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SMALL

**Talk**

with

**ROOSHAD SHROFF**

SACHIN HARALKAR



# The art of living

Architect Rooshad Shroff has made his way back to the country, hopeful of changing Mumbai's cityscape into an aesthetic, planned blend of spaces

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It has been almost six months since the Harvard graduate and architect Rooshad Shroff returned to Mumbai. Albeit, he is still finding his feet in the developing landscape of Mumbai, the 30-year-old Dadar-resident has already bagged a handful of projects — one of them being a first-of-its-kind exhibition hosted by nine leading galleries from Colaba, end of the month. Shroff has been roped in to transform the garden view room into an art space. "We are dissolving the idea of having individual gallery identities. Galleries won't be distinctively marked. It will be designed as one display space," he says. "Architecture too is an art. But it has restriction and rules you have to abide by. It's an art you don't live with, but live in."

Seated at his office in Marine Lines, Shroff says, "I was constantly exposed to the design world. My father is an architect and my mother is into interior design. In fact, my father was keen that at least one of his two sons doesn't take up architecture as a profession...there are far too many of us in the family. But as fate would have it, both of us are architects."

He studied architecture for three years at a college in Mumbai. "But I

found the education dry, and much more technical," he says. So he took off to Cornell University in the United States where he restarted his education in architecture. "The course at Cornell was much more wholistic. It broadened my vision, and encouraged me to think differently."

Education apart, it was the hands-on experience that really mattered to him. So after completing his graduation, Shroff did a fair bit of work. He joined the office for Metropolitan Architecture. Post his stint at the NYC firm, Shroff moved to London where he worked at the office of internationally-acclaimed Zaha Hadid Architects. "There, I had the opportunity to work on the Dubai Opera House project, which in terms of scale is perhaps the most challenging project, I have ever done," he says. But financially, times were weak. Recession had well-entrenched the UK market, and Shroff swiftly moved back to New York to pursue his Masters in Architecture at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University. "It was comfortable to return to education at that time," he says. His work produced at the GSD was exhibited at the 2010 Venice Architecture Biennial as well as the 2010 Shanghai Expo.

Sensing a growing market in Mumbai, Shroff returned to the city, a decade later, to officially kick-start his career. "Worli and Lower Parel

area have witnessed the most development. While the designs of these structures are questionable, let's just say, it's the best time to practise in the city. There are lots of opportunities for an architect in terms of design," he says. "Earlier, not much importance was given to design. No one appreciated architects. Architecture courses in India aren't competitive as yet. That just goes to show the demand for the profession. But this perception is changing. People are responding to design."

Although it's good to have new things coming up, he maintains, much also depends on the kind of development happening around, and how it's executed. "The far suburbs, for instance, are a lost opportunity in terms of having no real master plan, vision or infrastructure geared up for the region. It was a really good prospect to start from scratch, but it's planned like a gated-colony, he says. "New York is beautiful because there is uniformity within the absolute variation. Mumbai, on the other hand, is doing its own thing in a more chaotic way."

But times are hopeful, he says, "Several international architecture firms are coming to the city, and there is a growing desire to create a much more design-sensitive environment." Touché.