



Manish Gulati writes on how architecture should be treated as a living organism that changes, adapts itself and responds to every change around it

Does the architect define an architectural style or is the architect defined by their style? Does the architectural design ever confine itself into any style in the first place? These are the questions I have continuously asked myself over 15 years of my practice. In the end there is only one definite conclusion that I have been able to draw and that is that architecture is meant for the people for whom it is designed, not for the architects. It's purely contextual, both in space and time. Its purpose is not to redefine the living patterns of the people using it but to mould and continuously re-mould itself to adapt itself as per the evolving lifestyles and human patterns. I go further in saying, why stop at humans? The design needs to become more like a fluid yet super responsive void that is not only filled by the million ever-changing frames of the human living patterns. The design also provides a conducive environment for nature to grow and take over, forming that close knit bond where both co-exist in a symbiotic relationship, giving back to each other every moment and helping in a more healthy relationship of humans with their environment.

Only when the newly-built architecture has faced every season, from the burning heat to the chilling cold, drenched all over with the wind swept rains; only when it has learnt to live with every living creature, from birds to moths to dogs, cats and human beings; only then does it become architecture.

I think the best possible example of architecture is to create a building which nature accepts and thrives on. If nature grows over your building, if the tree, plants, leaves, insects, birds, animals accept your architecture, it is your first win; but if nature rejects it, then you are doing something wrong.

Manifestation of Fluid Architecture (M:OFA) is a realisation of a design theory

where architectural realms are redefined beyond the rules of regularised grids, dimensions and principles. Architecture in this context becomes a more fluid expression, continuously throbbing with vibrations of life. Here, the walls bend, column grids twist and the floors rise up and fall responding to the ever-changing energy fields created by the life forms it houses. The architectural box melts into a fluid, leaving a void to adjust the continuous paradoxes of the modern lifestyle.

If you look closer at our traditional Indian architecture, sustainability has been a way of life for us. Smart Green architecture entails zero wastage; it means that you manage three basic criteria – water, energy and waste control. When you say that you have managed your water requirements, consequently making yourself self-sustained or have monitored and controlled the energy requirements in such a way that you live off the grid thereby creating a building where your in-house waste is completely re-used and does not go out into unregulated landfills, only then you justify the term sustainability.



The winning building design of DPCC Head Office, serves as an 'Urban Sponge'.



Design Pavilion at Design ID 2014- Public Art installation, Sustainability and Collaboration

When we designed the head office for Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC), it was designed to be not only completely environment-friendly but to also help in cleaning up the pollution within the micro environment, much like a sponge. Through our multiple collaborative workshops with scientists and environmentalists, we came up with solutions like bentonite brick filters as construction material. Bentonite clay mixed with certain other additives over the wall surfaces can absorb the smog, particulate matter and can act as a filter to clean the air. So the air from the three parking lots in the office would channelise through these walls and gets filtered in the process, thereby, affecting the microclimate and air quality of that area. Further, reusing discarded shipping pallets to collecting rainwater in large tanks that run like tunnels around the basement, not only takes care of the drinking water requirement for the entire office but also helps in bringing the ambient temperatures down. We ensure that no system works in isolation; each system benefits the other and in effect benefits the entire building, the microclimate and the macroclimate. We planned to tap into the local sewerage into our sewage treatment plants and extract gas for turbines to generate power, water for running our HVAC plants and manure for all the terrace gardens.

In our other project, National Institute of Fashion Design at Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, the clues were drawn from every tree and rock on the site. The site, which lies on a hill top surrounded by Dhauladhar range, has mango and banyan trees as old as 60 -70 years. It would have been a crime not to consider their presence. Hence, our first line on paper was drawn only when every branch of every tree on site was not only documented on a survey plan but also mapped in our 3D software. Extreme care was taken while designing structures around these trees and the entire construction was a constant struggle, adapting and re-adapting the design so that the overall architecture becomes a part of the much larger and older microcosm. Its a sheer joy to experience this wonderful play of nature and architecture within multiple verandahs and terraces where the design students are able to work with nature surrounding them and the sweet tasting mangoes literally falling into their laps from the trees nearby.

Sometimes you just know that you done everything right - a design that is honest and humble that rises from the earth and merges with nature. The sharp lines of bold architecture are blurred by the soft edges of those million leaves and hundreds of flowers. The toughness of that stone masonry is softened by nature.

You are just an architect. You are just human. Mother Nature quietly and swiftly embraces your architecture, to melt it into a formless spirit filled with immense life - those innumerable butterflies, wasps and birds that claim the land more than you ever could. You just drew a few lines, the lines you thought would define the destiny of the land. The lines no longer clearly exist; nature has redesigned over your plans. Those bold lines blend into myriad shades of life, colors that you as an architect just couldn't imagine.

Under this context, can you as an architect define any particular style? I call it schizophrenic architecture, fluid, yet highly responsive. It exists in contradictions and paradoxes. What I think today for a certain context and time condition may not hold good tomorrow if any of the above two conditions change, which they will. So in that sense, architecture is more like a blank canvas with every condition getting resolved like a puzzle through multiple permutations and combinations, through juxtapositions of natural perfections to human errors. It is important that the architecture foresees these anomalies that would happen in time and make space for them to adapt and grow into a new language of design, a language that cannot be defined in words or through a set of few lines that make up architecture in today's world. ■