



Cultivating an Empathic Creative Environ

– *Sonali Rastogi*

1-3. Apollo Tyres Building, the high precision and environment-friendly corporate hub

4-6. The Pearl Academy of Fashion, Jaipur is conceptualise to create an environmentally responsive habitat while catering to interactive space bolstering creativity, fusing rich traditional elements and contemporary architecture

We started Morphogenesis in 1996 as a two-person practice working out of a tiny garage. In the midst of a paradigm change in the nascent liberalised economy of the nineties, this decision to set up architectural practice was a poignant one. Today, we are a collaborative of 130 people with our work spread across South Asia and Africa, the global recognition of our work cementing our faith in our vision. Our design approach has often been inspired

by the vast repository of historical wealth of building knowledge and the strong arts and crafts traditions of the region. Sustainability beyond purely energy consciousness – to encompass environmental, social, cultural and financial, has elicited varied architectural responses from us, which sit within our investigation into architecture through three pillars – passive design, resource optimisation and contextual identity.

Over my 20 year journey as a practising architect, there are some projects that have truly been milestones in either my success or in helping shape our firm philosophy or both. Apollo Headquarters (1999) is memorable for being our first significant commission. It won us our first Indian Institute of Architect’s Award and gave us conviction in our chosen path. Pearl Academy (2008) won us India’s first WAF Award, as it caught the global imagination. Having to stretch resource optimisation to its limits due to budgetary constraints, through the use of using of regional ideas, it defined the direction of every project since – where we look at each from the perspective of having no energy, no water and no





material. How then, do we approach design? Ever since Pearl, we have also been able to rejuvenate and use traditional crafts to a contemporary format in almost all our work.

We currently have a number of projects going on in the studio, of great diversity across typology, scale, climate and cost. The conscious choice of the firm to explore projects across this broad range allows for cross-pollination of ideas and propagates high levels of design innovation. Particularly exciting are the ones exploring new geographies, hence new local contexts, that push our understanding of sustainability—including a college in Bhutan and a residential township in Johannesburg. We are also designing what is likely to be the world's largest office spaces for the Surat Diamond Bourse in Dream City, Surat. A practice of our nature demands



adventurous and spirited clients, and ours have been receptive stakeholders of our vision. At the same time we have had a lot to learn from their processes, working with IT giants like Infosys and Wipro, for instance. Or with ITC, which has great green values and its roots are truly Indian.

7-8. New proposed project exploring new geographies, hence new local contexts that push our understanding of sustainability

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In the context of this edition's focus – women architects and designers – I have to say that I attribute my success in architecture to the fact that I have never allowed gender to be a factor in my own mind, to begin with. As a result, it has been quite a non-issue in my wider work ecosystem. It is an attitude that percolates across all of Morphogenesis. Having said that, we work actively towards creating a workplace that allows women to stay engaged with the profession, to accommodate the widest range of personal issues that women typically face in their lifetimes. The resultant is an exemplary gender balance where women make up 51% of our workforce, including at leadership level, a figure the firm is intensely proud of. The HR team works hard



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9-11. India Glycols Corporate Office, Delhi, a corporate office reflecting an ideology of transparency, interaction and fluidity while addressing energy efficiency through elements such as courtyards and green roofs



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to provide an atmosphere that makes this number possible – from working proactively towards challenging stereotypes and reducing gender bias, ensuring the safety of female architects working out of hours, to flexibility in working for new mothers, all unique in the context of architecture practice in India. Moreover, the gender pay parity gap has been and is, non-existent at Morphogenesis. ●

Sonali Rastogi graduated from SPA, New Delhi and AA, London, with a graduate diploma in Housing and Urbanism and Graduate Design respectively. Sonali is Founder Partner of Morphogenesis, one of India's leading award-winning architecture and urban design practices. Ranked among the Top 100 Architectural Design Firms worldwide by Building Design Magazine, UK in WA100, 2016 for the fifth time, Morphogenesis is the recipient of over 75 awards and has featured in over 500 publications, both International and National. Sonali's design attitude and her experience and expertise have been recognised by way of awards, including Laureate of the SIA-Getz Award for Emergent Architecture in Asia, Singapore. She lectures globally, has been a part of various academic and design juries, and been a speaker at events such as the Women Leaders in India Conference & Awards.

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