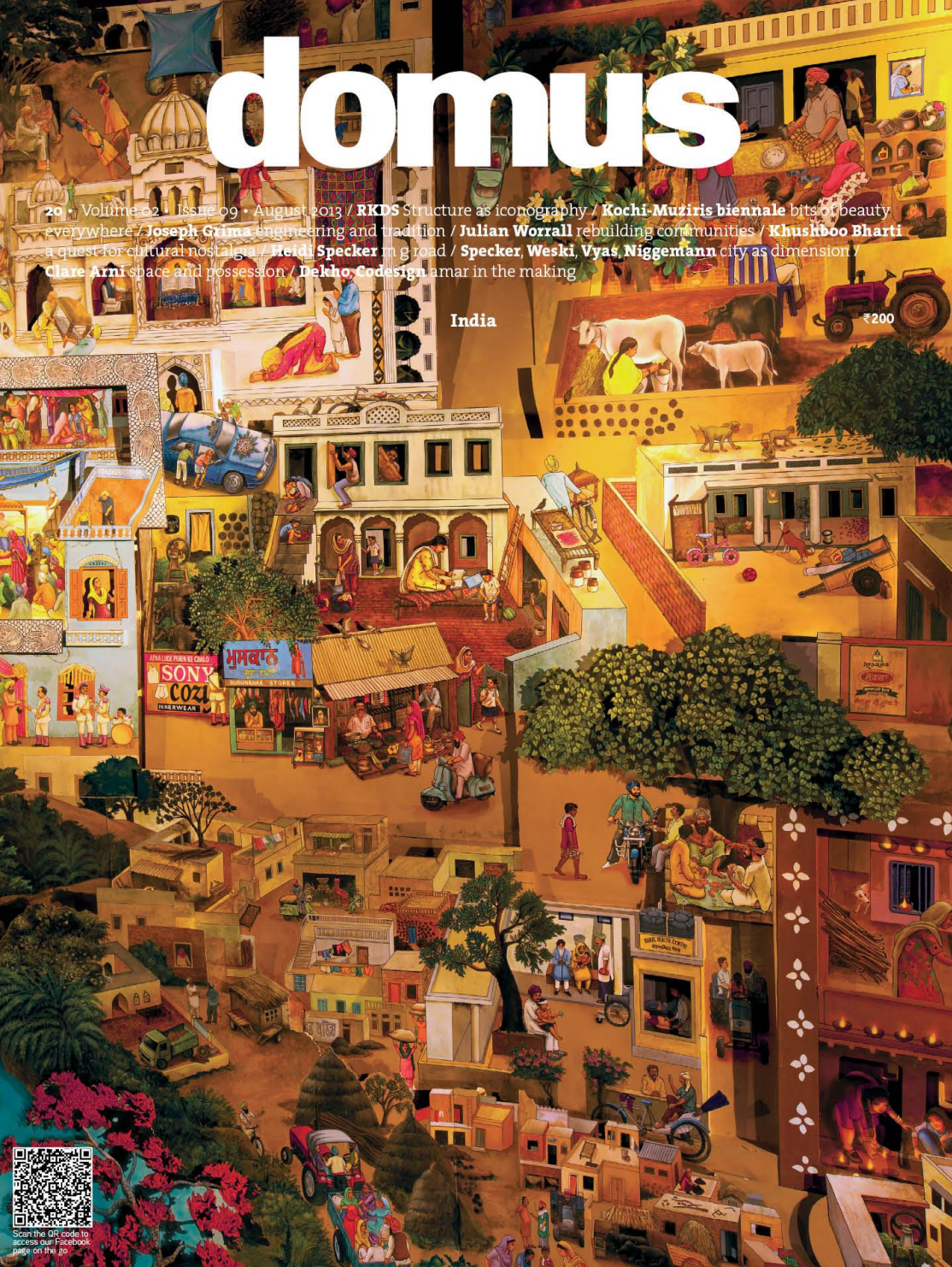


# domus

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India



## 20

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The image is from the Panjvani Gallery, Khalsa Museum; the exhibition is designed by Amardeep Behl. The hand-painted mural in the miniature style depicts the culture and the day's activities in Punjab through experiential narrations aided by a play of lights. This is from one of the many interviews in the book *Dekho* (2013), which is developed and produced by Delhi-based Codesign.

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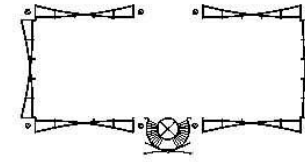
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## Structure as iconography

The Volvo-Eicher Headquarters brings together various components proficiently engineered in different parts of the world with local craftsmanship, thus creating a structure that shows a path to how we can build in the future. Playing with various visual metaphors and typologies, this building stands sharp against the chaotic milieu of Gurgaon.

*Design*  
Romi Khosla Design Studio

*Text*  
Suprio Bhattacharjee

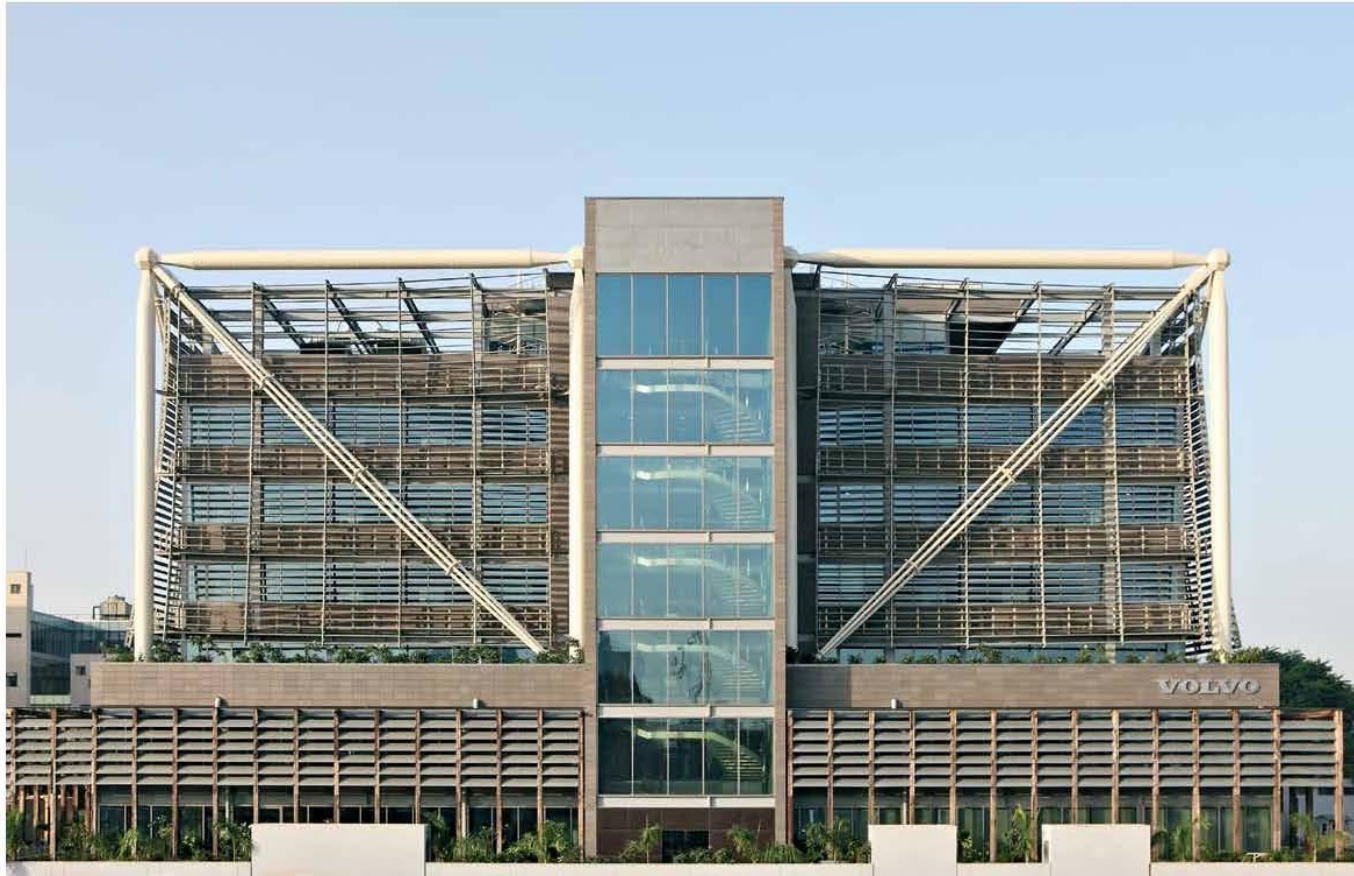
*Photos*  
Saurabh Pandey  
Chandu Arisikere



Something big has been moved into the placeless glitz of Gurgaon. It has less shine and is more obsidian. And instead of the impenetrable easy-off-the-shelf countenance we have a seemingly ceaseless flutter delicately hung. This is less of an insular fish tank and more of a Stevenson Screen. Seemingly paying homage to automotive containers in which automobile manufacturers would earlier transport their unfinished products in an SKD (semi-knocked down) condition, the building's undeniably powerful structural iconography can lend itself to amusing metaphors. As if a giant port crane has plonked this open container neatly onto a flatbed trailer. Oh, where's the towing truck?

This building, the Volvo-Eicher Headquarters, is one of the newest additions to Gurgaon's fervently growing assortment of buildings. What sets this one apart, at first glance of course, is its sheer stance and expressiveness of structure, that catapults a comparatively modest building (it only has 6 storeys) to the foreground of the urban mish-mash it is a part of. A study in how construction technology can show a path to how we build in the future, the entire building was componentised and effectively 'built' off-site with techniques employed that attempt a balanced approach between the precision engineered edifices of the erstwhile 'High-Tech' genre that we were enthralled by during the latter part of the 20th century, as well as the 'loose-fit' approach that is necessary for building

This spread: built in the tropical climate of India, given the present water and energy crisis, the design of the Volvo-Eicher Headquarters building explores possible ways forward for modern architecture, employing a balanced mix of traditional and global technologies

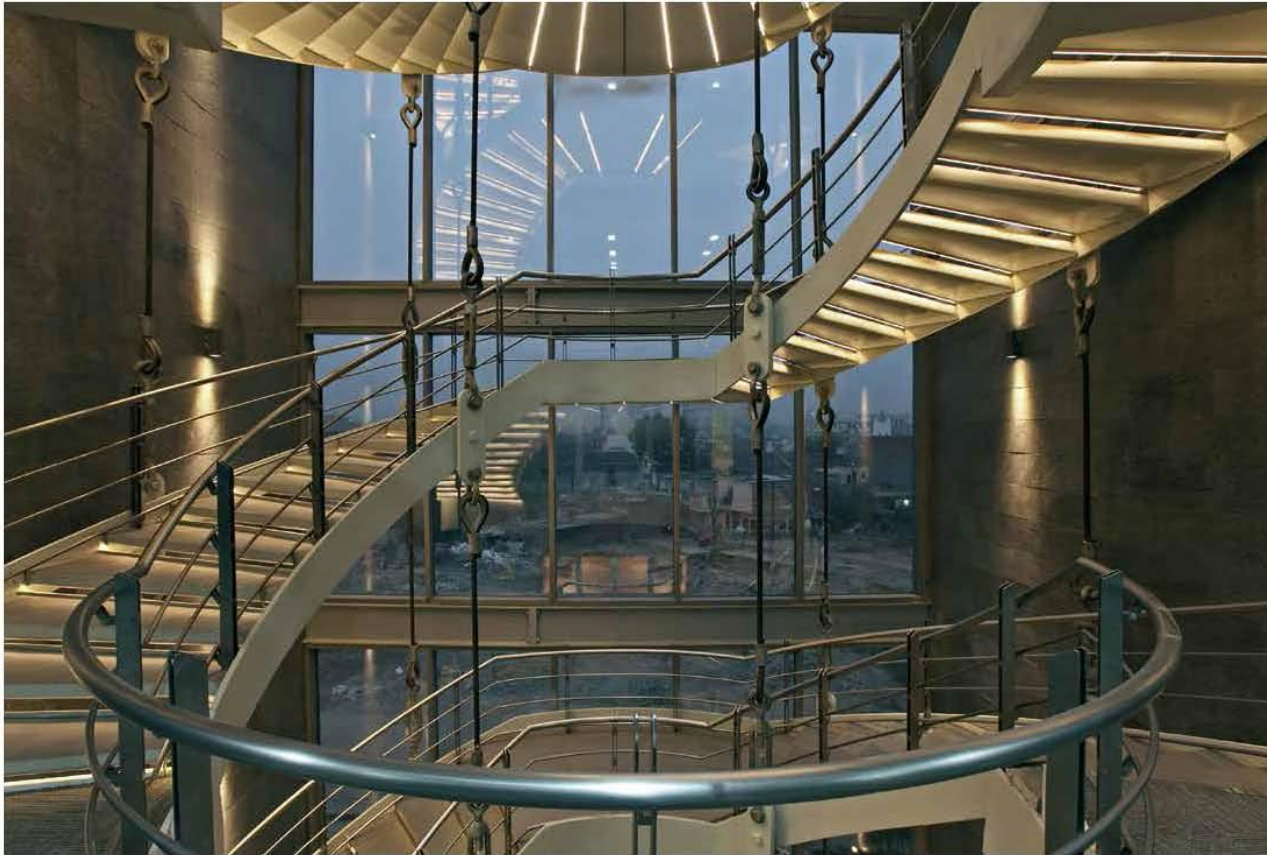


within a largely 'informal' and non-mechanised construction sector within the country. The country still has a persistent craft tradition, as pointed out in previous articles on the works of Kamath Design Studios, Studio Amita Vikrant and Vir Mueller. And the greatest challenge of any work of architecture within this milieu that chooses to employ sophisticated techniques and engineering (whether in its design or in its actual execution) is to achieve the tenuous balance between 'what-one-would-like-to-do' and 'what-really-can-be-done'. In this case perhaps, there were lesser doubts on the part of the client to support a building that is well, pre-engineered, but not off-the-shelf. Also the very setting of the project (in a dense urban setting where there would be considerably lesser challenges in terms of 'sophisticated' construction) pointed towards a balance that could be struck. Heavy engineering and fabrication came courtesy of modern steel factories in Bidar, Karnataka — the place where the famed metal crafting techniques of 'Bidriware' have their origins. Local metal craftsmen were made a part of the project too — in the process of an assembly as well as the finer details. The façade was fabricated in Mumbai. In many ways, the project's execution could point towards how, in the future, 'reconciliation' between the 'local' and the 'not-so-local' can be struck. Also the persistent metaphor here is that of how the automotive industry works.

This page the client wanted the building's unusual design that resonates with the cultural and climatic reality of Gurgaon, while justifying the functionality of the spaces within.



This page the architectural design approach is that of a mass-produced steel-span-free engineered building.



The spiral staircase during the construction stage



The trajectory of this building has been quite different from other similar structures because of the construction methodology employed; various aspects of this building have been crafted with close interactions with local metal workers



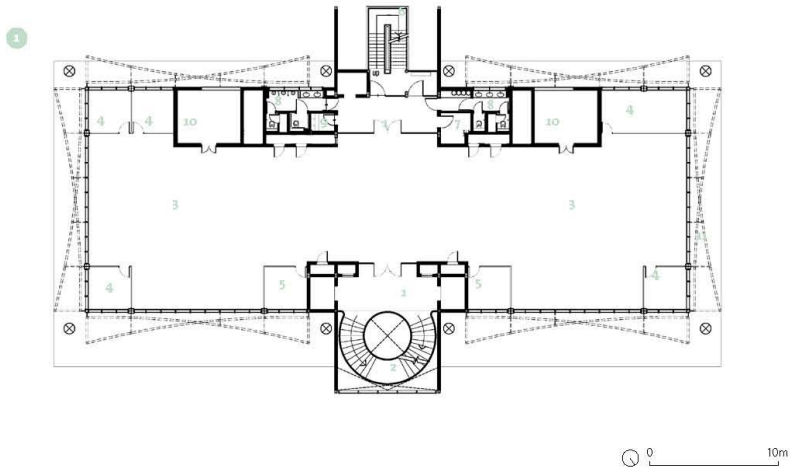
too, wherein a majority of components are manufactured off-site.

Typologically, the building prescribes to the generic within a relatively modest footprint – and understandably so, as it tries to maximise the envelope volume. This may also have been a prerogative from the point of view of LEED certification. The broad two-storey base houses lobbies, shared staff facilities as well as open-plan exhibition and user-experience spaces, while the set-back four-storey block houses typical open-plan office spaces. An uppermost 'penthouse' offers workspaces for senior management with the option of a charming screened terrace garden that would also house the mechanical and services equipment.

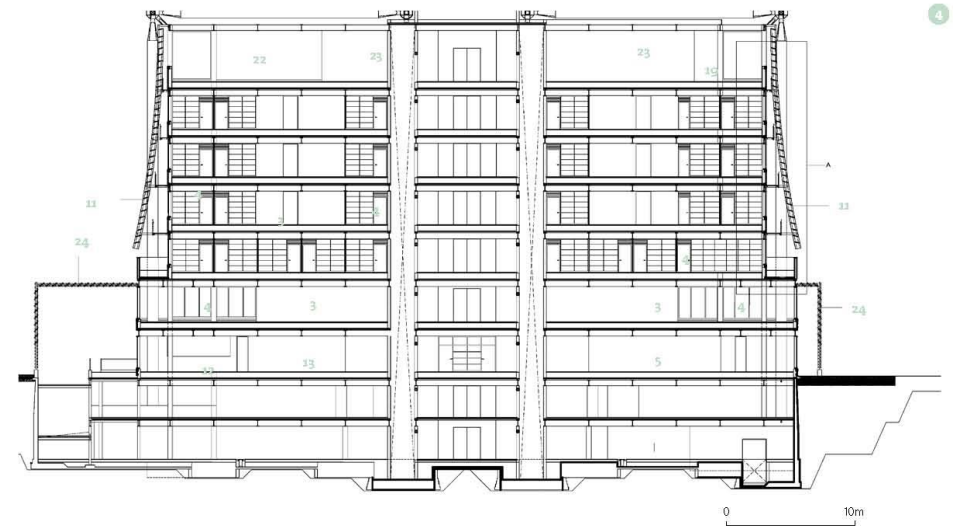
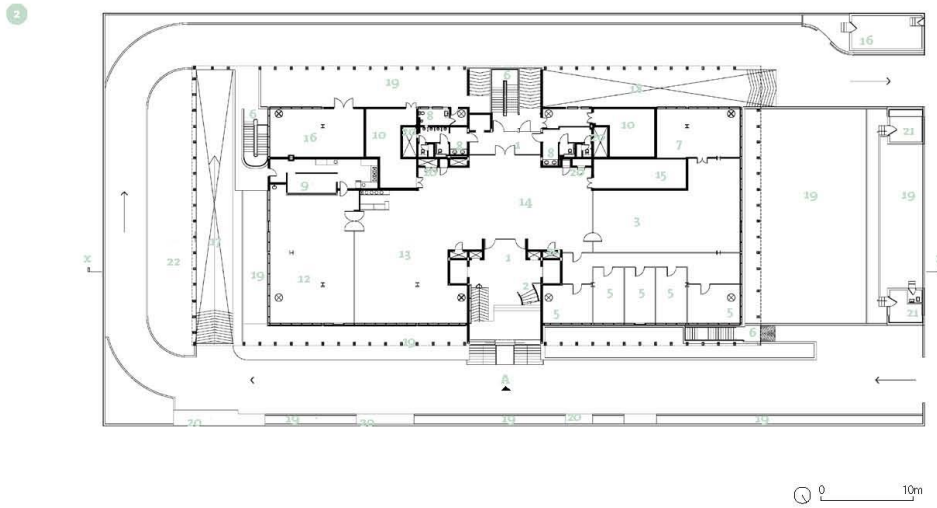
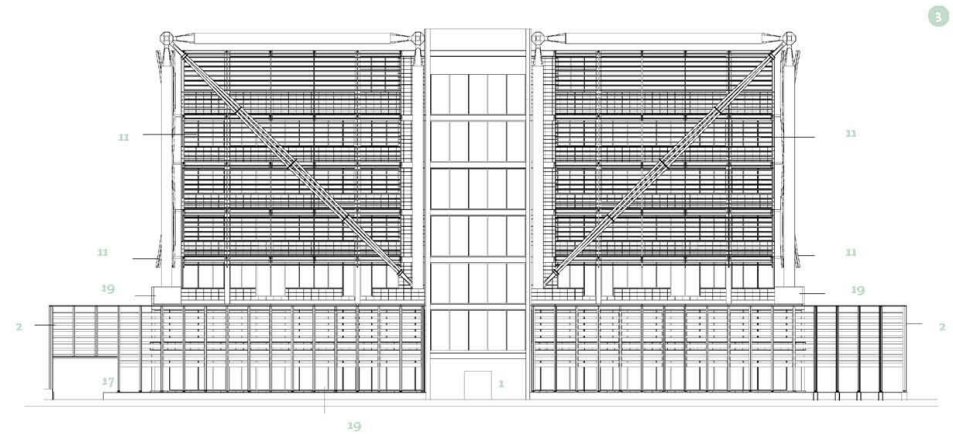
On a site that is oriented roughly in the South-East-to-North-West axis, the building tries to maximise its exposure to north light for the workspaces by positioning the bulk of its services on the longer South-West façade, which also forms a considerable heat-sink to the blazing afternoon sun. Roughly configuring an open 'T' within the rectilinear typical floor plan, the services maximise efficiency in terms of the floor-plate arrangement, allowing for large column-free office spaces. While the delicate all-encompassing 'wrap' of kite-like fluttering armatures over the generic glass-and-terracotta-spandrel-panel box makes for an enticing visual proposition, one wonders whether there could have been some scope of

View of the spiral staircase within the building

Image indicating the scale of the joinery and the different components coming together



- 1 Lobby
- 2 Main staircase
- 3 Open work space
- 4 Enclosed cabin
- 5 Meeting / conference room
- 6 Fire escape stair
- 7 Server room
- 8 Toilet
- 9 Pantry
- 10 A.H.U. room
- 11 Louvre
- 12 Canteen
- 13 Information meeting area
- 14 Exhibition space
- 15 UPS room
- 16 Services room
- 17 Entry ramp
- 18 Exit ramp
- 19 Green area
- 20 Service staff
- 21 Security hut
- 22 Service equipments
- 23 Senior management
- 24 M.S. + wood pergola



## VOLVO — EICHER HEADQUARTER

Design:  
Romi Khosla Design Studios,  
New Delhi

Principal Architects:  
Romi Khosla,  
Martand Khosla

Design Team:  
Chandu V. Arsilere,  
Ram Pandarathi Nair,  
Sanjoli Tuteja

Structural Consultant:  
Frischmann Prabhu

MEP & LEED Consultant:  
Spectral Design Services

Client:  
Eicher Goodearth Pvt. Ltd.

Location:  
Gurgaon, Haryana

## FACT BOX

Project Area:  
9,972 m<sup>2</sup>

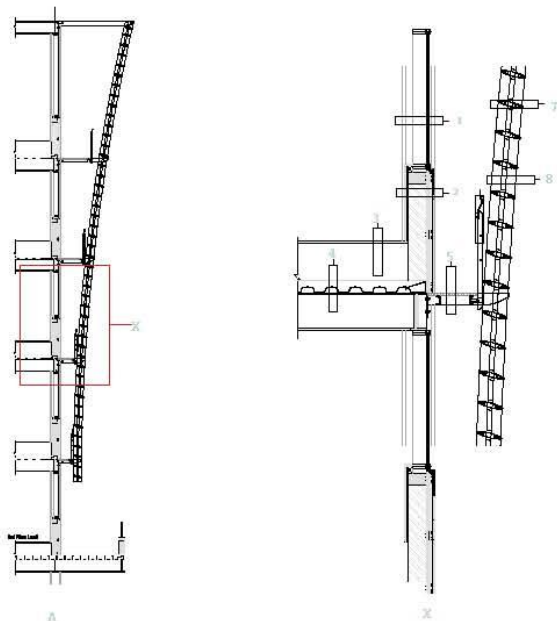
Project Phase:  
2010 - 2012

## DRAWINGS

- 1 Typical floor plan
- 2 Ground floor plan

## DRAWINGS

- 3 Elevation A
- 4 Section xx



- 1 Glazed curtain wall comprising of 24 mm insulated (HS) glass unit
- 2 Terra-cotta cladding comprising of ms (HDG-75 microns) brackets, metal shims welded to steel structure along with vertical aluminium box sections (anodised 25 microns) bolted to the MS brackets
- 3 Raised floor comprising of steel cementitious in-fill on 500 x 500 x 30 mm thick interchangeable steel panels overlaid with 5 mm thick carpet tiles
- 4 80 mm x 80 mm thick Zinc galvanised steel shallow composite floor decking
- 5 39 mm thick chevroned aluminium walkway on 150 x 75 mm twin galvanised steel brackets supporting vertical flanges of vrendal truss supporting louvres
- 6 42.4 mm diameter MS railing
- 7 Perforated aluminium louvres attached to the vertical bracings
- 8 150 x 75 x 12 mm thick vertical flanges of vrendal truss supporting louvres



This spread, the solar façade louvres have been hand fixed to pre-determined positions for modulation determined by complex calculation for each façade



defining the orientations and exposures differently, with say, more glass area on the northern aspects, considering the relatively dense metal scrim and the oblique angles at which sunlight may brush past those façades. Without doubt, the building's unforgettable iconographic signature is its oversized, super-scaled braced box, with the bowstring strut seemingly forming the axis along which the rib-like vierendeel beams supporting the perforated aluminium screen twist or rather 'warp', seemingly (and metaphorically, yes) bent by the Gurgaon heat. Its sheer ponderous nature and firm stance makes it a brawny companion to the gossamer-like wispiqueness of the sunscreen. At first glance the immense contrast may strike one as odd – more so as one never really gets a grasp of how the braced box 'sits' on the ground (it's lower frame seems to have gone 'missing') while the sunscreen manages to define a specific geometry. The broadened base here is perhaps a typological monster – what if we could have seen the two brace cubes float free off the transverse staircase core, seemingly levitating themselves in a cheerful, frolicking seesaw over the not-so-fancy neighbours, with the base discreetly tucked in?

The other significant and welcome aspect of the architecture is how it eschews a sense of visual 'refinement' in favour of a tectonic language that is 'rough-at-the-edges' – discarding the overwrought corporate imagery of a 'desired slickness'. Details and junctions are not meant to be covered up under the sheen of a supposed designer's attire, but are rather exposed and displayed unassumingly for contemplation and inspection. This furthers the building's core conceptual driver as an exercise in 'making'. Reused wood from packaging material from the truck manufacturer's factories reinforces this 'rawness' on the exterior pergola that wraps the two-storey base, as well as in the furniture that has been custom-designed.



View of the louvres as seen from within the building.



The building boasts of significant environmental strategies too – such as the reduced water usage, a lower running energy bill due to significant sun-shading in addition to greater ingress of natural light, as well as the significant usage of recycled materials – as described earlier. Of course the paradox is how the carbon footprint can be minimized in constructions like this, where components need to be manufactured and shipped in from distant places. This is a challenge that the global construction industry has been facing for quite some time now. With a few simple but dramatic gestures, this office building became a celebratory assertion of the possibilities of construction and the integration of precision engineering and local craftsmanship.

**SUPRIO BHATTACHARJEE**  
Architect

↑  
For the interiors, all packaging material of all the Volvo trucks that arrived in India were saved up and used to construct nearly 80 per cent of the interior woodwork.



↑  
View of the building within its backdrop, during different times of the day, and at night.