

# ARCHITECT and INTERIORS INDIA

Inspiration and insight for architects and interior designers

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8<sup>th</sup> Annual

**iGen**  
2019  
DESIGN FORUM

**Trend**  
Security systems

**Feature**  
Structural aluminium

**Spotlight**  
Sun shades



# Eighth wonder

Keynote speeches  
by Manit Rastogi of  
Morphogenesis and  
Sunita Kohli of K2India

After seven successful editions in Mumbai, the iGen Design Forum wowed Bengaluru with bright young talent, inspiring presentations and a delightful line-up of panel speakers



## AUGUST 2019 VOLUME 11 ISSUE 05

20



46



56



62



82

20

**SPECIAL REPORT**

The iGen Design Forum 2019 revealed opinions and perspectives through panel discussions and insightful keynote addresses by Manit Rastogi of Morphogenesis and Sunita Kohli of K2India.

46

**FEATURE**

Possessing a slew of positive qualities, structural aluminium, unsurprisingly, gets the 'preferred' tag in the infrastructure and construction sectors.

56

**PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT**

Myriad solar-shading solutions give relief to contemporary buildings from harsh weather.

62

**TREND**

An impressive range of high-tech security solutions help Indian consumers to secure their residences and offices easily.

66

**NEW DESIGN**

Esora and The Big Flip, two Mumbai restaurants, carve distinct identities for themselves through design in mixed-use buildings.

72

**DESTINATION**

Fairmont Jaipur dovetails ultra-modern comforts with newly-created Mughal-inspired design.

82

**BIG PICTURE**

Valay Shende's *Spirit of Bombay* celebrates the city's culture through striking sculptures.





# BEYOND PRACTICE

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BUILD A MEANINGFUL PRACTICE IN INDIA? MANIT RASTOGI SHARED HIS PERSPECTIVE IN THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS

**A**s a platform, the iGen Design Forum has always valued the dissemination of knowledge and ideas. The architecture community is getting increasingly collaborative and 'open', no longer hoarding wisdom – instead letting it permeate through its network, so that together we can build a better country. In this spirit, the forum invited Manit Rastogi, co-founding partner, Morphogenesis, to inspire a new generation of architects and designers with the treasure trove of knowledge he and his practice has assembled over the last two decades.

'Building Practices', Rastogi's keynote address for the evening, led us through the evolution of the firm as it witnessed the shifts in Indian economy and, subsequently, in the nature of architecture in the country. Recalling his student years with co-founder Sonali Rastogi at the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi, in the mid-'80s to early '90s, Rastogi mentioned, "At that time, a lot of the discourse in architecture was heavily driven around a socialist construct." They were taught to build cities and spaces for the everyday man. But when it came to their time at Architectural Association in London, where both Mani and Sonali were pursuing their Master's, the emphasis was on "process" and their influences traversed from philosophies, evolutionary thinking to theories such as neo-Darwinism.

When they returned home and chose to set up their practice in Delhi, it wasn't out of choice but a need – both on principle and personal fronts. Rastogi remembers applying for five jobs and being rejected by all. "It was not a great time for either architectural practice or getting a job anywhere," he added, and thus Morphogenesis was born on the mezzanine of a home garage. "We called it Morphogenesis because it means the origin of development of form, structure and organisation in nature," explained the architect, pointing out the unique designs we see in anthills and snail shells. At this time, the economy was transitioning from socialism to capitalism – "or socio-capitalism, as we were calling it" – and bringing with it a number of 'foreign' architects who were designing buildings and cities in India.

This was in contrast to the influences international architects like Corbusier, Kahn, Baker and others had on the country. In the scenario unfolding in the mid-'90s, "global discourse on contemporary Indian architecture had virtually vanished," found Rastogi, who also believes these strong influences were not from the 'West' per se – but from the northern parts of Europe and America, from where the capital funding was coming. As the development in India shifted from government to private, a New India was being envisioned primarily by private players, building cities and structures that – the architect believes – were not true to the notion of contemporary Indian architecture. It was precisely this reality that Morphogenesis set out to dismantle by becoming a practice that would contribute to a global brand for contemporary architecture in India.

Alongside this objective, they were determined to be a firm that follows the highest standard in consulting; creates a gender neutral work environment; builds a dynamic work culture that goes beyond the founders; works across typology, scale and costs; and finally, becomes an organisation that fosters learning and leadership. "We found that in India, most firms were driven by their founders and those practices died with their founders. The wisdom would disappear and won't perpetuate," explained the co-founder. They continue to follow the five principles till date. For instance, despite being one of the largest firms in India,

Morphogenesis will still design a smart art gallery or a house while also building three smart cities. For the practice, this process helps them to understand the "idiom of architecture in the global context."

At the scale at which the nation is growing, Rastogi pointed out that architecture needs to be a collaborative practice, it can't





be done alone or be the product of a single mind. This propelled them to create a multi-faceted, organisational structure that could navigate design and non-design functions (PR, HR, etc) efficiently without being extremely dependent on the founders. The architect admitted that initially all architects need to be a jack of all [trades], but eventually they need to focus on areas that interest them. In their own practice, Rastogi came up with a matrix structure that not only enabled the organisation to function smoothly, but also allowed individual architects to grow and find their respective strengths. "We are now structured as small design studios, each studio (about 10-15 people) has embedded within it all the functions to enable the studio to process," he added.

Calling it a synaptic loop, he explained how the 12 studios in different geographies (Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and now Surat), operate in eight countries with projects in 50 cities. "Beneath this inverted matrix, is the fact that our studios work as one team: they work at geographical level and they work at typological level. And together form a learning boat, which captures the information and then discourses it," he explained.

If fostering learning and leadership is a defining factor in Morphogenesis, its conscious efforts towards maintaining gender parity enables them to pursue that goal in a humane way. From being reported as one of the world's first architecture practices with a gender pay gap in favour of its women employees to schemes like Flex that help employees balance work and family life, Morphogenesis believes "a practice where women and men both can work all through their careers allows for great human capital, bringing different forms of thinking into the practice."

Research plays a pivotal role in the way they function too. Their in-house research team conducts extensive post occupancy studies of their built structures to identify patterns and processes that could improve energy efficiency. Through these studies, they have significantly reduced the energy load in major projects. "The west (or the north) came and told us to make a Green building, spend 10% more, ROI in five years. In India, we have to spend 10% less. Why should a Green building cost more? Using passive design, techniques that we've known forever, and using computational standards, post-occupancy metrics on them, we've been able to demonstrate that it is possible to deliver these buildings," declared Rastogi, who has been

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

"Our client is not our developer. Our client is the person who comes and lives in the apartment. Client and customer are two different people. When we start putting the actual customer at the centre of the design process, the process changes," explained Manit Rastogi in his keynote address.

At the end of his presentation, he provided an exclusive preview into their upcoming projects and walked us through the design process behind each one of them. While each project was aesthetically captivating, we learnt that the form was in response to the function of the building and the way the occupants will live in those spaces.

Rastogi highlighted projects across typologies: Surat Diamond Bourse, a 70,00,000sq-ft single building with 4,000 offices; Namami Gange, a government project and riverfront development that was designed after studying human behaviour and rituals; Infosys Nagpur, a sustainable campus designed to be net-zero in terms of water, energy and waste management; and Zydus Corporate Office in Ahmedabad, designed to be climate-responsive through a façade that utilises low-tech construction methodologies. Watching how each project was approached and designed was insightful, to say the least, and made the audience appreciate the integrity with which Morphogenesis practises.

one of the biggest proponents of passive design strategies.

Finally, Rastogi inspired iGens to approach architecture in a holistic manner, reminding them that "discourse" is critical. He advised them to write and publish their work. "What we are doing is magical, the constraints we work under are so high that it's time we make our brand of architecture 'sexy' for the rest of the world," he insisted.

"Stop thinking about buildings that are convoluted and in five-four dimensions. Sexy architecture is being able to put up a building with the constraints of resources, incredibly difficult bye-laws we work with, and with fees that are incredibly low," summed up the architect. Though in the eyes of the government the community may be insignificant, we still have the power to effect change and put Indian architecture on the world map, he added. Just the encouragement that's needed for our gen-next...and a perfect start for another enriching design forum. **AS**

i. Co-founder of Morphogenesis, Manit Rastogi's keynote address gave insights into the factors that have shaped the practice and the methodologies it follows.





1. The iGen Design Forum was held in Bengaluru for the first time this year.

2. Bibhor Srivastava, group publishing director, ITP Media India, gave the opening address.

3. Mohit Hajela succinctly highlighted the Jaquar Group's quest for excellence in his welcome address.

4. Sumil Khatwani of LG (L) and Indrajeet Saaji, director - Advertising, ITP (R) felicitate Mani Rastogi, co-founder, Morphogenesis and keynote speaker at the iGen Design Forum 2019.

# CREATING A BOND

## IGEN DESIGN FORUM 2019 CONNECTED UPCOMING TALENT WITH STALWARTS FROM THE FRATERNITY

**E**xcellence must be celebrated, but it must also be encouraged and fostered. Our iGen initiative has always been more than just a 'list' or stamp saying you have arrived. In fact, ITP Media along with its partners, initiated the iGen Design Forum to be a medium to facilitate change and growth in the architecture and design community. Identifying the best of the best in the field and connecting them with mentors and thought leaders ensures that the field has a promising future, both for individuals and the country.

"At Jaquar, we celebrate the spirit of design and each one of you is a mastercraftsman in the true spirit," stated Mohit Hajela, group head - Business Development, Jaquar Group in

his welcome address. "For us, a brand celebrating 60 years of manufacturing excellence this year, it is a matter of immense pride to state that we have grown with the Indian designers as much as Indian designers have grown with us. India, for sure, is making her presence felt in the global arena – and the work of our designers is acknowledged and appreciated in the larger canvas of South Asia. However, we need to walk many miles more when it comes to top Indian designers transforming themselves into brands. This is an investment we need to make,



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