

BRIGHT FUTURE
of INDIAN DESIGN

DESIGN INDIA

POOL MAGAZINE

ISSUE 29 NOVEMBER 2012



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THE TRUE NATURE OF THINGS

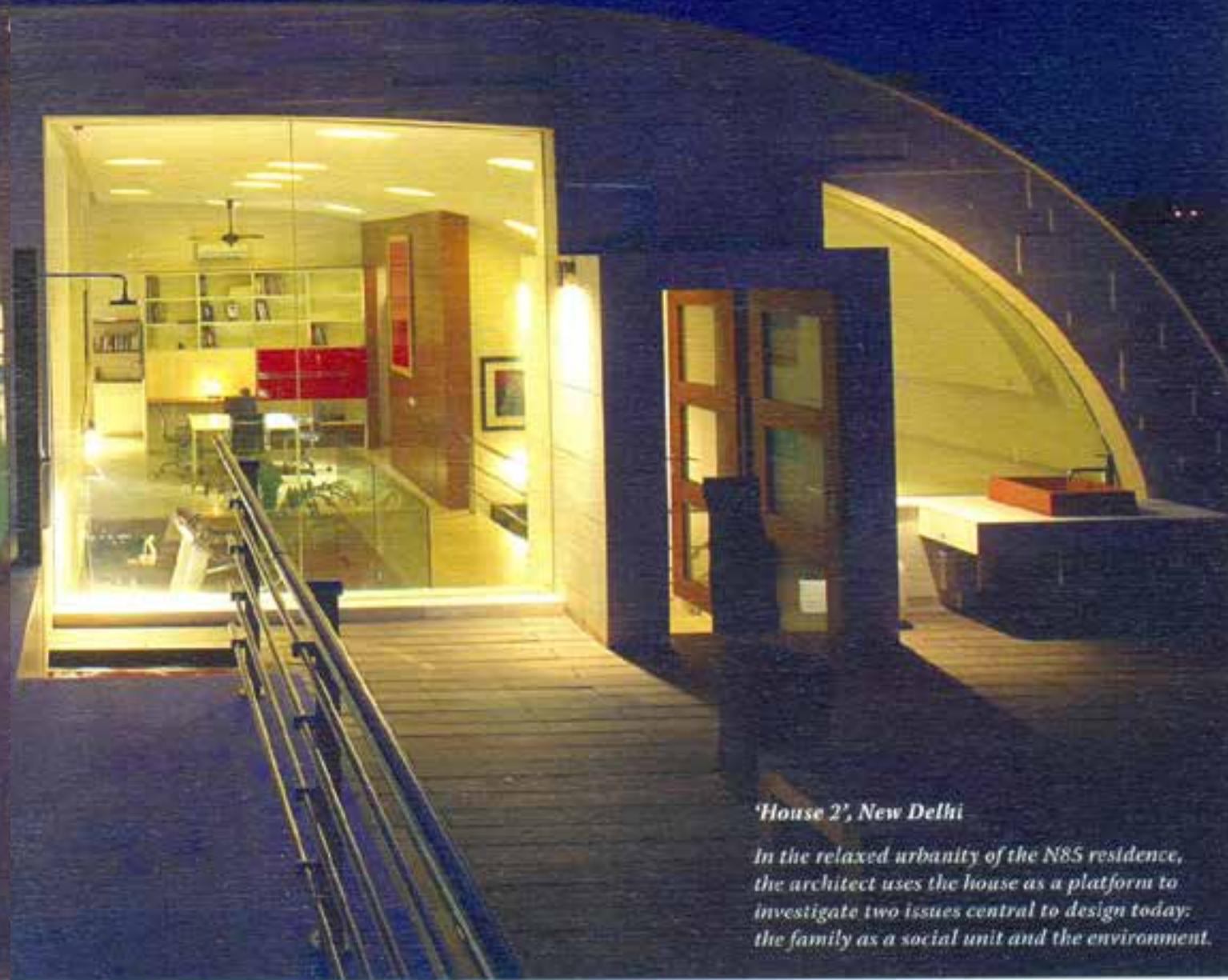


For Manit Rastogi, Managing Partner of New Delhi-based Morphogenesis, the all-inclusive nature of sustainable architecture is what will define emergent Indian design

www.morphogenesis.org

Tell us about your journey into architecture.

MR: I studied architecture at the School of Planning and Architecture in New Delhi before going to the Architectural Association, School of Architecture in London where I got an AA Graduate Diploma (Environment and Energy Studies), and an AA Diploma. Morphogenesis was set up in 1996 with a clear mandate of looking to expand the boundaries of architecture and environmental design with sustainability at the core. This was a poignant decision which was supported by the paradigm change in the nascent liberalized economy of the 1990s in India. Morphogenesis terms of engagement with architecture have always been interdisciplinary in nature, ranging from science and technology to finance, globalization and other forces of urbanization.



'House 2', New Delhi

In the relaxed urbanity of the N85 residence, the architect uses the house as a platform to investigate two issues central to design today: the family as a social unit and the environment.



Jindal Pipes Corporate Office, Gurgaon

The project entailed taking a completed building and designing the interiors for it with obvious constraints imposed on the interior architecture as the building design was done independently and with little provision for the intended and eventual use of the building.

Why the name 'Morphogenesis'?

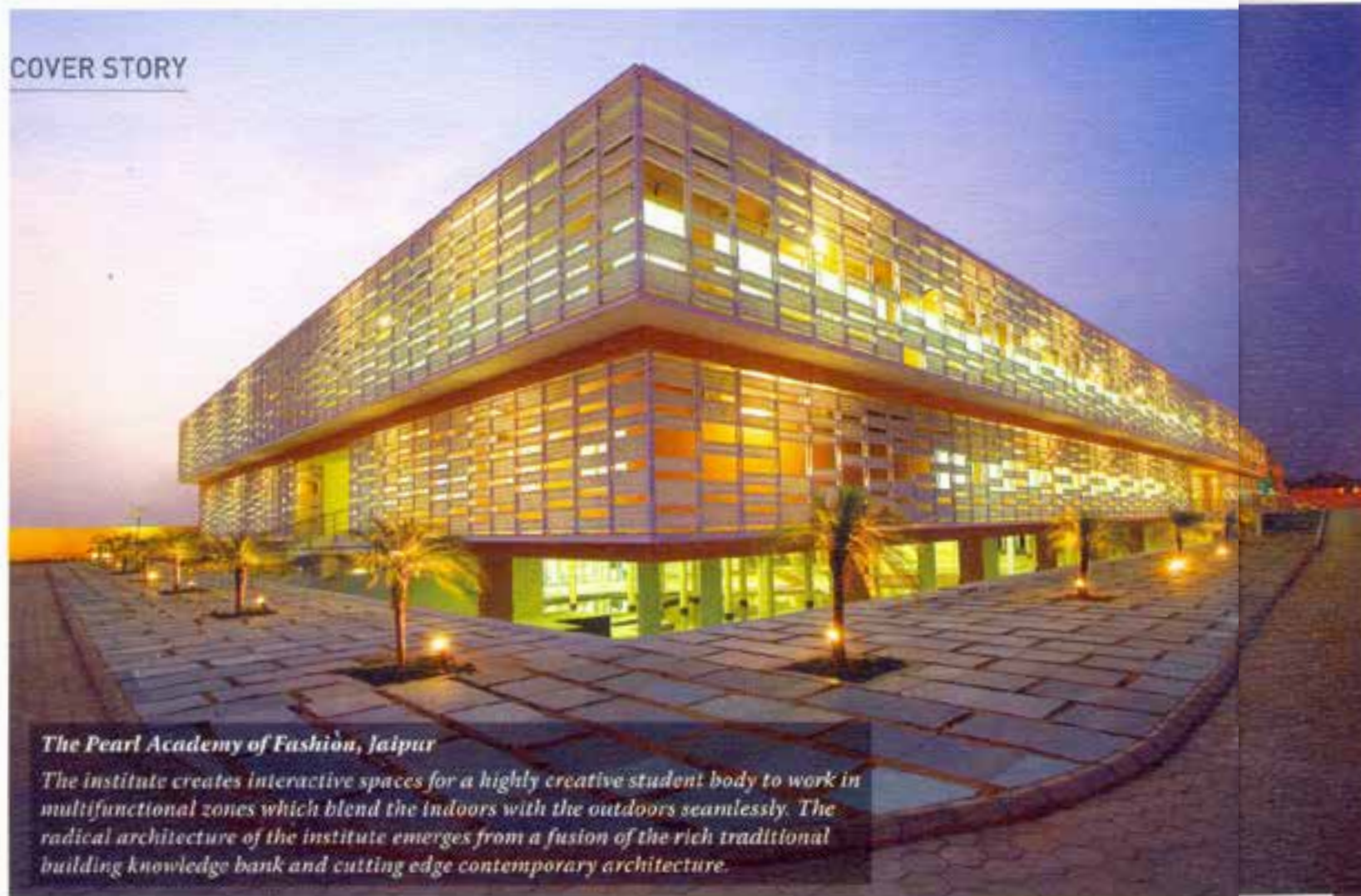
MR: Post-liberalization of the Indian economy, there has been a fundamental shift in Indian design thinking. Within this milieu of an emergent India, social, cultural, and economic values are changing at an unprecedented pace. Architecture, design and urbanism as processes need to be in step with this radical shift, if not two steps ahead of it. In this context, architecture is a strategic weapon to bridge boundaries and through discourse, it sets the

ground for evolution and innovation. It is within this milieu that the practice of Morphogenesis was set up. 'Morphogenesis' means the process of creation of form, structure and organization in response to nature. Using nature as an inspiration for its appropriateness, the morphogenesis philosophy of 'an architecture of almost somewhere' was formed.

The Morphogenesis approach to creativity is inspired by the evolutionary

processes in nature to create form which is optimized for the built environment and the community. Design is viewed as a result of different stimuli, such as climatic conditions, urban fabric, local traditions, and human activity. At Morphogenesis, sustainability is a core creative value and is practiced in the evolution of the design. The practice considers the widening scope of sustainability to be all-inclusive; to include social, cultural, financial, technological and environmental sustainability. Morphogenesis believes that this inclusive nature of design is what will define emergent Indian design.

My wife Sonali and I were the original founders, setting up Morphogenesis in 1996 upon our return from a long stint at The Architectural Association in London. The aim was to create a practice that would evolve and promote Indian contemporary architecture and bring its design values to the forefront of global discourse.



The Pearl Academy of Fashion, Jaipur

The institute creates interactive spaces for a highly creative student body to work in multifunctional zones which blend the indoors with the outdoors seamlessly. The radical architecture of the institute emerges from a fusion of the rich traditional building knowledge bank and cutting edge contemporary architecture.

What is your design philosophy?

MR: At Morphogenesis, we have become architectural activists in an attempt to effect change in our cities, in the buildings in which we dwell and ultimately, the lifestyles we adopt. We understand that we are working in an environment with limited resources. The main question that continues to pervade our design philosophy is the notion of how do we redefine sustainability by thinking systemically? How do we celebrate identity and diversity versus homogeneity? How do we think of our buildings and cities as bazaars (places of human interaction) rather than only as machines (places of human habitation)? How do we redefine our urbanism as an emergence of interwoven networks? The opportunity is immense, the opportunity to define a new emergent architecture – an architecture of almost somewhere, for a people of almost somewhere.

How do you approach a project and execute a concept?

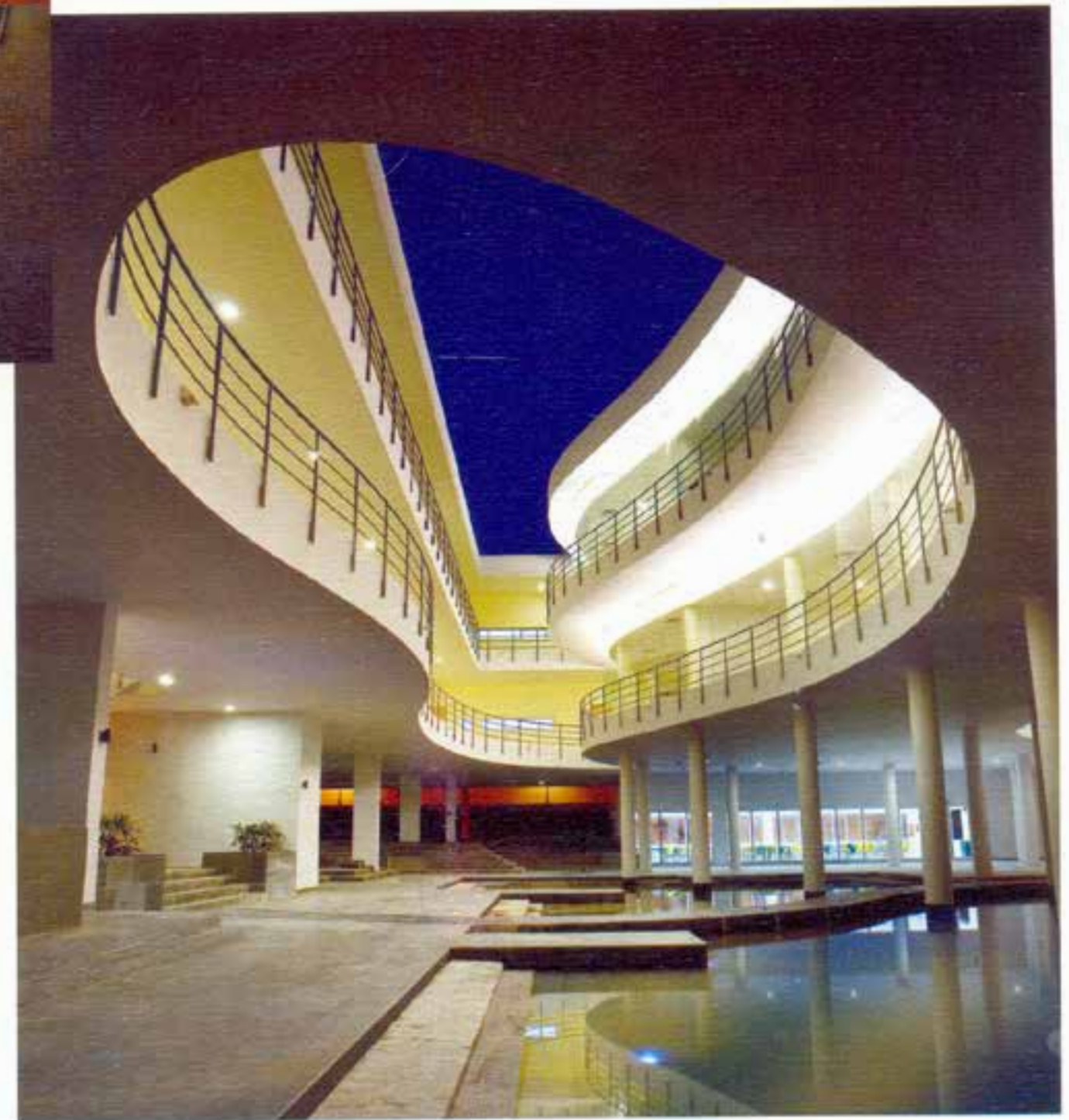
MR: All projects are conceived through a research-oriented approach to policy, planning, design, technology, and passive/low energy design and continue to carry the Morphogenesis brand of Engagement, Experimentation, and Innovation. Whether it is an institute, or a restaurant in a traditional bazaar or a corporate office, each project is a step forward in our efforts towards formulating economic, environmental, social, political and cultural processes that shape city life.

Environmental sensitivity is inherent and integral to the process of design, from concept to completion and to the full life cycle of the building. The goal when building sustainably is to use energy and natural resources wisely and in a responsible manner. Simply

put, we use the phrase 'no is more'; we begin any design process by saying NO! We have no energy, no water, no waste disposal, etc. and then begin to evaluate from first principles how to passively provide the basic fundamentals of comfort, safety and livability and yet sustainably respond to the local climate and ecology while remaining economically viable and globally pertinent.

What are your expectations from your team?

MR: The case for creating the new practice in the current globalized world needs to emerge from embodied sustainable processes. Designs should be an emergent product of the process and greater than the individual





architect. Today's architecture needs to be a product of the collective, wherein the organization acts only as a synaptic glue connecting individuals to create a collective genius.

Morphogenesis is an association of over 100 architects, designers, urban designers, master planners and environmentalists and support staff. We believe and expect that each member of this collaborative contributes to the evolving nature of design, and Morphogenesis thrives on this condition. This is what drives us every day; to create a platform for exchange of ideas aimed to bridge the boundaries between art, architecture, design and urbanism. The intent is to foster cross-pollination, interaction, innovation, a fusion of ideas, and the emergence of a discourse in the contemporary paradigm, in bridging two cultures, the local, and global.

Which project are you particularly proud of?

This is a difficult question to answer. Each project of ours aims to push the boundaries of design – and this is a process that evolves by attrition. I am proudest of the creation and evolution of Morphogenesis from where it started as a small architecture firm in a garage to an institution today, greater than the individual. It is during this transformation that various projects have been created and innovated and helped shape the ideology of Morphogenesis today.

How do you react to the large number of awards the firm has won?

It feels great to be recognized nationally and internationally as a leading Indian contemporary design firm; however it is only a small step in the larger goal. The work of the practice has been published and exhibited at several venues nationally and globally. Nationally the sense of recognition for our work that comes from our

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peers is very important for us to keep the energy going for the larger vision. International awards really reinstate the belief in our mission for an Indian, globally recognized architecture.

What problems do Indian architects face today?

MR: There are many issues that are plaguing the architecture profession and for that matter, all professions in India today. Issues of outdated education curricula and methods of teaching, commercialization of professions, ineffective regulatory bodies monitoring the practice of the profession by unregistered firms and individuals, lack of minimum standards and processes, disorganized construction industry, etc. The list is endless. But, in my opinion, the main issue stems from within the profession - a certain lack of belief in a holistic vision for an emergent India. Indian architects are amongst the best in the world – they need to realize the potential that they possess and rise up to the challenges that face the profession today by presenting a vision of what we can be, and not only what we are or have been.

Do you think design will succeed in bringing about innovation in architecture?

MR: Historically, the architecture of this region has been about innovation. Innovation was the only way to deal with the extreme climatic conditions, high seismic activity, lack of resources – water and energy, and access to only local materials. At some point with the advent of cheap energy and industrialization, we began to believe that we were above nature, that we could create habitats and workplaces devoid of context, climate and culture. This has largely led us to a point where we are

facing one of the gravest crises in water, energy and above all, unsustainable and unlivable cities and buildings. As much as design is responsible for the current condition we are in, design will also be the way out.

The opportunity for design to transform our lives, the buildings we inhabit, the objects we use, the materials we consume, and the waste we generate is immense. We just need to start thinking differently. The process of design is not only a tool for creating objects; it should be a systemic process for transforming society. We need to move design away from a 'master planning' approach, and rethink design as a process for 'strategic intervention' in society - bottom up, inclusive, effecting change by demonstrating success at a local level.

What is your take on sustainable architecture in India for the future?

MR: Indian architects, to a large extent, have always built and designed with limited resources and materials. With a local, socio-cultural response to design, the results have been more often than not, passive solutions, which further help to reduce energy and water dependence by increasing the number of comfortable habitable hours without reliance on mechanical means. Optimization of all resources is a prerequisite to responsible architecture today. Unlike other nations, local resources and methods of construction are still easily available to us. This local response towards sustainable building has inherently been different from the western model of green building, which has generally been equipment centric with comfort predefined in a narrow band. It is the adoption of this western approach in India that has allowed many projects to certify themselves as green, creating an



City Centre, Siliguri

Located at the entrance of the 400-acre Ulttorayon Township, the City Centre attempts to create a much-needed, organized commercial district for the city of Siliguri. It is positioned as an interface between the township and the city that envisages a new destination for the local community and emerges as an urban landscape in between the offices and commercial components of the master plan. This family entertainment centre is a judicious mix of retail, F&B outlets, entertainment areas, children's play areas and a large 4-screen multiplex.



The Nira, Kerala (Ongoing project)

The design brief called for a luxury eco-resort in Kumarakom, Kerala. As a boutique project, in close proximity of the Arabian Sea, the objective was to offer an indulgent retreat experience, of life amidst the backwaters. Physical and Visual Engagement with the natural setting laid the foundation for the development of the globally unique design set amidst a serene landscape.

incomplete and incorrect model of sustainability architecture. It is imperative that we, as Indian architects, take a few steps back into the past, to be able to find solutions for creating a sustainable future.

Are Indian architects too influenced by the West?

MR: The issue is not about Indian architects being influenced by European or Western architecture, but whether they are being influenced by the visual of the product or the process that created the product. Surviving globalization (and commercialization), where Form Follows Finance, has to be one of the most difficult predicaments for Indian architects today. For us, every project is an opportunity to investigate the program from a fresh perspective and to challenge the orthodoxies of architectural design and its established hierarchies whilst remaining culturally appropriate, and addressing global issues whilst respecting local traditions.

What's next for Morphogenesis?

MR: New projects that we're very excited about are the corporate factory and office we're doing for the DS Group in Noida, which is based on the idea of land tectonics where the landscape and the building are interwoven, thereby losing the classical distinction between the vertical and the horizontal, between outside and inside, between landscape and building.

We're also currently working on a tall commercial tower in Gurgaon which is extremely exciting as we have managed to recreate the idea of land, of a garden, of a plot of land at