

## ARCHITECT'S VOICE



Architect Mrs. Heena Shah

Mrs. Heena Shah is a practicing Interior Designer. She studied Interior Design from the Institute of Environmental Design, Vallabh Vidyanagar. After completing her studies at Vallabh Vidyanagar she initially worked with Amala Shah and Ariane Thakore. She had a good experience on developing furniture and working on the intricate patterns and detailing whilst working with Amala Shah.

While at Ariane Thakore she got an exposure on working with high profile clients where budget was not a constraint and where everything was customized to meet the client's taste. Thereafter she moved on to InteSpace where the scale of projects were huge and meeting the deadlines was always on chart. Since past eight years she is a Sr. Interior Designer with InterSpace Design Pvt. Ltd, Ahmedabad where she has – among other things - conceptualized varied residential, commercial, retail and corporate interiors.

# “Interiors are neither right nor wrong. They are only suitable or unsuitable”

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This month the Vaastuyogam team met Mrs. Heena Shah practising Interior Designer at her residence in Ahmedabad. Born and brought up in Mumbai Mrs. Heena Shah studied Interior Design at Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujarat. She does not have a family background of either interior design or architecture.

*Excerpts from the interview:-*

### Before joining design school

As a child, my parents thought I would do well as an interior designer because I was very good at sketching and painting. I participated in many competitions organized by Asian Paints and always received top grades. Almost everything I did informed my design instincts. I would not isolate any one activity. Everything got expressed in my drawing. I had this penchant for customizing everything. In my later years as an interior designer, these traits have become my strength. Design becomes the eye catcher

because it is customized; it is out of context, it is something newborn and fresh, something people have never seen before. It sort of stimulates the senses.

### Design School

After my family moved from Mumbai and settled in Ahmedabad there were three design school options I had after my schooling. NID, CEPT and Vidyanagar. I tried at NID and subsequently at CEPT as well but my grades fell short so eventually I went for the five year interior design course at Vallabh Vidyanagar. Though at that time I felt that I had missed out on a good design school, my subsequent experiences proved me wrong. Actually, Vallabh Vidyanagar has a more distinguished reputation as far as interior design is concerned.

### CEPT

What happens in a place like CEPT is that it has a fantastic reputation for architecture

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and planning but for interior design, NID and Vallabh Vidyanagar score higher. Moreover, my experience with interior design graduates from CEPT is that they are not flexible and have a mindset that is somewhat rooted in theory. CEPT design students ( I am not here referring to architects and town planners) tend to go berserk with celebration of design and are out of their métier when the environment does not provide a free hand and you have to tune-up to a recalcitrant contractors and subordinate agencies.

There is yet another thing; the advent of the computer is a great leveler. The traditional notion of an architect / interior designer having a vision and then drawing it and then constructing it is not really how it works today, and in reality, the computer has a lot of influence on design.

Having said that, let me add that these people are best as independent consultants or whilst addressing a corporate environment. To give an example, a couple



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of CEPT designers who were working with us. Later, went on to be proved as a big hit when they migrated to a modular furniture division of a large Bangalore based Indian multi-national company.

### Architecture V/s Interior Design

If they are true to public expectations of them, there is no gainsaying the fact that architects need to be more learned and have greater depth and bandwidth than interior designers. Examples like

Mr.B.V.Doshi, come straight to the mind in such a category. In the face of such stalwarts, an interior designer finds himself in a humbler station. In such an architecture the interiors are predesigned. For example , the place of a sofa or dining table could only be where the architect has envisaged it. There would be no other logical space , but what was the architect's intent. The interior designer would simply have to go along with the pre-determined vision.

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Clients show greater deference to an architect's viewpoint than that of an interior designer. Whilst dealing with architects clients are aware of their limitations vis-a-vis the architect and rely on him to deliver for them. In the case of interior designers, clients do not imagine themselves as untutored and insist on having a say on every little thing at each level. Architecture involves computations that result in geometrical and structural balance necessary for an upright structure. For the client this is all esoteric knowledge and an architect can shoot down a client's suggestion citing the argument that it goes against calculations. In interiors, there are no such computations. In fact, Interiors are neither right nor wrong. They are only suitable or unsuitable.

So, when there is no right or wrong every suggestion by the interior designer can go for a toss. Further still as interior design is more hands-on and client centric, drawings alone cannot carry the day; one has to constantly be at the site. When you go to a site, you usually run into usability problems pretty quickly. They're not hidden. They're not complicated. They're not baffling. They

were in the design or crept into the design and it is the lot of the interior designer to face-up to intense – and embarrassing – client scrutiny on a routine basis.

There is another side to this as well. Let us say you took a second opinion on a probable treatment course from a doctor. Even if his opinion will differ from the earlier one, neither of the doctors will run down each other. In the case of interior designers, the marketing strategy is to get the better of the competition by deprecatory allusions to the competitor's skills and ethics. The architects are of course more circumspect. All this leads to severe erosion of the respectability of the interior design professionals and so the interior designer's vision and ideology are always under siege.

Finally, what is organic about architecture as a field, unlike interior design, is this whole issue of a holistic worldview and of monumentality. Architects have to design things that are coherent as a single object, but also break down into small rooms and have an identity of both the big scale and the small scale.

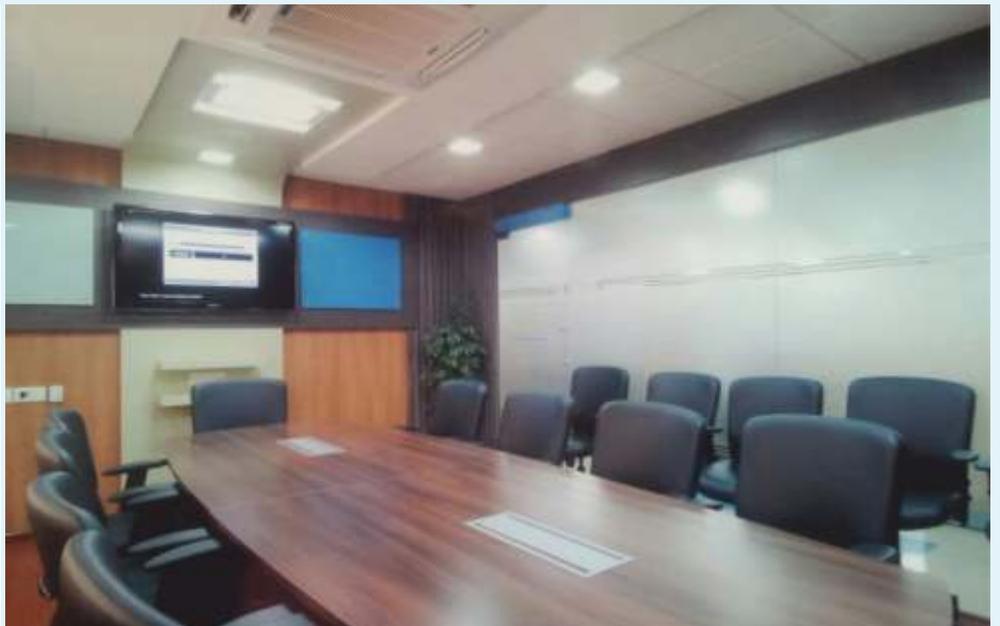
### Vaastu

My interest in Vaastu is peripheral. I have read some books on the subject and am convinced that it needs exhaustive time and

study to get to the bottom of it. I do know that the plot orientation, size and shape are together most crucial for a Vaastu standpoint. I am aware of the existence of Shermukhi plots and Gaumukhi plots. However, my encounters with Vaastu have been restricted to within the built space. However, I give importance to space planning first and last with nothing else in-between. There have been many instances wherein we have had infusion of Vaastu input and I have accommodated it without argument.

One client who was well entrenched in the shipping business was diversifying into cement. We did all their offices in western India. This was an assignment with total Vaastu control right from the start. For me it was a great learning experience from the Vaastu angle. Apart from the emphasis on directions there was strict control over the color shades used, different size tables depending on the hierarchy etc.

Since we were using modular furniture it was not possible to have different sizes of the same design tables, but since the quantities were large we were able to prevail over the manufacturers to customize their specifications for our project. Apart from this one glitch, working under Vaastu supervision was no problem at all. ■



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