



## "Vaastu is a deeply thought out science"

... Architect Sumesh Modi



### ARCHITECT'S VOICE

This month Vaastuyogam meets architect Sumesh Modi an architect from Surat.

Mr Modi was born and brought up Vyara a small town at a short distance from Surat, Gujarat's fastest growing city. His family is in the business of setting up temporary tents, shamianas and pandals. During his early days Mr Modi erected and dismantled many a pandal for the family business. However, even at that time his true interest lay in becoming an architect.

After completing his Bachelors of Architecture from Visvesvaraya Regional College of Engineering, Nagpur Mr Modi did his Masters in Architecture with Specialisation in Architectural Conservation from School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi. He is currently pursuing a PhD programme titled "Aquatic Architecture of Gujarat" at PRASADA, De Montfort University, Leicester, under the supervision of Dr. Adam Hardy and Prof. Nalini Thakur. The research is sponsored by the De Montfort University, Leicester, UK.

We met Mr Sumesh Modi at his office in Surat, Gujarat. Excerpts from the interview:

On Champaner the World Heritage Site near Pavagadh, Vadodara, Gujarat.

I had a passion to document things and almost inadvertently and even suddenly I got into the Champaner project. There was a high level task force meeting in Vadodara which I happened to attend and which was attended by nationally and internationally recognised conservationists and architects who wanted to talk to the officers of Gujarat and Central government about Champaner. The meeting was organised by the Baroda Heritage Trust. All the high level officials were present in this meeting. Amongst others, the Chief Secretary of Gujarat and the Principal Secretary of Gujarat were in attendance. Also attending were heads of other departments like forests, roads, irrigation etc.

At the end of the whole meeting, one thing surfaced and that was the urgent need to protect the ancient city of Champaner, almost all of which is in the reserve forest of



Mr. Sumesh Modi at site with team

India. The trouble was that the forest department was planting trees, the roots of which were destroying the buried city. The meeting was organised to prevent this tree plantation. Nobody could understand the

urgency of the situation and the Baroda Heritage Trust was fighting since last twenty years to bring the facts to government. At the meeting everyone wanted to know where is Champaner. This was an important question as the city was buried underground and could not be seen. Worsening the situation was the fact that there was no map whatsoever which could prove the location of the city and which indicated its roads and buildings. It was felt in the meeting that only after such a map and accompanying documentation were made, could anything be achieved. The meeting concluded with the Baroda Heritage Trust being given responsibility for preparing the map. But who would be the person who would do it? Suddenly Prof. Nalini Thakur pointed to me and said, "Sumesh Modi will make the maps and plans"

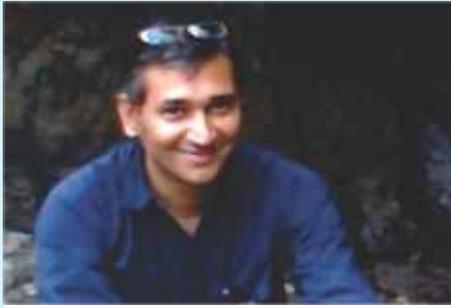
That was my starting point in the long journey of conservation that I have chosen to tread. My association with Champaner continued up to 2004-2005. I can say that this has led me to many other interesting and crucial conservation works that I have done for both the Central Government and State government of Gujarat.

In a way the Champaner has been a defining moment for my architectural career.

**For those who believe that Vaastu will bring them success I add one common sense rider. Not a single god will help you if you just have a Vaastu perfect house but you refuse to do anything. Ultimately you will have to work if you want to succeed. Good Vaastu alone is no passport to success.**



## ARCHITECT'S VOICE



**Architect Sumesh Modi**

Practising as a Private Architect in Surat, heading his firm Modi Associates. His firm has carried out umpteen projects of all kinds in Interiors ,Landscaping, Private Bungalows and Row Houses, Theatre / multiplexes, Commercial cum Residential complexes , Hospitals and Clinics .

Mr Modi has authored a Book titled "Architecture of Champaner-Pavagadh – Impressions of a Forgotten City" currently under the process of publication by Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi. He also prepared Exhibition panels on "Vavs of Gujarat" for the World Bank.

Mr Modi was instrumental in filing the nomination form of Champaner-Pavagadh for inclusion in the World Heritage List of UNESCO under the guidance of Prof. Nalini Thakur, Head of Department of Conservation Studies, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi Similarly, he also drew up the Management Plan of Champaner-Pavagadh, one of the prerequisites for acquiring World Heritage Status.

Mr Modi has done extensive conservation and restoration work for the Directorate of Archaeology-Government of Gujarat. He has done the conservation and restoration of Stepwell at Davad – Idar , Nagarani Stepwell at Khedchandrani – Himmatnagar, Ambapur Stepwell at Ambapur – Gandhinagar, Khan Talao – Dholka, Vanjhari Vav at Modasa – Sabarkantha, Vav and Kund at Gambhirpur – Idar, Stepwell at Hampur, Dhrangadhra, Surendranagar, Chowmukhi Vav, Chobari, Chotila, Surendranagar, Ancient Lake, Ten Talav, Dabhoi, Vadodara and the Vidhyaqdhar Vav, Sevasi, Vadodara.

### On his architectural practise

The first five years of my architectural career were spent doing work the Champaner World Heritage site assignments for Baroda Heritage Trust. After this I started working on my own projects most of which have been around Surat , Vyara, Bharuch and Vadodara.

For me, over and above all the other things, the true brief comes from the site. In the many schools, colleges and hospitals I have done, the client has given me almost 100% freedom to design to my satisfaction.

### On Vaastu

I must be amongst the very few people who have understood Vaastu by studying the original Sanskrit texts and not through the interpretation of translators. My understanding of Vaastu is that it is thoroughly site specific. Moreover, it is absolutely secular and has nothing to do with gods and mythology. It is a deeply thought out science that has been presented to the people in a very

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Maniba Bhula Nursing College

oversimplified manner with a loud layer of religion so that compliance was voluntarily offered by the common people.

Another issue I have is with the Vaastu consultants. I think they are far too rigid. Vaastu is couched in broad ambiguous language and gives sufficient leeway for alternative solutions. It strives at striking the

best balance to offer a good quality life to the occupant. Often the Vaastu consultant, merely to assert his authority, will come up with some fantastical instruction that is nowhere in the Vaastu texts. To justify himself he will put fear in the client and finally the client , fearing for his future, his family and his business will call me up and say," Sumesh, just do what the consultant



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says. We don't want to win arguments with him. We want to live happily" I accept the client's logic, because after all no one wants to take chances with Vaastu and I make way for the Vaastu consultant's advice, whether or not I am in agreement.

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## CHAMPANER



There was no map available on the site which is spread over an area covering about 10 kilometer in diameter. Today, this city is buried beneath the ground, but in the 1960's Dr. R N Mehta, an archaeologist at MSU, Baroda, carried out extensive archaeological expeditions and unearthed the lost city to document it. His documentation was referred to and the entire city was mapped on AutoCAD.