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COLLABORATIVE ARCHITECTURE

architect duo lalita tharani and mujib ahmed discuss the timelessness of design, the criteria for 'green' and 'great' architecture

International award-winning architectural practice, Collaborative Architecture is the creative design studio of Ar. Lalita Tharani and Ar. Mujib Ahmed. Driven by innovation and the ceaseless pursuit of quality in design, architecture at Collaborative goes beyond the prevalent notions of functional contingencies and simplistic approaches to problem solving. The husband-wife architect duo believes that the act of doing is not a forced result of the brief, but a compulsive urge of the creative mind. They say their designs 'are often not, not a result of rational processes, but intuitive layered palimpsests of logical, irrational, bizarre, poetic, clarified and impossible thoughts'.

Speaking of the path to better architecture, Ar. Mujib Ahmed says, "Great architecture does not need great architects, it needs great clients." Ar. Lalita Tharani explains, "Clients vary. Some have worked with us before, know us, and are aware of what we deliver. Others give us a basic brief and leave the rest to us." Ar. Mujib Ahmed likens the client-architect relationship to the contradictory personality types of Peter Keating, the conformist and Howard Roark, the diametrically opposite alpha male from *The Fountainhead*, saying great architecture lies between these extreme approaches and that the client should receive more than they came looking for. He adds that when clients approach a design firm with their brief, the easiest path is to stick to this. However, it is the interaction with the client and evolution this engenders that creates better design. Though most client involvement is

restricted to the programmatic level, this information is crucial for the firm to generate the intellectual and design-centric levels of the project. Ar. Lalita Tharani says, "Design cannot be forced. It relates to the client and the locale. A lot of our designs are born out of the content and the space. There is a program to follow, but it just guides us to the direction in which we take the design."

Ar. Mujib Ahmed says in most cases clients do not walk in, wanting an award-winning project. He says, "An award-winning project, like award-winning cinema or a book, is unwatchable, unreadable, undesirable, cost-overrun, experimental and non-functional. Our job is to make the client realize that good design can change their life. Though projects without any restrictions allow us to put to use all our creative energy, most often we work on



projects with debilitating constraints around us: functional, aspirational, budgetary and locale.” At Collaborative, these constraints become reasons to push the envelope of innovation.

The architects perceive architecture and design as a language, “You don’t need to invent a new language to write a new book. We use the same words, grammar, dialect and phrases, but we create totally different writing. Architecture is no different.” They feel that design is not to be looked at as a trend, an approach that makes design wafer-thin, thus expendable. In keeping with this, Ar. Lalita Tharani says they do not refer to palettes and seasonal color predictions. Terming themselves ‘color-blind’, the duo use white in most of their projects, though “Certain projects have colors speak loud, but it is only because the space requires it.” In terms of materials and products too, Ar. Mujib says that their projects are not a catalog or the center-

leaf of a design magazine and admits that they consciously get out of the particular space, which is defined by trends.

Ar. Lalita and Ar. Mujib believe longevity of architecture and design must be substantially higher than simple trends and products. Sadly, this timelessness is grossly missing from the much spoken green, says Ar. Mujib Ahmed. “People are crazy about sustainable materials and green. Though we don’t position our practice in either the green or non-green segment, we believe a project should have a much longer design life cycle i.e. longevity in terms of design relevance, which itself makes it sustainable in the long-run. They explain that despite using all the available green indices, if the client makes changes in a space, the green aspect is lost. A structure should also evolve with the needs and functionality of the client in a dynamically changing environment. Spaces change frequently,

more so in the retail and hospitality segments compared to commercial and residential spaces. “These changing spaces are dictated by trend, and it all becomes anachronistic after some time. Whatever green inputs you have put in that building just stay on paper. Because with frequent alterations owing to the space not meeting the functional, and psychological requirement of the user, the green aspects totally lost,” explains Ar. Ahmed.

Transforming projects into critical explorations of ideas and visions for the future, Collaborative Architecture defines its basic design philosophy as the relevance of the space. Explaining the interesting contrast their personalities make, the architects say, “You have to disagree, not just for the sake of pointing out differences, but for a more theoretical and intellectual counterpoint. That is the only way you can generate innovation and test your ideas...!”

BEARYS GLOBAL RESEARCH TRIANGLE

UPCOMING PROJECT

Location : Bengaluru

Concept :

In building India’s first Platinum Leed IT Park, the client wanted a highly innovative design. The project called for a multi-purpose lobby space with adequate lounge area, a large reception, multiple private meeting rooms and some retail interfaces. The 9 meter high lobby space is dominated by a central column which becomes the axis for spatial orientation. Custom designed lounge seating designed as clusters defines the character while the exposed waffle slab ceiling highlights the structural clarity of the space.





STACKED TECTONICS

INSTITUTIONAL

Location : Calicut

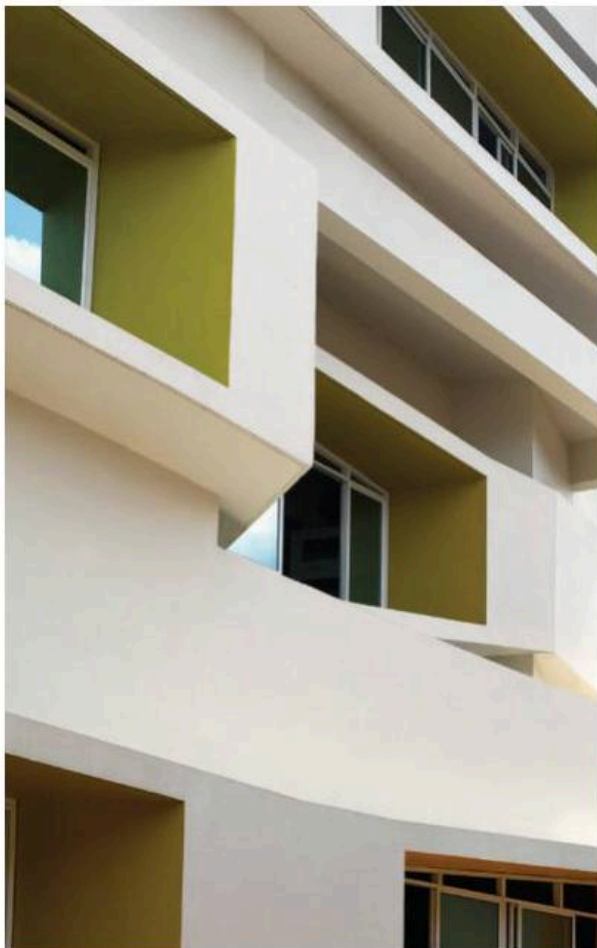
Area : 20,000 sq. ft.

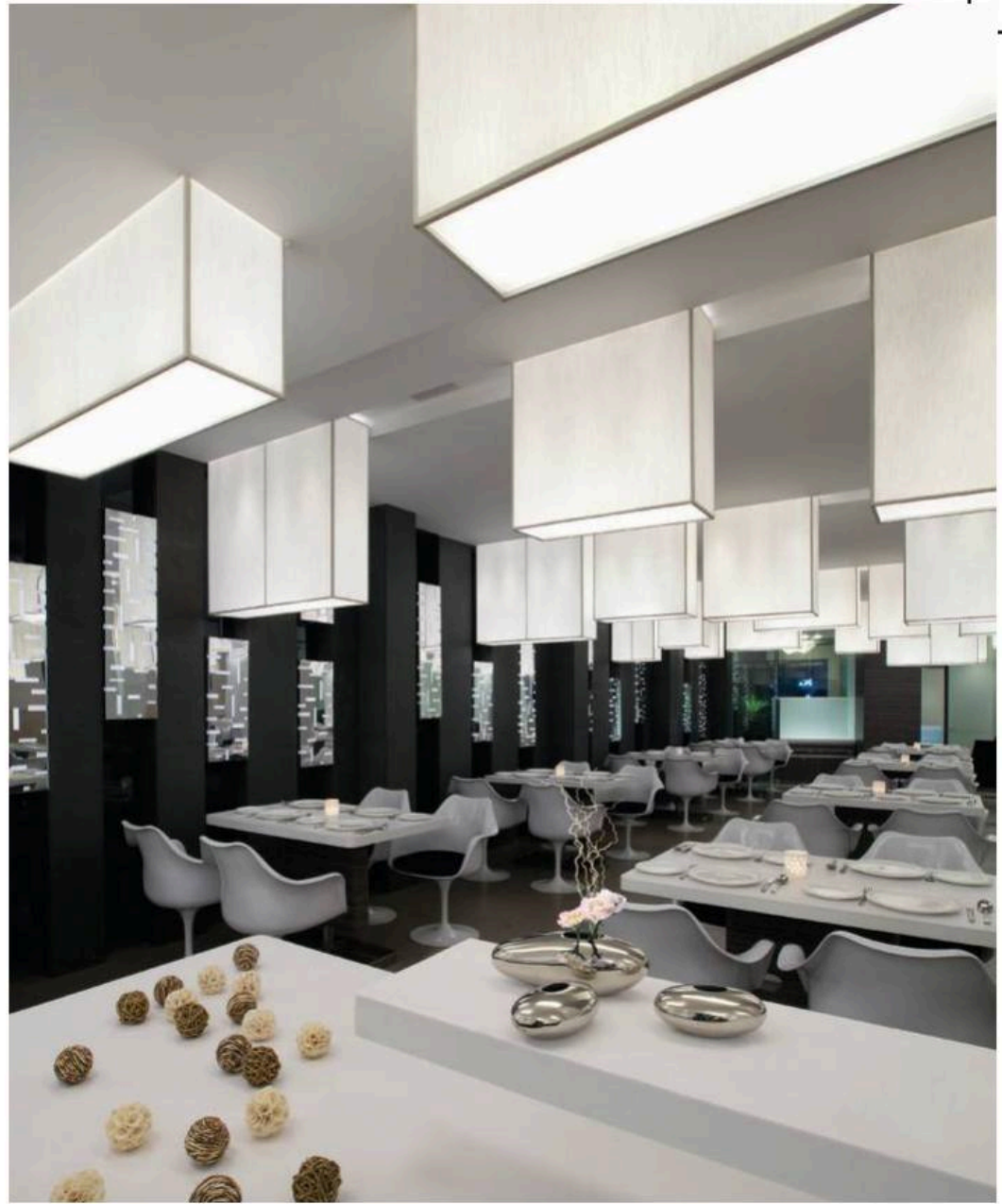
Concept :

The project is part of the JDT Islam Campus, a Muslim orphanage. The architectural firm was invited to design a prototype school for primary grade which could be assessed for its performance and physical setting on the campus. The project was designed as a catalyst to trigger quality interventions on the campus. The site was identified as a linear left over track between a girl's school and an existing old school building in the 20 acre site. The project had to be realized on a shoestring budget, in a village with limited skills and resources.

Key elements :

- designed as porous and inviting assemblage of classrooms and spaces rather than monolithic functional blocks to encourage interactive spaces
- exterior resembles three-dimensional building blocks, creating a multitude of sensorial and formal attributes, with changing forms when encountered from different vantage points
- huge windows, uniquely designed, allow streaming daylight into classrooms, saving substantial dependency on artificial lighting and add distinct character to each classroom





MEZBAN—INVERTED TOPOGRAPHY HOSPITALITY

Location : Calicut

Area : 3,000 sq. ft.

Concept :

The project is part of a business hotel which has been redesigned as a repositioning exercise. The strategy was to create a new identity to the already popular restaurant through interior architecture, making it a new dining destination. The design derives its strength from the innovative architectural lighting.

Key elements :

- highly flexible layout with higher efficiency on floor
- seating capacity of 2 to 4 pax per table
- waiting lounge outside the restaurant space showcases the restaurant floor
- custom designed lights along the exterior wall by Collaborative Architecture called 'Thousand Moons' create an undulating topography and lighting quality





GENDER BENDER INSTALLATION

Location : New Delhi

Area : 300 sq. ft.

Concept :

The installation, in association with Asian Paints, tries to address questions such as: Can architecture insinuate gender identities? Can space reflect alternate attitudes and lifestyles? How can space reflect the activism and non-conformist view of the groups who erase gender barriers? Can a space be called androgynous – gender fluid? Collaborative Architecture believes that Gender Bending is less to do with the aphorisms, sexuality and the externality that people associate with lifestyle. On the contrary, what makes the group unique is their courage to question social mores, a given gender, the status quo and the non-confirmative attitude. Space itself has no sex, it is non-gendered, but it can be infused and attributed with one.

Key elements :

- exterior is clad with mirror finished aluminum composite panel which is reflective of the societies views of alternate gender issues
- the slated trapezoidal prism reflect color in a multitude of ways depending on the angle of view of the spectator, throwing across a different view, color palette and interpretation of gender fluidity ifj

