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WRAP. 3

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Lalita Tharani and Mujib Ahmed create a vibrant at a computer training centre that caters to children of a primary school at Calicut, Kerala.



*A doodle without meaning
A thought without a 'rationale'
The urge of an intuitive 'mind'
Often bordering the 'irrational'..
And the 'impossible' visions for future
We call it 'the attainable thought'
May be architecture*

The above lines sum up the manifesto of Collaborative Architecture.

At a glance, it is difficult to fathom how something as monotonous as a computer-training centre could be designed so creatively. But architecture is a way of life at Collaborative Architecture — a young award-winning firm headed by Lalita Tharani and Mujib Ahmed. This dynamic couple believes that designing is an intuitive process. Even the process of planning begins differently and the practice infuses dynamism, innovation and vigour into the fun of making architecture.

"We didn't want the obvious architectural solution for the computer centre," say Mujib and Lalita. The centre sprawls over 1,600 sq ft and caters to children of a primary school in Calicut, Kerala. The design focused on creating an enjoyable space where education was the primary objective. The couple drew up a simple yet complex three-

1 *The wrap-effect seen flowing from ceiling to the workstations*

2 & 3 *Seen from any angle, at least two colours are visible and allow the eye to move till the end*

1



concept & materials

Concept

The focus of the computer centre was that besides design, the space should be enjoyable with education as the primary objective. The visual aspect was vibrant with green, violet and blue workstations that seem like doodles made by kids. The whole mass is anchored from the top, leaving the entire space clear of any visual obstructions at the floor level. An interesting concept is the wrap concept. In this the boundary between the floor, ceiling and walls is erased, thus making it seem continuous.

Materials

Laminates/ply: Greenply
Electricals: Havells and Osram
Paint: ICI
Hardware: Hafele & Blum

1 Thick glass was used at the base for transparency and to give the illusion of the workstation being suspended

2 Seen from any angle, at least two colours are visible and allow the eye to move till the end

3 A section of the Blue workstations

2



3





dimensional plan. The visual aspect featured vibrant green, violet and blue — unlike a typical training centre. A second look at the gaps in the green, violet and blue workstations make them seem like doodles made by kids. The design leaned heavily on child perception, creating a wholly informal teaching environment that the target audience — students of primary and secondary school — could relate to.

For Lalita and Mujib, the thought process begins with children when designing for them. The colours, which mark the different domains in the matrix, have been carefully chosen to generate brilliant overlays. “When you see the site in its entirety, the overall picture with the child-like doodles forms an abstract and connects all spaces. It also brings in playfulness and relates to the age group that will be frequenting the space,” adds Mujib.

Besides the inventive architectural approach, the program tackled cost-effectiveness as it was designed for an orphanage. The recurring maintenance cost and the use of artificial lighting was minimal as the centre is operational only during the day. Watch carefully and you find each outline is a different shape. The cut-outs in the wrap are ‘corrected’, intuitive, childish doodles that double-up as a ‘crawl/graffiti’ on the wall as well as integral architectural elements/iconography.

The colours, which mark the different domains in the matrix, have been carefully chosen to generate brilliant overlays

Says Mujib, “Children cannot repeat the same shape twice as they are spontaneous.” But when looked at in its entirety, the centre appears extremely sophisticated, with the workstations appearing to be suspended in the air.

Being an orphanage, sticking to the budget was a prime concern. To suit the requirements without compromising on design, the flooring was kept simple using ceramic tiles. “Besides being low-cost, its maintenance-free properties make it just right for the kids who would be using the space. In short, we wanted the material to be cheap yet the best,” adds the couple. “We do not translate the brief directly as given by the client, but look at an in-between reading. In this case, the centre was in an existing building. The function was training and thus the space has a single line programme. Designing linear space is always a challenge.”

The simplicity of the project is deceptive. The whole mass is anchored from the top, leaving the entire space clear of any visual obstructions at floor level. The workstations on either side are divided by 12-cm-thick clear float glass at the bottom resulting in a levitating spatial matrix. “The project has a complex framework. The

4 & 5 *The violet ceiling gives an illusion of the workstation being suspended, similar to the effect resulting from the glass bases*

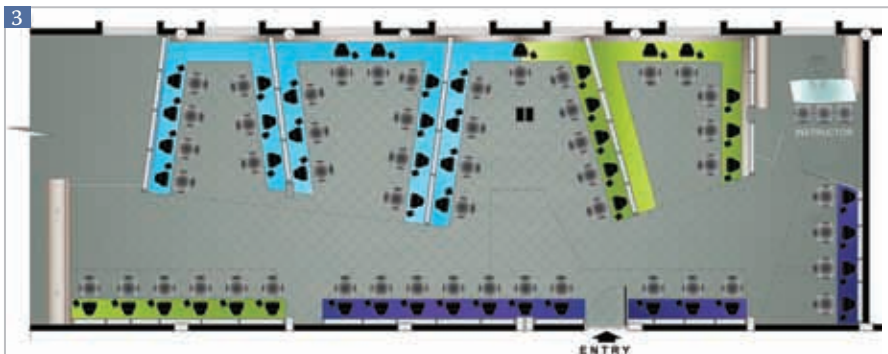
1



2



3



4



between the floor, ceiling and walls, thus making it seem continuous. Lalita and Mujib began with the Wrap Concept five years ago. "Wrap 4 and Wrap 5 are underway." In the Wrap Series, the space is conceived as a series of wraps, juxtaposed to create palimpsests of colour, which are spatial overlays and derived/accidental 'readings'. The firm thrives on myriad experiences and the expertise each new project brings in. Collaborative Architecture has design centres in either end of the country (Mumbai and Calicut), which helps them to optimize the logistics and the infrastructure allocations. "Every project is an opportunity to push the quality of architecture that comes out of the studio to a new high. The work-culture in either design centre highlights the strict discipline we enforce in detail, quality control and project cost in each exercise," add the architects. ^(B)

The space is conceived as a series of wraps, juxtaposed to create overlapping palimpsests of color, spatial overlays and derived/accidental 'readings'

1 Rendering of a cross-section

2 Lalita Tharani and Mujib Ahmed

3 The floor plan

4 Cut-outs in circles and unusual shapes appear like a child's doodles

ceiling takes the load and the entire framework was constructed in mild steel. Wires had to be pulled from the ceiling and the workstations are anchored in glass," adds Lalita.

An interesting concept that the couple works with is the 'wrap'. This erases the boundary

fact file

Project: Wrap 3

Client: JDT, Calicut, Kerala

Area: 1,800 sq ft

Principal architects: Lalita Tharani and Mujib Ahmed

Project architects: Nadia, Rajesh and Shoukath

Design duration: Dec 2004 to Jan 2005

Project duration: Dec 2005 to April 2006