

# WALLS THAT TALK BIZ

## ARCHITECTURE CAN REFLECT CORPORATE AIR



Peerzada Abrar

**I**MAGINE THIS. A foreign client visits an IT company in India. He is escorted to a room called a 'Bhaitak', similar to the one found during the time of the Mughals. The client dressed in a business suit takes off his shoes, loosens his tie and sits down in typical Indian style on the mattresses laid there. But there is something different from the classic 'Bhaitak'. Here you'll find an air of order and sophistication.

The 'Bhaitak' designed by architects Kalhan and Santha looks very traditional but at the same time the architecture is futuristic giving it a kinesthetic experience — the same sort of feeling one gets while entering a space ship. You can find different zones here. There is space for the coffee vending machines, chess boards and table tennis. And the purpose of this aesthetic architecture is to ensure more synergy between people in an organisation. There are swings and bubble chairs hanging from the ceiling where employees and clients can sit, conduct their board meetings, or have a tete-a-tete.

Some educational institutions designed by these young architects have been fitted with shades to block the hot sun and rooms are fitted with a three-way ventilation facility. Kalhan and Santha, who hope to enable design and architecture to play a role in business strategy, are bringing innovation into the design and process of architecture. The driving force behind Kalhan and Santha's success is their ability to combine contemporary design and creativity with a corporate attitude. Their work makes people look at things they have never done before.

Planet5Studios, founded by them, explores several innovative designs, in bringing the latest global management techniques in project delivery systems to India. They recently won the Honor Award from DesignShare, USA, 2007. Planet 5 Studios is a design studio, the principal architects being Kalhan Mattoo and Santha Gour Mattoo, both of whom have bachelors degree in architecture from Sir JJ College of Architecture, Mumbai.

From corporate houses to nightclubs to educational institutions, the couple have designed more than 60 architectural and interior design projects. Their designs can also be found in the hospitality, healthcare, retail and banks sectors. Attrition is a big



The designer couple Kalhan and Santha

**IT'S THE architecture which makes people feel more relaxed and happy in unexpected ways. Employees spend long hours at the work place. So filling office space with library zones, bubble chairs and swings makes the whole place more exciting**

SANTHA

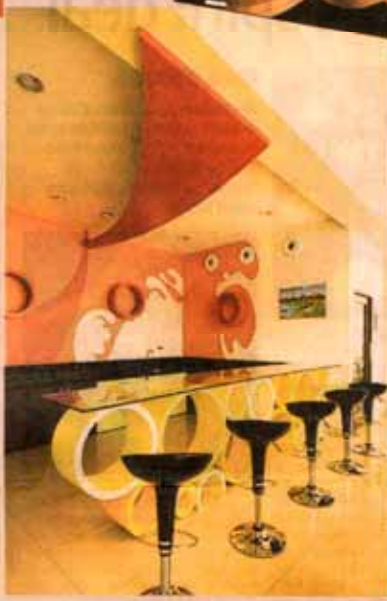
problem in corporate and IT companies and the work environment has a major part to play in it. A good working environment can make employees feel happy. But very often, most of the office spaces are far from aesthetic. "Lighting has to be of a certain order. There is a need to create the right ambience for employees," says Kalhan. Architecture can also play a role in enhancing performance. "We created a few designs for Gunnebo, a Swedish company which provides security solutions. The general ambience was very boring. We gave a lift to the ambience by designing game and library zones. Employees were told to book their desks or workstations at a particular time and the environment improved their performance," says Santha. The design for an area of 20,000 square feet cost Rs 2.5 crore. Today, experts in the field of architectural and interior design are showing interest in the impact of evolutionary psychology and cognitive science for creating buildings and space plans that support the way the human mind functions. The couple have sought the advice of behavioural psychologists, MBA experts and sociologists for a number of their projects. The assessment of success or failure of the concepts implemented

"Our focus is on the end-users. Architecture enabled the re-branding of the Vidyalankar Institute. We designed three-sided ventilation for the classrooms. We put shades and created ways for the hot air to go out," says Kalhan. The distance between the faculty and students was reduced so that casual interactions could happen between them. The model is being successfully implemented worldwide. "The main focus is on the interaction zones, where we placed chess boards, table tennis etc. Thus, more students started to come and didn't bunk classes because the environment was filled with fun and extra curricular activities," says Santha. "We created spaces which learnt an informal air and designed the architecture according to it. Such kind of strategy attracted more students and broadened their horizon for creativity and progressive thinking. Informal learning methodologies work," says Kalhan. The Studio is working on architectural design and interiors of a shopping mall in Malad Mumbai on an area of 1,00,000 sq ft and is estimated to cost Rs 13 crore.

The steel used in a restaurant in Bangalore has been moulded in crushed paper style reflecting light and giving an impression of dining and entertainment. In Coorg, they are developing an Eco Resort, built on the green concept. The designers and their Studio have worked for clients like Godrej and Boyce, BPL, UTI Bank, RPG, Starwood Capital India, Reliance Securities, Canam, Accord, Hindustan Infrastructure, Ethiopian Airlines etc.

"Demand has to be created and there is not much awareness about natural and informal environment. We want to break the stereotype iconic designs. For this, we need a good logical thinking," says Kalhan.

Interestingly, the material used in the architecture and interior designs by these designers are mainly used for packing shipping containers, wood used in railway sleepers and material from local stores. Besides having a strong team of designers, the couple also discuss some of their ideas with each other. When asked how it feels to work together as a couple, Kalhan says: "We learn a lot from each other and are comfortable with each other's ideologies"



is analysed after the completion. Workplaces should allow a sense of privacy. There has to be enough privacy and at the same time have connection to the broader landscape. In architectural interiors this includes drop ceilings in some areas, open areas, coffee bars, libraries, business support centres, and other common areas.

"Employees spend around eight to ten hours at the work place. So filling spaces with library zones, having coffee vending machines in the balcony, bubble chairs, swings, 'Indian Bhaitaks' for clients and employees improves their performance at work and makes the work place exciting. It's the architecture which makes people feel more relaxed and happy in unexpected ways," says Santha. Architectural details like graphic or video displays for people to see as they move through the workplace can provide the stimulating qualities of mystery and surprise that are part of the natural environment.

Sloped ceilings, trellises, and overhang structures supported by pillars can create symbolic tree canopies. Colours associated with productivity and harvest like green for vegetation, blue for water sources may be preferred to browns while golds are associated with the dormant season. Architecture designed in a logical way can also save space and money. "We introduced a concept called 'hot desking' where different employees use the same desk at different times. This helps save a lot of space. These hot desks are WiFi enabled," says Kalhan.

At the Vidyalankar Institute of Technology, the designers have created a contemporary educational village comprising distinct faculty blocks connected by an interior promenade with spaces for student learning activities. Protected from the elements with a huge roof which is porous, the building uses natural light and ventilation to conserve energy. The design for an area of 1,95,000 cost Rs 15 crore.

