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Fluid Spaces
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A photograph of a modern interior space. The ceiling is curved and white, with a red curved structure on the left. The walls are covered in wood paneling. A large, patterned rug is on the floor. In the background, there is a doorway and a wall with a red and black abstract painting. In the foreground, there is a low, dark wooden table with a white cushion and some framed photos.

FLUID SPACES

MOFA explores free flowing spaces that retain their individuality even as they transform the surface texture across 6000 sq. feet of complex, contemporary and personalized living areas for a Noida-based builder.

TEXT BY DEEPANJOLIE SONYA FIGG • PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY THE ARCHITECT

THIS SPREAD Multiple sections of plywood covered with a skin of reinforced cement, gypsum plaster result in fluidly flowing spaces melting and growing into one another instead of conventional straight walls. **TOP** The vertical window louvers infuse natural light into the living space. The central colour scheme border on the edgy: bright reds, mysterious black, old gold, natural wood tones and paler shades of tinted whites.




Delhi-based architectural team comprising principal architect, Manish Gulati, Tanushree Gulati, Aakriti Sood and Sajal Das together makes up MOFA, which is an acronym for manifestation of fluid architecture.

They certainly got a chance to live up to their christening when Noida-based builder Aman Mehra presented the core design team with the task of creatively planning out architectural aesthetics for his four bedroom penthouse. Spread across two levels, including a terrace pool to boot, the residence was expected to fulfill guest entertainment needs as well as meet his private relaxation requirements. They undertook the complete makeover of the structure given to them as 'an empty shell' and handed over fluid spaces to the client.

What made it possible for the MOFA team to move up from the conceptualization stage into the implementation one in just as free flowing a manner as the spaces they designed was their intrinsic realization for looking beyond the basic concrete slabs and column grid structure of the penthouse.

Since the team already had imagined endowing the Noida home with a personality just as vibrant as the owners, they conceived the structural tectonics as a force field that would melt, twist, swirl and renew each space it entered. This perception was the strong fundamental force responsible for transforming every element used in designing interior spaces within the home. With this challenging exercise in mind the MOFA team dwelled on viable architectural strategies that wouldn't compromise their vision for a fluid form to the given 'bones' of the house and yet ensure privacy, advanced aesthetics, ease of maintenance and staying within pre-determined costs.

The chief contractor was thereafter given the charge of devising various ingenious economical techniques that would help the design team find a middle ground between functionality and replicable fluid forms that ▶



THIS PAGE A close-up of the dining room reveals toughened steel merged with natural dark wood veneers which are elements of urban design - a theme that continues with bright red tones in suspended ceiling panels continuing in tableware and wall-art.

OPPOSITE PAGE

Architecture bordering on art: a bird's eye view of the family dining space.

were cost-effective as well as creatively satisfying. So, the end result includes plywood walls that are pliable but strong, as they have been reinforced by steel bars throughout, with a series of service conduits running through them much like blood vessels in any living organism would grant it a reason for existence.

The split between the two levels of the penthouse suite is accentuated by an inspired ribbon of light that floats in the open space like a fluid, 25 meter long sheet of paper, blurring the area where the two spaces divide - or merge.

This same ambiguous interspersing of spaces, but on this occasion, stretching across 3 generations of time instead of solid sets of rooms, is what clients, Aman & Bina asked of the MOFA team in their outwardly simple yet inherently multifaceted project brief: simplicity came via the creative freedom granted to the designers for applying innovations and advanced design techniques, choice of materials while layers of versatility were expressed in the sense of an innovative, livable home for three generations of the family.

Clearly the tone of MOFA's signature style is one that is definitely modern, speaking a global language, but other than these distinctive features, their youthful team's synergies are rooted in a very basic inspiration

of an endless journey of learning: Life.

"We believe our biggest influence is life itself. The complexity, simplicity, paradox, restrictions & fluidity that life itself has, is exceedingly mentally stimulating to apply, interpret & iterate. Every design has a soul, which comes out of our reflections of ideologies, fantasies, feelings, patterns, & forms that we see in life at that point of time. We take this soul further, empowering and nourishing it with our experience, dissections, analysis and ensuring workability within it. We try and replicate this soul in various layers, levels and mediums. What gets built is what effortlessly and fluidly pours itself from the idea to occupy the real space..." is how Tanushree puts across MOFA's design philosophy.

For Aman Mehra's personal residential space, the luxe-look to the dual level penthouse didn't come exactly without any challenges even with this kind of higher consciousness well in place. The wish list given by each of the 3 generations was in vivid contrast to each other. "The challenge was to fulfill those without making a kitsch and retain the sanctity of a true home intact..." for as Tanushree explains further, "It is here that one sees clearly how the same soul of the idea is interpreted varying for each generation." ▶



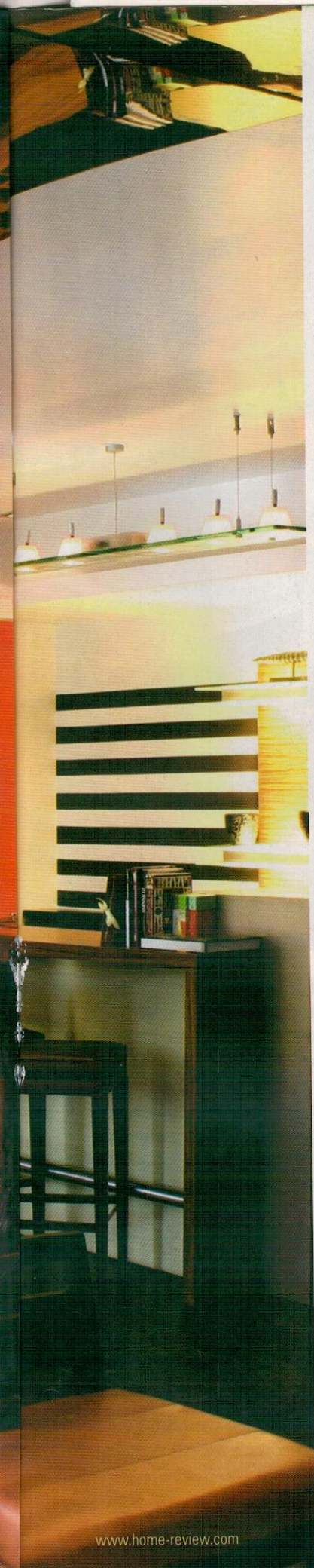
THIS SPREAD

Dynamic, bold and modular forms in bright colours give an animated look to the living room. **OPPOSITE TOP**

The upper lounge bedecked in warm, muted shades of beige, gold, bronze, natural wood tones and luxe furnishings were all part of the design process.

MIDDLE A section of the living room displaying curios above a wall-mounted shelf unit fixed on a game-board inspired wall; the playful mood is repeated via large, free-hand motifs on the coffee-table.

BOTTOM A view of the lower lounge reflects light and shadow play and use of eclectic installations induce life in the space.



THIS PAGE An unusual pod forms the kids sleeping area while a study table seems to emerge from the same notion of freedom in fluid creativity that connects various levels of the children's room design elements. **BOTTOM** Elegant, curved walls host toilet essentials, a sharp-edged C shaped towel rail and a look-down mirror in the kid's toilet make it apparent that it was no child's play to design a private space that would grow with its young owners.



What made it creatively fulfilling for the design team was that "in the end, most satisfying is the fact that each generation has filled those spaces accordingly and is of the notion that their own spaces are the best in the entire house. Also, the house being spread across three different levels made it important for us to club some functions and detach others in a way that the house functions like a joint family with contemporary values in a harmonizing way."

Bearing in mind they were given a penthouse unit located in a multi-story housing society, it was also imperative to keep creative instincts on a tight leash in so far as the structural grid and the outer façade were considered, which were not to be tampered with; this was the only architectural constraint, the team reveals.

Using the above mentioned as a skeleton boundary that was to be worked within and with, the MOFA team decided to "let the spaces flow into each other like a fluid, which melts and grows over the existing structure. This gave a basic fluidity and freedom to the plan..."



The ambitious luxurious lounging space blended into domestic bliss that makes up the Mehra home in Noida took 2 years to complete and its final form inspires a lot of awe from both residents and visitors. Not surprising at all, since at every turn and twist, there is a new, unexpected kind of feeling one experiences when moving through one space to another as the house kind of unfolds without missing a beat.

Tanushree likes to put it as, "This house has spaces as opposed to rooms. It's delightful to walk into an apartment, which seems to have a lot more of a distinct spatial quality and characteristics attached to it as compared to the common Delhi-bungalow fixation," signaling an ode to free-flowing personalized spaces for living it up: in true style! ■

THIS PAGE TOP & BOTTOM Sheer curtains draped over pavilions at the far end of the terrace cover an elegant chaise lounge seating. A flower-bedecked pool speaks of harmonizing natural elements with granite and sandstone floor.

