

# GLOCALISE The New Mantra

*Deepak Mehta Architect has been in the business of building design since 1985. S Meera in a chat with Deepak Mehta on his experience with the trends and developments in the real estate segment over the decades*

**You have designed a wide range of buildings for different purposes. What are the highlights of your design?**

Whether they are IT Parks and commercial buildings or residential buildings/townships, Deepak Mehta Architect's effort is to cater to the end users, uniting aesthetics with efficient space planning and modern outlook. Our residential projects are aimed at creating not just houses, but homes for people. They are conceived bearing in mind the lifestyle and mindset of the residents. The commercial buildings are designed to enable end-



users to function with maximum productivity. Our designs are on par with global trends, and at the same time, functional within the Indian context and local requirements. Deepak Mehta Architect's upcoming projects Prince Courtyard, Ecstasy, C'zar, KG Signature city, Lake Dugar and Artha One World are the epitome of our contemporary style of design.

**Tell us about the projects that have been milestones in the career of your firm. What makes them so?**

Each and every design of mine is close to my heart because they have all contributed to my growth as an architect. The milestones I would say, are the Orra Marina in Dubai, Arihant Majestic Tower in Koyambedu (one of the tallest residential towers in Chennai city), ASV Chandilya and many other Chennai projects.

These structures have a certain sculptural quality about them, which sets them apart from the rest in terms of visual appeal. The fact that they have been excellently executed on site, perfectly replicated as conceived in my mind, makes them even more special.

We have been pioneers in paraphrasing the architectural persona of Chennai since the past 18 years. The architectural fraternity has conferred accolades on a number of our projects for setting industry standards in various categories. Several of our award-winning, iconic projects have revolutionised the skyline of Chennai.

**You have been in the business since 1985. How has the real estate industry evolved since then? What have been some of the key changes?**

It has been a long journey from 1985 till date, and I have seen vast changes over the years. In 1985 for instance, there was no concept of hiring a design architect for a project. It was a common norm to hire a licensed surveyor, civil engineer or liaisoning architect who would execute the project without much architectural thought or expertise. Developers failed to acknowledge the fact that design

architects could do better justice to their projects. Gradually, the industry began to recognise the need for design architects, which is when we came into the picture, which in turn, has led to the emergence of distinguished, iconic structures in Chennai in the last few decades.

**What are the challenges faced by the real estate industry today?**

At present, our industry has to undergo a major transformation in terms of adopting modern building technology, automation in construction, superior quality materials/finishes along with the advanced sustainability methods, examples of which are seen in developed countries. There are many options available to the middle-income group today, so the challenge lies in meeting the rising demand for economic and affordable housing by developing innovative concepts for budget-friendly LIG homes. Design architects can play a major role in this transformation, provided developers are willing to adapt to these methods and overcome the teething troubles of this shift.



**What about architecture as a segment? Is it organised? What is your competitive advantage?**

Although the architecture and construction industry in India has come a long way since Independence and has progressed in leaps and bounds, I feel it has been denied importance as a specialised segment. To this day, the sector remains unorganised and lacks a systematic approach in most cases. This disorganised state, as well as certain other factors like shortage of space for residential units, and a general denial of these problems, pose hurdles in our path. But, our competitive edge lies in the fact that we as a team, try to find the best possible architectural solutions for these issues. In my opinion, quality is not superficial but rooted deep in the core.

**How would you compare the industries and design requirements of Dubai with India where different regions have different requirements?**

The architecture and building sector overseas and even in Dubai, is a lot more organised, and that makes a huge difference to the way buildings and their designs are perceived. Each and every building is regarded as an asset, hence, as an unimposed rule, each intricacy has to be looked into and in-depth working has to be provided by the architect before and during construction. The rules and guidelines have been framed to impart flexibility in designing, thereby, giving the architects a free hand to push the boundaries of architecture beyond its limits.

In India, we have designed buildings in over 15 cities. Every project has been designed keeping in mind not only the climatic conditions of the location, but also the socio-economic conditions, and general lifestyle of the society along with the saleability and setting which they are based in. For example, a building in Mumbai is designed differently from let's say Pune, even though they are broadly within the same zone. The same applies to



Chennai and Madurai as well, where people are acclimatised to a certain way of life and certain kinds of spaces.

**Do you design primarily for builders or also undertake independent projects?**

We have ventured into diverse disciplines involving projects for the municipal corporation and other governmental bodies, like the MCGM Colaba Municipal market (Mumbai) and MCGM Topiwala maternity hospital (Mumbai).

As an architect, I consider it my social and moral responsibility to give back to the society. My charitable projects and religious structures are just a few steps in that direction. They are particularly significant to me because through them I have been able to reach out to the underprivileged, and that gives me immense satisfaction.

**What are some of the factors that you keep in mind while designing commercial buildings and IT Parks?**

India has seen an economic boom in the IT sector in last 20-30 years, and that has spurred the demand for high-end, hi-tech IT Parks and commercial buildings.

IT Parks and commercial buildings have a relatively specialised planning approach in which the design is formulated keeping in mind the structural grid because the efficiency of the office space needs to be maximised as far as possible allowing for division/combination of units in the future as per the users' needs. Sufficient parking space is a key factor. Careful planning of the location of service core and its components like cargo lifts, service staircases, toilets, communication rooms, server/UPS rooms and AHU rooms are indispensable. Also, the end-users working in these buildings are confined within these spaces for a long duration of time, so ample natural light is of prime importance. Since the work culture of IT Parks is different from that of other commercial activities, the other factor to be borne in mind is that semi-open spaces need to be scattered in various pockets to act as breather spaces during a break. Barrier-free spaces help in enhancing interaction, and give the perception of being open and large as opposed to partitioned spaces or cubicles. Provision of recreational areas, food-courts and discussion spaces act as an added advantage to avoid monotony. These pointers, when taken care of, make a seemingly life-less commercial building lively and active, conducive to a holistic work environment. The Sterling Tower, the Ega Tower and Virtusa Software Tower are examples of a varied approach towards commercial buildings.

**Today, green buildings have become the order of the day. What are some of the key ingredients of such buildings?**

A clear understanding of heat flow mechanisms, ventilation effects and energy consumption are the pre-requisites in a green building construction. The principles of sustainability need to be incorporated right from the grass root level, wherein the design is orientation-specific and the material used is location-specific. For instance, orientation can be adjusted to allow natural light,

but simultaneously reduce the glare. Buffer spaces aid in keeping the inner environment of the building cool and shaded. The use of locally available material, bio-gas plants and renewable energy systems of solar wind type and solar geothermal type, need to be encouraged.

The Indian market in recent times has been exposed to a variety of modern materials such as solar tiles, sustainable concrete and green cement which can prove to be energy-efficient assets to the building. The use of external glazing with a low refractive index, modern HVAC units, and water recycling systems can be utilised



to reduce carbon footprint. IT Parks and commercial buildings have immense potential for the incorporation of sustainable construction techniques, whereas modest methods involving the use of fins, louvers, blinds and curtains will enhance the desired micro-climatic conditions within the habitable spaces.

**How do you see the industry evolving in the coming years?**

Evolution is inevitable, and this industry in particular, has a major potential to advance and grow. Even in the current times, statisticians claim that we are at least 2.4 crore units short as far as LIG and MIG housing are concerned. Design architects will play a crucial role in shaping the future of this country by developing cost-effective means of construction and by bridging the gap between developers and buyers. Architects, engineers and developers in the Indian market scenario have begun waking up to 'globalisation' and have started exploring the plethora of techniques available in the world market. If this industry receives the right kind of infrastructure and support from the government, our skylines can rival those of Shanghai and New York in the next two to three decades. ■

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