



NAGPUR NUANCES

THE CITY'S ARCHITECTS HIGHLIGHT THE NEED TO BALANCE TRADITION AND HISTORY WITH MODERN-DAY DESIGN NEEDS

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

Architect and Interiors India recently hosted the maiden virtual episode of the Jaquar Group Design Confab. Held on November 20, 2020, it put the spotlight on Nagpur. Given it is a city whose design thinking has evolved to suit the aspirations of its people while maintaining a deep connection to the region's customs and beliefs, the city's leading design minds spoke at length about this design ethos during the session.

PAST PERFECT
As a city that has balanced its rich past with modern needs, Nagpur has an architecture that is truly inspiring. In this respect, Mohit Hajela, group head, Business Development, Jaquar Group, avers, "Nagpur has a distinctive presence in the map of the subcontinent and has a rich heritage, dating back 3,000 years. The civil lines area developed during the British Raj has beautiful buildings, dating back to the colonial era, like the classic limestone building of the Reserve



1. The historic Lord Rama temple is built atop a hill near Nagpur.

2. Mohit Hajela, group head, Business Development, Jaquar Group.



Bank of India and the railway station."

However, the city is now an emerging metropolis. "While it retains all the grandeur of the old world, it is equally abuzz with modern structures that rub shoulders with colonial buildings that manifest into an intrinsic character, where modernity coexists with the celebrated legacy of the past," says Hajela.

Habeeb Khan, president, COA, and owner, SHK Associates, adds that it is important that architecture be merged with nature and materials be used logically. He explains, "Architecture is manmade and it defies nature because it is all built by human beings. Hence, it is important to build in sync with nature and that is where we need to understand how our forefathers built, essentially as a tool of problem solving. It had a symbiotic relationship with the structural systems and the problems faced by human beings."

Khan also suggests that one must be creative in their process of building and be in tune with the chain of evolution. "The colonial architecture in India was Indian, although it was built by the British. It was a fusion of their knowledge, expertise and the expertise of Indian craftsmen and Indian builders," he points out.

LOCAL LOVE

In fact, Nagpur is steeped in design heritage and this has had an impact on how the current architecture is defined. Shera Bano Merchant, principal architect & owner, Square 9

Designs, explains, "The city is interspersed with lakes and is surrounded by mountain ranges, and the structure of the city has dense areas interspersed with open areas that act like an oxygen bank. This is the design which we must imbibe. The buildings of the colonial era have a foreground and, while we need to have contemporary design, having this kind of space will help us appreciate architecture better."

Of course, efforts are also being made to keep Nagpur's past alive in today's times. Speaking of his experience working on a project that involves a heritage structure, Ashfaq Ahmed, director, Ashfaq Ahmed Consultancy Services, shares, "I am adding new dimensions inspired by the same, while we use technology to recreate the same kind of inlay work and arches."

The eastern part of the city has some fine examples of the traditional architecture where houses are located on the upper level and shops are on the lower level. Virendra Khare, principal architect & owner, VK Associates, avers, "Initially, it was all about low-rise and low density living and work to home has always been under 4 km, unlike other cities."

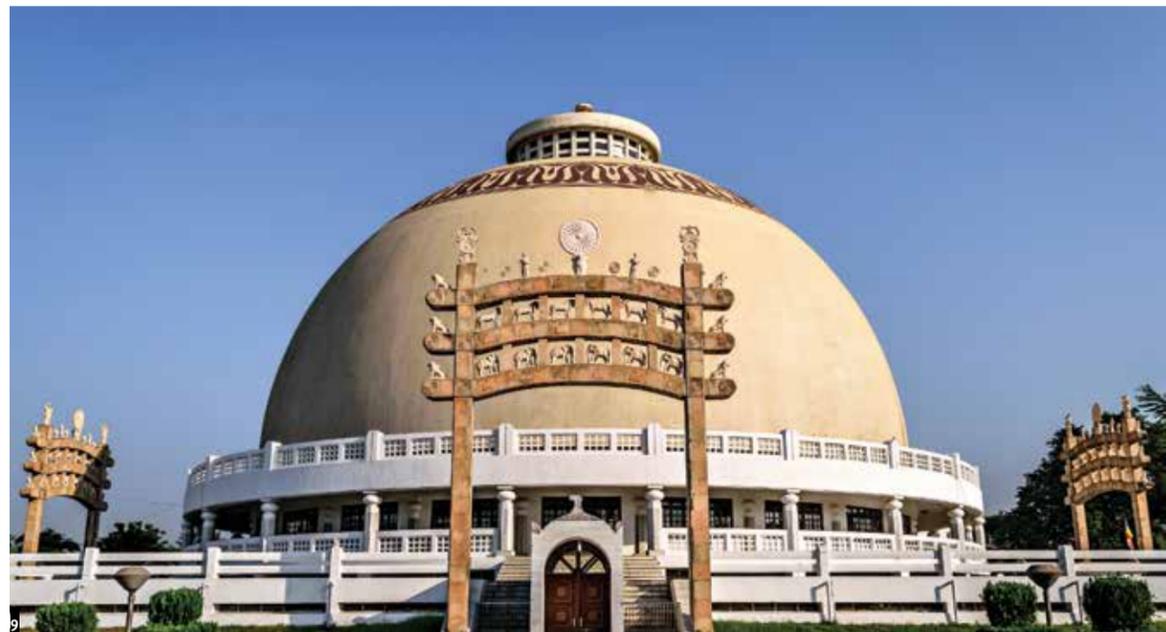
WELLNESS FIRST

With the ongoing pandemic, there is a renewed focus on wellness in the designing of offices and homes. Monita Patel, principal designer, Monita Patel and Associates, says,

3. The opening dialogue between Hajela and Khan revealed some interesting points.

4. The panel discussion was followed by an engaging session during which the panellists answered questions posed by the audience.

5. Habeeb Khan, president, COA, and owner, SHK Associates.

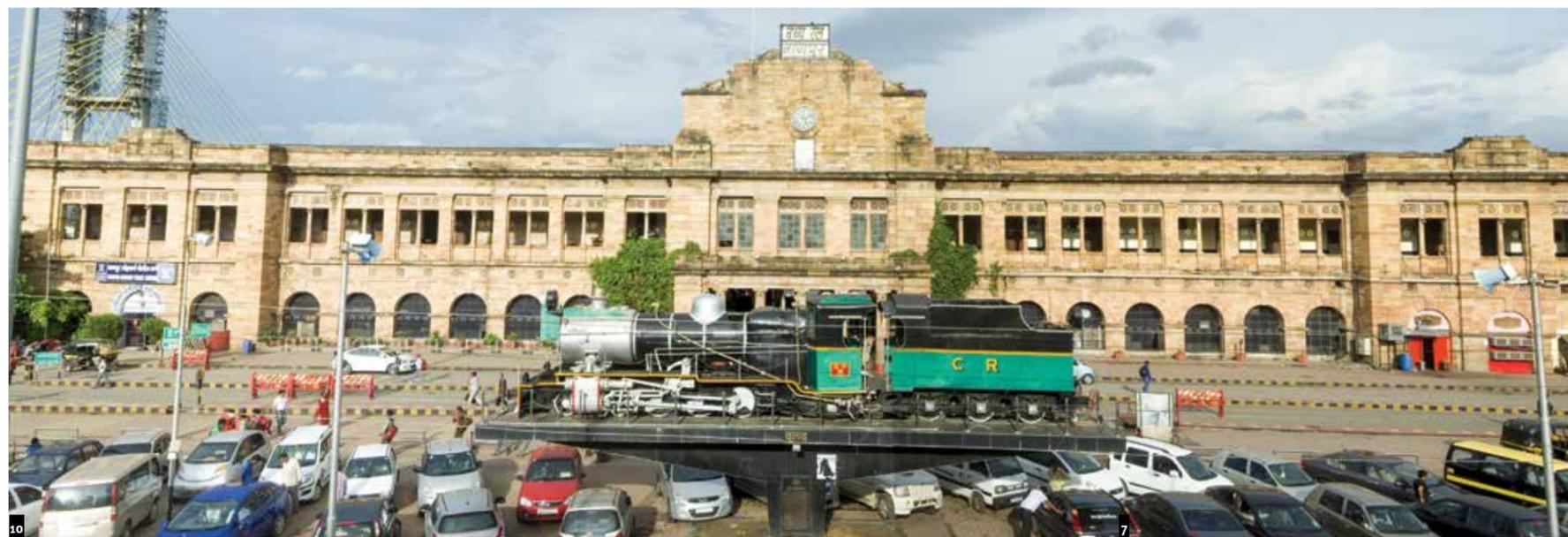


“Change is the only constant and we are witnessing this in the design fraternity. People have really understood the importance of a good lifestyle. Comfort and hygiene plays an important role in our lives.”

Merchant believes that design interventions would be needed, and states, “We need to think about offices which have social distancing norms and have to decrease the density first. Simple solutions like having glass screens between desks are becoming the norm.”

Likewise, at Jaquar, this has been a key driver of how they operate. Asheesh Bopche, branch head – Nagpur, Jaquar Group, avers, “People are now focusing on their health and designers must work around this. Customer expectations have increased manifold and hence it is important to focus on that.”

Khare adds that this is where all-inclusive housing townships are the way forward. “Building design must create some workspaces, some area for leisure and some area for fitness,” he says.



6. Shera Bano Merchant, principal architect & owner, Square 9 Designs.

7. Ashaque Ahmed, director, Ashaque Ahmed Consultancy Services.

8. A place of Buddhist pilgrimage, the Dragon Palace Temple is a more recent landmark structure.

9. Deekshabhoomi in Nagpur.

10. The Nagpur Junction railway station.



SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS

Obviously, the role of architects in rewriting the design narrative for a more habitable future cannot be undermined. Ahmed underlines the importance of using materials that are suitable to the local geography and says, “In a building we designed, we have reduced the glazing element and introduced light in a diffused manner. Air circulation has also been planned in such a way that there is a proper flow of air around the building. This kind of design with context to the region is also comfortable for the users.”

Sustainability is a key issue in building design and Khare agrees, “Solar panels are now commonplace in Nagpur and we can harvest the power of the sun. Clients now understand this very well and with energy and water rates on the increase, these are viable solutions.”

Similarly, Jaquar uses technology and design innovation in its diverse product portfolio. Hajela avers, “We can satisfy the needs, desires and dreams of our customers. As a solution provider, we believe that we help customers live an inspired life.”

Speaking of inspired living, the key takeaway seems to be that we must balance the use of innovations with lessons from the past, to create spaces that reflect the best of both.

11. The contemporary airport building façade, showing pillars supporting corrugated metal roofings held by steel frames, in Nagpur.

12. The historic temple of Lord Rama was built by Raghujhi Bhonsale, the Maratha ruler, in the 18th century.

13. Virendra Khare, principal architect & owner, VK Associates.

14. Monita Patel, principal designer, Monita Patel and Associates.

15. Asheesh Bopche, branch head – Nagpur, Jaquar Group.