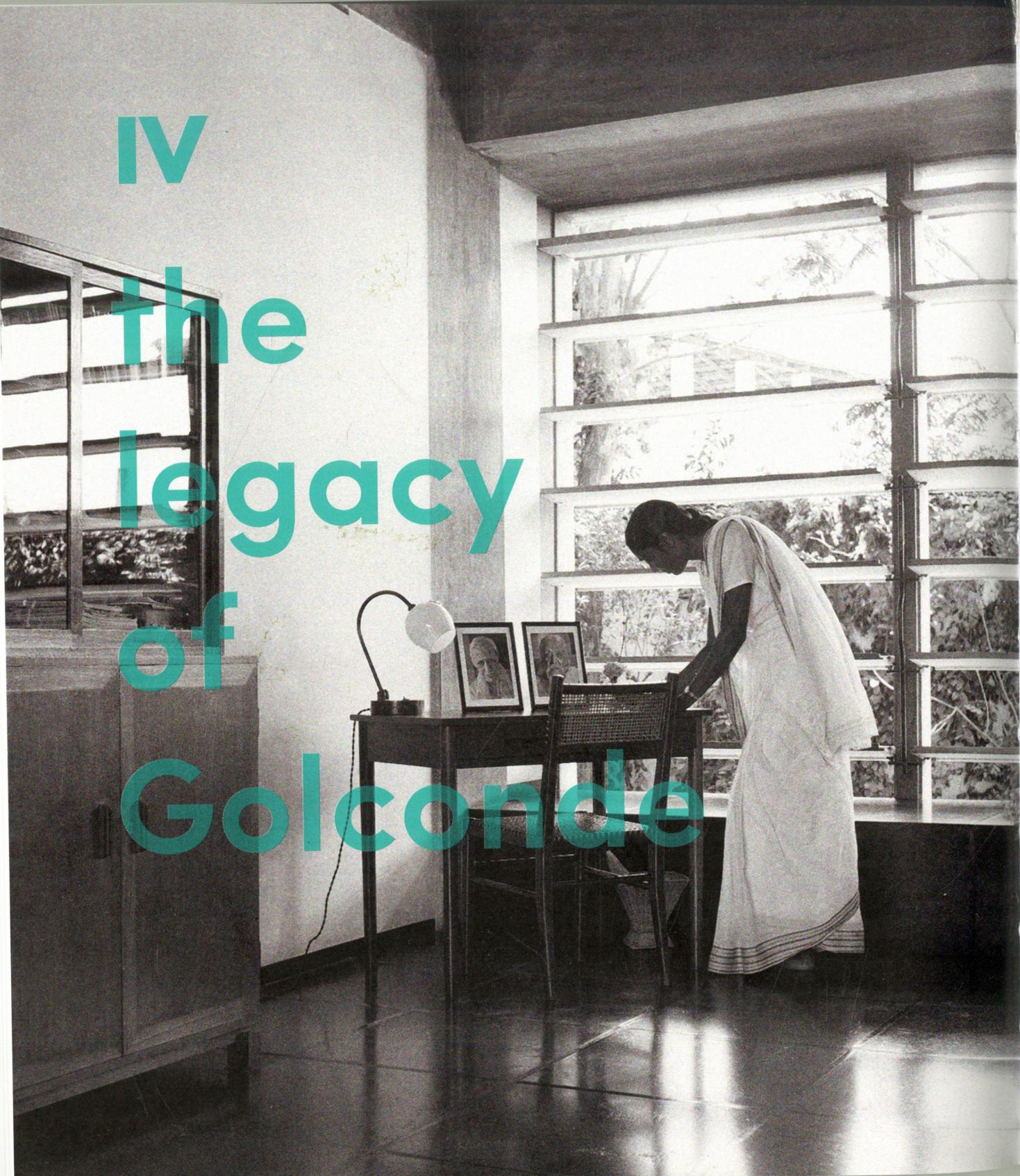


IV

the legacy of Golconde



One cannot construct a highly sophisticated building or run a large-scale ashram by being inactive, negative or pessimistic. Thus, there is an intensely active side to many aspects of Karma Yoga, the path of action. The Ashram itself carried on various practical activities: a book printing and binding shop, a blacksmith and machine shop, a bakery and kitchen, a farm and a dairy. In addition, there were unskilled laborers performing the many ordinary tasks necessary to bind a community together.

89
George Nakashima²⁰

68
opposite: bedroom interior



69
roof drain

During the summer of 2003, the authors conducted primary source research on Golconde. Living and working within the environment of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram enabled a rare glimpse of the rhythm and cadence of life within the halls, rooms and gardens of Golconde.

91
Golconde is not a guest house and even the term "dormitory" conveys only a partial sense of its use as a residential environment for some of the devotees in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The cohesion between its architectural organization and the hosting of a specific, ritualized lifestyle constitutes a notable aspect of the building. The ashram devotees living in Golconde are long-term inhabitants, and their rooms constitute their permanent residence in Pondicherry. As such, Golconde remains a private enclave. The gardens within the high walls are intended to secure a tranquil interior environment and facilitate the meditative lifestyle within.

The images in the following pages convey a visual documentary of the life within Golconde, recording the use and care of a building that has remained remarkably well preserved for over sixty five years. The precient ecological sensitivity evident in Golconde's design and construction, extends to an innate understanding of the life cycle practices integral to architectural preservation. The extraordinary condition of the building today owes much to the daily morning routine of maintenance. The stone floors are swept and washed, all rooms are dusted, and the window louvers and brass hardware are cleaned with a damp cloth. Long term maintenance such as the oiling of the Burma teak doors and the polishing of the furniture are performed annually.

Not simply an exemplar of the modernist aesthetic, Golconde is a precise and perceptive response to the program for life set forth by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

An abstract landscape of broken china tile waterproofs the concrete entry canopy. The reflective white surface offers a visual refuge when viewed from the louvers of the main stair. The rainwater flowing to the drain is collected for irrigating the garden.



92



93

The tranquil southern garden mediates between the street and the building. Passive cooling is facilitated by the breeze flowing over the reflecting pool and into the corridor. The absence of commercially available hardware inspired artful solutions such as the brass drain covers cast in the Ashram foundry.

70
opposite: south garden

71
breezeway drain





96

The rituals of everyday life such as refilling the earthen drinking water vessels and the folding of laundry, animate the mornings at Golconde.

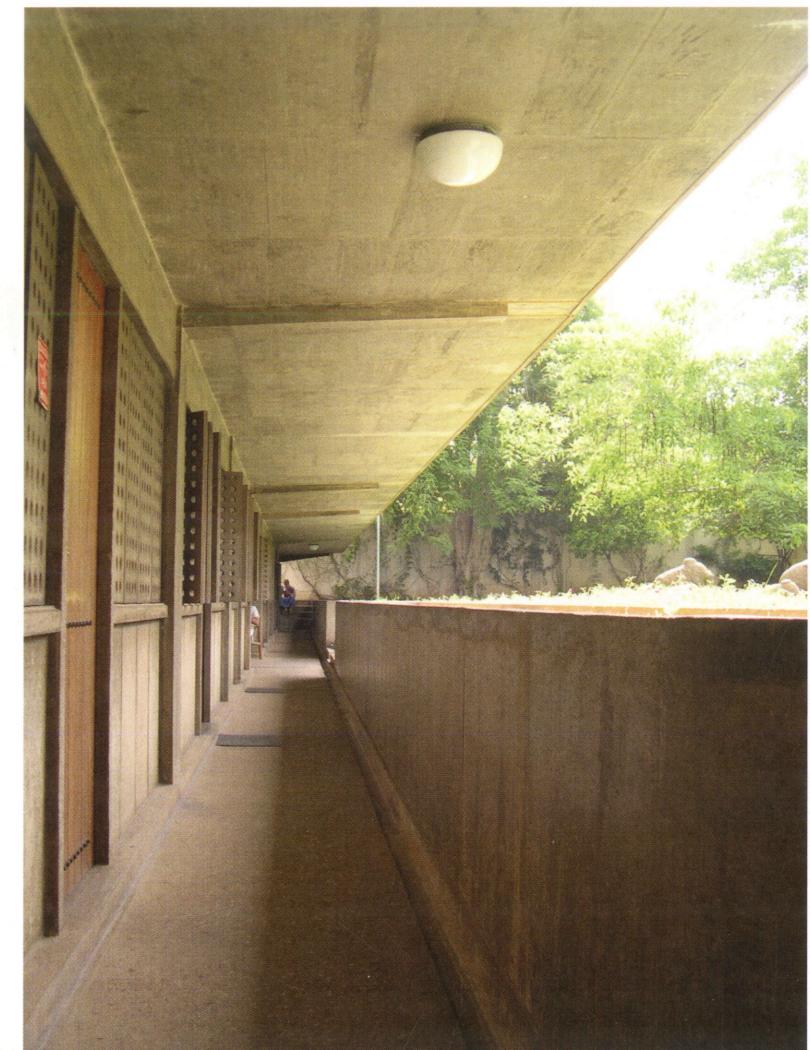


73
east service corridor

74
west service corridor



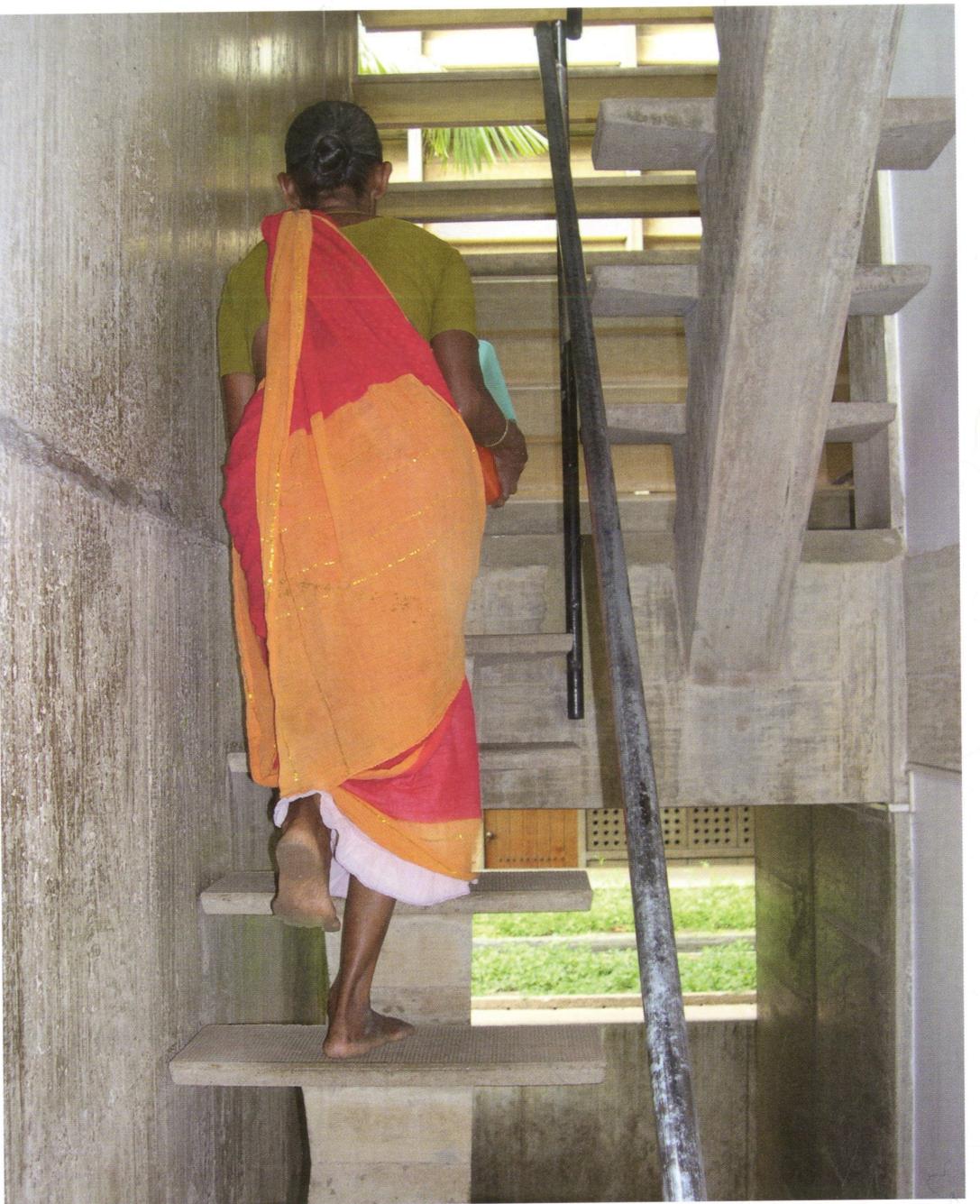
99



All utilitarian services such as kitchen, pantry, laundry and storage facilities are accessed from the basement corridor, overlooking the southern garden.

75
opposite: south garden

76
service corridor



77
service stair

100

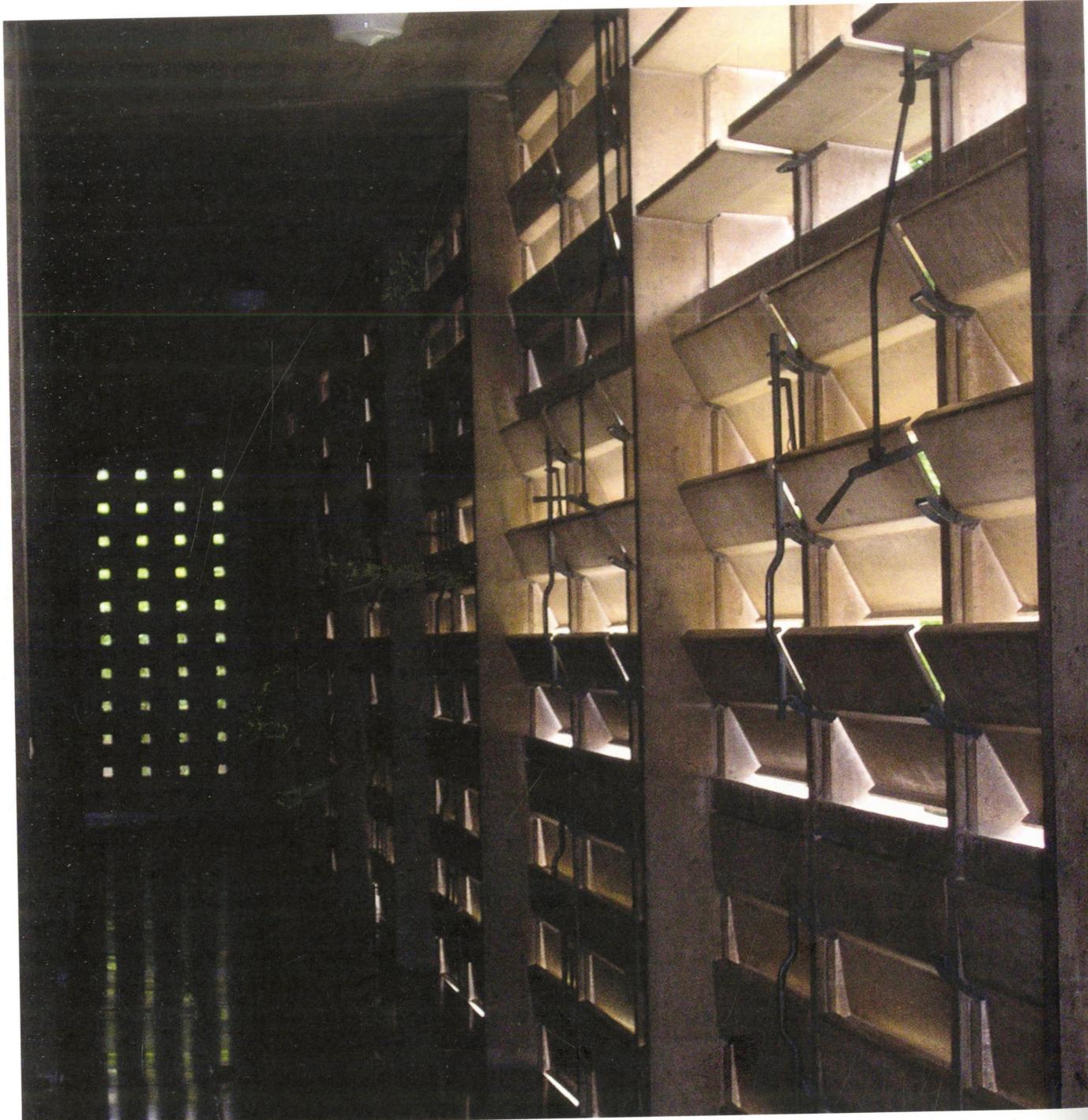
101



78
oil lamps in basement



79
south garden



80
corridor

authors

105

Pankaj Vir Gupta and Christine Mueller are the founding partners of **vir.mueller architects**. Based in New Delhi, their firm encompasses architectural practice, research and design education. vir. mueller architects have designed significant cultural, academic and institutional projects across India, including the Humayun's Tomb Site Museum for the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, in New Delhi – the first contemporary museum in India to be built on a World Heritage Site. The professional work of vir.mueller architects has been awarded and published internationally.

Pankaj Vir Gupta is a Professor of Architecture at the University of Virginia, where he co-founded the Yamuna River Project – a design research initiative focused on the dilemmas of unplanned urban expansion and extreme weather in mega-cities. The Yamuna River Project advocates for the revitalization of urban precincts, proposing design solutions based on on-going collaborations with knowledge partners, including municipal authorities, political leaders, and non-government organizations. Pankaj Vir Gupta received a Bachelor of Science in Architecture from the University of Virginia, and a Master of Architecture from the School of Architecture at Yale University. He is a licensed architect in the United States, and a registered member of the Council of Architecture in India.

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Christine Mueller has taught at the University of Texas at Austin, the Boston Architectural Center and at the Harvard Career Discovery Program. She has led the design process on several notable private residences and institutional projects at vir.mueller architects, including the University of Chicago Center in India. Christine received a Bachelor of Arts in Architecture (graduating Magna Cum Laude) from Washington University in St. Louis, and a Master of Architecture from the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University.

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