



“Vaastu is a matter of faith for some people and I don’t subscribe to it”

ARCHITECT’S VOICE

Born and brought up in Ajmer, Architect Gurjit Singh Matharoo did most of his schooling there before joining CEPT, School of Architecture in Ahmedabad. He is the Proprietor of his firm M/s Matharoo Associates that takes on jobs of Architecture, Interior Design, Product Design and Structural Design all under one roof. His assignment related travels have taken him to Switzerland, UK, Bhutan, Myanmar, Italy, Dubai and China, Mr Matharoo is Faculty at School of Architecture and School of Interior Design, CEPT.

We met Mr Matharoo at his Ahmedabad office.

Excerpts from the interview:-



Architect Gurjit Singh Matharoo

On architects and architecture

Amongst struggling architects friends, when a child is not behaving, we tell him , “If you don’t behave, we will make you an architect”. Jokes apart, the basic requirement for being an architect is good observation, innovation and an out of the box thinking. After the advent of computers some architects believe that drawing skills are not essential but I am strongly of the opinion that drawing skills are absolutely essential for being a good architect. Drawing connects you what you create directly to the mind. The hand and the mind are working in line, to use the computer analogy, with each other. The more the things that are added in between, the more is the distance between the brain and the creation for which it is responsible.

Teaching at CEPT

As a student, for me, architecture was in blood. My great grand father worked as an

architect for the British in the 19th century. I am indebted to the faculty at CEPT for whatever I am today. I teach at CEPT now. I love my job of teaching; it gives me the opportunity to be myself without restraint.

Design is intensely personal. There are no text books on design. It is only the supplementary courses like structures, history, etc where we have books. The teaching that goes to make an architect allows him/her to be innovative and creative. The most important thing that it does in the five years of its duration is that it develops you into a creative person in as much that you are taught to trust your own judgements, your creative processes. The schooling instils the confidence and the motivation to fall back on your creativity and your belief in yourself , because nobody – not even the faculty – can tell you whether your designs are good. This sense needs to be inculcated.

It is said that the architect’s profession is the profession for the old. After graduation, ten years or more will go in convincing clients to believe in your design ideologies and it is in these initial ten years that you may lose confidence in yourself and your creativity and succumb to commercial pressures. By saying this I am not asking architects to ignore a client’s brief. The client is the most important factor of the architect’s creative process. He is the one who pays for your unrealised creations and experiments. In the course of his journey, soon enough, the architect will find out which are the clients with whom he can work or can’t work. The initial period is the most difficult part, not the architect’s formal education nor the professional practise that falls after the initial ten years. It will be in these first ten years that you will either hold on to your ideas or you will let go of them. The



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The architect must learn to hold his own and not give away, or otherwise it will be the case of the patient dictating to the doctor what medicines he will take and how his treatment should go. Over a time a patient goes to the doctor that suits him and a client goes to the architect that suits him.



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architect must learn to hold his own and not give away or otherwise it will be the case of the patient dictating to the doctor what medicines he will take and how his treatment should go. Unlike a doctor who keeps repeating the same things – more or less – and so keeps perfecting himself whereas, for the architect each project is unique and new and so wholesale repetition is neither desirable nor allowed. An architect has to rise to the occasion each time; he worsens his reputation by repetition; it is not so with the doctors.



There are intangible factors in a building where everyone has a private opinion. The question of whether you enjoy being in a building, whether you are psychologically comfortable with it, whether the building elates you from a normal being to a higher being. Architecture takes you from a normal everyday experience to another level of experience psychologically. That is the job of the building and this is where the architect comes in – to give the building its emotive content.

The client has his requirements, and the fact that they need to be met is the architect's basic function. An architect cannot say to the client, "No, I will not satisfy your requirements." As a bonus, the architect must add the emotive content to the building.

I believe that the architect will only be able to achieve this if he is in full control of everything – the landscaping, the building architecture, and the interiors. As in an orchestra the conductor guides all the various musicians, the architect guides all the aspects of the premises as a whole. The conductor of the orchestra ensures that the music is not just coherent but beautiful to listen to. The architect does the same for the building as a whole.

On Vaastu

Vaastu is a matter of faith for some people and I don't subscribe to it. After implementing

AWARDS AND COMPETITIONS

INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

| No. | Award/Competition | Position | Year |
|-----|--|--|------|
| 1 | AR Emerging International Architecture Award by Architectural Review, UK | Invited jury member | 2010 |
| 2 | AR House 2010 | Winner for House with balls, Ahmedabad | 2010 |
| 3 | AR Emerging International Architecture Award by Architectural Review, UK | Winner for curtain door, Dilip Sanghvi Residence, surat | 2009 |
| 4 | AR Emerging International Architecture Award by Architectural Review, UK | Commendation for House with balls. | 2009 |
| 5 | Aga Khan Awards, Ashok Patel Residence, Ahmedabad | Nomination | 2009 |
| 6 | Aga Khan Awards, Prathma Blood Centre, Ahmedabad | Nomination | 2007 |
| 7 | ORDOS 100 | Chosen by Pritzker winning Architects Hertzog de Mueron | 2008 |
| 8 | World Architecture News WAN House of the Year 2006 | Runner up for House of Ashok Patel, Ahmedabad | 2006 |
| 9 | AR Emerging International Architecture Award by Architectural Review, UK | Honourable mention for Prathama Blood Centre, Ahmedabad. | 2005 |
| 10 | AR Emerging International Architecture Award by Architectural Review, UK | Editor's choice Award | 2003 |
| 11 | Park Hotel Revitalization at Lugano, Switzerland. | Special mention | 2000 |
| 12 | High Technology TV Tower & Station, Berne, Switzerland. | Third Place | 1990 |
| 13 | Oasis RIBA, U.K. | Special mention | 1988 |

INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATION

| No. | Award/Competition | Position | Year |
|-----|---|---|-------------|
| 1 | Royal Theatre- New Playhouse on the Copenhagen Waterfront | The federation of Danish Architects/ The Academic Association of Architects | Jan. '02 |
| 2 | F Wheel concept vehicle for 4th Mitsubishi Motors International Design Competition | Mitsubishi Motors Corporation, Japan | Mar. '02 |
| 3 | Ideas Competition for Dubai Internet City at Dubai, Participated from Dubai. | Dubai, UAE | Mar-Apr '00 |
| 4 | Concept Plan Competition for the Development of Integrated Arts, Culture and Entertainment District at West Kowloon Reclamation Honkong | The Planning and Lands Bureau, The Govt. of Hong Kong | Apr. '01 |
| 5 | Extension of Dullich Art Gallery at London, organized by RIBA, U.K. | United Kingdom | Jun-Aug '90 |



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Vaastu, people feel they have done so much more (that other people haven't) and that becomes a psychological prop. It is said that it is scientific but I have not seen the scientific part debated or tested impartially. Therefore this is where the argument rests: You believe Vaastu without challenging it or you challenge it but may end up not believing it. Yet, even while designing scientifically, and not intending to be Vaastu influenced, you do get a few things right as per Vaastu, as a coincidence.

The fact is that Vaastu is very popular and most clients will insist upon it. As architects we accept that as part of the client's brief; when it does come in the way of the design it does get galling and you try and explain to the client and

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Net House

hope for the best. The problem is worsened because Vaastu consultants have little or no knowledge of architecture and function or aesthetics is not their brief.

I'll recount an interesting Vaastu story that involves me.:-

We were designing a house which was very important for us. It was a beautiful site and we worked on the designs for six months. When the first sketch with the curvilinear walls and spaces got approved by the client and the house was ready for construction the client dropped a bombshell that it first had to be approved by their Vaastu consultant. With no straight walls and an indoor pool on the first floor it had no future.

When the consultant (who's claim to fame was in the lac of rupees worth of buildings that he got demolished) saw the plan, he smiled - here was another hapless victim - and put forth four conditions that the house must fulfill. Normally we find that some conditions are already met in the design while a few are possible with some effort without changing much, but here

was a design that had everything in the wrong place. I thought the project was about to be dropped, I mused over how we could have everything from the master bedroom to the kitchen to the living all in the wrong place and how it was possible for us to be so naturally against Vaastu and then an idea struck. We sent the revised plan to him for approval. He called up a day later, this is the first time in his career that an architect had offered a solution without changing even a single line! - all that we had done was we had sent him the drawing mirrored! ■



House of balls