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Abhishek Lodha

MD, Lodha Group, on
Branded Development

Ar. Vikas M Gore

Director, DP Architects, Singapore
"People consider paying overseas architects more, often for front-end work only, in the mistaken belief that this can result in a good building!"

Lalita Tharani & Mujib Ahmed

Fresh & experimental Projects
from Collaborative Architecture

Interactions

Subodh Shah, Classic Marble
Amit Syngle, Asian Paints
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Approach to
Materials & Emotions
while designing Kids' room!

ColourNext 2013

'India-centric' Colour Forecast

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3-D PRINTED

ARCHITECTURE

transform the world of Construction?
How successful would be the lunar
base on Moon?



Collaborative Architecture

@Mumbai

Founded in 2002, Collaborative Architecture is an international award winning firm headed by architects, Lalita Tharani and Mujib Ahmed, based in Mumbai and Calicut, India. Recently, the studio has started the China operations as well. Looking at the projects designed by Collaborative, one can easily make out the use of minimalist colors, pre-dominantly white & the emphasis on innovative lighting design. Recipient of a number of coveted awards and recognitions, the duo believes, the act of doing architecture is not a forced result of the brief, but a compulsive urge of the creative mind. *Sharing a brief interaction between Surfaces Reporter and the young architects...*



Ar. Mujib Ahmed and Ar. Lalita Tharani
Principals, Collaborative Architecture



WEDGE-1, Mumbai

WEDGE-1 is an architectonic exploration by the firm in creating projects, which are highly refined in architectural morphology, and yet fulfilling the programmatic agenda of the brief. **The architectural intent was to dissect the simple 'shoe box' and manipulate the architectonic character of the box in the most economical way.** The project had a very stringent budget limit and delivery schedule. The name **WEDGE** comes from the character of the spaces within the dissected box, which largely are trapezoidal.

The space has been organized as centripetal, pinwheel form as the central gathering space holds the different wedges around it's periphery with its undulating volumes and roofline. The peripheral wall sets the tone of the encounter with the exhibits with its unique cut-outs. The two dimensional cut-outs on the skin, transforms the project from a simple container of products to an architectural ensemble of multiple meanings. Walls are painted white, including the exhibit floor to heighten the perception of encounter with the products. The central gathering space has a series of light 'vectors' (1200 mm long T5 lamps), which forms an enclosing canopy and fuse the space to complete the Box.

S Collaborative Architecture is often said to be partial with the material 'Solid Surfaces'. Comment.

Mujib & Lalita - One material that we work a lot with is - Corian. Yes, we are often accused of being partial to this material. The beauty of Solid surfaces is that we can experiment with it by trying its versatility to the limit. The material itself is fantastic, yet at the end of the day, the outcome depends on just how well it has been fabricated! It's rather difficult to get good, professional fabricators. That's the reason we prefer to work with Dupont directly. They support us by assigning trained fabricators. We have used Corian as a structural material in one of our projects and were pleasantly surprised with the result. We have prototyped an entire bedroom in corian, and despite of its ALL WHITE (Collaboratives' favored colour) appearance it is rather warm & cozy, this is another trait of the material; despite of its composition being acrylic resin it doesn't feel plastic & cold. We are actively looking into using high-pressure laminate and fiberboard for a current project, as the budget for the project is limited & doesn't allow us the luxury of specifying Dupont Corian for the fabrication. We are constantly on lookout for innovative & versatile materials that opens up our design horizons & give us ample scope to experiment in new directions.

"The beauty of Solid surfaces is that we can experiment with it by trying its versatility to the limit."

S About designing residential spaces?

Mujib & Lalita - We design all segments of projects commercial, offices, retail, hospitality, health care, residential etc. On the subject of designing residences, we have been fortunate enough, to have been able to push architectural design boundaries whilst designing villas, but more often, have worked 'within the box' with residential interiors whilst designing apartments. As while

designing residing spaces, which are of highly personal nature than most other segments, the likes, dislikes, living habits & individual tastes play a crucial & determining factor in design directions, leaving little scope of design evolution. On the other hand, temporary Architecture & commercial spaces, allows greater freedom of design expression.

S Please share your experience in the Southern India market?

Mujib & Lalita - South Indian market is finally coming of age, by changing its design perceptions & adapting to radically innovative designs. For a long time though, it revolved around 'safe' & traditional design derivation. It was always the 'seen that', 'been there', design expectations; it was always the neighbor's house! We decided to go against the flow & tread our path, which resulted

in us having to turn down lots of projects that came our way. At times we were unsure that we would survive the ongoing trend then. Design expectations which were stagnant for many years, changed for better in past 4 years. In fact, most of our innovative architectural projects are down South!

S Lighting in your projects are mostly unusual.

Mujib & Lalita - We look at lighting as an integral part of the design direction, and customize the lights to a great extent wherever possible. In most cases, we end up sourcing the fixtures from manufacturers around the globe to have a desired architectural lighting design.

S Working together, you may have different opinions...

Mujib & Lalita - Oh Tons! But these differences give birth to the most innovative of our designs. Many a times we do think quite parallel, at others diametrically opposed, we deliberate on all these thoughts & resolve the most trying design problems. Our scrap often brings out the best design solutions; at other times one of us just lets the other one have the gratification of WINNING!

S Inspiration...

Mujib & Lalita - Inspire no, admire yes. We do admire works of numerous architects such as *Peter Zumthor, Alvaor Siza, Wang Shu, Tado Ando, Ben Van Berkel*, works of non-architects such as *Thomas Hetherwick* etc. And ofcourse *Zaha Hadid* not for her style of architecture but for the sheer tenacity with which she carved a niche for herself in this very male dominated profession and came to be reckoned as one of the forces on the world architecture scenario. Amongst the Indian architects / designers *Gurjit Singh Matharoo*, as his works are very poetic.



The two dimensional cut-outs on the skin, transforms the project from a simple container of products to an architectural ensemble of multiple meanings.

MEZBAN- INVERTED TOPOGRAPHY Calicut, Kerala

This 3,000 Sq ft project is a part of a business hotel which has been redesigned by the firm as a repositioning exercise. The strategy was to create a new identity to the already popular restaurant though interior architecture making it a new dining destination in the city to spur the business of the hotel. The brief called for a **highly flexible layout with higher efficiency on floor**, though it meant cutting down the seating capacity. 8 pax and 6 pax tables were taken out in favour of 4 pax and 2 pax seating which could be joined to create desired groups easily, with the linear lay out.

A vibrant waiting lounge is carved out from the restaurant space. The design derives its strength from the innovative architectural lighting. **The minimalist design gets transformed by the custom designed lights** which create an undulating topography and magical lighting quality to the space. Collaborative designed the series lights along the exterior wall named as ‘Thousand Moons’ which lends an unmistakable character to the façade. Lalita designed the architectural & identity graphics for the project.



MEZBAN

According to the architects, the best and worst about Mezban are:

*Mujib & Lalita - **Best Part*** is that the project became one of the most innovative hospitality spaces designed in 2012. The Hotel to which Mezban is attached became the most preferred hotel in the city. It also became one of the most published Projects by an Indian Architect internationally and brought us 6 international awards/shortlists and 5 national awards.

Worst Part is that everyone in Kerala wanted us to design another Mezban for them, which we have been resisting.



JDT PRIMARY SCHOOL- STACKED TECTONICS Calicut, Kerala

The project is part of JDT Islam campus, **the very first Muslim orphanage in India** situated in a quaint village in north Kerala, India. Formed in early 50s, the orphanage carried its legacy of philanthropic goodwill to orphans from around the country over the years. The firm was invited to design a prototype school for primary grade, which has to house classrooms, staff area, and Principal's room apart from ancillary facilities. The site was identified as a linear left over track between a girl's school and existing old school building in the 20 acre site.

PRIMARY ARCHITECTURAL CONCERNS

The project explores new possibilities of educational spaces to generate more interaction among student community and faculty, **emphasizing on ‘no-regimented’ spaces- a complete antithesis of the generally adopted rectilinear block design.** The sandwiching of the building in the narrow plot between two buildings posed the challenge of getting enough natural light throughout the class hours. The existing buildings also created a wind barrier. The project had to be realized on a shoe string budget, in a village with limited skills and resources.

THE LEGO - STACKED TECTONICS

One of the fundamental attribute of designing for children is to keep the ‘intrigue’ intact for a longer span of time. Self discovery and playful complexities are vital part of the project. As in building blocks of **Legó**, where a child is beginning to grapple with the possibilities of 3 dimensional forms, and the limitless variations by simple shifting of the blocks, the building is designed to create a multitude of sensorial and formal attributes.



JDT

Collaborative Architecture designed the series lights along the exterior wall named as ‘Thousand Moons’ which lends an unmistakable character to the façade. Lalita designed the architectural & identity graphics for the project.



MEZBAN



The project has sort of created a bench mark for JDT's future projects. The whole project was executed with semi-skilled workers from the village, who have no access to modern modes of construction.

JDT



JDT



WRAP -4

W R A P - 4, Calicut, Kerala Urban Flux Vs Pro-active Retailing

An unusual brief “Car displays, inevitably are ‘parking-lots’! Give us a nice back drop for the product display” and a strategic urban location, which smacked the main street of the city became the architectural direction and the determining design parameters. The brief was to insert the whole gamut of program for a middle-segment brand in a 12,000 sq ft old warehouse. The showroom abuts the main street with no set back, having a 60m long, uninterrupted façade. The ensuing architectural response did exactly the opposite of brief, by positioning the ‘parking-lot’ (vehicular display) as the ‘raison detre’ and the anchoring element in the showroom.

The disposition of the showroom posed a unique architectural challenge to create a 360 degree viewing, as the façade abuts the road and the customers enter from the backside of the showroom.

“The ensuing architectural response did exactly the opposite of brief, by positioning the ‘parking-lot’ as the ‘raison detre’ and the anchoring element in the showroom.”



CLASSROOMS

The class rooms are disposed around fairly loose ancillary spaces to encourage interaction among the students and teachers. Corridors become meeting points and entries could be open classrooms. A huge window punctures the classroom space streaming daylight and each classroom window is uniquely shaped and colored, extending the ‘intrigue’ inside the building and giving each class a quirky character. Generous spaces are provided for circulation, transforming them from passages to ‘Interactive Spines’.

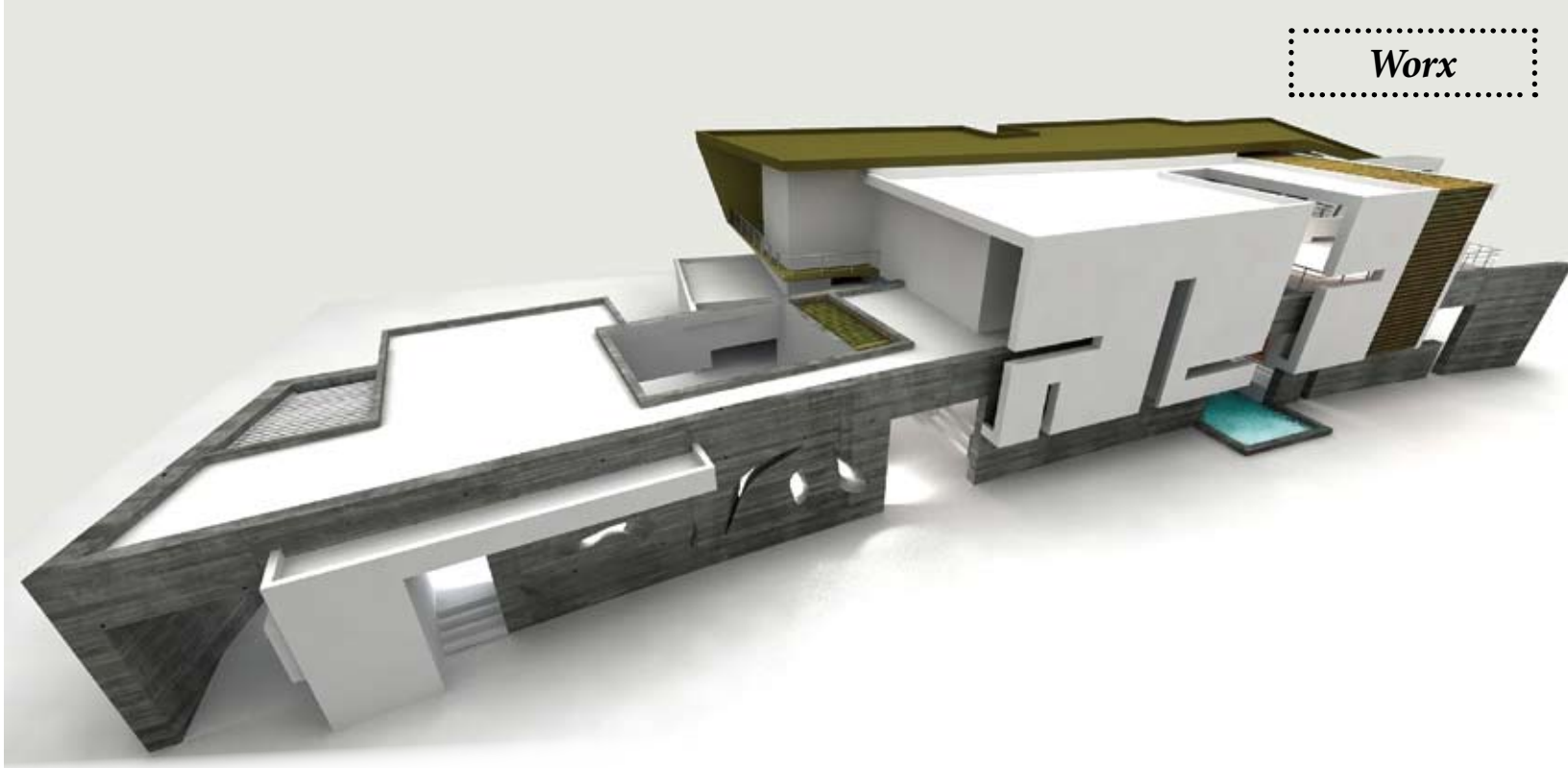
PROJECT SIGNIFICANCE

The project has sort of created a bench mark for JDT's future projects. The much opposed, wasted ancillary spaces became embedded in the daily interactions. Another rewarding experience has been to get a project of reasonable architectural complexity approved by the management, whose priorities were anything but design innovation. The attempt also underlined the studios ethos –good designs need not be expensive. The whole project was executed with semi-skilled workers from the village, who have no access to modern modes of construction.

“It was always the ‘seen that’, ‘been there’, design expectations; it was always the neighbor’s house! Design expectations which were stagnant for many years, changed for better in past 4 years. In fact, most of our innovative architectural projects are down South!”

The wrap, which merges the floor, wall, ceiling and the products into a single, unified entity establishes the vital link between the showroom, the display and the people in the showroom on one hand and the speeding traffic and the passer-bys on the street - a 60 m ‘Billboard’ mimicking the flux of movement on the street. The ‘hanging counters’ are the customer interfaces in the showroom, which are hung from the ceiling as the name indicates. These could be slid and rotated to a new position to maneuver the vehicles in the space. The spiral stair is also equally ‘engineered’ with custom fabricated, 3 dimensionally profiled cantilevered steps.

The installation done by Collaborative
Architecture for theme- GENDER BLENDER



GENDER BLENDER, New Delhi

Can architecture insinuate gender identities? How can SPACE reflect alternate attitudes and lifestyles...? How could SPACE reflect the activism and non-conformist view of the group who erase the gender barriers. Can we have a space which could be called ANDROGYNOUS....GENDER FLUID?

These are the questions the installation tries to address. Gender Bending (terminology is commonly known), is less to do with the aphorisms, sexuality and the externality that people associate with the lifestyle. On the contrary, **what makes the group unique is their courage to question the social mores, the given gender, the status quo, and the non-confirmative attitude.** The installation addresses these while portraying the space through the palette of ColorNext 2013. It addresses the Political/ Social externality Vs. the Private and Sublime Internality. The exterior is clad with mirror finished ACP, which is reflective of the societies views of anything to do with Alternative Gender issues.

HAQ RESIDENCE, Linked House, Kerala

The project is for a young doctor couple based in Kerala. The program was to accommodate a clinic along with the house in a rather unusually shallow site, with broad frontage. The existing well at site, which has been retained, became the deciding factor for spatial orientation, with clinic located on the left side of the plot with the living quarter on the right side. Hence the name- *LINKED HOUSE*.

The house has been designed as a strip cutting across the site, with the landscape inserted at various points along the length in the form of reflecting pools and patios. The proximity to the street, owing to the shallow site, resulted in introverted spaces, with a sweeping solid wall on the façade defining the form of the house.



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Lalita Tharani & Mujib Ahmed
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