

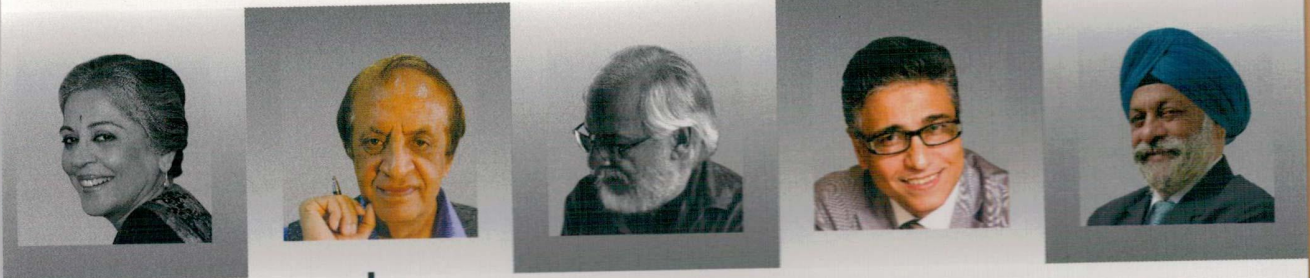
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Ar. Manish Gulati
MOFA Studios



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Creating Sustainable Architecture

Having worked for more than 15 years as an architect has brought me to question the entire perspective of sustainability. Building green is a continuous process of debunking a few preconceptions and taking a more relevant approach to architecture and its close association with nature. The fast depletion of resources is hampering the ordered balance with which nature works, and creating a severe disturbance in the natural cycle. And if we don't make the right attempts to recover the natural balance, our own survival is at risk. By seeking refuge in green architecture, we are oversimplifying the problem.

Green has basically no generic definition. It is a very contextual subject. To impart green character to a building doesn't only have to comply with certifications. We've surmised that by ticking certain components on a certificate or by keeping up with building norms, we can make our buildings green. It is not a prototype model one can irrelevantly apply anywhere in the world. It is about understanding the context, where your building sits, the nature around it, the macro-micro climate and everything that restores the natural balance.

We have ceaselessly imitated building models from the West. If we look at our traditional Indian Architecture, be it the vernacular houses of Kerala or the havelis of Rajasthan, we were sustainable in every way, nor did we create wastage. Years of Imperialism followed by blind tracing of Imperialistic blueprints without contextual adaptations, ended up defining a generic building vocabulary. It bore no apparent connection to the locational context, climate or even skill sets available in India. It is, therefore, imperative to understand our contextual intricacies and to derive models from the Indian subconscious. We need to revert to our roots in order to generate sustainable and eco-friendly structures rather than just striving for green certifications from the West. It is perhaps the right time to reflect on how culturally and intellectually gifted we are as a nation.

Today, going green is synonymous with drawing heavily from alien techniques, with exorbitant financial concerns. A design lacking in cost efficiency can never be green, plus, there are financial and human resources that are rarely acknowledged. Each of the three has to balance the other in order to create self-sufficient sustainable buildings. Any irregularity between the three, be finances or engaging high manpower that adds to the carbon footprint, end up disturbing the macro climate. Sustainability, after all, is about achieving the balance.

I admire...

From the vernacular houses of Kerala to the Havelis and step wells of Rajasthan and Gujarat, one comes across absolutely balanced structures rooted in the regional



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landscape. Where there is any imbalance created by nature, vernacular architecture has always responded positively in filling the void. Step wells were built in barren lands to conserve water and create an enclosed ambient micro climate for travellers to drink and rest. By taking care of the human resource, this architecture took care of the natural balance. Panna Meena Baoli and Sagar Lake in Amer, Rajasthan, built around the 16th century, are interconnected reservoirs that conserve rainwater. Percolating and getting filtered through layers of fine silt and eventually to an impermeable layer of clay, the water flows through the lake and gets collected in wells.