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BREAKING THE MOULD

WITH ARCHITECT ARUN PRASAD

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A YOUNG GUN BASED OUT OF COIMBATORE, ARUN IS NOT ONLY PASSIONATE ABOUT HIS WORK BUT ALSO VERY METICULOUS AND FORESIGHTED.

BY SUMISHA GILOTRA



They say that the best way to future is by designing it, and Prasad, Architect Planner, Arun Associates, has done exactly that. A young gun based out of Coimbatore.

Arun is not only passionate about his work, he is also very meticulous and foresighted. He has been working a lot in the 20 years of his career. Today, Arun Associates, one of the leading firms in Coimbatore, India, is associated with forward thinking and breaking designs.

His work spans residences, commercial developments, institutions, industries, and public buildings. His small team of 25 is one of the most valuable assets and has helped him with projects across India and South Africa. Interestingly, Arun's designs are conceptualised intuitively.

Passionate about material and technology, Arun invests a lot of time in research and constantly updating his knowledge. In fact, he has spent a lot of time understanding and experimenting with Modern Concrete Precast Technology and is instrumental in setting up two Modern Concrete Precast plants (Teemage Precast In), one in Kangeyam and the other in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. He has designed more than 10 buildings using the Modern Concrete Precast Technology and is regarded as an expert in the technology.

Arun is also very keen on Urban Planning and has been involved in city planning and has been





the city corporation as a volunteer since 2006. He is also a CTAG (City Technical Advisory Group) member at JNNURM (Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission) and the Smart City scheme. "I envision the city to be clean, with all the physical and social infrastructure in place. I also help in the rehabilitation of slums," he says.

ONGOING PROJECTS

His current pet project is Sojourn Stays, a second home complex, in the hill station of Ooty and Coonoor. Here, he is working with the terrain to maximise the natural surroundings and make the best of the climate of the region.

With age on his side, and aided by his keen intuition, Arun is sure to become an architect to revolutionise the way we perceive design.

IN CONVERSATION WITH AR
ARUN PRASAD

SG: Tell us a bit about your firm and your journey so far.

AP: The inception of the firm was in 1998. My father-in-law, a structural engineer with an experience of more than 40 years, got involved in Industrial Architecture. He paved the way for me to explore the field. We started with two drafting technicians, and today we are a strong team of 30. When I began to practice, the language of architecture was classic - Spanish tiles on a slope roof with RCC. It took us 10 years to break this shackle and evolve our own language of minimalism. Being a tier two town, we found it difficult to convince the clients in the early stages. Currently, we are handling around 50 projects across South India.

SG: Why did you choose to be an architect?

AP: You won't believe me, but it's something I decided on a whim. I once happened to meet my friend's father, who was an architect and saw his drawing boards. This was a eureka moment for me to pursue architecture, a form of art. Now when I look back, I think it was the best decision of my life!

SG: I'm sure you have worked on many projects in these 20 years of your career. But there is always a particular project which stays very close to one's heart. Which is the most significant project you have done so far?

AP: That is a tough one. I think it would have to be my own home. Here, I had no restrictions in terms of Vastu and had the freedom to design. The project was featured as 'Oblique House' in a video by Buildofy. And another one would be a school at Avinashi, built using Modern Precast technology. I had the opportunity to travel with the client (Teemage Precast) to 5 countries in Europe to choose the precast concrete machinery and design the factory. The school was the first project to be built as a prototype. Construction was completed in three months at a phenomenal pace, which would normally take a year.

SG: That sounds like a lot of fun. And you clearly have a thing for concrete and technology. What do you think

TAKE 5 YOUR DESIGN ICON

Tadao Ando. His architecture style is said to create an effect, emphasising nothingness and empty space, the beauty of simplicity. Active natural elements like light and wind are a distinctive inclusion to his contemporary design.

Your biggest inspiration

Two architects who inspire me the most are Norman Foster, known for his sleek modern buildings by incorporating high tech industry and technology into building design, and Charles Correa, known for his adaptation of Modernism that respond to local climate, culture and building context.

Your favourite design wonder

The Church of Light by Tadao Ando. The intersection of light and solid raises the occupants' awareness of the sacred within themselves.

Your pet peeve

Young architects coming into our firm are reluctant to take responsibility and be accountable to the profession.

Your design style

Intuitive minimalism with the abstraction of space.

AP: The patience and ability to conceptualise a design. Today, 'Speed is Design.'

SG: Well said! So, pick one, traditional architecture or modern?

AP: My take on design is about modern architecture with minimalism. Our practice takes cognizance of the multidisciplinary nature of contemporary architecture and fuses sensitivity with state-of-the-art technology to contribute in reducing the carbon footprint of the built environment.

SG: What is that one quote that you swear by?

AP: 'Light is God.' My designs have always been about exploring natural light in a space which provides a sense of awe rather than adorning the space with decoration.

SG: Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?

AP: Elevating construction methods such as Precast Technologies to become a dominant means of building in the modern world. I would like to get involved in prefabricated construction where all construction activities are done in a controlled environment. This would minimise the errors as it takes place in a controlled environment with precise consumption of all resources.

SG: What is the dream project you want to work on?

AP: I plan to design large exploratory spaces in a public to use and feel. The design will not include commercial spaces such as shopping and advertising. The spaces will be designed to find a meditative quality and stimulate their senses.

SG: Is there a message you would like to give to young designers who are just starting off?

AP: Yes! Architects need to be patient. Unlike other professions, they thrive in allied fields, young architects are keen to move into the fast-paced world. For a project to be complete, it requires patience and persistence.

|  | is your biggest USP?

year or two. So, don't jump into the first train.

CASE STUDY: SRI NACHAMMAL VIDYAVANI SCHOOL

Area: 69,827 sq ft

Sri Nachammal Vidyavani School, planned in an area of 1,26,000 sq ft, is located in Avinashi, Tamil Nadu. The construction of the school was planned in phases. The first phase, now complete and in-use, has a built-up area of 69,827 sq ft. The construction of the school uses Modern Precast Concrete Technology. The building follows the basic principles of Vaastu, and its primary design criteria is providing a stimulating environment for children with personalised outdoor classroom spaces. The school has a hierarchy of courtyards with a large central courtyard, smaller courts and strip gardens on all floors adjacent to the classrooms.

The biggest challenge was the time frame within which it had to be completed. With Modern Precast Concrete Constructional Technology, it was completed within five months. All building elements like slabs, walls, etc., were made in the factory and transported on trucks to the site and erected with cranes.



1. The construction of the school uses Modern Precast Concrete Technology.

2 & 4: The school has a hierarchy of courtyards with a central courtyard.

3. Its primary design criteria was to provide a stimulating environment for children.





CASE STUDY: OBLIQUE HOUSE

Area: 4200 sq ft

Location: Coimbatore

The design approach evolved from the idea of a courtyard to suit an urban context. The living and dining areas of the house open out to the court. Transparent barriers like floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors have been used. When these doors are opened, the living, dining and the garden become one large

1. The interiors are marked by intensely contrasting white walls and black riverbed frosted granite.

2. Oblique angular walls dominate on the exterior.

3. Transparent barriers like floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors have been used.

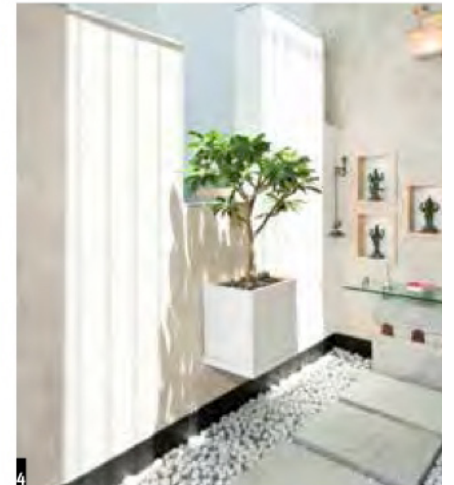
4. The play of natural light adds interest.



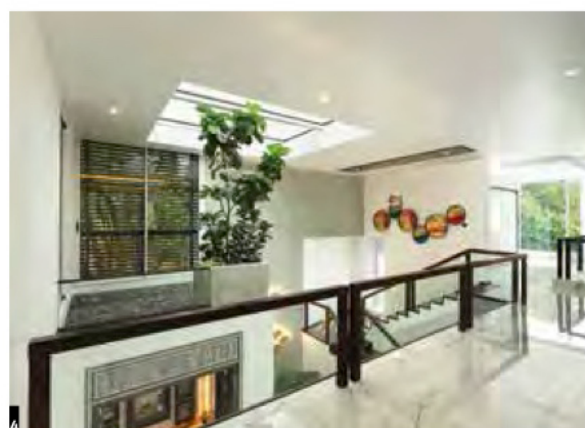
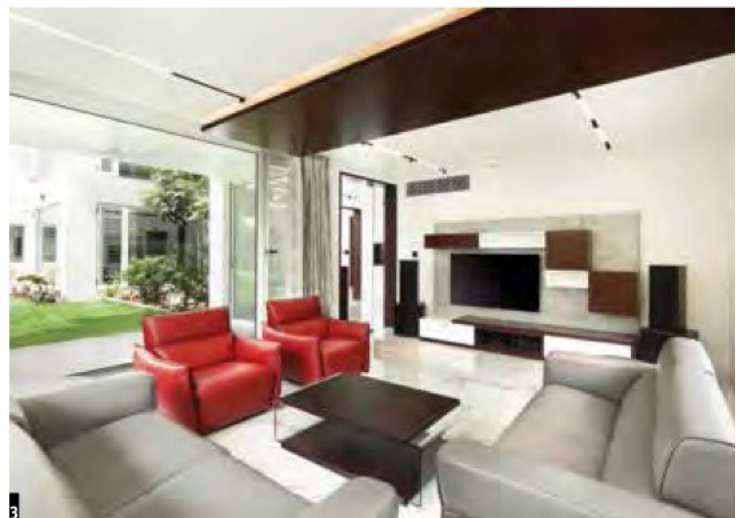
seamless space used for celebrations. One section of the perimeter wall is raised higher and defines the eastern end. This blank wall, treated as a canvas, is used for outdoor movie-viewing.

Fenestrations in the house rely on natural light. The most east-facing planes are made of glass. To take advantage of exposure to heat along the west, wall openings are present below the height of the site's perimeter wall.

Exterior finishes are modest, while the interior is marked by intensely contrasting white walls and black riverbed frosted granite. This starkness is moderated by the use of American white ash wood. The design is apt for a preference for interior pieces that make bold statements, such as the use of white and grey marble flooring. Red leather furniture has been installed. Oblique walls dominate on the exterior, appearing as a protective envelope, further accentuated by the way light enters the north-facing site.



CASE STUDY: REVELATION



Area: 7,250 sq ft

Located in the South Indian town of Coimbatore, this posh residence is bordered by roads on two sides, thus forcing the design concept to be inward-looking with segregated private spaces. The design ensures that every space overlooks the garden.

Natural light has been used optimally in the house. The layout is a conscious effort to create a play of spaces. A rectangular block is broken into transparent voids to make the spaces seem spirited throughout the day. A revelation is created when the user walks by the intimidating facade outside and reaches the perceiving voids inside. To accentuate the existing palms behind the site, the transparent voids are double-heightened. The light filled space looks welcoming and relaxing as the views are uplifted by nature's canvas. The double-height volume spaces of foyer and stairwell are connected by single height spines in both the ground and first floors, allowing the user to perceive the scale of the spaces in a unique manner.

1. The design is inward-looking with segregated private spaces.

2 & 4: The design ensures that every space overlooks the garden.

3. Natural light is used optimally in the house.

CASE STUDY: THE GLEAM HOME

Area: 8,800 sq ft

Located in the South Indian industrial town, Tirupur, this contemporary residence stands apart in its densely populated neighbourhood.

1&3: With the swimming pool and punctuated garden spaces being the point of focus, the design ensures every space overlooks private outdoor spaces.

2. The facade is a two-dimensional parametric design made of sheer walls.

4. Harnessing light is the soul of this residence.

With the swimming pool and punctuated garden spaces being the point of focus, the design ensures every space overlooks private outdoor spaces. The level difference of five feet between the roads on the East and West sides allows for a garage and electrical room to be tucked away in a semi-basement at the back.

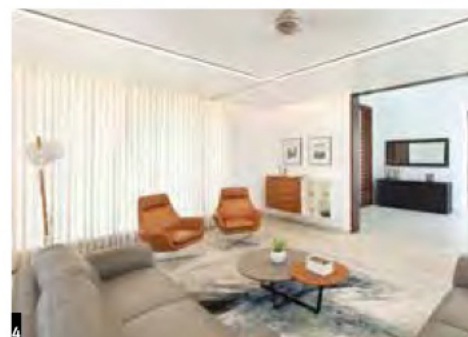
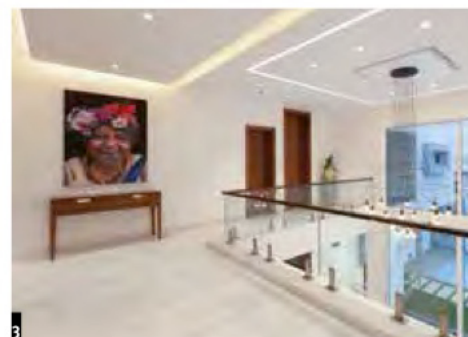
Harnessing light is the soul of this residence. The double-height foyer at the entrance is flanked by the formal and informal living spaces and has stunning views of the swimming pool court. The central spine, lined by a private and swimming pool court, leads to the pooja room, connecting the dining and the living spaces. The larger openings in the passage and in the dining integrates the indoor and outdoor spaces. The steel staircase, clad in wood, wraps around a sky-lit court. The three double-height volume

spaces of foyer, dining and stairwell are connected height spines in both the ground and first floors.

As for material, Onyx marble for the floor, white the walls and American walnut veneer for the furniture have been used.

The facade is a two-dimensional parametric design of sheer walls. Perforated aluminium screen on the facade filters the eastern Sun. Steel I-I-Sections, with supported slab, makes the car porch look afloat.

Control lighting, entertainment systems, security control and alarm systems bring an enhanced user experience to the residence.





A CONTEMPORARY FACTORY

Area: 3,99,000 sq ft

The factory for a knitted garments manufacturing unit at Preundurai, Sipcot, with an area of 3,99,000 sq ft is a gold-level LEED-certified building. The building spans about 770 feet by 233 feet and has a double-height office space on the frontage. Large openings with high-performance glass ensure ample amount of natural light. The canopy of the building extends east-west, which naturally provides a shaded pathway alongside the building for the workers. Energy efficient methods like performance glass and solar hot water collectors have been implemented. Two hostel blocks with a Ground +1 floor and a span of 208 feet by 110 feet each can house about 500 people. The hostel block has a central atrium which acts as a congregational space while the terrace floor acts as a multi-functional space for utilitarian activities. Passive cooling techniques like the stack effect and Venturi effect remove the warm air from the central atrium through clear-storey openings, making



the internal spaces cooler. The rooms in the hostel block are designed with continuous ventilators to facilitate cross-ventilation. These blocks are EDGE (Excellence in Design for Greater Efficiency) certified. Water-efficient methods like low-flow water fixtures have been implemented to control water consumption, thus achieving 51 per cent of water savings. The heat consumption at the roof level has been reduced with the use of steel canopy.

1. The factory is a gold-level LEED building.

2. Energy efficient methods like performance glass and solar hot water collectors have been implemented.



CORPORATE OFFICE AT TIRUPUR

Area: 19,260 sq ft

This corporate office for a buying house in Tirupur boasts of a façade that amasses layers of different textures and patterns. The triple height volume is perceived as a stepped terrain with the floor planes interconnected with bridges. A rectangular block with a central courtyard is broken into transparent voids to make the spaces spirited throughout the day. The interior palette is minimalist and a play of warm and cool colours used in different areas create a sense of interest for the user and the visitor. The white stucco walls and ceiling reflect the purity of light and make the spaces brighter.

1. The triple height volume is perceived as a stepped terrain.

2. The interior is minimalist.

3. A rectangular block with a central courtyard is broken into transparent voids to make the spaces spirited throughout the day.



