

RESORT RHETORIC

Architects are designing resorts that are upping the ante with their décor-led aesthetic and unique vibes.

By Bindu Gopal Rao

Resorts are designed for people to relax and enjoy, so they feel very different from homes or offices. Architects weigh in.

MAKING THE DIFFERENCE

Resort architecture is inherently different from other spatial typologies because it is less about transient functionality and more about immersive storytelling. Every resort carries a backstory, an essence of place, culture, or landscape, that must be woven seamlessly into the guest journey. From the moment a guest arrives to the time they depart, the design must communicate a narrative that resonates, transforms perspectives, and leaves a lasting imprint. Amey Dahanukar, Principal Architect, ARA Designs, explains, “Unlike hotels,



A view of the serene lake at Sayaji, Udaipur.



PHOTO COURTESY: RAJKUMAR ARCHITECTS

A composition of light, form, and texture, this courtyard residence blends bold geometry with intimate warmth. The interplay of matte facades, linear stair lighting, and shimmering pool reflections creates a theatrical yet serene atmosphere, where architecture and ambiance converge seamlessly.



Lakeside view rooms, with their expansive balconies framing panoramic lake vistas, invite endless contemplation.



Amey Dahanukar, Principal Architect, ARA Designs



Rajkumar Kumawat, Founder and Principal Architect at Rajkumar Architects



Vaishali Mangalvedhekar, Partner at SJK Architects



Khozema Chitalwala, Founder & Principal Architect, Designers Group



Vikram Choubal, Senior Vice President, Technical Services, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts



Dikshu Kukreja, Managing Principal, CP Kukreja Architects



Vandana Dhawan Saxena, Founder and Design Principal at Studio IV Designs

playful; for luxury guests, it may be minimal, stylish, and private. Local building styles and natural materials make the design feel authentic and connected to the place. The brand's character, whether modern, traditional, or eco-friendly, is shown through the design of buildings, interiors, and landscapes so that guests feel the same story everywhere in the resort. Khozema Chitalwala, Founder & Principal Architect, Designers Group, says, "Architectural style is never arbitrary; it emerges from the narrative we craft for the project. This story, shaped by the brand's ethos, the site's location, and the target audience, informs both the architecture and interiors. The approach may



The dining hall ambience has retained its colonial elegance marble tops, antique wooden furniture at Fountain hotel, Mahabaleshwar.

where efficiency, scale, and standardised luxury often take precedence, resorts demand a heightened focus on individuality, intimacy, and seclusion. They must respond to the unique context of their location, whether through materiality, spatial planning, or cultural symbolism, while creating an experience rooted in outdoor living and connection with nature. In this sense, resort design is about looking inward as much as outward: understanding the unique story the land must tell and translating that into a distinctive identity and USP that elevates the project beyond just hospitality into a place of memory and meaning."

DESIGN NARRATIVE

Each resort tells a story of its location, using local materials, culture, and landscape to create a unique feel. For example, stone from the site, art by local craftsmen, or spaces that frame special views. This way, guests not only enjoy all facilities but also experience the essence of the place. "Privacy, comfort, and connection with nature are most important. The layout of a resort makes it easy for people to feel relaxed and social when they want to. Guest rooms are placed separately for privacy, while common areas like pools, restaurants, and spas encourage people to gather. Pathways, gardens, and shaded seating areas invite casual meetings and walks. A special party or event area is located far from the rooms, so guests who want peace are not disturbed. This balance creates both quiet and lively spaces for everyone," says Rajkumar Kumawat, Founder and Principal Architect at Rajkumar Architects. Vaishali Mangalvedhekar, Partner at SJK Architects, adds, "Whether an international chain or a local boutique, a brand provides a design blueprint that ensures consistency and communicates its core values to the target market—and this permeates into the design of the resort. This blueprint can influence whether the overall design has strong brand recall with a hint of local flavour or whether it is completely immersed in local and vernacular architectural styles that help create a sense of place."

STYLE FILE

The design style of a resort depends on who it is built for. For families, it may be more open and



The new lobby area was reimagined as a welcoming, open pavilion supported by a space frame at Fountain hotel, Mahabaleshwar.



Soak in the serene charm of Oleander Farms, Karjat.



A cigar lounge that feels like a story unfolding, rich wood panels, arched alcoves dressed with artful accents, and layered textiles that invite you to sink in and stay a while. Every detail, from the patterned cushions to the glow of warm lighting, is designed to create an atmosphere of quiet indulgence and timeless charm.



Sayaji, Udaipur bedrooms.

PHOTO COURTESY: AR. KHOZEMA CHITALWAL

both feasibility and form. The National Building Code (NBC 2016) provides the framework for structural safety, fire protection, plumbing systems, accessibility, and sustainability. Vikram Choubal, Senior Vice President, Technical Services, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, explains, “Local zoning laws govern land use, building heights, setbacks, and density, with requirements varying across states and municipalities. In addition, stringent environmental regulations mandate impact assessments and safeguard ecologically sensitive areas, from forests and wetlands to coastal zones and heritage sites. At The Leela, these frameworks are embraced as opportunities for thoughtful, elevated design. Setbacks are transformed into tranquil landscaped courtyards, stormwater channels reimagined as reflective pools, and height restrictions honoured to preserve uninterrupted horizon views.” By weaving compliance into creativity, each resort achieves resilience and authenticity.

VOCAL FOR LOCAL

A resort should benefit the local area where it is built. During construction, local workers and craftsmen can be hired, and materials can be sourced nearby. Once it runs, the resort creates jobs for hospitality staff and helps nearby farmers, guides, and transport services. Using local food, art, and craft in the resort makes it more special and supports the community. In this way, the project not only serves visitors but also strengthens the local economy and culture. Dikshu Kukreja, Managing Principal, CP Kukreja Architects, says, “A resort cannot exist in isolation. It is most successful when it strengthens the community around it. Local labour and craftspeople are engaged in construction, ensuring economic participation and authenticity of



PHOTO COURTESY: ARA DESIGNS

A harmonious blend of serenity and robust masculinity, achieved through a restrained palette of muted colours.



PHOTO COURTESY: RAJKUMAR ARCHITECTS

be vernacular, contemporary, Mediterranean, or Balinese, but it must always remain contextually relevant. For instance, a Balinese-style resort in a non-tropical setting would lack authenticity. By grounding the design in its context, the story ensures consistency, resonance, and a meaningful connection between the brand identity and the guest experience.”

SERVICE INTEGRATION

The resort design also includes integration of essential services like utilities, sewage, and internet within its infrastructure. Services like water, power, sewage, and internet are planned carefully so they work smoothly but do not disturb the guest experience. Anil Badan, founder at Studio B Architects, says, “Facilities like water, sewage, electricity, and internet are fully integrated to sustain functionality as well as aesthetic appeal. Infrastructure is hidden behind walls, beneath floors, or under ceilings, with provision for maintenance without compromising design integrity. High-efficiency systems, unobtrusive plumbing, and high-definition network connectivity provide guest comfort without sacrificing the visual or spatial experience, enhancing a seamless luxury experience.”

RULES AND MORE

The design and construction of resorts in India are guided by multiple layers of regulation that shape



PHOTO COURTESY: STUDIO B ARCHITECTS

expression. Materials are sourced from within the region to reduce ecological impact and support local industries. In operation, the resort becomes a platform for regional cuisine, music, and art, turning culture itself into an economic driver and a source of pride.”

NUMBER CRUNCHING

Budgets for resorts are managed by planning costs carefully from the start. Designs are made simple to build and easy to maintain. Using local materials reduces costs without losing quality. Strict approval of changes, early supplier deals, and keeping a safety margin in the budget help avoid overspending and keep the project stable. Vandana Dhawan Saxena, Founder and Design Principal at Studio IV Designs, says, “Using local materials and labour, or finding markets and dealers closer to the projects, cuts transportation costs and often proves more durable and budget-friendly in the long run from a maintenance standpoint as well.” Phased development is another strategy, allowing for revenue generation from completed areas while others are under construction. Keeping an eye on the final number is imperative to control budgets. **■**

A lounge that celebrates craftsmanship and character, where intricately carved wooden furniture, rich textiles, and patterned rugs weave together a story of heritage and elegance.