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Faridabad: The Lalit Suri Hospitality Institute is a lesson in functional sustainability

Morphogenesis co-founder Sonali Rastogi talks to AD India about her design for The Lalit Suri Hospitality Institute in Faridabad, her penchant for brick, and the importance of creating spaces that lend themselves to memory

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Morphogenesis



"It is important that I make a building which is of the times that we are in, and also from the background of my own design perspective," says Rastogi

The Lalit Suri Hospitality Institute in Faridabad, NCR, is a study in legacy. The institute, which trains students who will go on to work at one of The Lalit Suri



Morphogenesis, founded by Manit and Sonali Rastogi, designed the structure cohabit with nature—a philosophy that they express with the acronym ‘SOUL.’ “It

A Green Dream

The northern end of the campus is bordered by a dense Neem forest, which Sonali was eager to preserve and incorporate into her design for the building. “Jyotsna Suri is herself quite a visionary, and very sustainable and design-oriented in her thinking,” Sonali says of the Chairman and Managing Director of Bharat Hotels Ltd., which owns the Lalit Suri Hospitality Group. “So whilst the reaction could have been to remove the forest, we decided to work together with the forest. I also find that there is no better way to make people live in a sustainable way than through education.”

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Site Responsive

The façade of the building moves back and forth with the edge of the forest, allowing the trees to shade the building and create a sort of microclimate in the area. Morphogenesis was also careful to design the building's open corridors to face the foliage—so that the need for air-conditioning was minimised, and students could feel like they were truly cohabiting with nature. Recreational spaces are placed on the ground floor, bordered by exposed brick columns and shaded by the higher storeys that surround them, but otherwise open to the elements. Jalis and jharokha—architectural elements native to north India and have been used as climate control features for centuries—the perforated façade optimises the building's access to breeze, shade and natural light. “When you're trying to design a budgeted project, which is what most educational institutions are, then it isn't just about the building cost, but the operating cost,” Sonali adds, “So if you make a comfortable college which is 25% air conditioned, versus one that is 100% air conditioned, then it is obviously a win-win.”

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Careful Design

Like the façade, the volume of the building ebbs and flows according to function. Most parts of the structure are two storeys high; some stay at level one, and a few go up to level three. “Every architect, given a chance, enjoys spatial exploration above everything else,” Sonali explains of her design, “and educational institutes, which contain a range of individual spaces and public spaces, allow you to tamper with volume in an effective way.” Light wells and courtyards and open corridors enhance the spatial fluidity and offer an interesting juxtaposition of spaces. “It also allows for human connection in surprising ways,” Sonali adds, “Your mind has to work three-dimensionally; your mental map of the institution is a three-dimensional one. There is an immense value to the ceded memory of your educational experience.”

The building is constructed primarily in brick, a material that the firm is particularly fond of. “The rawness of bricks has this Gurukul association in my head,” Sonali explains, “where you learn amongst bricks and green. Also, artistry in brick masonry is something which has been practiced in this part of the country forever. It can be made to seem as light as a veil, and it can become as solid as a fortress.”



The Interiors

At the core of Morphogenesis' design plan—and the client's own brief—is functionality. "Liveability was approached from two very interesting concepts," Sonali explains, "One was that we keep the students at the centre of the project, and see it from their usage patterns, and their synergy—but what I really enjoyed was the client brief that if they have to serve in a hotel, they have to learn to live in



double as culinary classrooms. The hostel rooms have been designed in the style of hotel rooms, so students can practice housekeeping in their own quarters. “This twist on learning to be a hotel guest carries both the educational as well as the residential component,” Sonali explains.

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Timeless Design

While Morphogenesis’ commitment is to sustainability and cohabitation, their design is decidedly modern, with a raw, exposed structure, clean lines and interconnected spaces. “There is the desire of being placed in today’s world, which

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background of my own design perspective, the cleanliness of our post-modernity, the linearity, the drama in the lines.” Sonali references the classic architecture of St. Stephens, IIM Ahmedabad and finally her own school, Modern School in New Delhi’s Vasant Vihar, all of which employ a natural material palette and regional architectural forms. “These kinds of projects are not about a trend, they’re about experience—so aging is not something that I hold synonymous with this type of architecture.”

The idea of memory—and the sensory details that accompany it—are inextricable from the educational experience, and for Morphogenesis, it is paramount that their design hold space for a certain kind of timelessness. “I’m very happy to look at the past, work in the present, and hope it works out for the future,” says Sonali.

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