

G2

THE GLOBAL GUJARATI

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LIVING SPACES



ROOSHAD SHROFF
THE ART OF
ARCHITECTURE

MUSIC MAESTRO

PERVEZ MODY
IN PERFORMANCE

POWER COUPLE

MINAL THACKER &
SUJAY JAIRAJ

SEASON IN THE SUN

SKIN CARE THIS
SUMMER

EMERALD PRINCESS

RUCHI DURLABHJI

Hot Summer
Couture

SEASON'S
SULTRY
SILHOUETTES



G2
PEOPLE

THE ART OF ARCHITECTURE

Rooshad Shroff, whose eponymous multi-disciplinary design and research studio, is creating waves within a year of its inception talks to **G2** about his successful practice. Though dedicated to the realisation of interiors and buildings, it has ventured successfully into areas beyond the traditional boundaries of architecture — furniture and fashion, publishing and graphic design

PH: SANDIP NATH



Rooshad Shroff



An avant-garde aesthetic

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OOSHAD SHROFF is the quintessential artist. The images that flood through his mind find immediate reality in his creations whether in the architectural space or in the graphics, furniture and fashion arenas. Having received an undergraduate degree in architecture from Cornell University and a Masters from Harvard, he has worked at the offices of the prestigious OMA/REX in New York and with the internationally acclaimed architect Zaha Hadid in London.

How are European, Asian and US perceptions of architecture different?

To me, they are not different. While they might have different styles which are lead by cultural, social or climatic differences, they are all extremely sensitive to design and share the same appreciation towards architecture.

Is there any structure that has recently made an impression on you?

Most recently it was the 11/11 parking garage in Miami by Herzog and DeMeuron. Not only is the garage a formal and structural masterpiece but, more importantly, it redefines a utilitarian typology transforming it onto a larger public /urban space. The introduction of the garage has completely changed the dynamics of Lincoln Road creating an opportunity to enhance the public realm.

Have you ever made a 'pilgrimage' to visit a specific structure?

Yes quite a few actually. I quite often plan my holidays around a number of structures I'm interested in visiting. To name a few — the 11/11 parking garage, the works of Le Corbusier in Chandigarh, the CCTV building by Rem Koolhaas in Beijing as well as the Birds Nest Stadium by Herzog and De Meuron.

Any comments on the design of structures mushrooming in Mumbai?

The city is at a very precarious moment. There is a surge of construction and the real estate market seems to be on the rise. But very little focus is given to design and master planning. While a few structures might be worth a mention the majority seem to me a lost opportunity.

Which religious structures do you admire for their architecture?

I find religious structures the most beautiful and fascinating in terms of scale, proportion, structure and the use of geometry. They are all incredible. It is difficult not to draw inspiration from all of them.

Are some architects overrated?

Well in spite of some architects being overrated, the profession, as a whole, is highly understated — especially in India. So if there are a few overrated architects that could bring awareness to the importance of design, well then it's a good thing.

What inspired you to study architecture?

I come from a family of architects, starting with my great-grandfather down to my father. My mother is an interior designer, so exposure to architecture and the design field was inevitable. My childhood was a continuous initiation into the design world, be it on family holidays with visits to museums and galleries or going to my father's office and sketching over blue prints as a kid. So architecture was subconsciously engraved into my DNA.

What is your favorite book on architecture and design?

S.M.L.X.L by OMA/ Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau. I am currently reading *Collecting Art — An Insider's View of the Indian Art World* by Abhay Maskara.

Can you tell us about the house you grew up in?

The house was designed by my father back in 1986. Having been born and brought up in the same house for a number of years, it has been a strong influence on my design aesthetic and I often subconsciously refer to a number of details from the house within my work.

Though the house was designed over 15 years ago, it still remains a very contemporary structure.

Who inspires you?

Within the design world, there are a number of people who I look up to but I admire and am strongly influenced by Rem Koolhaas and Zaha Hadid. I feel they are among the most important people in the practice today for defining a new method and approach towards architecture, design, structure and technology.

What is your ultimate goal when it comes to your work? What do you want to be remembered for?

My ultimate goal? Well, to win the Pritzker!

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Combining innovation, craftsmanship and quality

You also design furniture? Tell us about the C series.

With almost a decade spent in academia, in an increasing technological and digital world, there was a great exposure to new fabrication techniques. Easy access to use of the laser cutter and CNC mill introduced a new vocabulary within design that enables complex geometric forms to be manufactured with ease. While this was extremely seductive at first (as it opened up a number of possibilities for production for me) there seemed to be a sense of loss of authorship. Authorship not in terms of the 'designer' but as mass production happens with the click of a button, the individual piece loses a sense of authorship of the craftsmen. Every piece then also begins to mimic a prescribed aesthetic, one that follows an ease of production through technology and therefore it also loses a sense of place as the machines could be situated anywhere in the world. It is this loss of authorship — of the craftsmen and of the place — that prompted me to move in a direction quite against the flavour of the month and focus on the 'handmade'. Hence the first collection of furniture, the C-Series, which attempts to highlight the amazing carpentry work that is still possible by the craftsmen in Rajasthan. The C-Series range is all handcrafted without any power tools and is devoid of metal fasteners and screws. They are only used in traditional joinery techniques like the dove-tail joint which allows for all the pieces to be dismantled with ease thus facilitating easy transportation and reassembly.

This range not only tries to highlight the craft but also pushes the boundaries of the material itself, by taking on a cantilevered form which is not typically associated with wood. Especially in the C-Bench where the cantilever is taken up to 6 feet in length yet is strong enough for a person to sit at the edge. It is important to note that all the pieces are made only from recycled old Burma teak wood that has been salvaged from old bungalows that are being broken down. Each piece is, therefore, environmentally conscious as well. So there is an attempt to integrate a structurally intriguing form combining innovation, craftsmanship and good quality wood into a clean-cut, purified design.

What are the trends one sees today in designing products, furniture and other art forms?

Well, I'm one who is against trends. To me, architecture, design and décor should not be discussed as what's 'in' this season, as a home is one that you need to appreciate for a significantly longer period of time. There are pieces designed way back in the '50s by Jean Prouve, Charlotte Perriand, Charles and Ray Eames that are absolute classics and can look contemporary even in today's setting.

Is there a vast dichotomy between collegiate architectural curriculum and the actual practice of architecture? If so, what recommendations would you give to a student to prepare them for the profession?

The architectural education trains one to be a holistic designer. It moulds the way you think which is vitally important. There's so much to learn within the discipline that five years of schooling is only the tip of the iceberg. Practical experience is crucial. Take up placements at firms you have always looked up to and try to understand their design methodology and ways of working as against a purely aesthetic level. And more importantly — be curious, persistent and very hard working. ■

Awards and accolades

- Exhibited studio project Probe-Castellana at the Shanghai Expo 2010, Spain Pavilion, for the Chamartin Development
- Nominated by Harvard University - Graduate School of Design, to exhibit studio project Verticalspaces at the Venice Biennial 2010 Exhibition
- Nominated by Cornell University to exhibit thesis at the Architecture Biennial Beijing 2006
- Exhibited fourth year studio project Tessellations at the Architecture Biennial Beijing 2006
- Recipient of the 2006 Michael Rapuano Memorial Award for Distinction in Design from Cornell
- Winner, Architecture Poster Design Competition, School of AAP, Cornell University, 2004
- Winner, Most Creative Design: Façade Design Competition; AIA Southern New York Chapter and the Ithaca Downtown Partnership, 2003
- The Edward Palmer York Memorial Prize; awarded for outstanding performance in design, 2003