



25 MASTERS OF INDIAN ARCHITECTURE



MANIT RASTOGI

Every work by Manit Rastogi has a distinct inflection. His work is a stellar collection of modern, yet socially conscious creativity. "I have always been curious about how people inhabit spaces, how dwellings are formed. This curiosity grew into a love for design, architecture and a better understanding of urbanism."

Rastogi graduated from the London's Architectural Association with honours at the diploma level and a distinction at the degree level – where he specialised in Energy and Environmental Studies. After teaching for a few years at the School of Planning and Architecture, Delhi, the Architectural Association, London and the Hong Kong Polytechnic Institute, he decided to make his way back home.

With the rapidly liberalised economy on its way, 1996 seemed like an ideal time to start a new venture. Rastogi co-founded Morphogenesis with his wife and now leads as managing director of a team of some of the brightest creative minds in India. Over the years, the firm has received repeated national and international affirmation of their talent and vision. Their most recent awards include the FutureArc Green Leadership Award, Singapore and the ArchiDesign Awards for Best Commercial Building and Interior Design. While his list of accomplishments and accolades is heady, Rastogi follows a simple philosophy — sustainable design that adapts to the environment and is optimised for use by the community. "In the early '90s, after the economy opened up, Indian architecture and design had all but disappeared from the platform of global discourse. No one perceived Indian architecture as cutting edge and radical. Morphogenesis was set up to help redefine what Indians perceived as cutting-edge architecture and environmental design," he states.

This idea seems less surprising as you peel away the layers to his approach. While many architects begin their design process with sketches and figures, Rastogi takes a different route. For him, nature provides all the necessary first steps. The natural world influenced his earliest concepts of design. "The shape of broccoli florets, anthills and snails have always fascinated me," he says. "One of my earliest inspirations came from nature's miniature builders — ants. I was fascinated by how ants construct their habitat. The hill is designed to maintain a constant of two degrees Celsius in the queen's chamber to help her reproduce. Truly masters of architecture, they even accomplish this in deserts where the temperature can fluctuate from 55 degrees Celsius during the day to 2 degrees at night."

To bring his creations to life, he appends his

Office Architecture in its first year. Eight years later, in 2009, it was awarded the Green Good Design™ Award hosted by The European Centre for Architecture Art Design and Urban Studies and The Chicago Athenaeum. Re-defining simplicity is perhaps the most complex thing to attempt. Rastogi makes a compelling argument for his way of working. "Sustainability is at the core of what we do across India's five climatic zones. Our smallest project was 200sqft and our largest 3,000 acres." Although each project is different, the root of each project remains the same. He says, "We start with the idea of 'no is more'. We try and work out how to function with minimal energy, finance or other peripheral resources."

While much of this is practical, Rastogi dreams of creating architecture that breaks free from pure modernism. "I would like my work to represent the space that it occupies. It needs to belong, rather than simply be a construction that could be uprooted and placed just about anywhere." This unique identity is what he tries to shape with each of his projects. Conspicuous among his many imposing designs is the housing development Marble Arch that occupies 5.4 acres in Chandigarh and the award-winning Pearl Academy of Fashion, a colossal campus structure, 20km from Jaipur.

In keeping with his 'no is more' line of thinking, Rastogi is also a firm believer in good design reducing or even eliminating the need for things like air-conditioning, which are detrimental to the environment. The campus building in Jaipur is shielded from the hot-dry weather by simply incorporating a traditional Rajasthani architectural element, the *jali* that has worked well for housing in the area for decades. A mesh-like wall placed four feet away from the building acts as a buffer and reduces direct heat gain, yet allows plenty of diffused daylight through fenestrations. Another clever old-world technique used to regulate the temperature is the raised building with the hollow underbelly. Rainwater and recycled water from a sewage plant fills this deep crafted pool and evaporates to cool the structure internally. The idea comes from the *baoli*, or stepwell, often seen in homes and palaces around this part of India.

Rather than getting comfortable at the top, Rastogi has ambitious plans for the future. Among them is the hope to re-introduce in India the love for detailed planning. In his opinion, great architectural design is the culmination of a long and sometimes tedious process. Volumes could be written about the many things which set his designs apart, but with each new project Mani Rastogi looks forward to adding yet another carefully constructed chapter.

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