

Understanding Conscious Living in India

A deep dive into spaces, materials,
and the environment



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Introduction

India is on a path of exponential economic growth, projected to be within the top three economies in the world in the next decade. At the same time, the world faces an ecological crisis as a result of exploitation of resources that jeopardises our future. Towards a goal of better living for people and the planet, driven by the aspirations of more than a billion people, we ask ourselves: *what does conscious living mean to India?*

The word ‘conscious’ here denotes intentionality - the idea that our thoughts and actions have an impact on ourselves, the people around us, and the planet.

The focus on ‘conscious’ leadership has always been a priority for Godrej & Boyce with its track record of many innovations that have shaped independent India’s history.

Understanding Conscious Living in India is a Godrej Design Lab initiative to create conversations that spark ideas and more importantly, our collective conscience, towards better living with regards to our spaces, materials, and the environment.



The Approach

Godrej Design Lab is a platform to explore how design can impact better living. We collaborated with Unbox Cultural Futures, a leading arts and culture research organisation, to create a foundation for and inspire innovative ideas around conscious living. Together, we delved into the essence of sustainability in the built environment, exploring the dynamic interplay between spaces, materials, and the environment. Our research, enriched and nuanced by insights from experts and unique user experiences, aims to illuminate an Indian perspective on conscious living.



4 Big Shifts were zeroed in on that we believe have the potential to shape conscious living within India's complex socio-economic climate.

Each of these shifts has been further broken down into drivers, exemplified by case studies, and expert conversations from leading professionals in the world of architecture, design, urban planning, construction, and social research. These trends reveal factors within an intrinsic relationship between spaces, materials, and the natural environment that need our attention and action, now more than ever.

By collectively acknowledging these shifts and drivers, we can hope to build a future that walks the fine line between conscious living and transformative progress. Our aim is to inspire designers, architects, and creative professionals to enhance their products and services with mindful designs, in order to revisit the context of how we live, work, and interact as individuals and a society.

Defining ‘Consciousness’

Through detailed discussions looking at contemporary associations and understanding future aspirations, we arrived at a direction for ‘consciousness’ to drive this conversation.

As we look at conscious living, we consider three states of awareness:

Sensing the world

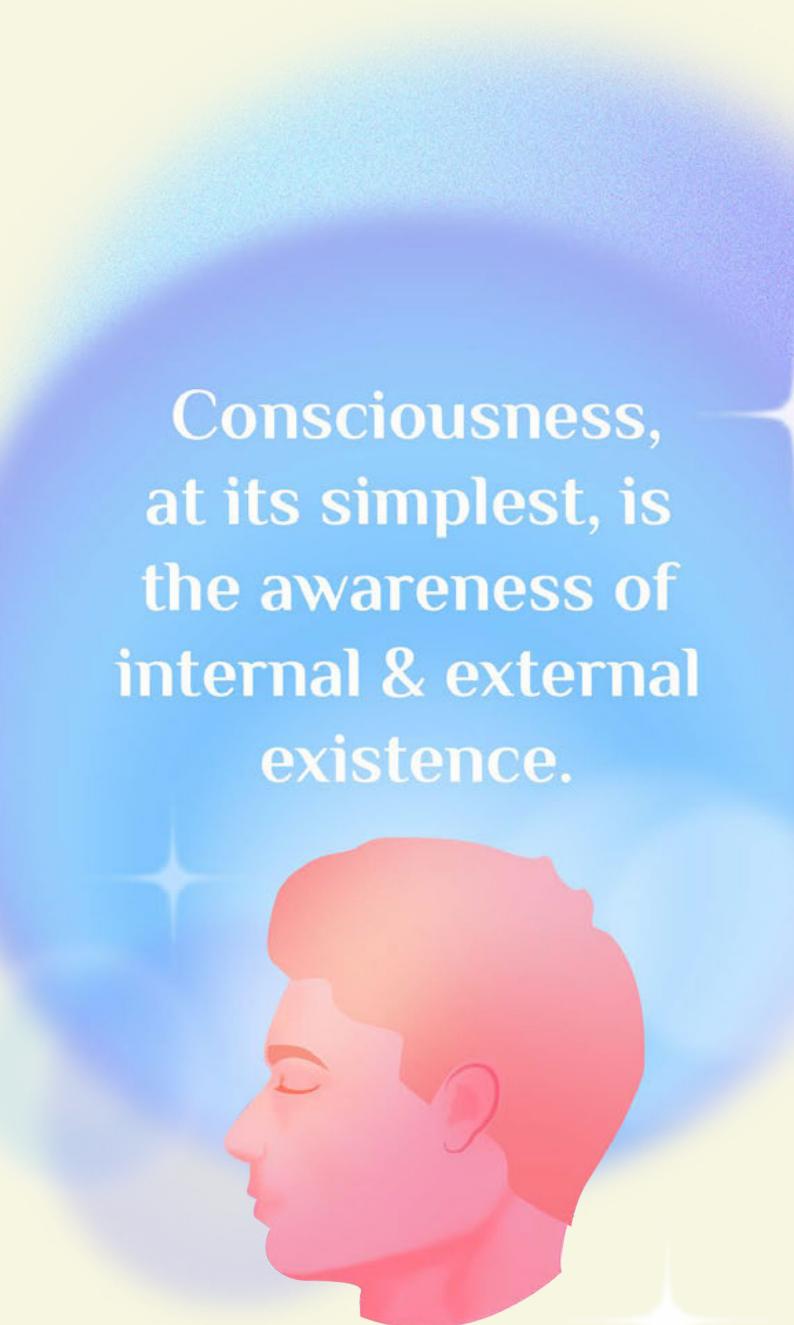
The awareness and sensorial experience of the external world - organisms, objects, events, context, surroundings, and environment

Sensing the body

Conscious awareness of our body, its internal sensations, bodily functions, and physical states

Sensing the mind

Conscious awareness of our mind, its feelings, emotions, thoughts, memories, mental processes, and cognitive states



Consciousness, at its simplest, is the awareness of internal & external existence.

India - An Overview

India is modernising its infrastructure in line with the Prime Minister's vision to achieve a 'developed nation' status by 2047. This includes advanced transportation, cutting-edge mobility tech, clean energy, and digital public infrastructure. With a young and dynamic population, the government is eager to foster a core national identity and a promising international image. India is actively establishing itself on the global stage.

While India grapples with the challenge of forging a cohesive national identity rooted in its diverse languages, cultures, and traditions, the concept of the 'global Indian' has emerged as a prominent narrative.

The country is witnessing significant overhauls, upgrades, and even upheavals on many fronts - be it technology, transportation, and connectivity. By harnessing the potential of its youthful population, India, as one of the world's youngest countries, can unlock abundant opportunities for growth in this landscape. Like thoughts racing in an excited mind, we as a nation are witnessing a frenzy of shifts that simultaneously resemble both chaos and opportunity.



In Conversation: Rahul Mehrotra & Nyrika Holkar

Sneha Ullal Goel sat down with leading architect and educator Rahul Mehrotra and Nyrika Holkar, Executive Director, Godrej & Boyce, to discuss conscious living, responsibilities of civil society and the future of promise of collective action.

The following is an excerpt from a conversation between Rahul, Nyrika and Sneha.

Sneha Ullal Goel: In this report we define the word ‘conscious’ as an awareness of internal and external existence. What does ‘conscious’ mean to you, as an architect, as a business professional, as a human being?

Nyrika Holkar: ‘Conscious’ denotes intentionality - the idea that our thoughts and actions have an impact on oneself and families, the community and the planet. Many of us as individuals and organisations are becoming increasingly alarmed by the rapid and adverse

changes in climate, and are increasingly making fresh choices as consumers conscious of this change.

This new ‘conscious’ behaviour not only signals a growing awareness of one’s own existence but also of the people around us, as well as the surrounding environment.

The power of conscious behaviour is multiplied manifold if this effort can involve our communities, therefore becoming a ‘collective’ effort. I firmly believe that more than ever, we need to come together to drive change in this context.

Rahul Mehrotra: Consciousness is an awareness that’s physical, spiritual and mental. It is also about ecological consideration. As architects, when we think ecologically, we create feedback loops. I might be designing a green building in Borivali in Mumbai, but I might be extracting materials from elsewhere, which could cause forms of displacement. If I’m not conscious of that, I’ve negated my intentions of making something green.

For me as a human being, consciousness is about being aware of this notion of interconnectedness. How we create an equilibrium and a harmony within that broader ecology that we exist in, is being conscious.

Sneha: Speaking of impact: the *Understanding Conscious Living in India report* and the *Conscious Collective* event. Nyrika, can you tell us why these are coming into the spotlight today?

Nyrika: With the report, we wanted to explore how conscious living trends are manifesting in India today. It highlights how our renewed understanding of traditional techniques and knowledge can potentially have a conversation with our optimism for modern technology innovation and new materials. It also underlines the idea of progress and development on one hand, and the need for conservation on the other.





But then how do we conduct a sensible, non-polarising discussion while balancing the trade-offs? Then of course, the idea of authenticity needs to be fine-tuned - how can we be true to ourselves, and true to our purpose and thus be driven by it? The report hopes to address these questions while underlining our sense of responsibility and collective action.

Sneha: What also stands out for me, through this initiative, is how design and architecture play a role in adapting to all of these choices. How can this platform attempt to tie all of this together, without having to single out the role of individual entities?

Rahul: With younger architects and designers especially, the spheres of concern and influence need to be balanced. We're worrying about the planet, trying to debate a host of social, political, ideological questions, thus

exponentially expanding our sphere of concern. Simultaneously, our sphere of influence is so diminished that we've become cynical and frustrated. The challenge for us in the future is to calibrate how we synchronise these two spheres. If these map upon each other, in equal proportion, we can effectively realise a sense of consciousness.

Values are a common denominator that can bring people together, because they are linked to aspirations. How do we then create the narratives that emerge from the idea of consciousness? If we understand consciousness as being a sense of interconnectedness, it will inform our values.

Sneha: But who sets these values? Shouldn't this be a collaborative effort? Or does it have to be dictated by an authority, in order to be effective? What do you think would work within India's complex ecosystem?

Rahul: We can, through consensus building and ratification - but it has to be a process. When we look at, what we call, slums - the *kutchha* city - they are victims of standards, because we've deemed the materials they use as being not permanent and not worthy of being acknowledged as habitation. This dichotomy is a result of the code. In rural India, they use mud walls, tiled roofs, and GI (galvanised iron) sheets. This is all propelled by that weird imagination of the 'world-class' city - every building is high-rise, built in concrete and clad in glass! Of course, these buildings exclude people - everyone cannot live in them, as they are victims of the code. That said, if you ratified making mud walls and tiled roofs, people might start improving their homes because they wouldn't be deemed illegal any longer.

Nyrika: Adding to your point about standards - at Godrej & Boyce, we've been experimenting with recycled concrete. The perception, rather misconception, is that it's less durable than virgin material. The building codes here are strict about what are acceptable materials.

How do we change some of these codes that have existed for years and need revisiting? Given the fact that infrastructure projects are large-scale and we're building rampantly all over the city, would it be possible to consider circularity when we're looking at these kinds of materials?



Sneha: It's sometimes terrifying that issues like climate change are dismissed as non-existent or something that can be dealt with, "when the time comes". As corporate entities too, how do you reinforce responsive action and responsibility among your consumers?

Nyrika: Corporates must play a role in shaping preferences, and work towards strengthening public-private partnerships. A good example is LED lights - government policy and incentives influenced corporates in shaping energy and lighting consumption behaviour, and now these lights are ubiquitous. As Rahul mentioned earlier, the sphere of influence is limited, but if we converge with the civil society, we can strengthen our relationship with consumers effectively.

Rahul: Climate change is a frightening rubric, but it's also comfortable in terms of rhetoric. It doesn't commit you to anything. As entrepreneurs and designers, we need to break this down into actionable tasks, which then aggregate in some way - this again is connected to the idea of consciousness where the tasks are interconnected, and the action is more effective. Civil society is perhaps the only part of society that has a pulse on the grassroots, as well as the wherewithal to negotiate with more powerful forces. For example, NGOs that advocate for slum dwellers have a pulse on the grassroots, but can negotiate with the World Bank and state governments.

I agree with Nyrika on the important role that civil society needs to play in the imminent future. I personally believe that the greatest constituency or 'client' for designers in the future is going to be civil society.

Rahul Mehrotra is an architect, urbanist and educator. He is the Founder Principal of RMA Architects and is Professor of Urban Design and Planning at the Department of Urban Planning and Design at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design.

Nyrika Holkar is Executive Director, Godrej & Boyce and curator of Conscious Collective - an outreach that aims to inspire thought leadership in mindful design, in the context of how we live, work and interact as individuals and society. The first edition of Conscious Collective will be held in December 2023 in Mumbai.

Sneha Ullal Goel is a former design journalist turned design culturist and curator. Through her work, she actively champions Indian-born and bred talent with the hope of contributing towards plotting the country on the world map of design.



A look at the shifts that have the potential to shape conscious living in India:

Looking Back to Move Forward

The uncertainties of our future have led us to look inwards and into our past for solutions



Balancing Act: Consumption & Conservation

The play between consumption and conservation is reshaping collective responsibility



Spaces Activated

A perception of cities as living organisms is evolving, urging us to address resilient urban planning



Search for Authenticity

The pace of information dissemination and the quest to be noticed have never been more pronounced





Looking Back to Move Forward



Looking Back to Move Forward

The uncertainties of our future - technological, political, and most critically, environmental - have led us to look both inwards and into our past. We have begun to rediscover ancient systems of knowledge and revisited the use of local resources. These allow us to unpack answers to address these challenges with new insights.

India's scientific capabilities, built through collaboration on a global stage, have empowered us to view our rich cultural knowledge and heritage through a new lens. This has resulted in a masterpiece-like convergence of the old and the new, the traditional and the modern.

We have learnt to move away from loaned ideas and interventions of the West, to empirically establish new wells of knowledge rooted in our own resources, flecked with contemporary insights.

Looking Back to Move Forward

*What
Drives
This Shift?*

INDIA,
REBRANDED

MAKE IN INDIA,
SUSTAINABLY

NEW
MATERIAL
LIBRARY

India, Rebranded

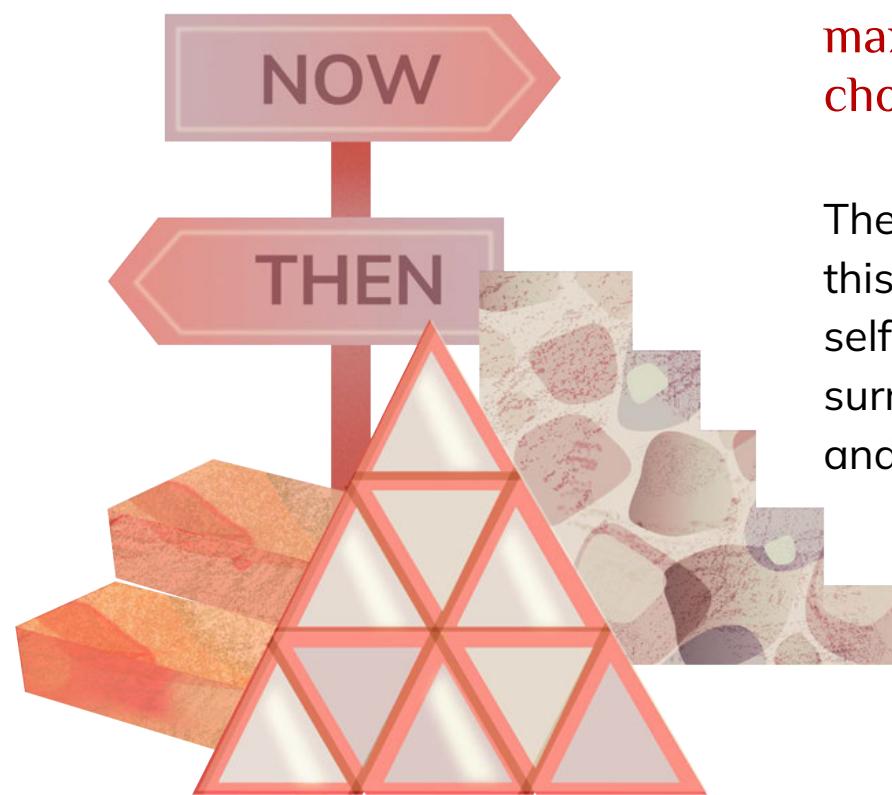
India is experiencing a holistic rebranding through the eyes of the world

We are seeing a consolidation of the past and present and a reimagining of our cultural identity. In the last decade, we have seen how India has taken control of its own narrative - for instance, actively restoring the original names of streets and cities.

In architecture, food production, and material science too, we are seeing a revival of age-old traditions. There is a proactive shift towards techniques that help us adapt to more judicious use of resources.

This resurgence of cultural knowledge resonates with the country's inherent desire to maximise value from how we choose to consume.

There is a move to extend this concept of value from the self (mind and body), to our surroundings (built spaces and environment).





A cool house of mud in one of the hottest towns in Rajasthan

Built and designed by Sketch Design Studio, this mud house situated outside of Alwar in the countryside, Rajasthan, seamlessly blends tradition with sustainability and sits right at the centre of a permaculture-inspired farm. Crafted using traditional techniques typically used by builders of the region and local materials like mud, reclaimed stone, and tall wild grass, it stays naturally cool and ventilated in the hot, arid months, and well-insulated during the winter. The outdoor areas have also been designed as suntraps to help tide through the cold weather.

Images credit: Sketch Design Studio

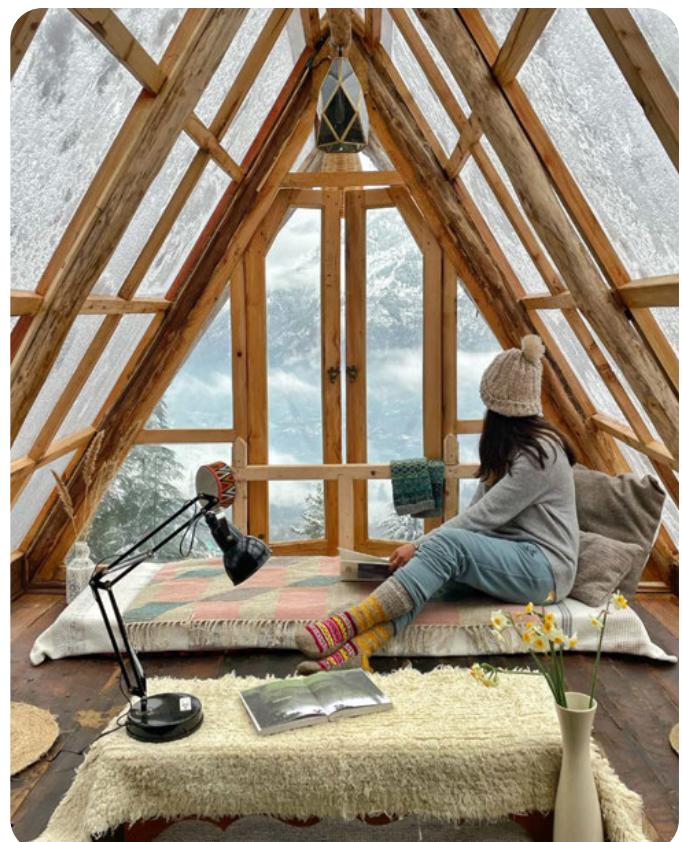




Earthquake-resistant homes in Himachal Pradesh

Based in the foothills of the Himalayas, Rahul Bhushan's architectural practice Studio North is working hard towards reviving vernacular building techniques like dhajji dewari (a timber frame with stone and earth infill) and kath kuni (alternating layers of wood and stone masonry, held in place without using mortar) to create earthquake-resistant structures in Himachal Pradesh. Dhajji House, in Naggar, is the best example of this kind of least invasive, natural, phenomena-proof housing, built from materials like timber from an abandoned house, stones from a nearby riverbank and mud from Himalayan sand.

Images credit: Studio North





A ‘living’ memorial that blends with its sinuous surroundings

Built and designed by Rajeev Kathpalia and his team at Vastushilpa Sangath, the Smritivan Earthquake Memorial Museum, in Bhuj, Gujarat, is a tribute to the victims of the Bhuj earthquake in 2001. With the vision of ‘planting a tree for every victim’, the design of the museum draws from age-old wisdom and traditional techniques to create 50 water reservoirs. The reservoirs have been charted out based on understanding the contours of the land, serving the integral need for water harvesting in this arid region. The path of the reservoirs is a pilgrimage and the spine along with a forest will develop. Featured also is a circular reinforced concrete structure with shuttering made from wood battens and symbols used by Kutch farmers imprinted on the concrete surface.

Image credit: AB Gusai for Vastushilpa Sangath

“

There is great potential in looking at systems that have worked for 1000s of years which we have let go of in the name of modern architecture and construction and blindly accepted whatever marketing suggests.

”

Monish Siripurapu
Founder & Principal Architect,
Ant Studio

Make in India, Sustainably

India's vision of becoming a manufacturing hub is slowly taking shape

The pandemic exposed the fragility of global supply chains, which led to an increased focus in India to build more robust local supply chains by extending our manufacturing capabilities into new areas.

Aimed at reviving India's economy, the Vocal for Local campaign was rolled out in 2020, to not only highlight India's rich local traditions but also create employment opportunities and further encourage indigenous and sustainable production.

In a pitch for self-reliance, the Product Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme continues this agenda with a focus on making Indian products and services globally competitive through promoting local manufacturing.

Policy support for green manufacturing

Many initiatives have been introduced to improve India's 'sovereign capability' with a particular focus on sustainability in the production of LED bulbs, EVs, and solar panels. However, this remains a complex issue involving governance, sustainability, and geo-politics, which leaves many opportunities as well as pitfalls to take advantage of policies that make a sustainable impact.





A path to sustainable processes and products

The manufacturing sector contributes to nearly 40% of the country's total energy consumption and is one of the major sources of greenhouse gas emissions. Pictured above is the Godrej & Boyce manufacturing plant in Shirwal, Maharashtra, a GreenCo Platinum Plus rated facility, in an IGBC Platinum certified building. The plant manufactures Godrej appliances including India's first 100% chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) and hydrochlorofluorocarbons free refrigerator and pictured on the right, air conditioners with energy efficient R290 refrigerant.

Images credit: Godrej Appliances



New Material Library

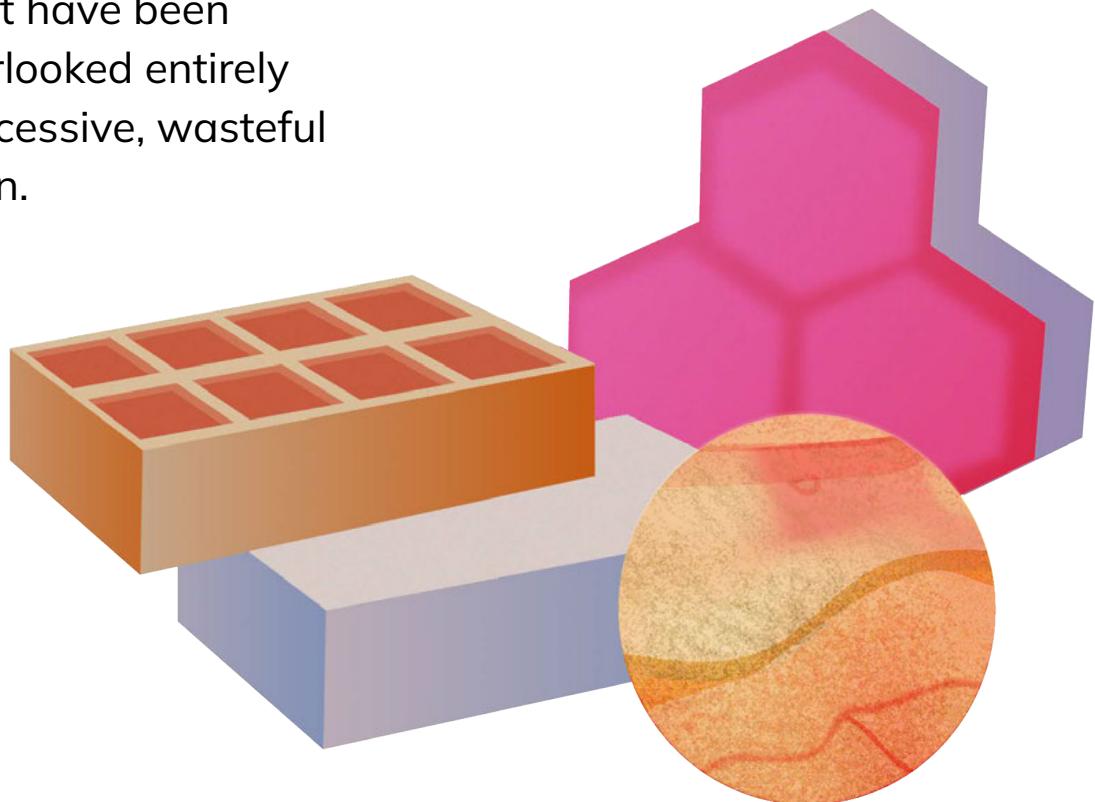
There is a need to infuse the ‘man-made’ world with resilience and healing properties

We are witnessing the creation of a new repertoire of materials and ingredients thanks to meticulous research and conscious reflection.

A treasure trove of traditional ingredients and local resources has resurfaced to help lay the foundation for developing new, innovative ones.

This helps us counter properties that have been diluted or overlooked entirely because of excessive, wasteful overproduction.

This inward gaze has allowed us to revisit our strategy for consumption that is additive instead of extractive, and proactive, not reactive. We need to apply a thoughtful approach for solutions to manage the existing, unsustainable production and consumption across sectors – whether it’s food, fashion, design, appliances or architecture.

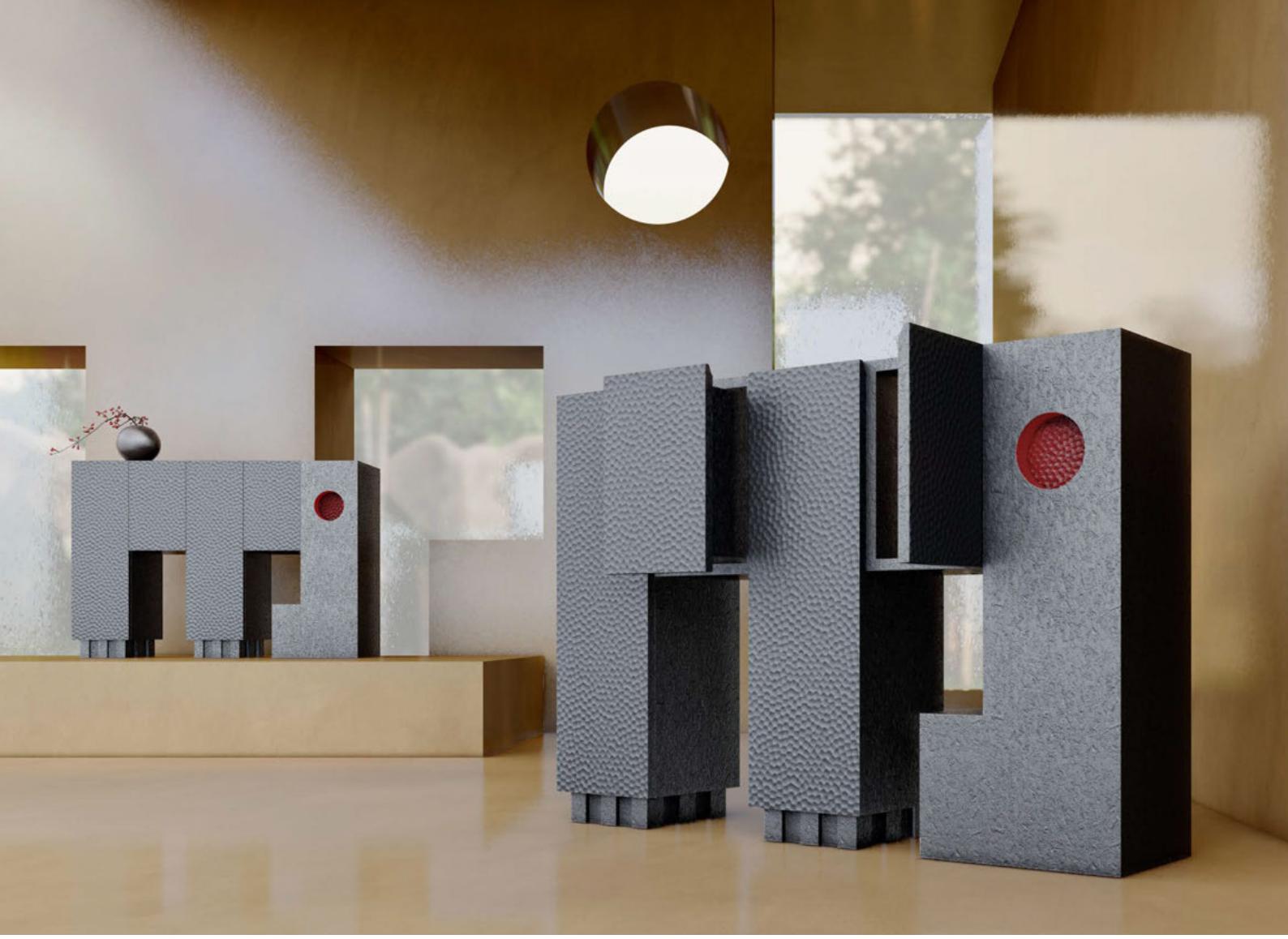




Material innovation for green construction

India generates an estimated 150 million tonnes of construction and demolition waste every year of which only 1% is estimated to be recycled. Godrej Construction recycles concrete debris to manufacture and produce building blocks, pavers and other prefabricated concrete products. Additionally, the company's recycled concrete plant is powered by 100% renewable energy, ensuring that the recycling process itself leaves a minimal carbon footprint. Pictured above is the Godrej Construction manufactured box culvert using recycled concrete, and on the left, their recycled pavers.

Images credit: Godrej Construction



Waste to wealth material exploration

Anomalia is a design and research studio run by two architects, Bhakti Loonawat and Suyash Sawant, who are committed to progressive materials. Pictured above is their Elephant in the Room collection made with recycled plastic boards that are free from resins, rendering them waterproof, termite-proof, fire-resistant, and recyclable. They are currently devoted to the research of Mycomaterials and its applications, with a focus on hybridising everyday objects by introducing Mycelium parts, featured on the left.

Images credit: Anomalia Studio LLP

“

Concrete-based construction has become widespread even in remote areas, and this approach is often perceived as aspirational. However, this has resulted in poor utilisation of local materials and vernacular construction methods, which are cost-effective and climate-responsive.

”

Priyal Shah

Senior Program Associate for the Climate Program,
World Resources Institute India

Asha Sairam

Principal, Studio Lotus

On the principles of conscious design, reviving traditional craft techniques and the collaborative process of working with traditional craft communities



In your opinion, how does Studio Lotus' process and work, especially Krushi Bhawan, best represent this shift?

We seek to create a sense of identity while remaining deeply conscious of the purpose a project serves. We designed Krushi Bhawan to bridge the gap between bureaucracy and the community by incorporating a sense of collective ownership, and were fortunate to be able to engage in a dialogue with an administration that was open to reinventing the typical government building experience.

The entire building is lifted to create a public plaza-like experience on the ground level – a space for farmers to have upskilling workshops, to be able to create a seed bank, or to run markets. The brick on the façade is inspired by the various colours of soil that you would find in Odisha, it being a building for the Ministry of Agriculture. So yes, it's about craft, but the success lies in integrating it with purpose and meaning.

Why is it important for your practice to not only integrate craft, but work towards the revival of craft techniques?

We hope to create a shift in the identity of what the modern articulation of Indian craft techniques could look like - by extension making them more relevant to a home, a workspace or even a government building. This widening of scope translates into a more sustainable livelihood for the craftspeople. For us as a nation to lose this wealth of our own heritage would be a tremendous loss. That is why we work on integrating craft - the fact that it revives is a happy by-product.



What has been the most important lesson you've learnt from India's historic design and architecture principles?

There is an immense amount of craft knowledge that isn't documented or assimilated. It's important to start listening, learning and absorbing this wealth of knowledge that's still deeply relevant and translatable to a variety of contexts. There are, for example, lessons we're learning from the usage of lime plaster in construction that we are applying to a residence in Dubai.

Asha is a Principal at Studio Lotus where she leads the branded experiences and hospitality interior design verticals.

Krushi Bhawan, Bhubaneshwar, Odisha

Developed for Government of Odisha's Department of Agriculture & Farmers' Empowerment, Krushi Bhavan transcends the typical, closed-off office campus morphology by bringing together governmental functions with direct community engagement. Studio Lotus worked with over 100 local artisans under the guidance of local architect Sibanand Bhol. The project showcases how contemporising of craft relies on the ability of the craftsman and their understanding of the technique they are working with, creating a dialogue where the artisan's knowledge informs design and process - a true partnership.

Image credit: Studio Lotus



Balancing Act:

Consumption & Conservation



Balancing Act: Consumption & Conservation

A nuanced understanding is emerging on the complex interplay between consumption and conservation. This deeper comprehension is reshaping how we perceive collective action, responsibility, and accountability, ultimately prompting a question of who brings the solutions to conscious consumption.

Consumers are looking to policy and private players to address their mounting consumption needs while at the same time managing and measuring environmental impact.

They are looking at these powers to take on the role of driving environmental progress, fostering an ecosystem that involves venture capitalists, innovation grants, and major organisations allocating substantial funds for research and development.

Balancing Act: Consumption & Conservation

*What
Drives
This Shift?*

SHIFTING
ACCOUNTABILITY
TO PUBLIC POLICY

COMMUNITY-
DRIVEN
ECO-SENTIMENTS

RISE OF
CIRCULAR
BUSINESSES
FOR CONSCIOUS
CONSUMERS

Shifting Accountability to Public Policy

India is enabling policies that build green practices

Policies with environment-friendly goals have been gaining momentum in India. In recent years, detailed strategies in the building and construction sector for resource efficiency, or subspecific agendas such as low carbon cooling solutions in buildings and refrigerants for products have emerged.

The country is making substantial investments in solar, wind, and

hydro-power technologies, positioning itself as a global leader in clean energy adoption. At the recent G20, India reiterated its energy-shifting goals and committed to reducing emissions intensity by 45% by 2030.

In the private sector, voluntary consortiums like the World Resources Institute and Xynteo are defining strategies to enable decarbonisation of businesses through industrial innovation that call into play stakeholders from across the public and private sectors.



India is currently on path to supply 50% of its power requirements using non-fossil fuel energy resources by 2030.



India ranks 3rd globally for its green building footprint

Research shows that buildings contribute to over 20% of carbon emissions in India - with their connected industries being one of the biggest consumers of natural resources.

The green building approach attempts to reduce the impact of buildings on the environment through their entire life cycle from planning to design, construction, operation, maintenance, renovation, and demolition.

The Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) leads green building certification in India, supported by partners like Godrej Green Building Consultancy Services - that certified the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation head office pictured above.

Image credit: Manoej Paateel/Shutterstock.com

Community-Driven Eco-Sentiments

Communities-driven efforts being made to manage and adapt to global warming

Community-level endeavours are underscoring the importance of bottom-up approaches in fostering eco-conscious behaviours and environmental stewardship. From Kerala to Rajasthan, communities are warding off the worst effects of global warming and adapting through solutions.

The rising trend of eco-villages in India demonstrates how sustainability, simplicity, and serenity coexist to make a difference not only to the quality of lives of the inhabiting citizens, but also to the natural habitats around them.

The village of Baghuwar, Madhya Pradesh has been Open Defecation-Free (ODF) since 2007. It has 100% literacy, over 55 biogas plants that produce fuel used for cooking, and active rainwater harvesting initiatives to increase ground water levels.





Mothers fighting for clean air and climate change

Originating in 2020 from Delhi-NCR, Warrior Moms is a network founded by 10 mothers who came together two years ago with a common aim of fighting for their children's right to breathe clean air. Since then, they have launched many initiatives to fight climate change and air pollution. Today, this community has 10 core mothers and a network of 2,000 plus mothers from nine states across India. Warrior Moms has also collaborated with organisations like Doctors for Clean Air, Chintan, etc, to conduct online and offline awareness. They have also organised informative sessions on the health impact of air pollution, sustainable mobility and related topics.

Images credit: Warrior Moms



Green villages by the youth, for the youth

International federation Life Project 4 Youth Alliance (LP4Y) has a global program called Green Village - which aims to encourage young people to take positive civic action for their community, with a focus on sustainability. This has currently been activated in remote villages in Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, where LP4Y organises workshops on ecology and training sessions on composting, gardening, and water management for dishwashing, to name a few. The efforts are already bearing fruit. In Green Village Chattisgarh, 540 young adults were enrolled into the program, out of which 76% of those who completed it, have found a job. In Green Village West Bengal, all candidates in the program are women.



Images credit: LP4Y

Rise of Circular Businesses for Conscious Consumers

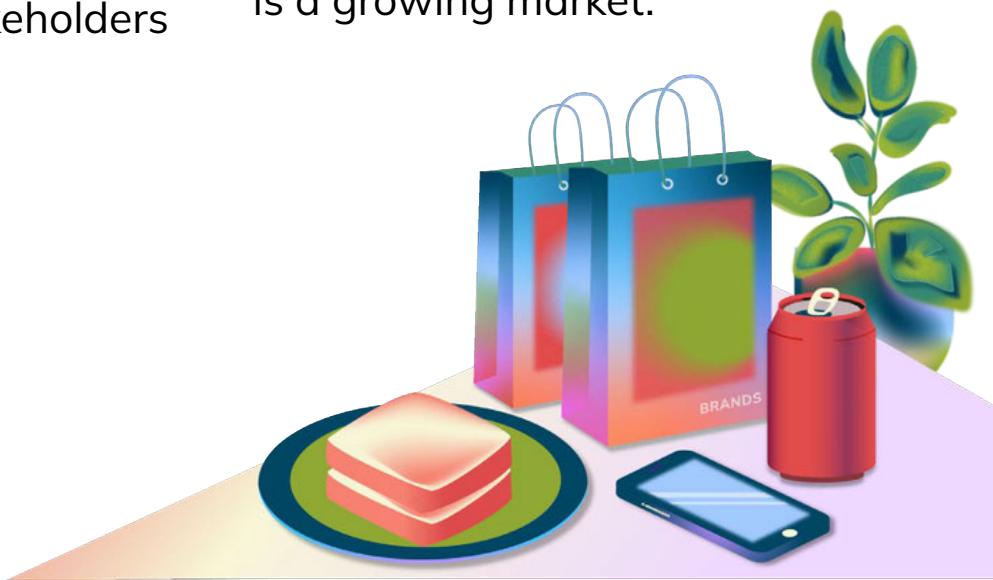
Awareness of the climate crisis has led to more sustainable consumption patterns

We are adopting eco-conscious lifestyles as a response to urgent climate concerns and a desire for well-designed experiences. As individuals become increasingly aware of the climate crisis, they are embracing more sustainable consumption patterns.

Simultaneously, there is a growing aspiration for products and designs that align with contemporary trends while incorporating eco-friendliness. The global race to innovate and create a more sustainable supply chain while fostering collaboration among stakeholders is underway.

Companies are now closely examining the long-term profitability of sustainable practices, realising that innovation in this sphere can confer a significant competitive advantage.

These companies are attracting the attention of climate-aware investors and venture capitals, looking for more conscious, sustainable, and long-term investments. A striking example of this trend is the alternative packaging sector in which biodegradable plastic packaging is a growing market.

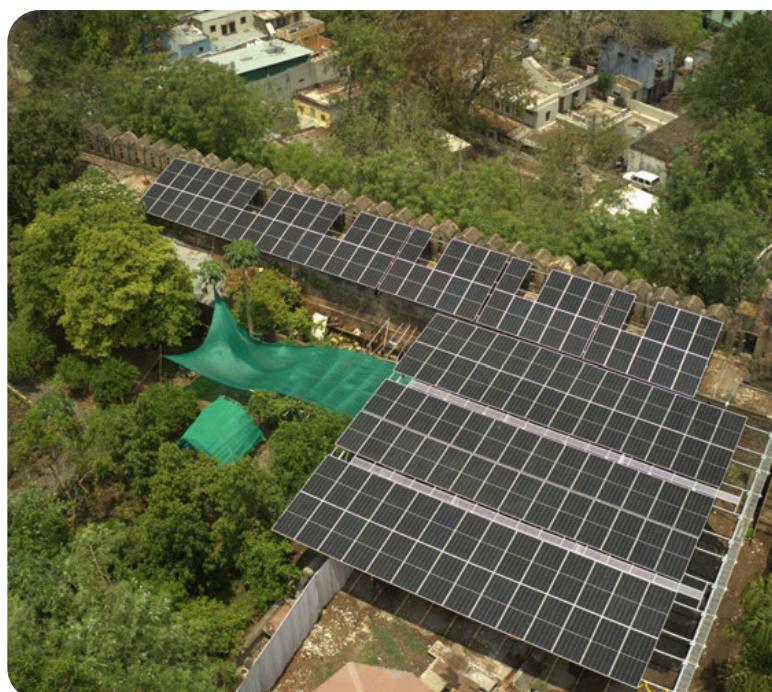




Green energy is shaping the hospitality industry in India

The 2022 Sustainable Travel Research Report by Bookings.com found that 91% of Indian travelers would want to travel more sustainably. Of these travellers, 64% said that sustainability efforts of accommodation and transport providers have a strong impact on travel decisions, which provides more incentives to the hospitality players to shift their practices to better align with sustainable goals. Featured here is a solar plant installed by Godrej Electricals & Electronics (right) at Ahilya Fort, a heritage hotel at Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh (above).

Images credit: Dipak Shelare/Shutterstock.com, Godrej Electricals & Electronics



Eco-friendly packaging alternatives have led to seaweed

Despite unsettling research and studies on the hazardous effects of single-use plastic and petroleum-based packaging, they continue to be popular packaging ingredients. However, there are organisations like Pune-based Zerocircle, that have come up with ingenious and useful alternatives to plastic - seaweed (below). Through in-depth research, tests and experimentation, Zerocircle has figured a way to convert various species of seaweed into packaging (right) that the founder, Neha Jain, claims is "low-cost, completely dissolvable, home-compostable, and bio-digestible".

Images credit: Zerocircle



Anupama Kundoo

Architect & Educator

On the housing projects she's built in Auroville like Full-Fill Homes and working with unique construction materials like ferrocement



Your work exemplifies this theme, *Balancing Act: Consumption & Conservation* given that you always focus on a conscious approach to building and design. In your opinion, how should we balance the way we conserve with the way we consume?

In order to balance consumption and conservation, finite resources should be used judiciously while countering challenges to expand human capacities and qualities infinitely. Human resources involve the use of human ingenuity and imagination, capacity to experiment and try out new things, and to adapt. Our resources include time, muscle, brain, care, and sense of empathy and community. It is the proactive development of the human capacities and resourcefulness which must be celebrated and remain at the centre of development strategies. Instead, the human consciousness which has the capacity to discriminate is often sidelined.

With your more recent interactions with clients, have you seen a conscious shift in adapting to climate conditions and preference of more local materials? Do you think this shift can be more consistent and even sustain long-term?

There is definitely a shift. However, many clients hope that the materials and the technologies will do all the adapting while their own lifestyles can continue as it is. The next step would be for human society to be willing to question some of their contemporary habits and to adopt lifestyles that are healthy for themselves while being also healthy for the collective and the planet's state as a consequence. The use of high-energy manufactured materials is on the rise. In India we have about 1/5th of the global population occupying only 2.6% of the world's land. We need several different strategies to navigate urbanisation.



Innovative prefab homes made from ferrocement

Full Fill Homes relies on structural ingenuity and engineering to achieve innovative high-speed, lightweight construction, saving materials, energy and time. Prefabricated ferrocement modules can be assembled on site in 6 days including foundation. High-quality modest living spaces, like Full Fill Homes assembled with flexible modular prefabricated units, allow creative combinations and user-participation. Folded forms give strength to the thin ferrocement elements creating voids, which become the complete storage solution for the residents, making furniture redundant, and the rooms spacious.

Images credit: Javier Callejas, Sebastiano Giannesini for Anupama Kundoo



Image credit: Javier Callejas for Anupama Kundoo

What is the potential of a material like ferrocement for large-scale and even cost-efficient building solutions, especially in a complex landscape like India's?

Among its many advantages, ferrocement requires raw materials that are relatively easy to source everywhere, and minimum training. It is versatile and plastic, lending itself to all kinds of expressions, lightweight, easy to transport and handle. Modular units can be produced with nearly no infrastructure locally without electricity, but they also could be mass-produced high tech industrially in factories. Moreover, they display higher ductile properties compared to concrete and can be considered to counter seismic loads, which is an important property to navigate climate change related developments such as disaster relief.

Anupama Kundoo is an architect and educator with her eponymous studios based in Berlin, Germany and Pondicherry in India.

Spaces
Activated

Spaces Activated

Our perception of cities and spaces as living organisms is evolving. The pandemic served as a wake-up call, to not only revitalise medical, cultural, and environmental contexts, but also address the urgent need for resilient urban planning.

This post-pandemic world has reshaped our expectations of where and how we are supposed to live, and live well. In this ‘new normal’, cities are becoming more socially oriented, with community spaces that prioritise social development, nation-building, leisure, entertainment, and spectacle.

From developing new tourist destinations to state-run competitions for the creation of public spaces, there is a concerted institutional effort to breathe new life into built spaces. Many challenges lie ahead, from a growing population to climate change, but they also present opportunities to reimagine cities as havens of inclusivity, well-being, and sustainability.

Spaces Activated

*What
Drives
This Shift?*

TACTICAL
URBANISM

INCLUSIVE
ADAPTATIONS

PHYGITAL
SYNERGIES

Tactical Urbanism

Efforts are being made to create city spaces that allow community engagement and well-being

A heightened focus on overall well-being is leading to more demand in cities for recreation. By creating vibrant and people-centric urban environments, cities are adopting an action-oriented and cost-effective approach to catalysing meaningful civic changes.

Such initiatives play a role in revitalising spaces for movement and leisure that promote mental and physical well-being, further enhancing the quality of urban life.

These spaces are being designed in a way that they encourage feedback and instill confidence in the feasibility of such infrastructure that contributes to India's transition towards more sustainable, energy-efficient urban solutions. Collaboration between governments and private sector stakeholders is crucial in funding and executing these projects, leveraging both expertise and resources.

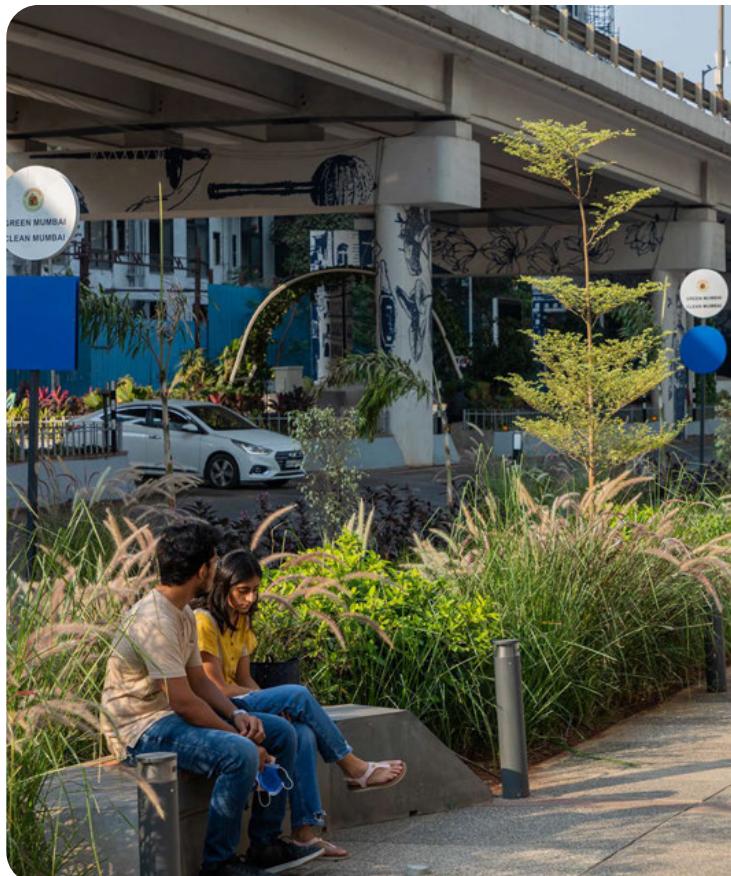




A neglected city space now builds a community

StudioPOD, along with MVRDV, transformed the neglected concrete mess below Mumbai's Senapati Bapat Marg flyover, into a thriving space for the entire local community, now called 'Parel Baug'. Designed by StudioPOD, One Green Mile is a "complete street" project that addresses the global challenge of transforming vehicular dominant corridors to reclaiming streets for its people in the heart of the city's financial district. The project demonstrates how using principles of good street design and placemaking can convert encroached and underutilised spaces into safe, fun public places.

Images credit: Umang Shah





Building a community through sports with Khelo India

As part of the *Khelo India* programme, an initiative by the government to promote sports culture in the country, a new football stadium was constructed in Ladakh, which boasts the union territory's first open synthetic track as well. This open stadium has an ultimate capacity of 20,000 spectators including a youth hostel for 1,000 students. According to the architectural firm, Studio for Habitat Futures (SHiFt), the hostel and VIP lounge are designed with solar passive architectural features, with each room being thermally insulated thanks to a trombe wall.

Image credit: SHiFt



Cycle-friendly cities with Cycles4Change

Thanks to the Smart Cities Mission by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, the Cycles4Change Challenge was launched in 2020, to inspire cities to implement quick cycling-friendly initiatives for which 95 cities registered. In New Delhi, architecture studio AfD collaborated with the city's municipality to design and rollout cycle infrastructure through a week-long pilot. In partnership with St+art and SmartBike Mobility, the 5-kilometre cycle track from India Gate to Lodhi Art District was activated with cycle-friendly signages and public art.

Images credit: Vibhor Yadav for Architecture for Dialogue, New Delhi Municipal Council and St+art India Foundation
Above: Artist Khatra for Pop-up Cycle Plaza
Left: Artist Shabbu for Lodhi Gardens



The growing awareness towards public spaces is related to the rapid sprawl of Indian cities.

A regulated planning which foresees a balance between public and private spaces is crucial instead of a retrofitted and tokenistic approach on the same. We have a responsibility as professionals to contribute towards creating scalable, innovative models and suggesting policies towards more accessible, sustainable public spaces.



**Giulia Ambrogi,
Co-founder, St+art**

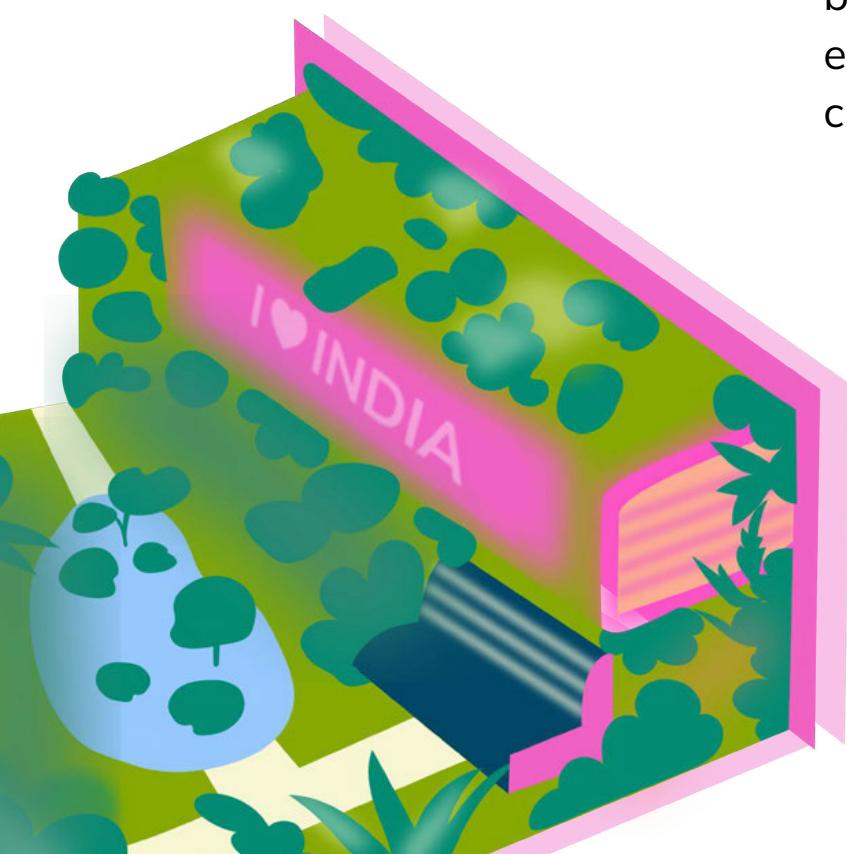
Inclusive Adaptations

New spaces of belonging are emerging to cater to diverse groups

We see a growth of projects aimed at taking into account the diverse nature of communities and needs across India. These initiatives are focused on creating an approach that benefits both people and planet.

Creating inclusive design spaces in response to India's varied groups and identities, each with unique needs and aspirations is the order of the day - one size does not fit all.

In online and offline spaces, there are 'new spaces of belonging' emerging that preserve stories of Indian heritage and foster conversations about traditions and sustainable practices, acknowledging and filling the gaps in historical narratives. Paired with this angle of being a responsible consumer, there is growing acknowledgment of reuse, readapt, or recycling. However, examples of readapted spaces in India are largely driven by economic choices rather than eco-consciousness. This might change in the future.





A modular approach to learning

Every year, parts of Indian cities disappear as settlements built informally by the poor continue to be evicted. ModSkool is a modular school designed as a response to the evictions and demolitions of slums in Delhi, specifically for the children of farmers along the river Yamuna. After a school for around 200 children in a farming community on the floodplains of the river Yamuna was demolished due to the 'illegal' status of the settlement, the community approached Social Design Collaborative to help them design a temporary school that could be dismantled before the bulldozers could arrive on ground to demolish it.

Images credit: Social Design Collaborative





A mindfully built educational space that nurtures and inspires

Located in the middle of the Thar Desert, the Rajkumari Ratnavati School, run by CITTA Education Foundation India and built by Diana Kellogg, serves girls from nearby underserved communities. The building is designed in a way that it shields against the harsh, excessive sunlight, and also incorporates ancient water harvesting techniques to maximise rainwater usage and recycle grey water. Furthermore, the school's lighting and fans are powered by solar energy, and the building is made by using locally sourced materials, thereby effectively reducing carbon emissions. In a recent collaboration with St+art India and through the BALA (Building as Learning Aid) initiative, one wall in each of the school's classrooms was painted based on a theme. This intervention was done with an effort to create an environment where learning extends beyond textbooks. Additionally, the uniforms of the students were designed by Sabyasachi, one of India's leading fashion designers.

“

While it is important to understand and address diverse identities, it is critical to identify commonalities and shared motivations upon which we can draw spaces, places and imagine alternative futures. This is relevant for divergent groups of people, but also imperative to bridge the widening gap between people and the planet.

We need to overcome our severely anthropocentric perspective on crises to institute sustainable systems that can actually be sustained.

”

Mrinalini Ghadiok
Architect, Writer & Design Culturist

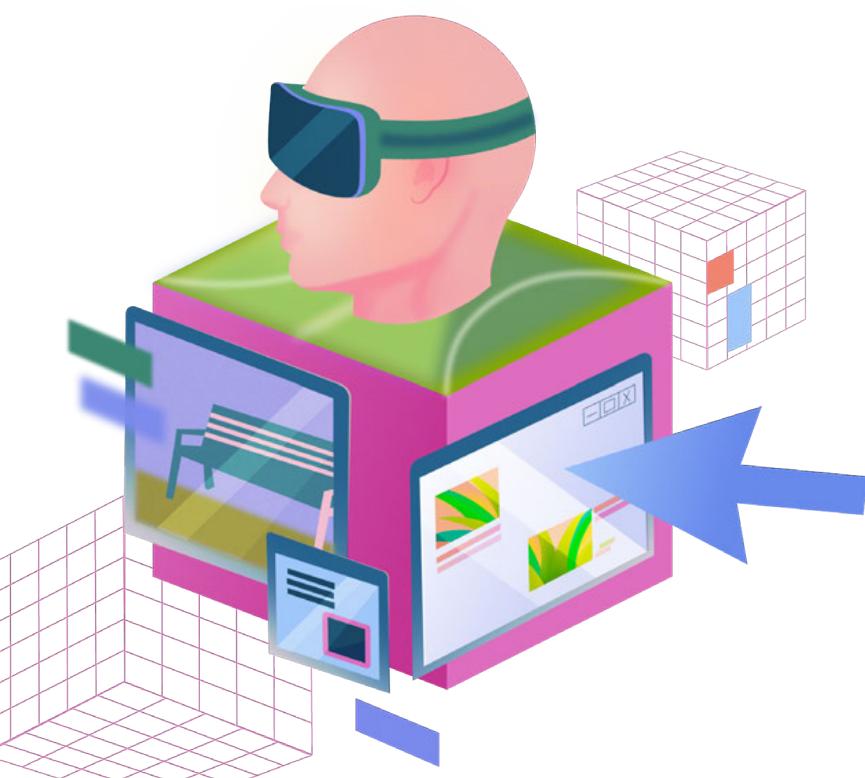
Phygital Synergies

As urban landscapes in India transform, the physical seems to be fused with the digital

'Phygital synergy' represents a conscious linkage between the physical and virtual worlds, reflecting the evolving way of life in an increasingly connected society.

Within this phygital existence, a distinct subtrend is emerging - one that underscores the fusion of physical and digital realms while prioritising inclusivity and adaptation.

Notably, institutions are embracing virtual environments for hosting conferences, highlighting the growing reliance on digital platforms for collaborative endeavours. AR apps are providing interactive tours, where visitors can use their smartphones to access additional information and multimedia content. Security and surveillance systems with advanced facial recognition technology and video analytics, are enhancing safety in public spaces.





Tamil Nadu's app-powered, digital tourism

The Tamil Nadu government is investing in digital tourism with digital tours of heritage sites and VR booklets. It is also in the process of launching an app, which will have features such as a guide to exploring tourist attractions on your own, sharing information and visuals of new-found destinations, and finding everything from authentic souvenir shops to clean and safe public restrooms anywhere in the state.

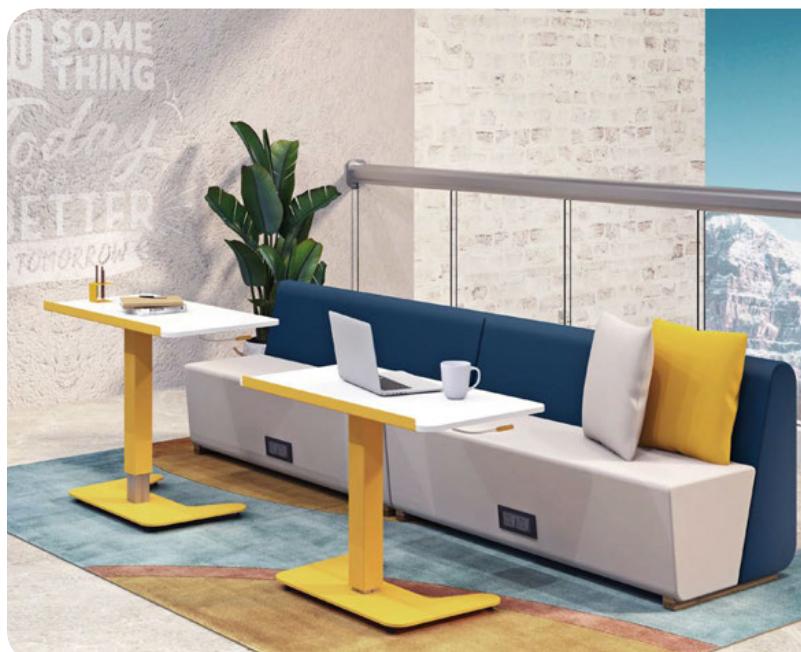
Image credit: Mockup from Vecteezy.com;
Screenshot from tamilnadutourism.tn.gov.in



The future of workspaces in India

Social shifts in the last few years have led to a relook at the structure of offices and a focus on more connected work experiences. There is an increased focus on formal and informal spaces that foster collaboration and also allow for rejuvenation. The Godrej Interio 'Social Office' concept offers design solutions that foster ideas exchange, offer quiet places for individual work as well focus on technology integrations that allow freedom and choices for work settings.

Images credit: Godrej Interio



Sameep Padura

Principal, sP+a

On the evolution of designing public and community-driven spaces and why stakeholder collaborations are key to realising public projects



What is your opinion on what has changed or evolved in terms of realising public spaces with improved social orientation?

I disagree with the premise that our cities are becoming more socially oriented, if anything it is the opposite. Mumbai's planning if anything has become only more insular - our imagination of the city's development operates between binaries of construction on plots and the installation of big transportation infrastructure. Public/community spaces that prioritise social development, nation-building, leisure, entertainment, and spectacle lie in between the two and we have no planning mechanism to produce that. We need to ask a simple question 'what does one's building do for the neighborhood/city?' and then develop facilitating regulations to enable that question to be answered by individual plot owners as they look to develop/redevelop their plots.

What does an inclusive approach towards designing community and public spaces look like?

In the case of the Temple of Steps, the brief was to simply build a temple for a group of villages around the JSW plant. During our interactions with the clients as well as the residents of the settlements around Nandyal there were a number of conversations about the need for a temple, its program and materiality but absolutely nothing to do with water. It was through our experience in and around our site, the depleting water table, change in cropping patterns and our understanding of water runoff from the quarrying process that allowed us to layer water harvesting and recharge as a part of the project's program.



What are your suggestions on collaborating with governments and private players to safeguard spaces like public parks, gardens, and even places of worship?

All public projects are about negotiation and in that case the role of the architect/designer is really an editorial one, suturing everyone's aspirations and ambitions into the fabric of a singular project.

Sameep is Dean, Faculty of Architecture at CEPT University, and founder of sP+a (Sameep Padora & Associates).

Temple of Steps, Nandyal, Andhra Pradesh

Inspired by a 10th century temple for the same deity at Tirupati in South India, this temple was designed and built for the residents of villages around Nandyal, Andhra Pradesh. In the dry terrain of Nandyal, the main concern was to provide a space that would marry the socio-cultural expectations of a temple with the ecological framework and dynamics of and around the site. The team designed a kund, a low-lying pit for recharging the groundwater and also collecting water overflow from limestone quarries, for the surrounding cotton and chilli farms in the region. The banks of this kund were imagined as a social space - a traditional ghat with a flight of steps leading down to the water-body.

Image credit: Sameep Padora & Associates



Search for Authenticity



Search for Authenticity

We live in a world of 24-hour news cycles, instant internet fame, and perpetual gaze of social media. The pace of information dissemination and the quest to be noticed have never been more pronounced. The advent of 'Generative AI' has further distorted perceptions and blurred our reality.

This technology-driven, knowledge-production is pushing us to define the boundaries of 'self' in relation to identity and how we present ourselves.

What it has led to is a conception of new identities and aesthetics in this search for uniqueness.

Search for Authenticity

*What
Drives
This Shift?*

PUSH ME,
PULL ME

MICRO-HYPER-
(G)LOCAL

EVERYTHING,
EVERWHERE,
ALL AT ONCE

Push Me, Pull Me

In a new journey of discovery, contrasting concepts and ideas intersect, leading to unexpected outcomes

The Global Outlook on Sustainability by Mintel 2023 showcased the say-do gap with consumers in India claiming that living sustainably is their top priority, however, only 15% were recycling and 17% commuting in an eco-friendly manner.

As India steps into an era marked by unprecedented economic growth, technological advancements, and climate uncertainty, we are still reconciling the concepts of the globalised age with our traditional values and responsibilities towards the natural habitat.

The consumer landscape and what it offers, has become a playground for this kind of experimentation globally, that wasn't possible for many Indians before. While as consumers, we grapple with balancing aesthetics, value and functionality, the outcomes range between the profound and profane.





In contemporary life where we are spoilt for choice, it has become important to be conscious of what we consume and what we are putting out for consumption - food and beverage, films, music, apps, books, art, travel, furniture, philosophy, relationships, advice, social media, anything and everything. It is incredibly difficult, but timely checks are good for everyone's health. Our attention is precious.



Sameer Kulavoor
Visual artist



The great low-waste Indian wedding

There is a rising, seemingly contrasting trend emerging in India of low-waste weddings that combines the opulence and grand scale of the 'big fat Indian wedding' while playing up sustainability and zero waste as its ethos. Nose to Tail for instance, is a unique green events firm whose work involves not only curating 'love with purpose', eco-friendly celebrations that keep the carbon footprint as low as possible, but also collaborating with artisans to create handcrafted and unforgettable experiences.

Images credit: Nose to Tail





A family home that embraces both traditional and modern values

Architect Varun Goyal's Courtyard House in Bhilai, Chhattisgarh was designed and built for two families living together, and wished two distinct homes that were connected by a shared courtyard. Even though this home appears to be contemporary in design and modern in composition, it exudes traditional materiality and brings together diverging concepts of togetherness with privacy. It also imbues sustainability with rustic detailing, contemporary flourish and use of only locally sourced and natural materials.

Images credit: Pankaj Anand for Atelier Varun Goyal

Micro-Hyper-(g)local

India's increasing influence on the world has had a cascading effect on the lives of average Indians

The newfound familiarity with global pop culture and media has led to the emergence of an urban Indian lifestyle that combines global cosmopolitanism with Indian traditions and values.

In this age, addressing 'Indianness' cannot be viewed in isolation; it is a complex blend of influences and a mixed reality of sorts.

In the race to be more exotic and unique than each other, an amalgamised global identity with specific niches of ethnic, regional, and denominational lines is underway.

This is further bringing lesser heard voices to the mainstream and galvanising new communities and practices around them.



Contemporary cuisine set within restored charm

Multidisciplinary design studio Otherworlds led by Arko Saha, transformed this 1980s villa in Panjim into Tertulia, a restaurant and bar that draws inspiration from the ubiquitous Goan balcão (a traditional porch where local Goans love to spend their time) with built-in seats. They blended hyperlocal techniques and materials to seamlessly combine old-world charm with contemporary aesthetics. By overhauling the entire villa, the team was able to remove some of the external walls and extend the dining space with an outdoor patio, sheltered by a bamboo canopy - an ideal shade during monsoons and summers.

Images credit: Studio Suryan and Dang for Otherworlds





A cafe that treasures both interactions and isolation

ARAKU Coffee, India's first specialty coffee without middlemen (from seed to cup), opened a flagship in Bangalore in 2021, and is unlike any typical cafe experience. Designed by Shonan Purie Trehan of Labwerk, and New York-based architect Jorge Zapata, this cafe features India's first-ever Modbar - a globally renowned experience that breaks the barriers between baristas and customers. Highlights of this space include a central island barista bar and modular coffee machine for free-flowing exchanges with staff and customers, private dining, and terrace, locally sourced designer furniture and lighting, curated art from Tarq that patrons can purchase, and even a bookshop corner.

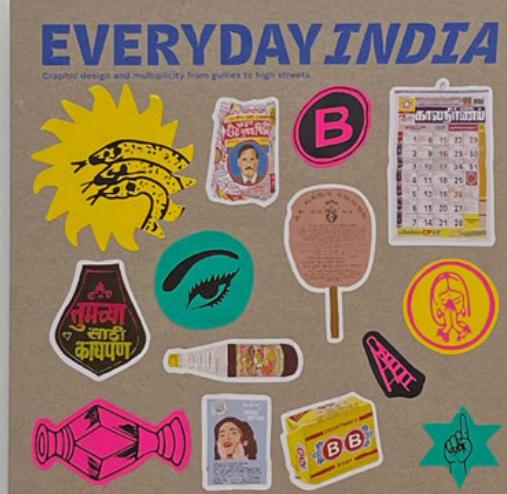
Images credit: ARAKU Coffee



A tribute to India's quintessential visual identity

Visual India is as much a sum of its striking contrasts as its culture and society. Contemporary artists and designers Sameer Kulavoor and Zeenat Kulavoor curated this book and exhibition that pays tribute to this visual India - designs we live and breathe without our knowledge, reminding us how much we take our surroundings for granted. Aptly titled, Everyday India, this book is a rich tapestry of storefronts, signages, and packaging that represent the chaos of everyday life in India. The book also questions "where design ends and art begins and vice versa and the overlaps between the two".

Images credit: BombayDuckDesigns
Project facilitated by BARO Market



“

In a dynamic world of modern Indian living, we often miss out on the fine balance of aesthetics, value, and functionality. As India's influence echoes globally, a new urban lifestyle emerges - where global cosmopolitanism intertwines seamlessly with our rich traditions. ‘Indianness’ is no longer a singular concept but a nuanced fusion of diverse influences, a kaleidoscope of identities.

”

Krsnaa Mehta
Founder & Design Director,
India Circus

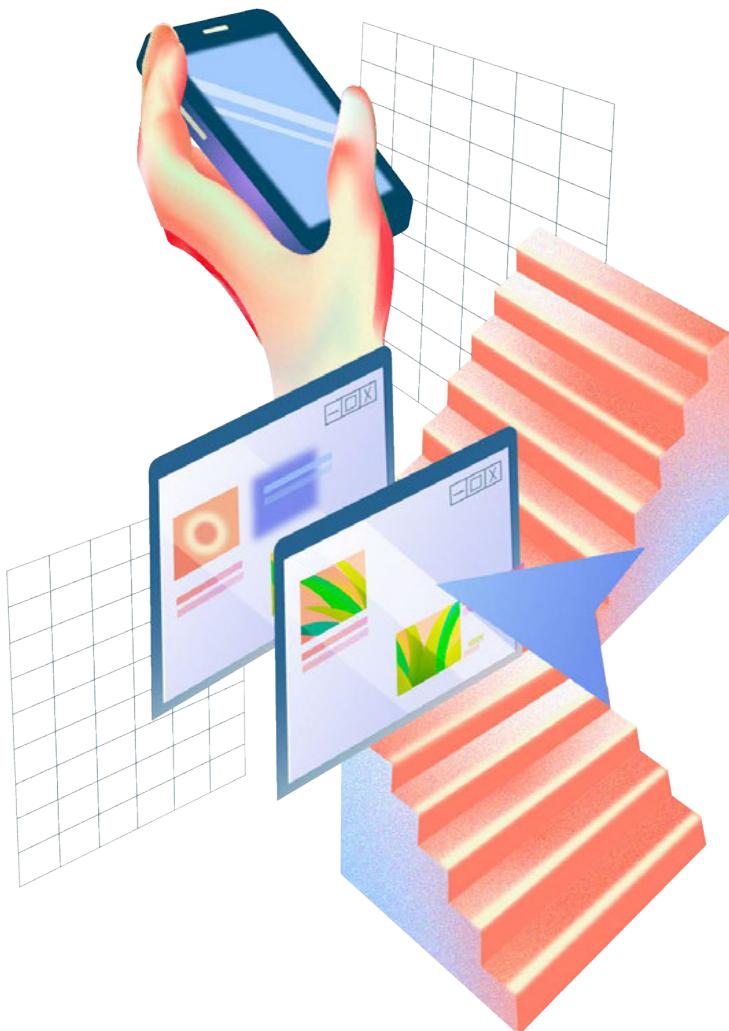
Everything, Everywhere, All at Once

Our everyday need for the internet and advanced digital technologies, has transformed our screens to portals to worlds within our world

The democratisation of the internet has brought us closer together, offering a window into each other's lives, entwined within the web of synapses on the information highway.

With this digital transformation and India's push for digital public infrastructure, the line between physical and digital has been blurred further, presenting opportunities for innovation too.

If this is leveraged well, we can be more empowered and in control of our own narrative.





AI imagines - decommissioned oil rigs to paradise islands

Imagined by The Busride Design Studio, led by Ayaz and Zameer Basrai, The India Future Project is a “speculative inquiry into our shared futures”, creating an alternative universe of possibilities. Through AI imagery, they visualise how actions of the now, could potentially cause repercussions in the imminent future. These images fast-forward us to a potential 2035, when G20 countries finally stand up to oil and gas lobbies to decommission existing oil wells. Ayaz explains, “The decommissioned rigs now become venues for a variety of green experiments. These little deep sea oases attract more adventurous guests, with sustainably minded restaurants and hotels opening up on their levels. By far one of the most interesting technologies to emerge from these experiments are the kelp farms and seaweed forests. With the documented benefits of decarbonisation, these kelp forests are now farmed in massive offshore water siphons, rivaling the metal and glass towers produced by toxic modernity.”

Image credit: The Busride Design Studio / The Busride Lab



World's first inclusive, large-scale e-commerce platform

Building on the success of India's Digital Public Infrastructure projects, ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce) exists to provide equal opportunities for all kinds of brands, buyers and sellers. Rivaling the likes of giants like Amazon and Flipkart, through its 'non-platform centric model', it hopes to bite into India's booming e-commerce presence by "enabling population-scale inclusion of all types and sizes of sellers". While their focus is on retail and restaurants, facilitating real-time transactions, it will gradually extend to travel, mobility. The goal is to bring on board 30 million sellers and 10 million merchants online.

Image credit: GraphicsKS/Shutterstock.com

Rooshad Shroff

Architect & Designer

On blending international design expertise with craft and creating a global identity through innovative curations and collaborations



How would you define the term 'authentic design'?

Design that does not really follow trends, but is reflective of one's true intuition; design that consistently follows a certain path or process, so that projects by a particular firm or individual may not necessarily look the same, but carry their signature regardless.

Your work can be described as playing with the dichotomy of traditional/global values and Indian/international tastes.

Why is the integration of craft important to your contemporary designs and process?

From its very commencement, my practice has centred around the implementation and revival of artisanry across the design spectrum. India's wealth of ancient handicrafts is legendary; the different time-honoured techniques add a layer of sophistication to any product, and we work principally to push the boundaries of each craft, contemporising it and rendering it relevant in today's design language.

The world's eyes seem to be on India now with respect to all aspects, whether it's hosting G20, advancements in science and tech and renewable energy resources, or even being the next big global powerhouse for arts, design and culture. How would you define this evolving identity of India, especially in the global map of design and craft?

The last decade particularly has seen far more appreciation of Indian artists and brands, which is definitely a step in the right direction. This in turn gives rise to further opportunities of collaboration, particularly on the international front. There is also a perceptible evolution within the Indian market and consumer; clients are more open to taking creative risks.



Marble inlay plates with contemporary flavours

Rooshad pushes the boundaries of contemporary design and local Indian crafts. Doodles (above left) was designed with Alejandro Shroff-Jiminez, Rooshad's 7-year-old nephew. Each plate in this playful collection is the young artist's imagination brought to life, featuring white, delicately hand cut Makrana marble inlaid with black Bheslana stone by the artisans of Agra. The Gyaan Project (above right) is a limited edition line of marble plates designed by 12 renowned talents in fashion, design, and architecture like Atul Dodiya, BV Doshi, Bijoy Jain, Christian Loboutin, and Abu Jani Khosla, each handmade by inlay artisans in Agra. The proceeds from the sales of each plate went towards the construction of CITTA Foundation's Rajkumari Ratnavati Girls School in Jaisalmer.

Images credit: Rooshad Shroff

Rooshad is an architect, curator, and product designer, whose projects range from architecture to interiors and bespoke furniture, with a special focus on artisanry and high-end luxury.



About Godrej Design Lab

Godrej Design Lab, an initiative of Godrej & Boyce, is a platform that encourages and advances design excellence and exploration.

Launched in 2014 by Navroze Godrej, Godrej Design Lab today continues with the intention of making life brighter and better through the power of well-designed objects, spaces, and systems.

Our efforts are focused on engaging the community through thought-provoking events, supporting upcoming talents, and showcasing how design innovation can create better products and systems.

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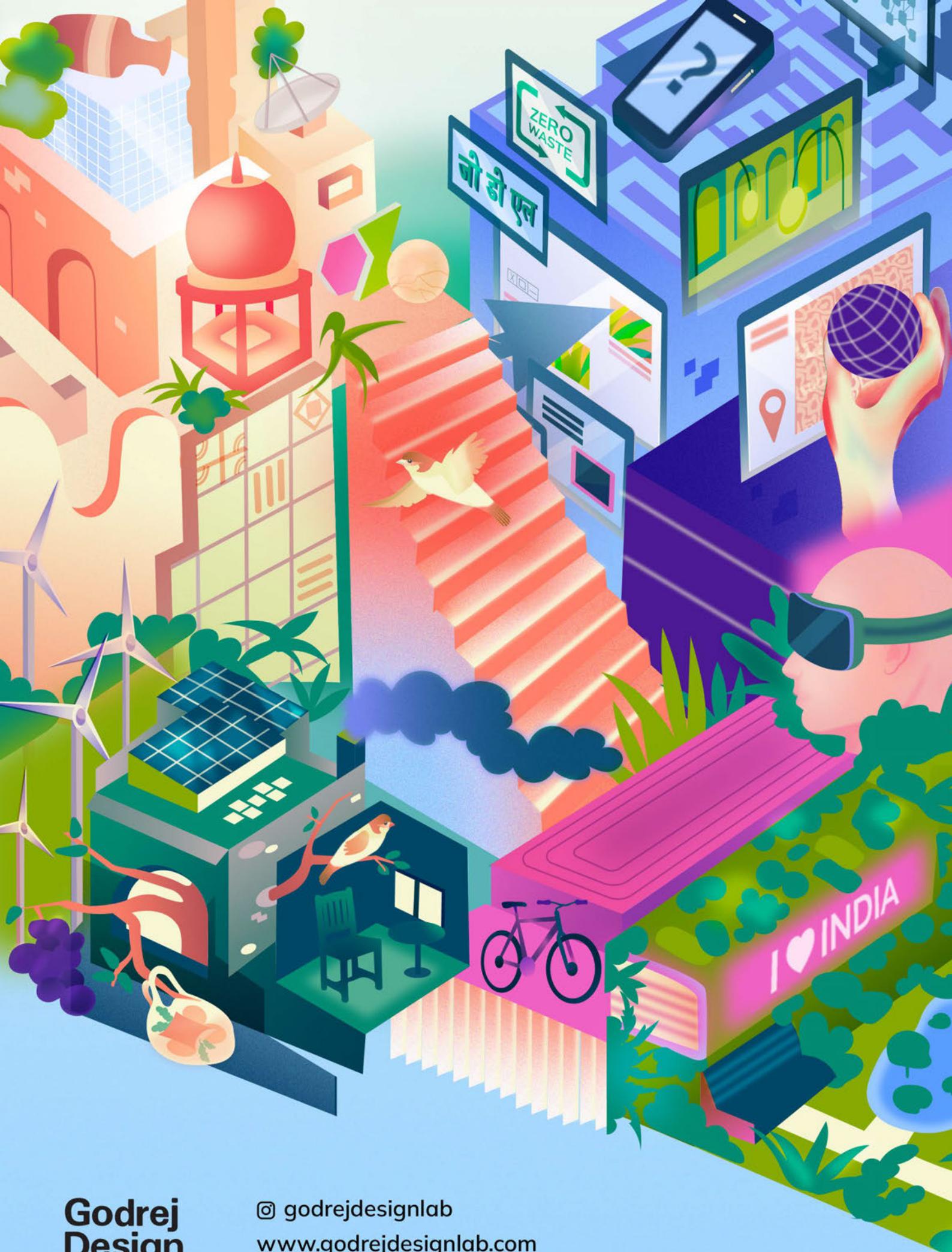
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