FASCINATING FACADES

Contemporary Indian façades are moving away from fully glazed skins toward hybrid systems that balance transparency with climate performance.

By Bindu Gopal Rao

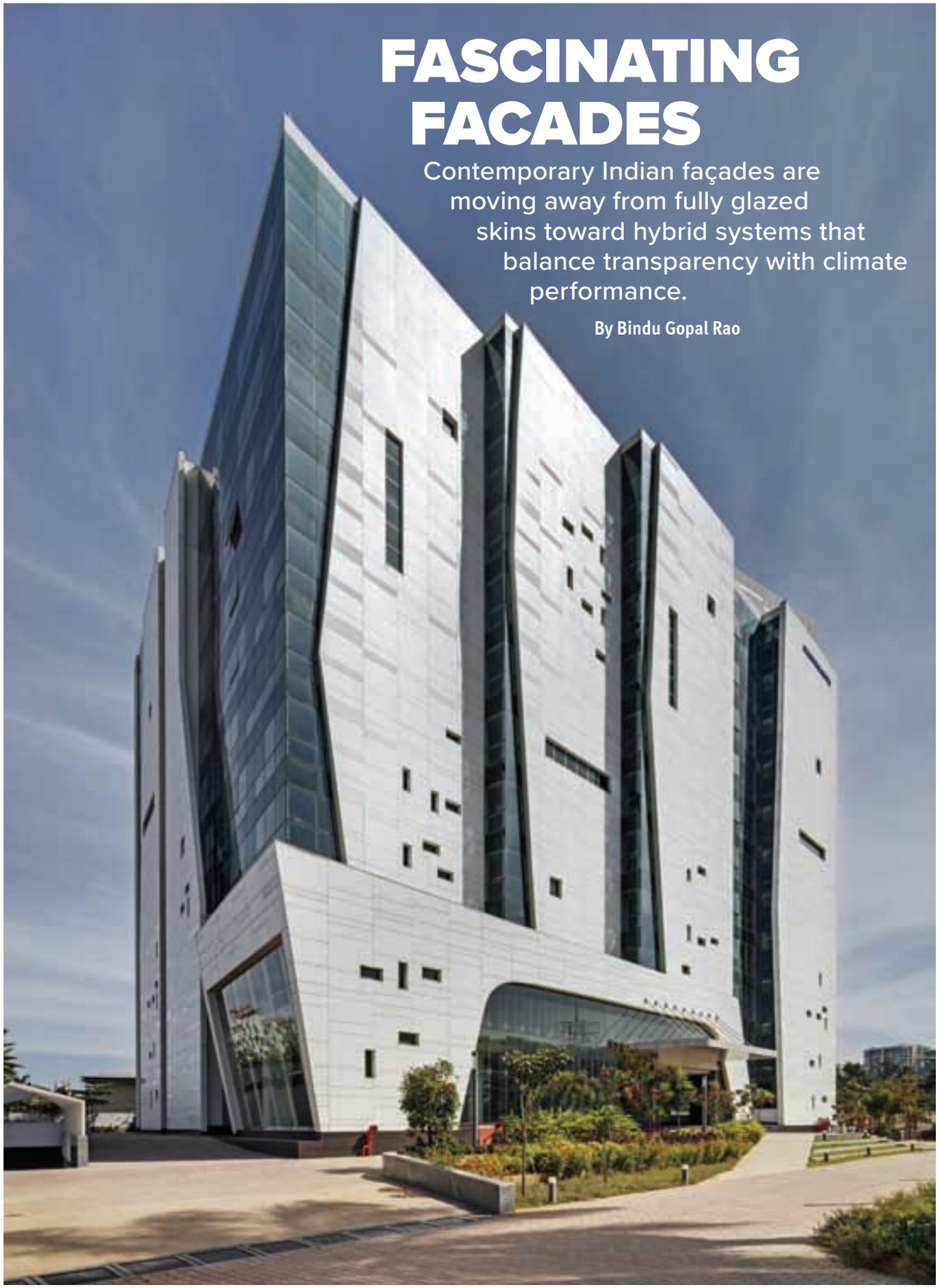

PHOTO COURTESY: FUNDERMAX

Contemporary Indian facades are balancing climate responsiveness with aesthetics.

The conversation around facades has moved to about how intelligently the overall building envelope performs. Experts weigh in.

Subhendu Ganguly, managing director, AluK India.

Ashwanii Khanna, Chief Customer Officer, Fundermax

NEW AGE FACADES

Contemporary Indian facades are balancing climate responsiveness (heat, dust, monsoons) with the growing demand for glass-heavy, globalised aesthetics. For many years, glass became synonymous with modern architecture in India. However, the market has evolved significantly. India presents one of the most demanding environments for façade and fenestration systems. "We design for intense heat, heavy monsoons, humidity, dust exposure and increasingly dense urban conditions where acoustic comfort has become equally important. A solution that performs well in Bengaluru may require a very different strategy in Ahmedabad, Mumbai, or Delhi. What we are witnessing today is a shift from appearance-led decisions to performance-led thinking," says Subhendu Ganguly, Managing Director, AluK India. Architects and developers are evaluating parameters such as solar heat gain, air infiltration, water tightness, acoustics, and long-term energy performance much earlier in the design process. "At AluK, we increasingly see projects adopting integrated approaches where glazing selection, profile design, shading strategies and tested systems work together. The future will not be defined by more glass or less glass; it will be defined by smarter, better-performing facades designed specifically for Indian conditions," adds Subhendu.

MATERIALLY SPEAKING

Materials such as terracotta screens, perforated metal panels, solar-control glazing, and kinetic façade systems are redefining façade performance in India. These systems are valued not only for aesthetics but also for durability, thermal efficiency, adaptability, and how gracefully they weather in diverse climatic conditions. Ashwanii Khanna, Chief Customer Officer, Fundermax, explains, "New materials and technologies are redefining façade performance. The industry is shifting beyond traditional materials like exterior-grade laminates

PHOTO COURTESY: ALUK INDIA

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(HPL), metal claddings (zinc, copper, and steel), fibre-reinforced concrete, and clay/terracotta ventilated facade tiles. Technologically, modern panels utilise dual-cure acrylic polyurethane resins, which provide extremely effective weather protection. These technologies render the facades scratch-resistant, impact-resistant, and optimally UV-lightfast, meaning they age gracefully with negligible discolouration or fading over decades."

CITYSCAPES AND MORE

Compared to the old-school approach, where most of the building was solid blockwork, and you used windows mainly for daylight and ventilation, today's glass-heavy facades in Indian cities can increase energy use. "The simple reason is heat. Even if you use a high-performance glass, a large glass surface will generally allow more heat exchange than a normal civil wall. So, you're not cutting off solar heat gain the way a solid wall does. That extra heat builds up indoors, and then the HVAC must be designed to fight it, which usually means higher cooling loads and higher running energy than a conventional wall-and-window building," explains Rohit Sharma, CEO, Innovators Facade Systems Limited.

Facades have become strong markers of identity in India's evolving built environment. Whether cultural, corporate, or personal, the façade often communicates the philosophy of the project through materiality, texture, lighting, and spatial expression, making it a key storytelling element in architecture today. The right combination and colour of glass, repeated thoughtfully across multiple projects yet adapted to each unique design, can become an

PHOTO COURTESY: 6HUES ARCHITECTURE STUDIO

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architect's identity, almost like a signature left on every tower. Similarly, the consistent use of a particular material or detailing language can instantly reveal the architect behind the building. "With today's possibilities of digital printing on glass, facades can also carry powerful cultural narratives depicting Indian art, patterns, and motifs in a contemporary way while creating a strong visual impact. In a parallel way, a glass facade can even function as a communication surface, almost like a brand board showcasing the company's identity and what it stands for," adds Rohit.

Rohit Sharma, CEO, Innovators Facade Systems Limited.

Aayush Arya, owner and principal designer, 6Hues Architecture Studio.

ARCHITECT ANGLE

Architects are increasingly using shading devices, double-glazed units, screens, and earthy materials like terracotta, brick, and stone to reduce heat gain while still maintaining a contemporary global aesthetic. They are also reinterpreting traditional facade elements like jaalis, chajjas, and verandas as high-performance architectural devices rather than decorative references. "Across regions, they are adapted through modern materials, parametric patterns, and layered façade systems that improve ventilation, shading, and privacy while retaining cultural familiarity," says Aayush Arya, owner and Principal Designer, 6Hues Architecture Studio.

PHOTO COURTESY: INNOVATORS FACADE SYSTEMS LIMITED

Facades are viewed as a critical architectural element that gives a building its symbolic expression.

IDENTITY MATTERS

Facades are viewed as a critical architectural element that gives a building its symbolic expression and conveys the architect's overarching intention. They are the 'skin' that gives a building its unique character. "Because modern cladding allows for total design freedom, from vibrant solid colours to custom-printed corporate logos or geometric motifs (like incorporating a company's diamond-shaped logo directly into the cladding), facades are heavily utilised to project cultural, corporate, and personal identities," says Ashwanii. For institutions and corporate buildings, facades often communicate values such as transparency, sustainability, or innovation. For residences, particularly in premium segments, they increasingly reflect aspirations and personal preferences. "However, there is also a growing movement among architects toward contextual identity rather than purely visual distinction. Materiality, proportions, and climatic responsiveness are becoming equally important expressions of character. Facades today have become one of the strongest visual and functional expressions of a building's identity. The strongest facades are often those where aesthetics and performance work together seamlessly," says Subhendu.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Facade design can significantly reduce energy consumption, especially in Indian cities with high cooling demands. "Passive shading, optimised fenestration, thermal mass materials, cavity walls, and high-performance glazing are among the most effective strategies currently being used to reduce heat gain and improve indoor comfort," says Aayush. Facade design plays a massive role in reducing a building's energy consumption. The most effective strategy currently being deployed is the rear-ventilated facade system. "By allowing continuous airflow between the cladding and the building's structural wall, this system dissipates heat, reduces the thermal load on the building's HVAC systems, and acts as a

PHOTO COURTESY: FALUK INDIA

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PHOTO COURTESY: 6HUES ARCHITECTURE STUDIO

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PHOTO COURTESY: INNOVATORS FACADE SYSTEMS LIMITED

Architects are responding with layered skins, recessed openings, screens, and controlled transparency to manage privacy, noise, heat, and visual clutter.

highly efficient thermal insulator. Furthermore, the strategic use of louvres and automated shading devices physically blocks radiant heat during peak sun hours," adds Ashwanii.

URBAN CUES

In dense urban environments like Bengaluru or Mumbai, façades often act as filters between the building and the city. Architects are responding with layered skins, recessed openings, screens, and controlled transparency to manage privacy, noise, heat, and visual clutter while maximising light and ventilation on tight plots. "Indian cities present some of the most complex urban conditions globally. Density, noise, limited setbacks, and mixed-use environments create very different challenges compared to planned urban developments. Today, facades are increasingly acting as environmental filters rather than purely visual statements. We see stronger emphasis on acoustic insulation, controlled transparency, screening systems and layered façade strategies that help create comfort and privacy despite external complexity. As cities become denser, façades will play an increasingly important role in improving occupant experience and indoor comfort," avers Subhendu.

LOOKING AHEAD

As the market matures, there will be a widespread shift away from heavy, conventional materials toward lighter, engineered stones, engineered woods, and high-tech composites. Eco-friendly products that are 100 per cent recyclable, bio-based, or sourced from certified sustainable forests (FSC/PEFC) will dominate specifications. The industry will also increasingly embrace digitalisation, using advanced CNC machining and predictive manufacturing to create highly complex, climate-responsive "living skins" for buildings. The future facade in India will not simply respond to climate; it will respond to how people live, work and experience spaces. Ultimately, the next phase of innovation will be defined by performance, comfort, and long-term sustainability rather than technology alone. Guided by the strong human and environmental values deeply rooted in Indian culture, India can evolve facade design in a way that supports progress without causing adverse impact on the atmosphere or nature. A&I