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AS DESIGNS RUN WILD!

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21 GADGETS

18 DESIGNER CREATIONS AND MORE...

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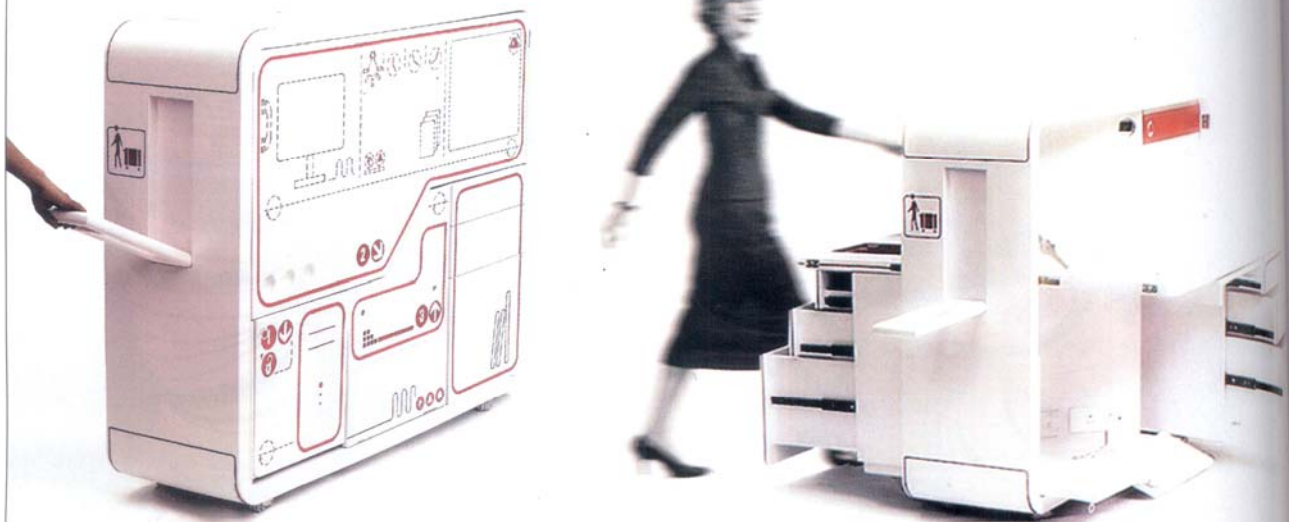
EASY IDEAS

to create your
garden with a twist


Featuring: Aradhana Nagpal & Pooja Nichlani Shetty, Brinda Chinnappa Somaya, Curiosity Inc, Eduardo Mendoza-Nunez, Jestico + Whiles & Spazzio Design Architecture, Kunal Shah, Payal Chopra, Planet 3 Studios Architecture, PR Design Group, Pradeep Sachdev, Rajeev and Radhika Kathpalia, Ramu Katakam, Serie and Yatin Pandya

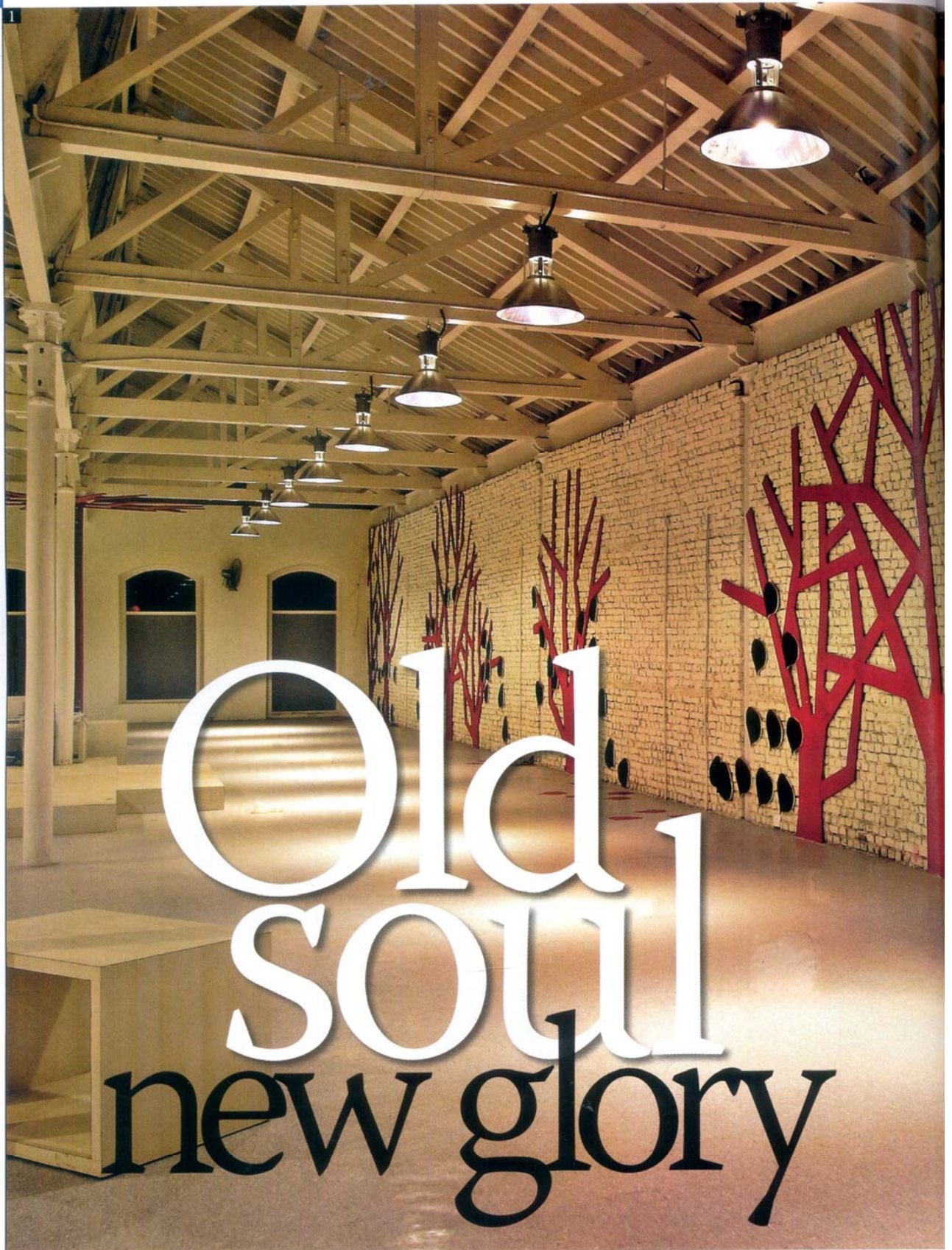
OUT OF THE BOX

Planet 3 Studios Architecture



"As practising architects, we are frequently asked to deliver just-in-time capacity additions to existing office facilities or offer built-to-suit solutions in timeframes that allow only razor thin margins for error. One such critical constituent is the workstation. Usually delivered on site as a set of components, it takes about a week to assemble. We thought there was room for some inventive thinking on this. We jotted down a design program with requirements such as ready-to-use convenience, modularity, flexibility, mobility and transportability, stack-ability and ease of industrial production. The design solution emerged in the shape of a rectangular box which, much like a Swiss knife, opens up to reveal two perfectly functioning workstations. It takes no special skills and

couple of minutes to install. The trick is in using the surface of the box as a jigsaw arrangement of components that unfold in a logical and sequential manner. Packed within are two storage cabinets, prefixed LCD monitors, keyboard trays, CPU stands, side separators and, of course, two table-tops. Necessary cabling to enable plug and play is, again, preinstalled. The box is mounted on lockable castors and can be moved around by means of a handle inspired by luggage design. Each workstation offers opportunity for customization and personalization. Name-tags, activity signs, pinup boards, side-separators, all can be added as per requirement. The workstation dimensions allow it to fit optimally within shipping containers. These stacked workstations can be transported in their own packaging." 





The team at Planet 3 Studios Architecture made sure that the Sea Horse Building Product Mall in Mumbai, is not just another adaptive-reuse-of-old property.

TEXT: DEEPA NAIR | PHOTOGRAPHS: MRIGANK SHARMA; COURTESY PLANET 3 STUDIOS ARCHITECTURE



▲ Sea Horse design team: architects Kalhan Mattoo, Santha Gaur Mattoo and Hina Parmar

[1] The original brickwork has been retained, but painted off-white. Graphical trees cling to the walls. These were inspired by a tree growing along the front facade, which had to be chopped down

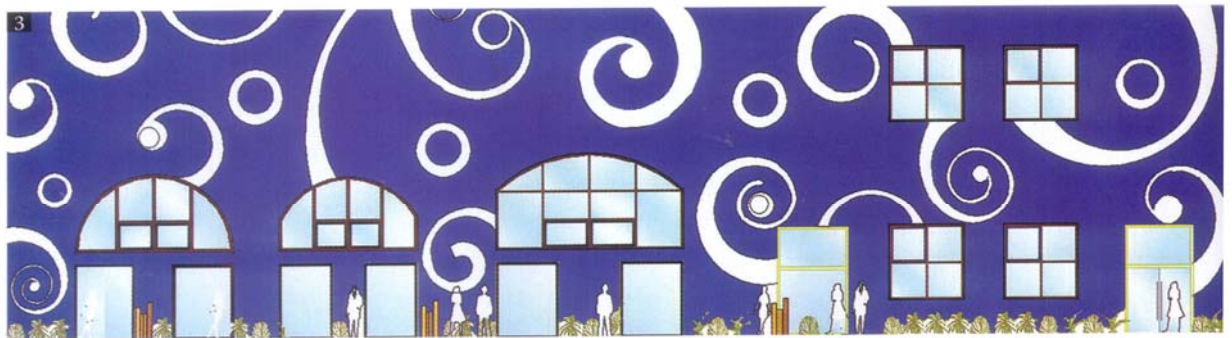


They are that rare breed of architects who shun the ordinary. Their designs are practical and refreshing. But what's most endearing is that they show utmost concern for those who'll inhabit their creations. An ideology that's leading the way for newfangled, yet sensitive design in India. Every time I've met them, their uber cool attitude and happy disposition has knocked me off my feet. And I'm very sure, that's what lured the head honcho of Sumer Infrastructure, Deepak Shah, to Planet 3 Studios Architecture. After a 30-minute tussle with rusted locks and jammed

shutters, Deepak unveiled a rundown cotton mill warehouse for a proposed project site at Reay Road in Mumbai. While gingerly stepping over innumerable pigeon droppings and finding their way through the light-deprived site, the team's foresight helped it envision the beauty of the decayed space. Yes, that's Planet 3 Studios Architecture for you! Give them the toughest briefs and seemingly hopeless spaces and these mavericks will smile, take the challenge and create something radical.

No matter how subtly you try to commend this team, directors Kalhan Mattoo and

- [2] Skylights were cut out in the 50-foot-high ceiling to bring in the sunshine. Large exhaust fans pump out the stale air
- [3] The architects went berserk with the sea horse tail detail (from the brand logo). It marks the entire space in one *gala* and the facade
- [4] On these free-standing modular display panels, the architects added the essential task lighting
- [5] A closer look at the large blue and red coloured cut-out patterns on plywood. Wall-mounted fans (which weren't a part of the plan) were added to increase air movement and enhance the cooling of this non-air-conditioned space



Santha Gaur Mattoo insist that it is the unusual projects with "killer riders" that call for nonconformist designs and Sea Horse Building Product Mall is a fine example. "Sea Horse is very different for many reasons. For one, it is a part of several almost 20-year-old, dilapidated industrial mill compounds and warehouses. Secondly, these structures offer numerous opportunities for adaptive re-use. Also, such projects are loved by most architects as the buildings already have a character of their own, having stood there for numerous years," explains Kalhan.

The initial walkthrough of the first two *galas* that were to be revived, revealed crumbling roofs, walls and floors... not exactly a confidence booster. But as we've said, this team is different! In the dingy, damp squalor, illuminated by faint streaks of light, they discovered interesting details such as cast-iron columns of indeterminate but showy promise, quality woodwork and more. "The client attached a three-year

lifespan to the project as the retail space will eventually move to a more suitable building. Therefore, we knew that it has to be built more like a large exhibition hall, than a retail space. We also knew that we'd be working within a stringent budget, yet there was something about the project that excited us. The height of the building, the trusses, the sheer volume of the space... We wanted to make something out of this rundown ruin, and revive the architectural magic of a bygone era," reveals Santha.

A detailed briefing session with the client gave the team important cues: the space was to function as a building-products mall and the target audience was an industry that understood design well... architects, interior designers, builders, contractors and the like. That set the ball rolling for some unconventional design ideas. "Considering our target audience, we presumed that we'd be engaging the interest of people who might be willing to accept something that was a little off the beaten track. Since it was

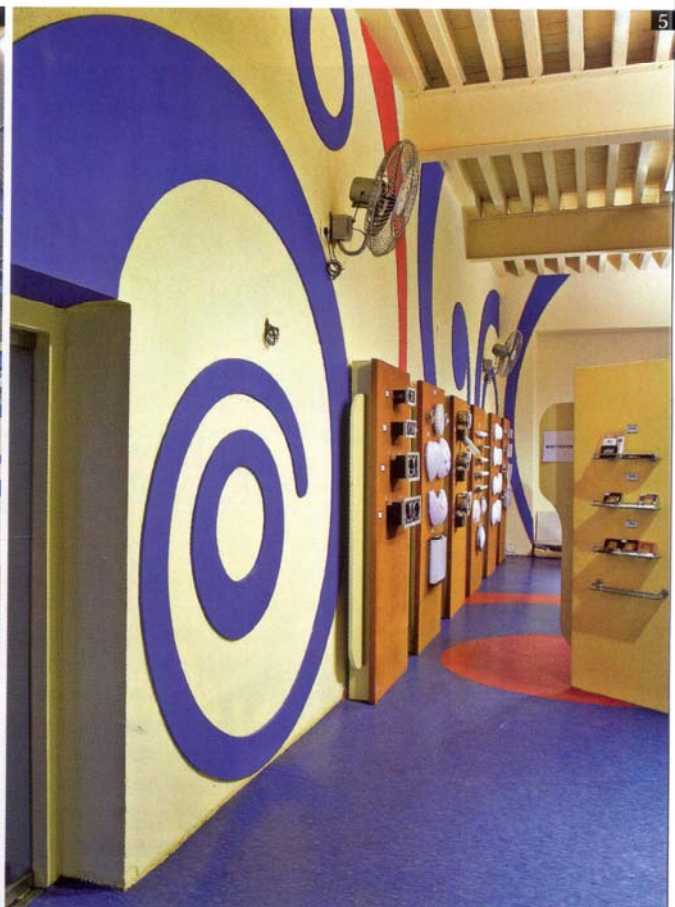
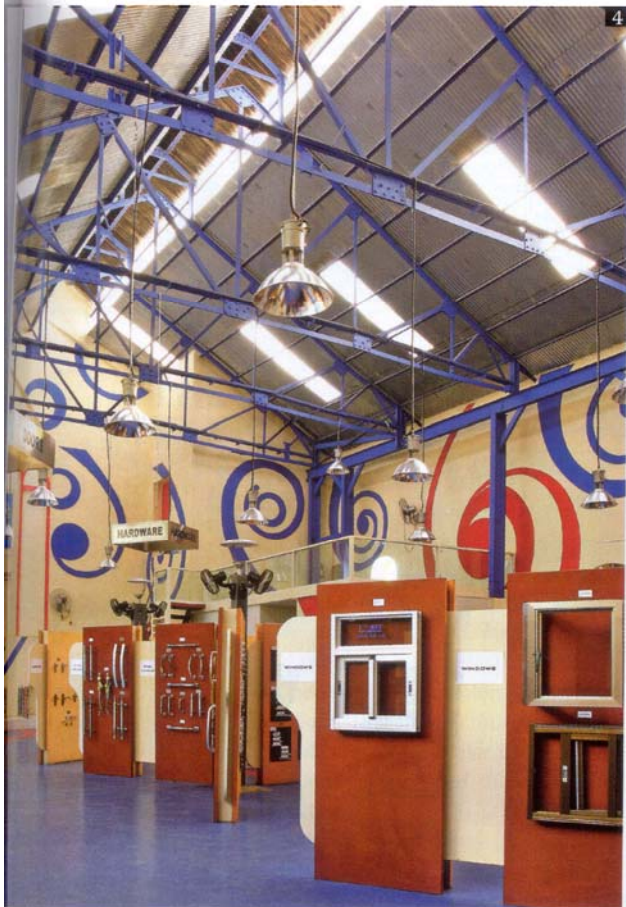
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>CONCEPT

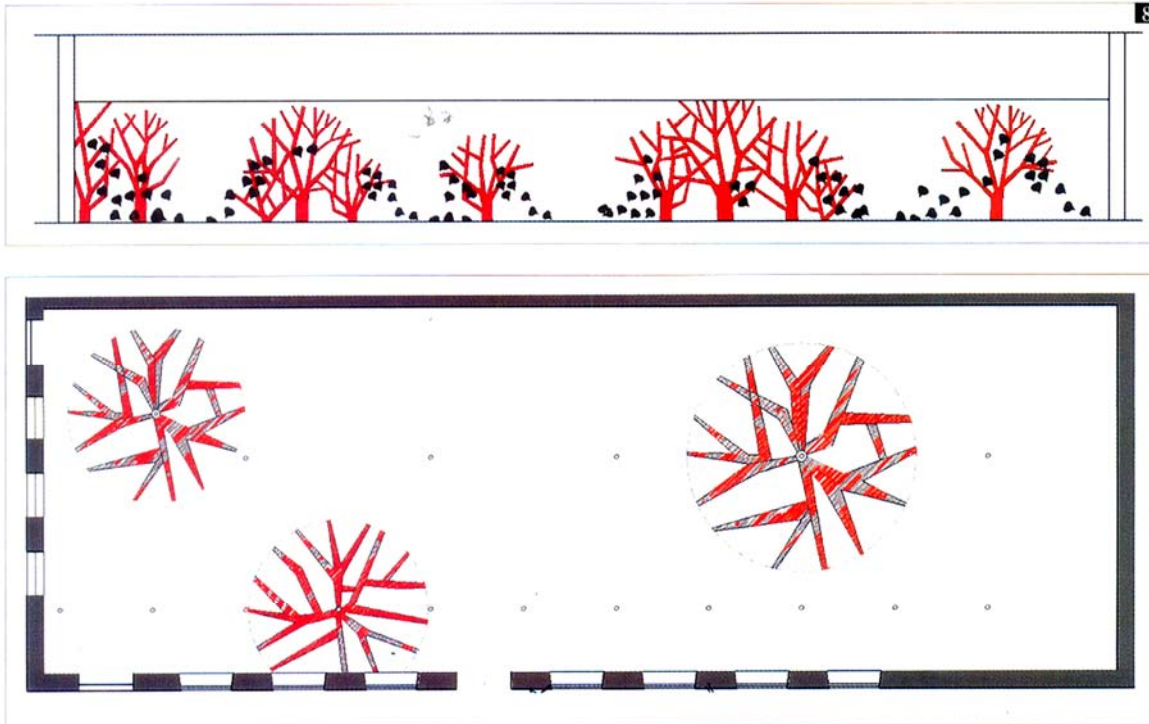
Adaptive reuse of a defunct structure. A set of warehouses were to be converted into a fresh retail space for building materials, without bringing down the original structure. The estimated shelf life is about three years.

>MATERIALS

Flooring	Vinyl
Interior walls	The original brickwork was maintained but was painted in off-white
Exterior walls	Asbestos-free cement sheet
Cut-out pattern	Red and blue plywood







In the dingy, damp squalor, illuminated by faint streaks of light, they discovered interesting details such as cast-iron columns...

- [6] The graphical trees were taken a step forward... leaf motifs are painted on the floor for a more dramatic effect
- [7] Using the cast iron pillars as the tree trunk, plywood cut-outs of trees were fixed on the ceiling as well
- [8] A graphical representation of the tree cut-out

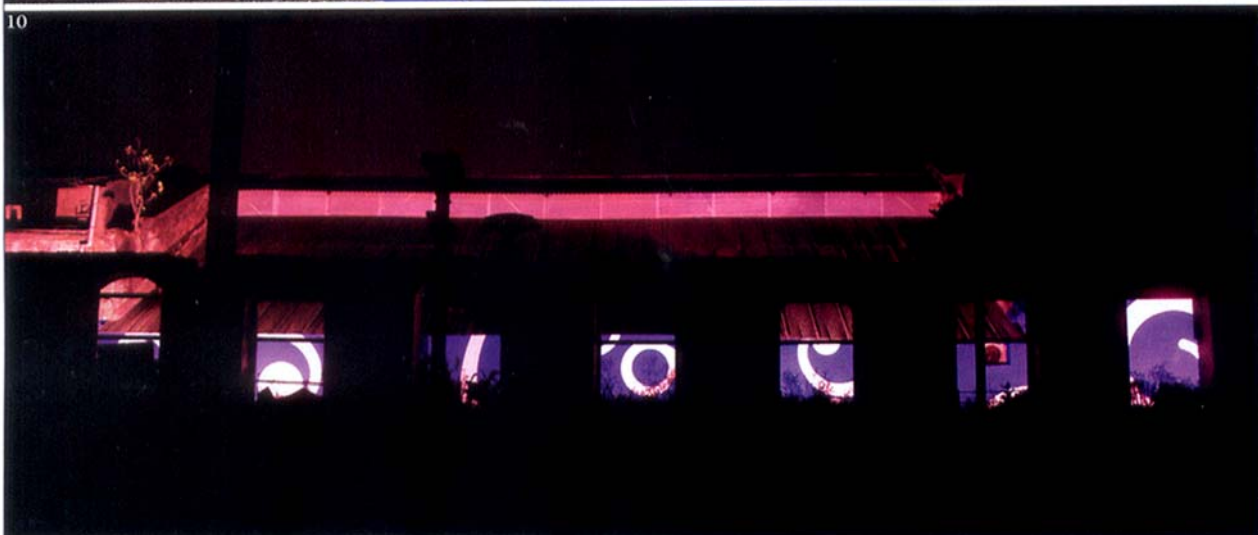
a niche group, we could afford to be a little more flamboyant,” assert the architects.

This much-evolved clientele also paved the way for a unique product display area. The conventional formula in retail space design, in which space-treatment takes a back seat and allows the products to do the talking, was given a fresh spin. The architects proposed to keep the basic shell, including the walls and ceiling, free of product display. Instead, display panels, pedestals and visual merchandising displays were parked as island units across the space. As far as technical details go, the architects derived task lighting, electrical power and even mechanical ventilation from free-standing steel columns anchored on the floor. This architectural model was also practical; being modular, the client can dismantle everything and shift them to a new location.

The design for the first godown draws inspiration from the Sumer Infrastructure’s

logo unit — the corporate colours of blue and red and, more importantly, the tail of a sea horse. So, a couple of conjoined halls, one of them with a 50-foot height, take on a dramatic avatar, thanks to the exaggerated-scale, curled, tail patterns cut out from plywood and painted in Sumer’s brand colours. This graphic pattern also makes its way to the external facade, albeit in a subtler version.

The idea for the second warehouse space (that bore wooden trusses supported on cast-iron columns) was actually a tree! It was during their first site-visit that the architects discovered a tree growing along the front facade and decided to make it an important element in their design. Alas! Their contractor didn’t have the same vision and had most of it hacked off. But Planet 3 being Planet 3, decided to pay a playful tribute to this ‘martyr,’ by creating plywood tree cut-outs to eventually line the ceiling and walls. There was another reason for these trees. These graphics owe their origin



[9] The original structure was maintained. It wasn't re-aligned nor were the uneven windows levelled; even the decades-old electric box (at the far end, outside the warehouse) has been retained... but painted red to gel with the overall look of the facade

[10] Night vision: the graphical patterns are sure to attract from afar

to the tree stencil blocks that are widely used in ACAD, to mark trees in an elevation and floor plan. This, the architects reasoned, would find a subliminal connection with the people who would frequent the space. Painted red, the trees stand out against the monochrome background of the space. "Someone in the studio thought of leaves, and we added cut-outs of leaves on the walls. Then autumn came, and we painted some leaves on the floor," smiles Santha.

As the architects say, although the retail space sells hardcore building products, as a project, it has been a lot of fun. It is also one of the firsts for the team in the "not-well-finished" category, but this is not the end of this project. They inform

me that their young enthusiastic client plans to acquire some more warehouses... Looks like the wacky Sea Horse is in multiplication mode! 🐎

[factfile]

Project	Sea Horse Building Product Mall
Client	Sumer Infrastructure Pvt Ltd
Location	Reay Road, Mumbai
Design team	Kalhan Mattoo, Santha Gour Mattoo and Hina Parmar
Area	20,000 sq ft
Cost	Rs 1 crore
Period	Three months