



Creative & Contemporary



Martand Khosla

Martand Khosla, a partner at Romi Khosla Design Studio, started his practice by designing structures and sets for theatre, fashion and public events. He soon moved on to a variety of projects, ranging from playgrounds, eco-friendly mud architecture, low-cost factory workers housing, high-end villas, institutional buildings and corporate offices across India. The architect expounds on his philosophy, influences and reveals why interesting design discourses are essential to good work.

TEXT: INSITE Correspondent | PHOTOS COURTESY: Romi Khosla Design Studio

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Martand Khosla studied architecture at Architectural Association in London and graduated in 2001. He worked briefly in London at a firm called Allies and Morrison, before returning to India.

“We set up RKDS towards the end of 2001 and early 2002 with a project to design patient accommodation for a hospital in West Delhi. This was a project given to us by Sir Sobha Singh Public Charitable Trust. My early years were spent designing fewer buildings and more interiors and events,” Khosla says.

Today, Romi Khosla Design Studio is a consultancy led by architects Romi Khosla and Martand Khosla. The practice engages in creative and contemporary design with a wide range of projects including luxury hotels, educational buildings for schools and universities, retail locations, small specialised interiors and urban planning.

The studio, in its present form, was rebranded as a dynamic design

centre intended to be scale agnostic and particularly class agnostic.

“Our intention was to be able to design a large variety of spaces for users from varied socio-economic backgrounds. Over the last 10 years, we have designed ephemeral event spaces, retail interiors, buildings for charitable organisations and educational institutions, urban sculptural installations and a host of furniture and products. More recently, we find ourselves working on larger architectural projects,” Khosla says about his firm.

To Khosla, design is the “ability to improve the usability of a space or object, while attributing an aesthetic dimension to it in a manner that the experience of the object or space moves beyond the visual or intellectual.”

On influences, he cites a variety that doesn’t necessarily lie within the realm of design but are more towards cinema, literature and art. “Some of my influences have been Le Corbusier, Peter Zumthor, Marcel



Duchamp, Berthold Romanovich Lubetkin, Andrei Tarkovski and Constructivism,” he says.

At the urban and macro level, the studio’s philosophy is to attempt to be simple, bold and formally articulate. The idea of the contemporary is central to the design philosophy. “Our approach would be to respond to the conditions of a site and situate our building within the context in a modern yet extremely local manner. This approach is carried through the detailing process as well, where we prefer to attempt and articulate bold details using as many local components available,” Khosla says, adding that care is taken to maximise the use of recycled material or use recyclable material wherever possible.

At the conceptual level, everyone in the studio is involved in the project even if the main design direction is being given by a particular partner. A lot of constructive conversations happen at the early stages of a project and the partners work with physical models in evolving the design. “As the project begins to crystallise, a partner takes over with a dedicated design team who follows through till construction stage. We then have weekly internal meetings where the progress and design are shared with everyone and inputs from other project teams are incorporated into the design and detailing process,” Khosla reveals.

Romi Khosla Design Studio is happy to work on any project where the client is open to an interesting design discourse. The scale and nature of the project are not defining criteria for selection; the design and socio-economic parameters play a decisive role in the selection of a project.

The studio now has a vast body of work to its credit and their architectural projects span several sectors - from low-cost rural housing



to high-tech commercial buildings. The firm has, over the years, attempted to find opportunities to work on a wide variety of projects in a variety of locations and for a diverse socio-economic group. “The purpose of working in this manner is for our own personal growth as designers and individuals, but also the belief that learning from a variety of projects has influenced design solutions in so many other unexpected projects. This varied exposure has allowed us to engage with the politics of this country at several levels, allowing us in turn to design better and more appropriately for it – Volvo-Eicher, Lahori Gate, Children’s Playground, Twist & Shout (Reclaiming the streets); A-house, Castro Cafeteria, M.F. Hussain Art Gallery and Dental College are a few of our favourite projects,” he says.

1. The structure made for Volvo-Eicher is first-of-its-kind dry construction building made completely with steel

2. Apart from the innovative technological features, the building stands out as an aesthetic complex engineering feat brought together by the complex collaboration of over 50 agencies



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The designer's work has been extensively covered by the national as well as international media. His students' canteen in New Delhi has been featured in UK as one of the best buildings of the 21st Century, and his first building – a hospice for poor patients in New Delhi – won the WA Award. But the five-time winner of the World Architecture Awards between 2009 and 2012 is raring for more.

On modern-day architecture in India, Khosla believes that India's relationship with modernism is not necessarily a "sequentially progressive one." He chooses to view it as a phenomenon that arrived with great vigour first during the Nehruvian era and has since then attempted to find its parameters of evolving within our cultural, climatic and economic realities.

"In this quest, a substantial volume of

construction has been removed from the modernist debate and modernism has been seen through an aesthetic lens only. The intellectual discourse has put forward several other interesting possible trajectories for India, which have not had adequate following within the larger practice of architecture," Khosla says.

Ruminating on the evolution of architecture in over the next few years, the designer says that he doesn't believe there will be a great change over the next few years in India unless there are some well-defined structural changes to the systems within which we build.

"There will always remain some smaller pockets where very interesting work has carried on in the past and I expect it to carry on in the future. However, the sporadic occurrence of adequate momentum has neither been able to influence

the broader base of users, decision-makers and pedagogy, nor has there been an articulation of a way forward,” Khosla says.

INSITE takes a look at two recent projects by Romi Khosla Design Studio:

Volvo-Eicher Corporate HQ, Gurgaon

The corporate headquarters of the newly formed joint venture, Volvo-Eicher, is designed to be a state-of-the-art steel building for the engineering group. This building is to use the least amount of energy and resources possible in its day-to-day functioning, and the client’s approach towards the project required RKDS to work in coordination with Spectral Design Services to design a LEED Platinum-rated building.

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

This structure for Volvo-Eicher is unique in its construction technology. It is the first-of-its-kind dry construction building made completely with steel. The LEED Platinum (provisional) rated building offers innovative technologies like raised floors for air-conditioning systems and exposed steel decking in the office spaces. The entire building is span-free and all work spaces are column-free. The façade has a very complex curved steel louvered system designed to light up all work space areas with natural reflected light. The external façade uses recycled wooden railway sleepers, a feature used throughout the interior design of the building, where 90 per cent of the wood used

is recycled wooden crates used to transport imported vehicles.

Apart from the innovative technological features, the building stands out as an aesthetic complex engineering feat brought together by the complex collaboration of over 50 agencies. The Volvo-Eicher Corporate HQ achieves several firsts in the trajectory of Indian architecture, setting new benchmarks for the future.

Greenply Corporate HQ, Gurgaon

The corporate offices for the MDF division of the Indian company were designed by RKDS in Gurgaon, NCR. The brief was simple: a unique identity. The 20,000 sq. ft. headquarters were laid out in a manner where the open-plan office

3. The corporate headquarters of the newly formed joint venture, Volvo-Eicher, is designed to be a state-of-the-art steel building for the engineering group

4. The 20,000 sq. ft. headquarters of Greenply were laid out in a manner where the open-plan office was in the centre and the meeting rooms and cabins were placed along the periphery of the space





5. The lighting design at Greenply HQ uses LEDs and varies between random placements to straight line rigid geometries

was in the centre and the meeting rooms and cabins were placed along the periphery of the space.

The central area was covered with floating MDF to create a false ceiling. “We innovated with our lighting consultant and the manufacturer of the lights to custom design uniform brightness disk lights, which when switched on act as down lighters and when off merge with the MDF disks,” Khosla says.

The circulation space, the main conference area and meeting rooms use saw cut raw wood used for manufacturing of the MDF boards.

“This allowed us to create a narrative between the different stages of the manufacturing of the main product,” the designer says. The layout of the office allows complete privacy to the workforce while creating a dramatic

axis along the main office space that led to various key destinations within the office. The lighting design uses LEDs and varies between random placements to straight line rigid geometries.

Certain alignments of the central disks allow for key axis within the office to be highlighted as the users walk through. The design of the office space juxtaposes rough exposed brick walls with the sleek high-end finishes of the lights and partition systems. The design features are limited to create a calm working environment where natural light passes light through to the core of the office. ●

Led by architects Romi Khosla and Martand Khosla, Romi Khosla Design Studio is a consultancy that engages in creative and contemporary design.

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