



JULY 2011

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The observant (and jobless) amongst you must have realized that we have now completed 3 years – that is 36 months of continuous badgering of our contributors, staff, printers and the like. In the words of King Canute – yes, the same dude who vainly ordered the waves of the North Sea to retreat – “Battling, struggling, pushing, fighting, killing much and robbing more!” Basically we’ve done all it takes to keep this journal going. I want to thank Sourabh for his relentless enthusiasm and Mohit for his complete support.

July is the month when Archonites get down to the grind – post Archotour (which has seen 4 successful sojourns in Europe thus far) – and buckle up to cram in 22 months of work in the next 11 – to reduce their guilt at leaving office for 10 days of mad fun. Now is also the time when new architectural and interior design traditions will be introduced to Archotour. Archotour has always looked for fresh thinkers and has actively worked towards mentoring young designers from various fields. Towards that aim the 2 winners of the Creative Design contest titled “Archonmentation” were also part of Archotour 4. A prize for their creativity!



Archotour 4 to the UK!

As our weary troops return from Archotour Four, which took them to ‘Old Blighty’ – the quaint Hindi/ Urdu term ‘Vilayat’ has its roots in that. I thought it would be an appropriate time to examine the legacy of British colonial architecture in India – and even more specifically that concerning the chief mode of travel of the day – rail. The British were intrepid adventurers with a profound sense of destiny guiding them in all their actions. They were Empire builders, and the Indian railways were the skeleton that held the Empire together. Railway Stations were therefore built on a grand scale, all marked by an architecture that was built to last. Railway termini like Victoria Terminus at Mumbai (now renamed CST), the spectacular Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus in the Indo-Saracenic style and of course Lucknow’s iconic Charbagh Station.



As an architect enamoured of history, and one who has travelled the length and breadth of India by train, also being one who yet despairs of ever completely seeing all of its charms and hidden wonders, I am constantly on the lookout for new destinations. Anyone who has any suggestions – within India please – please feel free to send me their counsel for my next break.

In this month’s Archotourer you will find an article by Sourabh on the Nizamuddin House: one by Saniya where she discusses her experience of interiors at Archotour and an article by Kunal Patel – on the Maggie’s Centre by the iconic architect Zaha Hadid – her first project in the United Kingdom. The Design Wall starts off yet another debate – this time on whether design is subjective; or can it be right or wrong? To round up matters, Sourabh is writing on architectural practices. I know why he is suddenly inspired on this subject – read his article to find out!

Until August then, it is cheers from us at Archotourer. Mohit is expecting some bouquets at archotourer@archotour.com. Please do write in to her and let her how you thought of the first issue of our fourth year in print!

- Kunal Savarkar

editorial

in focus

This is the residence for Mr. Ashish Tanuja in Nizamuddin, New Delhi. This 270 square meter abode is planned as an upside down house with a rooftop garden and pool, coming down to the living and dining areas and further down to the private sleeping spaces. The unit therefore responds exceptionally to a tight location, compact site and exciting client expectations.



the terrace garden

each aspect of design has been controlled and sculpted in such a manner than one can see a play in space creation, from the mix of volumes, materials and natural light.

a lot of the light is brought in strategically without views of the



bedroom on the first floor



the double height atrium

neighboring houses infringing through the concrete fins spanning forty feet. This gives a phenomenal expanse of totality as one climbs through the double flight of steps that bring you to the living area. Here one sees this sheer magnum of the space which has a glazed skylight connected across three levels, flooding the entire atrium with natural light.

the house is punctuated with a variety of indoor plants which not only help clean the environment around them, but act as easy aesthetic tools.

the real interiors have been sourced from zoljira, a boutique which offers the finest contemporary European furniture for the Indian market. a visual dialogue is brought about through the color scheming of each room in various warm hues of greens, beiges and reds which are accessorized by textured wallpapers and soft furnishings. unconventional clocks, artworks and lights lend a fun attitude to the residence.

the bare concrete and glass, the basic kota stone and bold colours bring in a rustic envelope within which the most modern and contemporary furniture and fixtures are housed, they fit well. thus, pure forms and textures express their capacity to have an aesthetic life as well as an ability to absorb all.

- sourabh gupta



the Maggie's Centre

has been no stopping in terms of learning and enjoying learning.

Whenever I had thought of how my job would be the principle ingredient which defined it was that, it should be a place where everyday is a new design day with nothing monotonous and having been here for some time now I can surely say that my decision of associating myself with Archotour was not wrong. From the day I joined, be it the Zoljira studio or the different residences I was given, in



The Zoljira Studio



The Zoljira Studio

Saniya Sharrad - Packed with energy, our 4 month young interior designer – Saniya extends her enthusiasm to all those she works with. But if you can't keep pace with her, mind you, you will politely yet curly be told to expedite. Recently back from her Masters in Design from the UK, she brings in the necessary international flavor and rigor to the team.

guest thoughts

design news



Maggie's Centre, File, UK

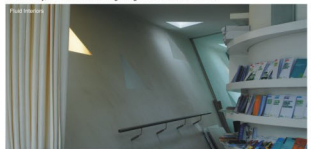
Hidden behind the Victoria hospital in Kircaldy, is yet another masterpiece by Zaha Hadid. The Maggie's centre, File is a support centre for cancer patients. The place is a haven to the distressed souls, fighting cancer – where they can drop in for a cup of tea and a chat with one of the cancer support specialists, to browse the library or to access one of the courses designed to help people live with, through and beyond the disease.

Laid out as an open plan, the external angular walls of the centre, open up in the front towards the lush green ravine – establishing a visual connect to the nature. The skewed angular walls, make dramatic cantilevers on the outside, giving the centre a geometric feel – as an element of pause between the wilderness of the forest on one side and tall hospital building on the other.

The internal walls are made soft by giving a slight curve, also allowing the spaces to blend into each other fluidly. The triangles of void bring in the natural light from outside, the smooth texture of the surfaces, the inviting warmth of the couches and designer chairs – all lend warm comfortable vibe to the centre, perfectly toning down the stark bold lines of the building structure.

All in all, the Maggie's centre is a building that makes one feel at ease, creating a sense of respite – by the walls that envelope and fold over to create a cocoon of protection.

Undoubtedly, one of the best buildings we got to see on the Archotour.



Kunal Patel - KD, as he is lovingly called in office, was a great asset on the Archotour - by being our very own GPS. His exceptional navigation skills are solely responsible for us being completely exhausted by the end of the trip. Reserved and reliable by nature, he speaks through his work and his positive attitude. This Zaha Hadid, Calatrava fan is an architect who pays great attention to structural details.

Archotour - the mad house of design. I have been here for four months but it feels like a lifetime - a lifetime in which I've tasted everything from sheer pressure to real fun times. Archotour to me is the storehouse of the most unconventional design ideas.

home page

News:



Archotour 4 - the group of 15



At the Arup office



Get together at South Kensington



Shahzad Ahmad

"To me, Archotour by far is the best office. I have learned a lot in the last 10 years despite many twists and turns in the journey. I've never felt lonely in these ten years since we all work together as one big family. The office trip to Neemrana has been a really special one and is etched in my memory. My request to all employees is to work hard and work together carefully to elevate Archotour to new heights. I wish and pray that my office continues to grow by leaps and bounds. Ameen."

- Shahzad Ahmad

BIRTHDAYS THIS MONTH:		NEW JOINEES:	
Anindya Ghosh	- First	Alex Thomas	- Trainee
Shivdutt	- First	Akhay Kore	- Trainee
Trilok	- Tenth	Shivas Tikoo	- Trainee
Keshav	- Seventeenth		
Preema	- Twenty Second		
Sourabh Gupta	- Twenty Sixth		
Siddharth	- Twenty Eighth		

Archotour 4 - This year's design expedition was to the United Kingdom. A group of 15 Archonites explored London – Newcastle – Glasgow – Edinburgh – Dundee – Manchester – Sheffield-Birmingham – Leicester and Cambridge in just 10 days. The moody English weather failed to dampen their spirits as they relentlessly camped, cooked and drove through Great Britain. As promised, the creative design architecture winners – Akshay Kore and Alex Thomas were also on board.

Arup and Foster+ Partners office visit - The Archotour team was granted a lifetime opportunity to visit and interact with the world's leading architecture practices namely Arup and Foster. This experience was truly an adrenalin rush and it injected new found enthusiasm in all the privileged ones who attended this rendezvous on the Archotour.

Archotour get together at South Kensington - On Saturday evening, the 11th of June, an Archotour get-together was organized in London. All ex-employees and friends in UK made it to this impromptu do. Thank you Chris, Tabitha, Ronak, Phil, Dhnanajay, Afzal, Kauntey and Bas of course, for taking out time.

Spotlight SHAHZAD AHMAD - Senior Engineer

"If there was a fire in the office, Shahzad would be the last man out" was my opinion of him year before last, on our ten year anniversary celebration. I maintain that and would like to believe that. Any task given is always accomplished and accomplished to the best. Shahzad is an enthusiastic worker interested and interesting in Archotour. He has completed a decade in Archotour and I wish the next decade will see him in even better light at our office. Quiet as he may appear, he is the voice of the office! We all at Archotour thank him and wish him luck."

- Sourabh Gupta

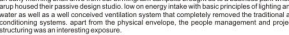
sourabh's desk

foster and arup are perhaps the leading english design and engineering practices. these are large scale offices across the uk and with a fairly strong global presence.

archotour had a chance to visit them as part of the archotour.



the arup office - exterior



the arup office - interior

an early morning brisk drive from our Birmingham campsite brought us to a business park where arup housed their passive design studio. low on energy intake with basic principles of lighting and water as well as a well conceived ventilation system that completely removed the traditional air conditioning systems. apart from the physical envelope, the people management and project structuring was an interesting exposure.



foster+partners office in london



the gherkin by foster+partners

the day ended with a light drive through the thick of london traffic into the foster office. it was an impressive and a basic built envelope overlooking the river, thames. walking through working models, the scale, the variety and the sheer quantum of work this office was producing was intimidating a fairly two dimensional working methodology with partners and norman foster working through a structured process of design and control. the experience of looking at old models of existing signature global projects as well the new works under design was an enriching, almost surreal experience.

archotour, an exposure driven exploration brought back great experiences from these practice visits. It gave us an insight to global practices, their philosophy and methodology. no lectures or books, no talks and no research can come at par with this first hand experience. what one wonders - is what makes these practices special, what makes them work. how do they position themselves, how they perform, their solutions are clearly special but what is even more special is that they make their presence felt, they make an effort to make and maintain their position. it is almost as important as maintaining a high quality of work.

i always tell the archotour team that these practices face the same difficult clients, they all run out of project money, there are always timeline issues and contractual complications. good money cannot be the only drivers and everything cannot be built or rather unbuilt around this argument.

back to the point of quality positioning of every practice, i sincerely feel that all of us in india have great potential to develop great practices. we need to value ourselves.

as i write this sitting in new york, kunal represents archotour with a talk on archotour in lbya at the inlie exhibition at the india habitat centre, new delhi, where he propounds the same idea, we need to fight this foreign architect fashion growing in our country, be the 'foreign returned' architects aptly filling the gap and obviously doing a better job!

form vs. function is design subjective? Or can it be right or wrong?

A design is not subjective. Its appeal however, may be.

What makes up a design is set criteria like - functionality, response to context and climate, spatial purity, appropriate use of materials, expression, form, etc. So when a design fulfills all these requirements or it doesn't. If it does, it is a good design, if it doesn't, it is not. There is no middle ground here, no scope for speculation based on mere subjective opinions cast by waves of the aesthetics.

if a design is not functionally accurate, spatially wrong and has foolish use of materials, then even if it looks aesthetically pleasing to certain people, it is not a good design. Hence no, design is not subjective. And yes, it can be good or bad.

It is a curious task to define a design as right or wrong. Wikipedia says, design (noun) a specification of an object, manufactured by an agent, intended to accomplish goals, in a particular environment, using a set of primitive objects/elements, satisfying a set of requirements, subject to constraints.

Thus, the key to the solution is to define the constraints! Now these constraints may vary from person to person based upon the action being taken (design driven) or the rational thinking (plan driven).

As per the former a design can never be wrong as it has evolved out of the emotions of the designer. In this case only the designer can claim it to be wrong! In the latter case, you may judge the design as per what you consider as 'constraints' and term it right or wrong but what is interesting is that even your choice of constraints may be considered right or wrong by someone else. So I wouldn't rather than saying its subjective, I would say that a design is both right and wrong at the same time. A better scale would be to define how Utopian it is!

- Vidhu Sivasana



How does the work?

How do you open the refrigerator?

How does the telephone work?

How does the microwave work?

How does the microwave work?

Art is subjective, design isn't. Design is a problem solving activity and it needs to fulfil requirements. A good design has to perform the task it was intended for and must do so for as long as possible without failure. A Good design is objective.

Having said that, designs can succeed or fail on a number of levels, some of which are subjective. Some of which aren't. Things like the overall concept, mood and its visual appeal are subjective, one person might think a design succeeded in its overall goals whereas another might think it failed. To decide this you probably need to have knowledge of the big picture, the overall design goals, the context, the without any context what can you really critique? Design execution. The execution of a design is the nitty-gritty details of the design. These can be so incredibly wrong that they stand out no matter how good the overall concept, mood and visual appeal may be. Here are some examples of miserably wrong designs.

- Mohit Sahai

* THE WALL is a platform where a design issue is raised and people give their opinions on it.

If you wish to be a part of future discussions please contact mohit@archotour.com

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the wall