

# VMRD

## VISUAL MERCHANDISING & RETAIL DESIGN

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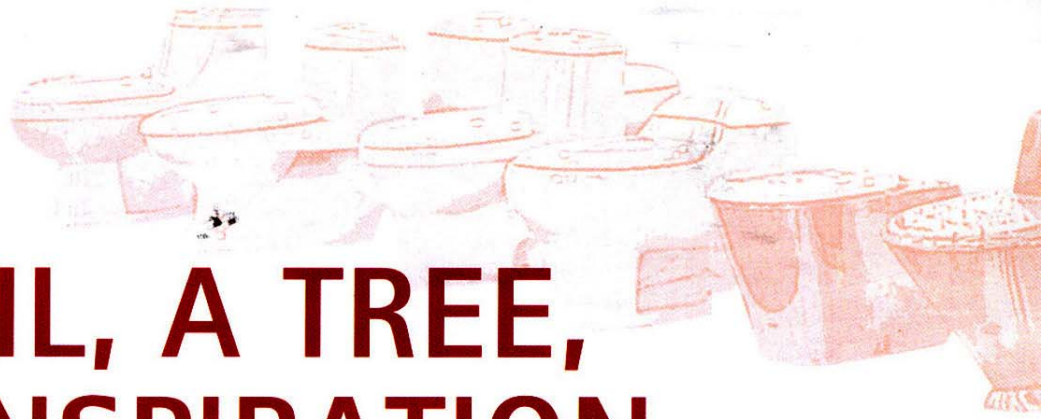
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Trees fabricated out of plywood and attached to the cast iron columns in the space

## INDIAN FEATURE



# A TAIL, A TREE, AN INSPIRATION

Another project where the city, Mumbai, the location, a defunct cotton mill, the merchandise, building products, and the target audience, architects and designers, are the same. But the similarities end right there. The concept for the Seahorse retail space on Reay Road, designed by Planet 3 Studios, had to rely solely on the designers' ingenuity in the face of limitations on almost every other resource.

Every good design's provenance can be traced back to that one moment of inspiration. But if the project involves a dilapidated cotton mill, with the degree of design intervention severely constrained by budgets, then inspiration is all there is to go by. As in the case of the design for the Seahorse retail space.

"We were offered a certain number of old warehousing godowns in a mill compound that had to be designed for a retail condition" says Kalhan Mattoo, Director, Planet 3 Studios. "But the project came with a killer rider; the space had a shelf life of about three years after which the entire retail space would move to a suitable modern building and these godowns demolished to make way for a new construction. The first casualty, naturally, was the budget, which was reduced to a fraction of the normal outlay for similar projects."

It also was no comfort that the target audience for the space was people with evolved design sensibilities, like architects and designers. The godowns also were in a state of extreme decay with crumbling roofs, walls and floors that did not do much for the confidence. But in the dark damp squalor, illuminated by occasional streaks of light, Planet 3 discovered intricate details like cast iron columns of indeterminate but flamboyant order, quality woodwork and more.

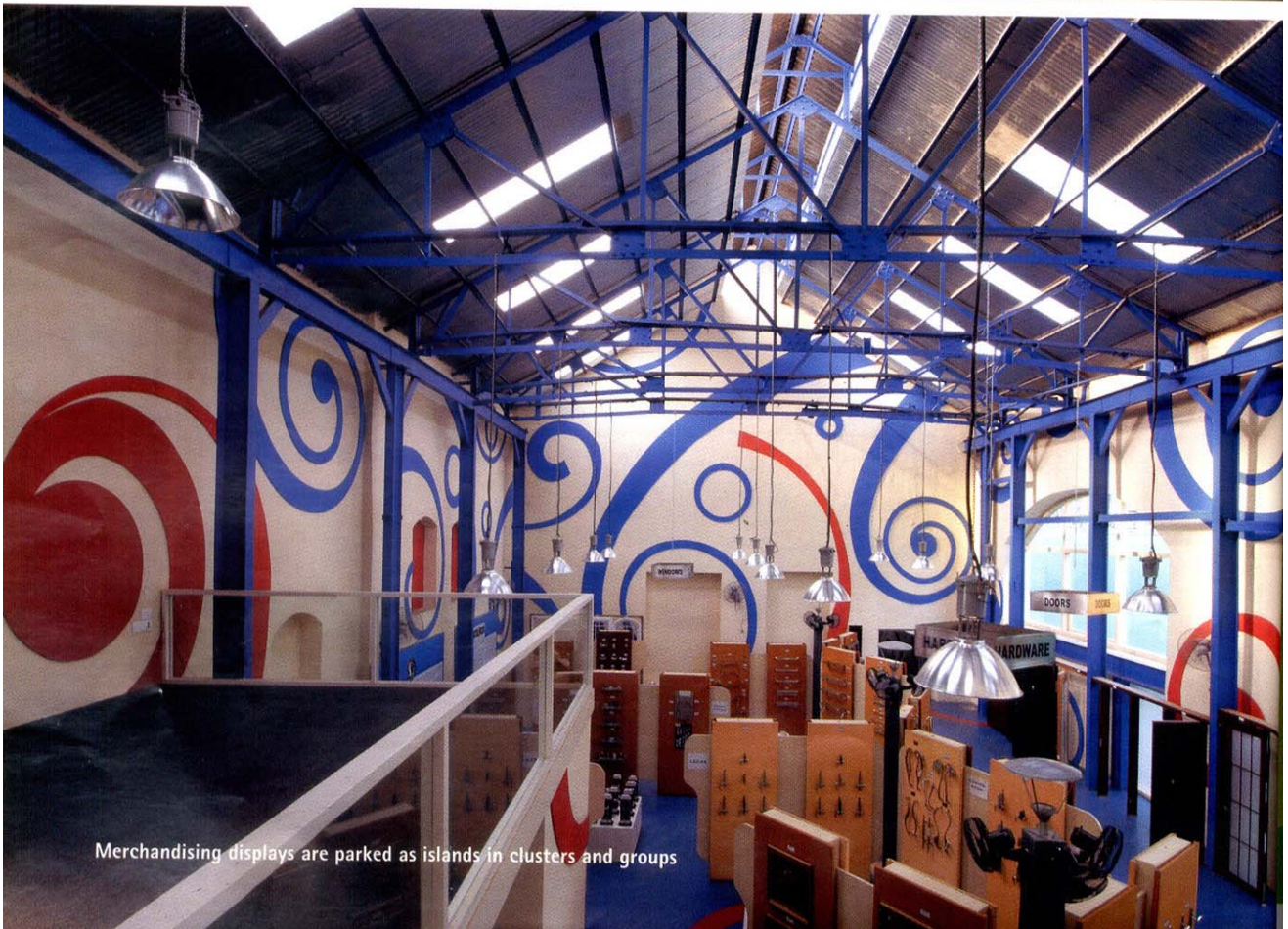
"A couple of adjoining halls, one of them 50 feet high, presented a unique challenge",

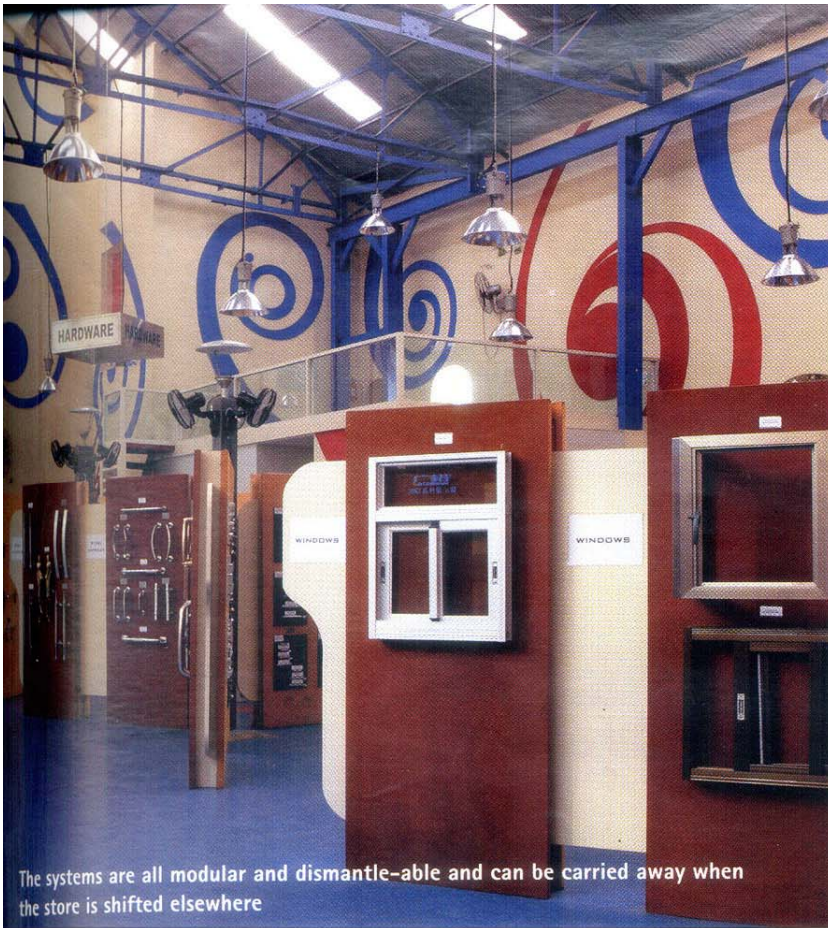
explains Santha Gour Mattoo, Director, Planet 3 Studios. "Bereft of any redeeming features in the interior, the cavernous halls seemed barren. We drew inspiration from the brand logo, specifically the tail of the sea horse, and projected it on to the walls. In its dramatic avatar, the tail curled to become out-of-scale embroidery patterns cutout in plywood and painted in brand colours."

The graphic Seahorse tail patterns also appear in cut vinyl form on the flooring and have also been carried on to the front façade, but in a subtler form. With this design move, the space acquired a degree of freshness and appeal, something it was sorely lacking otherwise. After some basic plastering work, the natural light inside was increased by adding skylights wherever possible and added necessary artificial lighting in keeping with retail display requirements.

For an adjacent hall the inspiration came from one of the obvious signs of the dilapidation of the structure; a tree growing right out of one of the walls. "We discovered a healthy tree growing out of the front façade", says Kalhan. "We wanted to retain it but, unfortunately, it was hacked by the site contractor."

With a touch of whimsy, Planet 3 decided to playfully evoke that tree inside in the shape of plywood cutouts on the ceiling and the walls. Borrowing from the graphic quality of tree stencil blocks in ACAD, a simple elevation





The systems are all modular and dismantle-able and can be carried away when the store is shifted elsewhere

and a plan block were used to replicate the tree, a graphic element that would resonate with the target customers. The trees were fabricated out of plywood and attached to the cast iron columns in the space and painted red, they stand out against the monochrome background of the rest of the space.

The warehouses came with their own quirks in the form of varying ceiling levels and odd sized windows. But the design concept allows these oddities to carry through making the architecture itself one of the bits that was being sold there.

A decision was also taken to keep the basic shell, including the walls and ceiling, free of display. The display panels, pedestals and visual merchandising displays are parked as islands in clusters and groups, deriving the task lighting, electrical power and even mechanical ventilation from free standing steel columns anchored in the floor.

The layout itself was planned starting with a display for new products and leading on to different sections for various merchandise types like ceramics, lighting, accessories, hardware etc. Adjacencies were also taken into account while planning the various sections



The final design concept creates a functional space with enough appeal for the target customer

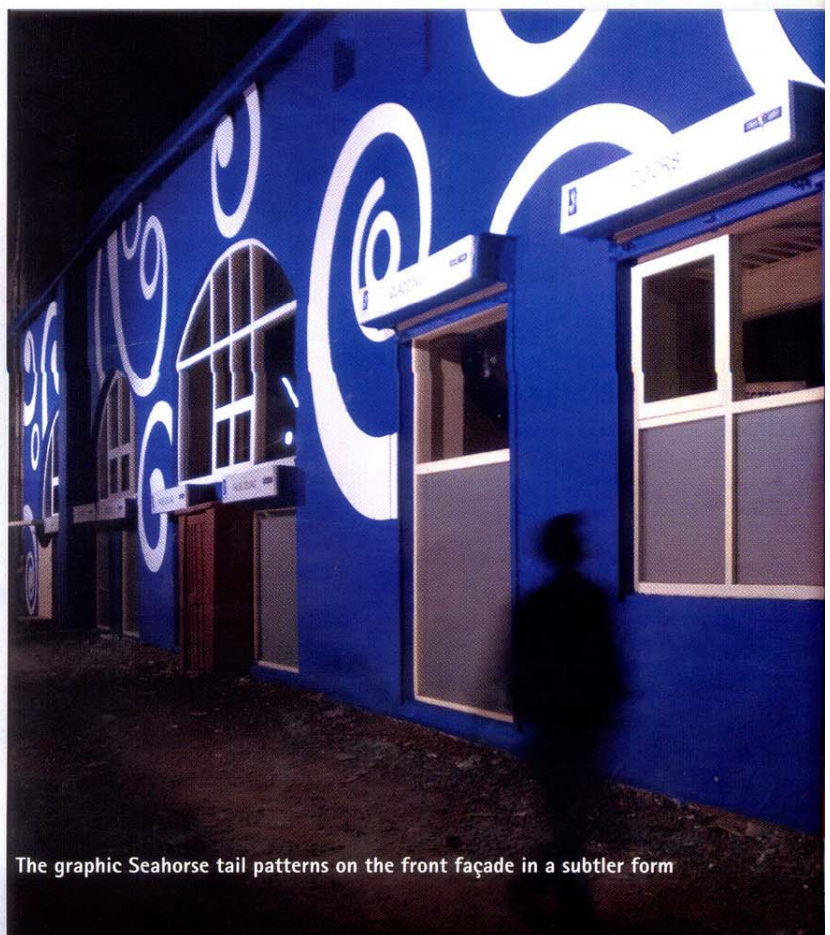
with, for example, electrical cables, lighting and false ceiling grouped close together for enabling better buying decisions.

The design of the display systems in each section was also influenced by the limitations imposed by the budget and the almost fleeting shelf life for the space. "We did not want to build any systems that could not be carried away from the site", says Santha. "So we created systems that are all modular and dismantle-able and can be carried away when the store is shifted elsewhere."

In spite of all the constraints, the final design concept has created a functional space with enough appeal for the target customer. But the concept itself will evolve as Planet 3 continues to work with the client at other locations.

"This was almost like a beta test, our first take on it", says Kalhan. "It really does not fit into any known look or format, but that is what we wanted. But the location we are currently doing in New Delhi is going to be far more evolved."

He also says that the location has been doing quite well in terms of getting the target audience in, which could mean that there might be a more liberal budget for the next warehouse. Failing which, there is always inspiration to fall back on ●



The graphic Seahorse tail patterns on the front façade in a subtler form

# THE 'NEW' WORLD OF RETAIL BANKING

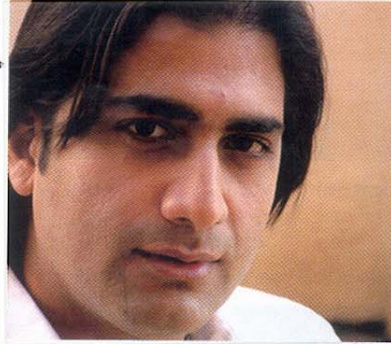
*Think of a bank as a store..... the customers purchase products through sales people (tellers and financial representatives) at a series of central locations (teller windows and personal banking desks). This is the only time when decision-makers and the products come together—and an excellent opportunity to motivate customers into action. In many ways, bank lobbies are a retailer's dream come true!*

**B**anking business has grown with leaps and bounds with a host of international players pouring huge sums of money to make their presence felt. As consumers are increasingly spoilt for choice, the large numbers of banking options are getting translated into a larger demand for financial products and customization of services is fast becoming the norm than a competitive advantage. Consequently, aggressive expansion with branches mushrooming on busy streets is pushing the design envelope.

Building a bank these days takes much more than bricks and mortar. Gone are stern walls, glaring fluorescent lights, and tellers imprisoned behind teller stations. When investing in a bank's image, every detail should reinforce the products and services being sold to the clients who buy them. New interior finishes and their applications should attract the customers' attention, generate trust, and create a comfortable atmosphere for financial transactions and sales. While a lot of other banks are meeting behind closed doors and worrying about the competition, Axis Bank is focusing on the future by breaking down the barriers that traditionally exist in a banking environment.

Brand building requires collaboration, tireless questioning, innovative design, fresh story telling...and an intangible or two. The benefits of products and services can be enhanced with signage and the graphic "look" when consistent in all branch locations with a direct relationship to advertising, brings the merchandising message to the physical space—where products are sold.

Powerful brands understand the importance of maintaining a unified image to make the 'shopping' experience better and easier for consumers. Their secret to ensuring a cohesive visual lineup that works for both the bank and its consumers? Design architecture. Exciting architecture, with design inspired by local sensibilities, ensure that banks are able to reinvent themselves as financial services retailers.



**Kalhan Mattoo & Santha Gour Mattoo, Planet 3 Studios**

The case studies illustrate this transformation at two different Axis Bank locations in two demographically different locations in Mumbai.

## Location 1

### Axis Bank, Crawford Market

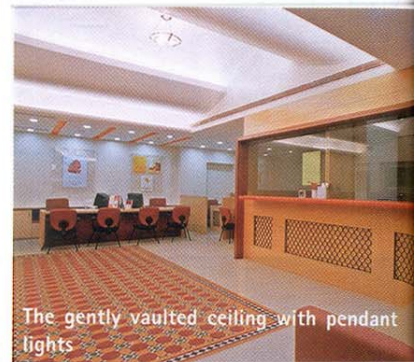
**The Location:** Housed in a modern building at the end of the Fort precinct and the beginning of Mohammed Ali Road area in old Mumbai, this outlet belongs to an architectural environment rich in tradition. The demography of the end-user must identify with the feel of the place. Maintaining a certain degree of design consistency over various locations and reiterating the core brand identity being mandatory.

**The Design Solution:** The idea was to evoke the character of the surrounding area through strategically inserted elements interpreted in a modern way. While keeping in mind the acceptable planning and finish parameters of such branches elsewhere, a few key departures were essential.

The use of locally sourced, authentic materials helps create a sense of belonging. A carpet of 'Bharat' cement tiles; a flooring used in neighbouring houses of the bygone era, is laid down in the central hall. This becomes the most striking feature of the space.

The pre-requisite for privacy of the exterior façade and glass partitions indoors is addressed with frosted film cut to a 'Saracenic Jaali' pattern. The motif is derived from the balustrade of a nearby building. This un-bank like design continues with variations in this theme on the teller counter apron and table fronts. The gently vaulted ceiling with pendant lights completes the look.

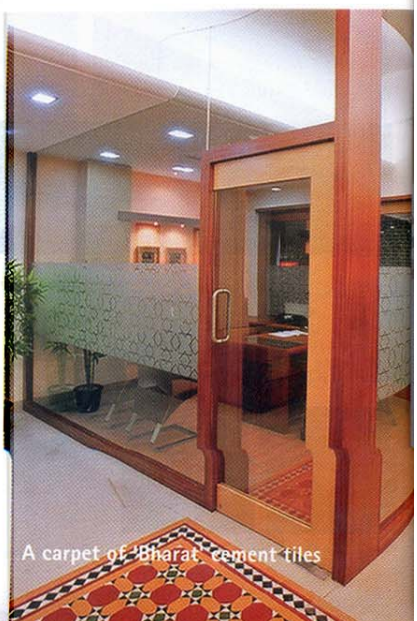
It is easy to believe that the customers appreciated the subtle touches of the 'old world' charm.



The gently vaulted ceiling with pendant lights



Glass partitions frosted film cut to a 'Saracenic Jaali' pattern



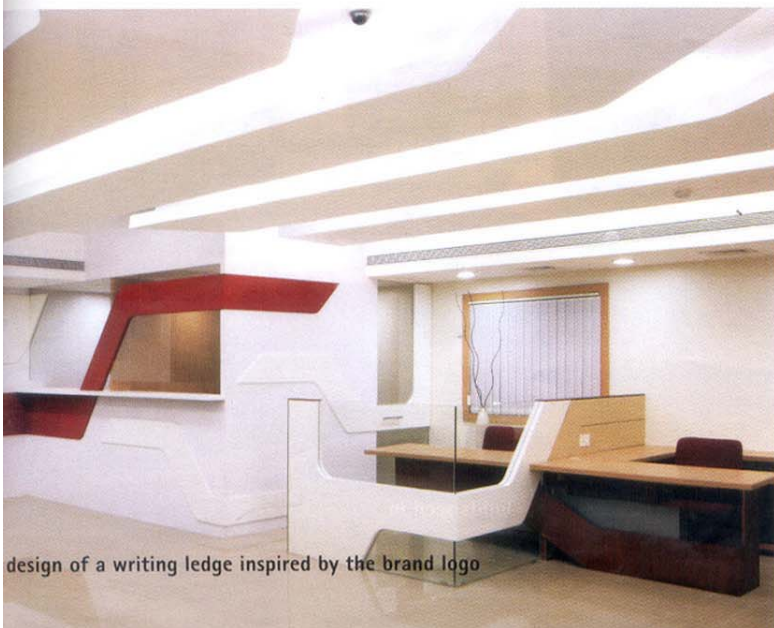
A carpet of 'Bharat' cement tiles



Individual bands direct consumers



The distinction between walls and the ceiling is blurred with planes



design of a writing ledge inspired by the brand logo

## Location 2

### Axis bank, Ulhasnagar

**The Location:** Ulhasnagar is an upcoming satellite town on the outskirts of Mumbai and like similar towns; its residents aspire for the glitz, glamour of big city life with the warmth and intimacy of local community, connections and convenience. It is imperative for the design to integrate these rapidly evolving customer tastes and preferences.

**The Design Solution:** The approach was from the point of view of introducing Ulhasnagar to new-age banking. Working with a contemporary design sensibility, all individual interior elements work together to deliver the intended message.

The entrance to the branch is through a narrow opening. Fast lines on the ceiling and the walls lead the eye to explore the interior that opens up as a surprise. The distinction between walls and the ceiling is blurred with planes that run continuously across both, turning, folding and descending at will. Individual bands direct consumers to the priority banking cabin, manager's cabin, the teller counter and so on.

This design language is carried on to the furniture and accessories. Even the design of a writing ledge is inspired by the brand logo. The choice of materials and colours is restricted to a palette that complements the brand and enhances its image.

**The Result:** Excellent examples of standard cost and time bound building of retail banking that accommodates innovation and local sentiments. The customer-centric core values of the bank are eloquently communicated through the physical construct.

A remodeled bank enhances the value of the bank to shareholders, customers, employees and the entire community. Overall, a less-institutionalised building will, without a doubt, improve performance on the street ●

*Kalhan Mattoo & Santha Gour Mattoo are the principal architects of Planet 3 Studios, a design studio and a constructor firm of architects and interior designers. Recipients of a design award from Godrej and a globally prestigious award from DesignShare, Kalhan and Santha incorporate edgy design and creativity, with a corporate attitude. Planet 3 Studios brings the latest global management techniques in project delivery systems to India and pioneers architecture that shapes and enhances business strategy.*