architecture as ‘ecology’ and ‘spirit’ expresses the underlying design philosophy of our practice—

Kamal S Malik

"Architecture is the spatial execution of spiritual decisions"

Luis Barragan

Ecology and spirit – the two together constitute sanyama or balance. With nature always the guide, my design response to projects reflects the social, cultural, climatic and spiritual diversity that is inherent in the sub-continent, resulting in the development of an architectural syntax that stems from the past but is continuously evolving (typified by ‘manthan’ or the ‘churning’) in what is deemed as an attempt to escape being ‘prisoners of time’. Architecture is viewed as a harmonious encounter between nature and culture – a new ideal of ‘osmosis’.

Serenity and science is both my inner search as well as the object of my work. I recollect one of our earliest projects: a residence in Delhi. Delhi, believed to be over 3000 years old, from Indraprastha to the present, a matrix of layered over-cultures expressed both in its axiality as well as the organic design of the ‘qatras’ or streets, built in brick and stone. The design concept emerged from this ‘past’, simultaneously engaging the sociology of the joint family (clients), a careful study of the climate (sun and wind), use of local materials and artisans: a contemporary interoperation of a linear and continuous philosophy that synthesises the past and the present.

Through our work, we have tried to develop an idiom that would reconcile the intellectual and intuitive aspects of architecture, that would provide a tangible link to the past without getting nostalgic, that would be technologically progressive without being experientially stunted, and that would, ultimately speak through the intangible science of perceptual phenomena.

The current over emphasis on the intellectual and conceptual dimensions of architecture has contributed to the disappearance of the physical, sensual and embodied essence of architecture. In our practice, we focus more on generic metaphors rather than specific analogs, relying on the intuitive reading of context, allegory and functional parameters to generate typological shifts. Empirical mathematical processes are tempered with the exploration of phenomenological precepts to generate architecture that transcends the merely intellectual and visual, and address
The firm Malik Architecture was established in February 1976. In the last three decades, the firm has designed a number of prestigious projects in India and overseas. The firm’s philosophy of providing a comprehensive designing capability and harnessing of new technologies has resulted in providing dynamic solutions in the field of architecture and interior designing.

The firm is, perhaps, one of the few offices in the country that enjoy an integrated capability of architectural, structural, HVAC, electrical, mechanical and interior designing. This is in keeping with the strong belief that ultimate design solutions cannot be arrived at without the timely amalgamation of all critical services at the initial concept stage itself.

Bhagwan Mahaveer Cancer Centre, Jaipur

The concepts of time, continuity, infinity, reflection and introspection provide us with a theoretical underpinning, and we try to articulate a syntax of metaphors that allows, through our work, to comment on subjects ranging from urban decay and regeneration to the more abstract and intangible notions such as the subtle differences between homogeneity and purity, and contradiction and chaos.

I personally feel that, like meaningful cinema and literature, the experience of architecture should be a gradual process of revealing; where with every successive ‘viewing’ or ‘reading’ layers could be peeled back and embedded constructs and metaphors could be allowed to emerge.

Light has always been a subject of fascination, and an integral part of our work, whether as a visceral sculpting tool, or as implied metaphor. Homogenous light paralyses the imagination in the same way that homogenisation eliminates the experience of place.

Much of our work draws inspiration from nature, not through its physical forms, but through its principles and processes. Our projects explore new relationships with the earth, and very often entire projects are driven purely by the need to create a renewed context by readdressing connections to the ground.

We have tried to explore the sensory and allegorical dimensions of the elements. In the same way as water has been expressed as a still, silent, brooding expanse, or its exuberance expressed through shimmering inclined flows, so too have the other elements been articulated in ways that engage not only their physical properties, but their latent potential for embedded metaphor.
Setting with nature

Andheri is an extremely congested and chaotic suburb of Mumbai. The Research Park site was completely overgrown with trees, some over a hundred years old when the architects first visited it. This aspect was the prime driver of the concept evolution. The client's brief was re-invented, "bald" spots between the trees were identified and a preliminary sketch thus resulted.

According to the architect 'research' is based on the 'intuitive' powers of the human mind, and thus, an environment that is serene and tranquil and in complete harmony with nature is imperative. Thus nature, the 'tree' and landscape became the primary elements; and the structures secondary. The three distinct functional zones namely the Chemical (New Chemical entity) laboratories, the Office and Research Tabulation zone and the "Leisure" zone (comprising the library, café, etc) were housed in the open spaces between the trees and linked by an extremely simple steel, concrete and glass box that served as space. The
Prismatic Profile
A first sketch of this office project was evolved on the first visit of the architect to the site. The concept was based on splitting the allowed built-up space into two rectilinear prisms. Each of these prisms was 13m clear, column-free spans achieved through post tensioned concrete. This span allowed natural ingress of light into the entire office. The two blocks emanated a completely different character. The one located on the south and west exposure was completely solid with deep recessed fenestrations whilst the second block on the north and east exposure is more transparent. To allow the early morning sun deeper into the building as also to graze the water "Kund", the second block has been hollowed at the base creating a massive stepped cantilever of 12m.

The two prisms are joined with a sweeping glass façade shaded over by an array of pergolas that modulate the intensity of light whilst encloving both the exterior and the interior spaces with a play of light and shade that expresses the passage of time.
Sculptural Cube

The repetitive and almost banal character that is associated with the architectural genre of the ‘mall’ had always deterred the architects from accepting such design commissions. However, the architects took on one mall project in the suburbs of Delhi in an attempt to express ‘the redemption of the faceless mall.’ Delhi is believed to be almost 3000 years old, a matrix of layered over cultures whose diverse architectural syntax is visible even today. The ‘stone’ architecture epitomised in the walls, narrow streets, axiality, courtyards and plazas, served as the inspiration in drawing up the first concept sketch of this project.

A ‘long’ fort wall in stone was drawn and breached the wall with an opening (the gate). A tilted futuristic metal cube thrust through the breach and through a minor planar manipulation created a large stepped plaza.