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Shades of Green

OPOLIS ARCHITECTS USES BAMBOO FOR THE CONSTRUCTION
OF A HEALING CENTRE TO REDUCE ITS CARBON FOOTPRINT



Innovative case studies
by Surendra Shah and
Tanmay Tathagat

KARAN GROVER
On energy efficiency

**CHRISTOPHER
BENNINGER**
The environment
crusader

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN
Collaborative Architecture

CERAMIC TILES
Architects' natural choice



PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

COLLABORATIVE ARCHITECTURE'S INTERIOR DESIGN FOR THE BAJAJ ELECTRICALS OFFICE IN CHENNAI GOES BEYOND THE FUNCTIONAL, OBSERVES MARIA LOUIS

1. An elliptical reception area demarcates public and work spaces.

2. Entries to service areas.

3. Architectural graphics decorate the walls of conference rooms.

4. Straightforward yet pleasing design.

Sustainability as an active strategy was the fundamental premise on which the concept design for Bajaj Electricals' regional corporate office in Chennai is based, reveal Lalita Tharani and Mujib Ahmed of Collaborative Architecture. "Bajaj is an energy company. If they do not make it a fundamental theme, who would?" asks Tharani. "Incidentally, they have made a commitment to make all their future work spaces sustainable. Kiran and Shekhar Bajaj are proponents of Green living, and Kiran heads a Bajaj initiative called *Pariyavarana Mitra*."

The architects received a typical straight-jacketed, hierarchical brief for

a corporate office, with cabins for senior managers, cubicles for mid-level managers, work stations for executives, apart from meeting rooms, conference rooms, staff service areas. A mandatory requirement was orthogonal spaces within the office, in keeping with the traditional principles of Vastu.

The brief emphasised that the budget and compliance with conservative Vastu dictats be kept in mind in terms of the orientation and placement of staff. "It was a functional brief, like any other," recalls Tharani. "You have to fix in X number of heads in a limited space, adhering to the needed footprint space allocation as per





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the stated hierarchy. This is always a major constraint in any corporate project, and this one was no different.”

Tharani recalls that the first impression they had of the site was “a standard office floor plate with some acute corners.” Their design challenge was to accommodate constraining guidelines such as the rigid orthogonal layout, yet evolve a ‘design narrative’ that would cleverly masks the ubiquitous gridded plan.

Deciding to invest the space with an architectural character that would generate work efficiency, the architects fulfilled the need for energy efficiency through the selection of Green-rated products, active tools to cut down energy consumption, daylight harvesting and the general orientation of the work floor, to tap maximum daylight and reduce south exposure to cut down cooling load.

The meeting room is placed strategically to segregate the public interface with the work interface. The contrasting dark colour and the free-flowing envelope of its space generates a spatial boundary between the public and work realms. Enclosed spaces such as the senior managers’ cabins, conference room and staff utility areas are positioned along one of the sides, allowing the work stations to tap the maximum daylight.

The cabins have glazed partitions separating them from the workspace, allowing

daylight to penetrate optimally into the entire space. Collaborative Architecture designed the architectural graphics on the wall to ensure adequate privacy in the cabin areas.

Every cabin, the passages and entry foyers are provided with active tools to cut down the lighting load. And finally, the office is equipped with state-of-the-art HVAC and BMS to make it a truly energy-efficient workspace.

The architects convinced the clients to incorporate Green tools into the project to make it an experience centre for Bajaj Electricals in South India. “It really works as an experience centre for them now, where the consultants take their clients to give them a first-hand feel of the active tools employed,” discloses Tharani.

MATERIALS AND SUPPLIERS

Vitrified tiles & Dado: RAK Ceramics
Modular ceiling: Armstrong
Hardware: Dorma, Hettich
Laminates: Merino
Desking system for modular work stations: BP Ergo
Chairs: Featherlite
Soft seating/loose furniture: Tangent
Air-conditioning (HVAC) systems: Bluestar
Light fixtures: Trilux



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CASE STUDY

BAJAJ ELECTRICALS OFFICE



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5&6. The meeting room is an anchoring element in the space, sophisticated in colour scheme and detailing.

7. A well-equipped, state-of-the-art conference room.

Though there were severe constraints in terms of expression of the design vocabulary, budget and programme versus the available space, she admits that no corporate project could be an ideal one as most of them would have similar constraints and limitations. "The project could have been different if the guidelines were a bit more flexible, though," she adds.

Initially, the architects had proposed a different and much more dynamic layout with a novel ambience. "But the Vastu

consultant had other ideas," laments Tharani. "This is the challenging part of working with a client who wants the space to be Vastu compliant. You have to work with Vastu consultants who interpret the principles rigidly – and yet, you have to come up with a convincing overall design. Thankfully, during the design process, the clients happen to see how some other ongoing projects in the studio are shaping up... and their confidence ascends. That gives us the necessary tool to nudge the project towards a suitable direction."

Revealing that clients usually prefer a tried-and-tested design rather than treading new paths and setting new standards, Tharani admits that most of Collaborative Architecture's projects begin with innovation on the back burner. And while constraints such as Vastu requirements do hamper creativity, she feels that is no excuse for bad design. "Vastu is a challenge, just like budgets, logistics, etc. it's just another parameter to be dealt with by an architect."

Another challenge for the team was the incorporation of the Green tools. "This is one of the challenges of emerging technology, because contractors and consultants are not really tuned in to different standards adopted by different service providers," she explains. Like most problems they have encountered during the design process, the final outcome of the interior design proves that innovation is the key to an effective solution.

Most of the specified products for this project have no VOC (Volatile Organic Compound) and less formaldehyde (zero formaldehyde is still to be attained in the Indian building industry). Daylight harvesting was implemented and energy consumption was reduced by almost 40%. Specified CFC-free refrigerant and advanced VRV (Variable Refrigerant Volume) systems were also employed.

Tharani adds that the Bajajs are satisfied with the end result. "This project has created a benchmark for their future projects in terms of design and environmental commitment. Shekhar Bajaj (CMD, Bajaj Electricals) ratifies that this is their best office so far," she discloses. "At Collaborative Architecture, though, we always believe in pushing the envelope." **AS**

PROJECT DETAILS

Name of the project: Bajaj Electricals' regional corporate office
Location: Chennai
Area: 4,200sqft
Architects: Collaborative Architecture
Principal architects: Lalita Tharani & Mujib Ahmed
Electrical consultant: Entask, Bengaluru
HVAC consultant: Entask, Chennai
Plumbing consultant: Entask, Chennai
Security and fire-fighting consultant: Entask, Chennai
Year of completion: 2010