

ART FORM : WILL KURTZ    PRODUCT DESIGNER : MATHIEU LEHANNEUR    MY SPACE : ROOSHAD SHROFF

# HOME REVIEW

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A closer look at architect Rooshad Shroff's career graph - which is indisputably impressive - highlights his conspicuous devotion towards anything design. Raised in a family where architecture was a regular staple at the dinner table conversations, it comes as no real surprise that Rooshad has made an early and a definite mark in the design domain today. Furthermore, studying in top universities and work experience at renowned firms boosted an already bright looking career path.

Ever since he started his firm in 2011, the studio has stretched the boundaries of architecture and design. Despite spending several years overseas, Rooshad has effortlessly embraced his roots and developed a unique narrative, where traditional craftsmanship meets contemporary brilliance.

Today, many designers work with traditional crafts but they generally tend to lean more towards reverence than innovation. Rooshad's experimentations, which are always backed by thorough research, display certain playfulness and stretches the limits of the materials and indigenous crafts. Each project helmed by the firm - it could be a large-scale architectural project or a single piece furniture - eventually evolves into edgy aesthetics.

In this interview, Rooshad provides his insightful views on design and shares some enriching experiences.

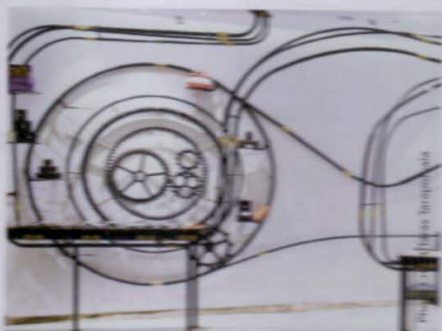


## ROOSHAD SHROFF

Interview by Shweta Salvi

You come from a strong architectural background, how has that helped your design sensibilities? Do tell us of drawbacks, if any, of such fine lineage.

Being raised in a family of architects, there has always been a subconscious association with design and architecture. Be it visits to my father's office as a kid, or through travels with the family. We would always engage in immersing with the arts through museums, design shows or even visits to important buildings - both contemporary as well as historic monuments. So it is this exposure to design and architecture right from an early stage that got me interested in the field and has influenced me in the way I look at design today.



As for drawbacks, I wouldn't call them drawbacks, but being from a family of architects there is always the constant referencing between father and son or the pressure to perform. The family becomes the biggest critics which in fact help enrich the work, as it's the most honest and helpful feedback one can receive. We all at present run 3 independent firms, which couldn't be more different in style an approach.



*Indian architectural institutes at the time, I felt, lacked the holistic approach to design. The educational system stressed on technical training but failed to shape conceptual thinking.*

Overseas education, especially from universities like Cornell and Harvard come with attached reverence. Tell us about your experience studying in these schools. And just to compare, what do the Indian architectural institutes lack?

Before I went to the US, I started my architectural education in Mumbai at Kamla Raheja (KRVA). After spending 3 years, I decided to start all over and enrolled for the 5 year undergraduate program at Cornell University. Of course, these universities being #1 in the US for both the undergrad and grad program respectively, come with a lot of years of experience and the resources are second to none.

The enriching part of each program is the great database of architects that come in either as professors or guest lecturers that help give you access to the world's Pritzker prize winners on a weekly basis. Also, you interact with a diverse range of students from across the world. You have the most ambitious and hardworking classmates who motivate you to excel, and by default you learn the most from your peers.

Indian architectural institutes at the time, I felt, lacked the holistic approach to design. The educational system stressed on technical training but failed to shape conceptual thinking. However, I feel this is rapidly changing with the way studios are now conducted in a number of schools where I go often as a guest critic for their final juries.

*For me, architectural education trains you to think differently and equips you to tackle design at every scale.*

One crucial stage/technique of the design process that architects/ designers tend to skip but should not...

Conceptual Rigour.

You have worked with two of the current leading architectural practices in the world; Zaha Hadid's and OMA/REX's work exhibits intense parametric design, while you have this unique inclination towards reinterpreting traditional techniques. If not the style, what did you take away from your experience with these firms?

Both the firms had a very different way of approaching a project from design conception to final realisation. For me, it was the process that was more important. For example - to take a program and to conceptually re-think what it could be and to find a solution quite different from the mundane was the enriching part of both offices. While at OMA/REX, the concept design was the most enriching for me - the way in which a project would be approached, understood and then delivered through a series of iterations and model making and finally come up with the best possible solution.

This process of working has definitely been a great influence and can be seen in the way in which I approach most of my own projects.



You have used traditional craft techniques on unconventional media - as seen in the embroidered wooden screen at Louboutin store - this must require a certain research and development period. Do you do exhaustive R&D on project basis or is it an ongoing process?

As an office we specialise in creating special materials for most of our projects - be it residential or commercial. A large part of the practice focuses on R&D - be it techniques of making or material development. Often they are derived for a particular project. However, due to a continuous R&D we now have an entire library of materials that have been created and sometimes get appropriated into projects if they work conceptually.

The R&D process is crucial for us, as we want to give a great emphasis on the handmade and the use of local artisans and the amazingly skilled craftsman from different regions of the country.

Apart from architectural projects you are fast gaining recognition for your work in allied design fields, what inspires you to stretch your abilities?

I have always been interested in different fields of design - be it graphics/ furniture/ product or fashion and have explored these different avenues right from undergraduate studies. For me, architectural education trains you to think differently and equips you to tackle design at every scale.

For example, when one does an interior job, there is a fine line between where the architect stops and other disciplines take over. The project needs to be tackled in totality and hence it is important to look into the furniture/ graphics, etc. After doing this for a few projects, now I am increasingly taking on projects where by we can have complete design role, handling each of these different departments to create a holistic project.

We get to witness your keen admiration of Indian craft in your projects, any particular craft you look forward to working on?

It's an ongoing research and quite often, during my travels when I stumble upon a new craft or craftsman, I often create a collection of furniture based on the possibilities of making. The craft in a way influences the design process and not the other way around.

Yours is a fairly young practice, what kind of work do you envisage the studio doing in the future?

More architectural projects, to begin with, and as the practice grows, I hope we can have a separate division for R&D, where we can continuously develop new materials/ techniques which could serve as a strong database, not just for our use but for other architects to tap into.

Your career is dotted with exceptional milestones and that too in a rather short span. Amidst all the hits do the misses bother you?

Not at all. It's all work in progress and a continuous learning process. With every project, we learn, which further influences and enriches our future work.

On a lighter note...

Any of your contemporaries that you admire?

My brother's firm - ShroffLeon, Ashiesh Shah and Rajiv Saini.

One thing about your profession that really irks you...

Indecisive clients that lead to never ending projects.

If you had not been an architect, you would be...

Chef.

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