

# ARCHITECT and INTERIORS INDIA

Inspiration and insight for architects and interior designers

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## Heritage

The Oberoi Grand

## Spotlight

Cladding

## Street art

Transforming urban spaces

## Competition

Results of Window Furnishing Contest

## Tête-à-tête

Martand Khosla

# ROMI IS WHERE THE ART IS

DRIVEN BY ARTISTIC PASSION, THE ROMI KHOSLA DESIGN STUDIO HAS SPEARHEADED NUMEROUS PATHBREAKING PROJECTS IN INDIA



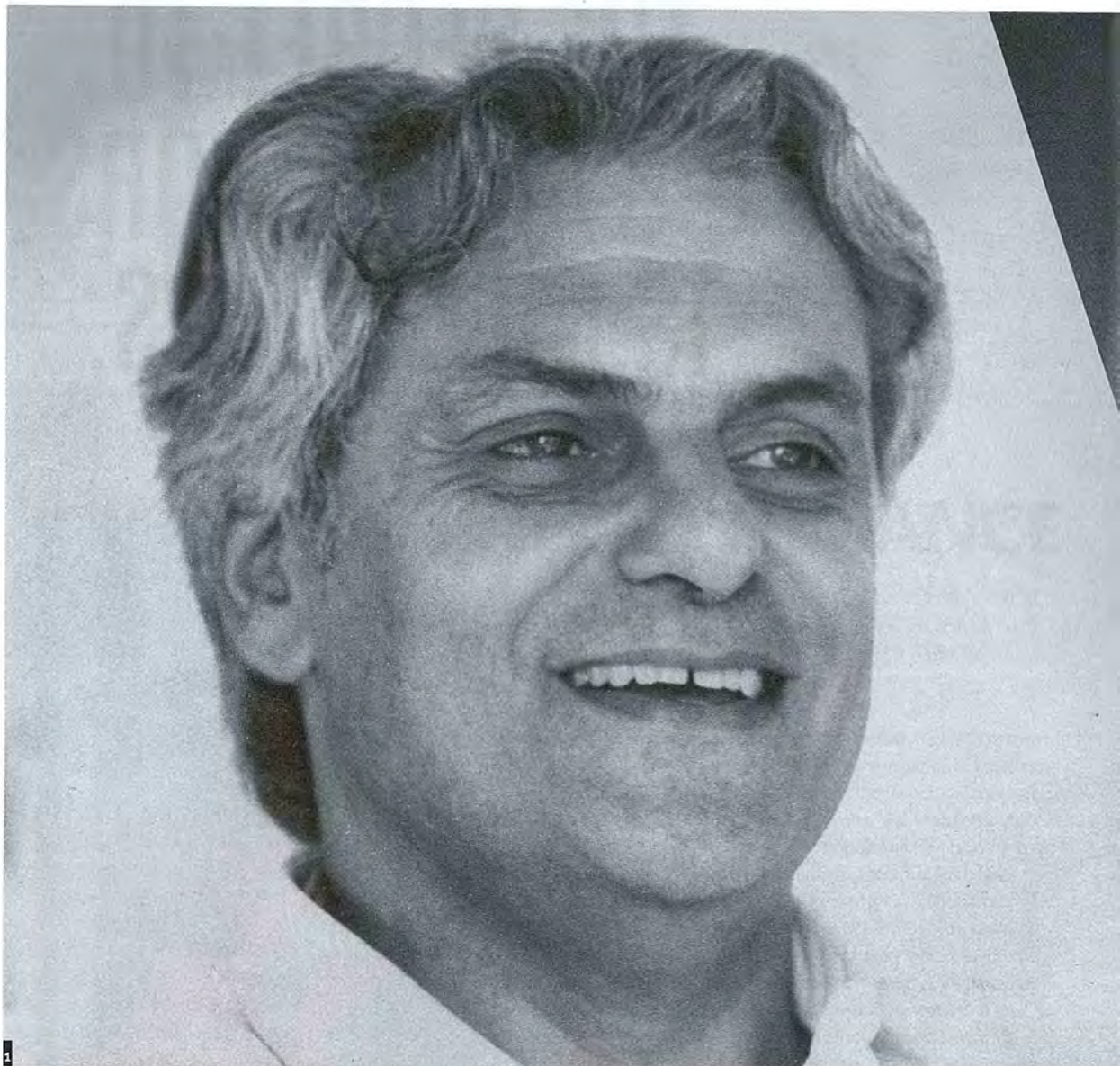
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# IN PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

1. Romi Khosla, founder and partner, Romi Khosla Design Studio (RKDS)

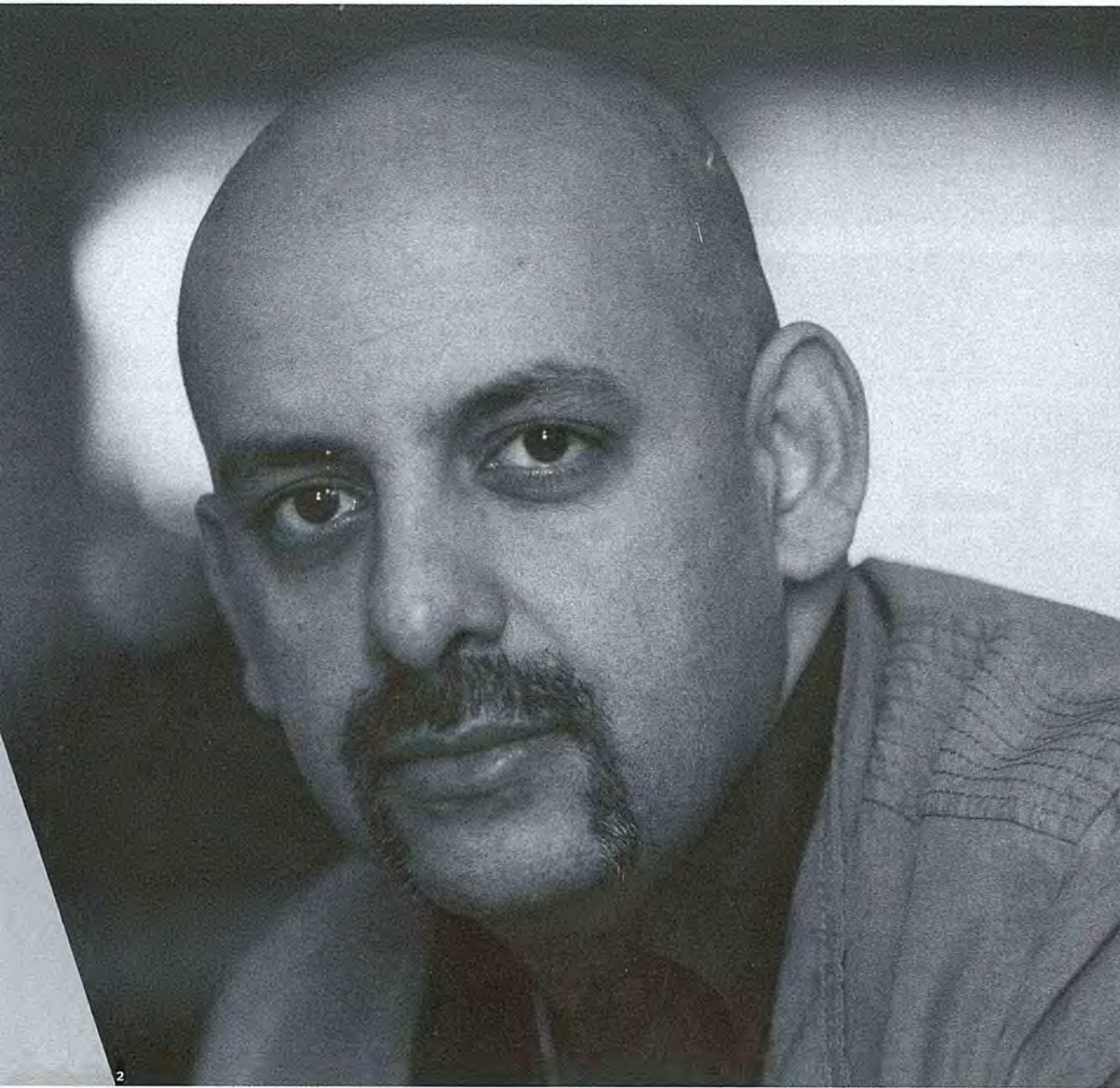
2. Martand Khosla, partner at RKDS since 2001.

**C**irca 1972, as an economics graduate from Cambridge working as an accountant in England, Romi Khosla found work monotonous and dull. This eventually led to the realisation that he needed to do something more creative than have a "life of calculations about others' financials." Remembering his initial encounter with architecture, the economics graduate from Cambridge recalls, "My attention was drawn when I stayed as a lodger in the house of Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, who had joined Le Corbusier to design Chandigarh. It was here, far away from the world of three-piece suits, that my awakening took place."

Khosla enrolled in an art school for night classes and, with a rich portfolio of drawings, gained admission to the Architectural Association School of Architecture, London. This was, as time has proven, just the beginning of his architectural passage. It was here that Khosla began to be shaped and moulded into an architect, under what he recalls as challenging circumstances.

When he returned to India, Khosla joined the firm Kanvinde Rai and Chowdhury with whom he had worked briefly as a student. He reminisces, "It was an excellent firm, upholding the best design values. I worked under the guidance of the grand old man as well as Murad Chowdhury





Martand Khosla shares a lot in common with his father Romi Khosla, the founder of their award-winning architecture studio RKDS, especially a relentless quest for perfection

BY CAROL FERRAO

and learned the unfortunate truth that clients here had little respect for either design or the architect." Here, Khosla met Vasant Kamath and Narendra Denge, and over time, their common ideas developed into the formation of a new practice, an establishment called The Group for Rural and Urban Planning (The GRUP) in 1974.

"Subsequently, both Kamath and Denge decided to move forward and set up their own practices (and have worked to the highest standards that had brought us together in the first place). I believe that the design philosophy of providing the highest quality of design for our rich and poor clients continues to influence all of our work," declares Khosla.

Over the years, the iconic architect spearheaded a variety of projects at the award-winning practice that he re-christened Romi Khosla Design Studio (RKDS), where he and his son and partner (Martand Khosla) have been working together since 2001. The duo have been charting new pathways to an all-inclusive, modern-style architecture that seeks to benefit each and every member of society.

The younger Khosla's story unfolded a bit differently. Unlike his father, Martand discovered his love for art and design at an early age. However, the quest to find the exact design profession needed some exploration. He studied art in England and began discovering art and design during his





## NATURAL CITIES

Architect Romi Khosla has authored three books, namely *The Idea of Delhi*, *Buddhist Monasteries in the Western Himalayas* and *Loneliness of a Long Distant Future*. Recently, in collaboration with Dr Vikram Soni, the veteran e-published *Natural Cities*, a method to live harmoniously with nature. Khosla senior elaborates, "There is one change I desire to see in India—greater seepage and deepening of democracy, the end of corrupt municipalities, and the day when the inhabitants of a neighborhood will decide the future of their built environment."

time at college. Back then, Martand remembers, "I visited a few art and architecture colleges and felt that they weren't teaching design in a manner that appealed to me. However, when I visited the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London, where my father had studied, there was a certain vibrancy that was evident even on a cursory visit to the institute's premises. It felt like a place which allowed for the ultimate creative freedom with a strong theoretical underpinning." As it turned out, as Martand says, "I didn't choose architecture as a career per se, as a first step; instead, I first chose the institute to study in."

Since joining the business and being at the helm of matters, the younger Khosla learnt how the practice works. He discloses, "RKDS has been kept to a maximum size of 20-25 architects with a high priority to personalised design. The idea now is that the partners themselves see each project through till its realisation, where they can work together on design projects of varied scales – be it retail, institutional, commercial or educational design."

The Khoslas agree that their architectural work can be summarised as the product of a collective. They explain, "It is the creative work of our studio, which passionately believes in designing with a high degree of originality, new thinking and unprecedented solutions." Their service is par excellence and amply evident in projects like the Castro Cafeteria, Polyclinic

for the destitute, Volvo-Eicher headquarters, United Breweries headquarter and Zuari Garden City, to name just a few.

As they put their heads towards continually construing appropriate design concepts, the father and son constantly dwell on the purpose of the project – to ask themselves if it will benefit ordinary people. "It is our quest to seek projects that will improve the lives of ordinary people. The Polyclinic for the destitute at Lahori Gate is a typical case in point," mentions Khosla senior. The studio also designed a special school for spastic children, a first-of-its-kind for the differently-abled in India, in which the brick-clad structure provides a warm ambience for specialised training and courses offered to both, the children and their parents.

Both partners believe that their drive is fuelled by unstoppable ambition. Martand points out, "Whether it is a tiny house or a large city, we have worked extensively at both scales and there are no limits to our ambition of enabling ourselves to better the world, with architecture as our instrument of change."

The young Khosla prefers working on projects that will benefit different socio-economic groups as opposed to working repeatedly on those of similar description and scale. This view towards architecture has set the firm apart from its peers, to be seen as a studio where intelligent design is the prerogative of all and not just the privileged few.

While talking about their most defining projects till date, the Khoslas mention two headquarters constructed in two different decades. "I would like to believe that a large part of our work has been pathbreaking; however, the duration of time [during which it remains pathbreaking] varies," explains Khosla senior. In his opinion, the United Breweries headquarters, built in the '70s but later demolished, was pathbreaking at the time and set new standards for design excellence. A novel system of environmental control was conceived for the building, which took the form of an 'environmental skin' wrapped around the cruciform building.

Identifying a comparatively recent significant project, Martand adds, "The Eicher-Volvo corporate office in Gurgaon is groundbreaking in features such as the use of complete steel, platinum LEED rating, open plan with under floor servicing, etc. Each element may not be exemplary, but their coming together is what makes the difference."

The structure uses a large proportion of reused material and a high percentage of easily renewable materials. It is defined by a unique span-free steel structure, set outside the main building envelope and designed on the principle of a diagonally-braced, stabilised cube.

Their creative work has led the Khoslas and the studio to be generously recognised by the World Architecture awards platform. Their winning projects include the Dental College, Plus House, MF Husain Art Gallery, Hospice and Eicher-Volvo headquarters. Besides these accolades, they have also won awards such as our Aces of Space Best Young Designer, CW Interiors Top Ten Indian Designers, IIID-MK awards, among many others. Romi has also served on the esteemed

3. Dental College, New Delhi. Among the unique features is the use of daylight for complex dental procedures.

4. Castro Cafeteria, New Delhi. The idea was to try and blur the boundaries between inside and outside.



Aga Khan Award Jury as well as the Izmir City Revitalisation Competition Jury in Turkey. Appointed as a principal consultant to UNDP, UNOPS, UNESCO and WTO, he has carried out extensive urban planning and revitalisation programmes as well as tourism planning missions to the Balkans, Cyprus, Central Asia and Tibet.

In the course of designing prominent structures, the partners have come to the conclusion that creativity and consumerism are not enemies. They believe that the global rise of consumerism has provided architecture with opportunities. "If an architect designs the headquarters of a brand corporation that thrives on consumerism, then architecture becomes the indirect beneficiary," they insist. "We must not forget that the history of the middle class and the ruling class and their aspirations is the history of architecture."

"Historically, in the past, the aspirations of the rich are all deeply embedded in architecture. The point of change that we are interested in, is to make a future where we create architecture that is aspirational for the ordinary and less fortunate," maintains Romi.

Such undeniable passion is directly shaped by their many life and personal experiences. The younger Khosla recalls his trips to Japan and USA to prepare for the Semi-Conductor project in Mohali. He also mentions how spending ten days in Dharavi benefitted his all-round development as an ar-

chitect. Martand lived for nine months in Palestine and five weeks in Kosovo on missions to soothe conflicts between communities, which changed his views of the world. All these experiences influenced his work, he admits, "One has to learn all the time and keep the mind empty of pre-determined solutions. Each architect has a unique journey that constantly teaches and thereby influences their work."

Of life's many lessons learned, including from the architectural profession and its subsequent ups and downs, Romi has imbibed that it is imperative to be the strongest critic of his own work. In the same vein, it is his understanding that architecture is not seriously regarded as a creative profession in India by governments, private clients, the media or the critics. According to him, architecture is associated with the art of clever extraction and maximisation of floor area rather than with fine, creative buildings. He believes that architecture can be motivated either with the pursuit of excellence or the maximisation of square foot space.

"Much of contemporary Indian commercial architecture reflects the facade choices made by project managers sitting over computer screens with facade/glazing salesman," explains Romi. "We, as architects, are lucky to have the design of the lift shaft all to ourselves! We have weak professional bodies, too many architectural schools, too many budding architects, those who could not get admission to medical schools and have too little devotion and respect for contemporary architecture."

Leading from his point, it is evident that the Khoslas find the achievements of contemporary Indian architecture uneven. While some of the work can be considered extraordinary, most are caught up with chasing profits in real estate that has taken over the branding of architecture.

Unanimously, they opine, "The urban landscape has been littered with structures that have little to do with the socio-economic, cultural or democratic substance of India. Simply because the landscape replicates mythical places abroad and aspires to transport you to some paradise, where golf is played all day, the grass is perpetually green and where autumn leaves fall on water bodies."

In the light of their honest perspective and criticism, Martand points out that he finds buildings like Kanchenjunga by Charles Correa, the International Centre by JA Stein, and the Spastic Society School by his father truly inspirational. "In India, the IIM and Mill Owners Association are truly modern," he points out. "The Pompidou Centre is a reminder of what great patronage can do for the development of architecture. Places that I like to revisit in my mind are the Thermal Baths at Valles and The Salk Institute, Brasilia."

Besides seeking inspiration from such projects, the Khoslas are interested in developing their creative prowess by participating in design competitions – some of which they have won. 'Twist and Shout' was their winning entry for the competition hosted by Media and Moving Art to include skateboarding as an activity into the main urban fabric of Rotterdam, The Netherlands. The duo's design proposal uses three strips of woods that twist and curve across the site, creating surfaces to skateboard on. The juxtaposition of the movement of skateboarders with that of vehicles and pedestrians creates a contrasting yet complementary fluid form.

"Some of the best venues for creative ideas in the abstract are competitions, where we can propose visual and architectural ideas without being excessively burdened by context, history and a building programme," explains Romi, "For us, to innovate is sometimes more important than trying to locate solutions in the reality of human environment."

## CITY OF HOPE

The artist and architect in Martand Khosla came together to provide an innovative view of the people who "build" modern India. In his first solo exhibition, he found inspiration from the migrant work force who make a significant contribution to the development of the country but are mostly ignored and treated as lesser humans. Martand's artistic works employed diverse materials to articulate his observations. Brick dust, an abundant material at construction sites, was used prominently for portraits, barren landscapes, workers' footwear and tools. About this collection, he has said, "I felt compelled to look at the issues I deal with as an architect, away from the macro level of master plans and the growth and stretch of urban organisms."

5. Shantanu & Nikhil store, New Delhi. Wooden strip cladding defines a surface fluidity that moves effortlessly from curved walls to floor and ceiling.







Martand Khosla, partner,  
Romi Khosla Design Studio.

# MARTAND UNPLUGGED

INTERVIEWED BY MARIA LOUIS

**Do you feel that architecture and design in India is a balance of science and art? Why?**

I do believe that architecture is entrenched in human sciences in its role as a creator of habitable and urban spaces. It learns from and metamorphoses human behavioural patterns simultaneously. At a more literal level, more recently architecture is in itself transforming as it begins to respond to environmental lessons and new technologies. As a discipline, it is an integral part of human sciences as well as pure sciences. I don't look at art and science as being different in this respect.

**Which Indian architect or designer do you consider an idol or role model, and why?**

There is no one per se that I idolise; however, there are several architects in India (and abroad) who achieve moments of greatness with particular projects. The buildings that are truly inspirational are Kanchenjunga in Mumbai by Charles Correa, the India International Centre by JA Stein and The Spastic Society School built by my father [Romi Khosla].

**Frank Lloyd Wright stated, "Every architect must be a great original interpreter of his time, his day, his age." How do you interpret your time?**

Progressively, the experience of time is getting shorter and change is becoming more rapid. Information is moving swiftly, decisions are taken faster and the sheer force of capital is changing the world at a never-before-seen pace.

Added to this, within India, a large majority of the buildings being built in our cities and villages are self-built. As a result, they are slowly transforming the entire built landscape of the country. In this environment, we seek to build with a certain contemplation – quietly, yet boldly.

**Many senior architects are bemoaning the irresponsible development of architecture. Do you think your generation can reverse it for the greater common good?**

Since the process of liberalisation has gathered momentum in India, the role of the architect as a person who debates and often visualises varied urban futures has diminished significantly. The present trends appear to be driven by the financial value of real estate and the absolute maximising of profitability. This trajectory will not significantly alter its course until there is a drastic change in the existing paradigm brought about primarily through the mixture of architects' actions and innovative and more inclusive policy changes. We must, however, remain positive in the free face of this current scenario, even if we feel disempowered to change it.

**What is your opinion of the development of architecture as a field that must benefit people, in India today? Are you personally doing anything in this direction?**

One of the basic pillars of architecture is the development of better spaces to live and work in. This is true at all the possible scales of the practice of architecture. Within India, the need for improvement of public spaces, buildings and the urban fabric is a common need shared by all – rich and the poor alike. But

due to the glaring inequality in our society, the need of the poor is far more urgent and must take priority over the middle class, who have some means to be able to overcome their difficulties.

It is our firm belief that good design should be available to all, irrespective of their economic status. We, as a practice, are extremely committed to working on projects for the economically weaker sections of our society. My first project that I designed was a shelter for the families of poor patients being brought to the GTB Hospital in Delhi. We have recently completed a hospice for HIV and TB patients in Old Delhi near a slum. I have been involved in designing a maternity home and a hospital for the Sir Sobha Singh Charitable Institute. We have also designed a playground for underprivileged children for the Deepalaya school in Gusbethi, Gurgaon.

**Name any new-age material, technology or innovation that you consider a great discovery/invention for the design of structures and interior spaces.**

I think new processes that are looking at Green buildings, not only in terms of reducing energy and resource consumptions – but also enabling buildings that have the capability to be green vertical gardens, is interesting. Added to this, the developments in solar energy and wind energy generation to the buildings would develop new and innovative building typologies and outlooks towards architecture.

**Which project designed by you is one that you would consider your best work so far?**

I think that best works are always those that lie in the future or, at least, are on the drawing board. From the moment of conception to the point of realisation, in every project, there are several stages at which the building begins to behave and relate differently to its surroundings and the people who build it and use it, from what was imagined. There are several agencies who are involved in its realisation, so the trajectory is always different from what we set out to achieve. I don't mean this in a negative sense at all; more often than not the outcomes of these changes are very positive and welcome. However, with each new building, there is a complex learning process that will invariably remain the case for all the buildings that are designed and realised. With this process, we evolve continuously and try and bring to the next design all that we have learnt – which is why I say that the best buildings lie in the future.

Having said this, there are several that I have enjoyed working with and designing, such as the Castro café, the Plus house, the A house, the Dental college and the children's playground.

**Name any locally-sourced Indian building material that you would love to use in abundance.**

Stabilised mud blocks and other earth-based material with low embodied energy, as well as fast replenishing woods.

**What aspect of your learning does your work represent?**

I aspire to think with complexity and build with simplicity. A complex understanding of space that would lead to a strong spatial experience would be an ideal place to arrive at. ■



# PROJECTS BY RKDS

A glimpse into the minds of the principal architects and their inspiring portfolio that is redefining architecture in India



## GOEL HOUSE, NEW DELHI

Goel House was a collaborative architectural project between Romi Khosla Design Studios and Lotus Design in New Delhi. The interiors and some ancillary structures were designed by Rajiv Saini Design, Mumbai. The private residence located on a large South Delhi plot is designed using a composite structure of structural steel and concrete. The star-shaped steel columns carry the load of exposed concrete slabs as well as exposed brick walls. The building uses polished Terrazzo flooring, polished timber for its interiors [to offset the robust clean lines achieved in buildings through its structural systems and materials]. The building plan is a perfect rectangle divided between two generations of the same family, between the ground floor and the first floor. The double-height interior entrance space unites the two residential zones.

## PROJECT DETAILS

**Name:** Residence in Friends Colony

**Architects:** Romi Khosla Design Studio, New Delhi; Lotus Design, New Delhi

**Lead architects:** Martand Khosla, Ambrish Arora

**Interior design:** Rajiv Saini

**Design team:** Chandu V Arsikere, Veer Nanavatty

**Built-up area:** 2,000sq-m

**Location:** Friends Colony, New Delhi

**Status:** Built

**Electrical consultant:** MaxMEP Consultants

**Structural consultant:** Manjunath & Co

**Plumbing and HVAC consultant:** MaxMEP Consultants

**Contractor:** Apport Constructions

**Year of completion:** 2011

**Photographer:** Randhir Singh







#### VOLVO-EICHER HEADQUARTERS, GURGAON

The corporate headquarters of the newly-formed joint venture, Volvo-Eicher, is designed to be an innovative steel building for the engineering group and to use the least amount of energy and resources possible in its day-to-day functioning. The clients' approach towards the projects required RKDS in coordination with Spectral Design services to design a LEED-rated building.

The building uses a large proportion of re-used material and an extremely high percentage of easily renewable materials. It is defined by a unique span-free steel structure set outside the main building envelope and designed on the principle of a stabilised cube which is diagonally braced.

Using Dry construction building technology, the team designed the steel structure span free and column free, especially on the work floors. The exposed steel decking turns function into art rather seamlessly.

The building has other innovative interventions – such as raised floors for air-conditioning systems, which allows 30% reduction in the use of air-conditioning. Additionally, the heat recovery system for the air-conditioning further reduces power consumption. The curved facade with steel louvered system lights up the interiors with good diffused natural light.

Recycled wooden railway sleepers are used prominently in the projects, both externally and internally. Most of the wood used in the design has come from recycled wooden crates used to transport imported vehicles.

In order to reduce water consumption, the building's plumbing system is designed to recycle water from toilets and kitchen and use it for flushing, irrigation and the air-conditioning. Fresh water is provided for washing hands and drinking. Because of these interventions, the headquarters uses 25% of the water in comparison to the surrounding structures. The green spaces of the building, including driveways and parking, are made using porous material to maximise water penetration into the ground to recharge the ground water.

#### PROJECT DETAILS

**Client:** Eicher Goodearth

**Architects:** Romi Khosla Design Studio

**Chief architect:** Romi Khosla, Martand Khosla

**Design team:** Chandu V Arsikere, Ram K Nair, Sanjoli Tuteja

**Area:** 9,972sq-m

**Location:** Gurgaon, Haryana

**Year of commencement:** 2010

**Year of completion:** 2012

**Cost of project:** Rs60 crore

**Structural experts:** Frischmann Prabhu

**LEED facilitator:** Spectral Services Consultants

**Landscape consultant:** Sameer Chakravarty

**Photographer:** Saurabh Pandey

**Award:** World Architecture award winner





### LAHORI GATE – POLYCLINIC FOR THE DESTITUTE

In the heart of the old city of Delhi, on the edge of the railway line, sandwiched between a mosque and the remains of a burnt slum, a modern polyclinic has been built to treat drug addicts, TB patients and the HIV-positive population who live on the pavements of Lahori Gate. This building has been donated to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi by The Sir Sobha Singh Public Charitable Trust. It serves as a day care referral medical relief centre for those who cannot afford treatment.

The site had a dilapidated building that had provided shelter for the homeless and was a hub of drug-related activities. Aware about these problems, the architects worked closely with the local community. The adjacent mosque authorities, too, were suspicious of the intentions of the project – until it was explained to them that the polyclinic was for the very poor who lived in the area. The location of the polyclinic abuts Railway land and their goodwill was also necessary for the success of the project.

This simple building is four floors high and is equipped with a hospital lift. A large area in the basement provides ample space for a modern pathological laboratory. The ground floor has the reception and the Out Patient Department cubicles for doctors and consultants.

Built in metal and glass, the Polyclinic is an intervention of contemporary architecture. Located next to an old mosque, it provides a fascinating contrast to the city's heritage structures.

The architects, familiar with the slum conditions of that area as well as the dilapidated buildings in the surrounding streets, chose to revitalise this depressed urban fabric by creating a contemporary intervention in its midst which would serve the community. The contemporary architectural language of the building is deliberate and intended to stand out from the cacophony of the surrounding architecture as a formal, minimal space which is open and welcoming to all.

The Polyclinic has four floors of 200sq-m each, where laboratories, reception, consultation rooms, day-time wards, doctors and nurse stations are situated. The fully-glazed front facade provides a view into the building, enabling the poorer patients to approach the facility with less trepidation. Once they have been registered, the patients proceed to the first level for treatment. Treatment areas require privacy, and have thus been shielded from view by coloured aluminium louvers that obstruct view but allow full fresh air ventilation.

The choice of primary colours that combine the yellow and blue louvered facade and brightly-ventilated areas seem radical, yet the combination moves away from the macabre association with health centre architecture. The glass-partitioned consulting rooms and ventilated waiting spaces have a tremendous amount of flexibility built in, should the need to reconfigure the space arise in the future.

The entire project has been funded by a public charitable trust established by the most significant contractor to build the Lutyens capitol complex of Delhi. This is their second donation to the citizens of Delhi. The first project, too, which provided accommodation for relatives of the poorest patients [who came to care for the patients admitted to the public hospital] was designed by Romi and Martand Khosla.

### PROJECT DETAILS

**Client:** The Sir Sobha Singh Public Charitable Trust

**Architects:** Romi Khosla Design Studio, New Delhi

**Chief architects:** Romi Khosla, Martand Khosla

**Design team:** Rajnish Pant

**Area:** 1093.50sq-m

**Location:** Old Delhi

**Date of construction:** 2009 - 2011

**Electrical, structural and plumbing consultant:**

SEMAC India

**Photographer:** Saurabh Pandey





### MF HUSAIN ART GALLERY, JMI (JAMIA ART GALLERY)

The University of Jamia was established in the 1930s. As the university evolved, it introduced a wide range of contemporary academic disciplines such as media studies and Central Asian studies. The university is popularly regarded as a progressive avant-garde campus. In 2008, the vice chancellor proposed a new cultural hub for the students, which would have as its core a contemporary students' canteen, a unique art gallery and landscaped lawns.

For the project, the architects chose white marble in the canteen and white metal louvers in the art gallery to express this contemporary identity. The art gallery was converted into a community space for gathering alternative expressions of culture and identity. This role signalled the canteen and the art gallery as iconic models of architectural expression in contemporary Indian academic institutions.

### PROJECT DETAILS

**Client:** Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi

**Architects:** Romi Khosla Design Studio, New Delhi

**Chief architects:** Romi Khosla, Martand Khosla

**Design team:** Rajnish Pant

**Area:** 810sq-m

**Location:** JMI University, New Delhi

**Date of construction:** 2007-2008

**Electrical consultant:** WBG Consulting Engineer

**Structural consultant:** Vinay Khurana, New Delhi

**Plumbing consultants:** Kumar Endecon

**Contractor:** Zumair Khan, New Delhi

**Photographer:** Saurabh Pandey

**Award:** WA Awards – Fourth Cycle June 2009 by World Architecture Community

The art gallery has three main parts. The front gallery that is naturally lit is primarily designed for the display of popular art and student exhibitions. The second is the main internal gallery, which is lit by controlled light and can be divided into two smaller galleries with the help of the central pivoting wall. This gallery is designed for the great university art collection as well as for external artists to exhibit at. Finally, the third exhibition space is the open-air sculpture court at the rear of the building.

Aside from this, the art gallery also has two artist studios adjacent to the sculpture court. These are designed for short-term stays of visiting artists. **RSI**