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THE STATE OF ARCHITECTURE IN INDIA

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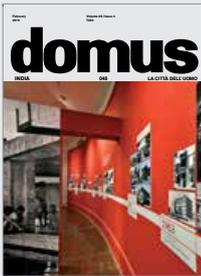
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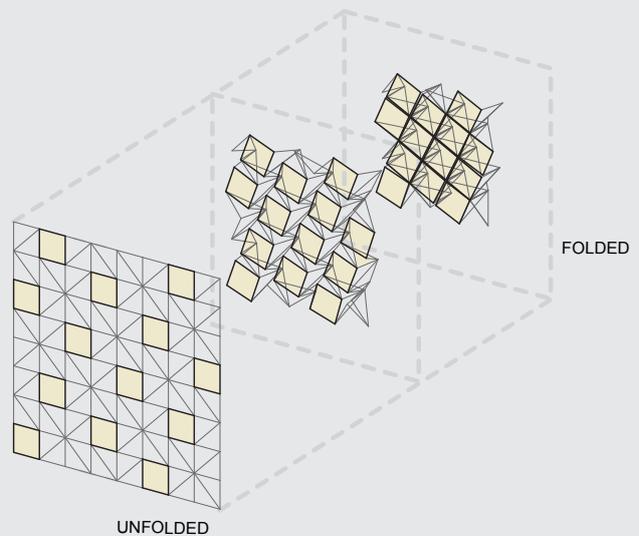
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Cover: View of The State of Architecture exhibition, which is structured as 3 experiential zones, each with its specific texture, tonality and mode of engagement with the questions that lie at the heart of the exhibition. Seen here is the second level (floors second, third and fourth) where the year-by-year documentation of buildings completed produces a time-line of the many projects built and produced in India.



Exploded view of the folding mechanism of the Breathing Wall installation by sP+a at The State of Architecture exhibition at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai.

BEING ARCHITECTURE IN INDIA Kaiwan Mehta

It is nearly after twenty-odd years or so that architecture is being revisited in a robust way – discussing its role and idea, its professional sense and objective, its arenas of education, journalism and criticism; and people with diverse views and arguments are sitting once again at a virtual round-table through *The State of Architecture: Practices and Processes in India* exhibition currently at show at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai organised by the Urban Design Research Institute and largely supported by the Tata Trusts, as well as foundations such as the Kala Ghoda Association. This issue in many ways is dedicated to the charged environment that this exhibition has instantly generated since it opened in the first week of January, followed by an inaugural conference on *The State of the Profession* both being featured in the pages to follow. *Domus India* is one of the primary partners sharing intellectual expertise and concerns and is happy to report largely on this historic moment through the pages of this issue.

One-third of this exhibition is much like ‘an observatory’ as Ranjit Hoskote, one of the three exhibition curators, explains; this is a 360-degree view of time-present as we occupy it now. It tries to make sense of the world of building and architecture as it unfolds in the political, cultural, and public arena today – and this is where the intentions of shaping *Domus India* issue after issue over the last 47 issues meet some of the concerns of the exhibition. We occupy, especially in these parts of the world a time and space that seems to be changing faster than one can grasp or imagine, producing objects and opportunities that are way beyond the comprehension of society and culture that house these. However, it is also not useful to say that times are chaotic, or that the world is incomprehensible, or that whatever is being produced is only a shallow handmaiden to its times – these positions are neither productive, nor do they help us professionals or critics. The challenge is to make sense of the times we live in; to decipher the slivers of hope and struggle, the crevices where people are making efforts to engage with the problems and privileges of contemporary times. How do we understand our contemporary selves within the larger landscape of architecture? It is even taking us to redraw a very basic question – architecture is?

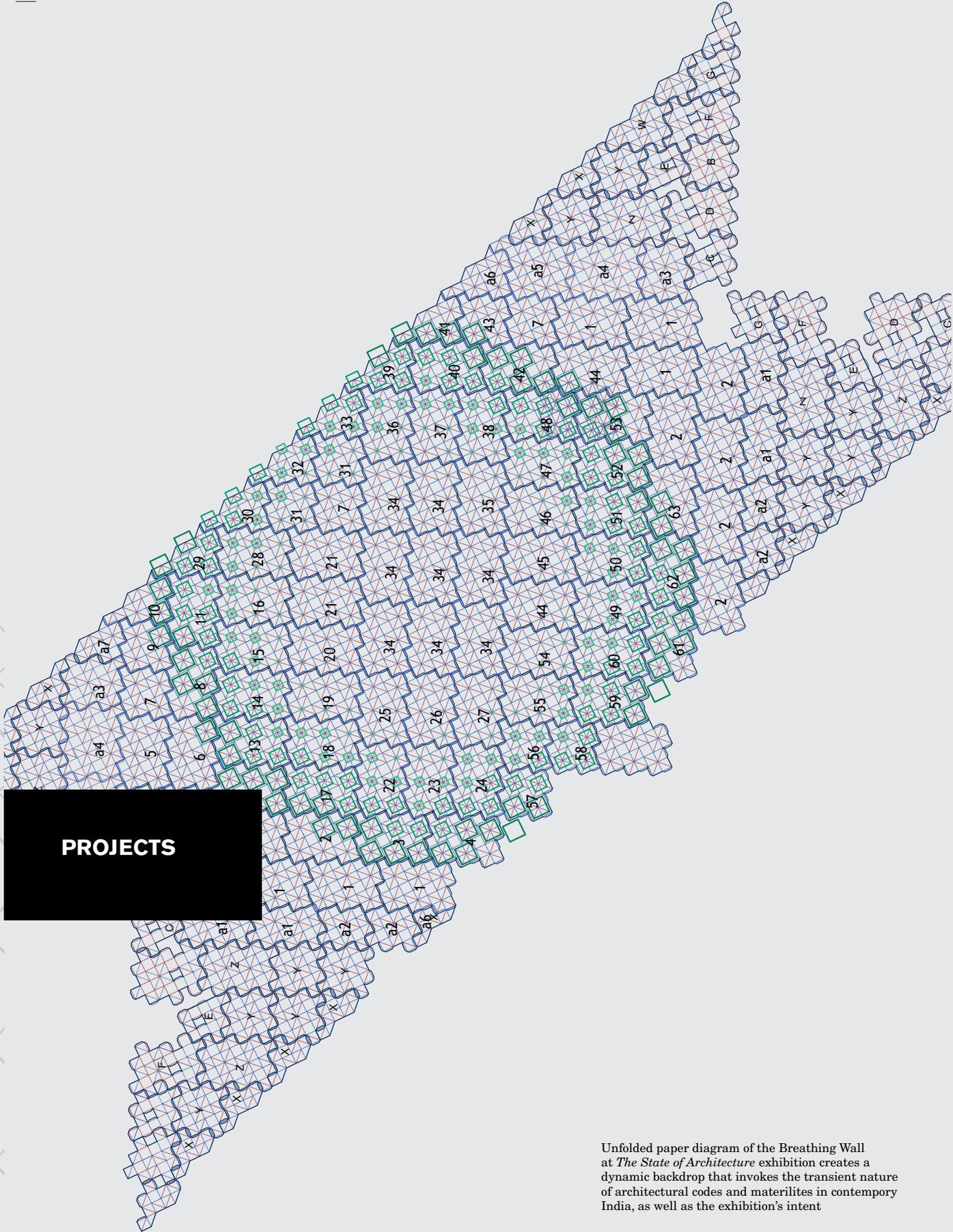
Offices are shaping new locations in the practice of architecture, and so involved and engrossed are they in their daily work that

they may not even realise that; but these are many times evident in the way work and craft, labour and experimentation is being presented and included in the way buildings are designed and made. The markets burst out with building materials since the liberalisation policies triggered off in 1991, and the flood (or rather deluge) continues; there were times when even the most established practices and architects lost track with this new forced entry of many materials but over a period time studios have asked critical questions through their buildings about the role and memory of building materials. Materials have been employed to challenge set notions on the idea of what defines a region – or rather a building in a region? Or what relationship exists between identities of sorts and materiality of forms? And there has been this going strongly to materials that occupied architectural imagination before the 1990s – but from nostalgia to new ways of construction and experimentation have even populated this response. The brick no longer wants to be an arch – and be it so!

Is this sensibility towards challenging existing or respected relationships a brash response from younger thinkers? Or is it a new generation through their work over the last twenty-odd years expressing the emergence of a new paradigm, a new set of theses that they themselves are unsure of, but are devoted to their paths and laboratories of experimentation and exploration. In the results that we see today – the buildings we see designed and built – we often see a rigorous set of questions being probed vis-à-vis form and architectural imagination, the idea of user and perception of visual language, possible emergence of new elements of architecture, or newer interpretations of what architecture is. What are the catalogues that attempt a registry of these newer forms of interpretation, and resistance? A resistance to being inundated by questions that do not hold much ground anymore, or a resistance to being run over by questions that are not yours, or a resistance to being asked questions that you are not responsible to answer? Here there is a temptation to bring back notes from an earlier editorial, on the role of the magazine – as a platform, rather than a brochure of ‘what’s up!’ As the editorial of *Domus India* November 2014 said, the magazine is “...in a way, a Library of Time for the field of architecture in India, as well as a Homing Cabinet, every issue is a ‘cabinet of ideas and arguments’ on

display, on exhibition... to shape itself into a provisional book – a provisional book rewritten and redrawn, or extended and expanded, every next issue. Every issue records in a hurry the many worlds that architecture occupies, the visual world we shape and inhabit, the world of making and building we live in, and operate within. It accounts in a ledger the tensions and imaginations the world of architecture that shapes and unmakes itself day after day; the landscape of smiths, carpenters, techies, bankers, corporates, politicians, and all those who partake in the making of a physical world we live in. ... In a contemporary world as ours, where ideas and meanings float, finding stories to rest in, believe in... homing of ideas to evaluate their own purpose and reflect on their lives (however short-lived) is necessary, and the magazine is precisely that box, that container which also showcases, which will allow things of various means and shapes to rest next to each other, however different or odd from its neighbour, but sit within proximity of variations, and strange objects – giving home, however transient, to an idea or a meaning. This cabinet is a showcase of ideas that are being juggled around – at times with certainty, at times with tentative lives – but they all need a resting place, a home for some brewing, some growing-up or self-reflection and evaluation; the magazine is the ‘cabinet for ideas’. ... The cabinet has a finite form, but its glass panels always allow a constant visual conversation; and every month you can rearrange the objects, bring in new ones, or get rid of some. The cabinet and the library have a visual logic of arrangement, like that of an exhibition, where the logic of a narrative builds up a content-form, image-meaning, conversation, dialectic. Every issue is a book, and necessarily should be so, but it is a book with many sequels, and that immediately does not let the magazine be a book as we know it. It is a book with an internal narrative logic, an argumentative format, a plot with characters; but that plot can be redrawn again in the next issue, characters may change and subsequent arguments can revisit and challenge previous ones.”

With these thoughts and notes, that are in the process of shaping themselves further with every issue, we invite you to participate in the journey of *Domus India* across its different issues, issue after issue, and as well enter the area of the exhibition that is poised at the juncture of many sharp and critical questions, contemplations, and theses. **km**



Unfolded paper diagram of the Breathing Wall at *The State of Architecture* exhibition creates a dynamic backdrop that invokes the transient nature of architectural codes and materials in contemporary India, as well as the exhibition's intent



Rooshad Shroff

CUBE METAMORPHOSIS

As a part of the public arena at *The State of Architecture* exhibition at NGMA, Mumbai, specially designed pieces of furniture punctuate the exhibition space without disturbing the display-narrative, and encourage spontaneous conversations

Text Rooshad Shroff
Photos Courtesy Asian Paints

The approach to design for this project can be summarised in one phrase – cube metamorphosis! The idea was to take a simple platonic form like a cube (18"x18"x18") as a starting point and have one singular formal move which would create a family of cubes. Each cube was the resultant of the intersection of a diagonal elliptical tube, piercing through the cube creating a cantilevered form that allows for a glimpse to the other side through the opening that gets created. The openings vary in sizes, and each defining curve is half of an ellipse; either side an ellipse of a different size, thus creating a diagonal void-tube. The opening, the void-tube stretched between two cut-outs from differently sized ellipses allows for many permutations and combinations as the size and location of the cut-outs changes. After which, the inner curved surface is painted

with 8 layers of paint and then carefully hand sanded to reveal the different layers of paint, allowing for many coloured contours to emerge and further animate the void-tube, while the exterior of each cube remains one smooth colour. The colour family used includes blue/ blue-green/ red-orange/ pink-orange/ green/ purple/ pink/ orange-yellow, while the exterior is painted in shades of grey – the lighter for the smaller opening, to a dark grey to the big opening. Once sanded, the pieces are all lacquered with 10 coats of high-gloss lamination.

When the pieces are placed next to one another they form larger shapes, each interestingly being a mirror image of each other, yet not looking repetitive of a module. The combinations start forming large constellations of platonic cubes and cuboids, as well as

interior-visual maze of the void-tubes. The same idea was taken forward in the form of a console and benches. A cluster of four come together forming an oval intersection with the symmetrical loft piercing through, allowing for the piece to have a uniform opening. The pieces were designed to create a public arena within the gallery space at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai for the *The State of Architecture: Practices and Processes in India* exhibition. They had to visually punctuate the space, yet not disturb the displayed narrative and content; as well as allow for clusters of seating and conversations to spontaneously take place within the exhibition. The system of furniture hence was to activate public engagement with the exhibition. @

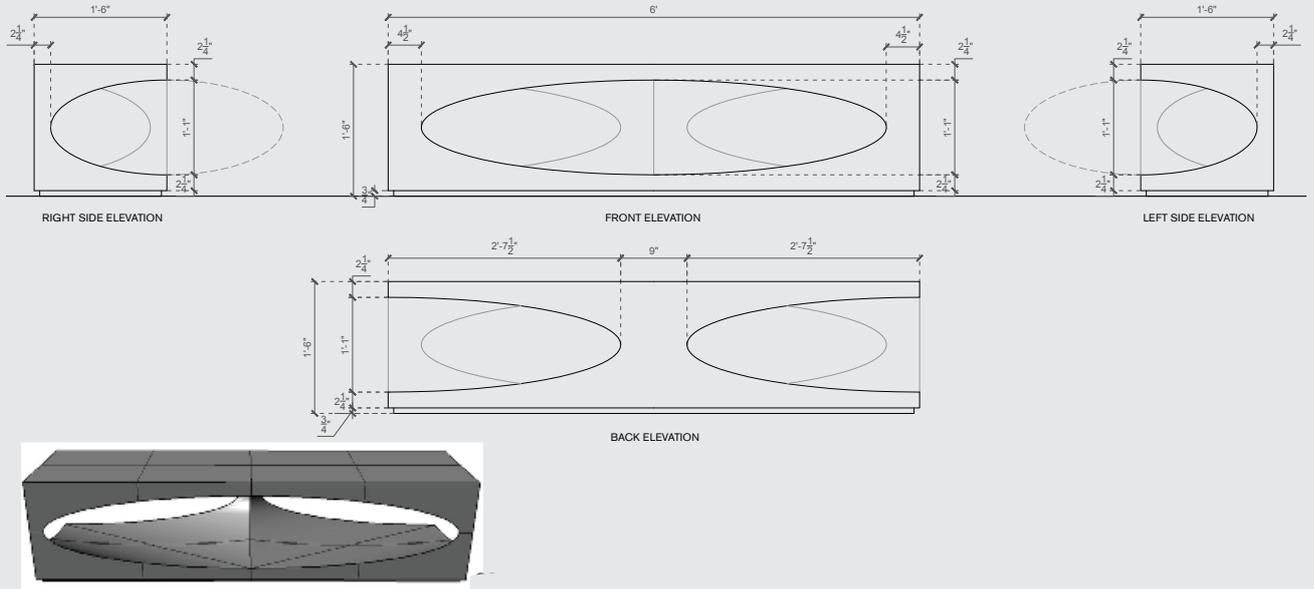




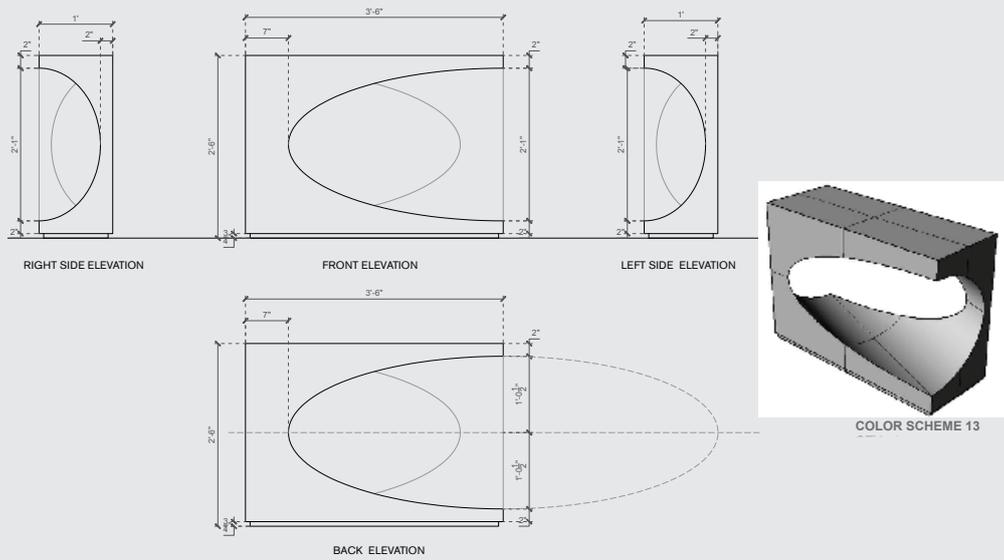
This spread: the cube furniture with vividly coloured cut-out voids impart a distinctive character to each piece. Various pieces can be combined together to form clusters of sitting arrangements, with colourful tube-voids adding to the visuality of the cuboid seats. Below: cube furniture at The State of Architecture exhibition at National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai. The voids are coloured with 8 layers of painting, then hand sanded to reveal evocative patterns



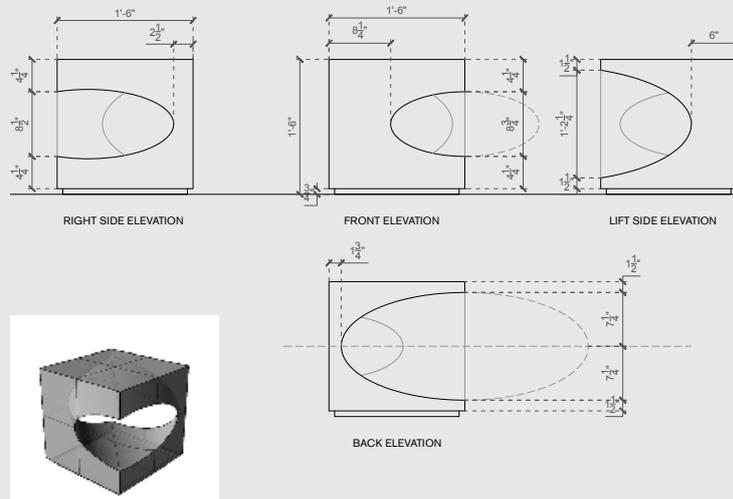
Photo Dinesh Mehta



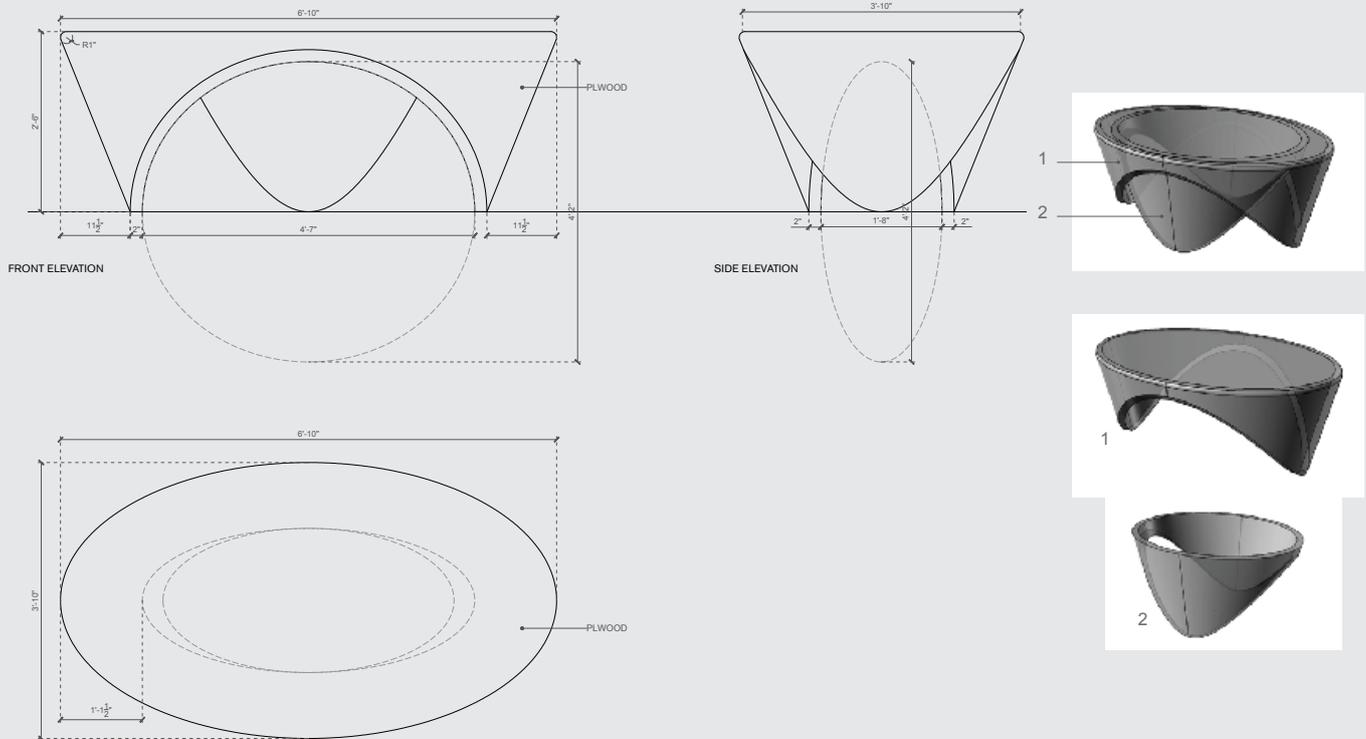
BANCH



CONSOLE



CUBE



HALF TABLE



This spread: images showing the making of the cube furniture pieces. A diagonal elliptical tube pierced through each cube, thus creating a cantilevered form. The openings vary in size, and each piece is one half of an ellipse, creating a diagonal void. After colouring and sanding the voids, lacquered with high-gloss finishing, many coloured contours emerge and further animate the void

This design experiment was supported and sponsored by Asian Paints.

