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“ I work inspirationally, laterally not literally, and within my own design bubble. I am influenced by beautiful things from all aspects of life. ”

- LORD DANDY SHOREDITCH



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and that's a WRAP...

INDIA'S AWARD-WINNING CREATIVE TEAM, COLLABORATIVE ARCHITECTURE,
PRESENTS THEIR UNIQUE CASE FOR ECLECTIC ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

Words :: J Lynn Fraser // Images :: Lalita Tharani, Ajeeb Komachi



PROJECT DETAILS ::

Project :: WRAP- 3

Project Location :: Calicut, India

Firm :: Collaborative Architecture, India

Principal Architects :: Lalita Tharani, Mujib Ahmed

Client :: JDT, Calicut India

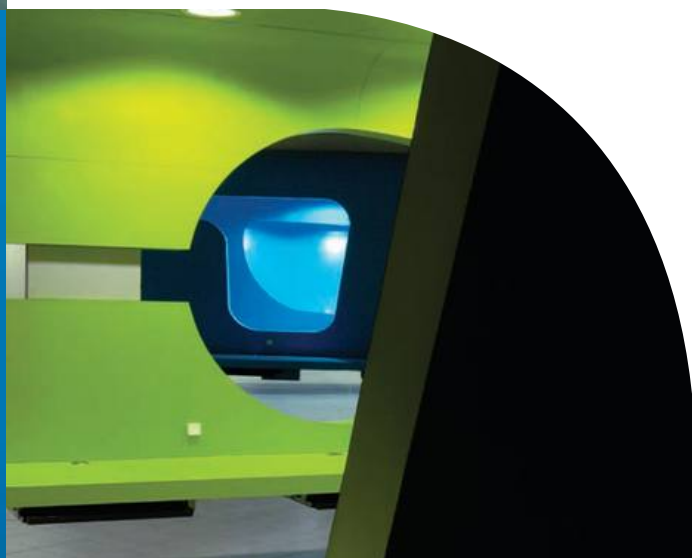
Project Area :: 1800 Sq ft

Project team :: Nadia & Shoukath

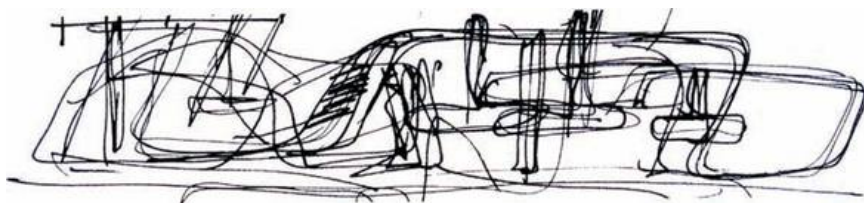


"We wanted as much
stimuli as possible
to make the end product a
LIVING ORGANISM"

- MUJIB AHMED



“DOING ARCHITECTURE IS NOT... A RESULT OF A RATIONAL PROCESS, but, [is] intuitive, often layered [with] palimpsests of logical, irrational, bizarre, poetic, clarified and impossible thoughts,” according to Mujib Ahmed and Lalita Tharani, the award-winning creative team behind India’s eclectic architecture and design firm Collaborative Architecture (CA).



CA challenges traditional conversations of retail, commercial and residential space with a broad vocabulary of materials and fluent translation of space, light, and geometry.

This approach is exemplified in WRAP 3, a computer room that CA designed for primary and secondary students at the JDT Orphanage in Calicut, India. “We wanted as much stimuli as possible to make the end product a living organism. [The work] is about creating living spaces,” asserts Ahmed, who earned a degree in Architectural Engineering in 1993 from Regional Engineering College (Calicut, India).

The 1,800-square-foot computer training environment seems lifted from the landscape of Dr. Seuss’s Who-ville. Cantilevered workstations “hover” above a ceramic tile floor. On angled walls, windows float like long steams of blown soap bubbles. The walls are made from a framework of structural steel clad with laminates. CA favours this type of steel because it has both “tensile and compressive strength,” according to Tharani. The crayon-coloured purple and green acrylic paint on the walls is appropriate for the room’s youthful clients. The ceiling, fash-

ioned from gypsum board and steel, is also laminated. Compact fluorescents illuminate individual work areas on the workstations.

“We love to explore,” says Tharani, who has a diploma in Interior Architecture from the Sophia Polytechnic. “We want to innovate on every project.” The firm’s WRAP concept refers to its view of erasure of boundaries between walls, floors and ceilings, as well as its willingness to draw upon different disciplines to interpret clients’ briefs.

The CA team incorporates design strategies from interior design, sociology and architecture, as well as Ahmed’s and Tharani’s respective studio and corporate backgrounds. “We don’t want to be shaped as a retail or institutional architectural firm,” Ahmed stresses. Tharani’s dream project would be to design a campus for an educational facility, and Ahmed’s would be to design a museum. Begun in 2000, the firm now employs fifteen people and has offices in both Calicut and Mumbai (formerly Bombay). Both cities are located on India’s west coast. CA’s clients are mostly business entrepreneurs. Tharani describes them as “widely travelled” individuals who are exposed to the latest devel-

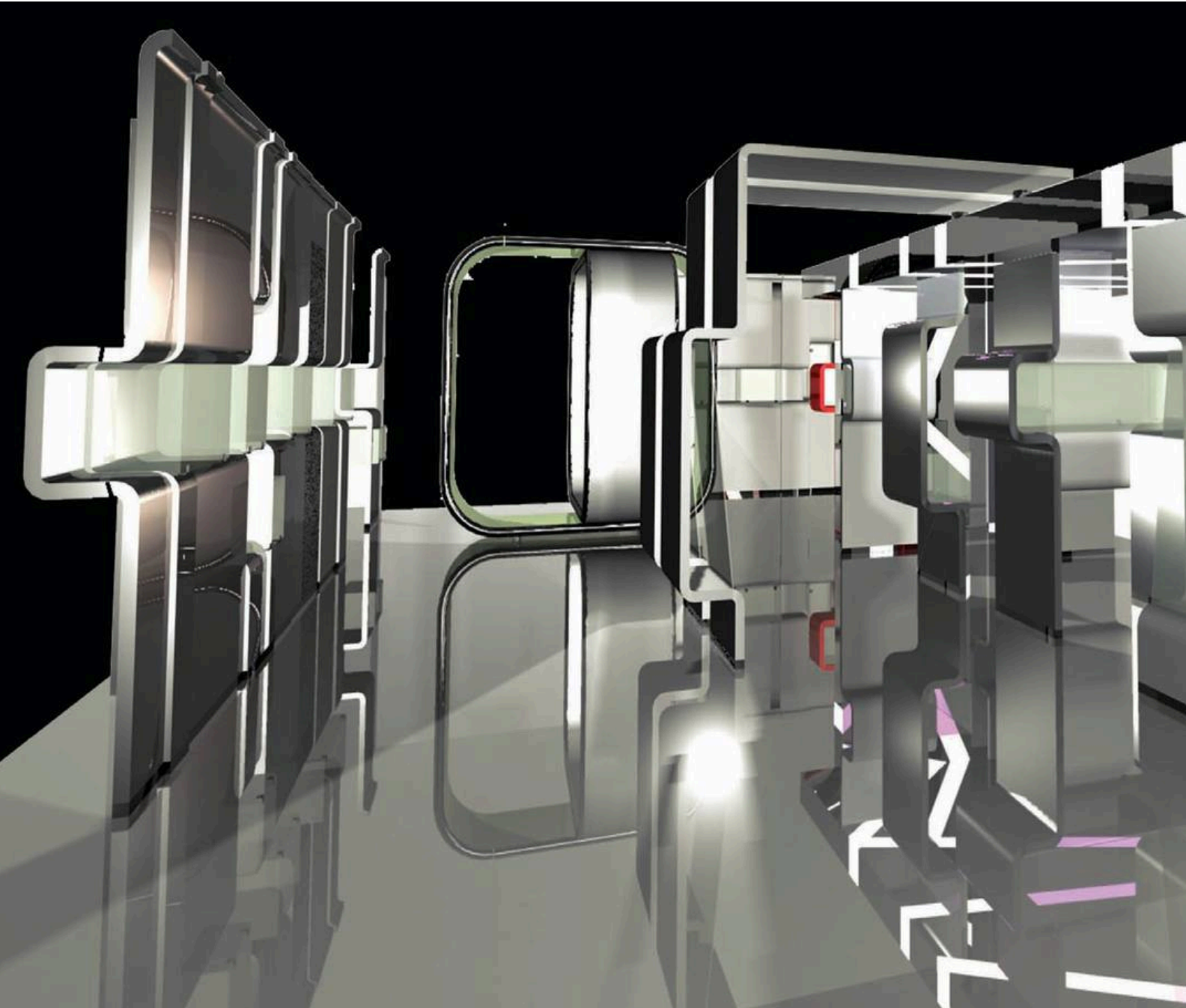




PROJECT DETAILS ::
Project :: WRAP- 4
Project Location :: Calicut, India
Firm :: Collaborative Architecture, India
Principal Architects :: Lalita Tharani, Mujib Ahmed
Client :: K T C Automobiles, Calicut India
Project Area :: 12,000 Sq ft
Project team :: Shoukath & Sandhya Banjan

“Collaborative is a highly dynamic practice on look for projects globally.”

— LALITA THARANI



PROJECT DETAILS ::
Project :: Concept Pavilion
Project Location :: Mobile
Firm :: Collaborative Architecture, India
Principal Architects :: Lalita Tharani, Mujib Ahmed
Client :: Titan Industries
Project Area :: 1450 Sq ft
Project Team :: Shoukath & Sandhya Banjan



"The pavilion is designed to maximize the interface between the audience and the products."

opments in art and architecture. Ahmed notes that 90 percent of the clients are under the age of 40.

Although Ahmed claims to be unfamiliar with Stanley Kubrick's movie 2001: A Space Odyssey, the aesthetic in CA's Concept Pavillion is strikingly similar with its retro 1960s futurism. As in the WRAP 3 project, CA's vocabulary of free-flowing floors, long sightlines and expansive space makes the 1,450-square-foot travelling exhibition booth seem larger than it is.

"The pavilion is designed to maximize the interface between the audience and the products," CA wrote of its approach to the design. The booth can be expanded or contracted as needed. The client, Titan Industries – a division of the Tata Group, a global company based in India – wanted a

space that would "convey the future directions of the company [while] showcasing the different brands of the company."

Boldly coloured in red and tan, the booth's floor-to-ceiling modules curl around rectangular glass vitrines displaying watches, jewelry and designer eyewear made by Titan. The modules are designed with heights of 3,000 millimetres and 2,400 millimetres. Made in a number of widths, the modules can be arranged into different groupings.

Fluorescent lights along the ceiling and supporting walls are inset in a criss-crossing pattern, guiding the visitor's gaze downward to the vitrines. Long hatch marks on the ceiling, called the "Hour Roof Zone," change colour as time passes, an appropriate visual metaphor

for a booth displaying timepieces. The floor's dark carpeting provides a neutral background for the display cases – or "domains," as Ahmed calls them.

"We are more Peter Keating than Howard Roark," Ahmed says, referring to the egocentric and domineering architect-protagonist of Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*. "We dislike the point of view of the God-like architect," adds Tharani. Nevertheless, CA will "restructure" a client's brief if they feel it lacks vision, as they did with the Concept Pavillion. Ahmed likens relationships with clients to a "double-edged sword" and observes that they can be "tenuous, because the client says that they want x, and then we have to educate them."

In the case of WRAP 4, the client, Hyundai, asked for "a nice backdrop" >>



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for the product display.” CA noted that its “ensuing architectural response did exactly the opposite of the [client’s] brief.” Taking their wrap concept to a grand and extreme form, CA created a car showroom that allowed 360-degree viewing of the cars, and took advantage of the former warehouse’s 12,000-square-foot space.

Reminiscent of a Möbius strip, WRAP 4 illustrates CA’s distinct approach to boundary-erasing walls, floors and ceilings. The showroom’s ambience is that of a pared-down futurism. Long, rectangular hatch marks – a recurring motif – decorate sections of the blue strip, which forms the display platform for the cars. A sense of speed emanates from the long white hatch marks, the angled white countertops and the angled blue strip. The Hyundai logo is also smoothed and angled to match the room’s sleek aesthetic.

Tharani and Ahmed are influenced by well-known architects from a variety of cultures. Ahmed points to the American

architect Charles W. Moore, whose angles and emphasis on basic forms can be seen in CA’s work. The cantilevered “outcroppings” and the sense of immense space in the public buildings of Spanish architect Rafael Moneo are echoed in CA’s approach to angles and boundaries. Ahmed also cites Louis Kahn, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris (Le Corbusier) and Frank Lloyd Wright as influences. These architects are known for their strong forms and their ability to distill a building to its essence.

Ahmed denies that his early studies with Californian potter and architect Ray Meeker, who along with Deborah Smith established Golden Bridge Pottery in Pondicherry (found at the south-east tip of India), still influence him. It can be argued, however, that Meeker’s fire-stabilized mud buildings and ceramics, for which he is famous in India, gave Ahmed a respect for volume and for the sensuousness of curved form.

In India, Ahmed believes, the lack of technology, dependable infrastructure and

team approach to building may be holding back the country’s architectural innovation: “In terms of the intellectual part of architecture, India is still catching up. Industry, the contractor and the architect are linked in the West. They are completely dis-linked in India. Which is why India can’t produce contemporary architecture.” Ahmed notes that, while the economies of India and China are growing at the same time, he believes it will take “50 years for India to catch up.” In India the mindset has to change. “The mentality of the clients has not changed,” Ahmed observes – even though, he concedes, “the middle class is changing the profession.”

India’s lack of infrastructure, combined with the CA team’s desire to explore and innovate, may draw them to projects outside of the country. “Collaborative is a highly dynamic practice on look for projects globally,” says Tharani. “We would love to do some institutional projects in Europe and North America...We are waiting for the call!” ☐



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