

Arya Architects

AHMEDABAD

The Aryas began their journey in 1999 with two projects – in Kutch, post the earthquake and a competition. Working together, the initial period of dialogue, discussions and debate set up design directions, philosophy and a working methodology which was eventually formalised as a partnership firm.

Each project is shaped by the underlying idea of 'appropriate'. Appropriateness is the result of a thorough understanding of the brief, the site, the context of the profession as well as the innate creative urge. It implies informed decisions as a critical part of the design process. The manifestation of this philosophy is seen in the choice of giving primacy to material and craftsmanship in the Mewar Complex, or to brief development in the Samakhiali reconstruction projects or the material and structure relationship in the Jindal Bus Station design. Over time, this approach has created diversity in the language of the office. Design decisions are carefully weighed and all possibilities are considered, without any filters of style and language. Explorations and experimentation in materials, technology and structure is evident in the office portfolio. Every design is approached with its own set of potentials and limitations. The firm engages in this tension between the physical reality defined by site, society, culture and the internal urge of the creative process.

Our vision and motivation is to reshape everyday used spaces. Much work done in the office therefore falls in the critical space of public architecture, be it schools, sports, transit or public health facilities. It is a challenging space to be in, often defined by the processes of government regulations. It is a space very few young practices in the country engage with. The endeavour is to change the benchmarks of public spaces, and bring dignity, diversity and quality to the common, ordinary and routine. This is done through the projects and also through regular dialogue with the government authorities.

The public nature of architecture demands it to be inclusive, democratic and equitable. The reconstruction project in Samakhiali was a laboratory to test some of the processes. Engagement and communication with the people was recognised as a core way to develop the design and its objective. We also understood our

own value as arbitrators and synthesisers. The projects are strung together by providing spaces of interaction, dialogue and occasion.

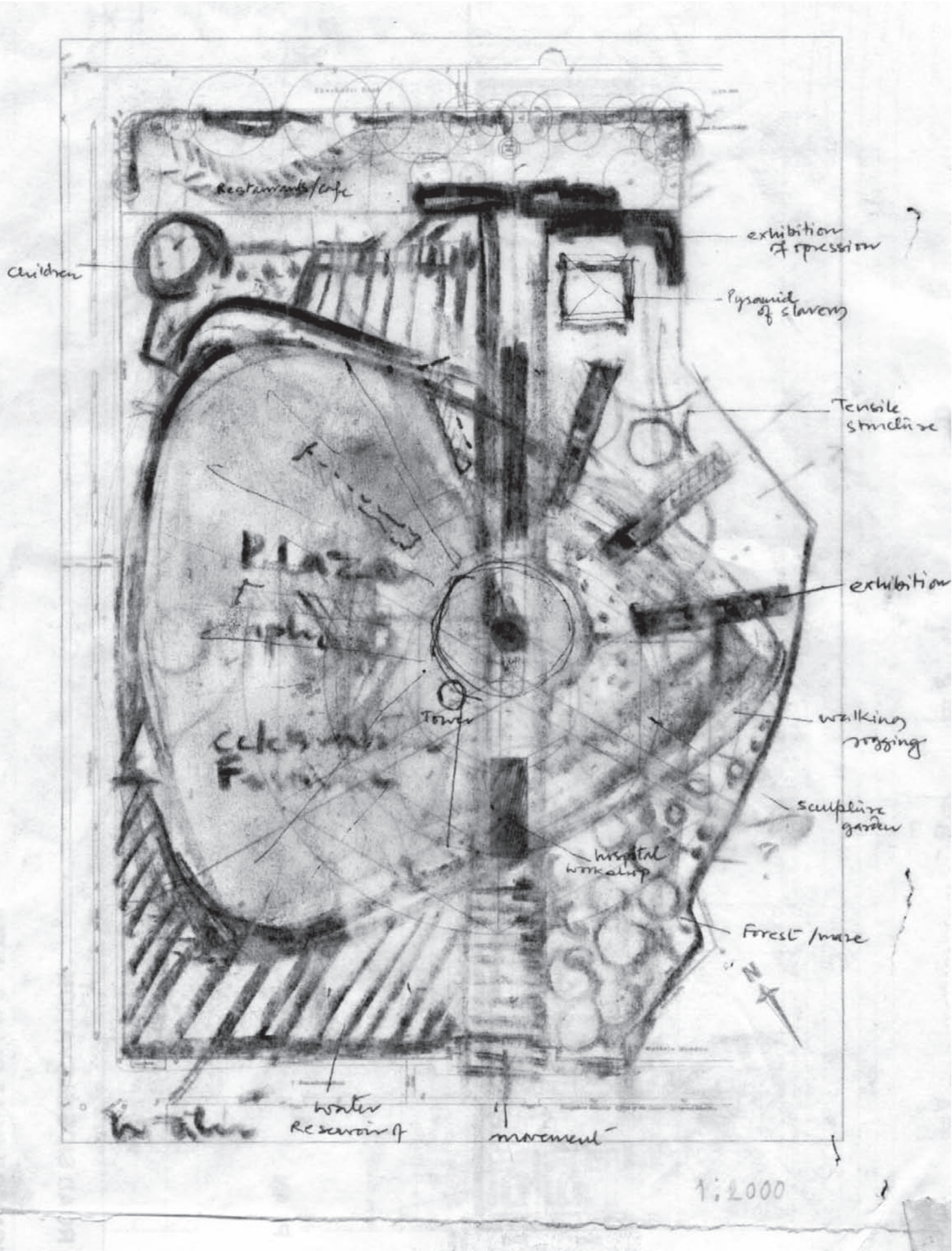
The BRTS bus station was the reinvention, of what was otherwise considered a banal object in the cityscape of Indian cities, into a spatial, experiential entity that brings comfort, identity and ease into the everyday lives of residents. Careful in the reinvention is the ability to keep it in the human scale, never to overwhelm, but engage with the subtle nuances of urban life. In the pursuit of providing the same, our projects become a way for us to address questions about people's lives, environment and cities.

Our journey in architecture is enriched by a concern and a deep respect for traditional Indian architecture which we have extensively documented. Semi-open spaces and in-between realms are seen as valuable to the Indian social and climatic condition. These spaces are a repeated element in the design. Informal public spaces like 'chowks' and the streets have been the life of Indian towns and cities, creating over time inclusive realms. In recent times, however, the quality of public life is deteriorating and public spaces are getting to be exclusive. The projects in the public realm are an attempt to bring back the inclusiveness of this domain through architecture. These are spaces that most citizens encounter, visit, inhabit and occupy in their daily lives. Inserted within the existing fabric, the projects draw upon experiences that are diverse and complex, yet the spaces pose as a silent backdrop to encourage and allow public interaction, participation and cohesion by bringing people together. Architecture evolves from an exploration of these spaces that are appropriate in terms of climate, are inclusive, allow for spill overs, are flexible, transparent and yet carefully defined.

As partners in the firm M/s Minakshi Jain Architects, the firm has brought in contemporary ideas of conservation into architectural practice. Our work continues to be fuelled by the challenge of responding to the people's needs in the contemporary times, along with an acknowledgement of the country's valuable traditions. Naturally, there are no perfect answers, but it is the quest that keeps us going.

- Meghal + Vijay Arya

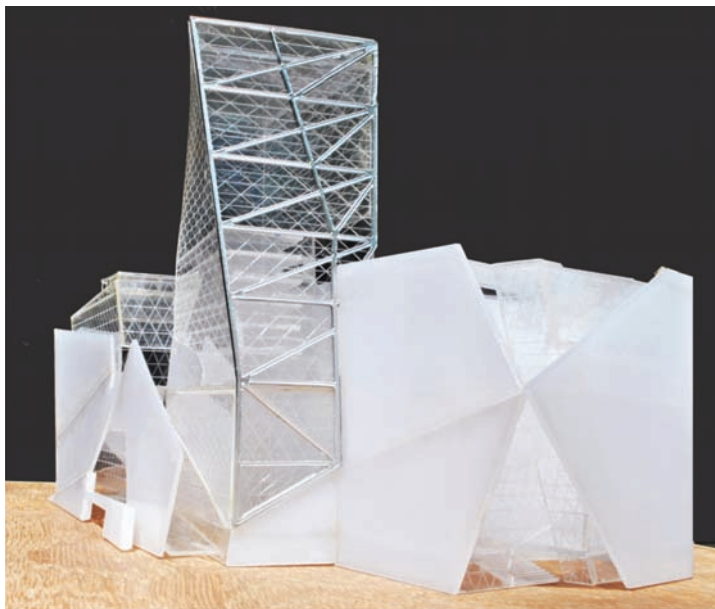
Drawings, Images and Writings: courtesy Arya Architects



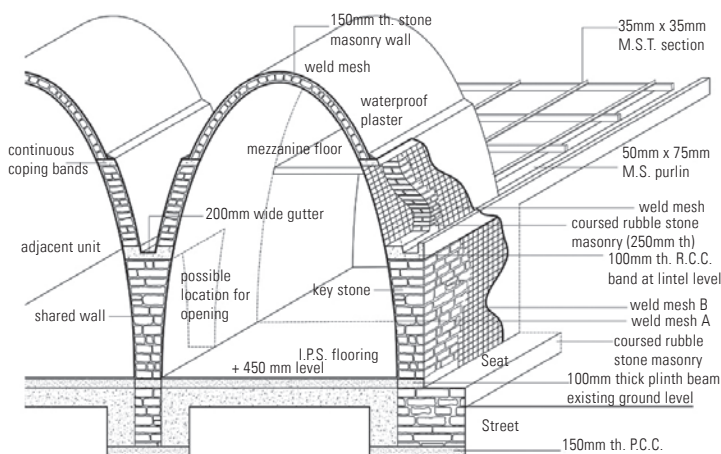
↑ FREEDOM PARK, BENGALURU



↑ Ahmedabad Football Stadium: The Stadium project was a challenge in generating porosity, light and ventilation, and expanse of space in a very tight land condition. Invoking the courtyards as an idea, the project was a vertical expression of solid (functions) and voids (courtyards).



↑ Ahmedabad Football Stadium: An unbuilt project, it was a tremendous exercise for the office in exploration of form, inclusion of a very wide range of functions, logistics of services, area, accessibility, etc.



↑ HUDCO Housing: Detailed sketch showing materials to strengthen the roof: The proposed system combined the existing rubble retrieved from the debris, strengthened by a steel cage, in the profile of catenary to be able to withstand earthquake. Gutters to collect rainwater doubled up as the horizontal bands for earthquake resistant structures, thus integrating structural systems, environmental concerns and social patterns.

AA: Arya Architects

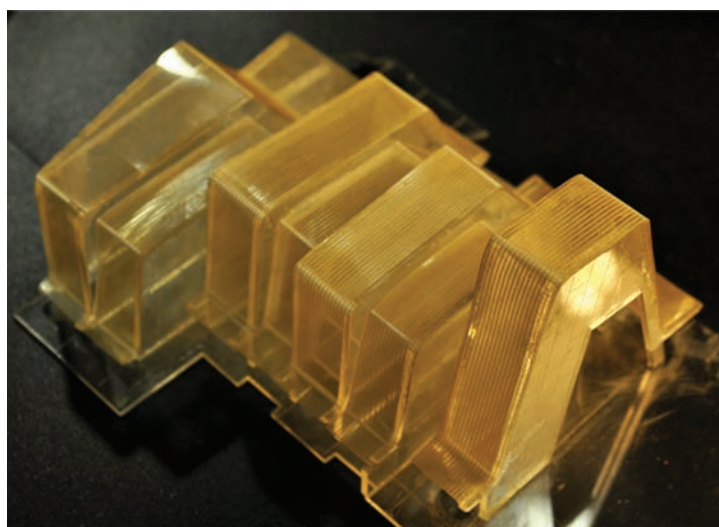
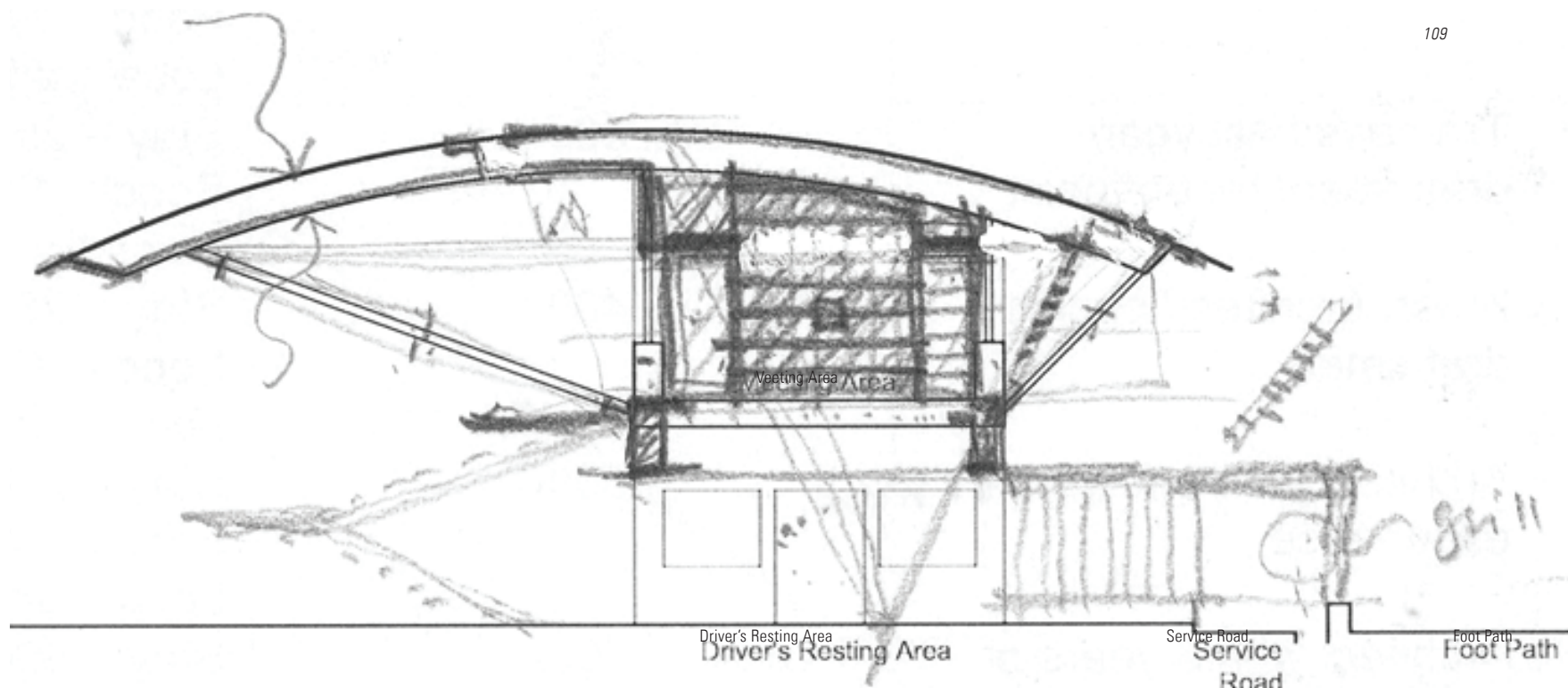
IA&B: Could you tell us about the beginnings of your practice? What were the formative years like? How did your work evolve?

AA: Meghal and Vijay Arya, both graduates of the School of Architecture, CEPT University, started their architectural practice in Ahmedabad after returning from their postgraduate studies in architecture from Georgia Tech, Atlanta and Aalto University, Finland respectively. The international education, coupled with substantial travel across Europe, gave them a richness of architectural experiences. The initial years of debate and discussion led to the emergence of two areas of interest – working in the public domain and seeking to decipher meanings in traditional Indian architecture. Since work in the public domain was limited in volume, this phase was marked by many competitions; quite a few of them in the area of transit facilities like bus stations and airports. It was a fascinating area of design – a paradox where the mobile and the static were in a continuous dialogue. Over time, the firm has established a niche in this area.

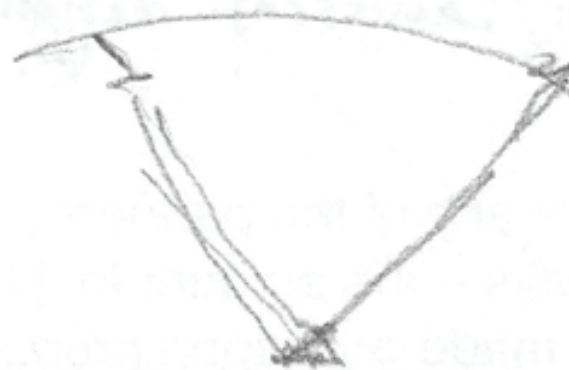
The maiden years were engagements in extensive documentation of historic buildings. Computer drawings were beginning to become a preferred way to prepare construction drawings. We took the documentation process as an opportunity to create our own systems for making high quality computer-aided drawings. The early years were also of realisation that architecture constituted a wide spectrum of actions that went beyond the drawing board design. Execution of the design and its parameters were assimilated. The value in the chain became evident with experience.



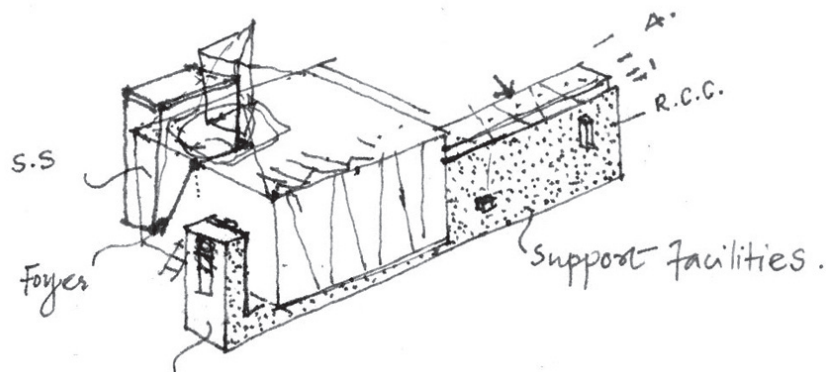
↑ HUDCO Housing: The competition was to design post-disaster housing, selecting a village in Kutch. Research revealed that much havoc resulted due to failure of walls because of missing key stones in the masonry. A cross-sectional model showing the material layers to provide strength to the roofs making innovative use of local resources was developed.



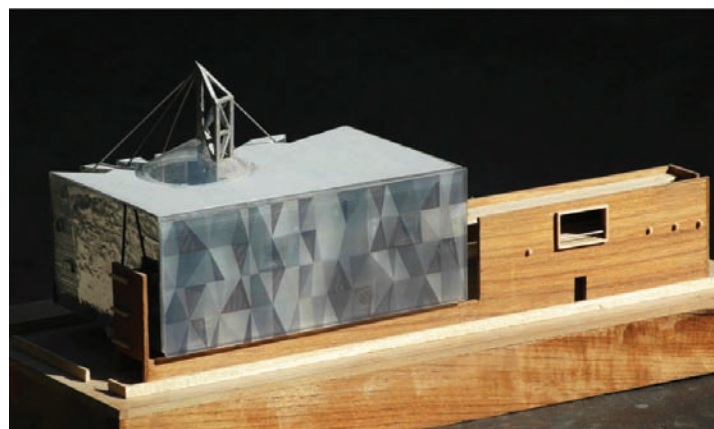
↑ BRTS Control Centre, Naya Raipur: Set in a barren, flat landscape with no reference around, the project seeks to create some undulations in the land. Maintenance spaces for transit facilities have not received the attention that other public architecture gets. For the Aryas, these spaces become potential laboratories to experiment with space and structure relationships.



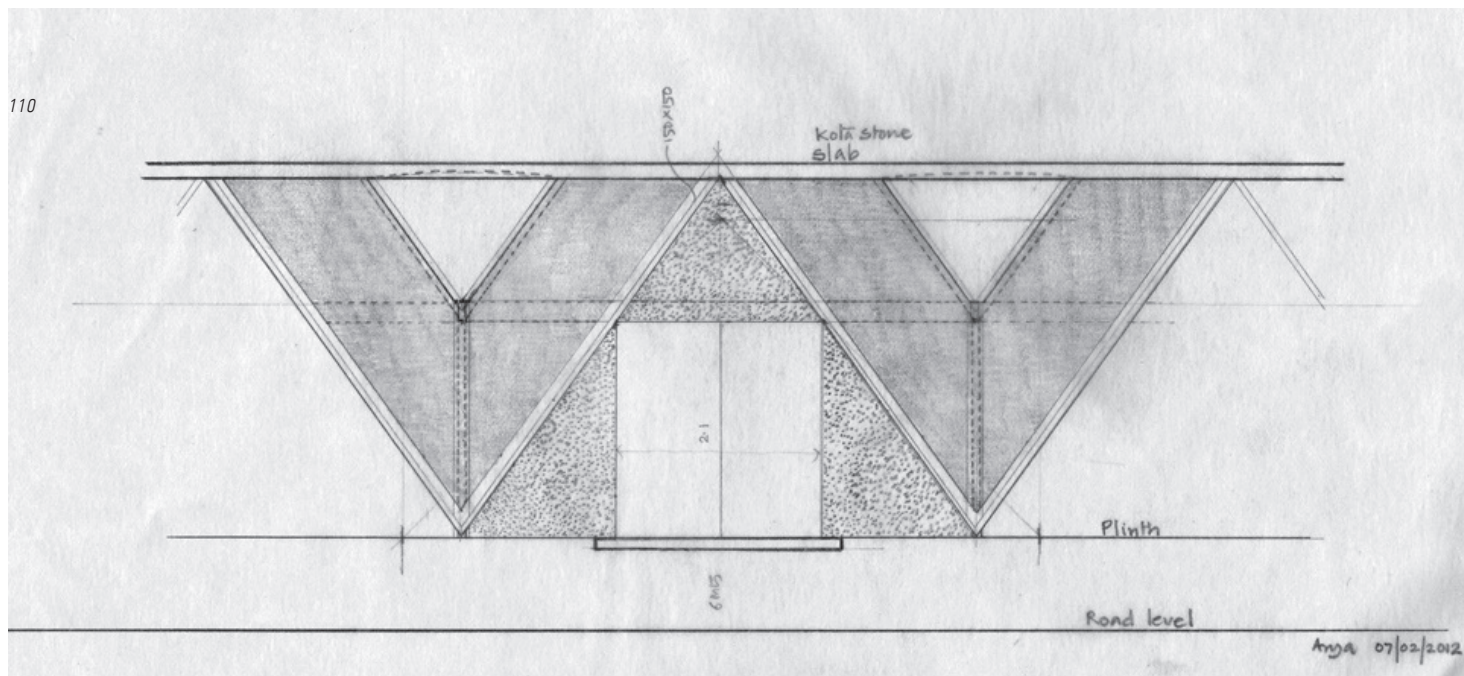
↑ BRTS Workshop, Ahmedabad: Detailed studies of functions and their relationships determined the plan organisation leading to an efficient diagram. The structure was worked out to avoid columns and provide a large, unobstructed space for buses to move and park.



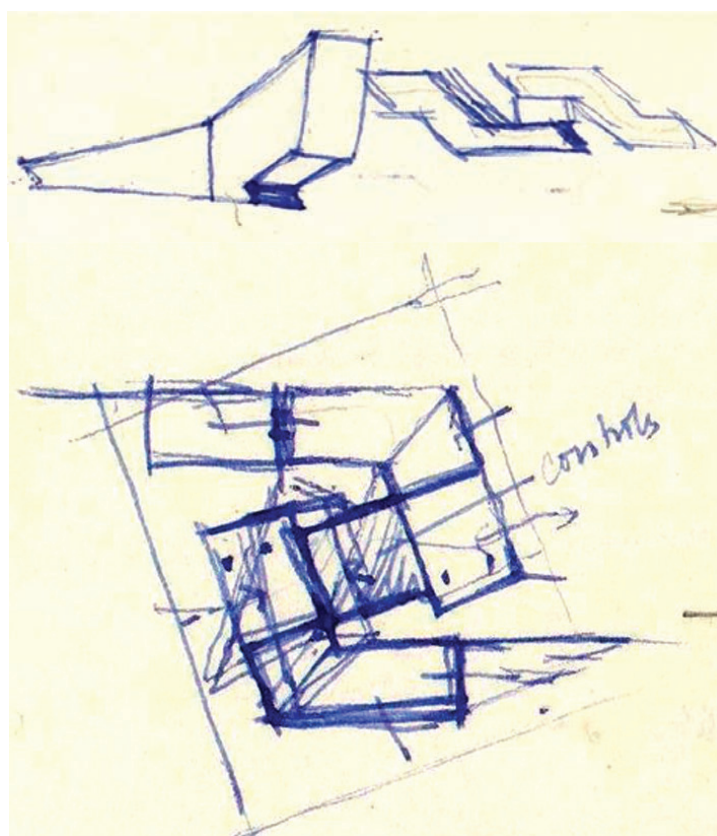
↑ Corporate House for INS DAG, Kolkata: This design combines two methods of construction - insitu wet construction and pre-fabricated factory-made parts. The structural differences express the many dualities: inside and outside, mass and light-weight structure, served and servant spaces, etc. Taking the structural idea of suspension into this project, the main INS DAG offices are the bridge between the existing RCC method and a future in steel. This allows large open free spaces that can be changed, modulated and modified as per the requirements.



↑ Corporate House for INS DAG, Kolkata: Aspects like environmental controls, passive cooling, water harvesting are integrated into this system with tools like terrace gardens, water collection pools, double skins. A singular expression has deliberately been avoided in favour of expressing the multiple possibilities of the material; an expression of the pluralities of contemporary society. The skin is, thus, an animated changing layer wrapped around the functions and from it, emerges a building.



↑ BRTS BUS STATION, SURAT



↑ BRTS CONTROL CENTRE, SURAT



↑ BRTS BUS SHELTER, INDORE

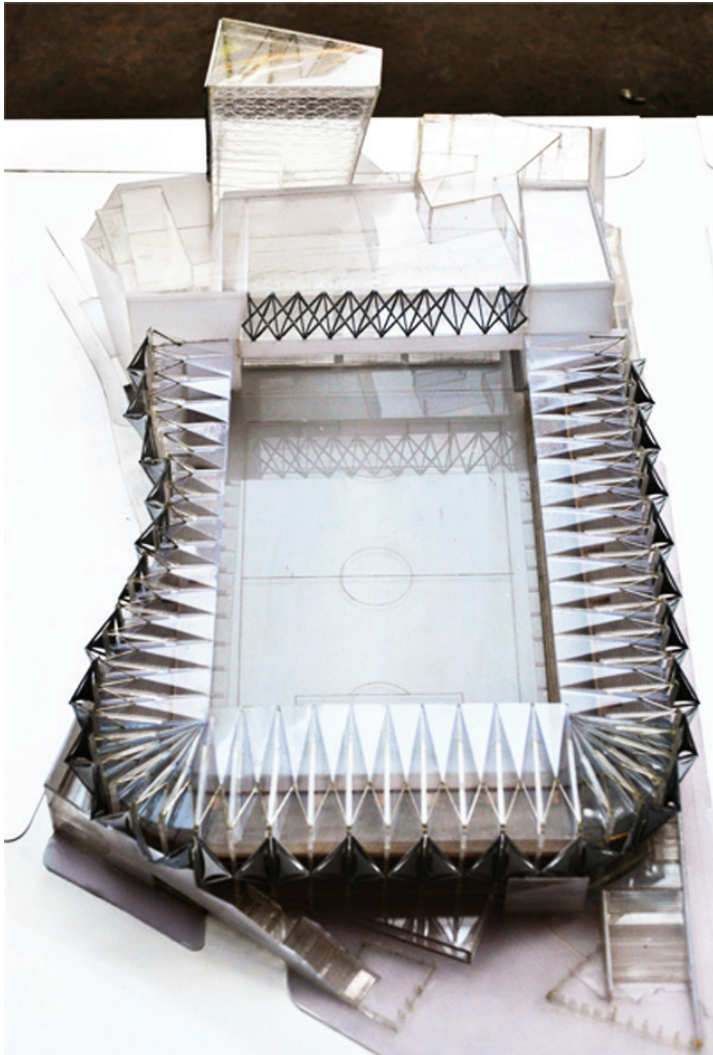
IA&B: Your studio works on a diverse set of projects – public and private. Is there a 'process' or 'method' that is central to your work? How do you approach your work?

AA: All the projects in the practice are approached with the philosophical attitude of seeking the primary concern, of reprogramming and understanding the brief. The design emerges through dialogue between the principals. The partners alternate between the role of designer and critic, thereby creating within the office the studio process of design. Appropriateness is discussed and debated. We believe in the ability of architecture to touch the lives of people. As architects we are capable of and responsible for shaping the experiences of the people who inhabit those spaces. The focus of our work is due attention and acknowledgement of what the end user needs, albeit with intensive explorations to ensure and deliver the needful.

Unique to projects in the public realm, the user is distinctly different from the sponsor/patron. As architects, the firm plays a pivotal role in collating the requirement of both, one through direct interactions and other through research, observation and dialogue. Reprogramming is an essential aspect of this process, as the sponsors' brief might not always suffice to ensure that the needs of the user have been met. It is here that we step in to bridge the gap between the two, making the whole act of designing more people-centric and meaningful.

The studio participates regularly in competitions. New ideas are tested through research and learning. They become a way to negotiate the distance between the academic studio and the real projects, serving as a great base to explore innovative dimensions of architecture. Very often, the ideas explored in the competitions have become a basis of live projects. Some competitions that we have participated in are Kolkata Airport International Terminal, Jindal Bus Station design, HUDCO Affordable Housing, Kolkata Airport National Terminal, Freedom Park, etc. Often the competitions have served as morale boosters, bringing the office together as a cohesive whole, changing the dynamics, pace and infusing a positive energy in the office.

On one hand, the studio has moved on to digital formats for construction drawings and on the other hand, sketching, hand drawings are also used. Effectively, any technology or method that is relevant and suitable to a better quality of project and which supports the thinking process is used. Iterations and alternatives are explored extensively, oscillating back and forth between various mediums. Physical models remain a preferred method of design exploration, irrespective of any other form of design development.



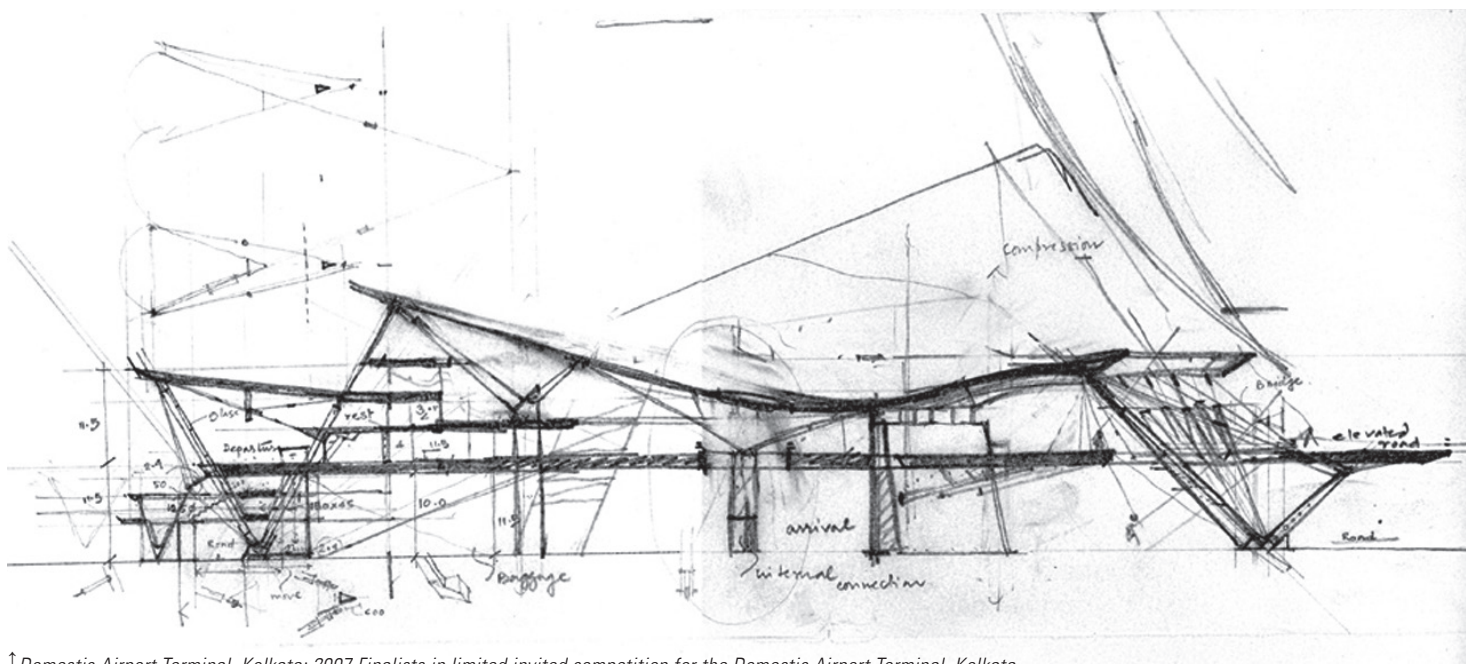
↑ Ahmedabad Football Stadium: Different projects call for explorations in different materials. Model of the Ahmedabad Football Stadium done in acrylic to show the internal structure and spaces.



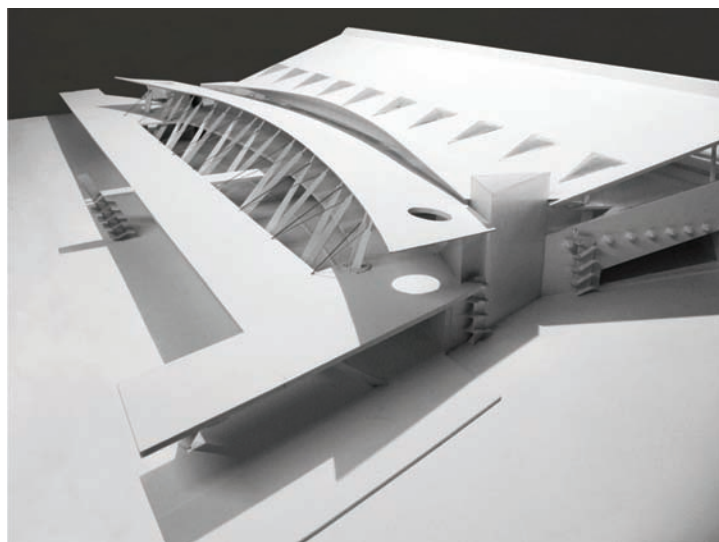
↑ School at Prantij, Gujarat: The design gives emphasis to spaces outside the classroom where learning by experimenting, with a hands-on philosophy takes place.



↑ Bindiben House, Bharuch: The entire house is raised on a hollow plinth to access views of river Narmada flowing near the site. Private spaces such as bedrooms are placed behind the curved wall. Living and dining areas are pulled out from the curved wall, which with large openings, frames views on the river side.



↑ Domestic Airport Terminal, Kolkata: 2007 Finalists in limited invited competition for the Domestic Airport Terminal, Kolkata. Structure worked out to create large open spaces for clear and easy movement of passengers through the terminal. Smaller structures and kiosks would float under this bigger structural canopy.



↑ Domestic Airport Terminal, Kolkata: The built form was worked out to ease the transition of travellers moving in and exiting through the building. The spaces are defined by the structure and allow for a functionally clear plan.

IA&B: Could you tell us about people and things that inspire your work? Masters and/or mentors, principles, etc ... What informs and influences your work?

AA: Traditional Indian architecture is a reservoir of knowledge and the rich legacy immensely drives our pursuit of congruous design solutions. Our work is deeply rooted to the sensibilities of the past, while simultaneously striking a balance with the contemporary. In the quest to create a deep and intrinsic relationship between the inside and the outside, the built and the unbuilt, we constantly draw references to and borrow from the traditional architecture where transition zones like 'verandahs' and 'otlas' constituted the in-between realm. Traditional elements and systems are understood to identify their intrinsic quality, and reinterpreted to respond to current issues.

The work of Finnish architect Alvar Aalto remains a source of inspiration as does the work of architects like Dieste. We are constantly inspired by the works of those who endeavour to raise architecture from the pragmatic to the sublime, to the evocative. Of particular interest is when, in any project, there is an exploration of architecture and structure as

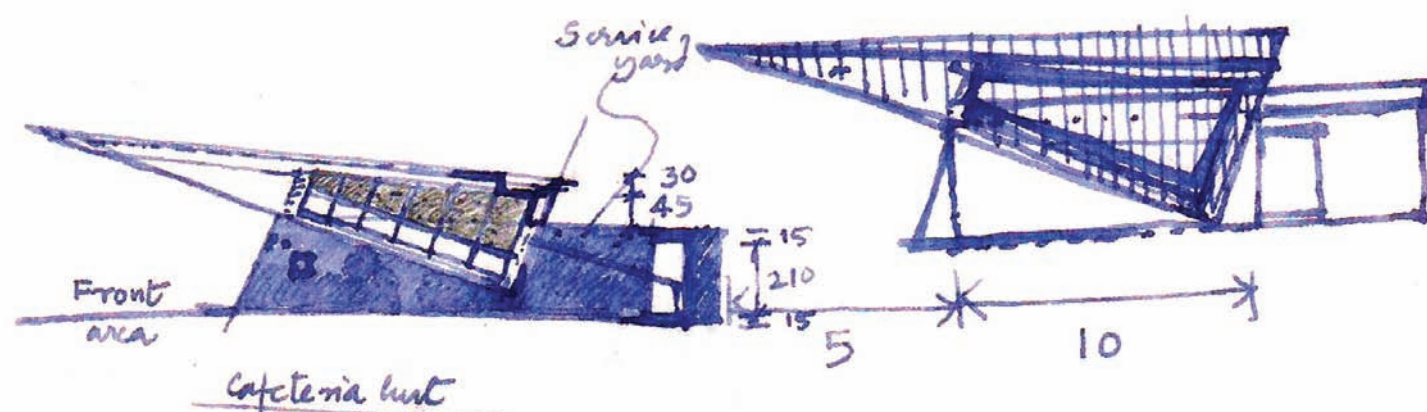
integral to each other, where the two are not defined as distinct but are an interconnected whole.

IA&B: Please tell us about a project that represents your practice — your most important work(s).

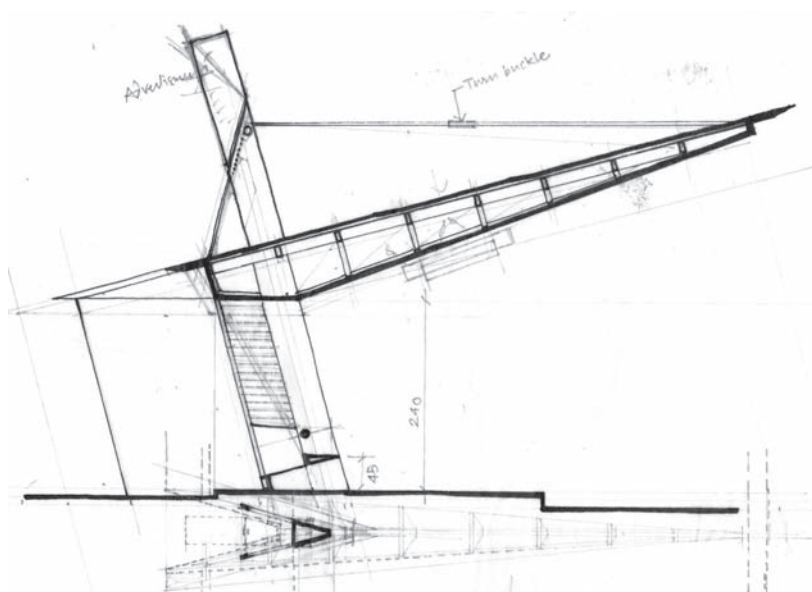
AA: Three projects have shaped our work so far. These projects are important for two reasons — in these projects important ideas were explored which became the basis of later works and they also brought recognition to the office through awards.

One is the Jindal Award — a competition for the design of a bus station which we won. Here, we explored the use of stainless steel and that exploration initiated a journey with steel that has remained with us all through. It was also the point where structure, functional requirements and architectural explorations of form were merged into each other. It began the journey of a way of approaching design which has been consistent. The competition entry worked on the principles of a kit of parts which were factory produced and assembled onsite. The entry based itself on the creation of an identity for a bus station to encourage more people to ride the bus, to bring dignity to riding a bus which in India remains a challenge as it is an issue of status. It is an idea which was to come to the forefront in the subsequent bus station designs.

Reconstruction at Samakhiali — The project began as an initiative of an NGO to adopt Samakhiali, a village in Kutch for post-earthquake reconstruction. The client brief was to start rebuilding the houses. Discussions with the 'Sarpanch' and villagers revealed that funds were not sufficient to provide houses for all. We felt that the limited houses would be appropriated by the 'fittest'. Rather than creating divisions of 'haves' and 'have-nots' it was important for the townspeople to come together as a community for the healing to start. A community centre as a resource place shared by all was proposed along with other institutions like animal husbandry centre supporting the main vocation of the people. A series of buildings thus took shape, including a girls' school, a pre-primary school, a 'panchayat', an overhead tank, a crematorium, a 'gaushala' and a water supply network. The choice of the programme was embedded wholly in the life of the village and accessible across all socio-economic segments. Architecturally, simple thematic spaces like courtyards, 'verandahs', and pavilions drove the design. Without resorting to imagery and pastiche, we were looking for an architecture that belonged. What emerged was easy to use and maintain, vibrant, full of natural ventilation, balancing the harsh sunlight space — a



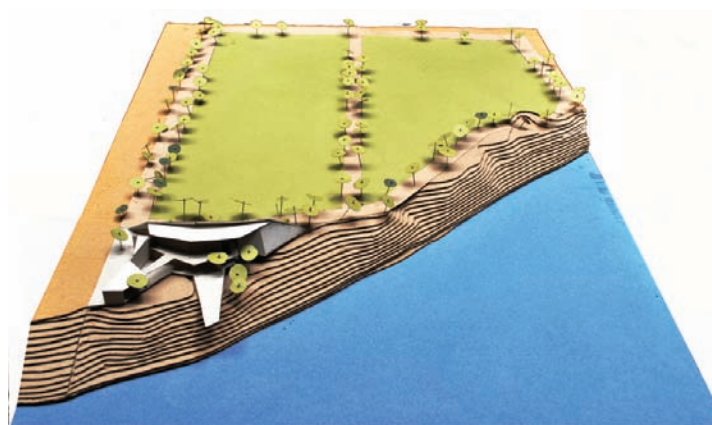
↑ PANACEA CAFETERIA, BADDI, HIMACHAL PRADESH



↑ SKETCH: EXPLORATION FOR BUS SHELTER

common-sense-architecture which gave us the J K Cement Award and the IIA Award for Public Architecture. This project was an important exercise in appropriate programme-building and to identify our passion to design places of everyday life.

The Mewar Complex near Udaipur is a series of memorial and tourism facilities built to commemorate the life of Rana Pratap, the legendary king of Rajasthan. Most of his time being spent in jungles, on battlefields, he did not have a legacy of buildings like palaces, 'havelis', etc. His was a life of frugality, hardships, and also full of strengths. While the brief of the government was to make battle scenes, 'chattris', walls with crenellations in line with the traditional architecture; for us the buildings had to resonate with the context and the life of the 'Maharana' rather than some fixed imagery. The projects were about the landscape and the tension between bringing the landscape into the buildings and taking the buildings out. They were about crafting the architecture out of local materials and raw textures into the landscape, marking a point and then leaving it to the forces of nature. The built form is thus, an outcome of strong concepts manifested in simple, fluid spaces that form the experience - an experience that oscillates between rough and smooth, inside and outside, man-made and natural, along with all the textures in-between. It brings the architecture into an ambiguous middle ground. The project is a direct experience of nature; the sky in the form of rising walls reaching up and open to sky spaces, the earth from which the project rises, the wind as it is funnelled into the building, the sun as it plays a drama of light, shadow and texture and water as it flows. Nature and building unite together to form a weave of experiences recalling the battles of the great warrior whose memorial this building is.



↑ Farmhouse for Bhargav Pandya, Gujarat

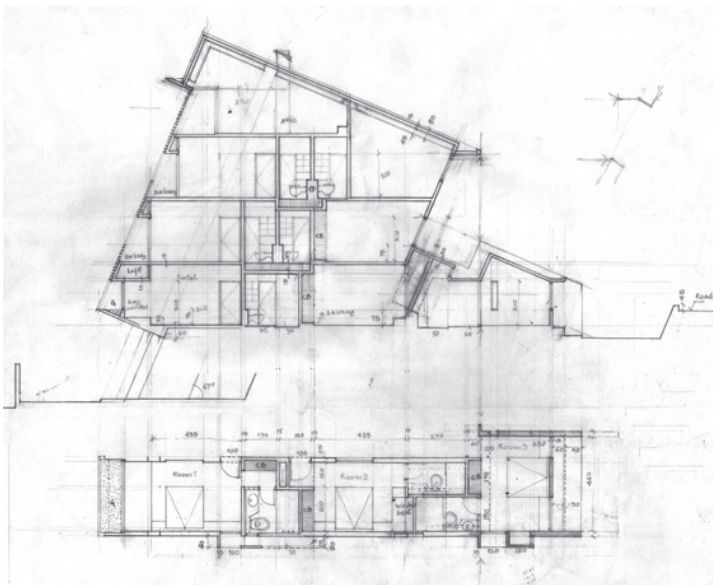
The farmhouse was strategically located in the landscape, and the design was born out of the site and natural context. Strongly rooted to the landscape on one edge, it rises and subsequently slopes over the edge of the river, with a deck cantilevering over the contours, and wide open living spaces that take advantage of the views across.



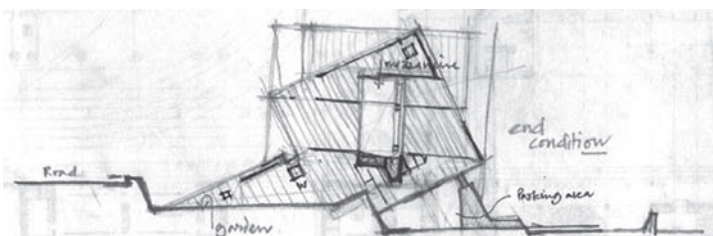
↑ Vijay Smarak at Mewar Complex, Udaipur.



↑ The striking geometry of the project emerged from a design strategy to integrate the sloping roofs with the geometry of the apartments. This gave a large semi-open space between the apartments providing for the common social space. For us, the value of the public social space has always been of high significance, often articulated as a semi-open space that accepts with ease and comfort the varied and diverse needs of the inhabitants.



↑ The highly contoured land on the periphery of Margao, overlooking landscape and the climate posed challenges resulting in the sloping roof determining the form. It is constructed with an RCC structural frame and laterite & brick infill in the walls. Long horizontal louvers on the external face of the building take the brunt of the rain protecting the windows and balconies.



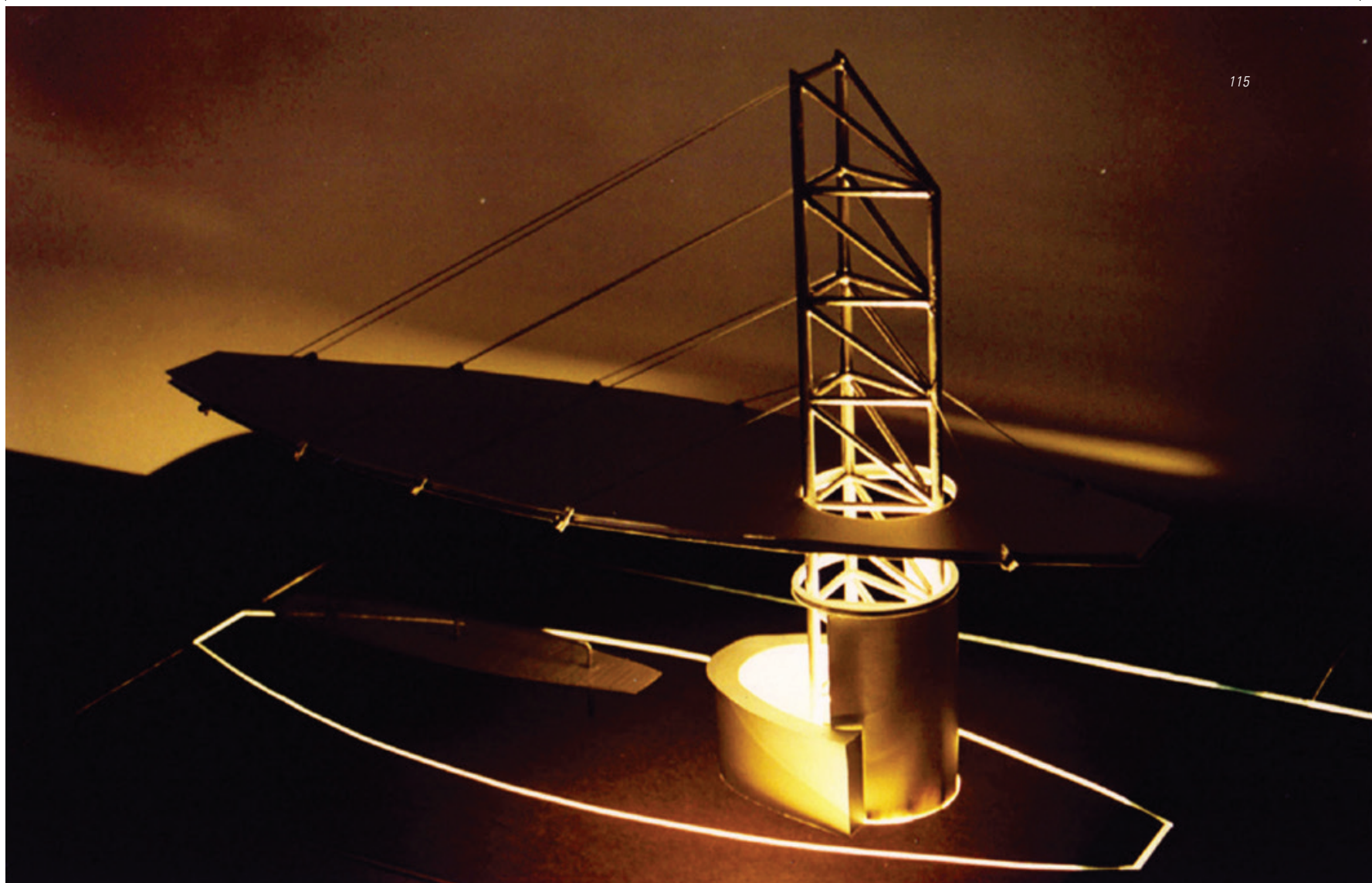
↑ The challenge posed by the level difference in the site (about 3.5m) was dealt with and used to advantage to tuck in the parking without making a basement.

IA&B: How do you see your practice a decade from now? What are the objectives you wish your studio to achieve?

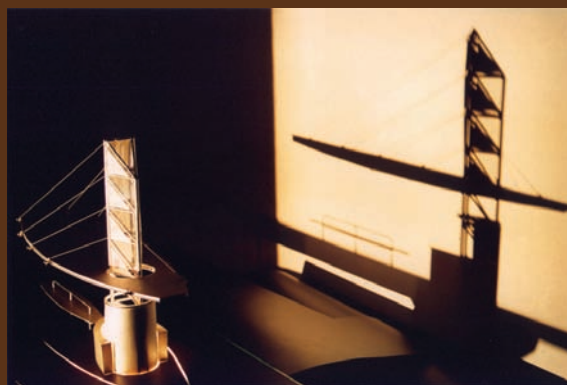
AA: Dealing with people at myriad levels and scales marks the point at which we are right now. We seek to constantly challenge ourselves by analysing and assimilating their needs and offering people-friendly design solutions to meet the growing demands of architecture in the public realm. Our work stems from specific concerns and we tend to work bottom up, thus, not coming from a specific language of architecture. Whether that should happen or not, is a question.

Our work has always exemplified our belief that architecture is not an elitist profession, and how design can be used to dignify the common man. We hope to continue working in this manner, as being able to reach out to a large number of people; making some small difference in their lives gives us immense satisfaction.

As of now, the office is largely driven by the partners as principal designers and the others in the office as developers of the design. In the future, over time, we would like to see the office as a co-operative of young architects, each bringing their own strengths and vision, making the practice truly inclusive in line with our philosophy of architecture.



↑ *Jindal Bus Shelter: Arya Architects won the Jindal Stainless Steel Award for a 'highly innovative' design of a bus shelter in stainless steel. The bus shelter category was chosen as it was exciting as an idea, small in scale and yet had the potential to explore design in steel. They worked with the idea of movement in the form, looking at it as a dynamic entity in the city. The solution, a slab hung from a central steel pylon, made it feel like a floating entity.*



← *Jindal Bus Shelter: The structure integrates in it signage, light, advertisement, a kiosk. The form also explores the idea of kit of parts — high quality, factory made components could be transported to the site and assembled quickly ensuring speed and quality.*

In the work of Arya Architects, one finds a consistent reaction to the urban. Through a structured process, architecture is explored as a medium to negotiate changing paradigms — of modernity, development and resilience. A consistent research into the patterns and ideas central to the architecture of India forms their conceptual structure. Contemporary materials and construction processes are employed in an exacting and patient design discourse to arrive at relevant, viable, practical and progressive solutions. Their work is also informed by a strong understanding of the Indian conditions; its structures and contexts.

As the city becomes the primary source of content, Arya Architects also draws from an intuitive understanding of the purpose — a process that is assimilative and internal. Architecture becomes a resource and a medium to understand human interactions and there is a considerable stress on this responsibility in practice. They invariably question and restate the brief to include causes that are central to working in India. Their buildings have a sense of integrity that comes from attention to detail, honesty in use of materials and accountable employment of technology. Here, complexity is a function of layering of thought. ■