

Corporate Office for India Glycols, Noida morphogenesis.

an illustrated monograph with detailed drawings
photography: andre j fanthome | edmund sumner | dave ten hoope

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"...a far cry from the monotony of the open plan office that has dominated corporate design for the past decade. It is akin to an oasis in a desert, a place to look forward to working in, even if you have a demanding 24/7 job."

- Ruchi Sawhney, *Inside Outside* (India)



Foreword: Rishi Raote

They copied us," says the office go-to guy, his chest swelling with pride. They copied us," says the architect, his face crumpling in irritation. Yes, they did - the neighbours, that is, who picked up the colour scheme of this good-looking new company headquarters building for their own office tower up next door.

That shouldn't trouble anyone because the red-and-grey colour scheme is all the two buildings have in common. The headquarters of India Glycols Ltd (IGL), designed by Delhi firm Morphogenesis in 2009 under project architect Sanjay Bhardwaj, is a muted, low-rise structure in more or less earthy tones. Its neighbour is a brash, conventional monster in shiny cladding.

Both buildings face the Greater Noida expressway outside Delhi, with its acres of tarmac, and are surrounded by featureless, empty land, partly cultivated but mostly just waiting for the next onslaught of construction activity. In architectural terms, "the context offers nothing" as Bhardwaj says, so he turned the building inwards. "We tried to make it as solid as possible from the outside, and completely did away with opaque walls on the inside. It's a strategy derived from traditional forms of architecture."

Which means: courtyards? The IGL building has four. The largest is the one in the middle. Like its smaller sisters, it serves many functions – it is required to look good, its water features help cool the air (creating a 'microclimate'). Ornamental plants and palm trees improve appearance and employees can step into their (limited) shade. Since it is a large courtyard and the building is only three storeys tall, the sun streams in unobstructed. Therefore, no office areas overlook this courtyard. Instead, corridors circle the space at each floor level. The actual office spaces with workstations for 250 employees are grouped around the two lesser courtyards on the south side of the building, which are small enough to keep much of the sun out. Thus, the building turns its back to the sun, even while letting it in.

And there's the key. This building is all about energy, heat and lighting – economising on the first, defeating the second and optimizing the third. None is achieved by simply throwing on a roof and turning up the air-conditioning.

The solid outer walls not only save the building's occupants from the boring view; they also act as heat shields. There is a narrow insulation gap in the wall, so heat does not get passed on.

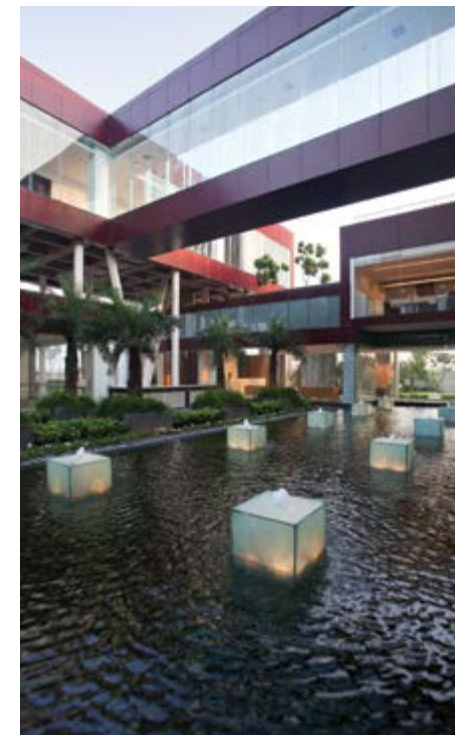
Where there is glass, it is "low-emissivity coated glass" which, says Bhardwaj "reduces the amount of sun that comes through". The outer surface of the glass is coated with a spray that roughens it just enough to scatter the light that bounces off - which means that the windows don't reflect the glare onto people outside.

The interiors too were fine-tuned to manage light. "Most of the surfaces are light-coloured so that there is a lot of reflected light", Bhardwaj says. The result is very neutral interiors, but "that actually gives you the best light for working." Direct light "adds to the heat load and creates glare". Indirect, ambient light is more comfortable. "Hard [Shiny] areas generate a lot of heat," the architect adds. The floor plates are just 8 metres wide, which means no part of the main workspace is far from natural light.

At the top of the building is more insulation: a roof garden reserved for IGL's directors and their guests. Lawn grass and low hedges grow in over two feet of soil on the roof. There is also a decorative pool and mist-spray fountains - all of which help keep the offices below cool.

So IGL's electricity bill is kept down. For one, almost no artificial lighting is used indoors during the day; Indirect sunlight serves most illumination needs. Second, the air conditioning plant need not work as hard. Bhardwaj claims that each ton of AC power cools 220 sq. ft. of this office, compared to 130-150 sq. ft. in a conventional building. Given a built-up area of 4 lakh (4,00,000)sq. ft., the difference is significant.

During Business Standard's visit to the office, workers were at their workstations; it was a warm day and lunch was over, so the courtyards, canteen AV room and gym were empty. The 60-seater canteen (which, Bhardwaj says, is now being expanded into a "food court") overlooks the fourth courtyard,



which is really a sunken portion of the main courtyard. The employees often sit outdoors to eat, hold informal meetings or work on laptops: as Bhardwaj says, "It's got to look nice for our clients, but has to be available for use for different things."

The client, IGL, is an Rs 1,600 crore (according to its website) petrochemicals company which prides itself on its 'green' habits in manufacturing. Its products serve in all sorts of industries, from textiles to packaging, pharmaceuticals, paper, agrochemicals, food processing and more - none obviously environment-friendly sectors, but certainly those where a good example might go a long way.

The last word must go to the occupants - not the directors who enjoy a whole sumptuous floor to themselves, but the junior employees for whom these spaces were chiefly designed. Bhardwaj says he was told by one that "We don't know how the building works, but one thing we can tell you is we don't feel tired when we go home." The office go-to guy told this reporter that employees enjoy watching the lighting and cooling mist spray come on in the courtyards in the evenings. "Late sitting bahut hota hai," he says: people are happy to work late.

(an extract from Business August 2010)
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Introduction

Work as a social activity

The office design for the corporate office for India Glycols is a direct response to the issues concerning the workplace today, while at the same time exploring the paradigm of the office space as a social platform.

As should be the nature of a well-designed corporate development, the building endeavours to exemplify the identity and corporate ideology of equity and transparency in the workplace as an integral part of the architectural vocabulary. The building fits within the conceptual, functional, and aesthetic framework of the international, corporate and contemporary global design agenda.

Among the primary concepts that guided its design development are energy-responsive design, a workplace corresponding to the requirements of the IT and communication age work ethos, re-evaluation of the context as prevailing, incorporation of building intelligence and development of building techniques that use modern materials within the Indian construction format. The idea was to assimilate and organize programmatic inputs into a coherent design by combining architectural specificity with programmatic flux.

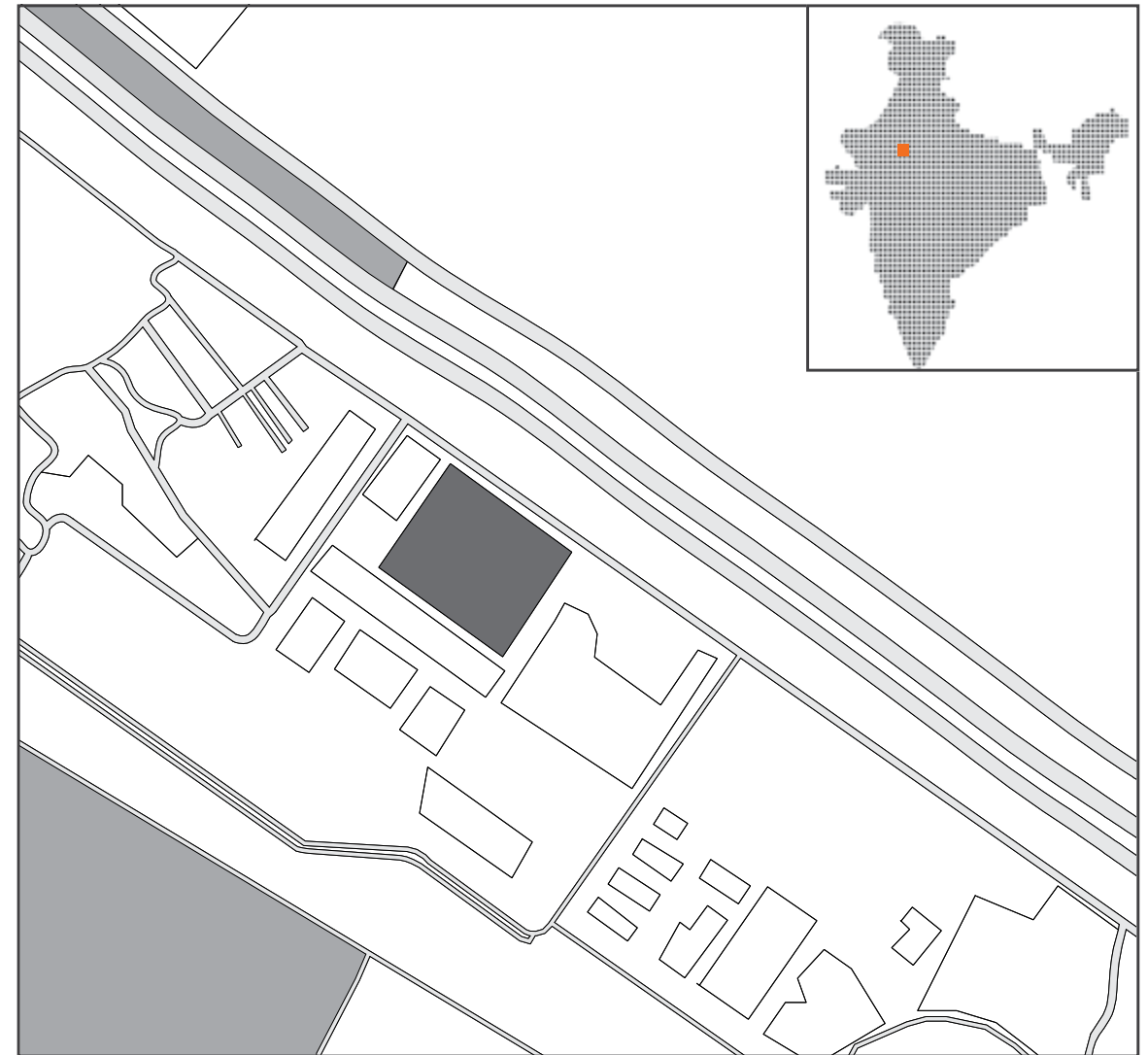


Context Location

An architecture of isolation

The project is sited in Noida, a typical upcoming suburban area of Delhi, where insensitive building activity has failed to create a meaningful whole. The needs of today's work culture implies the use of equipments that are highly sensitive to heat and dust, which becomes the reason/excuse for workplaces to 'seal' and isolate themselves from the external environment. This has given rise to an architecture of isolation.

The site was a derelict, blank field, in the middle of nowhere - an empty, flat, vast land without external views or interesting context. This along with the need to create a built form with minimum exposure to the harsh weather led to the choice of an introverted scheme that focusses on addressing environmental and socio-economic issues as first principles. It demonstrates that even with a need for seclusion, workspaces can establish connections with the outside.



Location Plan

