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MODERN MASTERS

SEVEN PRACTICES ARE CONTRIBUTING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE IN INDIA – AN EMERGING DESIGN SUPERPOWER.

WORDS **SIMON OSTHEIMER**

It may be a key part of BRICS, the grouping of developing nations that are increasingly dominating the world's economy, but India has long lagged behind other countries in the field of design. Certainly, its arts, handicrafts and fashion have found a following internationally, while its culinary impact is beyond dispute, but there is little attention paid to modern, contemporary design. Slowly, though,

perceptions are changing. In the vanguard is a wave of architects, both Indian and international, who are literally making their mark on the landscape, with innovative designs that are site-sensitive yet avoid the clichés of stereotypically Indian architecture. This is Indian design at its most contemporary.

SP+A

Stephane Paumier arrived in India in 1996 for voluntary civil service after his graduation from the School of Architecture of Paris-Belleville, where he studied under the renowned Peruvian architect Henri Ciriani. He won the international competition for the design of the Alliance Française de Delhi in 2001 in collaboration with Anupam Bansal and Rajesh Dongre from ABRD Architects. This success led to projects such as the French Institute of Pondicherry and the French Information Resource Centre in Delhi.

In 2005, Paumier founded SP+A Design as a principal, with Anupam Bansal and Rishnachandran Balakrishnan as co-directors. Both are graduates from the School of Planning and Architecture in Delhi, with masters degrees from Kansas and Berkeley Universities, respectively. The practice focusses on developing contextual skills for each project. Since 2005, the firm has conceived and realised many notable projects like the Tarun Tahiliani headquarters—nominated for the AGA Khan Awards 2010—the Triburg headquarters and the O.P. Jindal Global University. It recently won the international competition for the first Franco-German Embassy in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Paumier says that “successful completion of these projects entails long studies of the context of site,



history of the region and technical knowledge for physical realisation of desires, forms and spaces. It is the process of going through all these essentials systematically which helps develop each project individually and tend to its needs. With each, new constructional and structural techniques are evolved.” It seems that there is much more to come from this talented, transplanted Frenchman. *sp-arc.net*



PLANET 3 STUDIOS

Planet 3 Studios founders and principals Kalhan Mattoo and Santha Gour Mattoo know exactly where to situate their young, internationally award-winning practice: right on “the vanguard of future-forward design in India.” It’s a bold statement, but one the firm is living up to with its work, which balances “wit and wisdom.” The studio’s portfolio includes institutional buildings, mixed use developments, high rise buildings, adaptive-reuse projects, housing complexes, colleges, schools, training centres, corporate offices, banks, malls, retail outlets, resorts, spas, hotels, restaurants, lounges, nightclubs, furniture and industrial products.

“For us, for any design to succeed, a clearly articulated line of thought should bind it all together with dimensional interpretation that is consistent and careful,” say the founders. While they consider that interconnectivity within a globalised

design community is unavoidable, their global vision remains anchored to local realities. For instance, they designed a Food Court in Pune that is a contemporary glass box. The Indian context has been evoked in the *jali* skin that envelops it from outside; providing shade in a tropical climate, it reduces the energy usage of the facility.

As the Planet 3 team points out, any construct, be it an interior or architecture, is a product, which always needs to be delivered at expected quality standards, within a specified time frame and within budget. The reality of construction management and quality of contracting agencies leaves a lot to be desired, which is why many of their clients now insist that they take singular responsibility for the design, as well as delivery of the project. planet3studios.com

(OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) Indigo Delicatessen at Palladium; SP+A’s Stephane Paumier; 321 Tardeo in Mumbai.

(THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) X Block; IBP Food Court; Co-founders Kalhan Mattoo and Santha Gour Mattoo; Karnala Resort.



(THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) The Curtain Door; Gurjit Singh Matharoo; Onyx Wall.

(OPPOSITE, FROM TOP) The Blue Dome; The Inspiration Architects' office; Principal designer and managing director Jaigopal G Rao (right) and Director of project implementation Latha Raman Jaigopal (left).

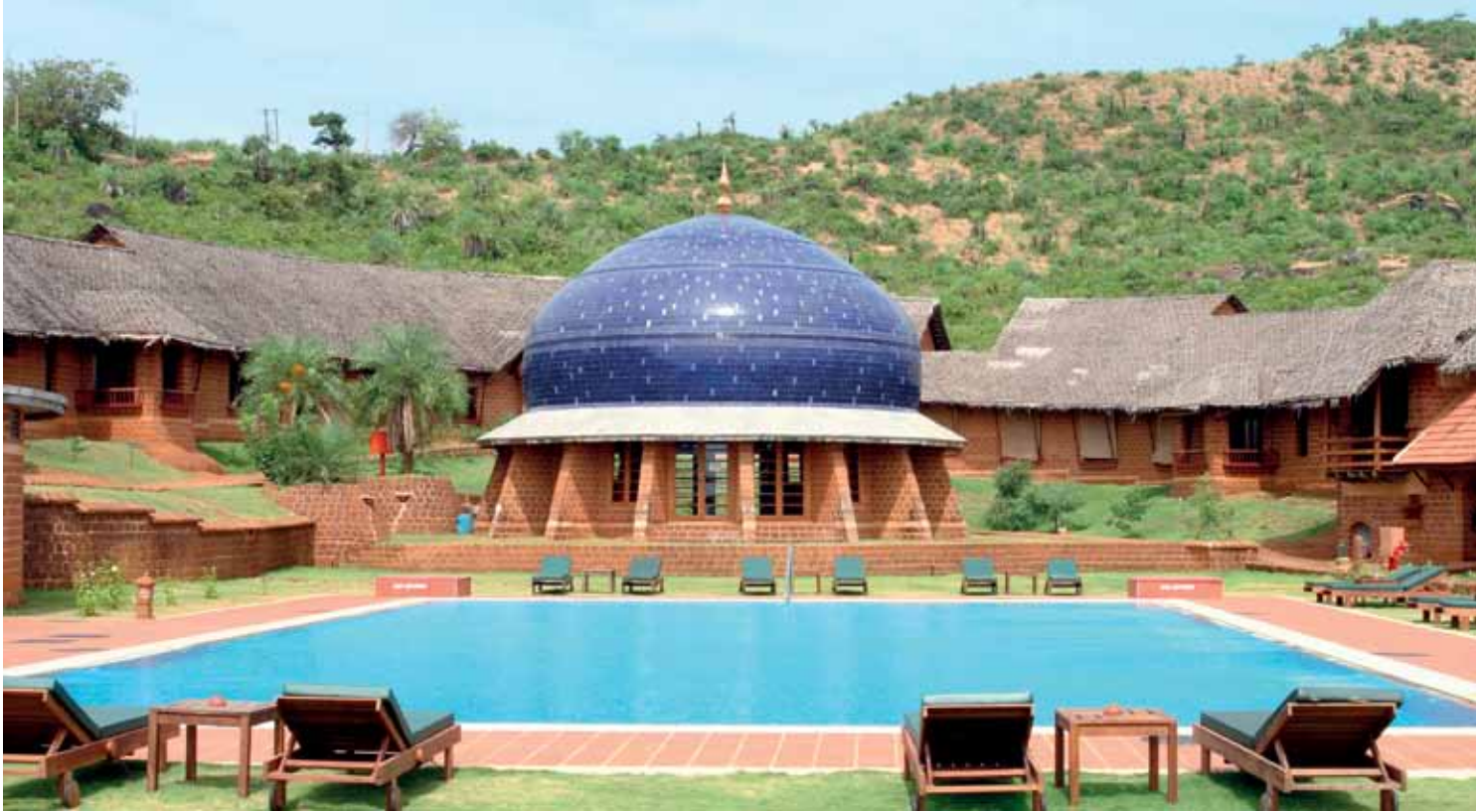
MATHAROO ASSOCIATES

Gurjit Singh Matharoo founded Matharoo Associates in Ahmedabad, India, in 1992. "We believe in a clear emphasis of functionality and services, in exercising an extreme restraint whenever designing, and using natural exposed materials where sunlight becomes the only embellishment, as it varies and changes through the day and across the seasons," he says. Indeed, Matharoo buildings are designed to be discovered; as one moves through them they unfold around one's body to reveal their secrets and meanings over time and over spatial layers.

Matharoo's office undertakes design work ranging from architecture, structural design and master-planning to product and automobile design. "We see all design disciplines as one, to remove boundaries and work with a fully combined approach," he says. "Interdisciplinary practice has become an important dimension of how we make all our designs."

Among the many awards the firm has won, of particular note was the AR Emerging Architecture 2009 award for the remarkable "Curtain Door." Standing 5.2m high and 1.7m wide, the door is comprised of 40 sections of 254mm-thick teak. Each section is carved so that the door integrates 160 pulleys, 80 ball bearings, a wire-rope and a counter weight hidden within the single pivot. Stacked one above the other in the closed position, each plank can then rotate by a simple push causing the door to reconfigure into a sinusoidal curve. It's a triumph of design, engineering, and creativity – traits that mark all of Matharoo's work in India. matharooassociates.com





INSPIRATION

Influenced by the works and writings of Frank Lloyd Wright, Inspiration's principal designer and managing director, Jaigopal G Rao, an architect by training, chose to base his architecture and aesthetics on the ecological, social, cultural and economic reality of India. Meanwhile, director of project implementation Latha Raman Jaigopal directs field level execution of the firm's various projects across the sub-continent. With a passion for energy efficiency and water conservation in the built environment, Latha has been instrumental in co-ordinating and detailing concepts of total water management, decentralised solid and liquid waste management, and relevant renewable energy applications.

According to the duo, Inspiration has been on a "continuous search through actual field practices to evolve design concepts, packages of design details, technology applications and approaches to aesthetics, so as to evolve a truly contemporary Indian architecture and construction language." Inspiration combines an experienced team of architects, planners, infrastructure engineers, structural engineers, construction management personnel, interior and product designers, horticulturists, trained artisans and technicians. The pair says their work has attempted to reach the whole cross section of Indian society, be it rural or urban, the economically well-off or the economically weaker sections, the well-educated and informed or the uninitiated. With over 18 years of experience in the field of nature-friendly designs and construction, Inspiration today enjoys a niche clientele—their 400 projects have been for individuals, corporations, government departments and NGOs—who aspire to environmentally sensitive habitats and inspired development.

inspire-india.com





IMAGES GIORGIO MOLINARI, COURTESY OF ANUPAMA KUNDOO

ANUPAMA KUNDOO

Anupama Kundoo founded her self-named architecture practice in 1990, with a strong focus on material research with the view of reducing the environmental impact of building technologies. She worked as an architect in Berlin from 1992 to 1996 in the area of social housing. Then, from 2002 to 2004, she was Sustainable Design Consultant to ICAEN (Institute of Energy, Catalunya, Spain) in Barcelona, for a European Commission Project working in partnership with the municipalities of London and the state of Haryana in India. Her innovative approach to architecture is supported by

intensive research and experimentation; from the development of building technologies and integration of energy and water-efficient infrastructure solutions, to building prototypes that are environmentally sound and socio-economically beneficial.

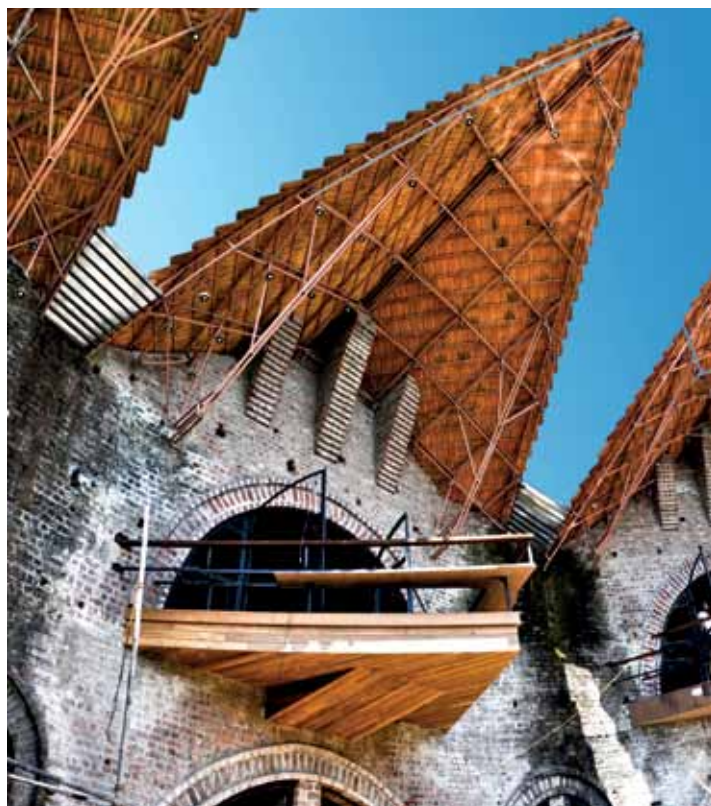
One example: the Townhall Complex in the utopia-driven settlement of Auroville, located in southeast Tamil Nadu state. “The challenge was to create an urban feeling that would attract the further development of this area, contributing to the character of the city to come,” says Kundoo. “The attempt was to demonstrate the language of

the interconnecting elements between the buildings in such a way that the urban character would be compact built spaces interspersed with service areas and public circulation.” Sustainable building infrastructure, always a key feature of her designs, was especially important for this project. For instance, rainwater is harvested from the roof and treated to drinking standards, while 100 percent of the waste water from toilets is treated and reused for irrigation. Principally planned as a building to be used in daylight, all computers will be able to run on solar photovoltaics in the future. *anupamakundoo.com*



(THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) Moon Light; Wild Echo; Farmhouse founder Mahesh Naik.

(OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) Anupama Kundoo; The Townhall Complex.



FARMHOUSE ORGANIC ARCHITECTURE

33-year-old architect Mahesh Naik pursues the philosophy of organic architecture invented by Frank Lloyd Wright, and carried through by the likes of Bruce Goff, Bart Prince, Fay Jones, John Lautner, Eddie Jones, Nari Gandhi and Laurie Baker. According to Naik, "Using nature as basis for design, a building or design must grow, as nature grows, from the inside out. Most architects design their buildings as a shell and force their way inside. Nature grows from the idea of a seed and reaches out to its surroundings. A building thus, is akin to an organism and mirrors the beauty and complexity of nature."


As Naik explains, organic architecture is a philosophy of architecture which promotes creating a structure growing from the ground, merging into nature and gradually vanishing into it. "I believe in starting fresh on each new project rather than bringing preconceived ideas based on previous work," says Naik, who feels that some architects have a "bag of tricks" making everything they do look the same in terms of general characteristics, no matter what the type of building. He instead wants to respond to the client, programme, site and climate in order to allow something fresh to result. He describes his work on a farmhouse located in the state of Maharashtra: "The site, heavy contour, its flora and fauna, a panoramic view of the sunrise, the sound of a flowing river, singing of birds and the sudden silence was equivalent to a Beethoven symphony." farmhouseorganicarchitecture.com



KHANNA SCHULTZ

Vrinda Khanna and Robert Schultz, both graduates of the Yale School of Architecture, are the husband-and-wife team behind the Brooklyn-based firm Khanna Schultz. Working in a variety of cultures and settings, Khanna Schultz has completed projects ranging from private residences to multi-storey office towers in locations as diverse as rural India and the New Jersey shore. According to the duo, they have a special interest in shifting perceptions of scale, both within a building, and between a building and its surroundings.

“Construction and detailing are a source of inspiration, balanced by a playful sensibility toward form and colour,” they say. “We follow a philosophy that inventive design must be grounded in a clear and realistic reading of client programme, budget, schedule, and site.”

Take for example their work on the Writer Warehouse in Mumbai, completed in 2007. This warehouse sits in a fast-developing commercial and industrial zone along a national highway near Mumbai. The environs are dotted with factories, storage facilities and office complexes. The approach was to develop a three-dimensional façade on the otherwise box-like structure, standing in contrast to neighbouring buildings, whose façades are either glass curtain walls or repetitive patterns of small windows. The façade is conceived as a transmitter of daylight, minimising the requirement for artificial lighting while also managing the intense heat and glare of the summer sun. The final method was to create the folds from a series of welded metal plates sprayed with shotcrete and then plastered smooth, allowing for a precision difficult to achieve in pre-cast concrete. khanna-schultz.com 



(FROM TOP) Exterior of the Writer Warehouse in Mumbai; Warehouse interior; Robert Schultz (right) and Vrinda Khanna (left).

