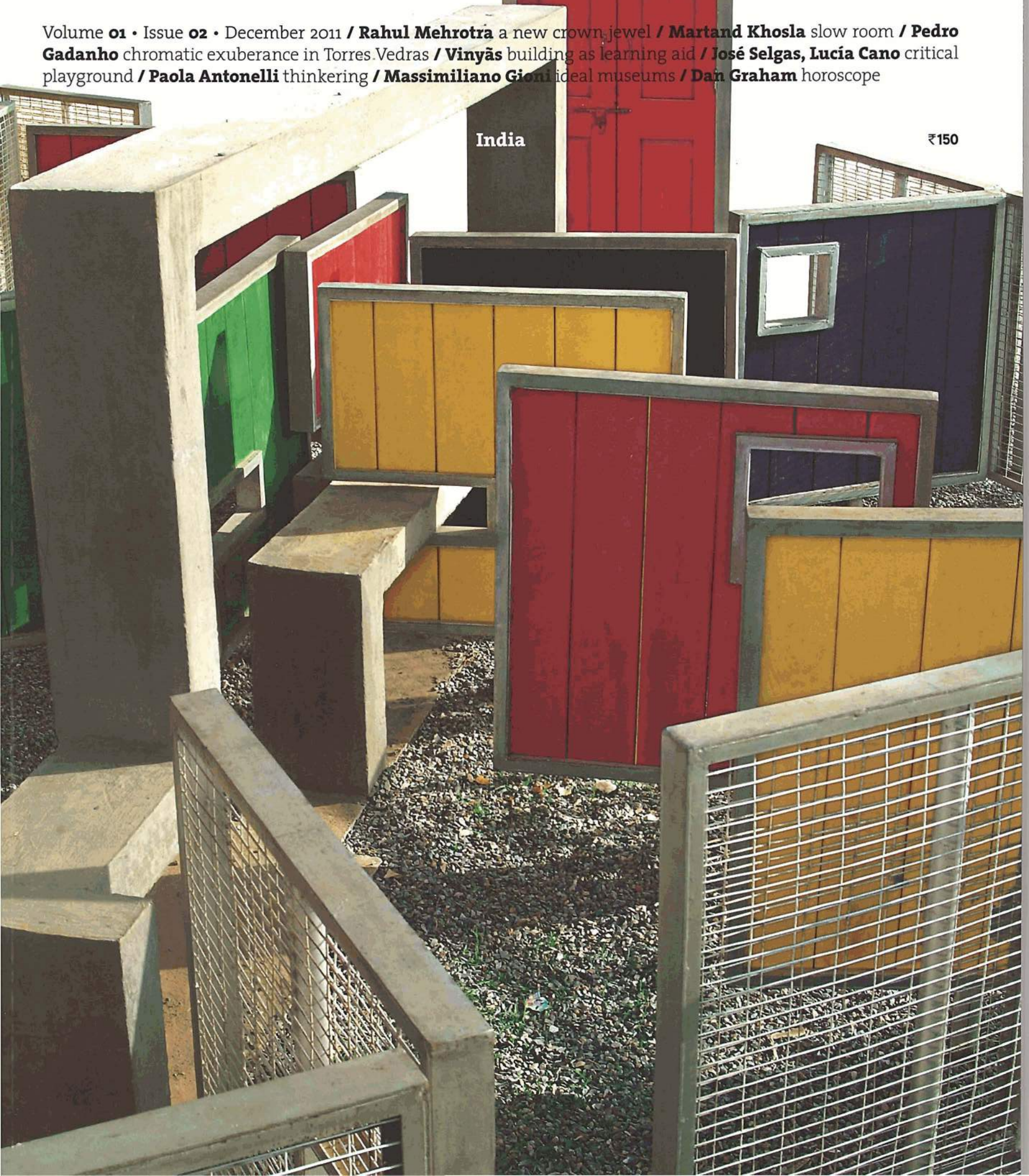


domus

Volume 01 • Issue 02 • December 2011 / **Rahul Mehrotra** a new crown jewel / **Martand Khosla** slow room / **Pedro Gadanho** chromatic exuberance in Torres Vedras / **Vinyās** building as learning aid / **José Selgas, Lucía Cano** critical playground / **Paola Antonelli** thinking / **Massimiliano Gioni** ideal museums / **Dan Graham** horoscope

India

₹150



Slow room

This small school playground designed by Martand Khosla, introduces the idea of flexibility as a potent tool for finely calibrating childrens' imaginations and providing a spatial device for physical play and narrative freedom

Design
**Martand Khosla,
Romi Khosla Design Studio**

Text
Radhika Desai

Photos
Charudutt Chitrak



The doorway acts as a physical and conceptual entrypoint into the imaginary domestic space of the playground; it encourages the establishment of an axis around which the children can use to build new and varying stories

For without any doubt, play is a space with an action and an influence of its own, one that opens up only once the small-minded bureaucratic query of the parent, teacher or doctor "Did you make that up or did you find it in the world?" has been banished...

— **SANFORD KWINTER**

Far from Equilibrium, Essays on Technology and Design Culture

Relating the idea of play to the state of childhood is perhaps the first impulse in an adult mind, and yet, the conception of play, in childhood and outside of it, remains one of the great aspects of human culture, and one of the few activities where the

suspension of disbelief enables faith in long-distant futures. It was in response to a competition for a peace park in Israel that Martand Khosla first began investigating the use of kinetics for a conventionally static *parti*. In using the idea of the motion of ships' sails to register air currents for a public park, a conceptual exploration slowly began which carried forward into a commission for a global design project called Playgrounds & Toys. This was spearheaded by Art for the World to commemorate the fiftieth Anniversary of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Working with a Delhi-based NGO, Deepalaya Foundation, Romi Khosla Design Studio began design and construction work on the playground for their school in

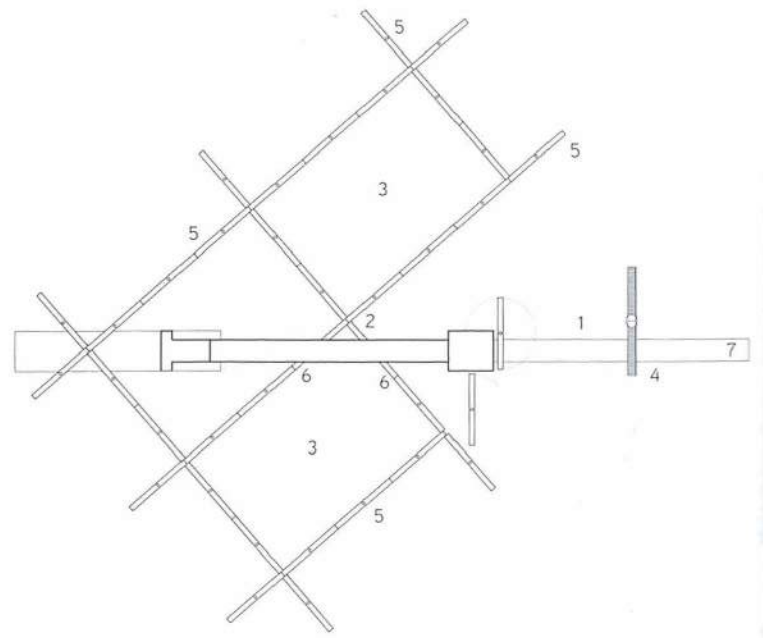
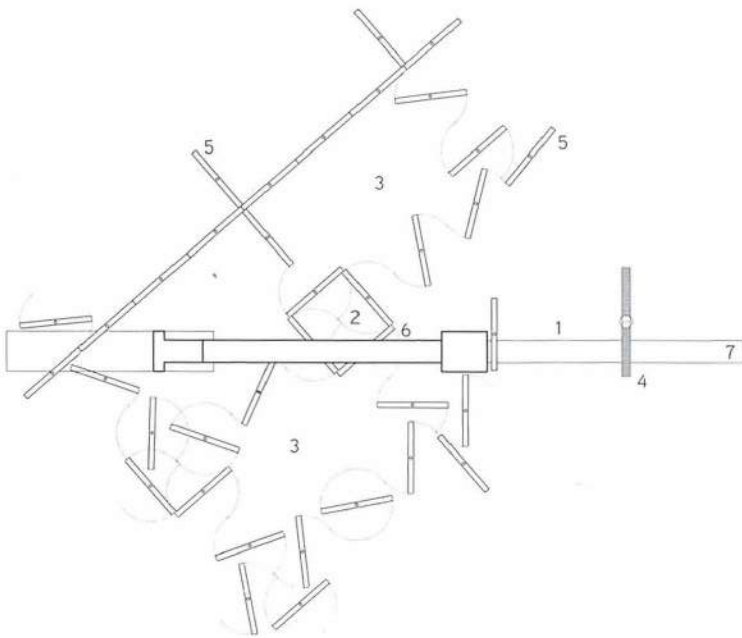
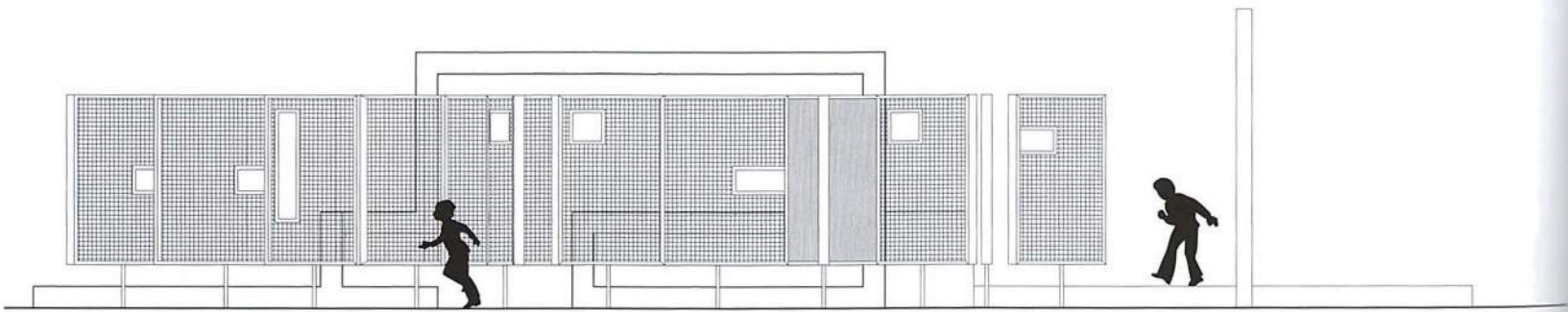
Gusbethi, Haryana



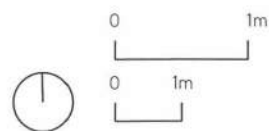
Gusbethi, Haryana which they called 'Slow Room'. One of the extraordinary aspects of childhood is the great capacity for imagining space (understood here as an architectural category), not just in terms of its materials and meanings but also equally in its spatial qualities. Using this as the premise for visualising the playground, RKDS began a simple and systematic overlay on the 150 square metres of *tabula rasa* set aside to build the playground for this school for children from underprivileged homes. The studio approached the problem by using the planning principle of a traditional village house, where it is the processional arrangement from the outside to the interior, based upon ideas of varying privacy, which defines its

formal layout. Marking the plot with a diagonal band of concrete and maintaining a constant width while introducing a shifting register of heights, the architecture develops around this axis, visual and spatial.

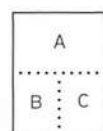
A route is implied with a conventional doorway for 'entry' but the immediate environment beyond this threshold is one rather like a grid with multiple possibilities for configuration. This is achieved by introducing flexibility at two important levels, one at the architectonic level, with a number of pivoting panels allowing for varying spatial configurations, and the other at the level of the user-child's imagination, where each layout contains the possibility of a new spatial story. The panels are located in a



- 1 Public zone
- 2 Private zone
- 3 Semi public zone
- 4 Door
- 5 Wire mesh pivoting panels
- 6 Wooden pivoting panels
- 7 Concrete strip

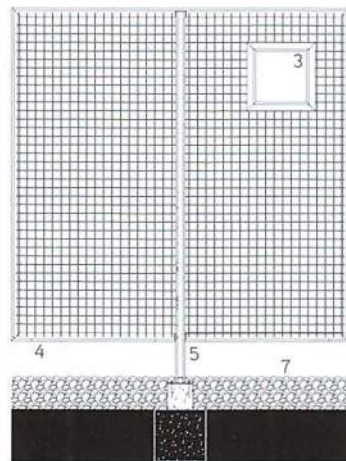
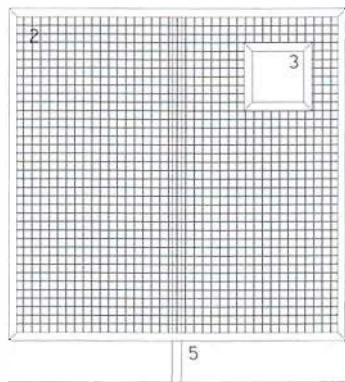


PLAN CONFIGURATION 1

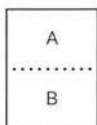


ELEVATIONS

PLAN CONFIGURATION 2



50cm



PANEL TYPOLOGIES

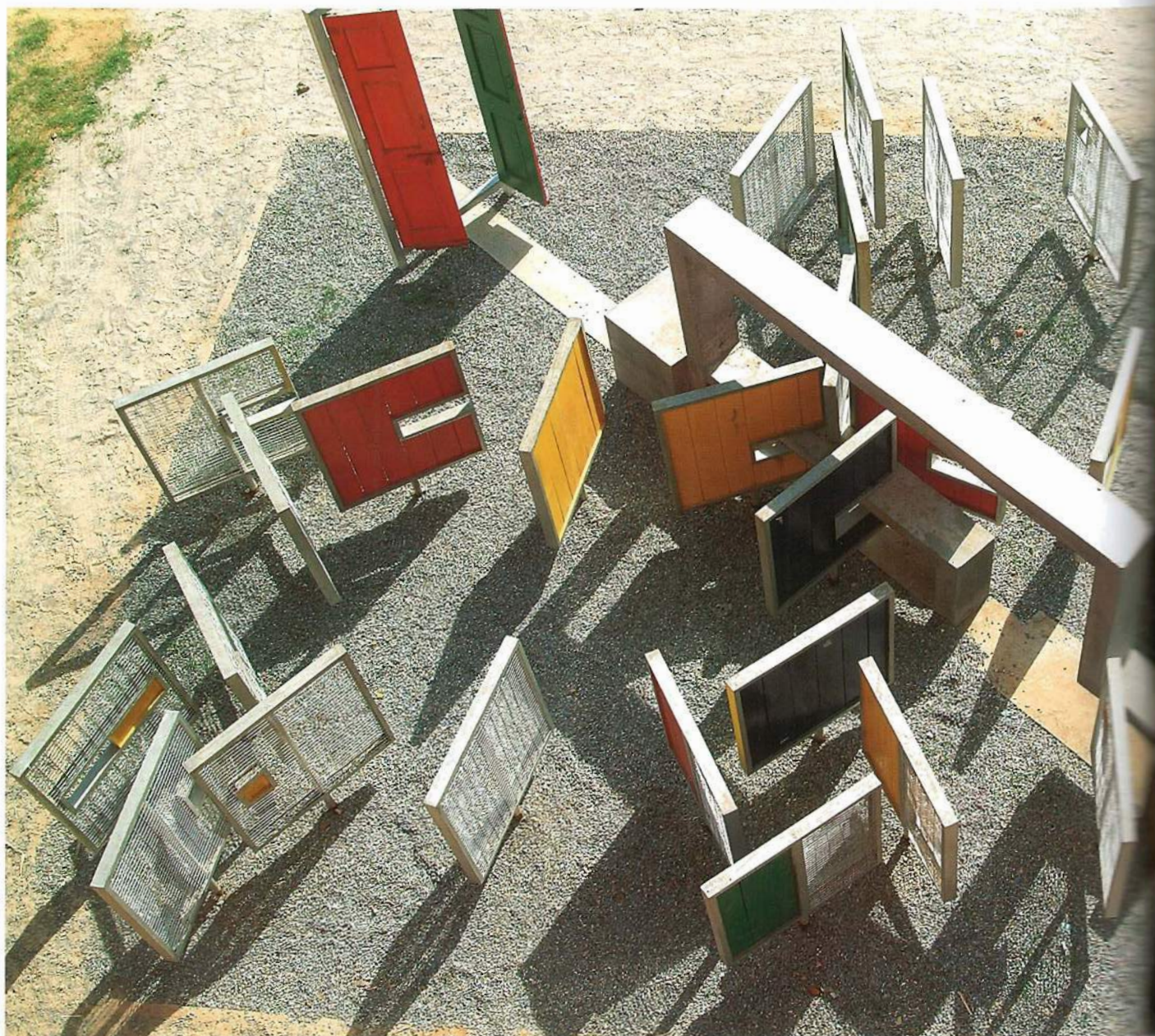
PANEL DETAIL

- 1 75mm C-channel
- 2 Expanded wire mesh
- 3 37.5mm L-section
- 4 Water drip
- 5 Pivoting rod
- 6 Base plate
- 7 Gravel base
- 8 Ball bearing

Site area **150 m²**
Location **Haryana**



↑ The pivoted panels work as notional spatial planes, allowing the children to imagine themselves in various environments



centrifugal manner, with the relatively opaque elements towards the heart of the space, and the more perforated panels towards the periphery. Sustained play-based activities in childhood enhance physical coordination both at the gross and fine motor skill levels, and the design of these pivoting panels provides an extraordinary opportunity for varying levels of exertion and rest, imagination and continuity.

The panels are designed to act individually and as clusters, and are located in such a way that they can be arranged in a number of possible configurations. Due to their material variations, ranging from solid planes to punctured panels and semi-opaque metal mesh sheets, the panels allow for changing levels of interaction between the children who are engaged in configuring them to match their stories.

Conventional architectural elements, built at a child's scale, are introduced more as symbolic devices and the door, window and stairway are notional devices for visualising other environments as much as they stand for real-life elements which provide continuity and comfort.

Where one group of panels could constitute a room complete with a window and hinged door, another could provide an enclosure much like a *hortus conclusus* in a city house. The limit on the flexibility of the panels ensures that the children work within the grid and its parameters while allowing their imaginations to work through a series of mental constructs, ranging from the more intimate security provided at the centre of the playground, to the delicious possibilities offered at the periphery with its semi-opaque screens.

The undulating concrete spine acts variously as a bench, a

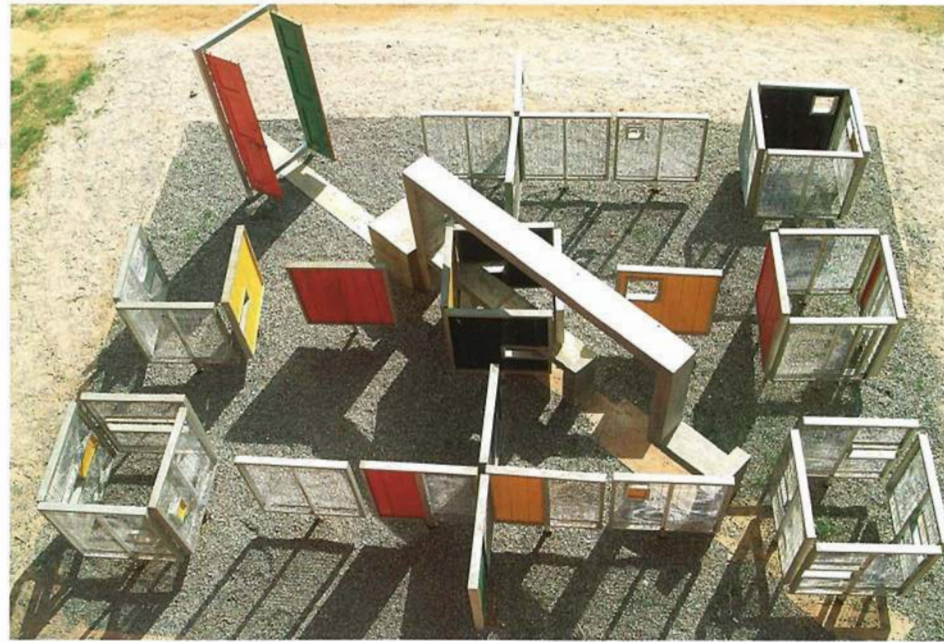
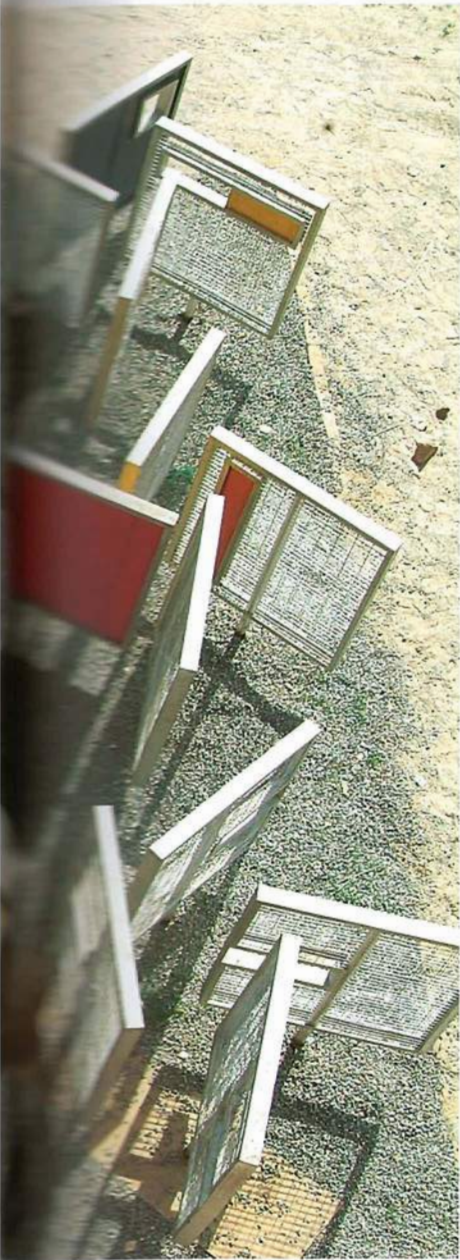
wall, a roof and a bed, and each child interacts with the panels in relation to this binding element. It would be an oversight to not refer to deconstruction when describing the disassembly and reconfiguration that the unique elements this playground provides. The points, lines and planes which together constitute this landscape are overt in their invocation of the possibilities that deconstruction provides; if not theoretically, certainly at the level of disassembly as a potent system both for projecting the psycho-geographies of its juvenile users as much as its designers. If then, a notional series of rooms without a roof could be understood as a unique learning landscape for a child, this playground becomes an example of the possibilities of play which exist beyond those one may find in the visible world their caregivers may expect them to!

—
RADHIKA DESAI

Architect
**MARTAND KHOSLA,
ROMI KHOSLA DESIGN STUDIO**

Design Team
KRITI SANGWAN

Client
**DEEPALAYA SCHOOL,
GUSBETHI**



← The variable possibilities in arrangement allow the children to reimagine environments using the same devices, encouraging spatial creativity; the concrete spine acts as a strong axis of reference for varying configurations that arise from the children's play requirements



← The pivoting panels, in varying grades of opacity and weight allow for much movement and pure childhood fun