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changing times

Talking of the early days, he says, "This was the period before the Indian economy opened up and the construction as an industry in India was almost nonexistent." While engaging the services of an architect by individual builders and developers was not quite uncommon, the majority preferred the big, established names. He says, "I did not have a single builder or developer when I began my practice. But I was confident because we were hard working and had the hope that someone would recognize us. I started with a small project of a bungalow of 2000 sq. ft. and along the way got outstation projects in Nashik and Devlali, though not with prominent builders. They were small private developers. After about 4 to 5 years of struggle, we got a good break in New Bombay (now Navi Mumbai). From then on, we never looked back. Almost every 3rd project in New Bombay was ours. We designed some high profile good conceptual buildings and several projects for Mayuresh group."

One of the challenging projects during this phase according to him was Sagar Darshan, facing Palm Beach road, with 19 towers in a row. "We wanted each and every room except the toilet and kitchen to face the water front and from the 3rd floor to the 15th floor every unit had a private terrace. It was very difficult to design it 15 years ago. And the project is still considered a landmark in Navi Mumbai." Ar. Deepak Mehta subsequently designed residential projects for Hiranandani Contructions in Thane and was later invited by Arihant Builders. "By then we had expanded our base to Chennai, where we designed some major commercial and corporate projects," he says.

sensitive and practical

Architectural practice according to him is not just another job. "It begins to flow in your veins if you are passionate about it. I constantly dream about architecture. My reading is selective and focused around architecture. Even while watching movies my attention is unknowingly drawn to the buildings in the scene," he says. The contemporary name that impresses him the most is Ar. Michael Graves. "I was overawed to visit Swan and Dolphin Resort in Orlando designed by him. I have traveled widely and seen several great works but this was the most impressive in its totality," he says.

Ar. Mehta feels that the overabundance of projects has spoiled architects as anyone can sell any product in a booming real estate market. He points out the haphazard growth of cities and the falling standards of construction quality. "Instead of creating appropriate designs, architects give a marketing pep talk to convince the builder, which is totally a wrong practice. If the recession had lasted longer, people would have learnt the value of true architecture or true real estate. Today, design is turned into a cut-paste job. Any cut-paste thing works because the market is good. But an architect must question his own conscience whether he is creating good architecture. Design is a serious effort and a long drawn process. Every aspect like detailing, material collection, site orientation, location and the marketability must be treated with utmost importance because if you don't make it profitable to the client, he will not come to you the next time," he says.

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