

MY SPACE : SANDEEP KHOSLA

KAMAT & ROZARIO UNCOVERED

DESIGN DESTINATION : SEVILLE

HOME REVIEW

VOL 12 ISSUE 11 NOVEMBER 2013 TOTAL PAGES 150

RS 100 HOME-REVIEW.COM

SHABNAM GUPTA'S
DIFFERENT STROKES

GAURAV ROY
CHODHURY'S
WHITE HOUSE

THREE TO TANGO

LOTUS STUDIO'S ECLECTIC HANGOUT

A true-blue architect would say "Read my space; don't try to read my mind." But we decided to take our chances and got lucky when Sandeep Khosla of Khosla Associates agreed to do this interview with us.

15 years of perfect partnership between Amaresh Anand and Sandeep Khosla and their unadulterated passion has confirmed their place in the top brass of architects of the country. But I am almost certain that this is not crucial to their practice, indisputably what matters is creating good design.

The firm is often tagged under the 'tropical architects' category but in my opinion the term is rather obsolete for a firm who believes in innovation and reinterpretation; influence from all quarters, be it social relevance or our architectural heritage duly reflect in their work.

They effortlessly make the switch from architecture to interior design to customised furniture design and in some cases bring all the three components together in one project. One of their latest projects, DPS Kindergarten School in Bangalore is a fine example of comprehensive architectonics whereas the firm's interior assignments oscillate between opulent sophistication to playful chic, while adhering to the project brief.

An unwritten design rule says that an effort should be made to produce edgy and novel designs each time you sit at the drawing board. In that case, how important is it to have a signature style? Technology invigorates our imagination but how relevant are these surreal graphics to the built form? Sandeep answers these questions and much more...

**SANDEEP
KHOSLA**
my space



The relatively small size of our studio (under 20 people) allows a lot of personal interaction not only with our clients but also our collaborators.

Tell us something about how you chose architecture as a vocation?

I was in a small Liberal Arts College called Bard in upstate New York where I was studying Fine Arts (which included drawing and painting) and economics, but was also exposed to classes in philosophy, music and literature. In my second year, I was introduced to architectural history classes which really spurred my interest in architecture. I found the process of drawing and painting fulfilling yet too personal and introverted. I thought architecture could be more all-encompassing, possibly combining all the arts and reaching out to people formally as well as experientially. That prompted me to transfer out into architecture school.

You pursued your education abroad and started your practice in India soon after. Overseas education especially from a university like Pratt comes with great reverence, but considering the different building contexts in both the countries did your education abroad ever seem like a disadvantage to you?

On the contrary my education at Pratt has been a big advantage as it taught me how to think conceptually about architecture. What I imbibed were strong

concepts and ideas and understanding the architectonics of space. The inspiring professors I had were architectural thinkers and not practitioners, and although my work at Pratt was largely disconnected from issues of culture, context, materiality and climate I was exposed to a variety of methodologies and schools of thought.

When I returned to India, I set up practice in 1995 after working with Charles Correa for a year. I plunged myself into projects and literally learned on the job with a steep learning curve. Although building methods are different in North America it was relatively easy to grasp construction methods in India. I think that it is easier to learn the nuts and bolts of architecture in real practice, but architectural discourse is something that I value most and can only be taught at school. Also being away for 6 years somehow gave me a greater appreciation of my own culture and context once I returned to India.

With two ingenious architects - Amaresh and you at the helm of the firm - how do brainstorming sessions work and finally come together on the drawing board?

Amaresh and I have shared a wonderful relationship over the past 15 years as colleagues and more importantly as friends. Our design process is intense and we are constantly bouncing ideas off one another.



There is therefore an incredible amount of conversation on each project and the direction it could take. Our roles in the office have also become well defined over the years and are complementary.

Concept design usually emerges from my desk and then Amaresh takes on design development before the work goes to a team (under our supervision) for construction drawings and details. The relatively small size of our studio (under 20 people) allows a lot of personal interaction not only with our clients but also our collaborators. We enjoy getting our hands dirty on site customising solutions with the contractors, masons, stoneworkers and carpenters. The process of making for us is sometimes as rewarding as the process of conceiving.

Khosla Associates' portfolio boasts of some excellent architectural as well as interior works. At one end, we get to see contemporary design combined with traditional ethics in your architectural jobs whereas in your interior assignments we get to see tasteful decor bestowed with glamorous treatment. How do you manage to bring out these varied effects in your work?



We really enjoy the variety in our palate of work and our projects range from small to big and from architecture to interior design, and customising furniture and even products. At any given time, I think we have to wear different hats while designing these varied projects approach with a different sensibility.

The disciplines of architecture and interior design also feed off each other very well and add richness to our work. Also Amaresh and I tend to divide responsibility according to aptitude... For example he is good at civil and interior detailing and I am good at furniture and styling.



It's been almost two decades since you set up practice and now clients come to you. Was there a time when convincing your clients to see your viewpoint a difficult task and how did you bring them around?

There is always a time early in one's career when convincing one's clients was more difficult than it is now when one has a body of work to show. I have to say though that I had a no compromise attitude from my very first project, and I was probably fortunate to get a few early breaks and clients who were willing to take a risk with me.

I never took on work that I didn't believe in, even though I was struggling financially. I believe that if you do good work, it will lead to more work. Having said that, both Amaresh and I realise that you are only as good as your last project, and that drives us to excel with every job that we undertake.



Now clients come to us asking us to replicate a project that we have done in the past, because they like it so much, but we convince them that we should do something different, innovate and not repeat ourselves and stagnate.

Where do you see the architecture scene in India moving towards, when currently it is all about "tallest building", "biggest cantilever", "most expensive building" and green architecture used more as a marketing gimmick?

The time has come in architecture to create buildings that are truly "relevant" and not just "iconic". Advanced Software has enabled us to create buildings in any possible shape - that doesn't mean we have to. Concerns of buildings should be driven by the need (social, economic, cultural, environmental, local) rather than only an image.

There is no doubt that there is some sensitive and thought provoking architecture emerging from our country, but a majority of architecture in our urban environment has been put up by developers and sadly in their case, whether residential or commercial it's really about building an image and selling an aspirational dream. Hence ideas from distant parts of the world are transported and replicated in a cut-and-paste way into our urban fabric with absolutely no sense of context. There are however also a new breed of developers emerging in our cities who are hiring the best of our architects and creating some exciting and relevant projects.



An architect/ designer whose work continues to inspire you?

I was a Frank Lloyd Wright buff in my student years and I still respond to his work in the same way 20 years later.... I was choked with emotion the first time I visited Fallingwater ... The audacity of the vision at the time that it was created. I think the relationship of his houses with the landscape is special.

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When one starts off with a new practice there is an energy rush to achieve certain goals; 20 years down the line is there something that you still look forward to doing?

We have been in the luxury segment for a while now, focussing on high end single family residences and bars/restaurants for the hospitality industry.

We recently completed a few institutional projects that were very rewarding. Our DPS Kindergarten School in Bangalore was adjudged Winner in the INSIDE awards in the Education category at the World Architecture Festival/World festival of Interiors held in Singapore last month. Going forward we are looking at doing more educational institutions and would also like to be involved in creating meaningful civic and community spaces.

Any building material that fascinates you?

Red/Coloured oxide flooring as was found in traditional houses of Chettinad, Kerala and Goa, which is now a dying art.

In India few cities like Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, and Mumbai are considered design destinations of the country. Is it that the designers choose to huddle to these cities or is there a favourable design disposition/regulations in these places?

Designers chose to huddle to these cities initially because of lucrative commissions and clients. Now these cities have developed vibrant design communities which attract more designers. Ahmedabad has of course a different legacy with prominent educational design institutions as well as the presence of masters such as Corbusier, Kahn and Charles and Ray Eames.

Our country has a wonderful architectural heritage (sadly some of it is in dilapidated condition), any personal favourite structure. Do you take cues from our rich history?



The Rock cut temples of Ellora outside Aurangabad that I visited for the first time recently probably left the deepest impression on me. I was mesmerised at the thought of creating architecture via carving out negative space rather than building from scratch.

Most definitely the architecture of the past and the learning from it is very crucial, and as contemporary Indian architects, we have much to be inspired by our architectural heritage. I think the central notion of pavilions that the Mughals brought with them, the open-to-sky courtyards or aangans of the havelis and traditional houses and the colonial verandas are all very useful concepts for our climate.

Learning from the traditional Indian science of Vaastu can also be useful, and we have designed several homes extracting the essence of the science yet, with a wholly contemporary expression. I find it important to extract useful concepts and ideas from the past and then contemporise them to suit our present needs.

Any thoughts on the new crop of designers/architects?

In the internet age with a barrage of images being bombarded to us daily from around the world, young designers/architects should think about the purpose of each of their projects rather than getting caught up in the image they would like to project for themselves.

On a lighter note, any other creative activity you indulge in?

Sandeep: Music and Photography
Amresh: Running marathons and collecting Vinyl records

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