

# Sonali & Mani Rastogi

## MORPHOGENESIS

Working out of a garage with no certainty of how the future would unravel, Sonali and Mani Rastogi started Morphogenesis in 1996 after a brief stint in London. For the duo – both alumni of Delhi's SPA (graduation) and Architecture Association, London (Master's), this promising start came with complete clarity of purpose: "to contribute to the definition of and the building of a global discourse on contemporary Indian Architecture." To this end projects of varying scales were welcomed – be it a small 400sq-ft office or remodelling of a single screen cinema into a multiplexe, the architects were hungry to experiment.

Soon they were exploring the evolution of the 'mall' typology, working with educational institutes that were pushing the boundaries for new forms of education, and projects in holistic health facilities, IT campuses, and others followed. "We were privileged to be the first entrants into many such typologies. Working across multiple skills and typologies allows for cross-pollination of ideas across this pool, which is crucial to stimulating new thought," Sonali shares. Having designed the first net-zero energy enabled school and first Indian building to win at the World Architecture Festival (WAF), this 'first' ethos has become synonymous with the way Morphogenesis works.

In the last 22 years, the Morphogenesis philosophy has not changed – but has evolved. "The vision stays the same, yet the tools keep evolving, where experience adds to thought and the canvases grow larger," says Sonali. These "fruitful, rewarding years" have now made Morphogenesis a collaborative of over 150 people with projects spread across South Asia and Africa.

Moving forward, they will continue to address the need for optimisation in deployment of limited resources. "As a rapidly developing nation with the urbanised population set to grow 30-50% over the next two decades, this approach becomes even more critical in urban and public projects in India. Sustainable urbanism is imperative, but can only mitigate environmental impacts so long as it is conceived with economic adequacy," asserts Sonali, who believes affordability derived from resource optimisation is as crucial to sustainable urbanism as environmental protection and socio-cultural sustainability.

Functioning as an architectural laboratory and not just a practice, the Rastogis hope to expand the precincts of architecture and environmental design in India. "We shall continue on this pursuit of excellence in architecture while setting higher benchmarks of best practices as an organisation." **AAI**



### LOOKING BACK

Pearl Academy, Jaipur, was a milestone, as budgetary constraints required them to critically re-evaluate their approach, forcing them to rigorously apply a 'No is More' philosophy. The project successfully dispels the myth of high cost being an intrinsic part of sustainable building design.

### LOOKING FORWARD

Particularly exciting for the firm are projects exploring new geographies, hence new local contexts that push their understanding of sustainability, including a college in Mumbai and a residential township in Johannesburg. They are also designing one of the world's largest office spaces for the Surat Diamond Bourse.