

A&B

IN CONVERSATION

Akshat Bhatt, Principal Architect,
Architecture Discipline

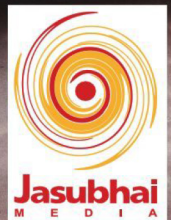
ARCHITECTURE

Luxury in the age of recuperation
Corporate Headquarters for Rug Republic,
Architecture Discipline

Breaking the glass and steel stereotype
Office Complex for Gopal Printpack Rajkot,
i-con Architects & Urban Planners

INTERIORS

Timber Rhyme, by Studio Ardete



Accelerating Change

Akshat Bhatt, Principal Architect, Architecture Discipline speaks to IAB about building future habitations in light of constant resource consumption, sustainability and globalisation. Citing an example of the current COVID-19 pandemic accelerating change, Akshat illustrates ways, methods and learning that can be imbibed for emerging cities and practitioners.

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Akshat Bhatt, Principal Architect

What design aspirations does Architecture Discipline have for the country? How do you wish to see design be a part of nation-building and law-making pertaining to better built-environments?

Cities have become man's new natural habitat. It is expected that, by the year 2050, ninety percent of the human population will live within cities. They can only be sustainable, however, if we ensure that they are healthier places to live. So we must call upon centuries of past experience, start setting up dialogues for continuity and demonstrate relevance -- to offer the promise of a bright future. We must not only provide space for people to live, eat, sleep, interact and recreate, but also for people's well-being.

We need to address issues of resource



Discovery Centre project in Bangalore. © Jeetin Sharma

consumption and utilization. At the current rate of consumption, the planet will soon become uninhabitable. So, we must find ways to generate our own power, treat our own waste and grow our own food as individuals and as a collective. Therefore, one of the objectives of architecture must not only be to humanize buildings, but to create an environment that allows us to move away from constant consumption.

Addressing sustainable goals for cities is pertinent because, while wars and the search for power are entirely ephemeral, what will remain of civilization is art and architecture. We must search for our own

domain within architecture, which are not just a simple multiplication of uninspired global projects, but also create inspiring landmarks that allow our cultures to express who and what they are. We must do so quickly, because, at its current pace, architecture cannot keep up with the revolutions that are happening in all other spheres of life.

Who are the stake-holders in the bureaucracy who can make the aforementioned possible?

Each individual must champion the cause of sustainable development. It starts with the elected government to create



Capsule for Automated Travel (CAT). © Architecture Discipline.

a framework for meeting these goals, followed by trained technocrats and eventually moves down to educationists. However, the buck cannot stop there; it has to stop at the citizen level. Each one of us has a responsibility not only to ourselves, but also to our future generations; only if we embrace this responsibility in its entirety and defend our role with all our might can there be a promise of a sustainable future.

If you had to revisit any of your old projects and make some design interventions in them to fit COVID-19 times, what would that be?

At Architecture Discipline, we have never believed that buildings are like traditional temples or classical forms that cannot be altered. We see them as flexible frameworks that interact with each other. This allows us to create large floor plates that are well-lit and well-serviced, further

equipping us with a tremendous amount of flexibility in the planning and usage of space. Therefore, our buildings, from within and outside, are designed to allow for easy reconfiguration. For instance, in the Discovery Centre project in Bangalore, one can play between opaque, translucent and transparent parts of the facade depending on how the internal spaces are configured.

While flexibility remains inherent to our designs, we also consider the lifecycle and serviceability of our buildings in our design process. Indoor air quality, air conditioning systems and even water requirements have been accounted for. Therefore, even with an unprecedented occurrence of the pandemic, I believe that our buildings have been robust enough to sail through this time, without requiring any significant changes.

Once the COVID-19 vaccine is administered to everyone - what learning would you want to carry forward and what systems do you wish to leave in the past? (As practitioners of the built environment)

The pandemic has demonstrated how change can be accelerated, and what we see now is a system that we would have to adopt in the future as a part of everyday life -- virtual meetings with video conference calls, working from remote locations, and travelling only when it is necessary will continue even in

the future. Deconstructing mass transport systems exhibited in our prototype of the Capsule for Automated Travel (CAT), creating medical and civic facilities quickly, as was demonstrated by the Life Community Medical Facility Project, are other things that I think we should continue to engage with, in order to lead healthier lives.

What we must leave behind are the progressive ways of the past, where we end up spending more time on the road than we do in our stable spaces such as our homes. We must understand that the green spaces and the city are two sides of the same coin. So, while we allow for compact cities, we should not destroy everything simply because we plan only for the automobile and mass transits. We must find ways to generate our own power, treat our own waste and grow our own food at individual capacities or as a collective.

How do you see design evolving in 2021? What typologies do you feel will be most impacted or will see maximum change?

Any space that allows for an uncontrollable gathering of people who are not acquainted with one another, would change. At the helm of this change would be our public transport systems, workspaces and commercial buildings. However, what these changes will be and to what extent will they be



Life Community Medical Facility Project. © Architecture Discipline.

propagated, will require serious economic reconsideration.

Curriculums and ways of learning have drastically changed. Architecture school has always had a collaborative and hands-on approach to education. It emphasised on site-visits, group projects, people management

(from clients to on-site labour), apprenticeship, etc. What would you advise students and even freshers who may miss out on this crucial mode of learning and discovery?

Why must design learning or teaching be so restrictive? We can find various ways to teach people skills. I think education



both art and architecture is that while nothing can replace the connection between your hand and your brain when you're sketching, a lot can be substituted by virtual processes. While site visits are an essential component in the architectural curriculum, they are not a compulsion anymore. There was a time when architects would walk around, draw plans for a scheme and then search for a site. But now, more often than not, a site is zoned and allocated to an architect beforehand. Furthermore, in the age of the drone and high-resolution camera, it is possible to minimize the need for a site visit. The best way for students to maximize their time and not miss out on opportunities is by learning the essential skills: reading, writing and sketching. ■

in design is more about grooming people with an attitude and character. It is incorrect to believe that only architects need to work in a collaborative environment. Even for an artist or a poet, there are many collaborative processes involved, from putting paint on a canvas to delivering the end-product to a client. However, one thing that remains true to