansive kitchens on a single level. We turned it into a vertical space and addressed the challenge in that project."

Ultimately, the space is for the user. They say, "The user of any particular space is most important. It is the user who decides whether the design is good or not good. This user centric philosophy guides our design principles."

### The Indian reality

Working in the Indian architectural space is not always a fulfilling experience. The architects deplore the lack of respect the profession commands in India, as opposed to that overseas. "Architecture has no power in India compared to the power it holds internationally, and architects are still not recognized well enough as professionals. A large number of people still think design is a very simple task. Some clients do understand the value of a design but many times a client has to be educated, and that itself is a challenging task. Unlike internationally, architects are not paid well in India."



The quality of education too is an issue according to architects Krishnan and Parvez, who believe the educational system needs a revamp and that architecture is seen as a poor second choice after medicine or engineering. "Today, several students choose architecture because they fail to get admission for medicine or engineering; it is not their first choice. That itself is a basic problem." They add that the burgeoning number of architecture schools that have come up over the last few years offer a compromised level of quality of education and say, "We can't expect professional design architects from these schools in the near future who can educate clients and people at large about design."

They see the practice hit by a crisis of confidence looking at it in the perspective of a megapolis like Mumbai. "Perhaps we have the highest number of architects (in Mumbai) who truly believe in sustainable architecture but commercial interests and corruption are an impediment. There is so much talent in India but we have a lack of belief. Clients pay exorbitant fees to engage foreign architects but they are not ready to show confidence in Indian architects."

#### Shared learning

KPa have never restricted themselves to the design any particular space. They say, "We started off as designers of an aircraft hangar and moved on to design residences, hotels, kitchens and even furniture. Learning something

new always excites us. For example, when we designed a veterinary hospital, we had to undertake a research in understanding animal behavior. We did several case studies to understand how animals react to different environments. It is easier to understand human behavior because the indicators and responses are clearly understandable. We visited similar hospitals in Thailand and the US to understand various aspects of animal response to spaces. It was difficult because neither of us is a pet lover. We also understood that pets in the USA or in Thailand do not behave the same way as Indian pets, where we have a large number of strays. So, replicating an international model is not possible, we had to be contextual. Now, fifty percent of this hospital is reserved for strays."

Krishnan and Parvez emphasize quality, context and the environment, especially in their education of the next generation of architects and say, "We keep telling the youngsters whom we teach, to aspire for quality. One must understand the essence of the space and what you have to deliver within the context. Also, how you behave with the environment and respect it, is important."

Through the years of practice, KPa has developed a team of associate consultants for development of design in the fields of structural engineering, electrical engineering, plumbing and firefighting, mechanical engineering and landscaping.



#### OUT OF THE BOX

##### A favorite pastime:

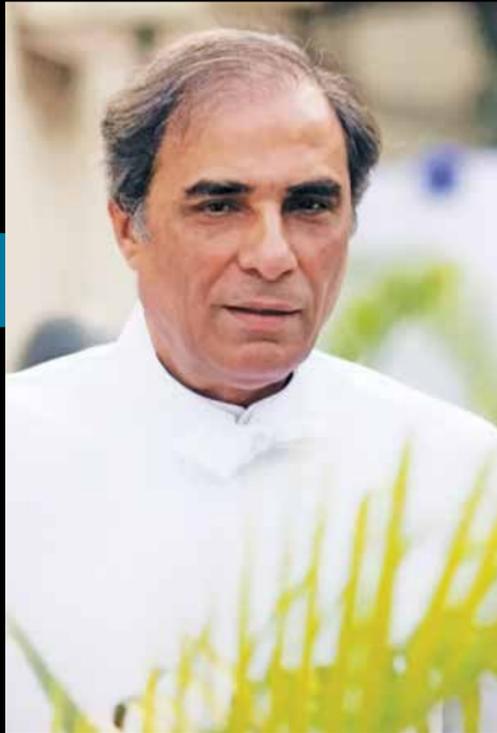
We both like sketching and drawing.

##### If not at work, you would:

We love travel and this travel need not be somewhere far way. Just getting out of the familiar surroundings is quite cathartic.

##### Top stress busters:

We both love music and movies too. Both are great stress busters.



## Ar. Hafeez Contractor

**Vision :**  
A home for every Indian.

## Changing skylines.

### Fortuitous meetings

Imbued with a sense of gratitude and respectful of the help and opportunities he has received, India's best-known name in architecture speaks fondly of his early influences; teachers who advised him, admonished and encouraged him, saying, "I have been fortunate to meet the right people at the right time, though sometimes, I was foolish not to understand that they were helping me." Some memories stand out; the 5th standard teacher who wrote 'No luck without hard work' on the blackboard; the school principal, Bejan Desai, who advised serious study. An English teacher who deemed the young Contractor "useless" as he preferred drawing bikes and guns to study and a cousin who insisted he join architecture, rather than the army or the police force.

He did act on their recommendations, but was unable to secure admission to a college of architecture, on completing the SSC certificate examination. An architect cousin Kharegat saw the young Hafeez Contractor's capacity to draw, and asked him to join his firm, steering him along the path to architecture. This was cemented when his architect cousins Tamas and Dinyar, approached Mr. Dallas, head of the Indian Institute of Architects for a letter recommending Contractor

to Mr. Wandrekar, then the director of the Academy of Architecture. Despite poor grades (48% against the cut off mark for admission, of 80%) Mr. Wandrekar permitted Hafeez Contractor to sit for the entrance exam, promising him admittance if he cleared it, which he did. He says, "I learnt new terms like 'section' and 'plan' there and realized I was already doing them all along while working with my cousin Khareghat from 1968."





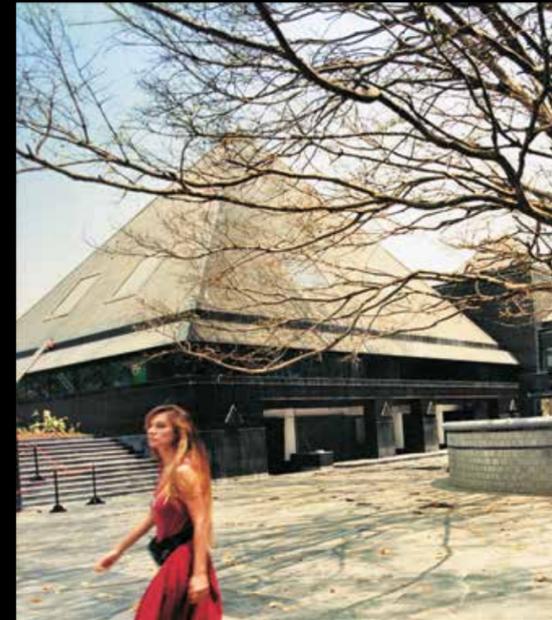
Summing up these serendipitous meetings, Hafeez Contractor says, "Meeting the right people has been important and God has been kind to me. When I decided to start independent practice in 1982, I did not have to struggle to get an office. A well-wisher gave me this office without charging a deposit."

Changing times. Appropriate architectural solutions. Contractor speaks of a different time in architecture, with the scale of project being vastly smaller, "Getting one or two jobs of 6000 or 10,000 sq. ft. was a great thing," he explains at a time when the largest architectural firm, Chawla and Associates, had strength of 20 - 30 architects. "I remember a guy came to us and said he wanted to make a 'Nagar' which was just 70,000 sq. ft."

It was also a different time in the life of the city, with far smaller population and development contained closer to the city center. Speaking of Versova, now a bustling, overcrowded suburb of Mumbai, he says, "When we went to Versova for the first time to design a building, it was like a desert with sand dunes and camels! There was a lot of opposition to the development there."

Conscious of the new realities of architecture, and the changing context of urbanization and growth and evolution from rural to urban and the enormous migration from rural to urban areas, Contractor says, the practice must evolve. The profile of employment has also pivoted from manufacturing to service. And it's all seen in the context of the enormous increase in

*"Whatever we do has to be appropriate for the time. Today, times are changing completely."*



population from 873 million in 1990 to a billion in 2000 and 1.4 billion today. Hafeez Contractor says while 35% of the Indian population live in cities today, this figure is expected to double in the future; adding that the onus is then on the architect to create solutions for the burgeoning urban population. He says, "Economists are discussing building a new India. We have to build one Chicago every year. I believe we do not have appropriate housing for over 25 percent of our population. Millions live in slums in India; one in two Mumbaikars live in slums, one in two Delhiites live in slums as do one in three in Kolkata."

Making the case for razing and reconstruction, he says many Indian cities face the issue of dilapidated structures, pointing to Mumbai's Mohammad Ali Road area with buildings in extremely poor condition, broken staircases and unhygienic conditions. He adds that this is true of several of our old cities and towns.



Hafeez Contractor discusses the path of construction in the years ahead, saying the population is young and well exposed, and will soon need homes and offices. The question arises of how these will be provided.

Urban solutions for a warming planet. Contractor says the need of the present time is urban renewal, to revive old cities. He puts the need for increased urban spaces in the context of the need for green spaces, saying 60% of India's land is rural, with forest cover of 27 per cent which we have committed to raising to 37 per cent in the Paris Accord while 7 per cent is under wetlands. He compares this with 2-3 per cent under urban areas in Europe, where infrastructure is in place and populations are dwindling.

He has a solution : to build upwards. He says, "Are we going to limit our urban areas when there is a demand for new cities? We need urban revival. Let's go higher! Let's leave more space for greenery. We have eaten into the forest for so many years; now let's think of how we can bring forest to the city, to create better living conditions."



Commenting on the practice in the last decades, he says the focus has been on creating the feel of abundance through the special spaces of a project : drop off areas, landscaping and fountains, elevation treatment and so on. While this was the accepted norm, he says what's important now is what he calls 'zero waste architecture' where what's necessary and most appropriate is done. Excess consumption of land, materials like cement, natural resources all point to failure, he says emphatically, adding that this happens all over the world predicting tragic consequences if we continue. "If we do not conserve and honor the environment, we are doomed. We are like a wheelbarrow on a slope, no one can stop it. So, the onus is on us. Sea levels are rising, and most coastal cities are predicted to be inundated by water. Ours is the first generation that can do something about it. And ours is also the last generation that can do anything!"

**Being future ready**

Architecture has a role in environment, according to Hafeez Contractor. "Architects have a responsibility to conserve resources," he says, adding that our dwindling natural resources will all be depleted in a few decades. His vision of the future sees denser cities and taller structures. "While we are concerned about several other issues like fossil fuels, as an architect, I would like to focus on how to design our future cities and buildings. We should have dense cities with proper surface as well as underground infrastructure. The buildings of the future would be higher, bigger and bulkier. We should





not focus on road transport and most of our transportation could be vertical. If we build dense cities, buildings would be more vertical and less horizontal. We can leave larger areas for greenery and forest.”

He says this way forward would also increase food security, which is a major issue as agricultural land is shrinking. “Land is the most

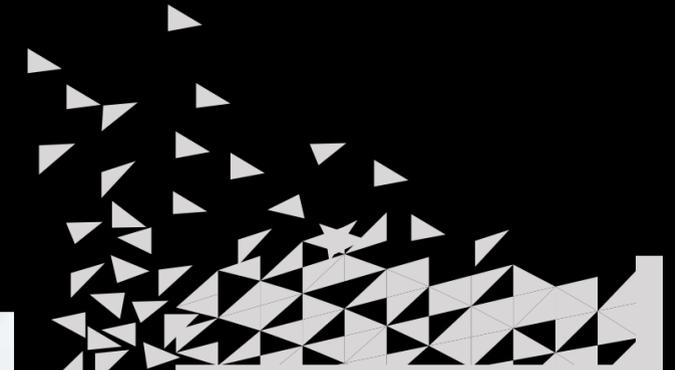
precious commodity today because it is not manufactured like other commodities,” says Contractor. “We cannot be making new cities mindlessly, but need to redevelop our existing cities. We have already occupied too much land. We should not create more hard surfaces and block the rain water from percolating into the ground. We have to focus on conserving.”

Despite his enormous success, Hafeez Contractor says architecture is an undervalued function. He speaks with characteristic passion of his chosen field. “Architecture is challenging. The work is deadline driven. It is ten times more challenging to design a good building than any other art form but unfortunately, we still do not respect good architectural building. Someone designs a salwar or a ghagra or a wedding dress and the media will makes much of it and writes it up. But when an architect loses sleep over designing a good building, no one takes note of it. I have never seen beautiful building design featured in the mainstream media.



So here, the important question that arises is, are we as Indians, fit for good architecture? Can we appreciate good architectural design? They want (and appreciate) good architecture in other countries.”

Casting some of the responsibility for uninspired building in the country, on the governance, Contractor believes post-Independence legality and bye-laws have been a roadblock. He points out, “What fabulous structures did we create post-Independence? Hardly any! Our bylaws are not fit to for good building. We do not deserve good architecture and it is sad that as an architect I have to say this.” Despite this, he believes in the future, one that lies in the hands of smart, educated and aware young citizens.



#### OUT OF THE BOX

**Information technology is:**  
double-edged sword. Youngsters have an access to information but how much of it is used?

**Success without hard work:**  
Happens only in the movies !

**Architecture is:**  
Like a jigsaw puzzle. I am given a plot and I have to consider and fit several factors like bylaws, land ceiling laws, fire laws and construct.



## Ar. Kanhai Gandhi

### **Vision :**

To create contextual, artistic & bespoke design solutions for each project that strike the right note between practicality and aesthetics, constraints, and aspirations.



## Power in diversity : the company with three principals.

Architecture was a surprise choice for all three principals of KNS Architects. While Shresht Kashyap's family was involved in Bollywood, he aspired to being a cricketer, playing for school and college teams. Neemesh Shah's father was an interior designer, which brought him the closest to architecture, of the three, while Kanhai Gandhi's family was populated with chartered accountants, traders and businessmen.

Kanhai Gandhi says he was awed by monuments like the pyramids wondering about monumental structures that were created despite the lack of technology. Later, he flirted with a career in medicine, but bowed to the creative and chose architecture. While interning at his chartered accountancy firm, he learned how a business is run, an experience that helped when they started their own practice.

### **Differences that unite**

The friends met at the Academy of Architecture, Mumbai where they were classmates for five years. When they graduated in 1995 they say, "We were close buddies by then, like characters in the famous movie 'Three Idiots!'" With such disparate personalities, they surprised their classmates with their decision to come together, in their practice; a decision that has worked well. They say, "We have known one another for the last 31 years and do influence one another. We were told that architects had big egos. Somehow, we never had that issue between us."

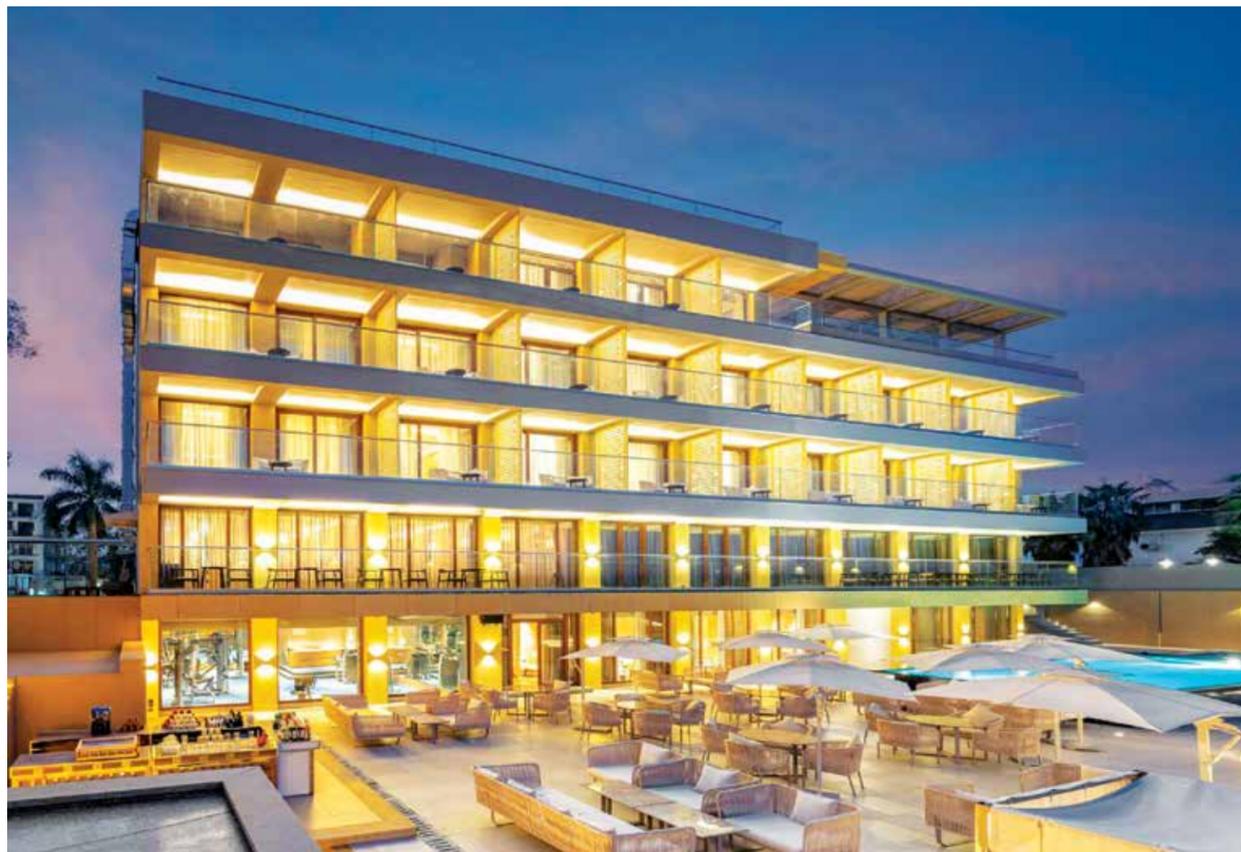
Speaking of the diverse gifts each partner brought to the table, Gandhi says, "Besides being an excellent cricketer, Shresht has the gift of the gab and can communicate well. Nimish is persuasive by nature and good at convincing. He is also a go getter who would not stop at anything till the task is complete. I always wanted to excel and leave a legacy behind. There was also peer pressure, as all my cousins did well in their respective professions. When the three of us began the practice, we met a client who asked us who was the principal architect in our firm? We said all three of us !"





A love for research and learning was honed with long hours at the library, in the days before information technology was widely available. The trio learned about Frank Lloyd Wright, Santiago Calatrava and Antoni Gaudi who influenced him and Tadao Ando. Reveling in their contrasting styles the young architects loved to understand what they did and how they did it. It was a revelation and one that convinced a still unsure Kanhai Gandhi, that he had chosen the right path.

However, it was practical, on-the-job learnings, that were invaluable, as Gandhi found when he did the interiors of some homes, during his college days. Early learnings such as a memorable hands-on experience of actually placing bricks in situ on a brick floor they worked on together at Rachna Sansad, during NASA,



*“The best learning is when you are actually there to experience these spaces, and you realize these are landmarks not just because they are beautiful but because of the thought behind the design.”*

and teachers’ words, still resonate. Another learning, is being taught to start from a dot and visualize a design. They say, “Our teachers told us that the dot is the seed from which everything starts. We did not think it was meaningful then, but now, after over 25 years of practice, it sounds so relevant.”

**Early work and milestones**

One of the first challenging projects KNS completed after starting practice in 1995, was a jewelry factory. They say some basic training from U S-based professionals was a big learning, helping the young architects understand the path a project takes through different stages from research and conceptualization, to delivery.

A seminal project that despite not being executed, helped define them as a firm was one where they had to design a theme park

based on Indian history. They say, “There were no computers then and we did all the drawings by hand, after thorough research. It was a hundred-acre plot and we had to recreate the history of around 2000 years. Though it was never completed, we emerged as ‘KNS’ through this project.”

Another office project for SRS Pharmaceuticals, saw them experimenting with lighting, in 2003-04. “It had a different look as we did not use any direct light from the ceiling. We created a wooden floor and all the lights were in the floor but every table had a task light.”

Other projects which were important in terms of learning included a bungalow project on a piece of barren land in Ahmedabad with no great view. Speaking of the project, the architects reminisce “It gets very hot in

Ahmedabad in Summer, and our theme was based on a courtyard. We wanted to create something contextual, so all the trees on site were retained and we created water bodies in the direction of the blowing wind. The clients were satisfied and we won several awards for that project.”

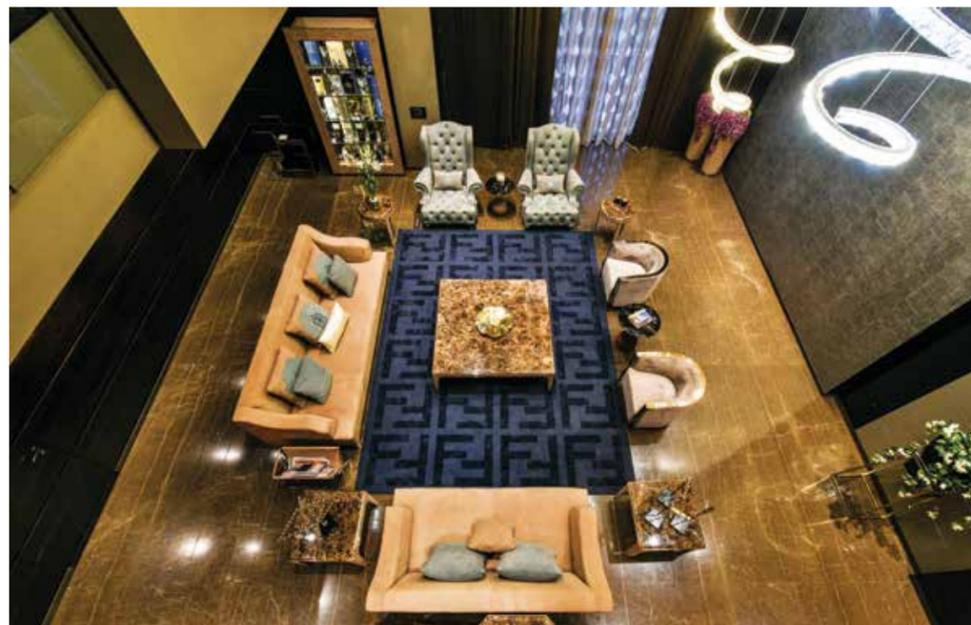
The focus to context has been a guiding principle. A more recent undertaking was a mixed-use project for the University of Karnavati, in Gandhinagar. A twenty-five-meter tall building, with lecture halls on the lower level, a hostel on the first level and multipurpose hall on the second level a massive garden dominates the design. The entrance was created as a cube with a dead facade with a scooped cube within it. The scheme was contextual with interactive spaces within the building.

#### The world is their oyster

Despite the enormous negative impact of the Covid crisis, KNS has expanded to doing projects in Washington, the West Indies, Kenya and Milan, Italy, saying, “Covid has become like a catalyst and the world has become much smaller. This has enabled us to interact with



consultants, architects and interior designers from these places. Their inputs add to our knowledge.” Importantly, they continue to be contextual. This extends to projects such as a *Vastu*-compliant house in Washington for an Indian family on a five-acre forest plot covered with coniferous trees. The glass façade of the house created a connection between outdoor and indoor while factoring in the extreme weather.



The architects treat *Vastu*, seriously, saying “They are basic principles applicable anywhere in the world, based on the laws of nature.”

Apart from working overseas, KNS Architects travel for leisure and learning, recalling the words of their teachers who encouraged them to do so. While not being specially influenced by a particular architect or style, they have visited all the landmark projects they studied at college, saying, “It is a different feeling when you actually experience these spaces. You realize how innovative and ingenious these masters were to come up with amazing designs. Most of these works were created before the advent of computers. For example, Antoni Gaudi’s La Sagrada Família in Barcelona, the design done then, is mesmerizing! We found Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum at Bilbao, awe inspiring, as is the Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris where the combination of glass and the landscaped garden is mind boggling.” Speaking of the magic and expertise of the immortal Frank Lloyd Wright, the architects mention the Guggenheim Museum, New York as impactful. Kanhai Gandhi says it’s a personal passion too. “Just before the outbreak of Covid, I visited Chicago and S C Johnson. I was amazed to see the way Frank Lloyd Wright has manipulated the space by using different heights at different points.”

“The best learning is when you are actually there to experience these spaces, and you realize these are landmarks not just because they are beautiful but because of the thought behind the design,” they sum up.





### Contextual design & gennext

KNS Architects define their design philosophy as 'being contextual'. They explain, "From 1950 to 2020, the population has multiplied four times and will further explode by 2050. We are depleting natural resources, the wilderness is shrinking, there is already an imbalance in nature. We need to revive and that should be the first principle any young architect should follow when he or she begins their practice. More than sustainability, it is about upcycling. We must get new technologies to upcycle and revive what is destroyed. We will survive only if we revive the planet."

They say there has been a real understanding of architecture in India, after Dr. Manmohan Singh began

economic reforms in 90s, and the globalization helped young architects gain a better understanding of the space. They say living in a developing country helps learning and preparation for the future. "In another 30 years we would be a developed nation and to go to that stage we would need architects and engineers. We will have our roles better defined. The world is getting smaller and the learning is easier."

Interested in digital art and media, Gandhi adds a note of caution to young architects not to get overly influenced by social media. He says, "Do not get into copy and paste because that will kill your creativity. You might design something fancy but it won't last long. Detailed study, research and hard work can create timeless designs."



### OUT OF THE BOX

**An architect you consider an icon:** Frank O Gehry, for using available technology to its fullest, experimenting with different materials in the most unimaginable forms in context with the design and achieving some brilliant constructions.

**An iconic structure that has inspired you:** Sagrada Familia was perceived and constructed using mirrors and pendulums which is very impressive in times when they didn't have the computers & softwares. Gaudi used this unique method to design the domes of his other structures as well.

**Elements of design you see when conceptualising a structure:** Any design appears to me as a matrix. A virtual grid. I approach the design as a journey, a virtual journey in the head transiting from one space to another. Understanding the journey of the user in the mind and bringing that into reality.

The architect trio are interested in the economy, equity markers and successful business models the besides architecture; more to bind them together. Gandhi takes his interest in digital art to the walls saying, "I have been passionate about digital art for the last 8 years and have tied up with a German Fashion Studio to turn this digital art into upcycled wall art."

Summing up, what gives them satisfaction after their 3 decade long stint in the architecture space? It's their clients and their delight in the spaces they create. "The client of the bungalow calling during the hot summer to tell me that he is enjoying the weather in his courtyard gives us a greater satisfaction than any award. That is the greatest validation of being contextual."





## Des. Shabnam Gupta

### Vision :

Our vision is to be the window for Indian design to the world. The Mission is to keep reinventing and adapting our design skills by enabling more and more skilled and unskilled labour to heighten their skill.

## Chosen by design.

Shabnam Gupta says she didn't grow up with dreams of getting into design. While she did not have a professional role model, she was surrounded by design and creativity. She says, "I just happened to grow up in a very creative background, and very early in life, was pushed into going to museums, art galleries, made to dabble in art, jump into rivers, and that honed me very naturally to choose a creative profession. I didn't choose design, it chose me!"

Despite not being enthralled by childhood visits to museums and art galleries, Shabnam Gupta says it has clearly impacted her design sensibilities. "One early memory is of being dragged through the Louvre by my father, rolling my eyes at the Venus di Milo and the Mona Lisa. I was taken to the Lido as a teenager and it shocked me. But somewhere I believe, all these experiences do impact you, though you don't realize it, and it surfaces much later in life. Being taken out of your depth removes so many creative inhibitions for you. I think that was the case with me."

She calls herself "a Mumbai girl" who went to school at St Joseph's Convent, Bandra, which she calls "a good-girl Catholic school, and I was number one on my principal's black list!". This was followed by a stint at Mithibai College for the Bachelor of Commerce degree, after which she joined the L S Raheja School of Architecture, Bandra, for the three-year interior design course. On completion of the course, she interned at Tushar Desai Architects and later worked with B G Bhatt.





Shabnam Gupta's design education started early, around 16 years, with on-the-job learnings assisting her father who handled the international marketing for the TV serial Ramayana. The exposure she received from the big production was invaluable and involved travel, interacting with clients and taking them sightseeing and shopping to craft stores helped the young Gupta realize her love of craft-based design. Her mother, a self-taught landscape designer, too, influenced her.

Even as a rebellious teen, Gupta loved working. Despite 'punked' hair, ripped jeans and black nail polish, she was not a part of the party crowd and worked through the college days, saying, "I found joy in my work at a very early stage, and I realized that it was work that brought me true happiness."

### Small beginnings

The first commission Shabnam Gupta received was to design a small room with a group of friends, while her first solo project was a friend's home. The clients were based out of London, and liked what they had seen of her smaller works and commissioned a huge 4BHK apartment in Juhu, with full creative freedom. She says, "It was a dream first project, and I put my heart and soul into it."

Though quite serendipitous, a milestone was just ahead. This was her second commission, the result of a chance conversation at an art gallery. She says, "I fell into conversation at an art gallery with someone who was a senior partner at Crawford and Bailey, a law firm in Mumbai, and was commissioned to work on his home in a heritage building opposite the Oval Maidan in south Mumbai. I never really looked back after that; that was what got the ball rolling for me."

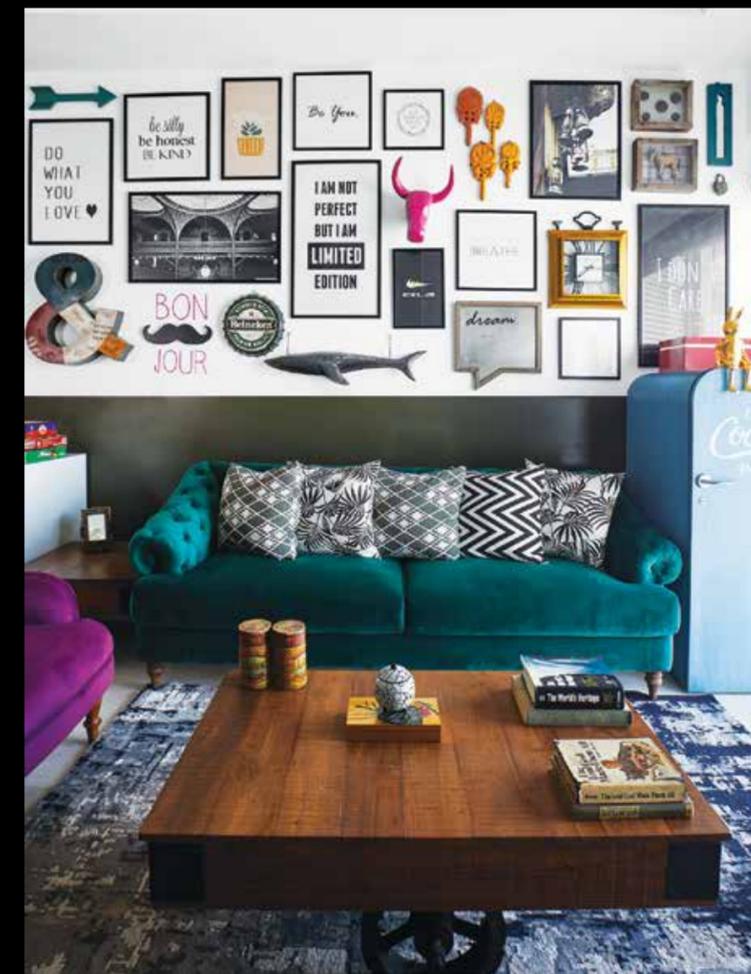


### Milestone projects

"I think you learn from every project," says Gupta, adding, "Once you start considering projects as small or miniscule, you stop being invested in them, and just run on autopilot." She keeps her practice small and selective, ensuring that they are invested in every project. "I would like to think that we have had a lot of milestones," she smiles, speaking of scaling up from doing three-bedroom apartments to 20,000 square foot bungalows. Interestingly, her clients also include a chart of celebrities from the film world. She says, "We started with Aditya Chopra's house, which got us a lot of eyeballs, then did Parineeti Chopra's. Irrfan Khan's home got us a lot of appreciation and international attention, and that led to Kangana Ranaut's home, and so on."



*"We go with our instinct, are honest with clients. It's important to remember that you are only a medium to finally create a home for somebody else. And you need to be able to understand that, balance that, and become a visionary for the client."*





Shabnam Gupta says, that while having celebrity clients helps them stay in the limelight, she does not consider only their glamour projects milestones, saying there are learnings at many levels.

**Far from the cookie cutter**

Neither a follower nor a believer in trends, Gupta prefers to attract the kind of client that is non-aspirational, but who is both comfortable in one's skin and willing to push the envelope. Creating homes that reflect the client, each home is tailor-made and products customized for them. The magic is in the interaction, which Gupta says is at a deeper level. Speaking of the Indian client, Shabnam Gupta says they are typically world-citizens who travel and are exposed to design from everywhere as well as happy being who they are having moved on from trying to impress people and using expensive materials. "That's why it's a great time to be in design right now, India is on par with what's happening in the rest of the world."

Looking at her 20-year career thus far, Shabnam Gupta says, "We mostly build friendships and relationships with our clients, and most of them come back to us, so we develop a real comfort level. I also believe that money is a by-product; it's about creating relationships and I still service my clients from 20 years ago."

**Evolving design sensibility**

"To keep evolving in design, you need to keep reinventing yourself," according to Gupta, while maintaining a balance between statement choices that become a sort of trademark, through material choices, art and color palette, which for Gupta is "uninhibited and eclectic". The two elements they pay attention to, while conceptualizing a space, are the art and the landscaping, saying, "It's imperative to me to know that will there be an installation in one area, or pop art on the ceiling, and what interface there will be between the indoors and outdoors, regardless of whether we are working with a professional horticulturist or landscape designer or an art gallery."



Their design principles hinge on instinct. Shabnam Gupta explains, "We go with our instincts, are honest with our clients and ensure that we are not doing just what we want. It's important to remember that you are only a medium to finally create a home for somebody else. And you need to be able to understand that, balance that, and become a visionary for the client."

**Art, plants and family**

Outside of work, I am a mom of two teenage kids, so I've not had that much time over the last two decades to pursue many of my passions. But we're a family that enjoys sports, and traveling is one of my passions; I find it therapeutic, both with family and for work. I love collecting art, I like to paint, and I have taken to organic farming recently at my house in Karjat. My retail brand, Peacock Life, has a warehouse there and now I'm going to create one of India's largest garden centers there.

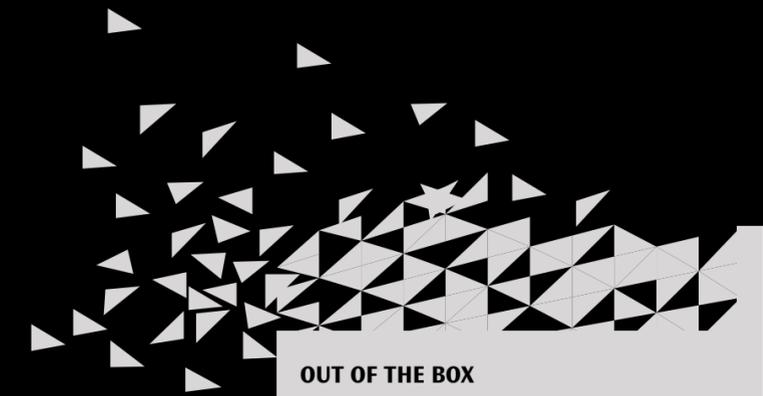




**Design today and the future**

Typically introspective, Shabnam Gupta comments on the state of her design practice saying, “I don’t know if I can speak about the current state of the practice at large when it comes to others, but I do believe that as a practice you reach a crossroads where you need to take a call as to whether you want to remain a small practice or take a bigger leap. You have to decide whether your work will get diluted and are you going to still be able to create what you are known for – which is tailor-made designs, and we are that point, currently.”

From the perspective of my online brand, the pandemic has resulted in brands going online now, and so design is now available at your fingertips. That has a lot of potential.



**OUT OF THE BOX**

**3 things that define a home:**

It’s the people that define a home; it’s never about the budget or the material or the work. Most people don’t understand that; it’s about the vibe of a place.

Second, not being afraid to reflect who you are is second on the list. By that I mean, if you are someone who loves to sit on the floor, I don’t know why people need to conform.

The third thing is sunlight; the amount of light that comes into the house.

These are all very unconventional answers, but they are the truth.

**2 Museums you love:**

The Met, NYC. The Louvre, Paris, though it’s very expensive and overwhelming.

**Upcoming artists you love:**

I like the work of Savia Mahajan and I like folk art a lot, so Baiju Shah.

**Future positive**

Shabnam Gupta believes in the value of interior design and its practitioners in India. “I think there is a great future in interior design,” she says. “Indian designers are really creating benchmarks on an international level. Product design is also moving ahead at a good pace, and there is a growing revival of traditional art forms which is very heartening to see. I hope that that’s a movement that we can be a part of.”

She has very big plans for the future saying, “I’m someone who was always taught to dream big, and I also believe that unless you dream it, it won’t happen. So we are working on many fronts, and there are many things in the pipeline, including a new brand, and some digital work in the next year, which will deal with revival and the empowerment of local artisans.”





## Ar. Reza Kabul

### **Vision :**

With a design philosophy centred around 'liberating spaces', we enjoy the trust and appreciation of clients with projects that set pioneering benchmarks in architectural design.

## From 'Lord of the backbench' to towering success.

### **Reza Kabul:**

An unlikely candidate for the painstaking path of architecture, Reza Kabul was one of the naughty boys; 'Lords of the back bench' as a teacher dubbed them, with a love for sport, but also paradoxically, for art. A Bombay boy, he attended the well known Christ Church school and later went to St Xavier's College. Despite being a good student, he says, "The best thing about school was sports! We played football in the rains, later I was a State level boxer and won several medals for Maharashtra state."

Speaking of his career choices, Reza Kabul says these were limited at the time, with medicine or engineering being the preferred options. Following this path, the young Kabul went to Baroda for an entrance test to read for the civil engineering degree, staying with a friend for the duration. The friend's son was an architecture major and working on his final year thesis. Reza Kabul was enticed, saying, "I saw all those colourful designs and drawings and asked him what it was all about. He said it was 'architecture' and explained the difference between architecture and civil engineering." The seed was sown. Reza Kabul sat instead for the entrance test to the architecture course and on selection, joined MS University, Baroda.

On completion of the degree in 1985, he landed the plum assignment of working with Hafeez Contractor. He says it was a time of fun and learning, saying, "If you enjoy what are doing, you're not working! We used to walk into the office at 9.30 or 10.00 am, the day would not end and the office would not be locked. It was open 24x7 and we spent more time in the office than we did at home. Those three years were like six years of working and

I thoroughly enjoyed it. I never felt I worked for him; I learnt a lot and got a wide exposure."

He took the step of setting up his own consultancy in 1988, in the mezzanine space above his father's restaurant in Worli, Mumbai. He laughs, saying it worked because, "the biggest luxury then was a telephone and there was

one in the restaurant!" Reza Kabul started with projects as small as a single toilet or a single furniture unit. He says he took no clients when he left his principal and had to scramble for work. Larger projects like bungalows or small housing projects came his way, often in faraway places like Badlapur, and not worth a lot in commercial terms. Speaking of those days, he says, "It was





a challenge to support myself, but luckily my father supported me. So I started my journey, and within a span of two years we had a staff of seven people in my little mezzanine office.”

Kabul was happy to do everything that needed doing, from taking printouts on the old ammonia printing machines handling the front desk. He says, “I never felt ashamed to do any kind of work right from being a receptionist to a peon to everything during the initial days, though it was a hard grind.”

#### Kindly prediction

A chance meeting changed the way the young architect saw himself. He says, “One day I met this elderly man Mr. Mittal, who said, this was the right time to have started. He said, ‘As you grow older you will gain experience and reputation due to your work. You will reach a stage where you won’t have to be a peon or receptionist in your own office.’ That was a game changer. I just met him once at a party but his words changed my life!”

Good fortune soon came his way when a civil contractor friend, a partner in a real estate firm, asked Kabul to design a twenty-storey tower for him. The important caveat was that there would be no remuneration. Kabul agreed, met the other partners and started work on a project in a familiar neighbourhood, near his old school. On completion, he says he did receive a small fee of Rs 25,000, but the project exceeded all expectations. He describes it saying, “We did the mock-up model and on the day of the launch, they started booking at INR 1600 to 1800 per sq. ft, but by the end of the day it went up to INR 5,000 per sq.ft.”



*“Inspiration to design can come from anywhere, from the works of great masters or Nature; from a casual interaction with the external world, a tree or even a logo!”*

The clients were more than pleased and this started a working partnership that spanned several projects. Other clients followed, asking for ARK’s design services and agreeing to his commercial terms without argument. He says, “That was certainly a milestone in my career. I did almost 10 to 12 projects with the same clients later in India and overseas and enjoyed a very good rapport.”

Another milestone on his journey, came from an unknown walk-in client, who wished to do a hospitality project in Dubai. Kabul agreed, despite the low fee. Twelve hospitality projects in Dubai followed

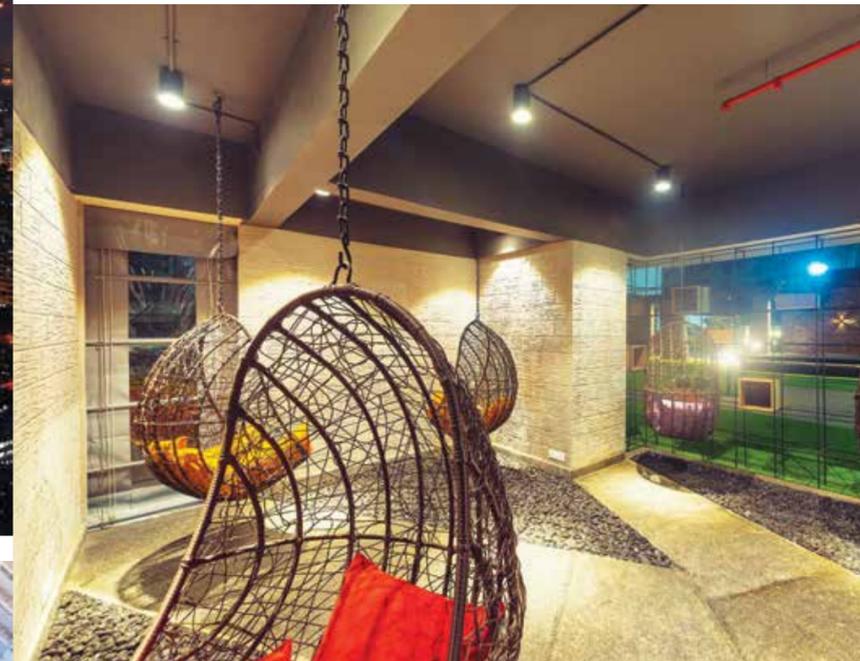
resulting in his setting up another office in Dubai. After the commission for a 200-room resort in Mauritius, Kabul says, “There was no looking back after that.”

Reza Kabul now has a staff of over 100 in Mumbai, an office in Pune and an office and studio in San Francisco. Pioneers of high-rise design in India, ARK is renowned for its award winning landmark projects such as Transcon Triumph, India (Best Residential High Rise Development India - Asia Pacific International Property Awards : 2015) and Shreepati Arcade, which entered the Limca Book of Records in 2003 as India’s Tallest Building.



### Thoughts on architecture

Thoughts on the big changes in the practice center around the enormous changes in information technology. Kabul says, "Now, we can see and feel a building in various dimensions before it is built. When I started, we only had a drawing board but now we have computers and so many software options." While appreciating the gifts of technology he adds, "The increasing use of IT has also made the younger generation forget how to draw with a pencil. I pick up paper and pencil to visualise what I think; that, according to me comes from the heart. With computers I feel a bit of disconnect."



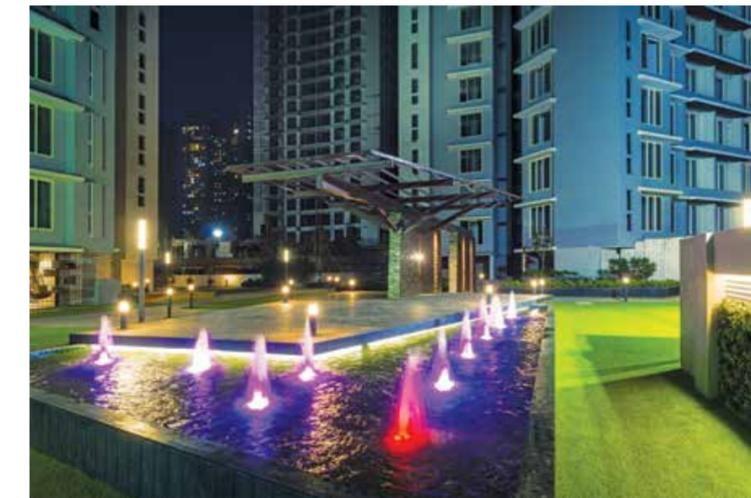
### Architecture in India

Reza Kabul says there's much to be done to bring Indian building norms abreast with those overseas, as the laws are "old, outdated and rigid" and cause serious restriction in building design in the country. He says, "We have to move with the times and amend laws, and learn and practice new construction methodologies and technologies. These laws restrict us from building structures which can be built overseas."

Describing his own process, Reza Kabul says, "I always keep the end user in mind while designing. If it is a residential space, I have to think of how a client can feel at home. Nowadays there is a trend to invite international architectural firms to design residential buildings in India, and many of them do not know the local lifestyle, culture and the way of living."

His influences are myriad. "I love to travel and see the buildings in different places. I love to study people and their lifestyles whenever I travel," he says.

Adding, "In the Indian context, Charles Correa has been an icon. I also like the works of Norman Foster and Zaha Hadid," but rues the fact that "some of the buildings they designed cannot be built in India because we have several restrictions."





#### Changes in the practice

Emphasising the role of the media, Kabul says it has played a great role in sensitizing the Indian reader to architectural and interior design. He reminisces, “I remember when I started there was only one publication called ‘Fountainhead’. Later, there was ‘Inside Outside’ and ‘IFJ’. Today there are numerous print and online platforms to showcase designs. The media has played a crucial role in popularising architectural and interior design in India. Today, architects get recognition which



was absent earlier. Competitions and awards have also elevated architects to a different status. Earlier an end user or a buyer would not care to ask the name of the architect who designed the building but now that architects and their designs are being acknowledged.”

He shares a few final thoughts on his passion. “Architecture is art plus engineering. There are no formulas in architecture unlike engineering,” says Kabul, “You have to be passionate about it.”

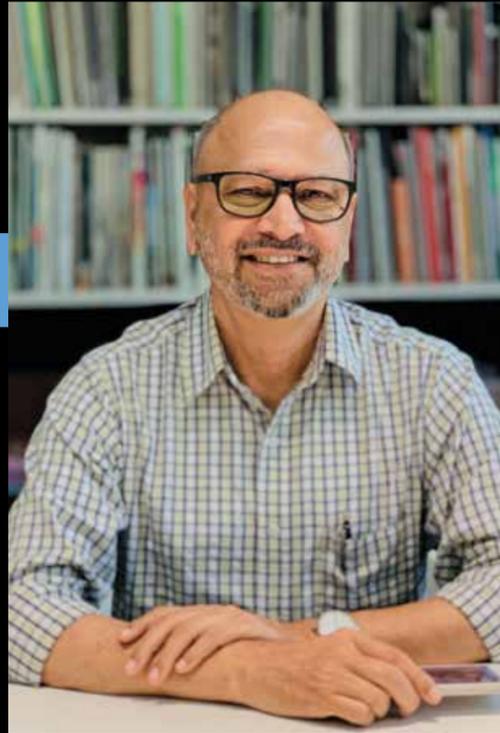
#### OUT OF THE BOX

**3 things I love doing when I’m not immersed in architecture:**

I love watching movies.

I love going for long intercity drives.

I love camping, but never tried it in India. In Europe and America they have beautiful camping sites with all facilities. In India our mind set is so urbanized that we do not know what green living actually is.



# Ar. Chandrashekhar Kanetkar

## **Vision :**

Design is the weaving of enclosed spaces, semi-enclosed spaces and open spaces and the main focus should be on the end user. The space created should keep the end-user occupied in such a way that he or she feels a sense of belonging to that place and they become an integral part of the space and do not want to stay away from that space.

## The analytical architect.

Born in Baroda, in Gujarat, Chandrashekhar Kanetkar was raised surrounded by beautiful architecture and greenery. He says, "I have wonderful memories as I grew up looking at the beautiful buildings around me; the University building, Laxmi Vilas palace and many more. The Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad was a patron of art and architecture and though they were designed by British architects, they have Indian influence and use local material." He says he was "glued to the museum building" as a schoolboy, fascinated by the interiors and large collection of artifacts. He adds, "Though at that age it did not make sense, I later on realized after joining the architecture course, how important those memories were. When you watch such buildings for 20 years, that kind of architecture begins to grow within you and leave a lasting impression."

## **Early influences and choices**

Kanetkar says architecture was an accidental choice. Enrolled in an engineering course, as one of the two career options people considered 'good' at the time, Kanetkar soon tired of the course and threw in his lot with some friends who had joined the architecture course. He says he found the course challenging but that his teachers kept him inspired. Mentioning a few that stand out, he recalls his teachers with gratitude and mentions Professor Pingle who taught aesthetics



and influenced him a lot. He says, "I feel that the aesthetic sense is the most important prerequisite to being an architect." He also mentioned Ar. Madhav Achval who was also a well-known literary figure in Marathi, and taught professional practice and construction. Kanetkar sums up, "The faculty was just fantastic and we lived architecture 24 by 7, thanks to these teachers who kept us occupied all the time and made it not only interesting but challenging too. Our teachers taught us to identify the extraordinary in the ordinary. Everything depends upon the way you look at something. It is important to have an analytical sense to look at things differently. That training still helps me in analyzing my work, my clients and my site."

He worked with his teachers during the vacations, particularly with architect Suryakant Patel and architect Madhav Achval for practical experience. Reminiscing, he says, "There were no computers then and we worked on drawing boards. Veterans like Charles Correa and Le Corbusier were very active and did a lot of work in Ahmedabad. Architect B V Doshi was in his prime. It was a great inspiration to visit the sites of these architects."



*"Architecture without context is meaningless. I believe architects and builders have to be socially responsible. And that's how we will be able to build better cities."*

He mentions being mesmerized by the Mill Owners Association building designed by Le Corbusier, saying, "I was thrown into a different realm of architecture. I learnt how a space can charge you and establish a dialogue with you." He also mentions Charles Correa's Gandhi Ashram as being "absolutely timeless" and that the most "beautiful and impactful aspect was its simplicity and the play of light and shadow which make it a great monument." Resonating with most students of the time, the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe were a big influence as well.

#### **Seminal moments**

Professor Pingle suggested that the young Kanetkar study the *wada* (mansion) of Nana Fadanvis, a well-known, wealthy statesman from 18th century situated in Panchgani on the bank of a river, for his thesis. He worked hard to understand 18th century Maharashtrian architecture and won the Gold medal for the thesis. He says, "That milestone was very important because I realized how crucial it was to look at architecture analytically."

On completion of the degree, Chandrashekar Kanetkar left the smaller



arena of Baroda for the big city, Mumbai and had the opportunity to work with Ar. Charles Correa, who was designing Navi Mumbai. Kanetkar joined CIDCO, the development authority for the region and worked with Charles Correa and other senior town planners, which he says was a great learning.

Both exciting and traumatizing was Kanetkar's first interior design assignment, for a four-bedroom apartment at Cuffe Parade, Mumbai. He accepted the commission as jobs were hard to come by but that he found the proposition terrifying. This too was what he calls, "a huge experience. I used to literally sleep at the site. I worked myself, hands-on with carpenters. I was asked to design an opulent apartment but I was never exposed to that kind of life. I worked very hard and the project was a grand success. That gave me a lot of confidence and never looked back." He says his professor Suryakant Patel's words resonated as he said, "You don't need to advertise when your work speaks for itself. You must do your best and that is your marketing. Your job will generate more jobs. Is not important if you know a new client or not."



#### Growth and milestones

From those simple beginnings, the firm has grown to offer the full range of professional services spanning commercial, residential, hospitality and office designs that include both architectural and interior design solutions. Seeing all projects as jobs to be undertaken, he says, "I wasn't very choosy because initially it was a matter of survival for me in this competitive world. As you grow and get your chances you must make them count. I precisely did that."

Discussing interesting projects, he mentions one that meant a lot to him, as it was a project the legendary architect Nari Gandhi had left incomplete. Kanetkar says, "I had to take over from where he had left off. Undertaking that project also meant understanding Nari Gandhi and doing a lot of research on his architecture. It was important to carry on his way of thinking and of implementing which was different from your normal thinking process. I took it as a challenge. It was a farmhouse spread over six acres of land and I successfully completed it. I always felt architect Nari Gandhi was watching me from the sky! Occupants and visitors to this project complimented me saying, they couldn't make out where Nari Gandhi had left and where I had taken over. It was seamless. This was a major milestone in my career because it was purely self-learning."



Having started with little choice, Kanetkar now selects projects with a large canvas such as the Hyatt in Goa. He says, "We tried to create 17th century Portuguese architecture, which is almost extinct in Goa now, to give a distinct identity to the hotel. We retained several old trees and created a narrative around the design. It was about a rich Goan who comes back from a voyage and builds a house, which keeps getting extended further, generation after generation in an organic way. In hospitality it is important to have a sense of the place. Buildings that we built contributed to the landscape and did not take away the original charm of Goa."

This sense of place is carried through in his design philosophy, despite the enormous range of new technology, equipment and materials which have impacted design. He says this makes design more innovative. However, he says, "India is already exposed to several new techniques but the mere use of technology will create cold architecture. We need to understand third world



architecture and great masters like Geoffrey Bawa, B V Doshi, Charles Correa and Ar.Achyut Kanvinde. They belong to a different era but the basics they applied are universal and timeless. If I can combine those values with modern technology, I would be able to create a better design. Architecture without context is meaningless. I believe architects and builders have to be socially responsible. And that's how we will be able to build better cities. A building is just not four walls and a window and door, the space you live in should make you think positively."



#### OUT OF THE BOX

**Hobbies and leisure pursuits:**

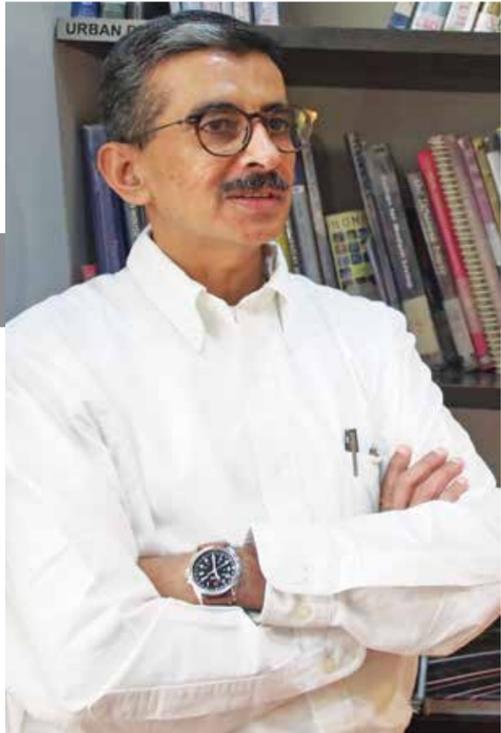
Golf, though I don't play much anymore. I love to travel a lot within India and outside.

**Something not many people know about you:**

I am very much into Indian classical music and a great fan of Kumar Gandharva. I feel his music has also influenced by architecture. He has composed several Ragas which are pure architecture, if one can decipher their notes and the structure.

**A building you would like to re-visit:**

One place I feel like visiting again and again is the Guggenheim museum by Frank Lloyd Wright.



## Ar. Kiran Kapadia

### **Vision :**

Architecture is a passion that drives ownership of every project; inspires excellence and motivates design making inhabitants happier, inspired and productive.

Our design methodology is process driven, with a profound interest in issues of site, context, environment, and materiality. Each project is a journey, at the start of which we contemplate a concept that does not yet exist, channeling the belief that “To travel is better than to arrive.”

## Marathon Man : leading from the front.

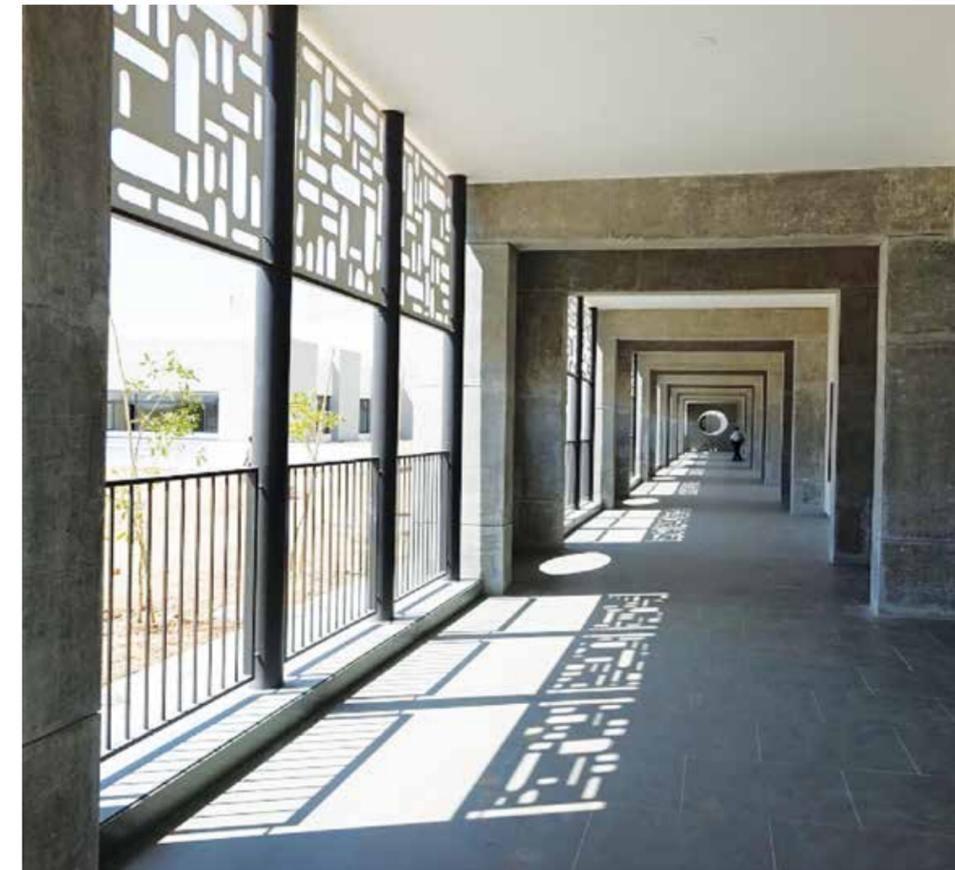
Thrust into the intimate and inclusive environment of the School of Architecture, Ahmedabad, from a relatively cocooned existence in South Bombay, Kiran Kapadia was also happily thrust into a world of great experiences. He says, “We had 150 students, with no difference between juniors and seniors and almost everyone lived on the campus. We had a great faculty like Ar. A. D. Raje, Ar. B. V. Doshi, Ar. Hasmukh Patel and renowned names as visiting faculty.” This led to the opportunity to hear luminaries like Buckminster Fuller and James Stirling and the shared experiences of Prof. Doshi’s work with Louis Kahn and Le Corbusier as he and A D Raje were the local architects for the Indian Institute of Management campus project. He says, “It was a great exposure for an eighteen-year-old boy from Bombay.”

learning there saying, “The ethos and spirit were different, Prof. Doshi would come at 9 pm to teach us drawing after his busy schedule, which everyone found normal!” He counts those interactions with illustrious alumni such as Ar. Jaimini Mehta, Ar. Kulbhushan Jain and Ar. Ravindra Vasavada, and their professors, invaluable. The students also had the opportunity for international exposure through the many exchange programs.

On graduation, Kapadia worked with Ar. Kamu Iyer, author of ‘From Diagram to Design’ and free-lanced with other architects for a couple of years, after which he decided on a Master’s degree. With good recommendations from Ar. A D Raje and Ar. Christopher Benninger, an alumnus of Harvard University, Kapadia joined the M. Arch program in Urban Design at Harvard, and had the opportunity to train with a chart of eminent names including José Rafael

### **Early days**

As a student at Bombay’s illustrious Cathedral School, Kapadia applied to the School of Architecture and cleared the stringent, purely merit-based application process. He left the insulated environment of South Bombay, for Ahmedabad where students from across regions and socio-economic backgrounds mingled in a liberal arts education, studying art, history, literature, textile design., Kiran Kapadia enjoyed the beautiful space and informal





*“The stories that your buildings tell the occupants are important. How occupants interpret and enjoy these spaces has been our core focus.”*

**Setting up practice and early milestones**

Kiran Kapadia decided to set up practice, in 1991, with a table in a corner of his engineer father’s office. He recalls his first milestone project, a bungalow for the Shroffs, of Charak Pharma Pvt. Ltd. at Umargaon, on the Maharashtra - Gujarat border, where the clients had a factory, and wanted a bungalow added on site. Kapadia recalls the terrible roads and the enjoyable train journeys to the coast and fondly remembers the four-bedroom bungalow and the happy and very involved clients.

decided to repurpose to a mall. They appointed D P Architects, Singapore as lead architects and Kapadia Associates as the local architect partners on the project. He expanded his team to 20 and moved office to Mahindra Towers during the ambitious project that lasted five years, and taught the architects about new materials while pushing their own boundaries and capacity. The project had several unique and interesting aspects such as the need to connect the existing buildings using steel bridges. These were prefabricated at Aurangabad, inspected in depth then transported on trailers at night to the site where they were lifted to position by crane. The project was completed in 1999, at a time when the Indian economy was opening up under Dr. Manmohan

Several residential and office projects followed, but the breakthrough was a project for Ajay Piramal at a pharmaceutical plant in Tardeo which he had



Moneo Vallés, the Pritzker Prize winner, 1996. On completing the master’s program, the young architect joined an urban design firm in Boston where he got a fantastic opportunity. Ralph Lerner, an architect from Princeton, had won an international design competition to design the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA), conceived by then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, to be built in Delhi. The architect interviewed the young Kapadia who was soon the only Indian working there with a team of 12. The idea was to develop the design under his eyes and then transfer it to India, with no computers or internet. Hand drawings were transferred to Jasbir Singh Soni, their partners in India, for the actual working drawings. Kapadia moved to India to overlook the entire execution and worked here for about two years until the untimely assassination of Rajiv Gandhi when the project was stalled.



Singh, a time of change and development and India's first shopping malls. Crossroads quickly became a tourist attraction and made Kapadia Associates widely known and had legendary architects Charles Correa and Ar. B V Doshi connecting with them to find out more about the mall. After the success of Crossroads came the CR2 at Nariman Point where the major challenge was to design basements as the site was close to the sea and had a high water table.

Several projects followed, till another landmark occasion occurred when a young, unknown developer called Abhishek Lodha walked into their offices. The son of a small builder, whose office he shared at Shah and Nahar Industrial estate, Abhishek had an engineering degree from Atlanta and worked for Mackenzie. He was bright, modest and passionate. Together they designed and developed Lodha Bellissimo,

a tower Mumbai's Lower Parel, the second highest residential tower in India at the time, at 222 meters and 53 floors. The project was completed in late 2012 and Kapadia Associates started a partnership which now accounts for almost half Lodha's portfolio.

Quite different but equally memorable was a large campus project for Hindustan Unilever at Andheri, on a twelve-acre plot with over 600 trees, where they wished to unify all divisions. Kapadia Associates was commissioned to do the master plan and feasibility. The project was to be completed within 18 months and the new campus to be an environmentally sustainable, synergized work space, with offices, laboratories, training centres, a hotel with 98 rooms, convenience stores, a library, a food court, an occupational health centre, a gym, sports and recreation centre and a day care



centre. It houses over 1600 employees and uses green and energy efficient building features such as rainwater harvesting, optimal use of glass and use of 'zero-waste' water recycling concepts. All the trees were retained. Kiran Kapadia says each project is different and brings with it its own challenges, whether it is a 4500-acre township project like Palava City or an 18-acre campus like the Swaminarayan residential school in Gandhinagar.

#### State of the practice

With technology determining the way we work, Kapadia says, "There is no difference between building in India or Singapore. Clients are professional, international clients are coming in, the world is getting smaller and firms must gear up to that scale." He says both teams and projects have become larger and more complex with specialization in the profession and new systems of work emerging. He sees the influx of international architecture firms into India as a good thing with enormous learnings to be gained. He says change must be embraced and new technologies have enabled us to look at design from a different perspective.



#### Future ready or future shock ?

Bullish about the future, Kapadia says the demand for good architecture will surge in India, quoting the large amount of construction in the country. He wishes institutes like COA or IIA were more dynamic, like their international counterparts and not stuck in legalities.

Kiran Kapadia sees a role for the government in infrastructure but believes smaller projects should be left to the private sector. He explains, “During 1970s and 80s, we had the socialist pattern where the government built a lot. Now the government is no more a major client but a facilitator. They are not here to run the real estate business. It should have a bigger vision and undertake major infrastructure projects like the Mumbai-Delhi industrial corridor which is huge, not undertake building some 1000 housing units. It is too small for the government.”



He adds, “The current challenge is to build new cities and restructure the existing. The laws are archaic and there is no integrated approach.” He gives the example of the parallel activities of the Mumbai coastal road project, the Nhava Sheva- Sewri link road and Metro rail network, all of which are being developed in isolation rather than with an integrated overview. He suggests a single planning authority for the Greater Mumbai region rather than the BMC for Mumbai, TMC for Thane and MMRDA. He says, “Each of these bodies act as is they have to guard their fiefdom with political interference added in. We have not understood the concept of urbanism.”

#### Legacy and intent

The marathon runner, who runs two marathons a year, has a long-term intent and strategy for the company he built. “I wish to leave behind an institution that stands on robust systems, culture and ethics which can be handed over to the next generation. In India, practices die with an individual. I want to create a different model. It is a ‘let go’ model which should run even after me.” Kapadia believes in innovation and has novel practices such as an external advisory management council, comprising five illustrious members including Suresh Singarvelu CEO, Prestige Developers, Anita Ramchandran, HR

expert and Mr. Ganguly, ex of Unilever and Blackstone. Their only task is to challenge the management team, which having been together for over 15 years, rarely challenge each other. With a workforce of over 100 people and myriad projects, Kapadia says their aesthetic is contemporary rather than just being stylish or oriental emphasising that the principles of sustainability, whether passive or active are important drivers of their design. He says “The stories that your buildings tell to the occupants are important. They should feel like spending time there. How occupants interpret and enjoy these spaces has been our core focus and it has evolved over the years.”



#### OUT OF THE BOX

##### What would you call another passion?

Marathon running. I run full marathons and started running when I was over 45. I started with half marathons and ran a full marathon at the age of 53. I now run two marathons a year; one in India and one abroad having run in New York, Berlin, Chicago, Boston, Tokyo, Rotterdam, Prague, and so on. It gives me discipline, I run for 4 to 5 days in a week to train and practice. It gives me my own space. I run without wearing headphones unlike many and I am in my own thoughts. It is a beautiful experience. Now I am 60.

##### What practice that you’ve started, do you feel particularly pleased with?

We have an external advisory management council of five members to challenge us; neither stake holders in the company nor related to profession of architecture. They are outsiders. We meet twice a year and they evaluate us as well as throw up new challenges before us. In India, practices die with an individual. I want to create a different model. It is a ‘let go’ model which should run even after me.



## Ar. Behzad Kharas

## The Entrepreneur-Architect.

**Vision :**  
To be a marquee design and build company in the private residential and hospitality interior space.

Inspiration started early for the young Behzad Kharas, who watched his architect father working nights on drawings, while in the employ of the king of Bahrain. After early studies in Bahrain and Boys' Town School & Junior College in Nashik, Behzad Kharas took architecture studies at the Rizvi College of Architecture in Mumbai. On graduation, he worked as a graphic designer and a signage designer rather than joining an architectural practice, as the stipends for interns were paltry.

He soon realized he needed a good portfolio prior to applying for the Master's program, and joined Ar. Pronit Nath of Urban Studio. Within a year, they had high-profile clients (Kotak Mahindra Bank, Inox) and the young architect had important learnings from shop floor processes, to working on factory floors. He was just finding his feet when the principal Ar Nath fell ill and Kharas got the opportunity to head up a project, which was the start of a good working relationship, and great work experience for the increasingly better resourced Kharas. Soon after, family lobbying saw Behzad Kharas leave Urban Studio for the better-known practice of a family friend, Architect Hafeez Contractor, where, he unfortunately felt he was a small cog in a big machine.

A month or so into the move, a family crisis, stemming from his father's ill health, forced him to make some big decisions. He thought about changing paths to being a flight purser with an international airline but was inspired by his mother's employer to stay and face the troubles head on. Kharas was told, "The world belongs to the brave", and those words have stayed with him, he says, "standing firm and facing challenges must be the only solution you contemplate."

He decided to leave the position at AHC and Mumbai. It was a seminal moment in the young architect's life. Family responsibilities and rising debt forced him to join his family in Nashik, despite being unemployed at the time. Six months later he was offered a work space by a graphic designer friend who had just acquired a small office. On renovating that office, he acquired both clients and referrals which proved to be the turning point in his career. Speaking of one client in particular, Behzad Kharas says, "He became my

godfather. He had a resort in Karjat that was in shambles; I cleared up that mess for him, and he realized that I had talent." New projects meant a shift in focus away from Nashik, to Mumbai. Of that time, Kharas says, "There were times when I would go from Nashik to Pune in the morning, Pune to Mumbai in the evening, finish a site by 9:30 to 11 pm, sleep in our Mumbai home, attend to a site in the morning, and then take the bus back to Nashik. My wife still teases me that my first love at that time was Neeta\*!"



Footnote: \*Neeta Travels is a well-known Indian road transport service.



#### Making moves

Kharas was married and moved back to Mumbai in 2007. He says it wasn't easy but that it forced him to start a business of his own, "I can't honestly say I wanted to open my own practice. I would have been very happy working for somebody as an associate, getting a fixed salary and a car; I had a very narrow vision!" It was the state of his finances and the health of his father that forced his hand and he shares a sense of gratitude to Ar Pronit Nath, his employer at the time, who encouraged and made several allowances for the young Kharas. Kharas soon started working on projects in South Bombay primarily with a well-known, well-networked business

community. He says that he continues working with them, with word of mouth referrals amounting to almost 80% of his project portfolio. This soon became too much of a good thing. "As the work began flowing in, I realized we were getting too much work, and the quality of work was being impacted." Though this was just a year into his setting up on his own, Kharas realized something needed to change from mechanical job completion to innovation, and wanted to earn more than a small percentage on his work. He turned to developing turnkey projects, and says, "I realized that my forte was in residential turnkey projects, so I focused on this and created a niche for myself."



*"The world belongs to the brave. Standing firm and facing your troubles must be the only solution you contemplate."*

#### Milestones

In a reminiscent mood Behzad Kharas says, "While they may not be great in terms of design intent, I consider the first office I designed for my friend in Nashik a milestone project, and the first interior project I was offered in Nashik; also, my first bungalow project (architecture + interiors) in Pune. In terms of design it is still very close to my heart because it is timeless, and is still maintained today."

Other milestones were not far. Kharas says, "It was always my dream to design a five-star hotel," and the opportunity was at hand when he was referred to IHCL for the Taj Vivanta in Navi Mumbai, now completed and delivered by BNKGroup. He says, "Vivanta was also a big milestone for us; as was working with Gayatri Ruia and Adi Godrej, people you have only heard of in newspapers and magazines, who then start addressing you in the first person. Their testimonials are in your company profile and in your book, and for me, that is a very strong personal milestone I have achieved."





#### Gennext advice

Behzad Kharas says technology has changed the profession dramatically, “Today, thanks to social media, putting out good work has become easier. I think there are a lot of opportunities for the young that we didn’t have, and to them, I would say, maintaining an honest approach, being less egoistic, not letting success go to their head is the way forward.”

Seeing the profession as entrepreneurial rather than simply creative, he advises a balance between design and management skills, saying, “Not everyone has the ability to scale up successfully; being a good designer and being a good manager in the design business are two different things.” He also encourages gennext to work first and strategize next, to take on every project and concentrate on portfolio-building, rather than niche-building and focus on financials. He warns stringently about “the trap of taking commissions from vendors - someday, someone will spill the beans, and your brand value and reputation will vanish overnight. If you are talented, and once you establish yourself, things will become easier.”



#### Bullish vision for the future

In retrospect, Behzad Kharas says he is happy with the choices he has made. “Had I gone to the US, my life would have been very different but there certainly would not have been a BNK Group. The recognition that I get today is because I have my own company, and people know our work, our abilities, and we get a lot of respect and faith from our clients.”

Kharas sees his company, BNK Group, as an independent entity saying, “My vision for BNK is for it to be a self-sustaining business. Even my email address

is not behzadkharas@bnkgroup.com, but cmd@bnkgroup.com, so that anyone can become the CEO. In the next 10 years, whether I am with the company or not, the BNK Group should remain alive. “Stressing the importance of human resources and organic growth, he says, “It is a group of people that has built this company, and my staff has stayed with me, because of one simple principle – if the company grows, then you grow, and then I grow.” Being a good manager as well as an architect, he sees the potential in the individual saying good talent must be hired, nurtured and retained, leading to the organic growth of the



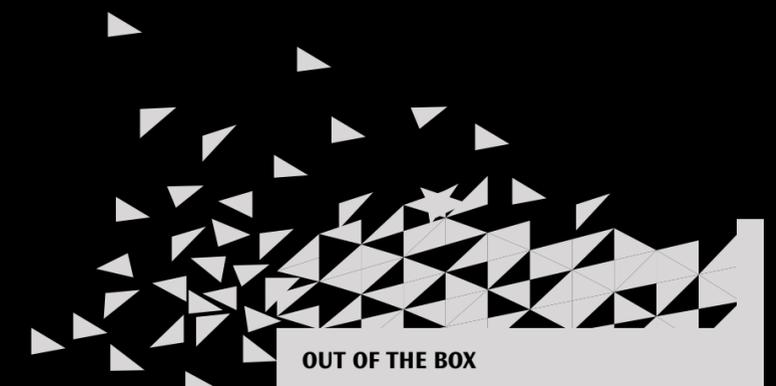


organization. He speaks of his team with pride, "My first employee (my peon) still works with me, on average, an employee works with me for 11-12 years."

"I'm now focused on getting the company to outlive me," he says, "and am putting in more processes to help us become more efficient. If you build in process gradually, and build the right values among your team, you can handle your customers. In the future, I foresee extreme competition, so firms that stagnate will get killed." Using the lockdown to restructure the organization and double the team to 46, he predicts a huge boom post Covid, where he says 'the market will skyrocket'.

The self-made entrepreneur-architect says he loves working at scale, working on a bungalow rather than an apartment but says the deal-maker is the faith of the client in the capacity and the process. He says acceptance of responsibility, even when things go wrong is a large part of their formula for success.

A die-hard family man and principal care giver to his extended family, Kharas says this is what will last and continue to be his top priority.



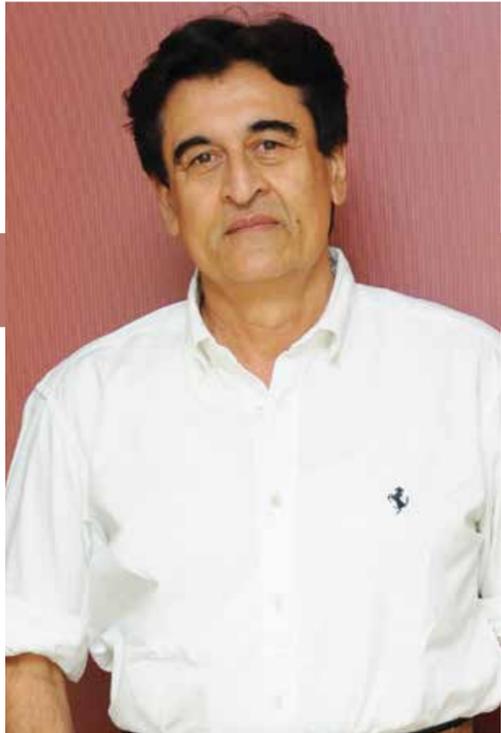
#### OUT OF THE BOX

**Three restaurants you really like eating at:**  
Souk at the Taj, Mumbai, Nusr-Et Steakhouse in Dubai and Cheesecake Factory in Dubai.

**Three cars you really like driving:**  
Range Rover, Rolls Royce and Bentley.

**One area of the house we should focus on more:**

The room for the help - people are ready to spend on every area of their house, but always miss out on this.



## Ar. Kamal Malik

### **Vision :**

To develop a relevant contemporary syntax of architecture for the sub-continent as a synthesis of ecology, spirit and ongoing 'manthan' or churning; gleaning from the rich historic, cultural and philosophical past. To create aesthetic, functional, socially and culturally responsible designs aligned with community values that are aesthetic and inspirational over time. The designs should be honest, promote highest ethical standards and push the limits of established design norms.

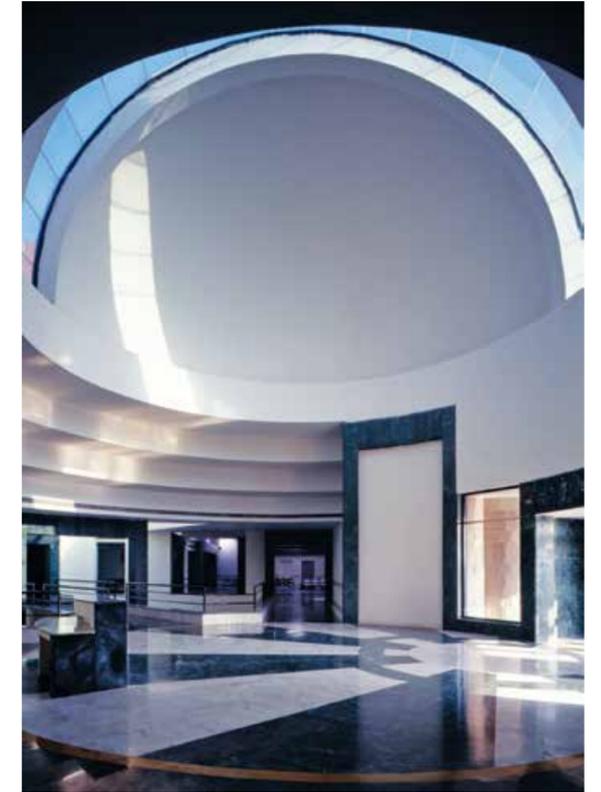
## The spiritualist as architect.

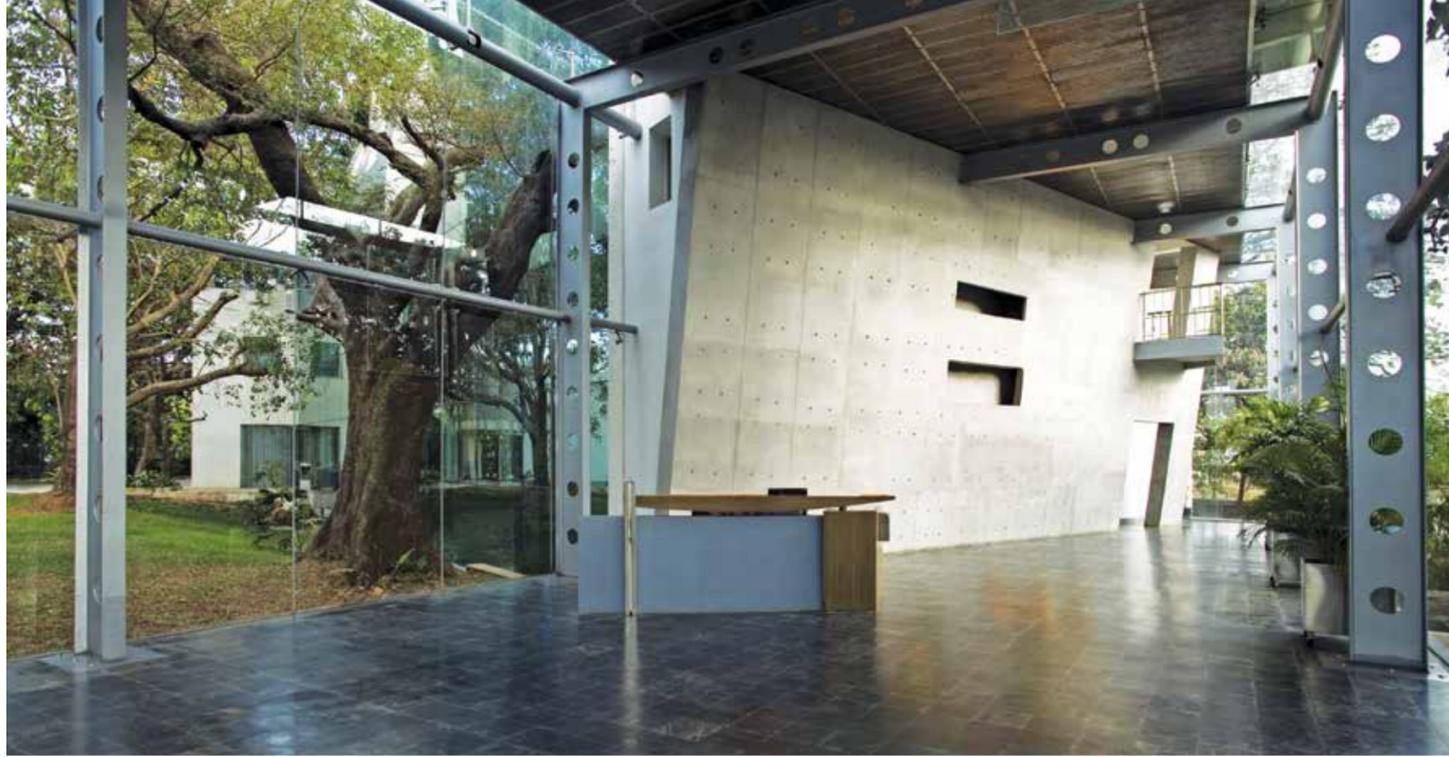
Growing up with the beauty of the commanding Himalayas, Kamal Malik says, "My early memories are of Shimla, the mountains, where I was born and brought up, which shaped the course of my journey, to a large extent." He sees his path in architecture as parallel but separate from the larger personal one, saying, "There are 2 journeys - one that I undertook, and the other one that most people want to ask about, which is architecture. They are separate journeys; one may have influenced the other, but I won't attempt to tie those influences."

### **Early influences**

He speaks of his childhood in the early 1950s, as a simpler time, less influenced by what he calls 'the dependence on gadgets', adding that the family got their first radio when he was seven. The emphasis was on clean, outdoor living, which he calls game changing.

Malik was raised by his grandparents, as his father served in the army. They saw no reason why a boy would need to spend any time indoors till dusk and encouraged enjoying the outdoors, with horse riding and boxing. The emphasis was on the physical rather than just book learning.



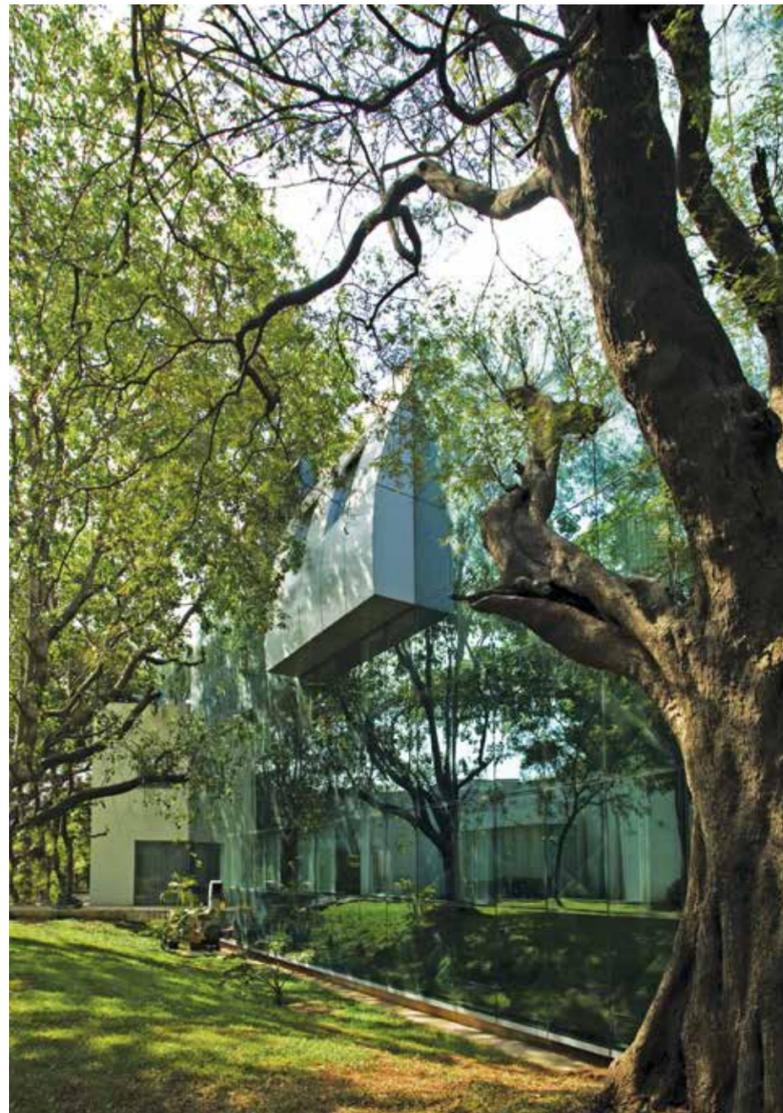


Despite this, he emphasizes that he did get the best of education, as a student of Bishop Cotton where the faculty was made up of an order of Irish priests who were passionate about imparting great education.

He says, "There was a real effort to ensure we enjoyed what we were studying, and if you enjoy something you do it with a little more concentration than when you are forced to do it."

He speaks fondly of those schooldays saying the students were prepared for a range of capabilities, from academia to public speaking and essay writing with an eye to improving their life skills through gentle mentoring.

Malik continues, "Of course such an education moulds you - how can it not? They were also incredibly strict in those times, but you played soccer with them in the evening, and that was the end of the matter."

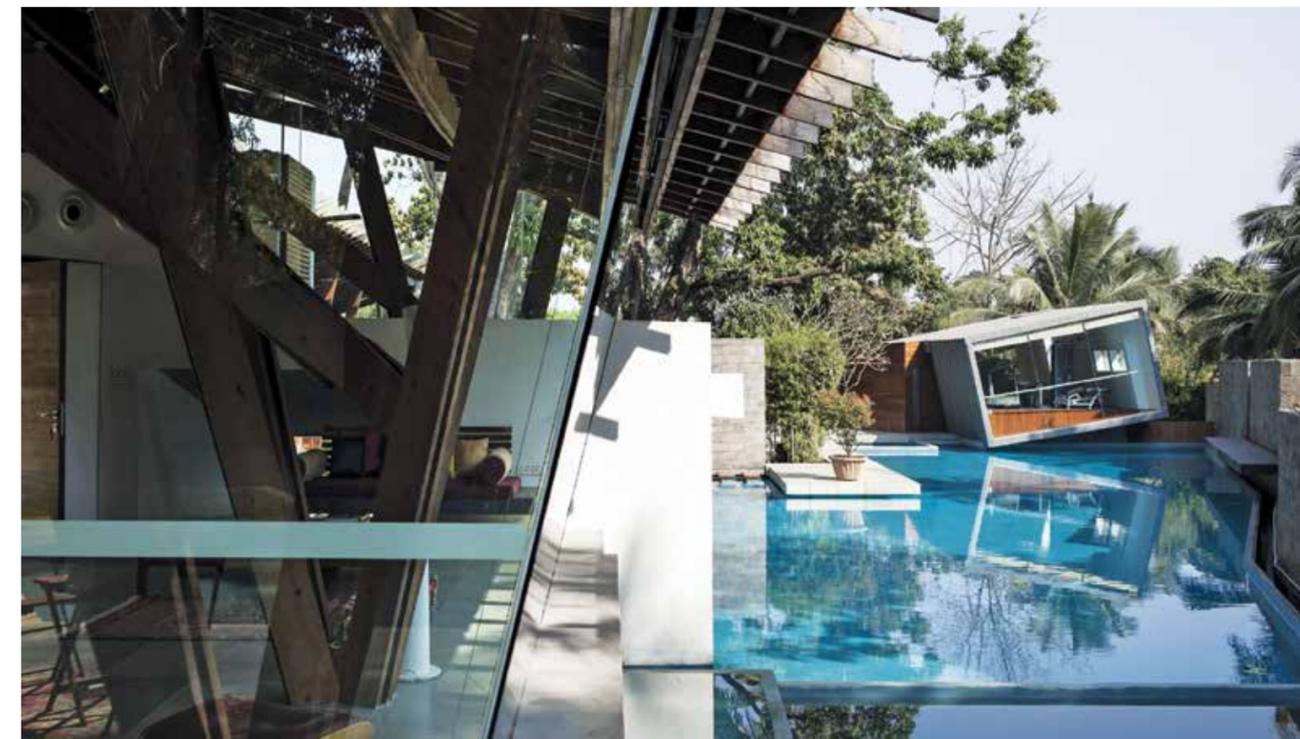


*"Instead of putting a stamp that 'Kamal Malik has been here', I seek to make myself invisible. There is a conscious attempt to not impose and from being a determinist architect, you become a catalyst. You are watching, observing, and most importantly, listening."*



He says this exposure to Nature played an important role in the person he is today. "The outcome of all this was that I developed a closer contact with Nature. You notice the change of the seasons; there were times when I woke up to find the whole world had turned white. And you fall in tune with that. When one starts to get closer and closer to nature, there is a language of communication."

Nature and a philosophy of life  
"Communication with nature turns to communion. There is a different intensity and oneness starts to happen," he says. This is one aspect of the journey, which overrides everything else because it influences every one of your actions. If you embrace nature, you will also find that there is no duality. And if you realize that this is the same aspect of nature that





dwells in you or me, you also don't find a division. So, my whole approach to life becomes unfragmented and I find that I cannot think negatively about anybody, knowing that they are part of the whole."

Connecting this deep philosophy of life to his architectural practice, Malik says, "This is very important when you come down to discussions about architecture. Somewhere in your work, these thoughts manifest themselves."

Having created iconic structures and enjoying the gravitas of having been in the industry for a significant time, Kamal Malik is often asked about is process. He says, "I've often been asked 'When you go to a site, what is

your first response? Do you pick up a pencil and start sketching; do you think this form should be here?' But when you realize that the mind is simply a collection of the past, so to expect something fresh and new to come from that past is impossible.

When I go to a site, I consciously do not carry baggage. I've often been criticized for not having a style, but that has never bothered me. My response to a site, when you're coming without baggage, is almost childlike, where knowledge does not accompany you, because all knowledge is old. I am reminded of what Gautam Buddha said - when you place your feet in running water they will never touch the same water again, because that has already flowed on."



#### Thoughts on his practice

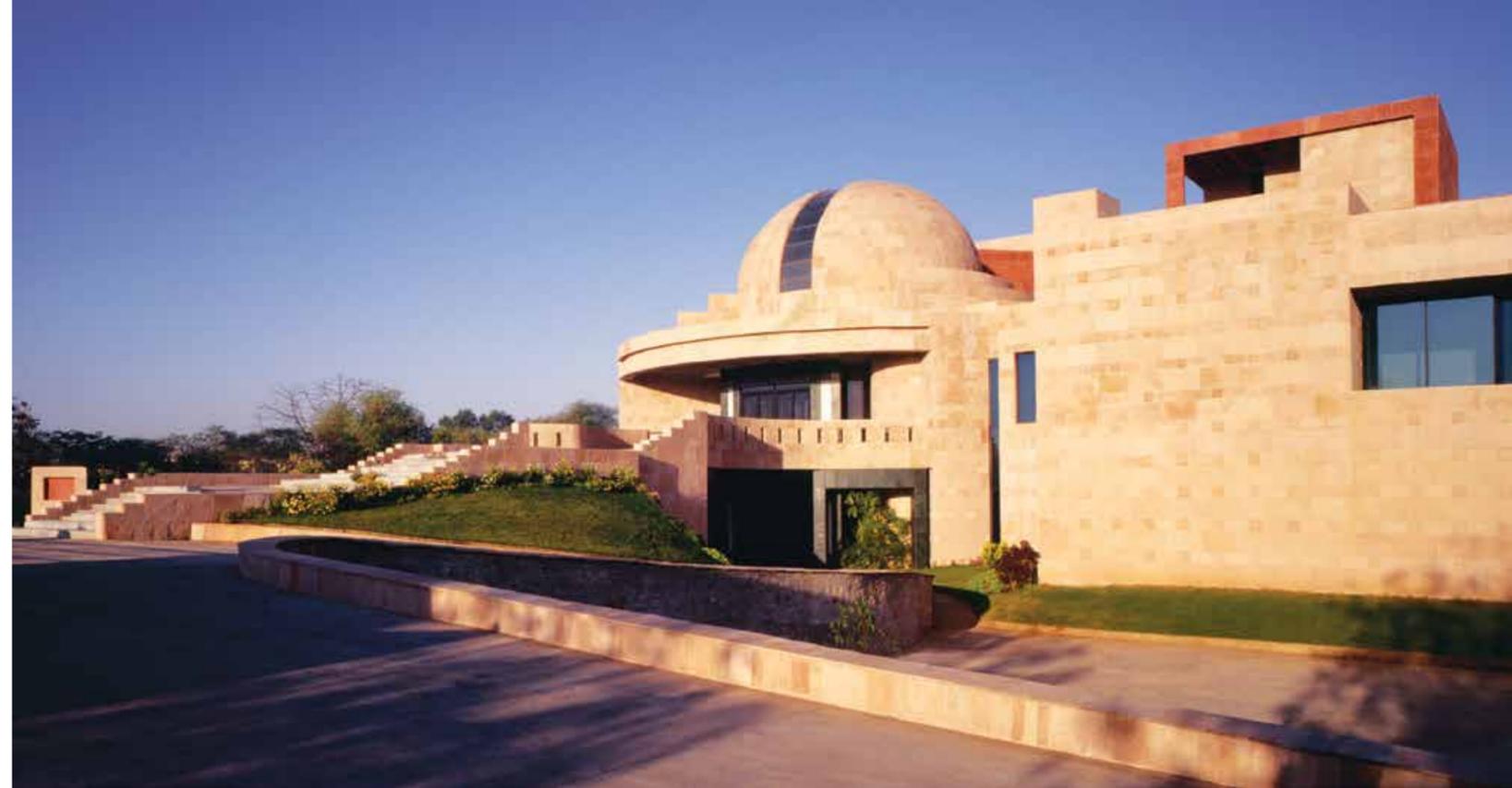
Kamal Malik speaks of the interesting nature of the sites he has worked on, saying they have been unusual and call for sensitivity and puts this in the context of his design philosophy. He says these sites are 'where one hesitates to draw a line, and rather are forced to ask if you can really improve anything'. Describing the importance of permitting the site to grow, he shares his thoughts on the family home in Lonavala, near Mumbai. "Every time I go there, I find the trees are getting bigger, and the forest seems to be encroaching. Maybe, in 10 years, the house will not be seen at all, not even the fleeting glimpses of stone walls. We're obsessed with form, but it's transient."

Malik says his philosophy helps understand the client and how they want to live, without 'jumping down their throats'. He says, "I think clients hire you as a guide, without questioning how they should live. But I'm certainly going to talk about where the sun rises, wind movement, sustainability, nature, and so on." Describing this nurturing of the client, he says, "We had a client who was Jain, and went to the temple every morning. We built him a kund in the north-east corner, which looks like a piece of sculpture, accessed by a stepping stone bridge."



Continuing his way of thinking to the practice at large, Kamal Malik says, "I'm firmly convinced that if a person practices his art with honesty, diligence and patience, all other things take care of themselves. Running after something doesn't get you that something. This led to another decision on the way they work, saying, "We do not work in a hurry. There are many practices that brought in multiple associates, but with my son and me, we still prefer to draw the first lines. That's a difficult, non-commercial choice." Describing the father-son practice, he says, "The shape of the practice is constantly debated. We do think about whether we should be constantly harnessed; and my son has begun to think like me, especially since he has become a father too. Unlike most practices, we don't divide work, we work on the same projects together; we make our site visits together, so we are in tune when we start drawing the first lines."

Kamal Malik and his son Arjun work in the realm of education, hospitality, healthcare, and commercial architecture. Malik adds, "Most of my projects evolve around a spine, an important tool in the act of meditation. My projects don't conclude - I don't have a beginning and an end, because I believe in the infinite. It's not a linear passage."



They enjoy undertaking small but important interventions. Malik describes one. "There is an old Shiva temple that gets submerged under Purna lake and is only accessible for some part of the year. Two years ago, we restored it. These are some of the initiatives that we undertake."

The Maliks carry this broad philosophy of oneness into their daily lives. Kamal Malik says, "I'm a farmer; I grow my own food. I am deeply involved with the farming community around my weekend home and have come up with schemes to benefit the families living in the area."

Summing up, he says, "So that is the background, a journey of communion with nature, coupled with spirituality, and finally, manifesting itself as an architecture of silence. I believe that the silence I have been blessed with I must transfer as much as I can, leave it behind me wherever I go. And most people who live in those homes, they feel blessed."

#### OUT OF THE BOX

##### What are you working on, now?

We're doing a book of 10 homes that span four decades of work of the practice. We chose residential structures specifically because they touch the lives of people intimately.

##### What are your other passions?

I write. There's a manuscript of about 80 pages on my experiences with meditation that is very private.

I enjoy sketching with charcoals. And I read a lot of very diverse books, from Hemingway to the Russian masters to Albert Camus. My reading progressively has become less and less easy – extending to Osho and Krishnamurti. It's good to engage with these elevated minds, because they're always operating in the gray zone.

I have, for 40 years, been an ardent squash player and sports is an integral part of my life.



## Ar. Nirmal Mangal

### Vision :

The role of an architect is to create aesthetic, functional, socially and culturally responsible designs in alignment with values of the community. The designs should be honest, promote highest ethical standards and push the limits of established design norms.

## To architecture born.

Born in Agra, in the shadow of the incomparable Taj Mahal, in a city with one of the largest concentrations of Mughal architecture in the world, it would appear that Nirmal Mangal's career path was a *fait accompli*. His father too was an architect, one of the first batch of the Sir J J School of Architecture. As the family's official guide to the Taj, Mangal says he grew up with a love-hate relationship with the fabled monument and scant appreciation of the heritage he was surrounded by. This changed when he joined the Chandigarh College of Architecture, where he went through a process of rediscovery of this heritage.

It was chance rather than the legacy of the great Le Corbusier which inspired his decision to read architecture at Chandigarh. He explains, "At the time, Chandigarh was an architectural experiment, and was in the youth of that experiment. It was wonderful to see it evolve, and that didn't hit us till we were halfway through the program. We learnt about Le Corbusier in our first year, but we did not realize the impact of where we were studying and that the legacy of Le Corbusier was phenomenal." At the time, he saw and appreciated the work, not just of Le Corbusier but of his colleagues Maxwell Fry and Pierre Jeanneret, whose signature he says can be seen in the buildings of Chandigarh.



He describes the time he spent at college as filled with design exploration. He says, "I thoroughly enjoyed my time there and it was an incredible high. Most of us pretty much lived in the studio, at a time with less distractions (Internet, smart phones, social media), so we spent a lot of time in design exploration. College helped me reposition my thought process as I became more aware of how little time I had spent in design exploration."

Nirmal Mangal later trod the path to the USA, to read city and regional planning, in Texas, but quit after the first semester, to work. Two years later, he went back to complete the Masters in architecture and settled to work in the US over the next 35 years gaining wide experience and learning.

Of the many experiences he gained, he speaks of his time at the iconic Taliesin Associated Architects, "Frank Lloyd Wright believed in this philosophy of the architect as a master builder and that though he never did design, that it should be the architect who should be directing the construction, because he is the content creator."

Of the three years that he led the design section of Taliesin, Mangal says, "Though it didn't quite work out, it was an incredible experience. I had



*"The strength that MMoser brings to the table, and what I focus on actually, is that we really don't have a catalog, or cookie-cutter style. It's process of joint discovery, where we take the client through the path of discovering what is the right design for them."*

full access to Frank Lloyd Wright's archives – I was actually allowed to touch the original drawings and I met people who were Frank Lloyd Wright's actual assistants; what I learnt from them was amazing. I have so many stories about my experience there."

When Mangal joined MMoser in 2010, he says he was not assigned to a specific office for 3 years, and rotated every other month between China, Hong Kong, Singapore, India and the US. The company was involved largely in designing interiors, but had clients reaching out to them as they appreciated their process, to design their office buildings, and so they expanded their portfolio to the office space.

Nirmal Mangal's mandate at MMoser over a decade ago was to grow their architectural practice in India, but found himself faced with a far wider brief. He has recently moved away from the running of the firm to focus more on the architectural practice, with the focus on end users rather than developer projects.

#### **Milestones at MMoser**

The several projects Nirmal Mangal helmed at MMoser, the Barmalt Development, a residential project at Gurugram stands out. Comprising about 500 apartments, the project was uniquely designed to provide various living experiences from villas to apartments to penthouses, in different kind of housing modality. He says, "Barmalt surprised me in the way it turned out. This client had never done a project of this type. We prepared at least a dozen schemes for them, and each scheme had a very different design concept. We sold the idea to them of a very simple concept, and the client loved it. When the concept evolved into the finished schematic design, the development was absolutely miraculous."

With a wider portfolio in the interiors space, Mangal says there was a huge opportunity to experiment. "We call it 'Inside Out' Architecture. MMoser's strong DNA in interiors, makes even our architectural projects program-centric, not whimsical. These are



projects which have a very strong basis on what the functionality of the offices are. So by the time the office is designed, both the architecture and the interior design work well.”

He speaks of other notable projects; a 400,000 sq ft project for VMware in Bangalore, the Walt Disney office in Chakala, Mumbai all of which were unique to the client. He explains, “The key thing is that none of these projects have anything in common. This is because the interior of every project is client-centric and a reflection of who the client is, how they work. The workplace strategy varies from client to client.”

Mangal describes the importance of strategic planning, as a part of the design process; one that’s based on the old problem-seeking methodology coined by Texas-based architect Bill Caudill who came up with the idea of ‘problem seeking’ (later a book of the same name) by asking the client what they want. Nirmal Mangal says this thinking was incorporated into projects adding value and delight. He explains, “In a project for Willis Tower Watson in Thane, Mumbai, we totally changed their thinking. It was such a departure from how they used to work versus how they work now, that when we completed that office, it

became a model for them to use in other offices. We were very happy to be able to influence that.” Design thinking was at the fore again, in a project for Google, Hyderabad. Mangal says they steered the client away from their prototypical thinking and explored new possibilities together. He says, “ Since then, it has been an incredible journey. The strength that MMoser brings to the table, and what I focus on, is that we really don’t have a catalog, or cookie-cutter style. It’s process of joint discovery, where we take the client through the path of discovering what is the right design for them. We think that approach has served us well.”

**Personal passions**

The self-professed ‘travel junkie’ also has a love of music and art, and an enduring passion for design saying, “I think the reason why I am interested in architecture is that I respond to design, whether it is the design of a pen or a phone. I am always looking for a paradigm shift in design, and the perfect example for that is how the design of the iPhone knocked Nokia off its perch as the world’s most popular phone.”

A lover of art and music, Nirmal Mangal says he enjoys museums and Western classical music, seeing art and music as a sort of continuum, he says, “The wonderful part about art is that it cannot be held down. People are always going to be exploring new ideas, new thoughts, they cannot be held back. I’m enthused about what is happening globally; my worry in India is that we are not spending sufficient time in design exploration.”





#### Engagement with gennext

Nirmal Mangal enjoys interacting with the Nextgen, saying, “The things I would like to see is for people to let their imagination loose, really see possibilities around them. I would really like to get engaged with some schools of architecture and show them where the possibilities are and where the inflection points are.”

These pivotal moments in architecture are often at the confluence of technology and design, Mangal says, “Modern architecture is full of such inflection points. Buildings were only around 5 storeys tall until Otis invented the elevator, which is how we got skyscrapers. In Paris, too, the top apartments under the mansard roofs used to be servant’s quarters, because nobody



wanted to climb up. The most valued apartments used to be on the ground floor. Now, the situation is entirely different – the most valued apartments are on the top floor. I’m hoping that future generations will discover similar inflection points, that will set the stage in the future.”

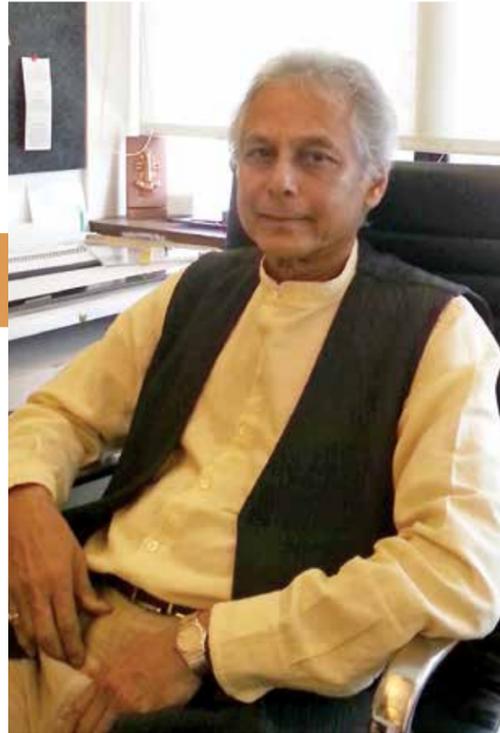
A prolific speaker and lecturer, he enjoys engaging with young minds. At a lecture at CEPT, Ahmedabad he asked how many were doing a thesis on low-cost housing, when 75 per cent raised their hands. He then made the point of distinction, saying, “You are missing the point here. You are not necessarily exploring design boundaries, what you are exploring is social issues. You will have time to do this in future should you wish to do so, but don’t waste this time you have in college to explore without it having an adverse impact on your career and finances.”



#### OUT OF THE BOX

##### What new thing did the pandemic make you think of?

We are looking at how to do resilient architecture. Because of the pandemic, we were all shut down, and this got us thinking, could we have designed things in a different way? How can we make the environment safe for our loved ones and colleagues? How can commerce work, and the urban infrastructure function?



## Ar. Prakash Mankar

### **Vision :**

A true designer finds a solution hidden in the spaces and enhances this with his skill to decorate spaces for clients in a way that they would never dream of doing on their own.



## Realizing a childhood dream.

Prakash Mankar realized that he wanted to be an architect before he learned the word. He says he was impressed by a beautiful bungalow he passed, on his way to school in Santa Cruz, Mumbai, and asked his teacher, who made such wonderful structures. She informed him that it was an architect. He says, "The next time my English teacher set us an essay, 'My aim in life,' I promptly wrote saying I want to be an architect. That's how I embarked on this path."

Describing his life at the time as humble, Mankar speaks of the joint family structure he lived in at Girgaum Chowpatty, where six members of the family shared a 10 foot x 12 foot room. "But," he says, "my mother always wanted to have her own house, so she persuaded my father to buy this plot of land on Ghodbandar Road (now SV Road)." Unable to afford the Rs. 15 per square yard price, they purchased it jointly with his uncle. That was when the young Mankar was 9. Later, he says he added to the structure as a young architect.

Interestingly, Parallax Studio, with whom Mankar has partnered, is situated on the top floor of the building that stands on the same plot, today. On completion of the secondary school certificate, Prakash Mankar joined the Sir JJ School of Art and Architecture, for the five-year course in architecture and joined the architectural firm of Bajpai Madan Patki Razdan, studying part-time. The firm was working on several important large-scale projects; factories, like the Mahindra factory, residential projects like Woodlands, Peddar Road, hotels like the Oberoi Sheraton. It was a time of practical learning in the seven years he worked with the firm, until he was given an opportunity he could not pass up.





### Life moves, career changes

It was at the time that the Oberoi Sheraton was being constructed in partnership with Dale Keller and Associates, Hong Kong. One person was to go to Hong Kong, work with Dale Keller on the project, then return to supervise. Ar. P G Patki encouraged Mankar to interview for the position, which he got, starting his journey started from architecture to interior design.

This was the beginning of a long stint in hospitality, first with Dale Keller projects in Asia and later, a bond of 3 years with the Oberois. Once completed, Prakash Mankar joined PG Patki to start their interior design division.

Reminiscing, Prakash Mankar says, "In those days, there were no qualified or experienced interior designers. The field was restricted to housewives and socialites." Stepping into the space with a professional approach, the firm garnered several important projects. The first of these was ITC Maurya hotel, Delhi. During the 1982 Asiad, they landed commissions to design three hotels – the Hyatt Regency, the Centaur at the airport and the Park hotel in Connaught Place. "These were definitely milestones in my career," says Ar. Mankar.

### Old school to new

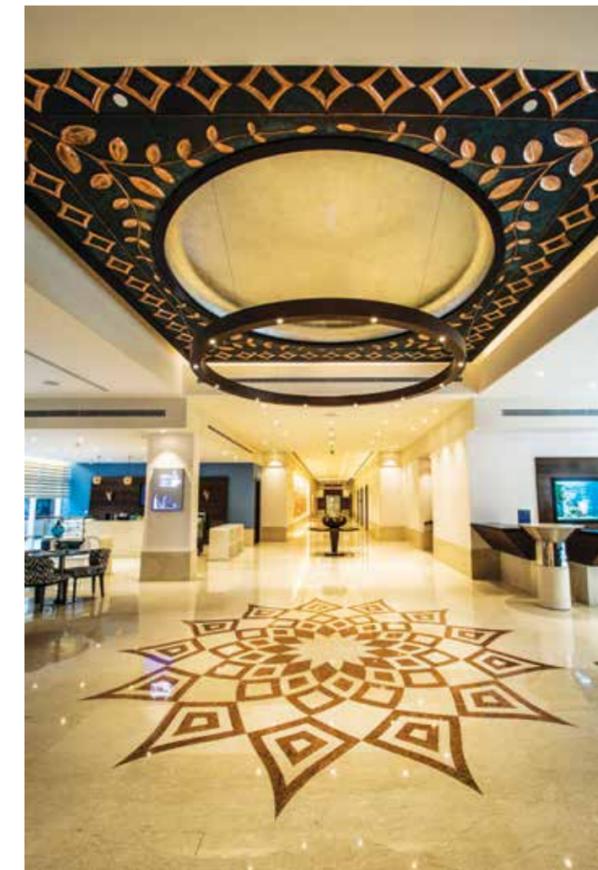
The evolution of computer technology saw a shift from the drawing board to software. Their major body of work being hotel design interiors, the shift was smooth., though Prakash Mankar says he is more old school, "These enabled designers to work on multiple jobs simultaneously. However, I still work on the drawing board." Technology also helped expand their focus to the interiors of hospitals that included the biggest and best from Hinduja hospital to the Asian Heart Institute, Saifee Hospital and Jupiter Hospitals. Discussing their portfolio, Mankar says they did foray into the commercial office space doing Citibank offices around India, but that the core areas of specialization stayed non-residential.



*"The three principles that have stayed with me have been hard working, integrity and honesty. These have seen me through this long career of mine."*

### Evolving design, changing spaces

Prakash Mankar says the interiors of hotels have seen a sea change in concept. He says, "Earlier we used to create an environment of grandeur and opulence using expensive materials. The idea was to make believe you were entering a new world and a different ambience, with a ritzy appearance. Since imports were restricted in those days, one had to work with indigenous materials to create a 'wow' factor. Soon, the minimalistic approach to design, pioneered by Anouska Hempel in 1978, gained momentum. I happened to visit the Blake hotel, and was very impressed."

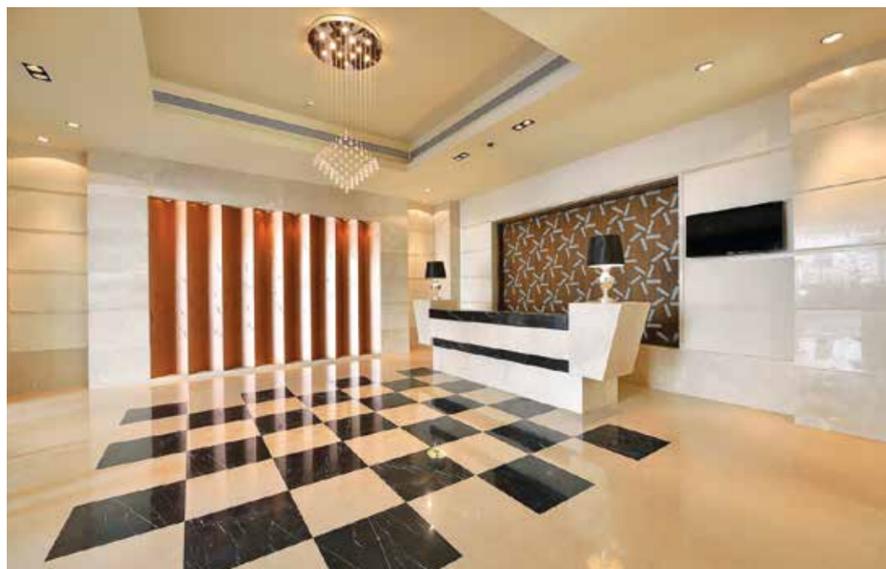




#### Stand-out projects

In a career spanning decades, Prakash Mankar says, “All my projects are very dear to me, but we enjoyed working on the Fariyas resort in Lonavala in the 1980s, creating a chalet-like hotel concept. The Rajputana Palace Sheraton in Jaipur, was notable too, “We used local materials, local talent and picked up design references from the palaces and forts in Rajasthan. That was a very satisfying project,” he says.

Exploring interesting projects, Mankar says, “I vividly remember the interiors for the ITC Maurya in Delhi, which remain the same today, as in 1976.” He says they noticed the asymmetrical placement of columns in the lobby which went against their design of a chaitya-style dome of the Maurya dynasty, which required symmetrical columns. Despite the expense of the large structural change both the architect and the designers wanted, the management saw the wisdom of this and the result was an iconic structure.



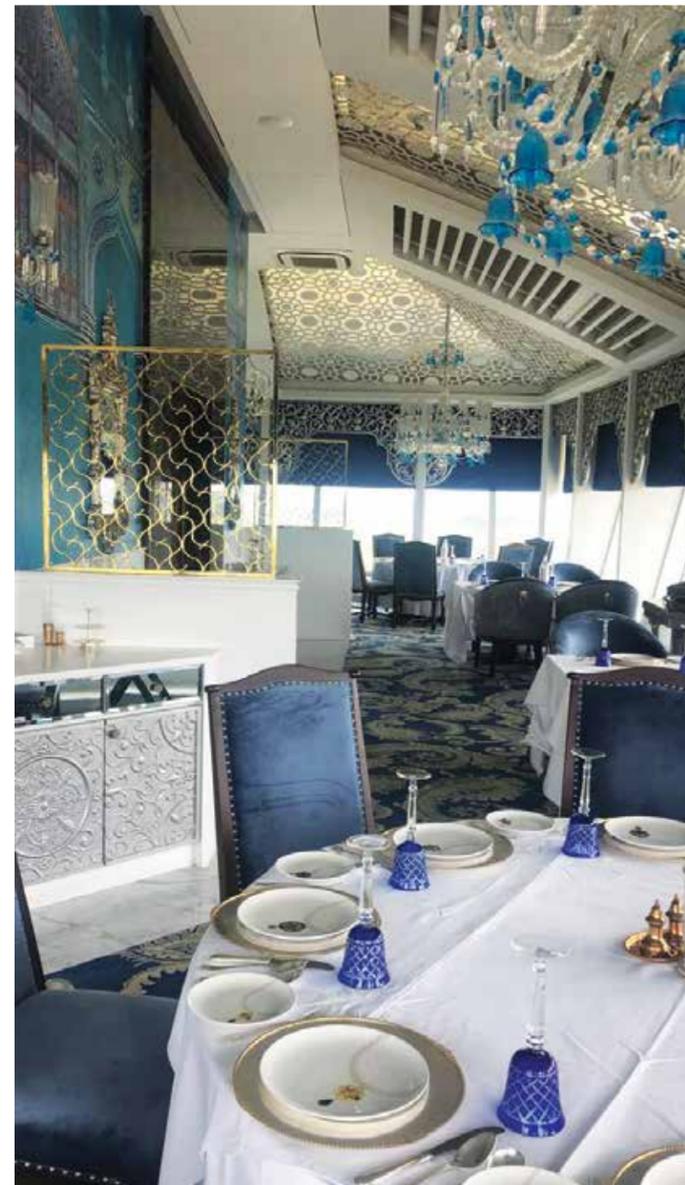
#### Lessons learned

This experience taught them valuable lessons on the early, simultaneous hiring of both the architect and the interior designer. This proved to be a valuable part of client education, and has become a part of the process of property development.

Mankar says the most challenging aspect of an interiors project is the budget, saying clients do not share their true budget causing a number of complications in the process from surfeit to deficit. A lack of surplus funds leaves no room to maneuver while a last-minute excess cannot add “gold and silver” to the design.

#### What we need

Speaking of what’s important, Prakash Mankar says, “When we started, there was not much competition. Now, it’s ruthless, almost a jungle, but the three principles that have stayed with me have been hard work, integrity and honesty. These have seen me through this long career of mine.” He goes on to discuss the state of the industry in the context of tourism and finds a clear role for government, especially in the new Indian reality of large domestic demand. He says, “Tourism was never a priority of the government. There are many places in India that would benefit from good hotels. I don’t mean fancy, expensive hotels; if a family wants to enjoy a holiday today, decent hotel accommodation is out of their reach. You need clean hotels, like the Taj brand Ginger, and the Sarovar



HomeTels. India has tremendous potential in terms of the domestic market, it's not just about catering to foreign visitors."

All change is inevitable. He says Indian design will come into its own, "I am certain that things will change, new hotels will be developed and provide opportunities to designers. Thanks to the opening up of the economy, international designers are increasingly preferred to design five-star hotels. For example, at the time of the Asiad, because we didn't have surplus forex, indigenous designers were given a chance. If given the opportunity, Indian architects can give a good account of themselves. The commitment and skills of chosen professionals will take India to the next level. I'm very bullish about this."

**Present work and future legacy**  
 What excites Prakash Mankar is doing interesting projects, irrespective of size. He speaks of a small 3 star plus hotel for Sarovar in a beautiful location at Guhagar and one near Kolhapur called Amba, a serene and beautiful landscaped plot with streams running through it and mountains in the background, for a planned hotel, residential facilities and hospital project. A matter of pride is that his son is the principal architect on the project, while the father works on the interiors. Speaking of the father-son team, he says the relationship is harmonious, having worked on other projects together, including the Radissons in Chennai and Ranchi and the Grand Bhagwati in Surat.



**Future positive**

Speaking of his legacy, he responds thoughtfully, "When I think of my legacy, I feel that whichever era you are born in, there are three things that pay rich dividends – hard work, honesty and integrity. Follow these principles and you will sleep better."

Mankar speaks positively of the scope for interior designers in the future, with more colleges offering courses and the course itself being less taxing than architecture. The possibilities of having a small practice, or even a home office are all far easier in the field. He adds a cautionary note, "I would, however, like to sound one word of warning. In this profession, do not undercut anyone; follow a code of ethics, because architecture is a very noble profession. Don't do anything to tarnish its image – that is my humble request to young practitioners. Also, be honest with yourself, don't waste your clients' money, this will help you have a long and fulfilling career."

Relaxing away from his enormous body of work and feeling of fulfillment, Prakash Mankar enjoys a round of golf at the Bombay Presidency Golf Club, saying he is a golf addict!

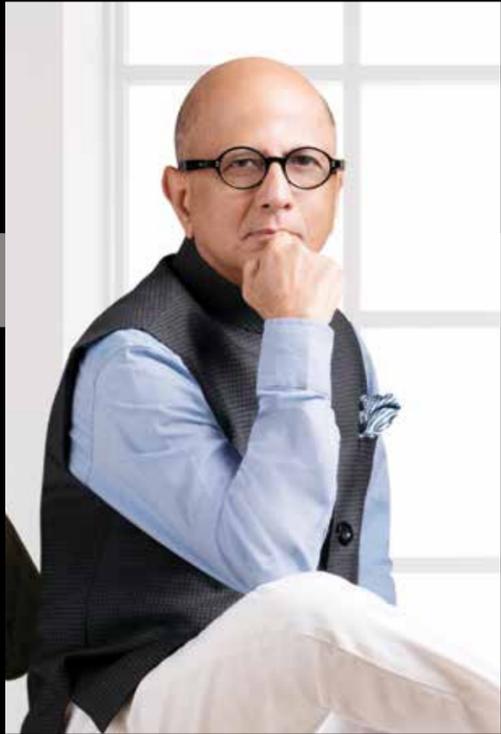


**OUT OF THE BOX**

**3 golf courses you really want to play on:**  
 Pebble Beach (California),  
 The Amby Valley Golf Course (Lonavala),  
 Oxford Golf Resort Pune.

**3 best hotel designs:**  
 The Hempel hotel, London;  
 The ITC Sonar Bangla, Kolkata;  
 The Emirates Palace, Abu Dhabi.

**A hotel you designed that you really enjoy:**  
 The Marine Plaza in Mumbai. All the buildings along that stretch are in the Art Deco style, so we tried to bring that aspect into the interiors. I particularly enjoyed doing the hotel bar, Geoffrey's.



## Ar. Alfaz Miller

**Vision :**  
To deliver timeless design consistently; design that is practical to use, implement and maintain.

## An appreciation of timeless design.

As a young boy, Alfaz Miller's exposure to architecture was limited to some relatives, cousins of his mother, who were architects and of whom she spoke highly. He recalls being good at drawing at school, and on completion of the high school certificate course at Saint Mary's Mumbai, he says, "pursuing an architectural education seemed the appropriate training to pursue."

Largely influenced by his mother and a few school teachers, Miller appreciated the advice he received from them and used this to make decisions on his career path.

He soon joined the Sir J J College of Architecture for the degree course and speaks appreciatively of Ar. Khareghat, the venerable uncle of the well-known Ar.Hafeez Contractor, saying, " T. Khareghat, Hafeez Contractor's uncle was a visiting design professor in architecture school. I felt we shared a bond and the same design sensibilities."





What stood out for him at college, was his fond memories of some close friendships which he made at the college. He says, "I have very fond memories of my 3 colleagues at the Sir J. J. College of Architecture. Munawar Noorani, whose father and brother were successful architects and Khalid Merchant, a compulsive gambler and Alankar Bhushan." It was with Bhushan that Miller started ABM Architects in 1972, when they had just graduated.



*"I have retired! I only design now". Implying that I have retired from managing a practice, which gives me time to design, and enjoy the experience."*



Miller says there were many happy memories of the time, several from the course and more from out of the course as he says it was the memories associated with his friends that stand out. He laughs at the memories of “Khalid asking Alankar, if the police would catch him for holding his girlfriend’s hand; Munawar making a design presentation of a master plan and calling a swimming pool a skating rink; and Alankar eating “kheema gothala” at Civil restaurant, opposite the school every day for lunch.

**Professional life**

While the fun of college days was unforgettable, the learnings made him the architect he is. He started fairly small, with his first commission, which

was the interior design of a small residence. Speaking of this project and what he learned, he says, “The main learning was how quickly the job got executed and the good amount of fees we earned in 3 months!”

While the jobs started flowing in soon after, he says, “The first significant milestone was the interior design of ANZ Grindlays Bank, at MG Road, Mumbai, which won ABM Architects, its first design award. Then many years later, the restoration and expansion of the ABN Amro Bank building in Baroda, and more recently the interior design of the Lounges in Mumbai International airport at T2. An interesting but extremely challenging project was the engineering and execution of the Art program at T2.”



All these projects were in sync with what was happening in the larger world of architecture in terms of preservation and adaptive reuse of the materials as well as of the fine detailing and immaculate execution. He adds that, “It was their distinctive and timeless design, and a craftsman like execution,” that made these stand out or become landmark projects.

**Principles and passions**

Alfaz Miller takes his projects seriously, as he does most matters, he says. What he describes as the guiding principles of his design process and in fact of his life are, “function, aesthetics which includes form and proportions, constructibility and cost,” adding, “I am a serious person by nature and my designs are subdued yet relevant and contextual.”



He offsets the seriousness of his practice with his passions for vintage cars and art. He says, “I was passionate about vintage cars. I am passionate now about our art collection, which is housed at home and in our office building.” Placing the credit of building the art collection at the door of his wife Brinda Miller, a well-known artist, he says, “The art collection just happened because Brinda knows most of the artists.



Some paintings were bought and some were exchanged with Brinda's work."

**The recent past and future**

Contrary to popular thinking on the state of the profession that credit all the ills of the profession to the pandemic and the business fallout of this, Alfaz Miller says, "Things have been tough even before the pandemic." Never in the position of wondering whether the next project would come from, he says, "The projects came but there were inordinate delays, budget constraints, etc," all making for a stressful work environment in hard times.

Despite the period of gloom and doom, the architect has a positive prognosis for the future of Indian architecture. He says, "In a developing country like India, architecture, city planning and environmental engineering will have a decent future." However, as with much else in the public domain, he points to the role of the government, saying, "A lot of improvement is required in the regulatory framework."

He feels the country has an important role to play in the future of design, with the fact of its being still in a development stage being a



positive. Miller says, "India is important because it is still developing and good design will improve the living conditions of the masses."

Alfaz Miller speaks simply of his legacy, saying, "My legacy is my work and my family who are all into architecture, design and art. The story unfolds with my daughter, Aahana, running the firm in future, with same values that I have inculcated in them and my practice."

Having run a venerable practice for several decades, Miller has some wisdom on patience and perseverance, to pass on to gennext. He says, "I would tell the Next Gen that design is serious stuff, that requires to be developed with a lot of patience. There is no quick fix solution. Take inspiration from the work of others, adapt and improvise and develop your own design language. Accept your failures and learn from them."

**OUT OF THE BOX**

**What would you be, if you were not an architect?**  
If I was not an Architect, I would be a carpenter.

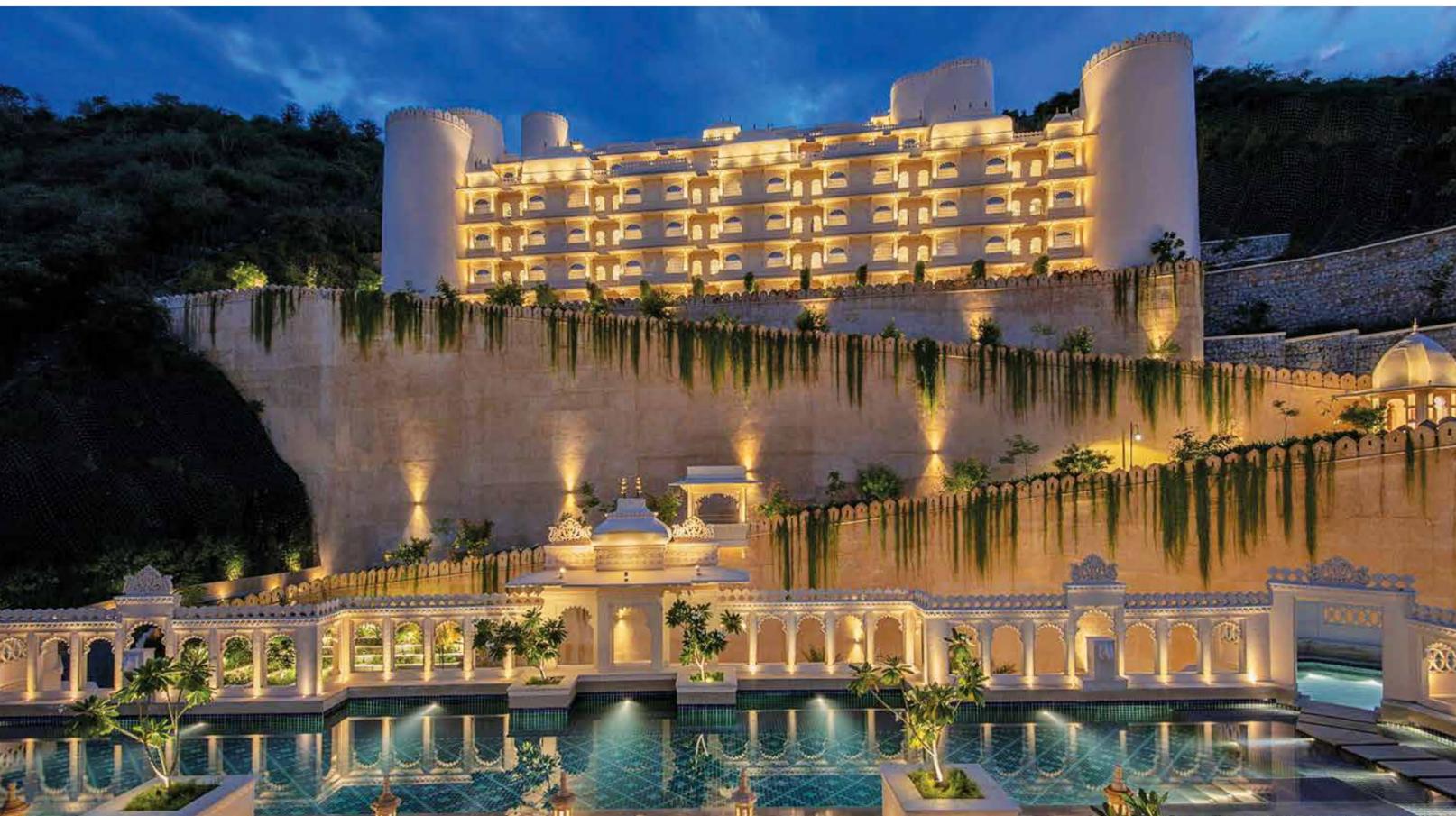
**What inspires you?**  
Nature and a good environment inspire me.



## Ar. Bobby Mukherjee

### **Vision :**

We believe design is a fluid and organic entity that blends cultures to give birth to beauty that speaks to the soul. Devoted to creating unique experiences, environments and city scapes, helping our clients achieve their vision is our primary goal.

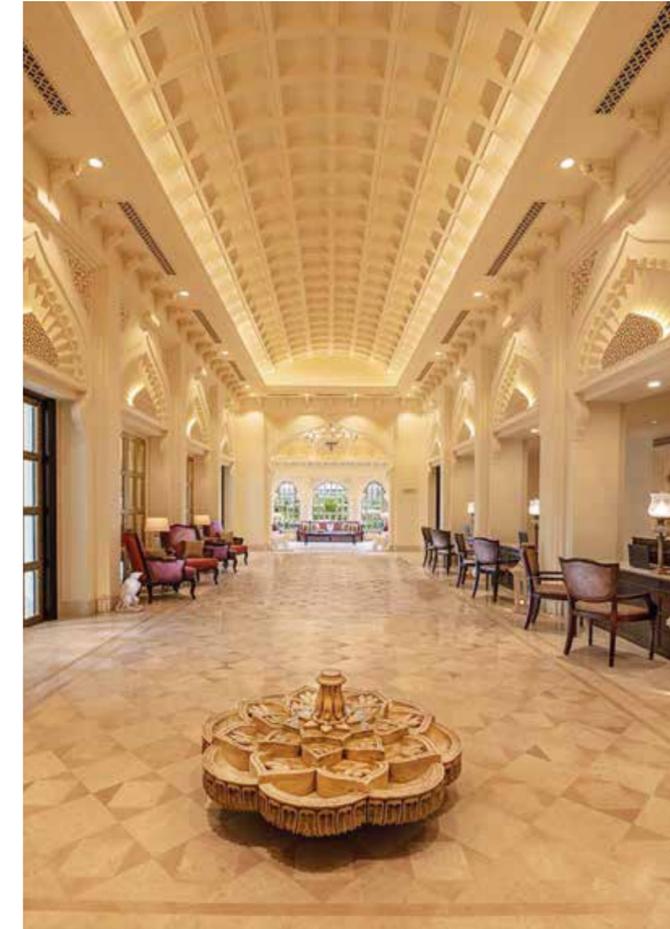


## Invoking drama into design.

Born into a family steeped in dramatic creativity, Bobby Mukherjee's path was fairly set by the time he had completed the higher secondary school course. While Bollywood seemed to beckon, with both parents in show business, and an impressive 27 ad films already under his belt by the time he reached Grade X, Bobby Mukherjee chose a different route. His choice had narrowed to being an artist or an architect, but the 'Picasso of Bombay Scottish School' as he was dubbed thanks to his ability in art and capacity to win prizes in the field, chose to be an architect.

Of his choice, Bombay-born Bobby Mukherjee says, "My first choice would have been to be a painter but I understood that it was not the safest bet." This apart, a visit to a hotel construction site impressed the young boy, who says, "I saw the grand scale of things at an early age."

The young Bobby Mukherjee remembers schooldays as being filled with auditions, "I remember doing the first black and white ad film for Britannia biscuits and other ad films for brands like Prestige cooker." Sadly, being diagnosed as slightly dyslexic making the written word an issue while his visual memory was strong. Mukherjee says the support his teachers gave him saw him through to achievement. "An art teacher in school, (Mrs. Sen), and the principal of Rachana Sansad Academy of Architecture, Pradeep Amberkar, helped Bobby Mukherjee succeed.





Mukherjee went to New York immediately after the degree to work and train but sadly realized some harsh truths. "I realized that I had learnt nothing during my five years of education in India and had to unlearn everything. We were only taught to draft and draw with no focus on critical thinking and analysis. I began to learn from the environment around me and what better place than Manhattan, to do this?" Bobby Mukherjee then joined a firm of young architect friends, in Manhattan, as an associate, bringing his own skills and work experience to the table, having started his own firm while still at college with an established office, staff and projects by the time he finished the course. A different kind

of work experience helped him hone his design skills in hospitality. He says, "I used to take up odd jobs in the evenings, such as a bartender, waiter or kitchen helper; that experience helped me a lot while designing hospitality projects later."

#### Early success

During that time two projects Bobby Mukherjee designed, won acclaim. A restaurant in Chicago won the Esquire 'Best restaurant design of the year' in the US and a healthcare facility for Oxford Health Plans in the Bronx won 'Best healthcare facility in the state of New York'. He began to get noticed and was in the news, with Bloomberg Television, CNN and other



*"My endeavor is to create designs that are timeless and not just made for the moment. When something is just trendy, you rule the roost for that time, but after a while the effect wears off. It is not timeless."*

channels and the LA Times and Detroit Times. The Indian press took note too and that helped jumpstart Bobby Mukherjee's career in India. His use of the internet, then in nascence, got him a page in the Indian Express at the time as "one of the first architects in India using the latest technology."

#### Big changes and many milestones

Bobby Mukherjee returned to India to care for his ailing mother, and fortuitously stayed on. This led to his participating in a competition to design the Amby Valley Project, in partnership with Los Angeles-based Gruen Associates, who had wide experience in

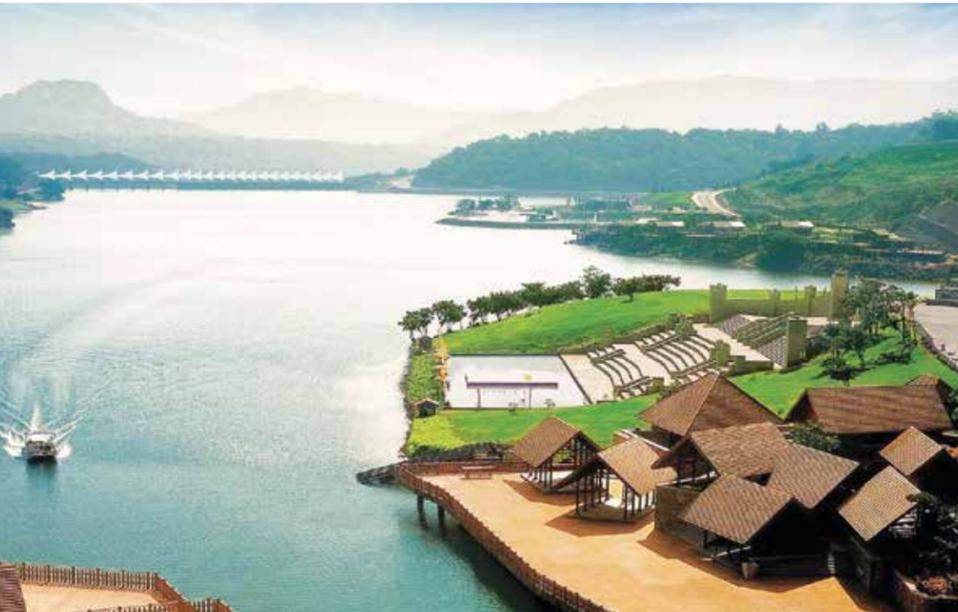
the master planning of several cities and townships. Mukherjee says, "I was ready to do all the hard work but needed their branding and experience." He dedicated an entire year to the preparation for the enormous project, made the final presentation in 1999 and won the bid. Bobby Mukherjee says of the moment, "For me, it is still the most important (project) because it is the biggest such project in free India. I was 28 and it was a 2-billion-dollar project with ten thousand acres of master plan." He worked on Amby Valley from 1999 to 2003 encouraged by the Chairman of Sahara India Parivaar, Subroto Roy, who allowed him all creative freedom.





Mukherjee continues, “All the lakes you see there were created on dry, arid land. I knew I could create large water reservoirs by building small dams. Subroto Roy never hesitated to spend huge amounts and the decisions were quick. He was an amazing patron, who allowed me to do my best.” This also paved the route to hospitality design, now Mukherjee’s forte.

Roy awarded the design contract for seventeen airport lounges all over India to his young architect, throwing the Sahara lounges into prominence and enabling Mukherjee to start bidding for hospitality projects.



This led to another landmark project, the iconic Le Meridien hotel, New Delhi. He says, “From doing a lounge of two to three thousand square feet to designing a big project of five hundred thousand feet was a big jump. I was never formally trained to do the interior detailing of a hospitality project and learnt the importance of documentation at this stage.” The renovation of Le Meridien, New Delhi, was an INR 3.50 billion project, won over renowned firms Wilson and HBA. “That’s how I entered the big glitzy world of five-star hospitality design,” Mukherjee laughs. “I enjoy designing hotels which are landmarks. It is your art, there to be admired by the entire city and the visitors.”

The element of drama made the Le Meridien project unique. From the floor patterns created by lighting to the visual projections from a forty-foot-high ceiling to the four-and-a-half-ton lit optical glass sculpture, at the entry lobby. The atrium forms a



nine- thousand-square-foot artwork; a painting which unfolds as one goes up the glass elevator. Mukherjee says he had engaged the services of some of the best artists and craftsmen from around the world for this project and experimented with different materials such as bleached Ash and glass floor panels from Japan.

All the hard work paid off with Le Meridien Delhi being declared a benchmark by the group, in their design guidelines for architects around the world. Adding another milestone to the journey of Bobby Mukherjee and Associates, comprising partner Paulomi Shah and a team of associates and designers, was the renovation of the prestigious Taj Bengal. He says, “While contemporizing it to modern needs and amenities, we made it even more Bengali in the *Raj Baadi* Style, but with traditional accents.”

**Powerful learnings**

Mukherjee has learned the power of the classic, saying, “What I have seen over time is when you make something too modern or cutting edge or trendy, you rule the roost for a time, but the effect wears off. My endeavor now is to work towards creating designs that are timeless and not just made for the moment.”

He points to the Lemon Tree Hotels, Udaipur as what he terms ‘new age Rajasthani style’, saying, “I know this project will look nice for the next fifty years,” he says, “while on the other hand, my modern, trendy designs might last for a maximum of 8 to 10 years.”



### Broader concerns

Concerned about the state of architecture and real estate in the country, Ar. Mukherjee says a lack of guidelines and master plans for the city create uninspired architecture. He says, "Commercial real estate developers want to use every inch of the floor space (FSI) and that results in boxes. This is a very shallow approach to design and we have a long way to go. We need landscape, roads, gardens, playgrounds and open spaces. A country like Dubai has come up, because of strong leadership and vision!"

He describes the current state of well designed, clean spaces surrounded by poorly laid out cities as 'living in microcosms'; saying "A beautiful palace hotel exists within its walls. The moment you are out of the gate

to go to the airport, the transition could be hell or mediocre, depending upon the city, but never heavenly." He sees the answer in good governance and better practices, with the competitive award of projects for public spaces, oriented toward quality rather than the 'lowest bid' given the abundance of design talent. Mukherjee says, "The great monuments of India were patronized by visionaries and executed by the best professionals not by those who quoted the least. You need patrons to create monumental architecture. Governments need to have the vision of a corporate. The bureaucracy often discourages politicians with a grand vision. Mumbai airport today is the best airport in the country and among 7 best airports in the world because it was a corporate initiative and one of the best international firms was appointed to design it."



### A path for gennext

To see more young people striving big and dreaming big, getting international exposure as a powerful learning tool, to "get out of their familiar surroundings and travel to different parts of the world to learn what architecture and design mean to the lives of people"; these are the dreams Ar. Mukherjee has for gennext. He says, "Our profession is about self-learning. I would advise youngsters to go abroad to seek inspiration and come back to make India a great place."

### Continuing passions and dreams

Bobby Mukherjee keeps his passion for art alive, painting abstracts and professes a love of monochromatic paintings and admires the work of artists like Salvador Dali, Paul Jackson Pollock, Picasso, and Zao Wou-Ki. "Sometimes I feel I should put the business on auto-pilot mode and paint, though that's not possible yet," he smiles.



### OUT OF THE BOX

#### If not India, I would live in:

Italy. I spend a lot of time there and it has influenced me a lot. It is not merely about their architecture; it's the way they dress, the food, the music, design sensibilities in their day to day life!

#### I'd love to visit:

Antarctica! I have been to Finland recently and rode snow bikes through the Alpine forest, chasing the Northern Lights. That is my idea of travel. My profession has taken me to some of the most exotic locations. It is a great opportunity to do the research that makes the design process more meaningful and satisfying.



## Ar. Prem Nath

**Vision :**  
'Simply functional and functionally simple.' A project can be simple in its design aspects but needs to be planned and constructed considering all aspects like material, quality, safety, smart inputs and several others.

## The mindset for success.

The imposing personality of Prem Nath is imbued with drama and flamboyance. Nothing today speaks of the early challenges he has triumphed over and speaks of with pride. He says, "My childhood days date back to the time of the India-Pakistan partition. Imagine a clumsy looking boy, migrating to Delhi to find a better way of life with his mother and siblings. My mother turned to doing construction work and I, being the elder son of the family, helped her. Like all the other children at the construction site crèche, I followed her to the work site. Extreme hardship and struggle characterized those days, however, I

turned this to my advantage. Working at the construction site, I understood the fundamentals of architecture, right from planning to execution. As I grew older, I started selling newspapers, balloons etc, to support our family income. I would say, never underestimate the power of a poor man, no matter who you are. A person with endurance, tolerance and zeal to work hard will definitely reach great heights, against all odds."

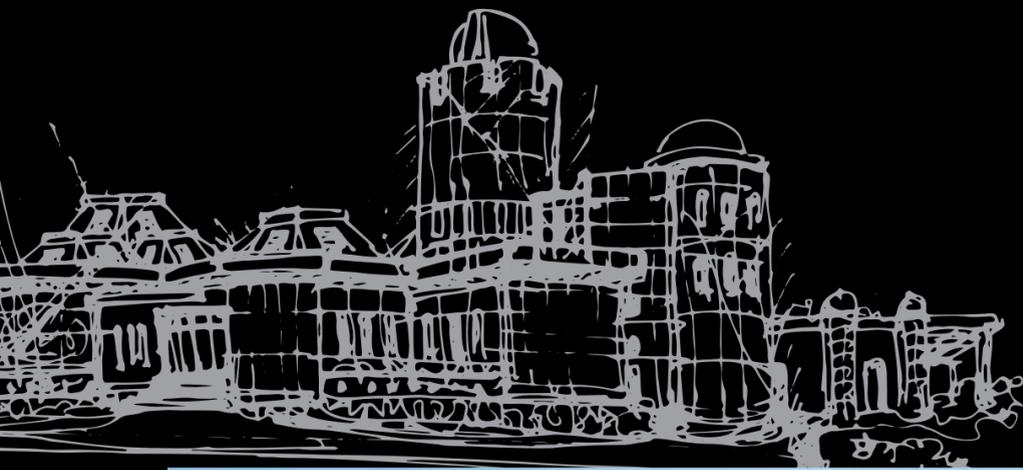
Prem Nath completed his school work with good grades and realized his capacity and skill in drawing. On completion of his school education,

he found several odd jobs and finally started work with an engineering firm as a blue-print boy for draughtsmen. The young apprentice was guided to architecture, and travelled to Mumbai to join the prestigious Sir JJ College of Architecture, which offered a part time course, while he supported his studies with a day-time job. An exhibition of student work at the college won him much appreciation and brought with it opportunities for the young architect which he says, "paved way to success." This included being invited with work with J.A. Stein, an opportunity he rejected, preferring to stay and work in the city he now called home.



It's clear to see that his innate resilience and confidence have won him both commissions and friends in a career that has already spanned 55 years and continues unabated. He set up his own architectural design consultancy in 1967 and attributes his success to performance and delivery. He says, "I strongly believe that a person, who is a performer, is always spotted by the people. I didn't have to identify the opportunity in the market, the market identified me as an opportunity. I do not say this with any ego, but yet this is true, I

was lucky to have got the opportunity to work for an actor like Dharmendra himself at the very initial stage of my career; I was happy-go-lucky yet very serious about my performance. Dharamji saw that smart architect in me and knew that I could deliver to him as per his high standards and at a fast pace." Several celebrity commissions followed including the who's who of Bollywood such as Hema Malini and Rani Mukherjee and the corporate world, such as Modis of the U. K. Modi Group and the Ambanis.



*"Sustainability today is like a fad, it's the vogue! But it's not rocket science, it's just common-sense architecture, a basic part of the architectural initiative for designing environment-friendly sustainable buildings. Sustainability was always a way of life in our ancient culture."*



**Resilience, success and many 'firsts'**

Prem Nath relishes a challenge saying, "My clients often call me 'a lucky architect' because I can perform under any circumstances. I have taken up jobs, which others dreaded even thinking of attempting, and have outperformed in those tasks. Where there is will there is way; this is who I am, what I am built of, and this is what makes me unique as an entrepreneur. Since the earliest stages of my life I had understood that one has to keep working, keep performing. We keep facing new hurdles, new challenges; it is upon us to convert these hurdles into 'jump boards', to scale higher limits, achieve better in life! I have always had this "Never Say Die!" attitude in my life." He credits the fact that he has been the creator of many "firsts" in the country, to





this positive attitude. These include India's first revolving restaurant in the country at the Ambassador Hotel, Mumbai; India's first Health Spa and Body Rejuvenation Center, Golden Palm Resorts, Bangalore; the first multiplex-mall in the country, Fame Adlabs at Citimall, Mumbai; the country's first fast-track I.T. Building designed, executed and handed over in just 8 months from the date of the first client meeting for Morgan Stanley, USA at Mindspace, Mumbai; India's first Award winning Day School with 'no homework' theme, Vasant Valley School, New Delhi, the first Gold graded and HUDCO Award

winner township for HMEI in the Punjab and India's first Platinum-rated school campus, Cygnus World School, Vadodara. He continues working on cutting-edge projects and is currently working on several 'Smart' projects, saying, "I like to challenge myself with something new always."

**Issues in architecture**

Prem Nath speaks his mind regardless of the politically correct position on all matters. Sustainability is no exception. He says, "Sustainability today is treated like a fad, it's the vogue! But it's not rocket science, it's just common-sense architecture, a basic part of



the architectural initiative for designing environment-friendly sustainable buildings. If one is honest, sustainability was a way of living in our ancient culture. Pick up any historical design and one would find them most sustainable. It's just that we got deviated from these practices and got influenced from the so called 'modern' designs and started designing energy guzzlers and eco-dampening structures. We have always been designing sustainable structures keeping in mind the concern for the environment that consisted green features."

Speaking on what makes good architecture, Prem Nath emphasizes the client and his needs. He says, "Comfort with a client is very important. It is imperative to understand the client, his way of living, his way of working, his family members or his staff, his lifestyle and then design what is best for him. I help my clients in all possible ways



and treat them at times like a child. I explain my designs to them with a lot of visuals and reference photographs and then deliver exactly what was shown. Seeing the world and experiencing global architecture enabled me to be ahead of my time. I also believe, every day is a new risk, it's a new challenge. Having a good relationship with the client improves business because while working on designs and planning, the needs of the client become clearer."

That Prem Nath loves his chosen field is indubitable. He says, "Architecture is one of the best professions one can practice. It is perhaps the only profession that enables one to be involved in every aspect of human life. One has to understand

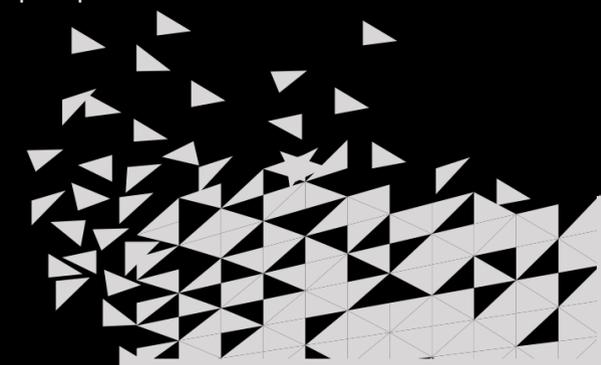
how a particular family lives, to design their home. One has to do an in-depth study on how a specialist doctor works, to design a hospital. One has to study mythology and religious scriptures to design a religious structure. This is one profession which ensures that one thinks ahead of one's time, since an architect designs what shall last for another 50-70 years or more. With the world evolving daily, we are forced to think beyond the future and have to predict what could be good for a project that would not be outdated for another 30-40 years. It is a risk one takes every day."

He laughs saying, "This makes an architect next to God! He has to foresee the future and get the same implemented as an iconic architectural marvel."

#### Lessons for gennext

What makes a good architect? Prem Nath says it's experience, saying, "Good practical experience of at least 7-8 years is necessary; this is mandatory in this profession. One has to understand the basics right to be able to execute an extraordinary design. The more practical knowledge we have, the more creatively we think. Innate skills are the basis, as he says, "My skills in sketching and knowledge of designing and execution played a major role in my success." One must also take time in design he says, "Architecture is a profession that moves slowly. We cannot hurry!"

He ends on a note of inspiration attributing success to hard work and grit and cites his idol as the exemplar, "My inspiration and idol is the great architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who started his career as a draftsman and went on to become America's top architect and perhaps the world's most well known. His ideas and vision were much ahead of his time."



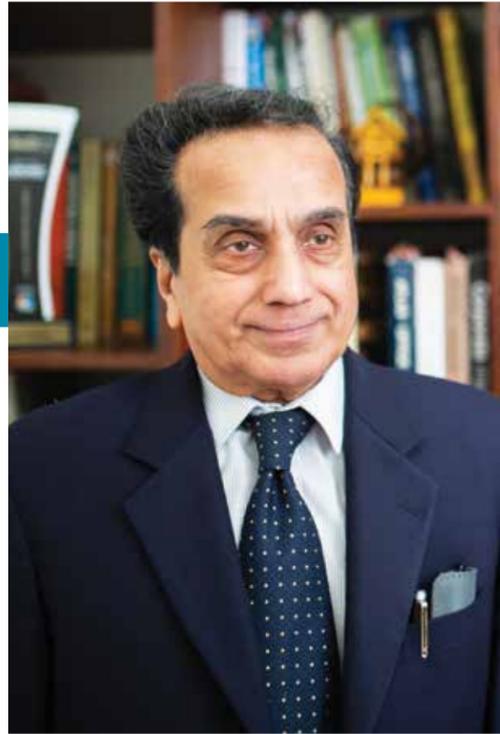
#### OUT OF THE BOX

##### How have you spent some of your happiest moments?

I do not 'spend' some of the happiest moments, I 'live' lots of happy moments and I 'enjoy and share' the joys of happy moments!

##### What is your idea of a perfect holiday?

A perfect holiday is blowing your fortune on indulging in an overall experience of excitement! Adventure, fun, joy, relaxation and good memories.



## Ar. Shashi Prabhu

### **Vision :**

Buildings symbolize the character of activities and goals to be achieved by occupants and the space designed must not overpower the individual occupant. Honesty, modesty and being faithful to your work are utmost important to achieve this.

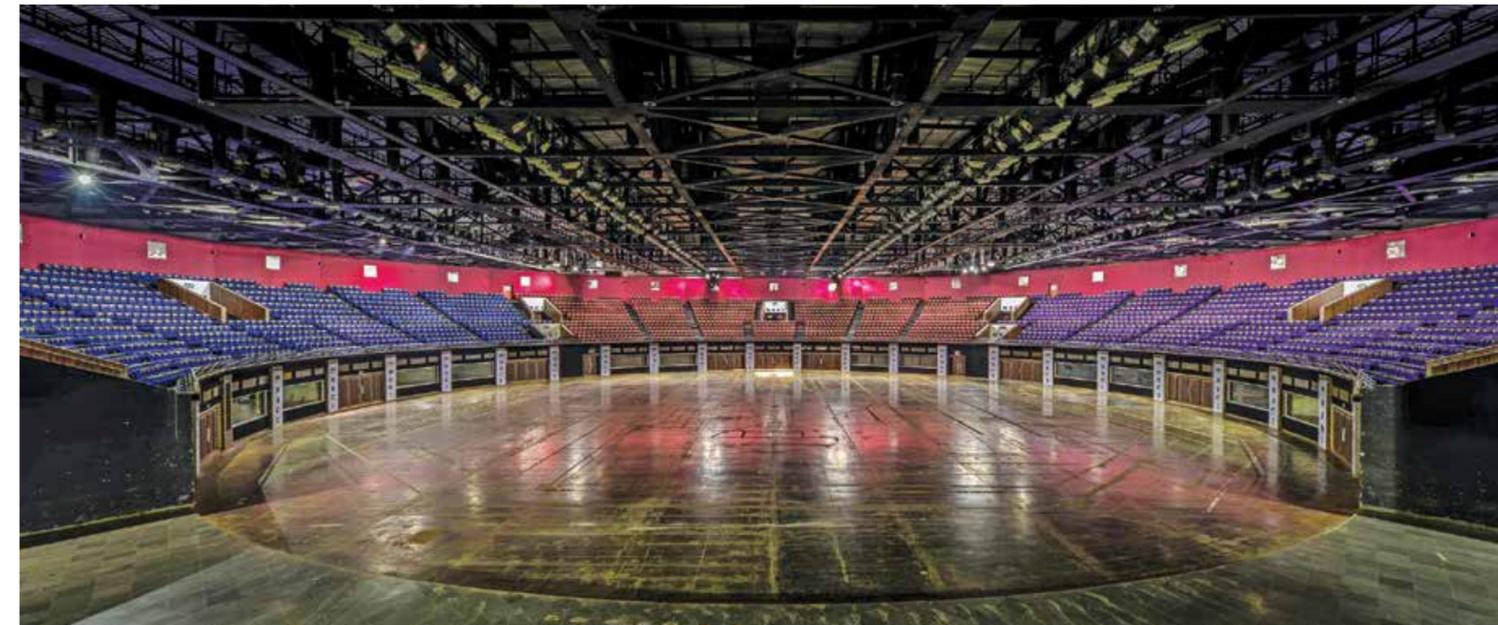
## Concrete solutions to human aspiration.

Born and raised in the heart of Indian cricket-Mecca, Mumbai's Shivaji Park, Shashi Prabhu had little doubt that he would, one day, be a cricketer. He recalls that he played well and was on the school team. He continued his pursuit of the sport at Podar College, where he joined a commerce course on the advice of his father. At college, he played under the captaincy of the legendary Faroukh Engineer and putting his personal ambitions aside, he decided to study architecture and joined the Bandra School of Art rather than join his family business, though this meant less time for cricket. He says, "I was interested in art and fascinated by good buildings, but the architectural profession had no glory as most buildings that came up at that time looked semi-ordinary. A trip to Chandigarh in my first year had a great impact on me and I was inspired to score good marks and topped the class."

Early challenges and opportunities Shashi Prabhu worked while he studied, which he says helped him a lot but the real world proved a hard battle for the young architect. He says, "Initially, I struggled a lot, going door-to-door to get work and began by designing buildings for housing societies. I lost many jobs but that never ever



discouraged me." Things changed dramatically in 1970 when a former professor, Prof. Gajendragadkar, asked if he was ready for a big job, and went on to introduce Prabhu to Sheshrao Wankhede, then finance minister, a daunting prospect for the 26-year old. He enlisted the support of his friend Subhash Akshikar, a senior architect with Mody and Colgan, a reputed architectural firm and went on to design the Garware Clubhouse. Prabhu says reminiscently, "We made some basic drawings which I had cherished until five years ago."



The positive spell continued with strife between the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) and the Cricket Club of India (CCI) presenting an opportunity for a second stadium in Mumbai, after the iconic Brabourne Stadium. This was owned by the CCI and Shashi Prabhu was given the brief to design a new stadium for the MCA by Wankhede As stadium design was relatively less known at the time, Prabhu asked his friend structural engineer Kamal Hadkar, whose aesthetic sense was widely appreciated, to join him in this endeavour. Once Wankhede approved the initial drawings they were asked to complete the project in 12 months. Prabhu says, "Our dynamic team completed the project in the record time of 11 months and 23 days at a budget of slightly over INR 20 million." This stadium with a seating capacity of 45,000 was a great achievement, vindicating 18 hour-days with a cheque of INR 50,000! The project was deemed a success and the first match was played immediately.

#### Landmark projects

A lull followed this high and the young architect was beset by doubt when he says, "There came a second turning point in my career when I happened to meet Balasaheb Thackeray". This meeting in building the Dadoji Konddev stadium, in Thane. When the Asian games were announced in Delhi in 1980, Prabhu was invited to design the Indira Gandhi Stadium, a unique project which he says was unforgettable as Indira Gandhi monitored the project herself. The massive structure had a huge roof spanning 750 ft in diameter with just one compression ring on the structure. This pushed the firm into the limelight and they went on to design the Hyderabad National Games complex, Pune's Balewadi Stadium and sports complexes in Punjab, Bhopal and Patna.

This immense success brought with it the concern of being typecast as 'sports architect'. This changed with the opportunity to design a hospital building for the Thane Municipal Corporation. Shashi Prabhu says, "It was challenging



*"I believe one should not step into the architectural profession without 'data' by which I mean enough knowledge to run the practice on your own, have humility to admit limitations of expertise and seek specialised consultancy when required. In the modern context, that is what architecture is all about."*



due to my lack of exposure to the vocabulary of health care buildings." He remedied this by resourcing himself in the planning of modern healthcare facilities by studying healthcare facilities in the USA and (then) USSR, seeking extensive consultancy from senior doctors and attending international conferences and seminars to learn more about hospital design. They then designed a hospital as a low rise structure, almost like a spine, which was high on functionality and appreciated as one



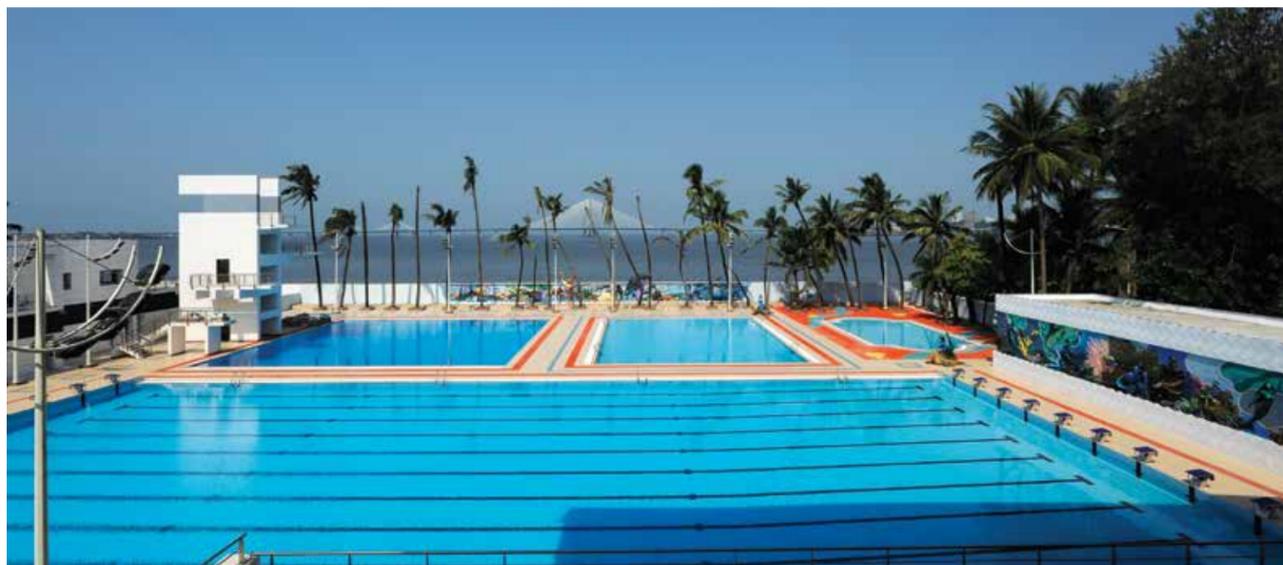


of the best architecturally designed and planned buildings for a hospital. Over forty hospitals followed: from one in Pimpri Chichwad, near Pune in 1985-86 to Kalinga Hospital in Bhuvaneshvar and Mumbai's well known Leelavati Kirtilal Mehta Hospital. Prabhu says Kirtibhhai Mehta did not want a typical hospital design and got a well-equipped, state of art hospital in the '90s with a flexible design that has kept it relevant to the present. due to which it has served for almost 30 years.

Shashi Prabhu shares his passion for detail and being better educated in the field saying he has spent long hours at libraries and rechecking his notes and is

still learning. He adds, "Healthcare is a tough subject; hospital designing is not everybody's cup of tea." He explains, "In health care design, we go through a process called the floor space program, which analyses the utility of the floor area on a plan with its different dimensions. We study various departments and their connectivity. Also crucial is the movement of the patient, the general traffic and the traffic of the hospital staff. This is followed by analysis of the return on investment."

Their foray into the hospital space was punctuated with sports club design for The Club in Andheri, Matoshree Club, Garware Club, MCA at Bandra Kurla Complex and many others.



Another impressive landmark is the YB Chavan Cultural Centre in South Mumbai commissioned by Chief Minister Sharad Pawar at the inauguration of one of the hospitals. He wished to build it as a tribute to the late Y B Chavan a patron of the arts and literature. Prabhu tells the story of the building, "He said the British and the royals in India created porches which were not accessible to the common people and wanted a common man to experience the grandeur of the building. So we created a large podium in the centre with a huge traditional Indian lamp (laman diva) hanging in the middle."

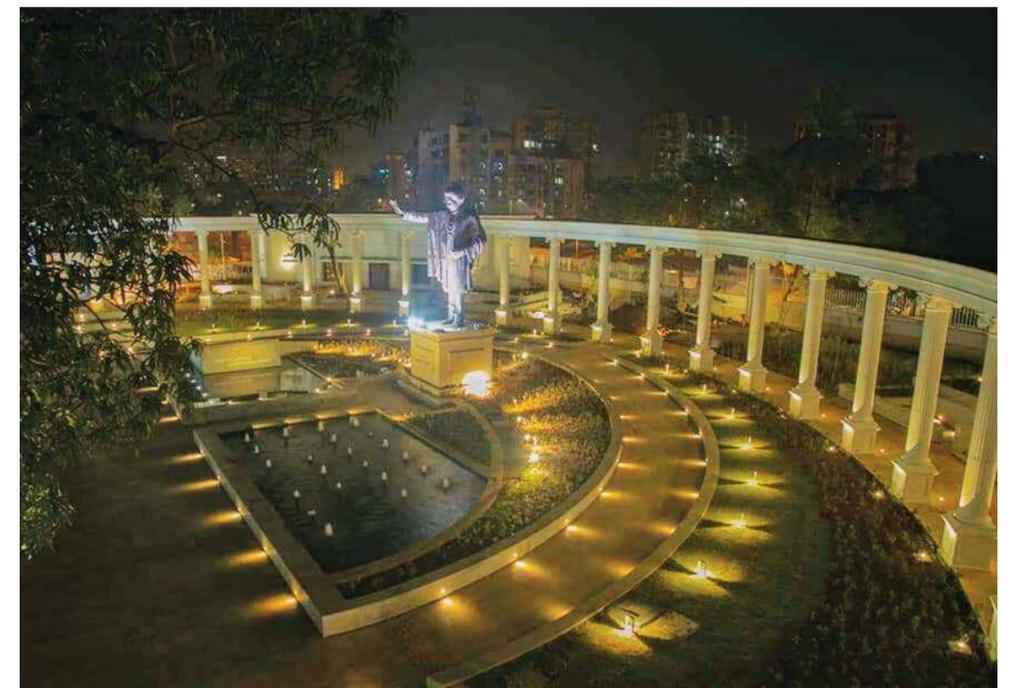
#### International footprint

In 1976, Shashi Prabhu opened an office in Dubai with the ambition of designing for an unlimited audience. This has grown into an impressive organization under the guidance of Ashok Parkar, Partner, with the repertoire of

a few hundred villas in and around Dubai. In India, the firm has offices in Pune, Hyderabad, Goa and Amravati and technical collaboration with some of the leading architectural companies of the world such as Perkins and Will (Chicago), HDR Architects (New York) and Verner Johnson (Boston).

#### Important learnings

Shashi Prabhu speaks of the many ways in which the sector has changed saying, "When I started architectural practice in 1967, it was quite simple. I was alone, preparing my drawings, getting them approved from the local authorities, resubmitting them, visiting sites; when you play all these roles, you realize the value and importance of people around you: clients, contractors and laborers. Now, this gap has widened because when you do 60-70 jobs simultaneously, so today our communication is minimal."





He says an understanding of the client is the foremost imperative in any sort of building project, adding that the roles of the various agencies involved in a project have changed. He says, “While the role of developers and other specialized agencies has become most important, architectural practice has itself become easier with the advancement in technology and material. When I started practice, there was nobody called a developer. Usually, a group of people came together and started a cooperative society. Slowly, the land became precious and the cash component came in. Earlier nobody had the ready money to promote big projects and they borrowed from banks. Now the third party investor as the developer is the ultimate decision maker. Earlier in many cases the contractor used to double as a developer. But buildings constructed then were not as strong as those constructed today due to innovative technologies and change in overall consciousness with real estate gaining a strong industry status.”



#### Wisdom from experience

Prabhu has a clear vision of what’s needed for the practice, “I firmly believe that one should not step into the architectural profession without ‘data’ by which I mean enough knowledge to run the practice on your own. One should also have humility to admit limitations of expertise and seek specialised consultancy as and when required. In the modern context, that is what architecture all about. The younger generation entering the profession should never lose a hope if a few projects are lost. When you survive and grow, you reach the next stage where you lose one project while two more are waiting for you.

He says, “The challenges architects face in India differ from those overseas where monumental modern structures are created, we have the issue of providing basic shelter to the millions of masses.” Prabhu has been involved in framing the laws and bylaws for the Slum Rehabilitation Scheme on Mumbai city in 1990s and other matters of policy. He is now joined by the next gen of family, his sons Atul and Amol, who take his legacy forward.



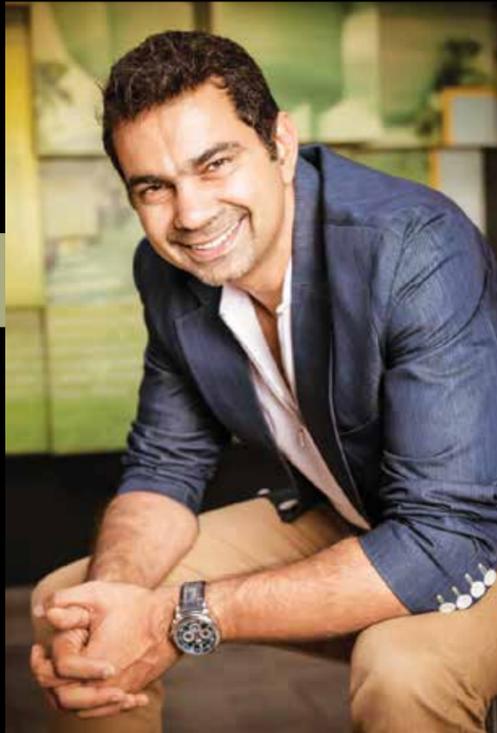
#### OUT OF THE BOX

**If you weren’t an architect:**  
I would have been a cricketer.

**What are some of your happiest memories?**  
Some of my happiest moments have always been spent with family and friends. I remember when I got the news of the birth of my first son Amol while I was in Dubai in 1970. That was one of the happiest moments of my life that I can recollect.

**My perfect holiday is:**  
Getting lost in some wilderness with some friends. Once I went to the north of Siberia with some friends. There was only snow and sand for miles and miles. It is a completely different landscape. I would like to revisit that place and get lost there for a while to forget about everything in life.





## Ar. Sanjay Puri

### Vision :

To evolve design solutions that are contextual and create spaces that revolutionize the way they are experienced.

## From artist to architect.

Sanjay Puri won every art prize there was in his school, Mayo College, Ajmer, and understandably wanted to be an artist 'when he grew up'. That was in the 8th grade and this changed a year or two later when he read *The Fountainhead* between the 9th and 10th grade. He says, "I changed my mind because I realized that architecture is an art everybody can actually use. It was at that point onwards that I wanted to be an architect."

With this unshakeable clarity of purpose, on completion of the class 12 board exams, the young Sanjay Puri started looking for an architect he could work with, for first-hand experience. He says a mutual acquaintance pointed him in the direction of a young architect who had just started his practice 9 months before this. His name was Hafeez Contractor. He recalls, "I was the 4th person to join Hafeez, and I was the first person to join him with zero experience, so all credit to him for actually hiring me in the first place!"

### Early learnings

Ar. Puri says his time at Architect Hafeez Contractor prepared him uniquely for both architecture school and provided him real-life training to be an architect. He says, "My time with Hafeez was very memorable. He would push me to take the onus, sent me to sites where I would learn on the job and actually execute work. I was adept with interiors sites, handovers, working drawings, before I even stepped into architecture college! This on-ground training gave him a singular advantage over other students at Mumbai's Rachana Sansad Academy for Architecture. Puri reminisces, "I had seniors advising me that I should quit so that I would not be limited in my thinking, but I ignored them and kept working my way through college."





The training and experiences Sanjay Puri gathered at AHC were seminal to his path. He says, "I remember this one incident very clearly: one Monday, he asked me what I had done the previous day. I was a 19-year-old, so I had spent the day hanging out with friends and watching movies. Hafeez suggested that I spend my free time going to construction sites around the city, even ones that we were not associated with, to try and learn something. I did as he asked, as he was my mentor at that time. So, I have seen the World Trade Centre being built (in Cuffe Parade) and knew every construction project in south Mumbai intimately, because I had visited every one of them."



#### Flying solo

The depth of his association with Ar. Contractor made it a difficult bond to break and it was only when he was offered a solo commission for an entire township that he considered this. It was too big an offer to turn down. "I didn't stop working with Hafeez till I was hired by a developer for a 54-acre project called Vasant Nagari," says Ar. Puri. "This was a phenomenal step ahead for a novice architect like me. My professional fee for this project was very low, but that didn't bother me as creating a master plan for this project taught me a lot."

This was the starting block in the path to numerous other developer-driven projects, which saw Sanjay Puri Architects working on sites in every western suburb in Mumbai, from Bandra to Virar. While bringing success and growth, the sameness less satisfying. Realizing the bounds of the space, Ar. Puri made a conscious decision to shift to a new direction. He says, "This happened first with one project called Trioise Mall, Lonavala, where there was a complete breakthrough; we managed to do a very sculptural building that was completely abstract, with folded concrete."

*"There is no substitute to experiencing a building in reality. You have to sit in a place, you have to walk around it, you have to feel what you feel when you walk inside it — a photograph or a video does not capture that."*

#### The second creative wind

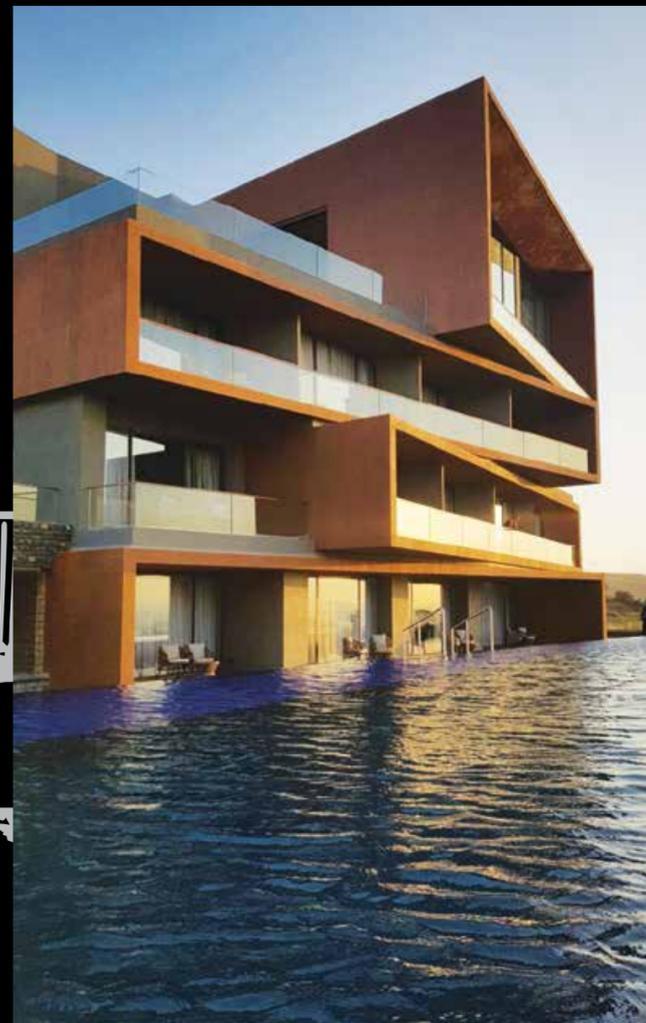
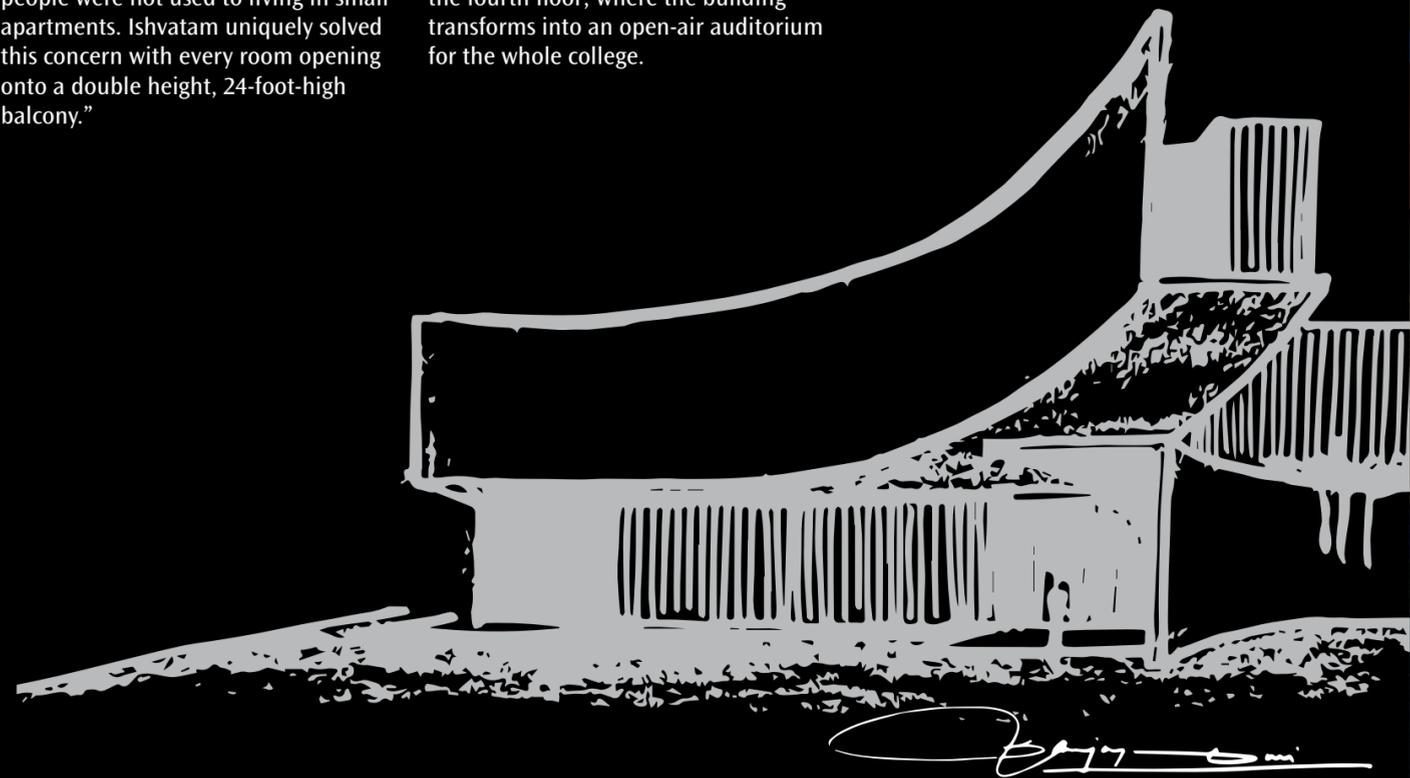
Marking this milestone, Ar. Puri says, "That was the starting point of a whole new series of architecture for us." Commissions for private townships, schools, hotels, all started to flow, marking a transition from the first phase of work to a more creative, broad-based chart of projects. Describing their changed perspective as more discerning, Ar. Puri says, "The driving force is that as long as you get something new to do, an opportunity to make an impact, that gets us to take on the project. Some of these are in unusual places like Bhubaneswar, Ranchi, Lucknow, and smaller places in Rajasthan, like Bhilawal and Ras."



### Counting milestones

Taking a broad overview of his impressive body of work, Ar. Puri marks the Triose project as one of the first milestones. It was the challenge and excitement of another smaller project, the Ishatvam building, Ranchi, that was also memorable. Ar. Puri says, "The builder approached us with the plot, and asked us what he could do with it, which is rare. Our advice to him was to build a residential structure of one flat per floor, since the plinth was just 2,000 sq ft." The story of the project was also in a sense the story of the path of urban development of the city marking the transition from bungalow-living to learning to live in apartment complexes. The city lay sandwiched between Adivasi land on both sides making expansion impossible. He says, "With an FSI of 2.5 in the city, people were not used to living in small apartments. Ishvatam uniquely solved this concern with every room opening onto a double height, 24-foot-high balcony."

Other landmark projects include the low-cost school in Rajasthan designed with sheltered open spaces, natural ventilation and natural light and The Aria Hotel, Nashik, an energy efficient structure, with 50 per cent of the hotel naturally ventilated, solar energy to minimize the carbon footprint and courtyards to provide ventilation and natural light. The unique and the interesting excite Sanjay Puri. The Courtyard House in Rajasthan with 35,000 sq ft of real stone, completely imbued with the character of Rajasthan, with a contemporary slant; a resort in Jaisalmer that derives its concept from the sand dunes, with buildings designed as sand dunes; a university in Indore, a 200,000 sq ft building that steps up from an 80,000 sq ft floor plate, at ground level to the fourth floor; where the building transforms into an open-air auditorium for the whole college.



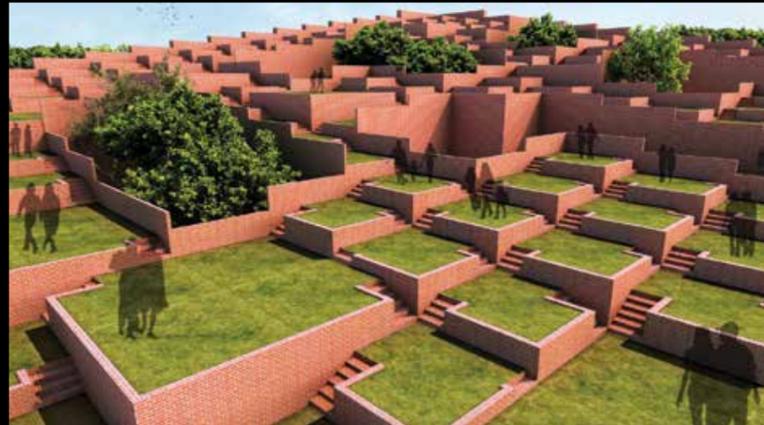
### Decoding a Sanjay Puri project

Ar. Puri says understanding context and learning from one's past are key to his architecture. "The key principle is to understand the requirements from the perspective of the typology, client, climate and the site context. Next, you look at things that have been done in the past, of a similar typology, and avoid the bad design. You have to create your own solution for that particular site keeping in mind the past, the functional aspects, what the client wanted and what the site demands; but the key is bringing all these things together in your own unique way which then gives you a totally different perception of space and the way spaces are created within that building."

### Where we are now

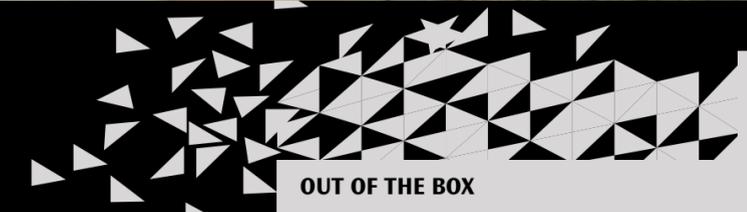
On the current state of the practice, Ar. Puri says "It is good, because people are open to experimentation on different levels – not just design, but materials, and sustainability." He feels a possible negative, in the Indian context, is that architecture, is not a known field, so "good looking" is equated with "good architecture". Sharing an experience of a hotel in Indore where the project management consultant objected to aspects of the design to reduce the cost, Ar. Puri says, "I explained that all the rooms were north-oriented, so that the heat gain was reduced by 26-30 per cent and that the corridor was single loaded so that it could be ventilated naturally, to save air-conditioning costs." Despite all this, the PMC had his way.

The bottom line is client-education. Ar. Puri says, "There needs to be awareness of good architecture, that this comes first. The fixation on cost just demeans architecture and the architect."



### Driving passions

"My passion is architecture!" says Sanjay Puri. "It always remains the strongest passion. If I have time off, I look at buildings and experience them. Every place I go to, I first find out what the new buildings are, whether they are worth seeing, and then experience them."



### OUT OF THE BOX

#### The building that excited you the most when you actually experienced it:

There are 2 buildings, one of which is the reason I went to Germany in the first place. The Theatre (UFA Cinema Center) in Dresden by Coop Himmelb(l)au. This is one of those that you cannot understand even after seeing the pictures, because it is abstract on another level. The second was the Jewish Museum by Daniel Libeskind, which was mind-blowing.

#### Three projects you are excited about working on right now:

One is Prestige University in Indore, Hitkarini University in Jabalpur, and this large semi-traditional house in Jodhpur.

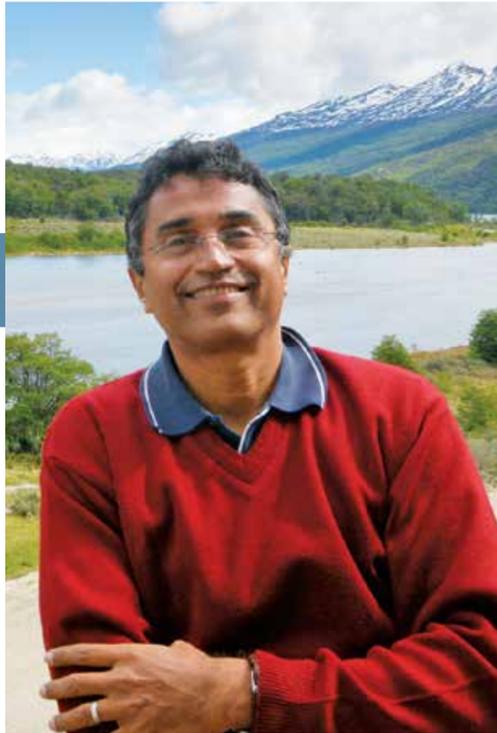
#### Any project that you always wanted to do but haven't yet been commissioned to do:

A museum. I would love to do a museum.

#### Any advice for students since you had an unconventional path to becoming an architect:

I would advise all students to work from day 1 and physically experience buildings rather than seeing them on social media or books.





## Ar. Ravi Sarangan

### **Vision :**

We believe that every-time we design, we should be making a concerted effort to improve the immediate environs of the project, and contribute to the well being of its occupants and its social environs.

## The accidental architect.

Flying in the face of convention Ravi Sarangan says, "I got into architecture purely by chance," a choice he made despite the archetype of parents dreams of their children being doctors or engineers. Respect and appreciation for his heritage of education resound as Ravi Sarangan speaks of his early influences; his father, an engineer, his brilliant mother, a homemaker, and an architect cousin.

A 'Mumbaikar', Ravi Sarangan studied Mathematics, Statistics and Economics at St Xavier's College, Mumbai, but soon changed streams when he took an entrance exam for architecture. On acing the exam, he laughs at the memory, saying, "I thought that if a college was going to put me on the merit list, I should take it up! That's how I joined the JJ College of Architecture."

He speaks fondly of the learnings of the time. "My education at JJ built up such a good foundation. Human values such as mutual respect, keeping one's ego aside, humility... you need these attributes to practice as a professional and design good spaces. Studying in JJ taught me to work with a team, rather than think the architect is God." This time also created a sense of connection and community and gave him friendships that are still strong. "We had some fun times in college," he says, "I feel I can relate to every scene in '3 Idiots'!"





#### **Tough learnings**

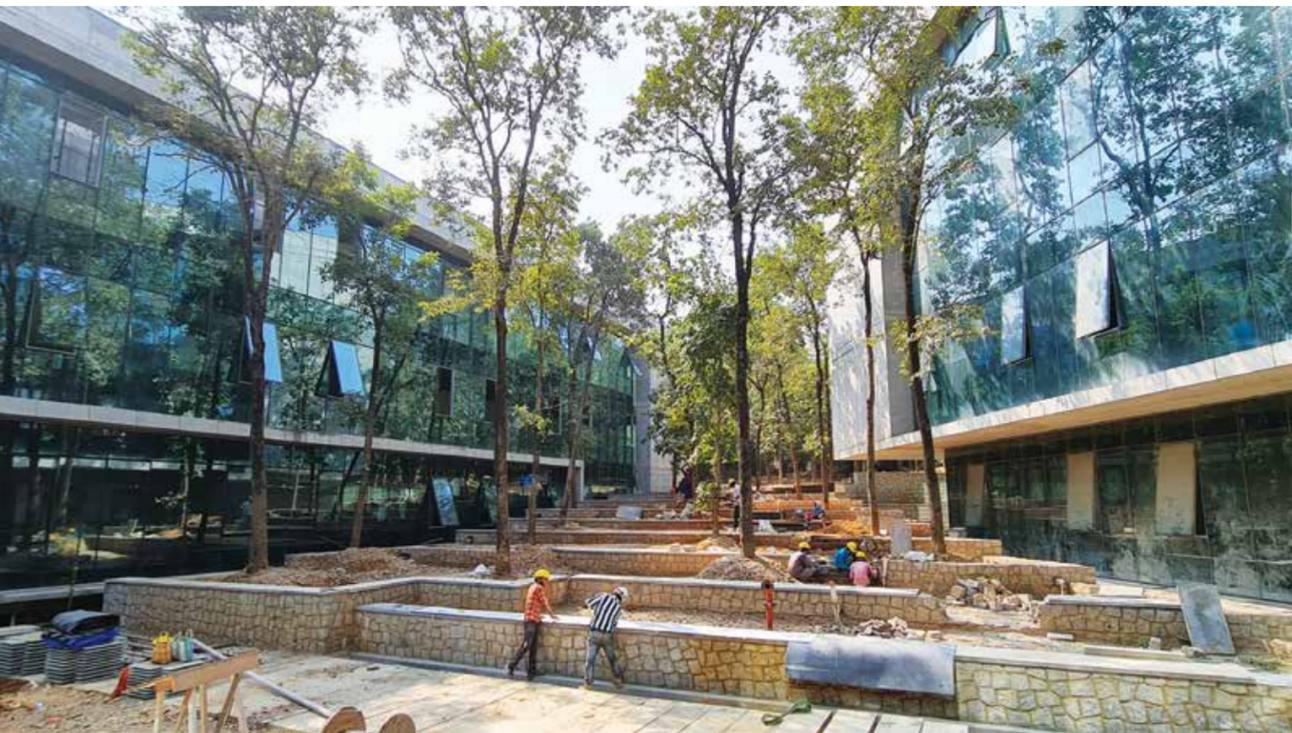
The period after graduation was one of hard learnings. Setting up on their own, Sarangan and his partner Sanjay Srinivasan started small, designing a kitchen at Chembur, and an office at Saat Rasta, Mahalaxmi. Ravi Sarangan says, "We were at point zero. The profession was not a cakewalk, we had to go through the grind, brick by brick." While largely working on interiors projects, they continued to have a vision for a big-firm format. This was actualized over the next thirty years, growing to a company with 7 distinct verticals and projects spanning townships, hotels, developer projects, commercial, retail and residential projects.

*"Architecture is a dialogue; we don't leave a stamp behind. Every building we design is an extension of the client's vision and ideas."*

#### **The big break**

It's the stuff of cinema. In 1996, Sarangan wrote to Mr. Narayana Murthy, as he had to several other firms, saying they were a passionate, design-centric firm, and expressing the desire to work with Infosys. On being invited to Bangalore, he flew on a ticket he had borrowed money for, and met Mohandas Pai and others at Infosys. He says, "It was a great meeting, and resulted in a project in Manipal Center, Bangalore."

This was the bright spot in a relatively dark period for the partners functioning from their garage-office in Chembur, Mumbai. Ravi Sarangan says, "Those three years were a struggle," with growing domestic and business responsibilities, but things soon started looking better. Sarangan says, "Once we bagged that first project with Infosys, we never looked back. We kept working with them, delivering projects before deadline. We don't do design and build projects; or contracting. We just do the design, but we manage our projects. This set a trend, and we influenced many other firms to adopt the same practice."

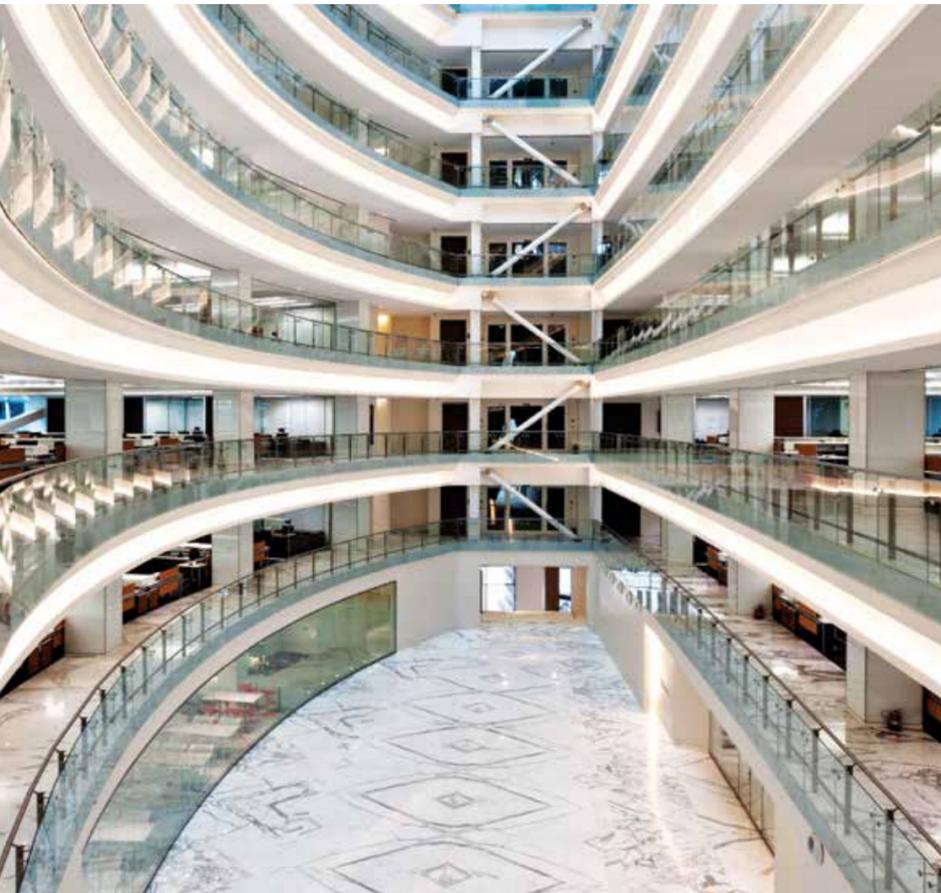


### Gamechangers

Things changed again at the turn of the millennium, when they were commissioned to do a large architectural project for Cognizant Technologies in Kolkata and one for Tata Consulting Services, in 2000. Ravi Sarangan's letter-writing skills proved lucky again in 2004, when he wrote to the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Mr. Narendra Modi, which culminated in being invited to design the state BJP HQ.

He continues, "That was a heady time for us!" The company grew to a strength of 300 people in 2006-07, investors showed an interest in the firm and Edifice too were looking at acquiring an American firm, but were "saved" by the events of 2008. He says, "That gave us time to rethink the company; we call it Edifice Version 2 from 2009 onwards, because we had time to set ourselves a set of goals."

He also recounts another milestone, closer to home, "The last one is when we had a grand reunion of ex-Edificians last year, just before the pandemic hit."



### Architectural milestones

Ravi Sarangan marks their work for JSW, the steel major, as an important milestone "We have worked with them extensively over the years, and did the JSW office at BKC." He says art made the project unique. "The Jindals are great patrons of Indian art and the entire 200,000 sq ft of space is done in pristine white, so that the human beings and art stand out. It's a very museum-inspired design solution."

A resort for the Taj Group of hotels at Rishikesh, situated on a bend in the Ganges, so every room has a great view, and the Amar Raja project, stand out for their unique interaction with Nature. The latter, once situated on a barren 50-acre parcel of land at Tirupati, is a lush forest today. He credits the vision of the owners for the large-scale plantation and afforestation with mostly Red Sanders, which grow up to a height of 30-40 feet. Sarangan says, "From this project, we learned that sometimes, architecture is also about making the buildings disappear, because the height of the buildings is limited to the height of the trees."

And sometimes projects enter the record books. Ravi Sarangan mentions the Tata Cancer Hospital, Varanasi as unique, being completed in 11 months flat. "It's in the Limca Book of Records," he smiles.

He adds, "There is a common thread to all these projects – these are design sensitive, discerning clients. Architecture is a dialogue; we don't leave a stamp behind. Every building we design is an extension of the client's vision and ideas."



### Edifice Version 2.0

Having accomplished this impressive chart of projects and accomplishments, Ravi Sarangan turned his vision to the company. He says, "Version 2 is about good architecture and attracting good talent. Efficiencies and sensitivities came in – today we are very critical of the kind of work we do and document our errors to ensure the same mistake is not repeated."

Decisions were taken to pursue quality over quantity, to go after awards, invest in the right people and not damage the environment. They have also tried to promote what he terms "inclusive growth", to give local artisans within the area of a project an opportunity. Sadly, he says, this has not been as successful as he would have wished, "I would say we've succeeded in everything except this last aspect."

### Guiding principles

What Ravi Sarangan sees as his personal guiding principles are simple, "Make as many friends as possible in life, don't hurt or cheat anyone, respect one another, help each other." He is also an avid cricketer, part of the Edifice Cricket Club and loves travel. He says Japan speaks to him. "If there's a place that has the deepest impact on me, it is Japan," as it resonates with his own core beliefs.

Translating his personal belief system to the professional environment was a natural progression, with integrity being at the core and a complete rejection of the 'kickback culture' of the early 1990s. Professional respect resonates with their official policies too, Sarangan says, "What we did differently was that whenever we came across good talented people, we just hired them, whether we had work for them or not." Sarangan clearly shares a sense of satisfaction as he says, "In 1994, we started sharing wealth with the employees."



**Issues in architectural practice in India**

Ravi Sarangan rues the lack of focus to quality and a strong association in India. He says, “You need to get the fraternity together, and get them to follow the rules. We need to let only the best emerge. But I’m very heartened by some of the boutique practices that I read about – there is good work happening.”

Sarangan believes in a responsibility to the next generation of architects. “When we did architecture, there were 27 colleges in India. Now, there are 27 in just Mumbai and Navi Mumbai. The reason I highlight this is that I believe that if architecture has to be taught and learned, it has to be done in an environment where there is architecture – in an environment where there is not just a concentration of monuments, but also architects. It’s so disheartening to see colleges in very remote locations, where good faculty is hard to come by.”



**The legacy**

Speaking of the future Ravi Sarangan says, “Our legacy is the built form – it lives beyond us. If I can leave behind architecture which is sensitive, timeless, comfortable for the human being, I think I’ve done my job.” With 70 per cent of their income still coming in from existing clients, the inference is clear. These core values have been imparted to the 1,000+ employees of Edifice who are now ambassadors for the profession, and a way in which the firm gives back to the profession.

Believing in the role of the government, he says, “When it comes to the future, I think that the government – instead of running hotels and an airline, should focus on creating good educational infrastructure. If we need to practice good architecture, the society itself needs to be a conducive environment.”



**OUT OF THE BOX**

**Contemporary artists you like:**  
Dhruvi Acharya, Bharti Kher, Ranjani Shettar and Shilpa Gupta.

**One thing you would say to architecture students today:**  
Be as original as possible.

**Your Friday night lectures:**  
It’s called TGIF. Three Fridays are internal events, where each vertical showcases their work, or a vendor showcases his product, on the fourth Friday, we invite an external guest, who could be a contractor, consultant, another architect, to talk about their work.



## Ar. Prashant Sutaria Ar. Hemanti Sutaria

### **Vision :**

My design vision is to create something extraordinary by using the ordinary. We should not borrow greatness from masters but learn from them and apply it at a local level.



## In search of Utopia for Everyman.

Prashant Sutaria says he spent his childhood in what he calls 'a utopian environment at an industrial colony that was far advanced for the times.' The housing colony of the National Rayon Company near Kalyan had plenty of greenery, a river close by and a lot of empty space and playgrounds - an ideal environment for a young lad to grow. Though it no longer exists, it impressed the young Sutaria with its planning and organization, which he terms 'one of the best planned townships', and was one of his earliest influences to being an architect. He says distances were minimal and his father's office a 10-minute walk from the home, as was his school, the hospital, the club house and shopping center, saying "that part of childhood has influenced me to a great extent as an architect."

A leader at school, Prashant Sutaria was Head Boy in the senior years and was fascinated by astronomy, physics and trigonometry and buildings. A voracious reader, he said he enjoyed Reader's Digest and National Geographic and spent long hours in the library, a habit which continued into college days. He says their school was influenced by Gandhian philosophy and their principal Shri Pathak and his wife Nalini, also a teacher, inculcated positive values in the students.



The young schoolboy had already decided on his path, when he was just in the 9th standard, with dreams to join CEPT, Ahmedabad. Fate took him down another path and he studied architecture in Mumbai, instead.

Hemanti Sutaria was as far from wishing to study architecture as Prashant Sutaria was sure and considered studying pharmacology or microbiology, when an uncle suggested she study architecture. The partners met at college and became friends.





#### Lessons in excellence

It was a college expedition to the national event of NASA in Thiruvananthapuram when Prashant Sutaria the value of excellence. He says their college team had secured the highest points in socio cultural activities but lagged in other areas. They returned with the realization that as architects, we must excel and need to perform better. His teachers too played a role in his path. Sutaria mentions Architect Prof. Umesh Pachigar “was a great motivator” ensuring that their batch produced some of the best-known architects of the country.

Prashant Sutaria started work early, and worked through his days at college and on completion of the course, worked on a few small projects. A fortuitous meeting with Rai Bahadur Oberoi and his son Vikas Oberoi, who was a student at the time, evolved into a long-term partnership. He says his friendship with Vikas was nurtured with long conversations on architecture, design, philosophy and art, cementing their bond. Sutaria went on to do several projects with the Oberois in the Lokhandwala area where he has done over 2.5 million



*“Our cities lack public places and amenities that add the human touch to the urban environment. Architects and planners can contribute in the form of well-designed public buildings, parks, and other amenities that add to the quality of life of the residents.”*



sq. ft. for various commissions. This led to his setting up an office in the area and moving from their Flora Fountain office which he had originally set up with partner, Hemanti Sutaria.

#### On-ground learnings

Prashant Sutaria’s early training and experience prepared him for the more serious work of his own practice. He says, “Designing buildings at a very young age helped me a lot, and the stint with Oberoi was significant. I learnt a lot, especially the commercial aspect of the real estate industry.” Discussing the skyrocketing of real estate prices and the sea change in

profitability, he says, “The real estate prices at that time in the Lokhandwala area, were at INR 1,400 per sq. ft. and we sold our project at INR 1,800 per sq. ft. Now the prices in the area start at INR 25,000 per sq. ft.” He adds, “Fortunately I was associated with developers who had a vision.”

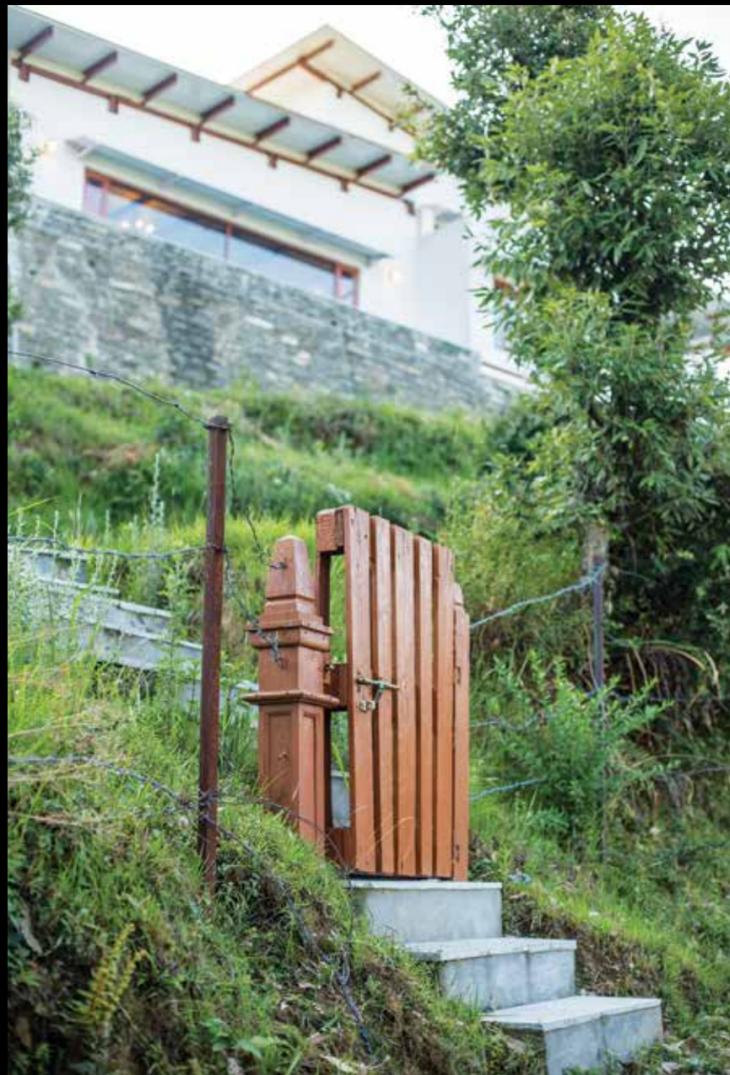
Sutaria developed his practice in commercial architecture but decided to go large in 2000, with the focus on what he terms ‘mega projects’, going on to do several shopping malls and hotels. He has now focused in on large-size projects such as the one they are currently working on with a project spread of 750 acres.





#### Issues in architecture

Stepping away from the daily activity of projects, Prashant Sutaria feels the pull of urban planning with a clear need for the field in our cities. He says, "Our cities lack public places and amenities that add the human touch to the urban environment. The need to provide promenades, public parks, performing centers, museums and sports facilities is very crucial for the common citizens' perception of quality of life in an urban environment. There is a need to incorporate this in all development plans of existing as well as future cities. For architects and planners, the area of contribution is in the form of well-designed public buildings, parks, and other amenities that can add to the quality of life of the residents of the city. Private projects done within the city, with a vision to serve the general population in the form of small details like integration of landscaping, consideration of public transportation and providing amenities

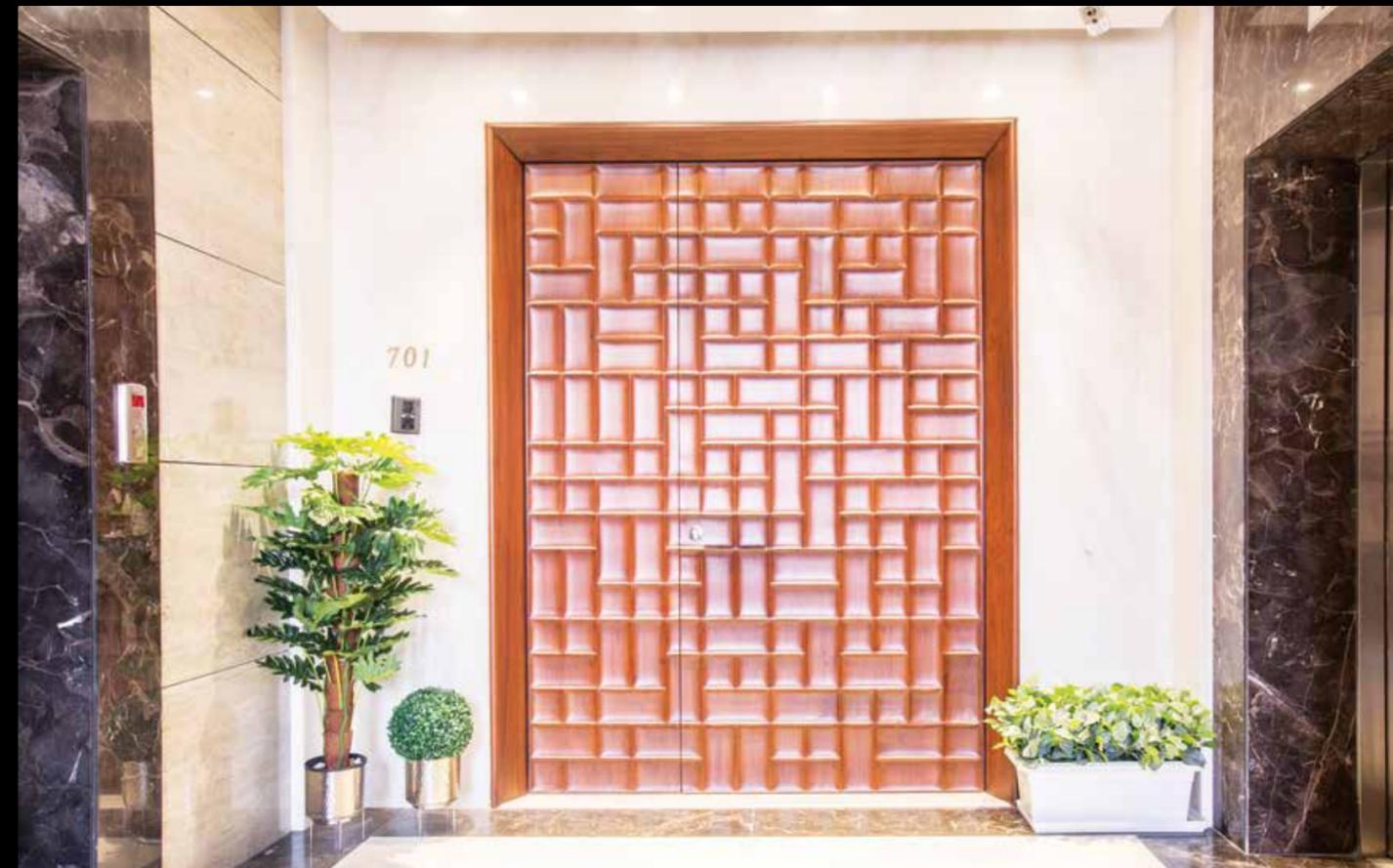


for the population at large, like toilets, bus stops, rickshaw and taxi stands, will create an overall experience which is rich and fulfilling for a common resident."

Drawing the eye to the need for a broader, policy-based approach to urban planning, Sutaria says, "The creation for a common platform, city and region-wise, of all professionals with the sole aim of contributing towards planning a better city, in the form of ideas, constructive feedback on government policies, opposing and resisting implementation of wrong policies jointly, will add a lot of value to this government's initiative of creating Smart Cities."

#### Dreams for the future

Prashant Sutaria's fascination with the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and Taliesin as a student, hasn't left him. He says, "I was very influenced by Taliesin; which is his home, studio, school, and 800-acre agricultural estate. This also resonated with my childhood in a utopian kind of colony. I still have it in mind." While this burns gently on the back burner, Prashant and Hemanti Sutaria are kept continuously busy by the scale of their on-going work."





Eschewing the mundane, the Sutarias say they like challenging projects with complexity at various levels, space constraints and Floor Area Ratio (FAR) restrictions. They say this extends to both existing and new developments citing the several award winning hospitality, residential and other projects in their portfolio, “In Greenfield projects too, we like to do something different, with the focus on using local materials and reflecting local ethos through the design. In a recent hotel project we completed in Bengal, we convinced the client to use terracotta. Energy too, is a big issue. We are designing a warehouse near Mumbai where we have used solar roof

panels over an area of about two acres. The electricity generated is supplied to the main grid of the government and then is bought back and that saves a huge cost. We also created ponds to conserve water in that project.”

Besides Frank Lloyd Wright the partners enjoy the work of Antoni Gaudi of the many Indian architects, they say the work of Nari Gandhi and Charles Correa touch them most, saying, “Charles Correa did 35 projects in his entire life but all of them are noteworthy. The way these masters used space and materials to create a wow factor is amazing.”



Prashant Sutaria takes a more philosophical view to clients, saying, “We get all types of clients, some are evolved and some are not, but most of them have a practical approach. We have to educate them as they are investors and users and hence they should be happy using the built spaces.” He adds that the recent Covid situation also taught them the value of time and the energy spent in transit. He says, “ We often discuss reducing the time wasted in commuting to the workplace and we noted that my house is seven kilometers away from my office but it takes over 45 minutes to commute one way. During the Covid 19 pandemic when work from home became necessary, I realized the importance of those 90 minutes!”

#### OUT OF THE BOX

##### Something you both love to do:

We love to travel and I take photographs while I travel, especially by air. I love to study maps and topography and read a lot of fiction. I shifted to self-help books by the time I turned 25. Listening to Western classical symphony music.

##### Most important books:

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey.  
Rich Dad Poor Dad by Robert Kiyosaki.  
The *Bhagvad Geeta* and have read one chapter a day for 28 years.

Hemanti has a great interest in Indian mythology.



# Ar. Sandeep Shikre Ar. Alpa Shikre

### Vision :

Architecture can be summed up in three words: Space, people and happiness and has to be comprehensive, collaborative and people centric. When the people feel happy in the premises you have designed, your job is done and that is the legacy we wish to leave.

## From the smallest beginnings to a mega international platform.

This thriving 30 year-old consultancy of 275 architects and professionals, invaluable experience of working with some of the biggest names in the fraternity and impressive, people-centric work culture, started small. The son of a government officer and the youngest daughter of a middle-class Gujarati family teamed up to create this commanding presence in architecture, design and project management consultancy. Sandeep Shikre says, "I come from a very humble background but was taught from childhood that education was the most important in life."

### Early days

A passion for cricket, nurtured at the famous Balmohan Vidhyamandir, founded by *Shikshan Maharshi* Dadasaheb Rege, inspired dreams of a career in the sport, but this quickly switched to engineering after the Class XII exam, at Ruparel College. He says, "I kept my cricket kit aside with a very heavy heart." Initially interested in engineering, the young Shikre's interest was caught by the more creative field of architecture (despite the fact that he wasn't great at drawing) and with creating built environments for people to live in. He now says, "It's a myth that one must be good at art to be a good architect." Considered a niche profession with just three colleges in Mumbai,



Shikre joined the Academy of Architecture with best friend Unmesh Joshi in 1980.

Alpa Shikre's journey too was influenced by one of her many siblings, from early school at Carmel Convent, Bandra and later at K C College. Alpa Shikre says, "My elder sister was instrumental in drawing me towards architecture and I joined Academy of Architecture after an entrance test." A fortuitous meeting with a senior at college, Sandeep Shikre, led to a lifelong partnership.



Speaking of their early influences, Sandeep Shikre says, "School and the Academy had a large role in shaping us both. My teachers mentored and guided me and the academic pattern itself was about creating leaders. Prof. Mhatre, Prof. Wandrekar, Prof. Gumaste and Prof. Amberkar taught us to believe in ourselves and instilled confidence in us."

#### Early work

Driven by the entrepreneurial spirit, the young Shikre was raring to go on completion of the degree and started with freelance work, later working with a teacher, Ar. Uday Dighe, who made him a partner. He recalls his very first project as a small (300 sq ft) office for a family friend who was a water scientist, which was designed in such a way that he could rest there as well. Despite not earning a fee, Shikre says he received several gifts as well as inquiries for consultancy. Alpa Shikre says their own family residence, a renovation project, was the first big one. She adds, "I worked elsewhere for a year and then joined him. He (Shikre) has always been a guiding force and a mentor to me."



*"We must be sensitive about sustainable architecture and to think about the impact of our design on society at large. That is the moral responsibility of an architect, because whatever we create, leaves a huge impact on the future."*

#### First steps in practice

Sandeep Shikre reminisces saying that when he started practice in 1989, the trend then was to engage senior architects with 15 -20 years of experience in the profession and likens the early struggle to 'tapascharya'. They then decided to focus on their interiors design services which saw them consulting for several HNIs who he says, kept them abreast with new technologies, materials and luxury.

#### A time to grow

Ironically, it was during the recession in 1996 that a huge opportunity came to the young company. Manohar Joshi, former Chief Minister of Maharashtra and father of his friend Unmesh Joshi wished to build a technical education institute in Aurangabad and was impressed

with what he termed Shikre's 'out of the box designs'. It was their first purely architectural project and went so well that Joshi offered them a second project, a four-star hotel project. The client gave them a free hand which helped them put several innovative ideas into play such as glass curtain walls, automation, digital lighting and façade lighting. The time spent researching international designs and solutions while working on this project proved important learnings for the entire team and created projects that were testimonials to their capacity.

This was followed by another landmark project: renowned surgeon, Nitu Mandke's hospital, later taken over by Reliance as Kokilaben Hospital. Another first for the young team, this hospital project was completed in the record period of nine months.

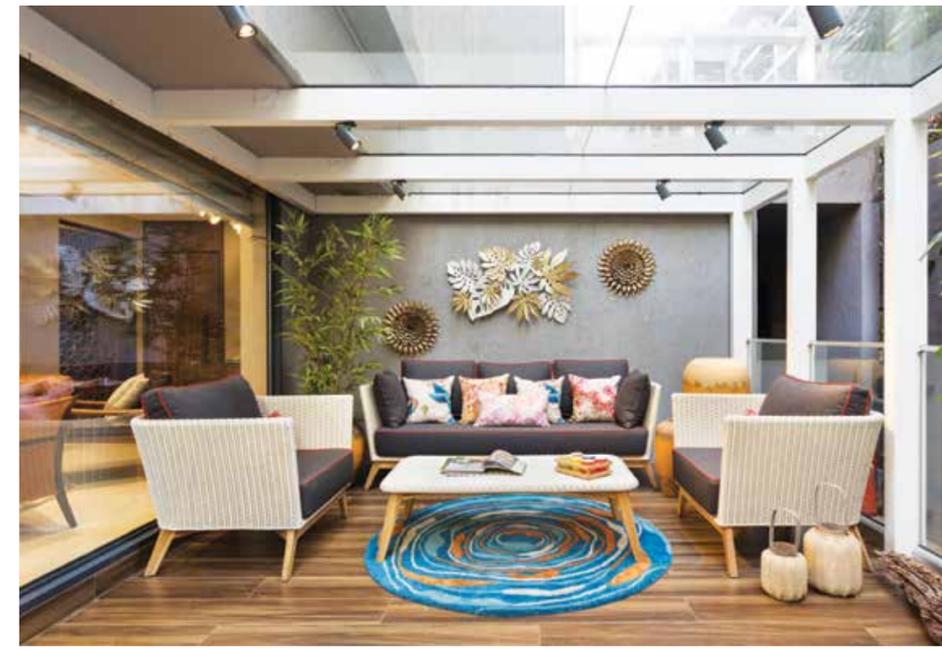


**Growth and international footprint**

With the turn of the millennium came big changes with an international partnership in 2000, which was facilitated by their focus to technology and a chance visit from a friend, Atul Kulkarni an architect from California. Impressed with SSA's computerised set up and practice, he recommended a tie-up to his American company, who wished to expand operations to South-East Asia. Sandeep Shikre says, "It worked beautifully for both and we did earn some extra dollars!" They later expanded operations to the Middle East with projects based in Dubai between 2001 to 2007. This was a time of expansion where they saw their team grow from 25 to 60 strong.

**Dreams for the future**

Speaking of their competence, Sandeep Shikre says, "Architecture is versatile. Many architects prefer to have a niche speciality, but our portfolio includes all kinds of projects including residential, commercial, institutional, hospitality, health care, mixed use, public spaces and urban spaces. We have won awards in almost every category. We love architecture which is an intelligent science, but are also strong in interior design."



Shikre says, "A designer can add a value proposition if he can understand construction management and deliver a quality project within the given budget." This led to the creation of a third division in 2003, project management, known internationally as AE (Architecture and Engineering). This was somewhat of a balancing act, not wishing to deviate from hard core creative architecture or to dilute their image. The support and trust of their clients carried the day and made this the right decision. A strong construction management division, good engineers who would interact with designers and suggest solutions at the design stage, and a strong research cell enabled bringing

several technologies to India for the first time. These included the jump form systems comprising hydraulics-enabled formwork and working platforms in construction and the compass system in vertical transportation.

**Learning from the best**

SSA have had the opportunity to work with the greats from across the globe, from Daniel Libeskind, Kohn Pedersen Fox (KPF), Michael Callison, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) to many others. Sandeep Shikre says, "One thing all great masters have in common is an understanding of architecture from all dimensions. We have learnt a lot from each of them."



He welcomes international partnerships saying, “When Berlin was rebuilt, every public building was designed by internationally acclaimed architects from all over the world. There was no feeling of insecurity among German architects. That is the reason they could get masters like I M Pei, Rem Koolhaas, Norman Foster, Daniel Libeskind and many others as result of which Berlin became a Mecca of architectural design.”

#### Work culture

The investment in their team and practice have certainly paid rich dividends of loyalty and competence in the team which has grown to 275 over 30 years with most associates being with them for between 15 and 20 years. A constant training and internship initiative and upgrading of resources has proven useful, with an earmarked budget for education and training. The Shirkres say, “This is the legacy we want to leave behind : social bonding and a feeling of a large family. We care for one another and that is the reason even during the tough time of pandemic, there was no stress. The quest now, is to institutionalize this.”



#### Thoughts on Indian practice

Discussing the state of Indian architecture, the partners say things have changed for the better, with the growth of Indian architecture and competence. Shikre says this started with the high-rise boom about 2 decades ago and the launch of huge infrastructure projects. International architectural firms were hired, but over a period this transitioned to hiring excellent Indian architects for complex infrastructure projects like airports.

The Shirkes are appreciative of the process-driven method of international firms saying, “In developed countries, they spend a lot of time on pre-project studies, design programming, proper research and analysis and validation, before beginning to design. For large projects, they spend six to nine months on pre-project workshops to understand all facets of that project. We, in India like to get on to the job as soon as possible. Indian architects need to spend more quality time on research and analysis. We need to have a meticulous approach to go to the next level.”

Shirke sums up saying, “We have to be sensitive about sustainable architecture and to think about the impact of our design on society at large. That is the moral responsibility of an architect, because whatever we create, leaves a huge impact on the future. We can't get carried away with our own obsessions.”

#### OUT OF THE BOX

##### Other passions:

Sandeep Shikre: Cricket !  
Alpa Shikre: Travel, swimming & reading fiction.

**You relax at the end of a hard day with a:**  
Movie night at home.

**To take a break from day-to-day work, you:**  
Travel and explore something new!





## Ar. Ninad Tipnis

### **Vision :**

My design philosophy is that there is no philosophy. Design is a collaborative process. We create memorable spaces that are seemingly effortless, where people simply want to be and strive to make every project unique. We hope that others would see our designs as sophisticated and with a modern edge.

## The free-thinking intellectual.

The warmth of family and strong values inculcated by them in the young Ninad Tipnis, made for a happy childhood. The son of what he terms a 'rockstar' architect father and supportive and loving mother, Tipnis was born into architecture in a sense, though he had little recognition of this for a long while. The fact of his father being successful but not as available as others, intrigued the young boy who wondered what it was that his father did. It was the family that was 'the village' that nurtured the young Ninad Tipnis, who says, "There were several opportunities to connect with culture and with good values through family get-togethers. We were taught to treat everyone with respect, irrespective of person's social position or profession."

While appreciating the teachings of the family, Tipnis says he was always a bit of a rebel who rejected the constricting norms of formal education. He says, "It was not about being rebellious but about creating my own rules." Though school itself was a mixed blessing, he says, "The subjects that I hated were more than the subjects I loved!" Tipnis still enjoyed schooldays as a naughty, clever child with several friends, whose company he enjoyed. Friends and fun apart, Ninad Tipnis praises his teachers who he says were like a second set of parents. His free spirit was seen as rebelliousness and made him the target of reprimand and punishment, but created a unique space for bonding with his mother who supported her son through it all. Summing up the learnings of the time, Tipnis says, "I learnt to dream big from my father and I learnt discipline from my mother. It was a convergence of discipline and dreaming big, which are very important values to me today."



### Freedom and choice

Faced with vocational choices and lines of study, Ninad Tipnis was unsure of which way he would go. What he did know, with great surety, was that he wished for freedom, which he describes as “the freedom to be.” Adding, “It is easy to articulate it now but I did not know what it exactly meant then.” He says his father was an influence pulling him to architecture, as was the environment, which he terms as “different, because besides whatever glamour was attached to the architectural practice, the overall atmosphere was very conducive. Architects competed with one another but were also friends. They respected one another. Fees were the last thing they discussed. Patrons and architects collaborated together and created a project. I still believe in those values and though commercialization has taken a centre stage, I like to stick to these values.”

Tipnis joined the Rachna Sansad academy of architecture, and sees this time as important in shaping him. Expressing appreciation of his teachers, Tipnis says they were excellent and gave the students person attention and inculcated discipline in the rebellious while making them work hard and spend long hours



*“Design is not just what it looks and feels like, design is how it works. Design need not be complicated but has to be functional.”*

developing their skills. This culminated in his teaching his fellow students of the fourth and second years while he was still a student of the fifth year. He started practicing his real world skills as well saying he would “do something entrepreneurial,” such as computer classes, in the vacations, adding “Whatever I did had a business angle to it.”

### Work time

Ninad Tipnis started practice in 1992, while still a 3rd year student, when he started working in his father’s office during the vacation. Passionate about technology, he handled IT, overseeing the computerization of the firm, over the next five years, to about 60 to 70 computer stations. He



did a 10 year stint with his father, but says they rarely interacted, being preoccupied with their own work. He says he had much to learn at the time, “I was part of several large projects but as a student it was like a large elephant I was trying to scale and I couldn’t grasp all the parts. We did all kinds of projects, like commercial, institutional, government and industrial.”

He started independent practice soon after but found they did fairly run-of-the-mill projects for about a year, after which Tipnis decided to take matters into his hands. “I decided to approach large banks and the first major job that I got was for a private



bank to design a branch. It was called UTI Bank then, now known as Axis Bank. We must have done over 250 projects for them, which includes several branches.” Providing end-to-end turnkey solutions in the belief that the architect must be involved in the build process, Tipnis says this has worked to their advantage with long-term clients like Axis Bank.

Ninad Tipnis says the legacy of his father’s practice worked both ways, being known as architects of large projects but having little to show in terms of interior projects where clients questioned his experience in designing large corporate offices. This inspired growth in providing composite solutions.

Discussing their spectrum of work, Tipnis says, “It is glamorous to say that every project is a challenge. However, there are projects you don’t know how you finish them, whereas certain projects challenge your thinking and make you a better practitioner. Sometimes, they make you a different human. My most challenging project was a competition by invitation where some of the competitors were my heroes while I was a student. It was a four hundred thousand square feet project and I had no experience of working on such a scale. The biggest project I had done before that was one tenth the size of this project, but I had always had a passion for



banking architecture. This was the Deutsche Bank project in Pune, a 9 storey building and each floor plate what’s bigger than any project that I had previously done. That was a challenge but we had faith in our journey, working for over a year and I used to be at the site every day.” Banking projects were a call to success and opened several other doors such as the Emirates airlines offices, their service centres, retail windows and regional headquarters at Nariman point as well as shipping and pharma companies.

JTCPL Designs now works with some of the world’s most important corporates and banks across the country and has on going relationships with illustrious clientele like Emirates Airlines, Deutsche Bank, Axis Bank Limited, TATA AIG, Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, HDFC Bank, BMW, Standard Chartered Bank, VISA, K Raheja Corporation, Nokia and Siemens, among others.

The practice has received recognition from renowned bodies such as IIID MK Awards ‘09, CSI Felicitation Awards ‘10 and the IGen DesignForum’12.

Currently a global player operating across regions, the firm now boasts a strength of 40 professionals.

**State of the practice**

Ninad Tipnis sees the future as being collaborative, having worked with like-minded practices across the world. As banks were allowed to function during the pandemic, this worked in their favour and saw JTCPL set up an office in Dubai during lockdown. With a presence in 13 locations worldwide, he says, “The key is to stay on the cusp of currency. Sometimes experience is overrated as the speed at which knowledge is accumulated today was not there in the past. The emergence of digital media has made knowledge available to all and it is this



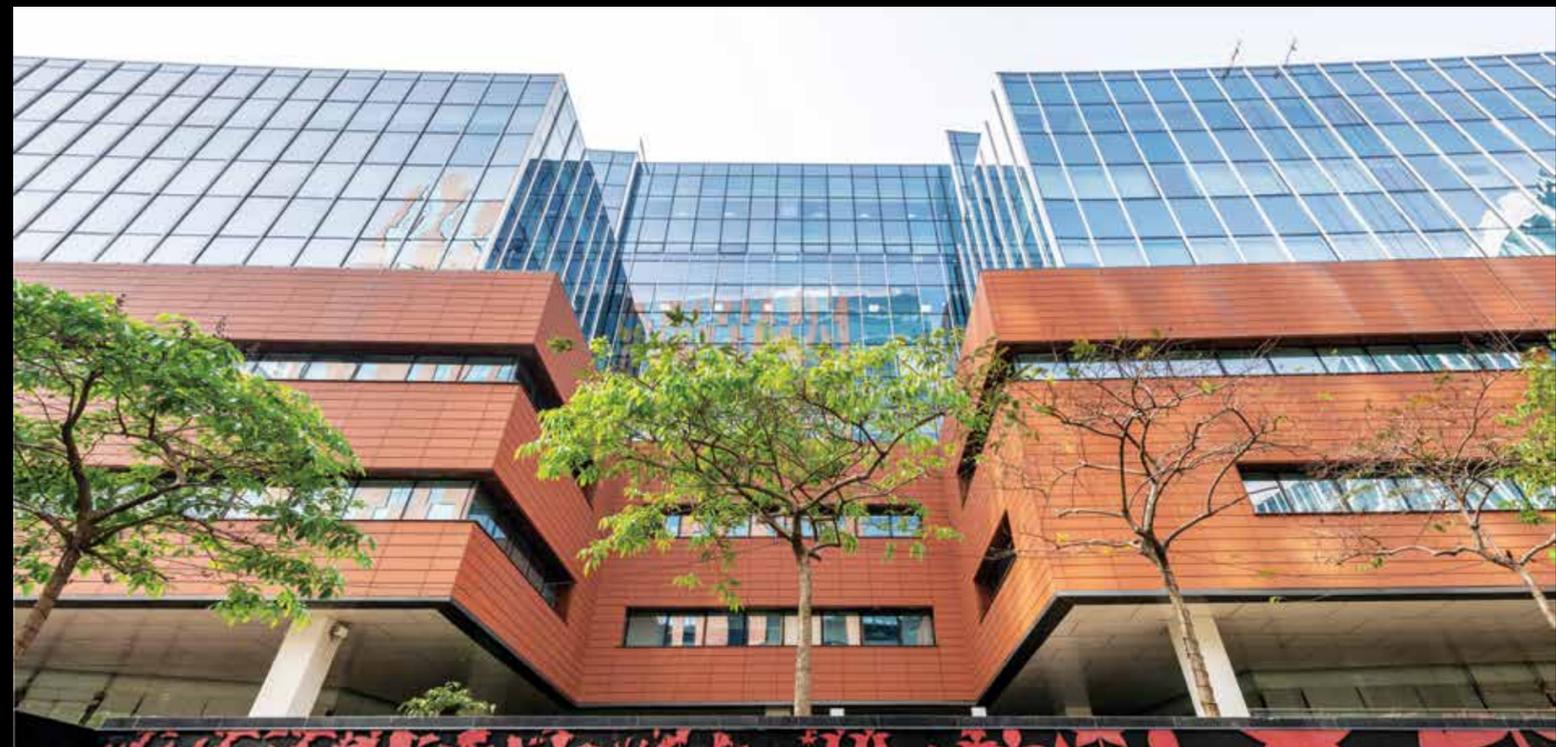


that can insulate against crises like the pandemic. As the IOT (Internet of Things) gets more democratic, we will see the infusion of IOT in the office of the future. So it's not surprising that the individual workspace is less of a status symbol. Critical parameters will be measurable and hence improved."

Design is a collaborative process. Earlier, an architect was considered the evolver of the project, but now we have consultants for every aspect. The concept of unique ability is playing to its best, to get the best design.

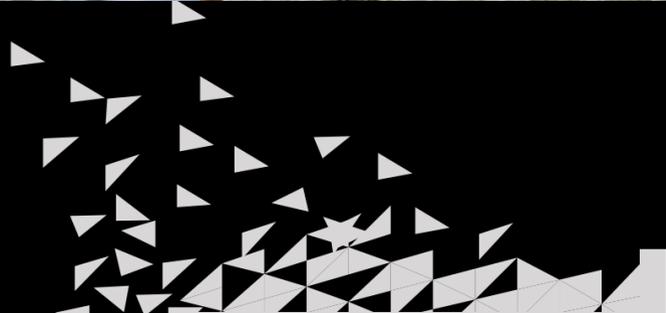
The free thinking architect has clear thoughts on the teaching of the subject saying improvisation is more important than curriculum and that a knowledge of market forces and financial planning is imperative. He suggests finance management and entrepreneurship are important aspects to learn as most architects must operate like entrepreneurs.

He says his own influences keep changing. "Back during student days I liked Santiago Calatrava, Frank Lloyd Wright, Arata Isozaki, Kenzo Tange, Charles Correa. They were my role models. Now architectural practices influence me. Practices which are scaled, modular and multi locational. I would like to see an Indian practice with 10000 people. I don't look at myself achieving that scale, because I believe in modular practice, but I feel there are several Indian architectural firms who have that capacity."



#### Learnings from Covid-19

Surprisingly, Tipnis sees covid-19 as a positive intervention for the practice, saying, "It taught us new ways to do business." He says he saw many practices affected during the black swan event due to lack of financial planning, but that they were unaffected as they had several bankers were mentors. He sums up "This is the best time to be in this profession. You must have focus, consistency and discipline. One needs to be determined as there is no alternative to hard work. There are no short cuts to success in this profession."



#### OUT OF THE BOX

##### Passions apart from architecture:

I have a passion for learning about leadership and entrepreneurship.

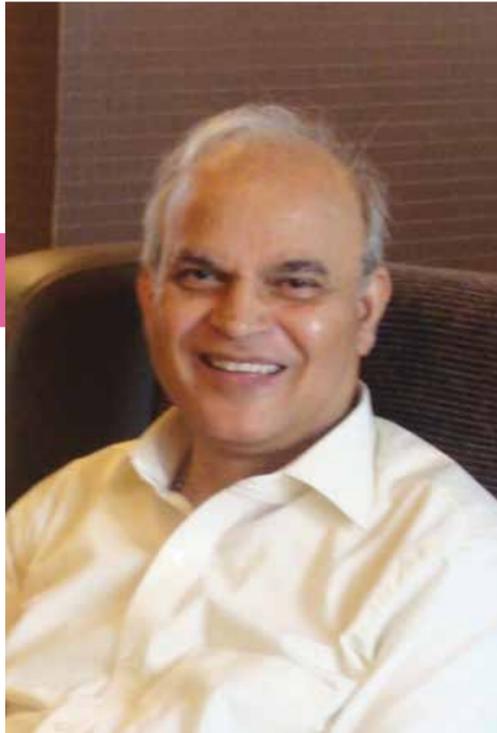
Fitness. I am a long distance runner, I pursue fitness all the time.

##### What excites you?

Human longevity is something that excites me. We do not know what the world is going to be in 20 years from now, but it is always nice to be there to witness it. Psychology and nutrition interest me.

##### If could give up architecture for few days and do whatever you want:

I would love to mentor young leaders. I love quality conversations and travelling. I often travel alone, exploring different architectural wonders around the world; Toronto, Paris, New York, London, Singapore and Dubai. I am a big fan of capitalism and I like geographies that celebrate capitalism.



## Ar. D M Upasani

### **Vision :**

My design philosophy is to condition the unconditioned and vice versa. I don't do cosmetic architecture. Architecture has to evolve with its personality and behaviour.

## The philosopher architect.

D M Upasani was born in Nagpur and his early education in Akola, but his was not the typical childhood of a small town as the family had roots deeply entrenched in spirituality for seven generations. His father was a spiritual preacher, a Kitankar, who preached Shankara's Advaita (non-dual) philosophy and was widely travelled, as far as London where he delivered several lectures. With his mind nourished in philosophy, his drawing skills were cultivated by a teacher, Mr. Kshirsagar who encouraged his latent talent.

The family later moved to a huge house in Pune known as Sardar Biwalkar's Wada (castle) and needed some reconstruction. The process of construction fascinated the young Upasani, a student of class IV, and was his first exposure to masonry, timber joinery and even the making of arcs. He says, "That was quite an experience!" The young mind was also influenced by a neighbour, Mr. Gokhale, who was a sculptor and a painter of Ganesha idols. Upasani reminisces, "I used to sit in his workshop for hours and observe everything."

### **Early challenges overcome**

The family then moved to Mumbai and the path seemed set for the young artist to join an art school with aptitude for art. On passing the entrance exam, he was invited for an interview with the dean, Prof. V. N. Adarkar, who noticed he had scored a distinction in all subjects except English, as he had studied in the vernacular. He advised him to join the architecture course, in the adjacent building. It was a simpler time, with no admission tests and an exemplary marksheet, which allowed for a walk in acceptance to the course.

Upasani speaks of early challenges largely on account of the language, which eased as the course itself got more difficult. This





*"Architecture is a behavioural science and triggers the mind in a particular way. A gloomy space can make you passive whereas a well-lit enchanting space refreshes you and makes you think positively. The target of an architect is to create those experiences."*

#### **Building a key competence**

His journey brought him full circle to Ar. Romesh Pathare and the opportunity to work on hotel projects, both in Dubai and in Mumbai, on the iconic Sea Rock hotel. He later went on to work with Madan, Patki and Razdan where he did an eight year stint, under Ar. P G Patki. This was the time of his immersion into hotel architecture. He says, "We were involved in the extension of Oberoi Hotel. I was made architect in charge and P G Patki sent me for meetings with Rai Bahadur Mohan Singh Oberoi, where I got a wide exposure in hotel design and generated a desire to learn more about hospitality design."



D M Upasani started his own practice in the early 1980s when he answered a newspaper advertisement for an architect. He was dismayed when he realised the position was to work with a builder and wished



culminated in his scoring the highest in the fifth year in design and structural design which is a combination of the logical and the creative. He says, "An architect needs both hemispheres of the brain to excel, otherwise you will be an assistant to some architect throughout your life."

His plans to travel overseas were changed by the demise of his father, just 20 days after he completed the architecture course in 1969, and family responsibilities were transferred to his shoulders. A teacher Ar. Romesh Pathare recommended the young Upasani to several architects and he worked first with Charles Correa and with Parelkar Oalekar Parpia and later with Marathe and Kulkarni. D M Upasani recalls the time, "Ar. Kulkarni used to draw flawlessly even at the age of 70. I learnt a lot from him and his son Ar. Ashok Kulkarni, who designed Rajghat Memorial of Mahatma Gandhi in Delhi."

Upasani later joined the Maharashtra State Electricity Board, (MSEB) as an in house architect and worked on the Koradi thermal power station, a canteen building and the housing project spread over 750 acres. He says, "I tried to something innovative in the housing project, but the authorities wanted run of the mill, typical designs. That was disheartening." He soon left MSEB and joined Master and Associates, where he says he was given a free hand and worked on an educational campus project in Pune for Sadhu Vaswani Institute and some hotel projects.



to retract, but was persuaded to meet the builder. This led to a meeting with Shantikumar Majithia, a big name in the real estate industry and his partner K M Goenka. They offered Upasani a 40 per cent share in a new firm which they incorporated as Designers' Enclave Private Limited and commenced work on an apartment building in Juhu. Together, they worked on projects such as Central Park Hotel, Bombay International Hotel and several other real estate projects in the next years. He simultaneously did some freelance work on other hotel projects, including ITC hotels.

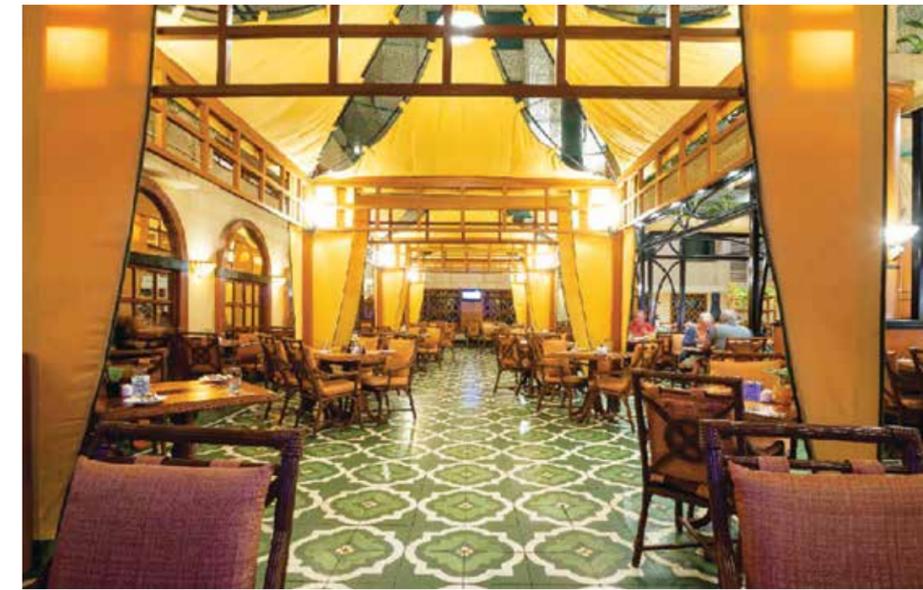
Upasani Design Cell was founded in 1984 and their office set up in Colaba, in South Mumbai. He was well known as a hotel designer and received several commissions but always thought with appreciation of the experience of designing the Oberoi hotel and the guidance of Ar. P.G Patki. He adds, "Whatever I am today, I owe it to a

few persons; my father, who inculcated an aesthetic sense in me while we were rebuilding our house in Pune; my teacher Kshirsagar, who honed my drawing skills; Ar. Romesh Pathare, who recognized and appreciated my capability and Ar. P G Patki who showed faith in me."

#### **Memorable projects**

His expertise in hotel design won him accolades and clients in India and overseas. Speaking with fondness for one of his first clients, the hotelier Vithal Kamat, he says, "One of my first memorable projects was Orchid Hotel, Mumbai, which is India's first eco-friendly hotels in 1991, which won 6 international awards. I designed several other projects in different locations for him."

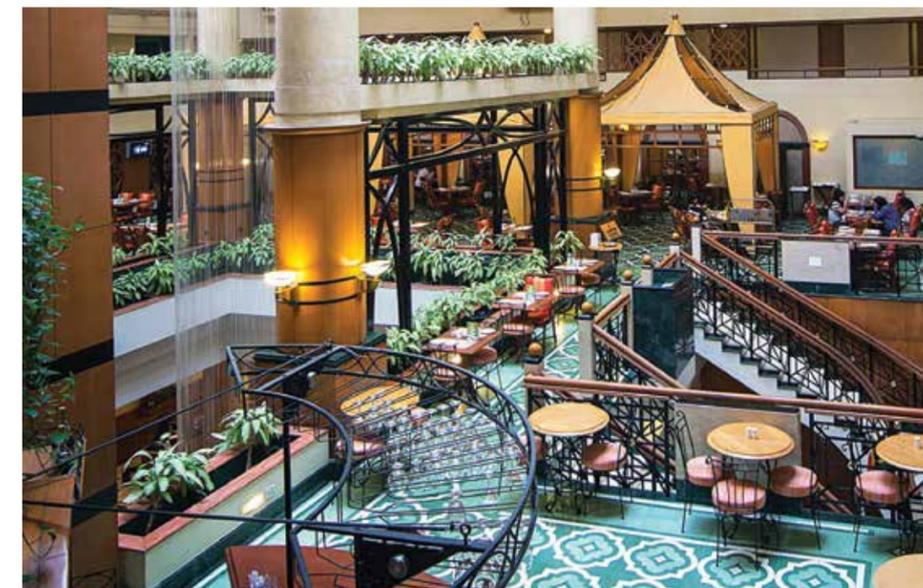
However, it was the Sahara Star, a project won through an invited competition, that stands out as most prestigious. He tells the story of the award of the contract.



After the presentation, "The chairman Subroto Roy (Sahara Shri.) asked just one question 'Can this be built the way you have presented it?' and my reply was, 'Yes, I would not present it, if it was not possible.' It is one of most iconic hotel projects to our credit. We were given full freedom of expression and the entire process of project development during construction was filmed and telecast as the first Mega structure of the country on the National Geographic channel." A sense of pride in the project as well as the involvement of his son, Pranav, is clear as he adds, "My son Ar. Pranav Upasani has contributed in concept development as well as in design development and the interior design of 110 rooms."

#### **Tales of experience**

His long experience in the industry has left him with deep learnings and a lasting love of hospitality design, which he shares. "I have designed all kinds of projects as well as master planning but what appeals to me most is hospitality design." It has also left the mild-mannered architect with a deep disdain for working in a builders employ. He says, "Most builders feel they have employed you and not appointed you to design. They think they know everything and want architects to turn their ideas into drawings. I find it embarrassing and suffocating."



His enjoys his clear strength in hospitality, and “ the freedom to create a new experience with no monotony, where every project is a new opportunity to create a landmark.” He also enjoys designing residential projects where the architect is given full freedom to design and has worked on the master plan of C ward in Mumbai for Lok group.

Sharing his interest in designing multi-use projects, he says, “I like to work on multi use projects and have recently designed one in Muscat which includes a hotel, a hospital, a shopping mall and commercial establishments. This was challenging because requirements differed in every space.” However, it is teaching that he calls his passion and says his office has been the training ground for many young architects who went on to professional success. Happy to mentor and be a guide for these, Upasani says, “Academics is equally important because the application of thought and conversion to the built form is one aspect, but thinking itself is the fundamental aspect, ignored by many architects. Many architects succumb to the commercial pressure and ignore the creative aspect.” Rueing the current state of the practice, he says, “The architectural practice is slowly succumbing to the market pressures.”



Profiteering and greed are to blame. Other concerns are to do the templating design (as in large hotel chains) with no respect to the context and the user perspective. He says, “They forget the structure has to complement the local surroundings and ethos.”



### The environment and the practice

Seeing architecture as a wholistic practice, Upasani explains, “Environment-friendly architecture is not only the application of technologies, but about how that environment is friendly to people and how it appeals to the senses of people. All five senses are triggered by the ambience that is created. If you enter a traditionally designed temple, you will experience it. The space created within a built form changes the frame of mind. Our ancestors knew how to use elements like direct and reflected light, sound, textures very effectively. It was not an accident but well thought out. Architecture is a behavioural science and triggers the mind in a particular way. A gloomy space can make you passive whereas a well- lit enchanting space refreshes you and makes you think positively. The target of an architect is to create those experiences. Freedom of expression is important to achieve this and it is a process that has to be conceptualized in mind before touching the pencil to the paper. The mind has to be trained to follow the process which begins with the observation. After which one has to assimilate and synthesize.”

### OUT OF THE BOX

#### Other passions and hobbies:

I love poetry, sketching and philosophy.

#### Admired architects:

Frank Lloyd Wright and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe are my idols.

#### A dream for the future:

I wish to start my own institute to teach architecture.



# Ar. Zubin Zainuddin Ar. Krupa Zubin

**Vision :**  
To offer excellent design and aesthetic sensibilities exclusive to each project that with high-end quality and luxury as the essence of the practice; using the invisible nuances to make a visible difference.

## Owning the winner's mindset.

A fascination with the experiential, an inquisitive mind and a love of art; a mixture of several aspects of her personality and creative bent led Krupa Zubin to being an architect. She says, hailing from a simple background helped her appreciate the many layers of creative experience. She remembers being interested in art from childhood, but does not dwell on the past, saying "Childhood and school days were so long time ago that I honestly do not remember much." The focus is on the present and the great interactions they have now. "We meet so many people every day and have so many conversations with some brilliant minds. We do not socialize much because we think that our life at work is filled with socializing and learning more about people in many ways."



For Krupa Zubin, her path was driven by a desire to achieve, to attain heights as a woman. She says, "I was very ambitious despite my humble background. It was not about money, it was about achievement and making a difference and what you leave behind. As a woman I wanted to cross the boundary, I wanted to achieve something. That got scripted at a very young age. There were so any things I wanted to do and I would dream big, I even dreamt of being Miss India!"

This burning intent led her to being the first architect of the family, just as her sister was the first doctor of the family. These accomplishments brought a sense of achievement to the sisters, who were encouraged by their home-maker mother and businessman father.

The young aspirant enrolled at a new college of architecture in Navi Mumbai, founded by Dr. K. M. Vasudevan Pillai. She says the newness of the institution was an





advantage and the young architect soaked in the learning, "We had close access to teachers and seniors, I was an introvert then and would look and learn. We had a lovely open campus with a lot of empty space all around. These may appear insignificant but small things always matter a lot to me."

Zubin Zainuddin too studied at an institution nearby, the Bharati Vidyapeeth College of Architecture at Belapur and the future partners actually met briefly in the first year of the course, though they became friends years later. While Krupa Zubin learned by

observation, Zubin Zainuddin was more hands on, enjoying practical experience while working with Sabu Francis and Associates in parallel with the architecture course. Interested in developing software and a natural leader, who knew he wanted to be an architect from Grade VIII, the friends gravitated to discussing their work and eventually working together.

They started practice in Navi Mumbai and later moved to Mumbai, where Krupa Zubin says, "We literally did not know anyone but won our first award before we started our practice!"

*"No project is too small and no dream is too big. You must do justice to what comes to your table in terms of design."*

Eighteen years down the line, she looks back at their journey with satisfaction saying, "Our first project was our own house which won an award and then the next one was our own office which also won an award. In a way, this was a sort of validation from the industry. It taught us two things. No project is too small and no dream is too big. You must do justice to what comes to your table in terms of design."

**The winning attitude.**

In an unusual progression, the partners at ZZ started their portfolio largely designing health clubs and salons, the residential projects followed. Good work sought them out, as did a range of clients; something the young architects still wonder at, but put down to doing their best for each client. "People used to find us and reach out to us which I found quite amazing. When we shifted to Mumbai also we had clients coming to us after learning about us through word of mouth."





Equally interestingly they do not see any projects as 'landmark' apart from their first two projects. Krupa Zubin says, "For us, each project has been important and challenging. In the words of the great composer A R Rahman, a particular favorite of Zubin, 'Do not hold your best song for the next movie.' As an ardent fan of Rahman, Zubin loved this and we follow this maxim." She continues, "If I were asked to pick a milestone, I would say, our first two projects because they opened up an entire new palette of work for us." The first was their very first residential project in Mumbai; a 30,000 sq. ft. villa which they did for a client they met by chance, on a train. The other was a hospital project they were commissioned to do by the brother of a jeweler whose showroom they were designing. Krupa Zubin says, "Such new connections and projects defined our profile. We had never done hospitals.



But he had such belief in us and thought we would do something different. It was the trust of clients that pushed us to do our best." This did push them to the next level, as she continues, "The ICU we designed was completely different from what you see in normal hospitals. It was a new concept, inspired by an aquarium."

renewed vigor. Attitude matters because it is not about today but about the long term." This was an attitude that saw them transition from small residential projects spanning a couple of thousand feet to mammoth homes of 70,000 sq. ft. What brings the greatest satisfaction though is their several repeat clients, which she says, "reassures us that we are on the right path."

Their journey, though now an exemplar of success, was not without its roadblocks and challenges, which they conquered simply by having and owning the 'winner' attitude. Speaking of their early challenges, Zubin says, "We struggled in the beginning, but because we love what we do, it was like a sportsperson who plays a match and loses; we were always ready to play the next day with

There is an emotional aspect to their design that makes each space unique, according to the Zainuddins. "The human connection is a very important aspect of every design. Whether it is a product or the architectural design, the relationship between the emotional quotient of the user with the product or the space is important."





**Global inspiration, unique vocabulary**

On the path to creating their own design language, the architects drew on their exposure to the global design community. Zubin says, "We followed our own instincts and we always looked at a global perspective for an inspiration. Travel has taught us a lot. We never aped but tried to find our own language." She speaks of finding inspiration from all they see and experience abroad, saying, "I am totally impressed, for instance, by kettle designs in Japan, where each kettle has a specific design based on its role. When we see these products, there is a constant wish to observe and study. When we travel, we try to understand the sensibilities of architects who created monumental designs, be it in Paris, Verona or in Japan!"

Krupa Zubin speaks of the architects they love and find inspiring from Carlo Scarpa, saying "There is a sense of silence in his work," to Charles Correa and Frank Gehry. She mentions the Louis Vuitton Foundation museum in Paris designed by Frank Gehry saying, "The landscape, the form of the building and the way the art is portrayed inside come together to create an amazing feeling."

Krupa and Zubin Zainuddin are avid travelers and make unusual stops in their journeys. Exploring the places they visit through long, early morning walks, she says helps them "see the new place through a different perspective." They visit museums and love visiting bookstores. She says, "There are huge bookstores, open till 4 in the morning where

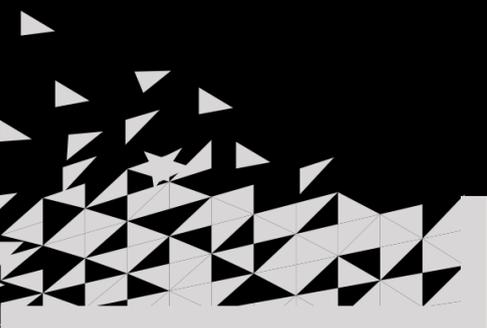


you have to wait for a seat as there are young and old everywhere, reading books." Avid readers and cinema lovers who inspire and push each other, Krupa Zubin says, "Zubin is a voracious reader and can often be found up at 4.30 in the morning, reading. We both love watching multi-lingual movies and screen movies at the office too."

**Thoughts on urban planning**

They feel matters of urban planning, which come under the purview of the government, are of great importance to a community and to enhance the quality of living spaces. This is even more important in public spaces. Krupa Zubin says, "When we travel abroad, we see how they beautify spaces under the flyovers or the greenery they create.

Open spaces are turned into community spaces which define the look of a city. The best example is the High Line in New York city. They transformed this abandoned, unattended space into a beautiful community space." Other lessons learned include restriction of vehicular traffic in cities. Zubin adds, "I feel we should restrict vehicular movement in certain areas, at least on weekends, as they do in Verona." Ending on a positive note, she says, "These are small things that can bring about the change but overall, I am happy because a lot of change is coming in and our cities are certainly getting better." Zubin Zainuddin sums up "Let's be passionate about work and get infectious about good design because some infections are good."



**OUT OF THE BOX**

**Fashion designers you love:**  
Viigil Abloh, Yohji Yamamoto and brands like Comme des Garçons.

**Architects whose work you enjoy:**  
Nendo's Oki Sato is a designer whose work we both enjoy and often visit his exhibitions. When you look at his work you realize how you need an empty mind for clarity of thought to create those designs.

Patricia Urquiola, Pierro Lissoni, Thomas Heatherwick, Zaha Hadid and Bjarke Ingels.



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