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Fusion is their mantra

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Picking up local ideas and incorporating them into their designs is the strategy adopted by Vijay and Meghal Arya of Ahmedabad.

For architects Vijay Arya and Meghal Arya of Arya Architects based in Ahmedabad, the idea of structure as the integral part of their design where it reflects its resilience and brings in the link with the materials used, were the realisations from their 15-year architectural journey. The significance of the structure and the importance of picking up what is local and working on the same before incorporating it into the design has been the chief plank they have rested on throughout their practice.

In an event recently hosted by the Indian Institute of Architects, Vijay and Meghal Arya presented their designs which showed a fine fusion of the inside and outside spaces into an ambiguous middle ground.

Interestingly, their first foray into design happened to be a competition, which they also won, involving a bus shelter in stainless steel. It was followed by another which involved a foray into the earthquake-devastated Kutch. Noticing that the stone walls were falling apart in layers, they decided to address it with a mesh wrapping while continuing to use stone as it was the chief local material.

Landing soon with a documentation project in Rajasthan made the duo understand better the conservation techniques required to care for old monuments. The design of the Mewar Complex near Udaipur was perhaps a fallout of this understanding as well as the need to link in the prevailing local sensitivities.

The complex was to house a series of memorial and tourism facilities that would commemorate the life of Rana Pratap, the legendary King of Rajasthan. Given his life of frugality, spent in jungles and battlefields, the requirement was to create battle scenes, the simple yet rugged lifestyle of the Rana. This was accomplished through semi-open spaces, the structure kept simple yet robust, with the use of local stones that incorporated local craftsmanship.

Their design of an apartment complex in Goa breaks the conventional horizontal repetitive lines to replace with inclined ceilings and walls with all-weather spaces as well as common spaces between the blocks.

Sports complex

The Veer Savarkar Sports Complex again reflects their versatility in bringing in a differential design in a location that is largely an industrial area where textile mills had gone defunct.

In this project, with the motto of restoring the dignity to our public spaces, the Aryas carved out a large field from the allotted space and assigned it for a public garden. Inclusive amenities such as crèche, a library, internet café, restaurant along with an auditorium, amphitheatre and conference hall were designed. The semi-open spaces created flexible user spaces while the large overhangs of the complex kept the interiors cool during the hot summer months.

The multiple trees that prevailed in the site were further retained and converted into natural public seating spaces. "Ever since its inauguration, the complex is extensively used by the public not only for local activities but also city-scale public activities", says Meghal.

The Aryas have a firm belief in the need to create architecture that would act as a catalyst to social upgradation. Their design of the bus station for Ahmedabad BRTS is a case in point. Given the wide cross-section of users as well as the number who would be frequenting, the public interface and ease of movement were brought into perspective while designing the spaces. To bring in transparency, stainless steel cables were extensively used while wood prevailed wherever human touch was imminent. The accent was on active engagement with local culture as well as adapting to local conditions.

While state-of-the-art construction techniques turned it into a landmark, the design veers around high durability, pre-fabricated parts that permit quick assembly while offering aesthetics and easy maintenance. The station also invites plenty of natural light and ventilation through the day. Given that the model could be replicated in bus stations across the country, the structure is also adaptable to use of different skins that would offer a different identity in each location.

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