



DECEMBER '08

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archohm works

You know you are growing old when the years go faster and faster. So it was with 2008, it began with my first ever foray into adventure tourism, and is now about to end.
This month I am opening a Pandora's Box of sorts- I am going to share my thoughts regarding architecture, architects and their place in society.

In ancient Greece, the architect was a 'chief builder' or 'master builder' who conceived, designed, detailed, managed and supervised the construction of buildings. From those times to the medieval, architects were multi-dimensional with respect to their skills- typically being good engineers, artists and sculptors as well. Examples abound from Vitruvius to Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. They had a venerated role in society and indeed if their names have come down to us, it is because they were often acknowledged on prominently displayed plaques on the walls of their creations.

In today's world, architects have a far more complex role, where apart from designing buildings and spaces, they need to also assist clients in obtaining building sanctions and permits, preparing and awarding tenders, making construction schedules and the like, and (where required), supervising the construction as well. They have to coordinate the design efforts of a number of allied professionals like structural engineers, HVAC and electrical consultants, landscape architects and horticulturists, etc.
It therefore warms the cockles of one's heart when one sees inscriptions like the one at Alais, for that is the Western world.

Until the Architects' Bill was passed (Government of India Act No 20 of 1972) anyone could call himself an 'architect' in India. Subsequently the title is protected by this Act which allows for simple imprisonment of upto three months for those who use this title without proper certification.

Today in India, an architect means different things to different people. To some the architect is a trusted consultant who creates a design solution for a client that addresses the project's needs- present and future, creating spaces and buildings that help the client live and work better; by providing timely and expert consultancy on all things to do with architecture.
To some others, the architect is a necessary evil, needed to obtain building permissions and completion certificates, valuations from banks and financial institutions, and to certify contractors' bills. A classical example of Indian English is the ease with which people interchange 'architect' and 'architectural'. As a true statement, made in my presence- 'Yeh building singapuratik ke architecture ne design kari hain'. The underlying factor though is that in either case, nobody thinks it fit to mention the architect on the foundation stones, etc.

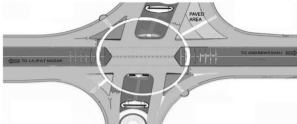
My case rests:
This month Sourabh pays tribute to one of the most enduring materials- concrete. Used by the Romans two thousand years ago, it is still very much in fashion! One of Archohm's well-wishers and noted structural designer- Manoj Gupta, has chosen to write about innovations in structural design. Sharing space is another renowned structural designer, Panjag Gupta, who has unraveled the mysteries of the Erasmus Bridge for us. Please mail us who you think are the best architects of all time. It would be interesting to understand if popular perceptions match ours. And just as an aside, Sourabh and I don't agree on this one- he thinks my choice is not quite [wright]!

Masters of Modern Architecture:
Gropius, Wright, Corbusier
-Kunal Savarkar



FEEDBACK:
Congratulations!
...a brilliant job...the creative input that your firm puts in is amazing! Eagerly waiting to know more about you!
-Manoj K. Juyal

CONGRATS ! You guys seem to be doing great work and having a good time too... That's not the regular updates through your 'Archohmeter'.
-Amit Sengupta



Delhi's Moolchand Khairatram Hospital was the successor of the original charitable hospital built by the grandfather and grandson pair of Moolchand and Khairatram at Lahore.
The intersection of Lala Lajpat Rai Marg and the Ring Road was identified as a point of traffic congestion in the late 1970s. A flyover with a unique double curve was built there, but by the late 1990s even that was not able to take care of the huge traffic volumes.
As the city of Delhi grew, and the Ring Road began to be used by a multitude of vehicles to move across the city, it was clear that the Ring Road needed to be free of traffic intersections. However this was tricky at Moolchand, as there was already a flyover crossing the Ring Road. A decision was therefore taken to build an underpass that would pass beneath the existing intersection thereby allowing uninterrupted traffic along the Ring Road. The design also took into account the fact that eventually both the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Metro projects would also cross this intersection.

Archohm in turn was commissioned to provide a complete design solution that addressed the issues of linkages- both vehicular as well as pedestrian- with the broader aesthetics of a large urban insert that consciously as well as sub-consciously impacts the psyche of road users on a continuous 24/7 basis.
The design scheme includes the eye-catching pedestrian subways on either side of the underpass, along the Ring Road, which are popularly referred to as 'caterpillars' by members of the public.
Yet another innovative facet of the design is the 'shade creators' that cut down light as one passes from the bright outdoors into the relatively dark spaces of the underpass. The idea is to create a gradual change in quantity of light, and making the driving experience better. The sides of the underpass are highlighted by the use of stone, and innovative lighting that aids drivers. The task of converting the existing two level intersection into a three grade interchange, supplemented by a grid of pedestrian crossings, was begun in 2003 and completed in 2006.
This is a project which pleasantly surprised people across various sections in Delhi. It proved that urban inserts can make a positive- both integrable as well as invaluable- impact on society at large. To Archohm this urban design project was almost akin to a 'delhi tax' that we gladly paid, for the privilege of improving our built environment.

The last word: To me the motivating final factor for joining hands with Sourabh was the fact that the Moolchand Underpass was designed by Archohm.
"Ask not what Delhi can do for you, ask what you can do for Delhi"
Adapted of course from JFK's immortal quote.



Kunal Savarkar: The editor of the newsletter getting a re-introduction as he has extended himself to writing on one of the Archohm projects that brought him to join us at the Archohm team. So while we were paying the 'Delhi tax' by doing such a project, we got the best reward (read fees) in cash and kind by having his invaluable time and energy synergising with Archohm.

It has often been a difficult judgement, whether to infuse architecture into structure or to infuse structure into architecture. Both are inevitably dominant. Just to explain through a few recent examples:

The Khalsa Heritage Complex in Punjab has made an extensive use of architectural fair faced concrete, comprising Blast Furnace Slag cement to give a colour to suit the likings of the architect Moshe Safdie. In addition, preparation of a large number of mock ups led to an unmatched quality.



The Atrium hotel in Bangkok incorporated the innovative features of pre-cast concrete banded slab system (way back in 1991) that could make 20cm thick slab span 8.2m with 4.0m long cantilevers to meet the architectural demand, while allowing the remarkable speed of constructing a floor in just 7 days thereby helping the owners achieve a quicker return on investment.

Architecturally pleasing piers, crash barriers, lighting posts, lip shaped voided slab superstructures, etc have made the Mukerba Chowk flyover in Delhi an eye catching landmark project, where riders hope for a red signal (which of course is not present!) so that they can admire the beauty of the grade separators.



The approach flyovers of the Wazirabad Signature bridge incorporate curved rib shaped protrusions from the spine shaped superstructure, altogether adding a new feature, wherein the architectural element has been camouflaged into structural needs to support transverse cantilevers of the deck slab. Textured concrete for piers, crash barriers and RS Wall panels add elegance to the project.

I would end by stating simply that carefully weighing architectural and structural features would necessarily provide aesthetic pleasure.

Vinay Gupta: One of the leading structural consultants working with renowned firm of TPCCL, has been a friend and colleague for Archohm in its journey to shape up the various infrastructure projects of Delhi. As an engineer for architects, he is very open and optimistic, believing in expanding an architect's imagination rather than restricting it.

in focus



The Erasmus Bridge, designed by architect Ben Van Berkel gave a new face to Rotterdam. Much hyped and publicized, it went through its rounds of speculation and criticism before it opened to the Dutch masses on September 6, 1996. It is 808 metres long, with a 139 metres high asymmetrical pylon which earned the bridge its nickname of 'The Swan'. The construction of the bridge cost approximately 75 million euros.

I am not going to bore you with the structural analysis of the bridge though my design instincts drive me to elaborate on the same. Even without thinking of the technology and the engineering, one cannot stop admiring the sheer beauty of the bridge, the scale, the shape and the influence it has on the people of a city. Not only does this put a city on the global platform but literally and metaphorically opens new avenues of development. At the entry from the city, one sees a new reorganized structure and land use that smoothly picks people from one side of the river. Within the project, the bridge, one accommodates functions like offices and commercial space, also developing the riverfront for public views and use. Then at the exit to the other side, a complete new program of mixed land use is planned. This is where the Erasmus Bridge enters into the new Wilhelminapier, a reclaimed piece of land to house state of the art offices, public functions like theatres and schools as well as to accommodate large residential developments. A small pavilion designed at the foot of the bridge gives information on the projects and picture perfect panoramas of the city.
Thus, a single intervention like a new bridge across the city river, opens up a radical redevelopment of the urban fabric and brings in a sense of character and belonging to the city.
Wonder what could happen if the 'Delhi Noida Direct project' of the past and the 'Barapulla Nallah Bridge project' of the future were treated in a similar fashion.
How might the skyline of Delhi look?



Panjag Gupta: He has literally brought structural stability to Archohm, providing design solutions that take our mad ideas through to fruition. A friend, also family, he is incredibly in sync with Archohm in energy, enthusiasm and philosophy of design and life.

Though an optimist, whenever I see a new metro station in Delhi or a large scale urban redevelopment for traffic reorganization in the city, I feel another opportunity has been lost!

This feeling comes because when one exposes himself to sensibly designed and strategically planned projects in other parts of the world, the power of such projects unfolds dramatic results. One such project is the Erasmus bridge across the river Rotte in Rotterdam, in The Netherlands.

NEWS:

The diwali party in office: In the midst of a thousand and one deadlines and submissions, archohm took the time to celebrate Diwali in a big way. The celebrations began with a screening of a humorous film that showed the best of the Mandwaas trip (See archohmeter October 2008 for details)- bringing back memories of fun times, lots of laughing, and more! This was followed by a round of Tambola; after which the party moved out into the front yard- which resembled a veritable conference of chat-sellers. The idea was to gorge on these spicy delicacies, follow it up with a gulab jamun or two, all washed down with some cola. Just as people thought it was all over, a humungously long and drawn out series of fire-cracker explosions were heard, drawing onlookers from all around. It was an extra long 'taff' (chain of fire crackers), with 5,000 individual crackers, give or take a few!

The new office puja: After a lot of deliberation, and lightning quick execution of interior works, Archohm occupied its new building, located just a couple of minutes away. This was preceded by a puja to eliminate all negative energies. Thus the new premises were occupied in a most auspicious manner.

UPCOMING PROJECTS:

Ebony Gaur: Archohm assisted in design and development of a second 'Ebony Gaurier' store in Gujrat, almost like an annual event as the previous one at Noida opened exactly 12 months back. This exercise in facilitating a clean and clear process of construction was clinically executed in record time. Archohm's expertise on detailing and project management were both tested here.

Lucknow Stapur Toll Plaza: Is yet another addition in toll lanes and Archohm's national highway coverage!

Next edition of Archohmeter onwards we will be adding a toll lane metre and the kilometres Archohm adds to its project profile. The plazas to be designed for the DS constructions, will be a standard device for reliable, efficient and economical solutions.
BECIL Office: The broadcasting consultants responsible for setting up all the FM stations and allied infrastructure across the country are moving into their own corporate office building designed by Archohm. Interior design works are in progress to move these vibrant group of engineers into an even more exciting environment.



DID YOU KNOW?

Jorn Utzon, the architect of the Sydney Opera House never stepped inside his magnum opus, because of a fight with the state government. According to legend, the Dane's designs for Australia's most famous building were rescued from the pile of 233 rejects by one of the judges.
Sanjay Gupta Interior Designer
Irem Singh Draughtsman
Kushaal Draughtsman
Asif Aquebal Draughtsman
Vikas Electrical draughtsman

LARGEST FOUNTAIN:

The Fountain of Wealth: Located in the centre of Suntec City Mall in Singapore with a base area of 1,683 square metres, this fountain is distinguished by a bronze ring supported on four legs, weighing a hefty 85 tonnes. The ring shoots water inwards into the reservoir below while at the heart of the fountain, water shoots up to 30 metres into the air. According to Feng Shui experts (Chinese geomancers), the water flowing inwards represents riches pouring in. Take a walk round the fountain and touch the water for good luck and prosperity. Who knows, it might just work for you!

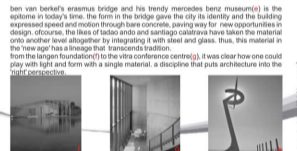
sourabh's desk

I was honoured by the Indian Concrete Institute by being asked to present a paper on aesthetics for their theme 'concrete for new age structures'. concrete, a material that has completely changed the face of architecture in the world, an invention that provided us architects and engineers with incredible flexibility and power to express our thoughts and skills.
From my favourite projects in history by le corbusier and wright to their contemporaries in zaha hadid and herzog & samson, all have interpreted concrete in incredibly creative manifestations.



corbusier's la tourette(a) and ronchamp(b) clearly expressed how concrete could be moulded organically as well as played with using extreme discipline of clear line and planes.
wright's johnson wax factory(c) demonstrated the immense imaginative potential of the material through its famous mushroom columns.
zaha hadid's fire station(d) brought the possibility of using concrete in planes but with a complexity of another level.

ben van berkel's erasmus bridge and his trendy mercedes benz museum(e) is the epitome in today's time, the form in the bridge gave the city its identity and the building expressed speed and motion through bare concrete, paving way for new opportunities in design. of course, the likes of tadao ando and santiago calatrava have taken the material onto another level altogether by integrating it with steel and glass. thus, this material in the 'new age' has a lineage that transcends tradition.
from the lagan foundation(f) to the vitra conference center(g), it was clear how one could play with light and form with a single material, a discipline that puts architecture into the 'right' perspective.



from the barcelona tv tower(h) and the lyon station to the seville bridge, calatrava has always expressed his skills in creating a scale, a sculpted built form that touches even the most naive user, a strength, all structures should ideally evoke.
summary: the glorious past of concrete needs to be punctuated by inclusion of a 'new age' indian architect and friend, gurjeet singh matharoo who has defied all by persisting with concrete to create some landmarks in indian architecture.
carrying this as our starting point, the next level in concrete construction, engineered to further innovations and design is incredibly exciting, a suspense that keeps one going to play with this material day in and day out.
structures, buildings as well as infrastructure, need to speak a clean, honest language of construction that follows logic. it needs to be as bare and as basic as science and can be engineered into exotic forms through imaginative engineering, this brings out the strength of concrete, a material that can be moulded practically into any form and can function in every sphere of our modern life.

From concrete doors and furniture to buildings and bridges, the design trends of the future look at this material with great optimism.

editorial

guest thoughts

design news