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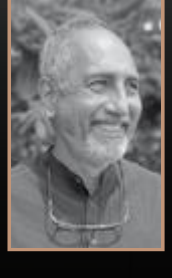
INDIAN DESIGN MAGAZINE

Biophilia in Workspace

VIVEK SINGH RATHORE

RAHUL KADRI



NEELAM MANJUNATH

BABA SASHANK

POOJA BIHANI

VARUN SHARMA

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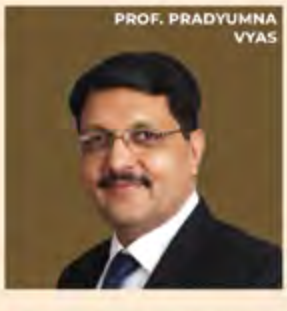

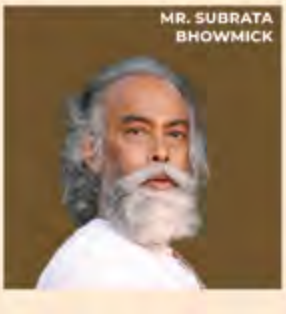

*presented in alphabetical order

my page

Hello Readers!

Growing up we learnt that fresh air and sunshine are good for our health. Studying architecture and climatology we learnt the theories and rationale. But, putting a potted plant on the office desk does not suffice. The fresh air and sunshine benefits have to be deep-rooted.

Stress is a huge factor in contemporary human life; and it simply can't be wished away. Work-related stress especially has become a major concern as stress (along with its many associated ailments) has become a leading cause of death - particularly for people in their forties. Workspace design has thus evolved and undergone a paradigm shift. An intervention that has the potential to be a game changer is biophilic design.

We all know that the most popular holiday destinations are those that take man close to nature: whether mountains, beaches, rivers, or forests. Escaping from work, leaving behind urban chaos, and spending time in the lap of nature helps people feel rejuvenated. Biophilic design uses that principle; extrapolates that same thought. If nature relieves stress, bring nature into the spaces we live and work in – that's the broad outline. And since work is the bigger stress inducing factor, workspaces are undergoing more significant changes; with biophilia being innately integrated into the ethos of the space.

The Insite Story this month features the work of Ar. Vivek Singh Rathore of Salient Design Studio, Kolkata. One of the leading supporters of Biophilia, he has been fortunate to get a number of pathbreaking projects where he got the opportunity to explore its potential.

Other Indian architects that have adopted biophilic design to ease the stress of work environments include young, talented designers such as Ar. Baba Sashank & Ar. Vindhya Guduru of Spacefiction Studio, Hyderabad; Ar. Pravir Sethi of Studio Hinge, Mumbai; Ar. Varun Sharma of Ultraconfidentiel Design; and Ar. Pooja Bihani of Spaces & Design, Kolkata.

While versatile artist Jatin Das features in our Art column, Insite Icon of the month is Bangalore based Ar. Neelam Manjunath whose work and contribution to the field of sustainable architecture is highlighted in a beautifully penned "I believe..." story for the readers of Insite.

Much Love and More Light,

roopa sabnis pinge
ARCHITECT, CRITIC, AUTHOR & EDITOR

www.insiteindia.in

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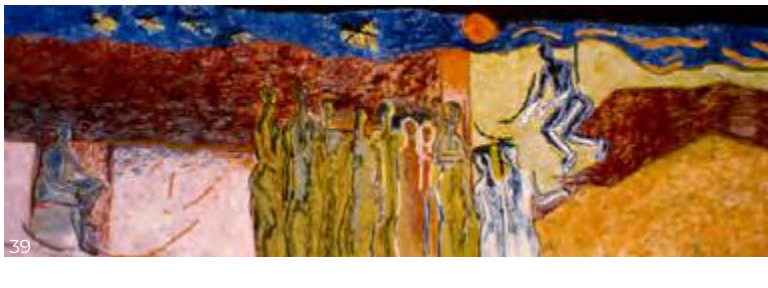
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FRESH AIR & SUNSHINE

Re-working Workspaces

Text: Ar. Roopa Sabnis Pinge
Photographs: Salient - Architecture Studio

Celebrated architect and IIT-Roorkee graduate Vivek Singh Rathore is the founder of the Kolkata-based Salient Design Studio; partnering with his wife, Ar. Anuradha Rathore, a well-known landscape architect. The multidisciplinary and award-winning studio established in 2005, uses a research-based approach to design; with the 'context' always given top priority.

Also noteworthy is the studio's ability to adapt to change, while integrating new-age techniques and technologies into their core ideology. In sync with this adaptability, the firm has been successfully employing the biophilic design philosophy in the multiple workspace environments handled by the firm.

In today's stressful times, architects across the world have adapted biophilia in workspace design. This trend started gaining momentum post Covid-19; as people lived through a particularly stressful situation, the work-from-home concept had been firmly etched on people's mindset and lifestyle, and going back to the workspace seemed daunting.

In India too, workspace design has evolved and adapted to the growing understanding and awareness of biophilia. Biophilic design can actually be retrofitted into existing workspaces by adding green walls, natural light, and water features – though the task might pose a few challenges. The biophilic aspect should ideally be incorporated into the core ideology at the stages of design conception and development.

Earlier often confused with Organic Architecture famously espoused by Frank Llyod Wright in 1908, biophilia is now being increasingly understood as a whole new thing. While organic architecture suggests the built form being integrated with nature, it completely misses out on the human factor. Biophilic design, on the other hand, supports a direct man to nature equation; such that the occupants of the built form connect with nature for overall wellbeing. Organic architecture is more about using natural forms; and incorporates macro elements such as structure, materials, and site planning. Biophilic design is more holistic; it addresses micro elements such as layout, interiors, furniture, and even textures and colours.

The Biophilia Hypothesis shared by E.O. Wilson in 1984 rests on the premise that humans have an innate connection to nature, so design should bring natural elements, patterns, and processes into human-made environments – for improved health, well-being, and efficiency. Multiple real-time studies have proven the veracity of this hypothesis.

Ar. Vivek Singh Rathore is among the first Indian architects to adopt biophilia; as evident in his more recent projects. Biowonder – an office tower in Kolkata, one of Rathore's early projects foraying into biophilic design; is the first biophilic corporate park of eastern India! This mixed-use project is a Gold-rated, LEED certified building, that embraces and embodies the core ideology of biophilia.

1

Supporting the biophilic design theory, Rathore explains: “Post the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important that we as humans connect and accept nature as a prescriptive order of life. The need to weave an experience of the body, mind, and soul in our built environment is important.”

One of the most important challenges faced by companies today is employee satisfaction. Here the importance of workspace design becomes a huge factor – with the new mantra of biophilic design pointing towards a positive outcome. “Ample sunlight inside, and views of outdoor landscaped areas help reduce the boxed-in feel. The addition of plants in and around the office improves air quality and assists noise reduction. This leads to visual and emotional comfort for the users of the space,” says Rathore. “And that has a strong corelation with the level of motivation and satisfaction that employees feel.”

From inception to execution, the design of an office space should focus on holistic wellbeing of the users; potentially leading to higher productivity at work.

In this feature, we look at two other projects from the Salient portfolio: SRMB – a corporate office and Storii by ITC Hotels – a wellness retreat. In the first project, the biophilic focus rests on natural light and greenery; while the second one integrates biophilia using water bodies and greenery.

As Rathore says, “Biophilic design isn’t about decorating with nature — it’s about designing as nature. We must embrace unpredictability, texture, decay, and joy, letting buildings live, breathe, and age as we do.”

SRMB CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS:

A more recent office project handled by Salient Design is the 39,500 sq ft corporate head office of SRMB in Newtown, Kolkata. This IGBC Gold certified building debunks the traditional hierarchal mindset, and from this process emerges a more inclusive and modern workplace culture. Directed towards enhanced productivity and collaborative growth, the design has a deeper focus on ensuring the well-

1. Façade of the SRMB Corporate Head Office in Kolkata

2. The entrance foyer of the workspace has a welcoming feel

3. The biophilic workspace has an enchanting water body

4. The workstations in the open office space enjoy views of the greenery

being of the people that use it. After all, it is a space where people spend approximately 60% of their daily waking hours!

The design strategy was to allow glare-free north light to stream into the interior spaces; and introduce the biophilic concept into the atrium – developing it as an engaging volume with interacting levels, incidental spaces, and collaborating opportunities.

By doing this, 96 percent daylight (north light - glare free) is harvested. This reduces the electric consumption, and lowers energy bills significantly – contributing to sustainability of the design.

In terms of wellness, the biophilic integration was expected to improve the indoor air quality by about 40%! Office absenteeism observed to have reduced by 50 percent, over a three-month period – potentially points to the success of the biophilia-centred workspace design.

DESIGN HIGHLIGHTS:

- Connect to Shades of Daylight and Sky renders a sustained Circadian Rhythm over the day
- Connect to Greenery, Flowing Water helps beat stress through the restorative power of Nature
- Connect to Panoramic Views helps build an acceptable mental psyche and behavioural response
- Connect with the levels encourages approachability and collaborative spaces, promotes walking and social interaction
- Connect with the people through incidental social spaces and visually connected volumes provide the best spaces for reading, meeting, sharing

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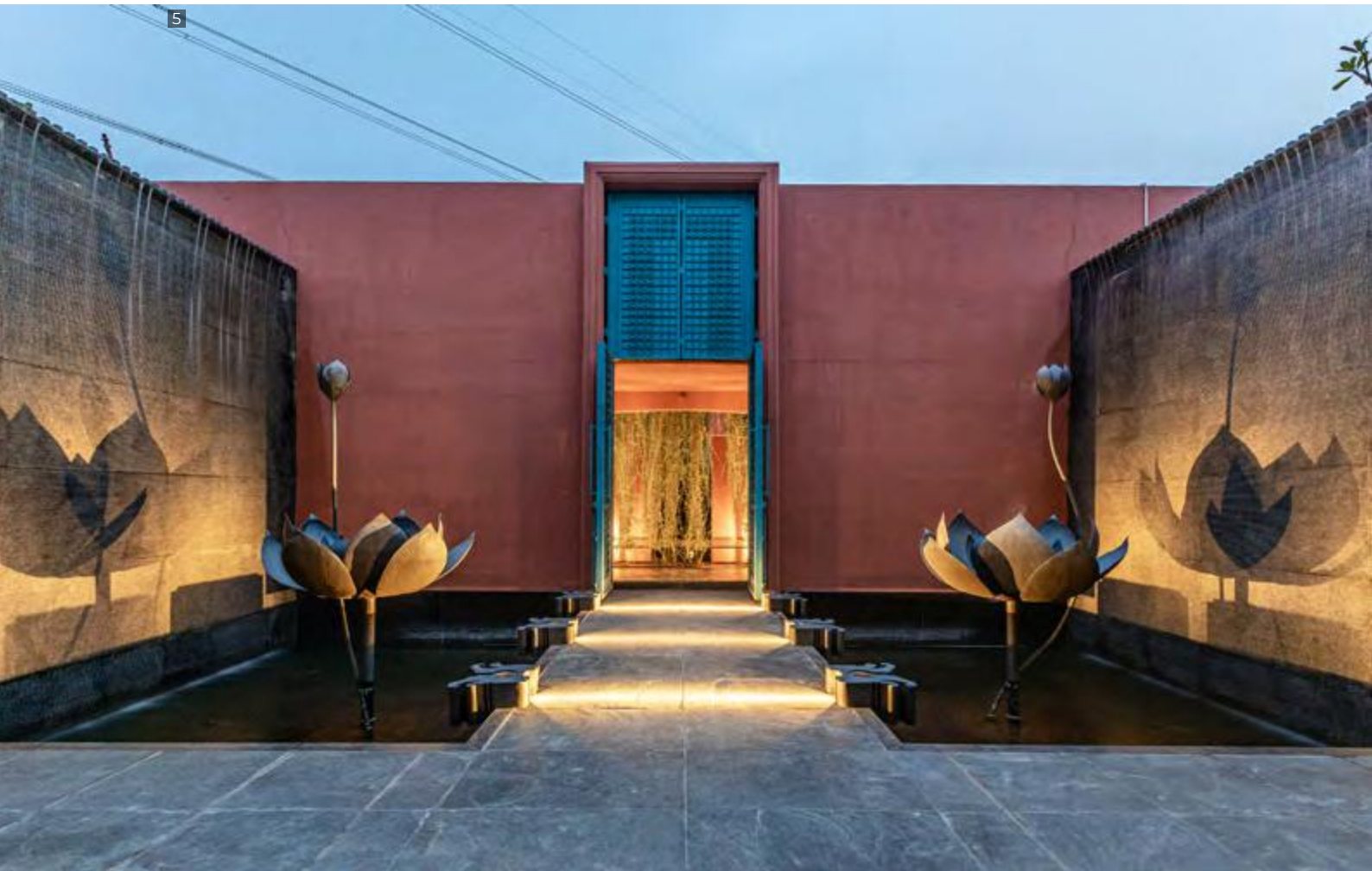

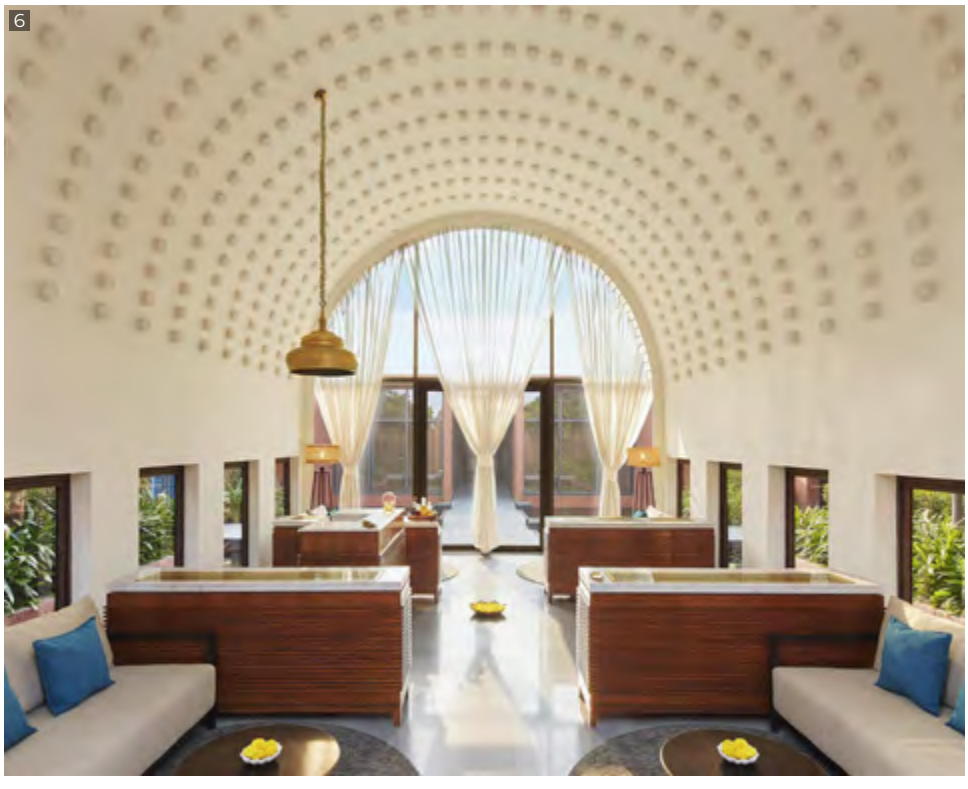

5. White Water Court - a relaxing space at the wellness resort

6. The reception foyer invokes an aura of serene indulgence

7. The view of the reception lounge from outside - setting the mood for a relaxed staycation

8. Door to the tranquility courtyard

STORII BY ITC HOTELS:

This wellness retreat in Bairampur, West Bengal is a 22,000 sq ft property located on a one-acre site. Eastern India is a land of water bodies, lakes, ponds and rivers. West Bengal, particularly the areas around Kolkata, have over 13% of registered water bodies. Since water comprises a large part of the human body, water as an element becomes a critical determinant of our wellness.

With three essential components in its program - the spa, the yoga-shala and the salon, the wellness retreat was crafted on a site with a peninsular profile surrounded by a 5 acres of water body (lake). Located within a campus of 90 acres, this one-acre component has 24 guest blocks for staycation guests and for those who engage in longer wellness programs. A total of 14 service areas include spaces for massages, ayurveda treatments, hydrotherapy, mud therapy and so on.

The design evolved as a series of experiential courtyards with meandering walkways linking introvertedly planned, disintegrated blocks/modules. Walking through multiple courts amidst water and nature has a calming effect on the mind of the visitor.

Planned with a focus on cardinal principles; and considering solar orientation and wind flow, the modules were laid out in a way that courtyards were created. Curvilinear profiles were selected for the courtyards for a visually soothing quality.

The deliberate arrangement of open spaces/voids between modules and the careful integration of open courtyards and closed volumes facilitate cross ventilation. Daylight, natural ventilation, textures, colours, fragrances, the flowing architectural form, aromas of earth, sounds of the winds together create a symphony of spatial and sensory experiences – intended to evoke all five senses.

Besides the courtyards themselves, the design includes prescriptions of Vedic architecture to induce positive energy. For instance, the vault shell casts off fluctuating EMFs from HT power grid and the RCC-free beam grid network in the corridors facilitates smooth flow of energy.

Interpolation of spiritually uplifting artworks from Indian culture further help in building up an environment pulsating with hope and positivity. Use of passive cooling strategies and planned natural circulations leads to the creation of a microclimate that allows all common areas to have a comfortable ambient temperature, without the use of air conditioning.

Daylight harvesting in the interior spaces and common spaces has reduced the power requirements to less than 50% as compared to conventional systems. ■

10

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9. The décor of the couple treatment room is inspired by water ripples and the Beli flower

10. One of the lavish guest rooms at the resort

11. The palm court corridor is an interesting transition space that connects man with nature

For more visuals, scan this QR

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DESIGN HIGHLIGHTS:

• Strong monochromatic architectural rendering of terracotta is complimented by a monochromatic treatment of interiors
• Wellness is best related to biophilic design. Inspirations from Bengal jasmine (the local BELI flower) in motifs, relief work subtly connects the senses to the imageries of nature.
• Water being a dominant element in the design, forms such as ripples, folds and flutes are seen reiterating in the interiors.
• Materiality is natural - timber, stone, lime coat, natural fabrics, rattan and metal.
• The larger narrative of engaging five senses was carried through changing views based on the solar path, induction of natural aromas, natural textures, and natural sounds.
• Preventing glare, daylight management in interior spaces with two layers of curtains, anti-skid flooring, repetitive patterns on vaults for better acoustics, aesthetically conceal MEP installations, use of low-maintenance furniture are few of the other important design interventions.

ROUGH, READY, **REMARKABLE**

A sustainable, site-smart sales office by Kolkata-based Pooja Bihani that embraces impermanence while being iconic

AR. POOJA BIHANI

Established in Kolkata, Spaces & Design is known for its bold, context-driven architecture that seamlessly blends interior and exterior sensibilities. Spearheaded by Ar. Pooja Bihani, the firm's latest project, the Urban Park Office, encapsulates its approach to material honesty and sustainable design. Designed as a temporary sales gallery for Orbit Group, this 325 sqm office was envisioned, executed, and brought to life within a flat 75-day timeline while balancing the rawness of a live construction site with the vibrancy and functionality of a high-traffic business environment.

Text: Ar. Swara Popat
Photographs: SuryanandDang

A TEMPORARY STRUCTURE WITH A LASTING IMPACT

Set on an upcoming project site, the Urban Park Office serves as both a functional sales office and an immersive gallery. The architecture features two distinct inverted sloping roofs connected via a central spine, which cleverly houses the HVAC system branching out into the programmatic spaces. The exterior form offers an arresting silhouette while enabling efficient environmental control.

In line with the theme of ephemerality, the walls have been intentionally left unpainted, unplastered, and unclad, reflecting the raw essence of the site. Yet, this deliberate incompletion is anything but careless—the material choices reflect a calculated design ethos that celebrates authenticity and sustainability. The use of fly ash bricks, paver blocks, and bison board ceiling panels not only gives the space its industrial charm but also allows for easy dismantling and reuse—critical given the office's intended five-year lifespan.

1

INSIDE THE URBAN PARK

Upon entry, visitors are greeted by a large architectural model of the project, setting the tone for a highly visual and interactive experience. Adjacent to it is a welcoming reception and waiting zone—an open, green-infused space that encourages engagement. The planning is smartly zoned: to the left sits a café and pantry, flanked by utilities and restrooms; to the right, dedicated sales cubicles, an AV room, a conference space, and a director's chamber cater to various client and business needs.

The design reflects a clear hierarchy of movement and function, but what elevates it is the integration of nature. A thoughtful selection of live plants, placed both indoors and along the façade helps cool the space naturally and softens the architectural starkness. Perforated paver block walls double up as vertical planters, enabling passive ventilation while introducing biophilic texture into the interiors.

MATERIALITY AS NARRATIVE

One of the most compelling aspects of the project is how it uses materials to tell a story. The interiors consciously mirror a construction site—yet manage to feel curated, not chaotic. A flowing epoxy finish mimics poured cement, while exposed brick partitions and unfinished surfaces reinforce the aesthetic.

To prevent the design from feeling overly austere, the team incorporated punches of colour through furniture and lighting—bold reds and blues act as focal points, offsetting the grey-toned palette. All furniture pieces are bespoke and built on-site. Much of it were consciously designed to be repurposed in future galleries, extending the lifecycle of every piece.

1. The raw, unfinished walls reflect the theme of ephemerality and stay true to the site's essence

2. Industrial materials like fly ash bricks and bison boards allow easy dismantling and reuse

3. A clear spatial hierarchy is enhanced by the seamless integration of nature

LANDSCAPE & CLIMATE SENSITIVITY

The entrance aligns with the future approach road of the larger development, creating a continuity between the temporary and the permanent. Landscaping plays a key role here—laid out in contour blocks, each level features curated plantation to create an immersive green belt. This green planning doesn't just add to the aesthetics; it contributes to a pleasant microclimate, offering much-needed respite in a bustling site context.

The Urban Park Office is a stellar example of how temporary structures can carry permanence in thought. With sustainability, resource-conscious design, and honest materiality at its core, the project proves that "short-lived" doesn't have to mean short-sighted.▪

4. & 5. Bold reds and blues in the furniture and lighting offset the muted grey palette

6. Thoughtful green planning helps create a pleasant microclimate within the dense site

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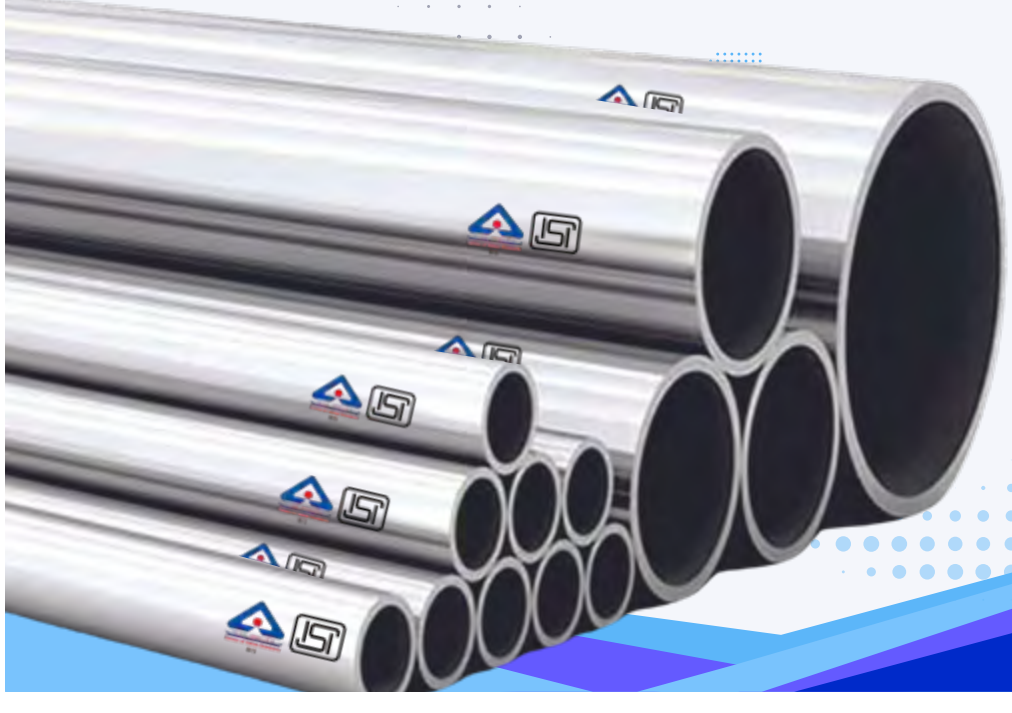

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SCREENING THE **GLASS BOX**

Hyderabad-based Architects Baba Sashank and Vindhya Guduru Design the MGB Headquarters in Hyderabad

AR. BABA SASHANK &
AR. VINDHYA GUDURU

Established in 2015 in the heart of Hyderabad, Spacefiction Studio - led by architects Baba Sashank and Vindhya Guduru, works as a collaborative studio that sustains a fresh outlook to design concepts within and beyond the field of architecture. Baba Sashank graduated from JNAFAU Hyderabad, and Vindhya Guduru, from CSIIT Hyderabad, also has a masters in Interior Design from Pratt Institute, New York.

The MGB Auto Headquarters in Hyderabad is one of the most pathbreaking projects from Spacefiction Studio's diverse project portfolio.

Text: Ar. Nupur Pabari
Photographs: Vivek Eadara Photography, Monika Sathe Photography

A city rich in Nawabi culture and architecture once upon a time, Hyderabad has fast grown into a competitive cosmopolitan urban space, attracting big-tech companies to build millions of square feet of office space each year. In a hot, dry city like Hyderabad, corporate office workers are resigned to closed-up office spaces, with round-the-clock air conditioning and little to no access to fresh air, light, and ventilation.

Rarely do these new office spaces consider the local climate and cultural conditions as a part of their architectural design. More often than not, offices are sealed glass boxes – relying heavily on air-conditioners to maintain a stagnant indoors temperature, come what fluctuations in Hyderabad's seasons – hot summers, pleasant monsoons, and tolerable winters. This paradigm of building – mechanically controlled and indifferent to context – perpetuates

a corporate office typology that emerged post the second World War in Northern America. While the singularized architectural concept spread across the world during the 20th and 21st growth of high-speed world economy, Spacefiction Studio realised the need to contextualize spaces for maximum land and user output.

The project started with an existing concrete framed structure spread across 604 square meters of floor space, built on site according to the previous designer's plans. Spacefiction Studio was tasked with bringing this structure to life as MGB Auto dealership's office and headquarters. Baba Sashank and Vindhya Guduru, along with their associate Ar. Anusha Dasuri, recognized the need to focus on design elements that could optimize the building's climate responsiveness – overlooked completely in the original design. To this end, Spacefiction Studio built on their practice's ongoing research – perforated screens as a way to blur the boundaries between the inside and the outside of this office. A well-integrated metal frame was designed around the building's concrete frame, infilled with 3mm metal sheets with 8mm perforations at a strategic ratio of 1:3:5 – enveloping the entire structure with a screening system.

.

The western end of the building, which typically receives direct sunlight during the second half of the day, was blocked by placing services – toilets and staircase – making it an austere façade. This left the remainder of the column-free floor plate for the main workplaces – the primary program. The southern edge of the headquarter

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1. A perforated metal screen softens the transition between the interior and exterior

2. The design builds upon an existing 604 sqm concrete frame from a previous plan

3. The screening system serves as a defining feature of the building's identity

4, 5 & 6. A geometric pattern adds visual rhythm and gives the facade a strong street presence

7

building, which also receives a brunt of the harsh daylight, happened to be the street-facing façade of this five-story structure.

An important consideration for Spacefiction was the assemblage and the appearance of the screening system that created the façade. The geometric pattern decided for this screen created a playfulness and lightness that gives the building a distinct identity on the street. The colourful façade is an additional consequence, creating a visual interest for the young students of the kindergarten across the street. The balconies around the office are populated with easy-maintenance plants, creating a juxtaposition of green plants and yellow-orange behind them, from within the office. The round-about balcony is accessible from all the workspaces across the office floor – through openable windows and doors that also allow

For more visuals, scan this QR

cross ventilation and floods of natural light till late hours of the evening. This also reduces the users' dependency on air conditioning, except for the very hot days.

From the underutilized, dark spaces of the stairway, many niches and seating areas were carved out – often used by the staff for gathering, as well as for solitude and a break from the corporate hustle. Across the four floors of the office building, workplaces are organized in a typical, hierarchical manner – growing from lower-level employees at the first floor up to the executives on the fourth. One element that ties the entire office together? Direct access to the outdoor space – balconies which act as a generous, democratic provision.

The architecture of the MGB headquarters transcends the most common approaches to deal with Hyderabad's head – an air-conditioned glass box – and offers a method for passive cooling. This approach benefits its occupants, and challenges typical design methods by combining age-old traditional cooling technique with newer contexts.■

7. A playful yellow-orange palette responds to the kindergarten across the street

8. Openable windows and doors connect workspaces to balconies, enabling natural light and ventilation

8

"i believe..."

AR. NEELAM MANJUNATH

Coordinated by: Roopa Sabnis Pinge | **Images:** Courtesy the Architect

"I believe...in Simplicity—Sustainability—Spirituality: My S3 formula for A Better World. Connection to nature is always a priority; Honesty in design is non-negotiable; and Equity of resources makes the world a better place!"

An architect, planner, scientist, activist and theoretician, Ar. Neelam Manjunath is best known for her work in the field of sustainable architecture, and particularly for her endorsement of bamboo construction.

A splattering of educational qualifications add an interesting dimension to her multifaceted personality. A BSc in 1982, followed by a B. Arch in 1987 led to the founding of her practice as Manasaram Architects in 1991. In 2004, she founded the Centre for Green Building Materials & Technology (CGBMT) to address the critical need for awareness, knowledge, and resources in the realm of sustainable building materials and technologies.

More recently in 2021, she studied Circular Economy and Sustainable Strategies, University of Cambridge Judge Business School.

The Beginning

Growing up in a middle-class family in a small town in Bihar, I had a simple and happy childhood close to nature. This connection to nature has profoundly influenced my professional life, where I strive to seamlessly integrate my buildings with the natural environment. After graduating from the Government College of Architecture in Lucknow in 1987, I worked with renowned Landscape Architect Ar. Ravindra Bhan to learn natural landscaping. In 1991, I started my private practice, Manasaram Architects.

Simplifying 'Architecture'

Since my student days, the principles of solar passive design, Indian Vastu Shastra, and my fascination with organic architecture, a term coined by Frank Llyod Wright, have guided my professional explorations. I found Vastu Shastra, written by Rishi Manasara, to be very elaborate and scientific, which inspired the name of my practice, Manasaram.

I believe in designing buildings for holistic living, addressing our physical, psychological, and spiritual needs. To achieve this, I use the five elements—Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Space—in my designs with which everything in this world is made up of. Our energy fields are disturbed when distanced from nature, so I ensure my buildings are intrinsically connected to it. I work with available materials on site - the soil, the sun, air, water and space, emphasizing low-energy, cyclic processes that produce no waste. This is another valuable lesson I learnt from nature.

"An architect is a catalyst providing social and cultural stage sets for all human activities. Hence the magnitude of responsibility on their shoulders is of staggering proportions! Hence a mix of "RESPONSIBLE Creativity and CREATIVE Responsibility" should determine the ARCHITECTURAL character of any Building". This is my own quote from student days. Early on, I had this realisation and it has been on my wall ever since.

Projects close to my heart

All my projects are very close to my heart. But I will mention a few that were turning points and have shaped my practice of close to four decades.

In 1998, Ashraya Housing by Rajiv Gandhi Rural Housing Corporation, Government of Karnataka was an exercise in lowcost housing for the marginalised. I did about 15 projects covering over 10,000 houses for various types of beneficiaries like weavers, leather workers, auto drivers, potters etc, each with a distinct set of requirements as per their occupation within a budget of Rs 40,000/- using alternative materials and technologies to suit the climatic conditions. After multiple beneficiary meetings, I designed 32 variations in incremental housing model for the project.

This was the beginning of a professional relational with the then MD, Mr N Shivsailam, IAS which continues even after his retirement. He also gave me my first project with Bamboo, a pantry for Raj Bhavan, Bangalore which eventually put my professional life on another new trajectory- my explorations with Bamboo.

Most of the projects assigned by him were challenging but many of them went on to win awards and accolades for me. Navodaya Residential school, Hassan; State Level Energy Park, Bangalore; Metro Station With Bamboo, BMRCL and so on.

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In 2003, I approached Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed University), Agra for starting courses on Bamboo. The Chairman, Advisory Board for Education Prof. Dr. Prem Saran Satsang offered unwavering support in promoting bamboo and other alternative technologies through projects and programs. Some of the projects done for the institute are their Guest house, Amritsar, Creche and Conference halls, Dayalbagh, Agra, and Rajaborari Bamboo Center, Timarni, MP. I started courses on Bamboo Application Technology, the first ever structured Bamboo course in the world with Dayalbagh University. I am an Adjunct professor, life-time pro-bono architect and Advisor on Sustainability and Bamboo with the University.

In 2007, I started working on a housing project Aditi Greenscapes, my residence, House of Five Elements and my office, later named Bamboo Symphony. I had been wanting to combine mud and bamboo in my projects for a long time and this came as an opportunity. While working on these projects I conducted many experiments in materiality, space design, services, landscape, water and waste management. Aditi Greenscapes, now nearing completion, is the first residential development in India to be registered and IGBC LEED platinum pre-certified, with 30% land area and overall 100% area naturally landscaped with one tree per resident. Villas are themed - based on the elements earth, water, fire and air and apartments designed as vertical villages with deep balconies and sky gardens for each apartment. The project is designed on a 4-acre plot with 83 dwellings, and is an example of creating healthy oxygen rich microclimate in cities even in small scale residential developments. Bamboo Symphony is my most innovative project till date; receiving over 10-12 awards.

I have been doing research and documentation of traditional building systems and using them for contemporary usage. My Toda 2.0 project is an effort towards a collective return to their heritage. Traditional Toda huts in the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO heritage site, are marvels of pre-modern architecture facing cultural loss due to modernization. I have combined their traditional practices with modern amenities to transform their buildings into contemporary habitats using alternative materials and technologies ensuring a cultural revival, social acceptability and restoration of the vulnerable Nilgiris ecosystem.

Centre for Green Building Materials and Technology HQ is the new campus for my school doing eco-education and skilling for over two decades. Therefore, the campus embodies all my philosophies on designing spaces. We practice “recognition of prior learnings” of artisans and indigenous communities. So, the design process has been participatory from day one cutting across levels from artisans at the site to designers, academicians, and policymakers with a very highly engaging, innovative, and hands-on problem-solving approach. We have been involving the surrounding village communities around us as resource persons for local material mapping, learning prevalent traditional building practices, farming patterns, etc.

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1. Bamboo Symphony: The Manasaram office blends sustainability with modern corporate requirements

2. A Conference hall in Dayalbagh, Agra optimizes the potential of bamboo construction

3. Sustainable architecture emerges from an innate understanding of the five elements: earth, fire, air, water and space – and their interconnectedness

4. House of 5 Elements: At any point in this house in xcddddeBangalore, one can experience a connectivity with the five elements of nature: water, air, earth, sunlight, and greenery.

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My tryst with Bamboo

In 1999, I fell in love with bamboo; with its beauty, versatility, properties, and ability to adapt to diverse requirements. I actively promote this material as it is a traditional building material and I believe that adapting it for contemporary usage can better the lives of the underprivileged. I have been using bamboo in combination with other natural materials in my diverse projects from small garden kiosks to metro stations and more. I have researched, advocated, educated, skilled, published, exhibited, collaborated, in short, did everything that needed to be done to mainstream bamboo in building and construction sector. I also exhibited at the International Architectural Venice Biennale, 2016. From being the only architect in India and probably one of ten globally using bamboo in 1999 to 100s in India and 1000s across the world, bamboo has come a long way.

To promote the industry, I started bamboo workshops in 2000 and rolled out structured courses with the assistance of Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed University), Agra in 2011 for certificate, diploma and PG level skilled human resources. Many of our alumni are teaching in institutions, conducting research and building etc, across the world.

In 2022, I launched my book 'Let's Build with Bamboo' in two volumes as a manual, to facilitate its widespread usage. I have sold over 1000 copies and COA has distributed 450 copies to architecture colleges across India as a reference book on bamboo.

A healthy natural ecosystem in a city is the fundamental requirement for equitable, resilient, and safe urban spaces. My Bamboo City project is about closing the loop in my effort of mainstreaming bamboo for ecology as a carbon sink, remediating degraded lands, rejuvenating lakes, and reversing air pollution at the city level. In 2023, I launched and submitted the project proposal to BBMP, Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagar Palike for Bangalore as a pilot Bamboo City as a plug-in to Bangalore Climate Action Plan. I have proposed planting one bamboo per citizen in the wastelands, parks, roadsides etc in the city and incorporating 30% bamboo in development projects for buildings, products, energy, textiles, paper etc.

Disruptive Pedagogy-- CGBMT- School of Simple Living

The idea of alternative courses in Architecture has been my dream. To develop and mainstream sustainable material and technologies, advocacy, education and skilling is extremely important. We have been running structured courses on Bamboo Application Technology for the last 15 years and will be launching courses on 'Simple Living' soon.

At CGBMT, we have established long term relationships with many esteemed organizations, universities, individuals and media globally. Being a World Bamboo ambassador of WBO and an expert, Bamboo Construction Task force of INBAR, NitiAyog, CED-Bureau of Indian Standards etc has helped us immensely in this regard.

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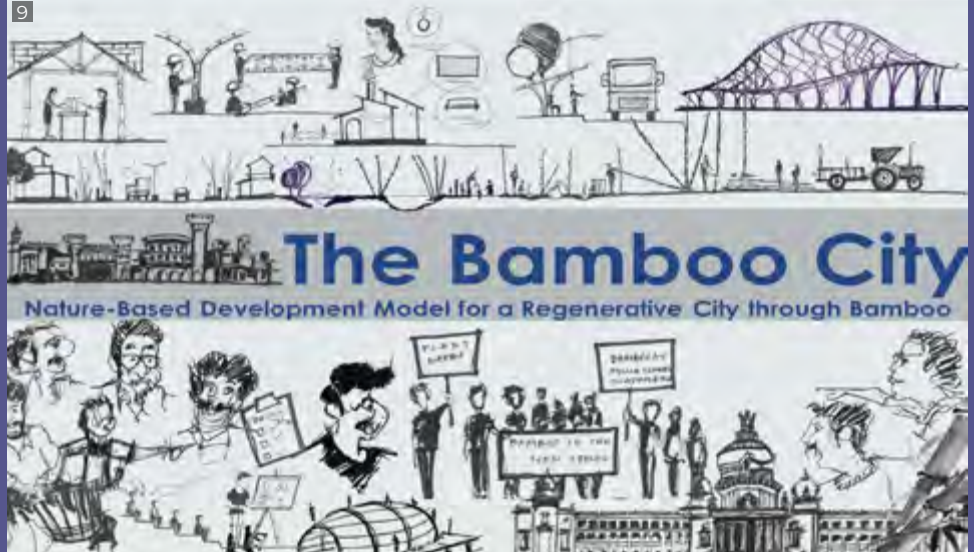
Awards & Accolades

I have been juggling diverse roles in my quest to mainstream Sustainability and Bamboo on one hand and making ends meet to pay my bills on the other. To add to this was the agony of continuously pushing boundaries against the glitzy architectural fraternity, manufacturing houses and the capitalist-consumeristic world at large! But I have been suitably rewarded for my quests from 2005 onwards including Lafarge Innovation Award, World Community Awards, Arcasia Gold, 4 RTF awards, Fibra Awards; and also a nomination for the Aga Khan Awards.

Looking into the future- Hailing the young

Moving forward I plan to concentrate on setting up CGBMT- School of Simple Living as a full-fledged campus for Sustainable Living and design in Bangalore and have more collaborations. The syllabus is based on 'Balancing the Five Elements' to achieve a model of regenerative habitat, urban design and planning. I hope to roll out 10 courses by 2025 and add to them as we go. For me, CGBMT is about transferring my belief, ideas, skills for posterity for a safer, healthier, and happier world.

In my practice I have always taken projects aligned with my values and convictions and will continue to do so. Someone asked me about my future professional aspiration at my Graduation ceremony in 1987, and I said "If I am able to make one building which can change the Architectural vocabulary for a better world, I will consider myself successful." I still carry the same dream. ■



5. "Let's Build with Bamboo" by Ar. Neelam Manjunath: Shri. Nitin Gadkari Minister of Road Transport and Highways at the book launch

6. Yamuna Biodiversity Park: Spanning 15 m, the 1.2.m wide bridge based on a simple arch truss shows bamboo as a viable and sustainable material

7. Cocoon - Farmer's Pavillion at Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Trichy done in association with CARE School of Architecture, Trichy, and Aarhus School of Architecture, Denmark.

8. Toda Dwellings, Nilgiri hills: Barrel-vaulted roofs, bamboo frames, and grass thatch - built without nails or cement

9. The Bamboo City project explores the potential of bamboo as a Nature Based Solution for Carbon Neutral and Regenerative Cities

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FROM THE **WINDOWS TO THE HIMALAYAS**

Ultraconfidentiel's Human-Centric Workplace for Microsoft India, Gurugram

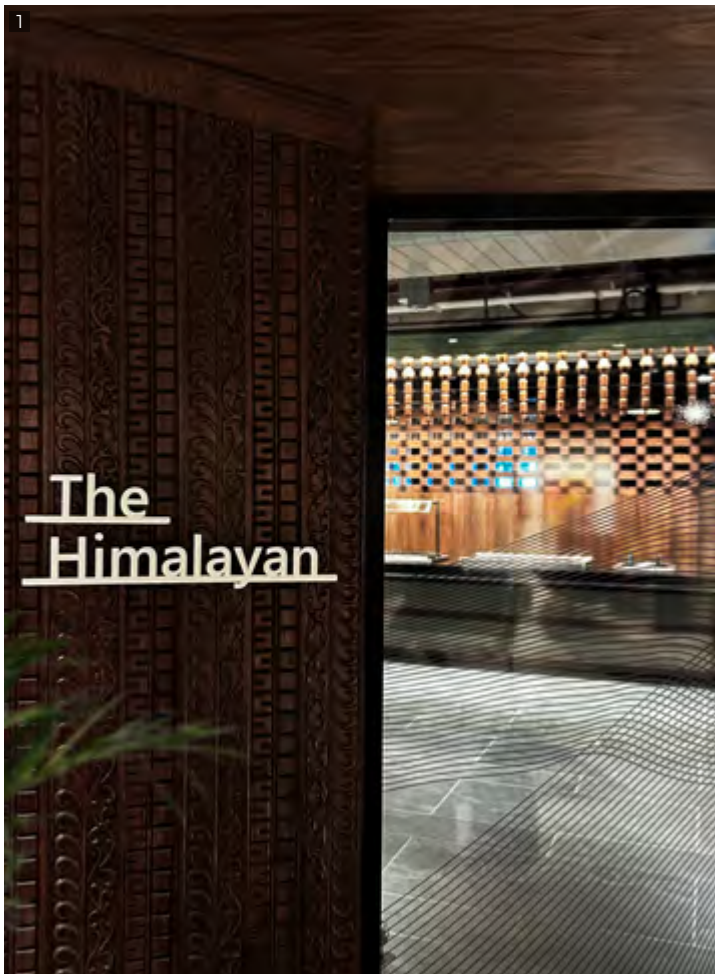
AR. VARUN SHARMA

Text: Ar. Vishnu Vasudevan
Photographs: Courtesy the architect

Ultraconfidentiel Design is a design and build company founded in 2007 by Amaury Watine and Stephanie Bonduelle. With its headquarters in New Delhi, India, and satellite offices in Mumbai, Bangalore, Colombo and Lille, France, Ultraconfidentiel's projects include offices, retail outlets, hotels and hospitality venues.

Ultraconfidentiel's design of the Microsoft India Head Office in Gurugram stands as a benchmark for hybrid, human-centric environments that blend technology, well-being, and a strong sense of place. Drawing on local inspiration and global expertise, the project integrates context, sustainability, and flexibility to create a new paradigm for the future of the workplace..

Offices are places where ideas are born, teams build trust, and company culture thrives. The pandemic, however, challenged the traditional role of the office by proving that much work can be done remotely. Today, the office must justify its existence by offering something remote work cannot: genuine human connection, spontaneous collaboration, and a shared sense of purpose. It is no longer about simply showing up at a desk but about entering a thoughtfully designed environment that supports diverse work modes, nurtures well-being, and fosters a sense of belonging. This shift calls for workplaces that are flexible, healthy, and inspiring—spaces that balance privacy with openness, technology with nature, and efficiency with comfort. The modern office is a destination employees choose to visit because it offers an experience worth having, not out of obligation. Going



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to the office today means embracing connection over isolation, collaboration over solitude, and presence over distance. It is about reclaiming the workplace as a vital part of how we work, learn, and grow together.

The Microsoft India Head Office, completed in 2024 by Ultraconfidentiel, responds to these ideas in a direct and thoughtful way. At 100,000 square feet, it is one of the largest new-generation workspaces in Gurugram, but its significance goes beyond its size. The project is a careful study in how architecture can be at once technologically advanced and deeply connected to place, while remaining open to new ways of working and being together. As you move through the office, the atmosphere shifts with the day. Natural light filters through carefully placed openings, casting patterns on floors and walls. Air circulates freely, carrying subtle scents from green walls and the sounds of daily activity. The space is open and flexible, able to host meetings, focus work, or informal gatherings without rigid boundaries. The workplace itself becomes a backdrop for whatever happens inside, always ready to adapt.

Ultraconfidentiel, the firm behind the project, has built its practice on

the belief that good design is both innovative and grounded. Founded in New Delhi in 2007, the studio draws from a global perspective while staying closely attuned to the nuances of Indian culture and climate. Their process values local materials, traditional skills, and a strong sense of ecological responsibility. Each project is an opportunity to bridge past and present, and to create spaces that feel both familiar and forward-looking. For the Microsoft office, the aim was to design a workspace that could serve as a flexible hub for collaboration, but also as a place for focus, restoration, and community.

The design draws inspiration from the Himalayas and the Ganga River, translating the region's natural forms into a series of flowing, interconnected spaces. The office rises and falls in gentle curves, with no sharp divisions between zones. This was achieved not through digital modelling alone, but through a process of observation, prototyping, and adjustment. The architects worked closely with consultants and craftspeople, testing and refining the forms until the space felt just right. This approach—responsive, iterative, and grounded in real conditions—shares a spirit with parametric design, even

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1. The project explores how architecture can be technologically forward while staying rooted in place and people

2. Parametric design here is driven by real-time site conditions and user needs, not abstract software inputs

3. Inspired by the Himalayas and the Ganga, the design transforms natural forms into fluid, interconnected spaces

4. An open, adaptable layout allows the workspace to evolve with its users and their interactions

5. Local materials like stone, wood, and textiles ensure durability with minimal environmental impact

if it is not wholly digital. The result is a workplace that feels organic and alive, shaped by both the hands that built it and the environment it inhabits.

The parametric aspect of the project is evident in its responsiveness to context. Rather than imposing a fixed solution, the design team adjusted layouts, materials, and details based on how the space would be used, how light and air would move, and how employees would interact. These were not abstract parameters set in software, but real-world variables negotiated on site through dialogue and experimentation. This hands-on, material-sensitive method is a form of parametric design—one rooted in lived experience rather than digital abstraction. It challenges the assumption that responsive design must always be technologically mediated, and reminds us that adaptability in architecture can emerge from intuition, collaboration, and the wisdom of builder.

The project uses a palette of local materials—stone, wood, and textiles—chosen for their durability and low environmental impact. Many elements, from modular furniture to green walls, are designed to be reconfigured or reused, supporting a circular economy. The project was made possible by a diverse team of architects, engineers, craftspeople, and Microsoft employees, each contributing their expertise. By working together, the team ensured that the space would support both current needs and future change. The design was not imposed from above,

6. Modular elements and green walls promote flexibility and align with principles of circular design

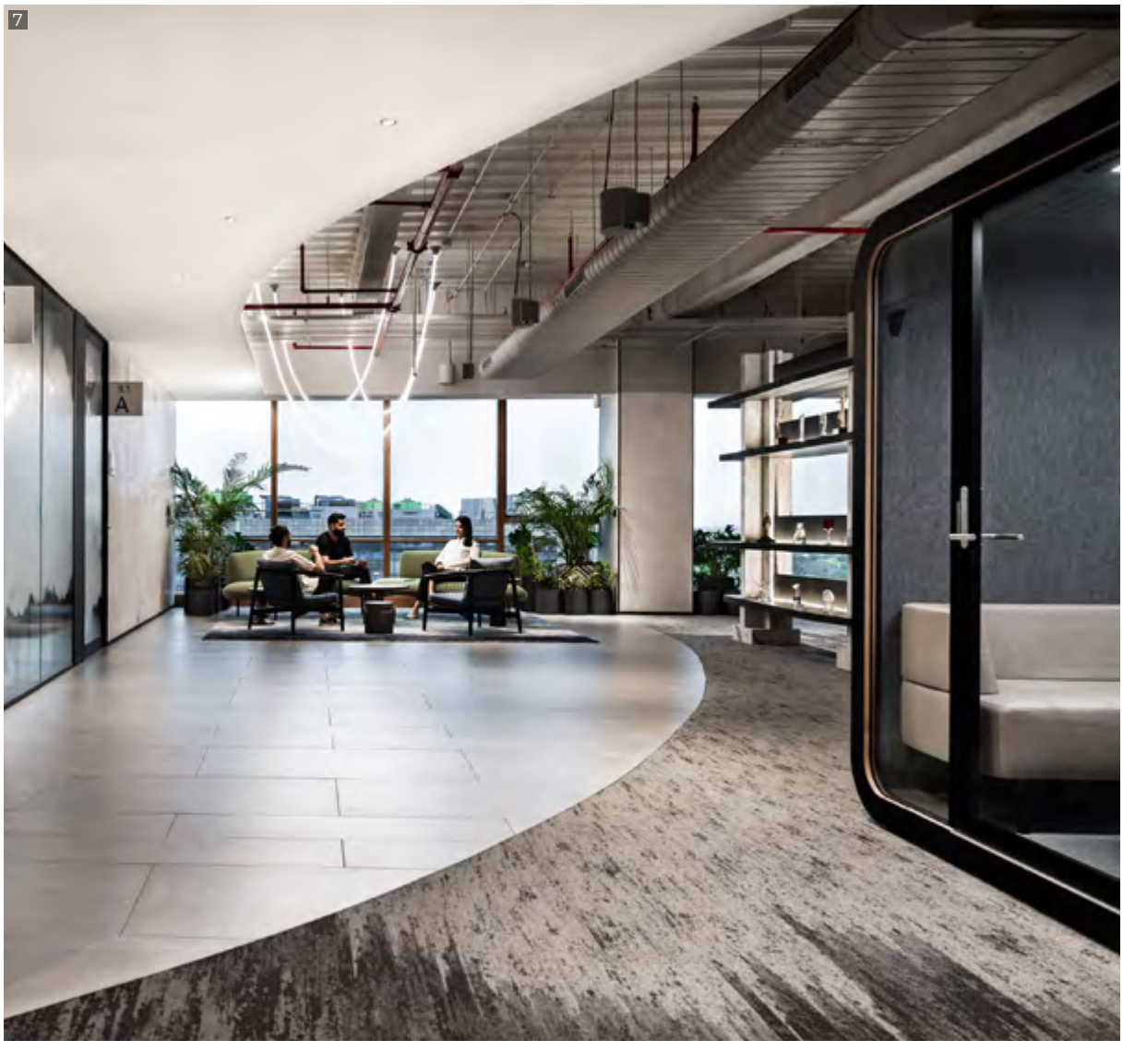
7. Smart systems from touchless entry to AI-powered soundscaping, boost comfort without disrupting the experience

but emerged from dialogue and shared purpose.

The environmental strategy is straightforward and effective. By using materials with low embodied energy, maximizing daylight, and promoting natural ventilation, the office sets a strong example for sustainable workplace design. Advanced systems—touchless entry, smart sensors, AI-powered soundscaping—enhance comfort and efficiency without being intrusive. The thick, layered envelope helps keep the space comfortable year-round, while the open plan allows for flexibility and growth. There is no reliance on high-tech gimmicks—just careful design, attention to climate, and respect for people and place.

The design process, in this case, is as important as the finished building. The architects did not start with a fixed vision, but allowed the design to evolve through conversation, testing, and adjustment. They listened to the site, the client, and the people who would use the space, letting each factor shape the outcome. This kind of flexibility is rare, but it is what gives the project its strength. The office is a reminder that architecture is not just about making objects, but about bringing together people, skills, and ideas.

The Microsoft India Head Office in Gurugram demonstrates a practical approach to designing workspaces for today's hybrid and human-centric needs. By focusing on local materials, sustainability, and flexible use of space, Ultraconfidentiel has created an environment that supports a range of work styles without relying on flashy technology or grand gestures. The project's strength lies in its thoughtful integration of context, function, and adaptability, showing that effective workplace design can be both grounded and forward-looking. This office serves as a useful example of how architecture can respond to changing work patterns while respecting the environment and community it inhabits. ▪



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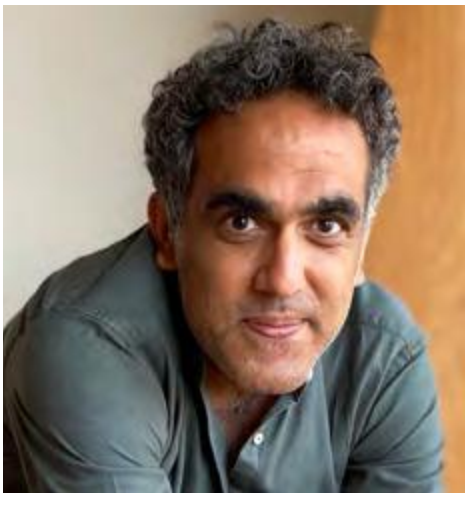
THE FOREST OF **KNOWLEDGE**

Mumbai-based Ar. Pravir Sethi reimagines a library at the Cricket Club of India, Mumbai



AR. PRAVIR SETHI

Founded in 2014 by architect and designer Pravir Sethi, Studio Hinge is a Mumbai-based multidisciplinary practice known for its explorative, detail-rich design approach that spans across architecture, interiors, and furniture. With multiple international awards under its belt, Studio Hinge has consistently challenged the conventional through projects rooted in storytelling, material experimentation, and a deep sense of place. Sethi's educational and professional trajectory from the Academy of Architecture in Mumbai to The Bartlett in London, and collaborations with architects like David Chipperfield and Sanjay Puri, deeply informs the studio's nuanced aesthetic and its evolving relationship with craft, memory, and innovation.

Text: Ar. Swara Popat
Photographs: Suryan + Dang Photography

What does it mean to design a library in the post-digital age, especially for a generation whose instinct is to swipe before they flip a page?

Studio Hinge's latest project, a library housed within the Cricket Club of India (CCI) in Mumbai, offers a compelling response. Designed during the isolating months of the pandemic, the library is both an architectural intervention and a social reconnection—one that goes beyond books to reimagine the library as a forest-like commons: where learning is leisurely, spaces are inclusive, and the architecture itself becomes a metaphor for discovery.

Set within a repurposed fourth-floor space of the club's admin block, the new library draws from the poetic idea of “reading under a tree.” And this isn't just a metaphor. Existing concrete columns have been cleverly transformed into arboreal forms and tree trunks with circular bookshelves at their base and arching steel-and-timber branches above. These branches intertwine to form light, mesh-like canopies that echo dappled sunlight through Ficus and Gulmohur trees visible from the street below.

The design reveals layered thinking; with nuanced detailing enhancing the experience. At the heart of the space is a cylindrical bookcase that acts as both reception and visual screen, separating public from administrative functions. Around the structural “trees,” freestanding circular bookshelves form “hedges” that invite visitors to wander, browse, and lose themselves in books. These low-height shelves (never above 1.2m) ensure unobstructed sightlines, welcoming daylight, and a sense of openness for adults, while

offering children a maze-like, playful journey through literature.

Notably, the project addresses the post-pandemic need for social spaces. An adjacent, under-utilized Zumba studio has been seamlessly integrated into the library program, transforming into a multipurpose room for author readings, film screenings, workshops, and book clubs. Engineered oak floors, mirrored cabinets hiding books, and a wave-like timber ceiling render the space adaptable, equally at home hosting dance rehearsals as it is literary gatherings.

Materially, the palette is both tactile and responsible. FSC-certified Western Hemlock and Yellow Cedar dominate the interiors, while custom terrazzo flooring with marble and green glass chips abstractly mimics fallen foliage – just like a forest

1. The library reimagines a forest-like commons where learning, leisure, and discovery intertwine

2. Existing concrete columns are transformed into tree-like forms with circular bookshelves and branching canopies

3. Interlacing timber and steel branches form mesh canopies that mimic dappled light through nearby trees

floor. Natural ventilation and daylighting strategies are embedded through enlarged, openable windows on the north and east facades—dramatically reducing the load on artificial lighting and cooling systems.

Studio Hinge's solution addresses the deeper existential question that libraries across the world are grappling with: how to remain relevant in the age of algorithmic learning and digital reading. Their answer is rooted in community, memory, and the quiet joy of being surrounded by stories - not just in books, but in the space itself.

The Forest of Knowledge thus emerges as a modern, inclusive, and environmentally conscious space. Blending nature-inspired design, community-centric programming, and sustainable practices, the library transcends its traditional role, becoming a vibrant hub for engaged learning.■

4 & 5. A former Zumba studio now serves as a versatile cultural space, blending seamlessly with the library's design

6. FSC-certified woods and terrazzo flooring evoke the textures and tones of a forest floor

A PULSE OF **PASSION**

Jatin Das's monumental murals and sculptures map the visceral and spiritual landscapes of India

MR. JATIN DAS

Born in December 1941 in Mayurbhanj, Odisha, Jatin Das is one of India's most revered modern artists — a painter, poet, sculptor, muralist, and educator. With over seven decades of multidisciplinary practice, his work transcends disciplines and geographies. Awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2012, his art reflects a tireless quest to capture human emotion, heritage, and the metaphysical through sweeping murals, expressive figures, and deeply evocative sculptures.

Text: Ar. Swara Popat
Photographs: Courtesy the Artist

In the grand narrative of Indian contemporary art, few artists have wielded their brush with the sweeping ambition and cultural consciousness of Jatin Das. His artistic journey, spanning over six decades, reads like an epic poem written across canvas, steel, and stone—each medium becoming a verse in his larger ode to the Indian experience.

From the moment one encounters a work by Jatin Das, there is a lingering intensity; not of stillness, but of movement caught mid-breath. In his **monumental mural at the Parliament of India, "The Journey of India: Mohenjo-Daro to Mahatma Gandhi,"** this kinetic energy bursts forth. Spanning 68 feet, the mural traces 5000 years of India's cultural and political legacy, rendered in seventeen interconnected panels of oil on canvas. Installed in the Parliament Annexe's VIP lounge and inaugurated in 2001 by then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, this masterpiece distils India's vast past into brushstrokes that whisper and roar.

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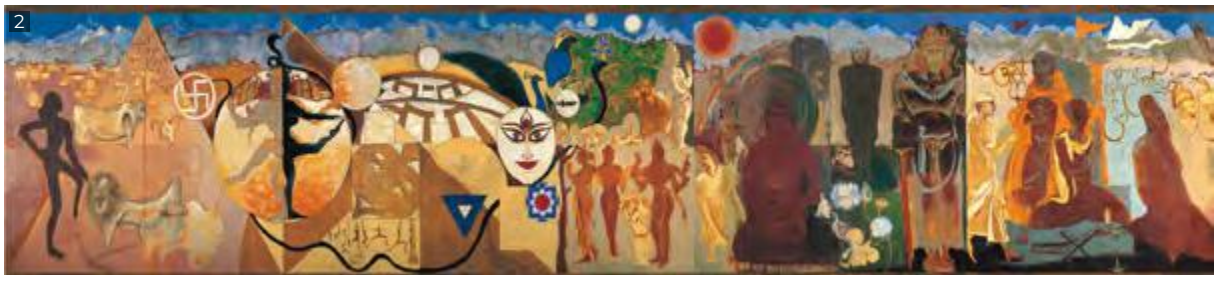
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Das's ability to **translate complex narratives into visual poetry** is a testament to his immersive approach. Before painting the Parliament mural, he collaborated with historians, created hundreds of sketches, and even produced a full-scale key drawing. Yet, when it came time to paint, he abandoned all references and followed intuition. It is this surrender to the moment, to emotion and form, that distinguishes his work.

This intuitive sensibility manifests again in Flights of Steel, **an installation at Bhilai Steel Plant, Madhya Pradesh.** Created from steel scrap — the forgotten remnants of industrial production — Das conjures figures that dance, reach, and strive. Originally intended as a single 50-foot sculpture, the project evolved into a dynamic ensemble on a traffic island. "I went wild in picking up pieces of scrap iron like a child with toys," he recalls. The process was collaborative, grounded in learning from the hands of welders and cutters. Here, Das crafts not just form but energy, the untamed force of creation.

Another defining project is the series of murals and sculptures for the **National Centre for Plant Genome Research (NCPGR) in New Delhi.** Working alongside scientists and

1. Man stretched to nature – exploring human connection with the natural world.

2. Monumental mural at the Parliament of India: "The Journey of India – Mohenjo-Daro to Mahatma Gandhi."

3 & 4. Flights of Steel – installation at Bhilai Steel Plant, crafted from industrial scrap.

5. Mural at the Adani residence, Ahmedabad – where the artwork seamlessly flows from wall to ceiling.

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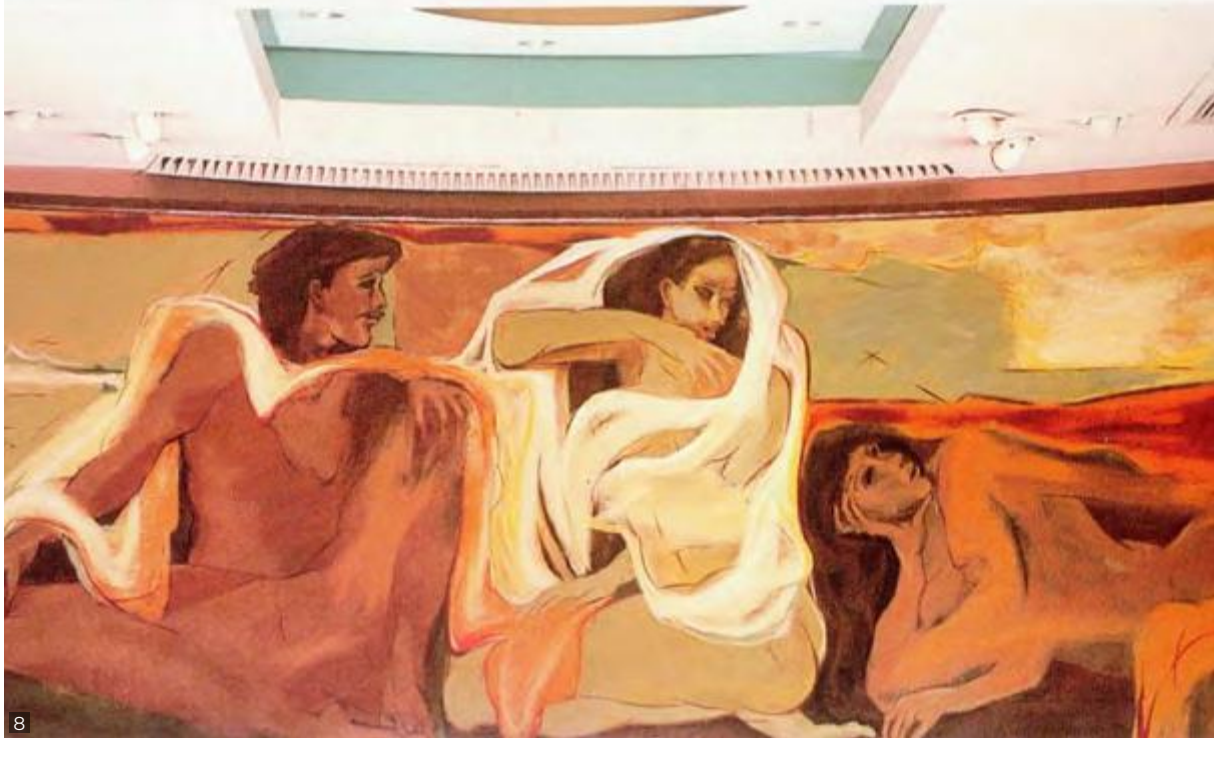
architects, Das explored **metaphors of life and DNA.** His mural "Birth of Brahmand" (7'4" x 47'6") anchors the project — an explosion of cosmic birth, painted in oils. The accompanying sculpture, DNA, is a 17-foot kinetic hanging mobile crafted from copper, brass, and stainless steel, suspended in the foyer like a strand of consciousness. The integration of science, mythology, and spirit demonstrates Das's rare ability to straddle disciplines without diluting essence.

Das's global sensibility found expression in the **Chelsea Arts Club mural (London, 2009),** where large black figures were painted directly onto the Club's façade — their presence bold and primal, **ephemeral yet assertive.** It was performance and permanence combined.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In more recent years, his works have continued to reflect the pulse of society. **The Exodus 2020 series, created during the pandemic lockdown, captured the tragedy of mass labour migration in haunting ink drawings.** These were later exhibited at Art Alive, New Delhi. In 2023, Jatin Das – A Retrospective (1963–2023) at the National Gallery of Modern Art, celebrated six decades of his relentless artistic evolution.

Even in residential commissions like the **Adani Residence murals in Ahmedabad (2013–14),** Das challenged the conventional, choosing to make the **mural travel from wall to ceiling, blurring boundaries of architectural space and painted narrative.** Similarly, his paintings at Bengaluru International Airport offer travellers visual meditations in oil — stretches of **human figures that embody waiting, longing, and motion.**

While many artists seek refinement, Jatin Das seems to seek truth; raw, layered, and honest. He teaches not through formality but through presence, having served as visiting professor at institutions like Jamia Millia Islamia, School of Planning and Architecture, and Harvard University.

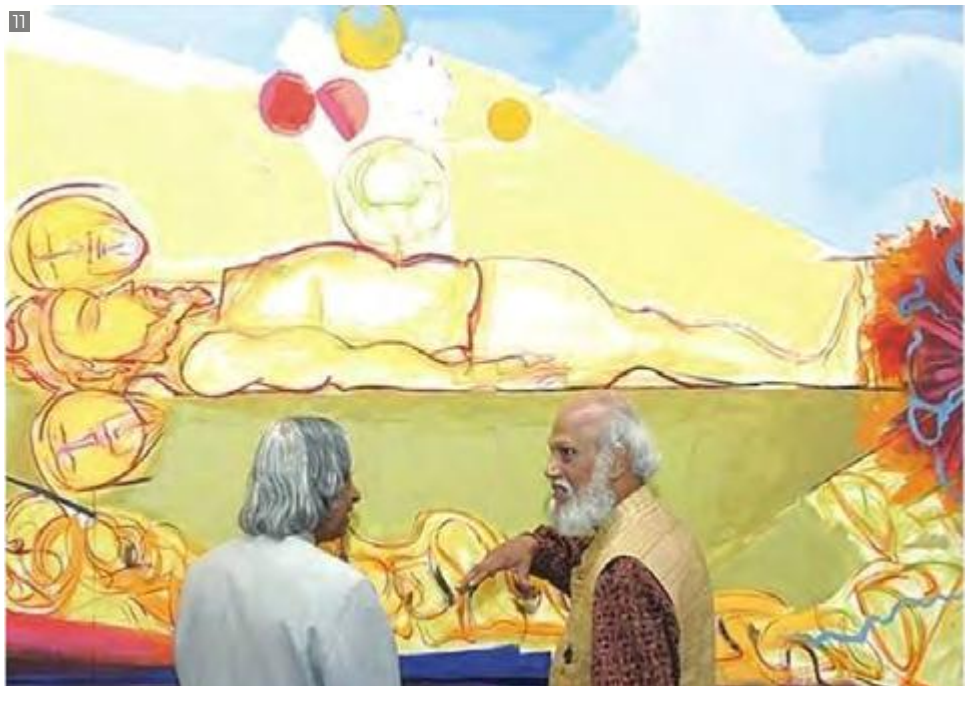
His art is not only prolific but also deeply philanthropic. Whether designing postal stamps, supporting disaster relief in Odisha, or establishing the JD Centre of Art, his practice is rooted in service to culture, to memory, to craft. As his ink, oil, and steel breathe life into canvas, wall, and air, Jatin Das continues to sculpt time itself — visceral, vibrant, and unflinchingly human.■

6 & 7. Behind the scenes – Das shaping murals into visual poetry through layered narratives.

8. The Royal Presence – mural at a bistro in Hauz Khas, New Delhi.

9 & 10. Chelsea Arts Club mural, London (2009) – bold black figures painted directly onto the façade

11. Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam inaugurates the NCPGR building, engaging with Jatin Das over one of his murals.



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WALK THE TALK

The Malabar Hill Elevated Nature Trail in Mumbai by Ar. Rahul Kadri, IMK Architects, Mumbai

AR. RAHUL KADRI

Text: Ar. Roopa Sabnis Pinge
Photographs: Courtesy IMK Architects

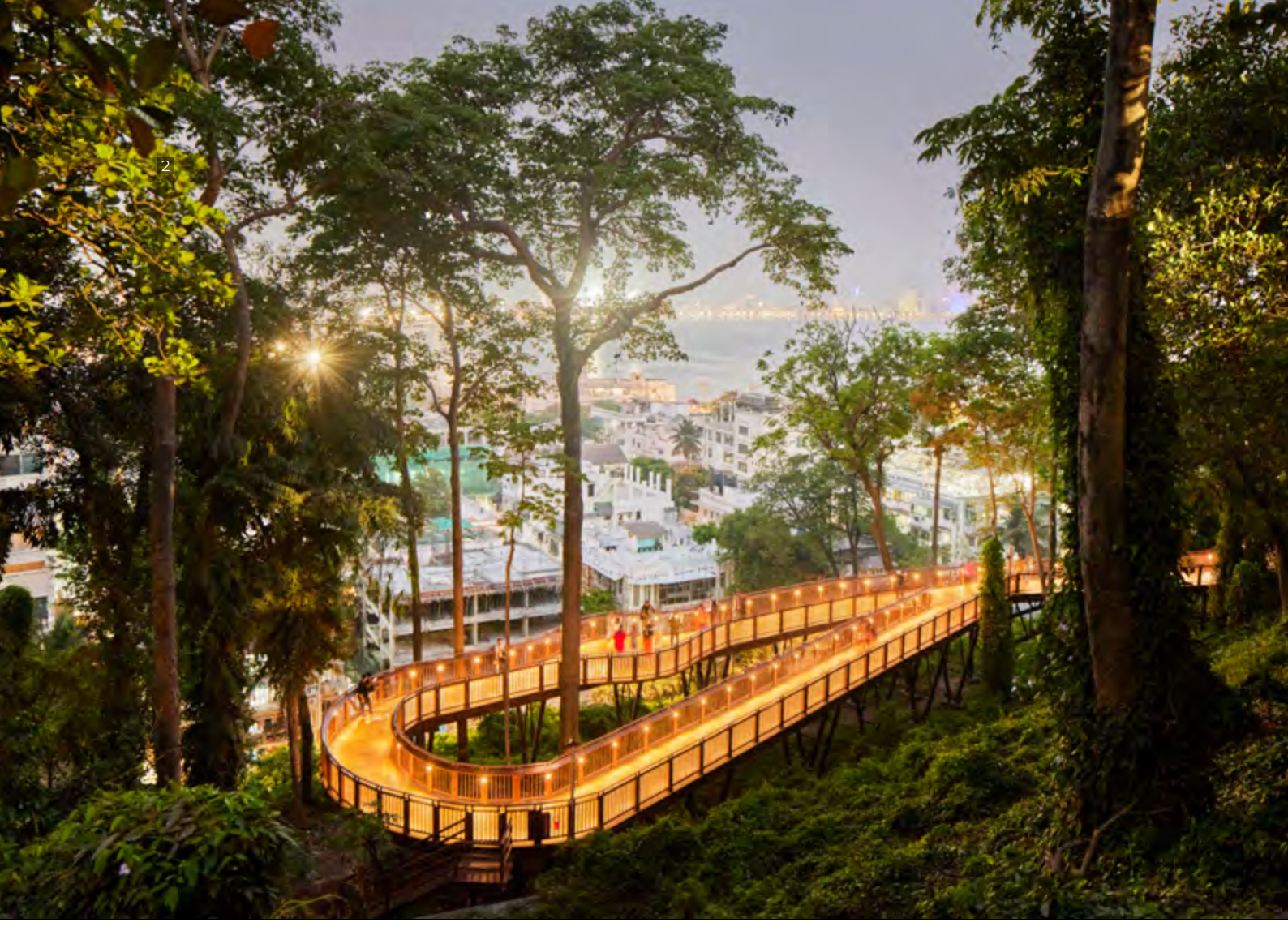
Hungry for a patch of green in the concrete jungle that Mumbai is, Mumbaikars are flocking to the newly opened (and much over-booked) Malabar Hill Elevated Nature Trail! Designed by Ar. Rahul Kadri of IMK Architects, the project was commissioned by the BMC and supported by the JSW Foundation, as well as the Nepean Sea Road Citizens Forum.

Founded in 1957 in Mumbai, IMK Architects is an architecture and urban design firm, with a second base in Bengaluru. Helmed by architects Iftikar and Rahul Kadri, the firm remains focused on architecture rooted in culture and civilisation, serving community needs. With social consciousness, sustainability, and robust design at its core, IMK continues to blend legacy with innovation, shaping people-centric, inclusive, and ecologically sensitive spaces.

In an age where sustainability has become a topic of coffee-table conversations in well-heeled elitist crowds lounging in airconditioned clubs and cafés, Ar. Rahul Kadri is refreshingly different. The phrase “walking the talk” comes alive on this wondrous walkway in the woods that he has created for Mumbai. How many of us, even those living in Mumbai, were even aware of this natural gem tucked away beyond the urban chaos? The Malabar Walkway, thus makes it real; and fun to discover.

The Malabar Hill Elevated Nature Trail – already dubbed as the Malabar Walkway – is a winding wooden path inspired by Singapore’s Tree Top Walk. Starting on Siri Road, near the Kamla Nehru Park, it meanders its way through the forested hill, loops back and ends in the Doongerwadi woods. The Nature Trail takes visitors to explore the flora and fauna, and the biodiversity that is unique to this forest.

1



Architecturally, the walkway has been designed with a conscious effort to minimize disruption of the natural environment, and well as to celebrate a harmonious human-nature interaction in an urban core. While not a single tree was cut in the process of building the walkway, lifting it up ensured minimal disturbance to the forest floor and the creatures that call it home. As Rahul explains, “The idea was to allow people to experience and enjoy the forest. But how do we make sure they don’t disturb it? Considering this is a hill slope, another concern was to not disturb the flow of water. The third was the reptiles. We wanted to avoid interactions between humans and snakes. So, we decided that the best approach was to lift the path off the forest floor.”

Sleek epoxy-coated steel columns with low-impact pile foundations support the elevated walkway, and the deck is lined with planks of Merbau wood – a material chosen for its durability and aesthetics, and also sourced sustainably.

The elevated walkway includes features like a birdwatching zone and a glass-bottom viewing deck, enhancing the visitor experience while building awareness of the forest's biodiversity. Here many of the native tree species – Banyan, Gulmohar, Mango, Coconut, Raintree, Jamun, Bael, Ber, and Jackfruit – are seen thriving. And with the trees, come the birds, the bees, the squirrels, and the snakes – all together creating an ecosystem. Visitors have spotted or heard a variety of birds such as Kingfishers, Bulbuls, Parakeets, Indian Grey Hornbills, Golden Orioles; as well as lizards, chameleons, and pythons while traversing the walkway. Kiosks along the trail display panels, providing visitors with information about the forest and its ecosystem.

The minimalistic design and the wooden treatment ensure that the walkway merges beautifully into the environment, notwithstanding the structural intervention. Strategically placed lights emanate a soft, warm glow; illuminating

the walkway for visitor safety, whilst ensuring minimal disturbance to the fauna. Moreover, the undulations in height (2m to 10 m) based on the type of trees surrounding it contribute towards creating a more wholesome experience of traversing the 482 m path.

For Rahul though, on a personal level, a walk in these woods began very early in life; and he has fond memories of exploring it with a loyal companion – his pet dog. While this sounds like a paragraph out of a Hardy Boys novel, for an eleven-year-old Rahul to grow up to be an architect and get an opportunity to actually build a nature trail in the same forest, seems surreal. "I enjoyed my time in the forest, and being with myself," he explains. "I love to find pathways, and I intuitively know the way."

But then childhood gave way to adulthood; and excursions were replaced by expectations. In the lockdown during the Covid pandemic one day Rahul with his architect wife Shimul Javeri Kadri climbed over the fence and once again started walking through the woods. "That was the day it all began," says Rahul. "I sensed that the people of Mumbai needed to enjoy this forest..."

So, when this project started shaping up, Rahul once again walked up and down the paths, trying to read the site, and listen to the forest. "I believe in understanding how the site works. I spend a lot of time imagining the structure and the space around it. I love to be on the site alone. It is when I get a deep, intuitive sense of how things need to unfold."

Finally, the Malabar Hill Elevated Nature Trail has shaped into a reality. Thousands of people are queueing up for a dekko! Interestingly, Ar. Rahul Kadri - a well-established, widely respected figure within the fraternity has suddenly become a 'popular' name amongst Mumbaikars! The adulation must be certainly exhilarating; but for Rahul, the greatest satisfaction came when his work got a nod of approval from his 97-year-old father, the very famous architect I. M. Kadri. Rahul smiles as he recalls his father's words: "Everyone is talking about your work, everyone is loving it. You have done a good job." And this good job is one that will leave its imprint on the history of Mumbai for many decades to come. ▪

1. The elevated walkway at Malabar Hill, Mumbai

2. The lit-up loop of the 482 m walkway weaves through the rich forested area

3. The walkway overlooks the forest and the city beyond

4. Mumbaikars enjoying the new public green space in the city

MAKING HISTORY IN OKLAHOMA

AR. OSCAR CONCESSAO

Architect Oscar Concessao, co-founder of Oscar & Ponni Architects has been inducted into the **2025 Hall of Fame** by the Gibbs College of Architecture, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

A student of Prof. J. Ramanan and an alumnus of the National Institute of Technology, this recognition celebrates his outstanding professional contributions and lasting impact on architecture education and practice. Concessao has worked in New York with leading architectural firms on skyscrapers, stadiums, hospitals, and institutional buildings. His practice has spanned a wide range of projects, including information technology parks, biotechnology and nanotechnology campuses, government buildings, educational institutions, residential and commercial complexes, and infrastructure across India and the Middle East.

Over the course of his career, Concessao has received 218 international, national, and state awards for architectural excellence. His recent work includes designing the Telangana State Secretariat in Hyderabad. Significantly, he becomes **the first Indian architect to receive this** prestigious honour in the history of the University of Oklahoma.

A CALL FOR IMPACT-DRIVEN IDEAS

MS. GITA BALAKRISHNAN

? ethos™ !!
FOUNDATION

The **Ethos Foundation** has launched an open call for ideas that champion **innovation, social good, and environmental change.** Whether it's a community initiative, a design solution, or a product with a purpose — the foundation is seeking meaningful work from students, young professionals, and changemakers.

Selected entries will receive mentorship and grants to help bring their ideas to life.

Scan this QR code to make your submissions

PP COMPRESSION FITTINGS BY **SUPREME INDUSTRIES**

A Durable and Efficient Solution for Piping Systems

Traditionally, PE pipes were joined using Butt Fusion, Socket Fusion technique which was a bit cumbersome, time-consuming and unreliable technique. To overcome this, Supreme Industries has launched **PP Compression Fittings** which provide **ease of connection and reliable functioning.**

Polypropylene (PP) compression fittings are a reliable and efficient solution for joining polyethylene (PE) pipes in piping systems. Known for their **versatility, durability, and ease of installation,** PP compression fittings are widely used in **agricultural irrigation, water supply networks, and industrial applications.** These fittings leverage polypropylene's strength and resistance to chemicals, making them **ideal for a range of demanding environments.**

How PP Compression Fittings Work

PP compression fittings consist of several key components: **Lubricated Lip Gasket, Packing Pressure Bush , Clip ring, a Quick Joint Nut, and the main body.** When the compression nut is tightened, the clip ring clamps onto the pipe, securing it in place. Simultaneously, the Lip Gasket presses against the pipe, creating a watertight seal without requiring adhesives or welding. This straightforward assembly makes PP compression fittings a practical choice for quick, reliable connections, especially in PE piping systems.

Benefits of PP Compression Fittings

1. High Durability and Chemical Resistance: Polypropylene is naturally resistant to various chemicals, corrosion, and UV exposure, which enhances the fitting's lifespan and makes it suitable for outdoor and buried installations.

2. Ease of Installation: PP compression fittings are designed for quick assembly without specialized tools or adhesives, allowing for simple, on-site installations. This ease of installation makes them especially advantageous in remote or large-scale agricultural and construction projects. It can also be easily dismantled during maintenance.

3. Leak-Proof Connections: The compression mechanism creates a strong, leak-proof seal that remains secure even under high pressure. This reliability is critical in water distribution and irrigation systems where water conservation and efficiency are priorities.

4. Wide Range of Sizes and Configurations: PP compression fittings are available in a variety of sizes and types, including couplers, elbows, tees, and reducers, allowing them to adapt to various pipeline layouts and specific application requirements.

5. Environment-Friendly Material: Polypropylene is a recyclable material, making PP compression fittings an eco-friendly choice. Their long life and reusability further reduce environmental impact, particularly in agricultural settings.

Applications of PP Compression Fittings

PP compression fittings are widely used in **agricultural irrigation systems** for joining PE pipes, where they provide durable connections that withstand soil pressure, moisture, and temperature fluctuations. They are also commonly found in **potable water supply systems, landscaping,** and other water-related applications. In **industrial settings,** PP compression fittings are useful for **low-pressure fluid handling, including wastewater and chemical processing,** due to their chemical resistance and adaptability.

Conclusion

PP compression fittings offer a high-performance, sustainable, and cost-effective solution for piping systems across multiple industries. Their robust design, chemical resistance, and ease of installation make them indispensable in agriculture, water supply, and industrial applications. With a focus on reliability and longevity, PP compression fittings continue to support efficient fluid distribution in modern infrastructure.■

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PITFALLS IN **PASSIVE FIRE PROTECTION**

Learning from the mistakes of others

MR. ABHISHEK CHHABRA

Text: Mr. Abhishek Chhabra
Photographs: Courtesy the author

Abhishek Chhabra is a fire safety expert with nearly 20 years of experience in conformity assessment. With good knowledge of international compliance standards, including those set by North America, Europe, Britain, ISO, IMO, and Indian authorities, Abhishek currently represents two leading industry associations - the Firestop Contractors International Association (FCIA) and the National Fireproofing Contractors Association (NFCA). In this role, he spearheads efforts to raise awareness and understanding of passive fire protection practices. Through his initiative, tic.guru, he offers educational courses related to the Testing, Inspection, and Certification (TIC) industry.

This is the fourth part in the Knowledge Series on Passive Fire Protection, where he shares insightful perspectives on common pitfalls and how we can proactively learn from the mistakes of others.

I was told there are three ways to learn something that can be potentially life-threatening. For example, if you eat mercury, you will die.

The first way is that someone you trust tells you this.
The second, which can be painful to witness, is when you see someone else eat mercury and die.
The third, which ideally should be avoided, is to eat mercury yourself.

If you've been following this series and have read the first three articles about passive fire protection or fire stopping and compartmentation, you've already come a long way and should have a sense of how you can play a part in saving lives. This article continues that learning journey and shares some of the common mistakes others have made.

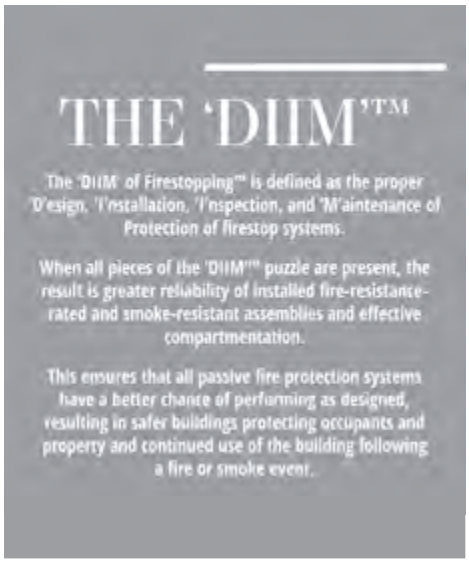
RECAP

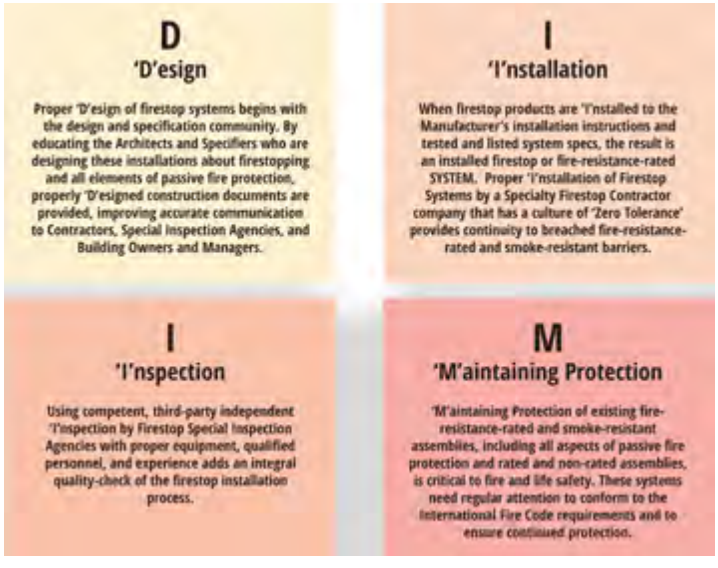
Readers of the series now understand what compartmentation is from a fire safety functionality point of view. They also know what goes into designing compartmentation and how guidance documents like building codes provide clear direction for this.

The series has also offered a bird's-eye view of the assurance industry—i.e., the ecosystem that ensures reliability and assigns responsibility. This assurance is built through standards, ranging from:

- **Product standards,** which define how products should behave
- **Assurance standards,** which ensure repeatable evaluation of compliance with these product standards, such as consistent testing, certification for supply chains, and inspection of executed work, like installation.

The previous article gave specific examples of standards used to define fire resistance and containment behaviours, as well as standards for implementation and assurance.





DESIGN PITFALLS

While people in our nation continue to thrive amid creative chaos, we've historically invested less in standardization. On the other hand, several countries that emphasize standardized practices have developed better tools to implement building codes effectively. For readers interested in going deeper, here are some references:

- Construction Specification Institute (U.S.)
- Uniclass System (U.K.)
- ISO 12006-2 Standard

These systems extend building codes to define standardized methods of writing construction specifications. The aim is to help diverse stakeholders—architects, consultants, contractors, facility managers, manufacturers, governments, and property owners—speak the **same language**, which minimizes errors, enhances efficiency, and stimulates economic activity.

As India's National Building Code prepares for its next update, I'm happy to share that it will now offer enhanced guidelines for easier and more precise compartmentation design. The goal is to eliminate ambiguity and ensure airtight assurance methods are clearly defined when designing fire compartments per code.

PROJECT EXECUTION PITFALLS

When the design-related pitfalls are avoided, key stakeholders—such as building approval departments, contractors, subcontractors, manufacturers, and distributors—can effectively speak the same language. FCIA's trademarked **DIIM™ philosophy** is a prime example of such a shared language.

Ensuring that professionals understand and use this language makes execution smoother. Here's an example:

A hospital designed in India falls under subdivision **C1: Hospitals and Sanatoria.** Additional classifications like **E (501 beds and above)** or **D (201–500 beds)**, along with other variables, determine the fire resistance rating for various compartments within the hospital.

This foundational information must accurately carry over into procurement specifications. Systems and materials, such as fire-rated doors, partition walls, and fire-stopping solutions, must be defined by compliance with performance standards. For example, certification and listing or random testing can help ensure the correct fire resistance rating is maintained.

Moreover, **specifying who is authorized to install and maintain** these elements is a crucial part of the technical specification.

PITFALLS AFTER OCCUPANCY

One of the biggest pitfalls in a building's lifecycle is the lack of proper documentation for fire and life safety measures. Buildings evolve. The money spent after handover—through repairs, refurbishments, and repurposing—is typically double or even triple the pre-handover investment.

This post-occupancy phase is where many fire and life safety practices get forgotten or discarded.■

last.page@insite

Thanks to the vigilant online communities and protection of Geographical Indication (GI) Tag, the international fashion giant Prada could be brought to terms by Kolhapuri chappal manufacturers. As we recently saw, Kolhapuri chappals, which are sold at ₹ 2,000-3,000 in India, were presented by Prada as "toe ring leather sandals" at Milan Fashion Week at a price of ₹ 1,20,0000 without revealing the source of their 'inspiration'!

This proves Pablo Picasso's famous quote "Good artists copy, great artists steal". A phenomenon observed centuries ago seems to be still prevalent all over the world… Also, selling a low-cost item at almost sixty times its value on a high-profile forum, proves the idiom - **दुनिया झुकती है, झुकाने वाला चाहिए!**

India has a wealth of indigenous arts and crafts; and quite often, international labels copy from us and make millions but the actual creators – the artisans and craftsmen - don't even get an acknowledgement!

Design piracy is a global phenomenon. To prevent design infringements and to recognise unique products based on their geographical origin and to provide an assurance of authenticity, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has launched GI. Although GI is available since 2004 in India for "protecting invaluable treasures of incredible India" sadly there are not many takers! While a relatively small country like Germany has 15,000+ GI Tags, a large country like India with thousands of unique products, has only 600+ registrations!! Ironical, isn't it?

While the overall GI scenario in India is not encouraging, India has undoubtedly emerged a winner in this controversy, thanks to GI and the international hue & cry. In what seemed like a fight between David and Goliath - Prada – the Italian Goliath to our Kolhapuri David – released a statement: "We acknowledge that the sandals featured in the recent Prada Men's 2026 Fashion Show are inspired by traditional Indian handcrafted footwear, with a centuries-old heritage. We deeply recognize the cultural significance of such Indian craftsmanship"! Certainly a rare occasion, when an international label was compelled to admit that it had hijacked a local craft for minting money!

This is a big win for the manufacturers of Kolhapuri chappals. While Prada may or may not collaborate with them, they have successfully 'arrived' on the global fashion scene! This will open up a huge export potential and also boost domestic sales, now that these modest chappals are endorsed by an international fashion house. Both options will benefit the creators, in line and spirit with the doctrine propagated by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to find **"आपदा में अवसर"** ('opportunity in disaster')! Jai Hind!

KAMAL KHOKHANI
Publisher

HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR NEXT ISSUE

UPCOMING ISSUE

MINIMALIST DESIGN

» AR. LALITA THARANI & AR. MUJIB AHMED
A modern minimalistic language explored by Mumbai-based firm Collaborative Architecture

» AR. DHARAM PATEL
Of AAA, Vadodara shares two amazing projects

» AR. KRISHNA MISTRY & AR. ANAND JARIWALA
Showcasing Rujuta Divekar's Mumbai home

» AR. RAHUL MEHROTRA
Veteran Mumbai & US-based Architect featured as the Icon of the Month

» AR. CHETAN LAHOTI & AR. ANAND DESHMUKH
Pune-based Mind Manifestation Design share a beautiful minimalistic apartment in Mumbai

» LADY KISHWAR DESAI
Featuring the Partition Museums in Delhi & Amritsar

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