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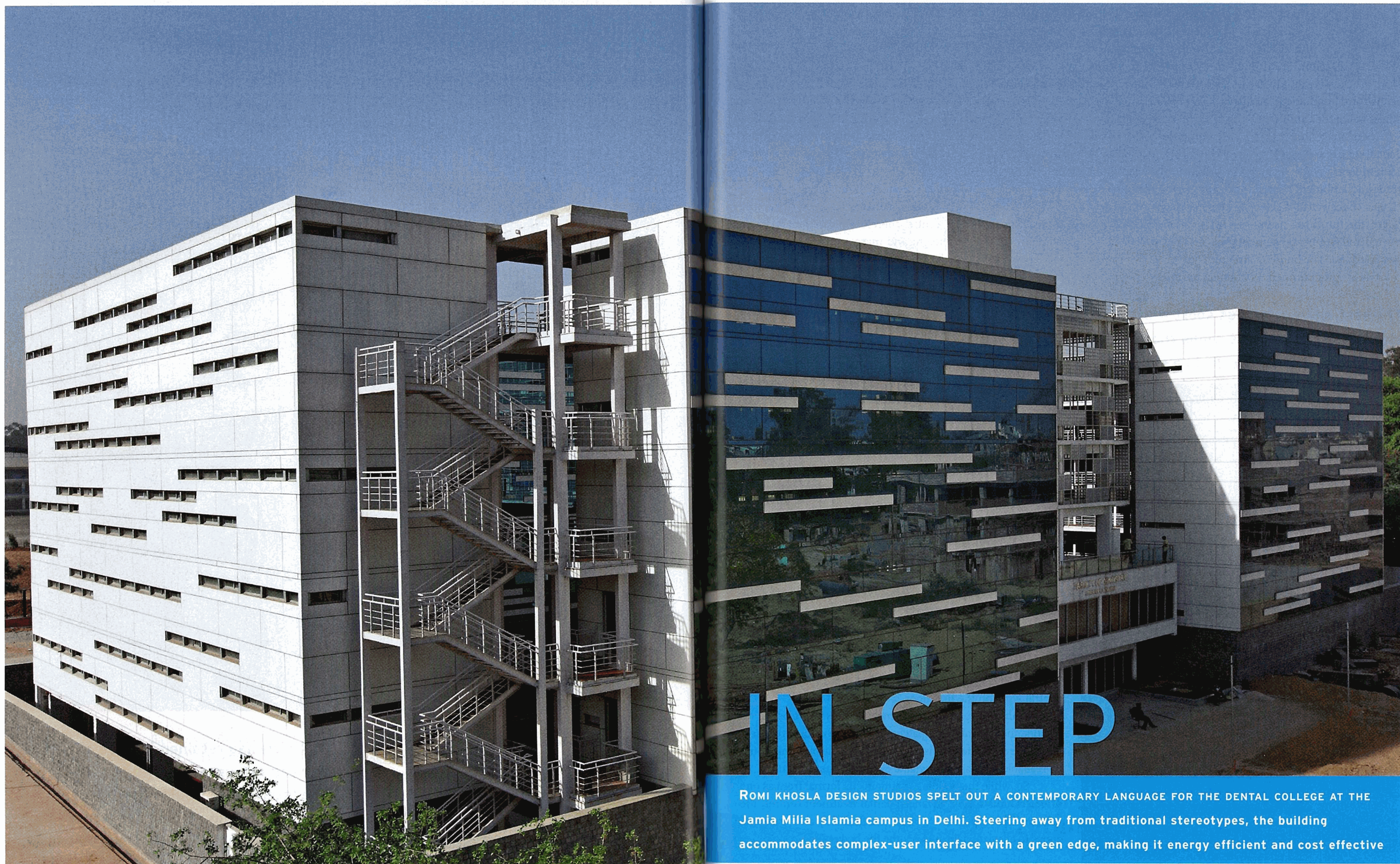
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IN STEP

ROMI KHOSLA DESIGN STUDIOS SPELT OUT A CONTEMPORARY LANGUAGE FOR THE DENTAL COLLEGE AT THE Jamia Milia Islamia campus in Delhi. Steering away from traditional stereotypes, the building accommodates complex-user interface with a green edge, making it energy efficient and cost effective

How do you tread lightly when leaden feet of architectural history are at your doorstep? This was the challenge confronting Romi Khosla Design Studios at the Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi. The Dental College would be the third building the architects designed on campus, the others being the canteen and the M F Hussain Gallery.

Architects Romi Khosla and Martand Khosla gave the dental centre a stark white façade, veering it towards the contemporary while making it relevant to the institution's academic ambitions. The programme was a complex one. "It was conceived as a series of capsules which would act as nodes for the three users—common public, doctors who treated and taught and students who learned and practised," says Martand. The building structure embraces two primary courtyards programmed to connect various departments,

The east and west wings sport white aluminium clad masses, while the central wing takes on glass blocks in a steel grid



examine movement patterns, and provide ease of access. These courtyards worked for the design team in delineating the functional arrangement required for the centre.

Project architect Maulik Bansal elaborates, "Conceptually, the form can be divided into three blocks—east wing, central wing and west wing. The east and west wings would house laboratories, clinics and staff rooms. The central wing would accommodate lecture and seminar rooms, as well as semi-public areas such as the library and the administrative offices."

There were obvious reasons that the building couldn't be scaled high, since the site is surrounded by low-rise, fine grain structures. The centre, therefore, takes breaks in its elevation so that the height and mass are not immediately evident. The north façade takes on curtain glazing to maximise natural light into the clinics. This means that doctors can actually avoid artificial light during check-ups, save on energy and reduce patient anxiety with anglepoise lamps away from their faces.

Efficient energy was the primary motivator to design open corridors and non-air conditioned public spaces. Access to the zones was deftly handled by keeping the academic entrance separate from the public entrance.

A composition of steel and concrete, the three wings wear concrete while the circulation areas have light steel structures. The east and west wings are articulated as pristine white aluminium clad masses, with an informal façade designed for the central wing. It takes on random patterns of glass blocks in a steel grid. Kota stone in the public area, clinics and laboratories helps in maintaining hygiene and is equally cost-effective.

Man-made contours had formed on the site due to years of neglect, creating two levels to work with. The architects used both the levels to access the building for the public and the students. The library was planned on two levels, with the lower levels extending into the green courtyard. These lower levels were partially bermed, raking advantage of the topography and allowing for a cooler space. The garden continues over the roof of these spaces into the central wing on the first floor.

Unlike hospitals and treatment centres that 'close in' on visitors, the central green patches de-stress visitors and users alike. The design team ensured the plan of the building would be readable and easy to navigate even for a first time user.

So, while the building maintains its formal front as one of north India's most advanced dental treatment centres, the informal side provides its users the flexibility and break-out zones to alleviate pain, and soothe the body, soul and mind.

— Text by Shiny Varghese