South East Asia is known for its iconography, spiritually diverse architecture and interiors reflecting a synthesis of heritage, arts & crafts, the ideals of philosophy, rituals, belief and values, forging a link between man and the Supreme. This reverence for contemplative interiors as a form of creative expression is deeply rooted in our community, culture and history.

Embark on a pilgrimage through sumptuous references and details found in the luxurious past of the traditional temples of India, the meditation beliefs of the Buddhist, the ornate richness of the Mosque structures, the ceremonial realisation of cessation of life, manifestation of memorials, tributes and sacred narratives, and their modern contextual adaptation retaining the emphasis on integrity and authenticity.

Our approach looks to extend the idea of the regional paradigm whilst separating it from the pervasive image of what defines the local, as is seen in the case of the Shiva Temple, Wadeshwar and Jetavan, Maharashtra.

The Shiva Temple Project, completed in the year 2010, is an example of while adhering to the planning logic of traditional project types we can depart from the conventional, formulating an informed response to the site, material and labour, bereft of clichés whilst constantly engaging the client in the design process.

The temple was constructed with very limited means through ‘Shramdaan’ (self-build) by the villagers and the local basalt stone as the primary building block because of its availability from a quarry within 200 meters from the temple site. A collaborative design dialogue with the temple priest and the villagers enabled us to sieve out through the decorative components from the symbolic. Standing by the planning logic of long-established temple architecture, the form of the temple chosen evokes in memory, the traditional Shikhara temple silhouette. The path to the temple through the white oak trees is marked by two free-standing basalt stone walls embedded in the landscape, directing a person onto the East-West axis on which the Garha Griha (inner sanctum) lies. A wood-clad frame wraps around one corner marking an exaggerated threshold at the entrance, holding the Ashtadhaatu (eight metal...
composite) temple Kalash (finial) and a skylight illuminates the interior.

The heavy foliage of trees along the site edge demarcates an outdoor room, which becomes the traditional Mandapa (pillared hall), flanked by trees as its walls and the sky as its roof. Religious iconography in the form of statues of the holy cow, Nandi and Lord Vishnu’s avatar as a turtle become installations in the natural landscape setting of the metaphoric Mandapa. Since the temple is designed to be as much a landscape project as it is an i

1. Religious Iconography in the form of installations in the landscape setting of the metaphoric outdoor Mandapa
2. Entry to the sanctum is through an exaggerated threshold space
3. One of the two courtyards at Jetavan, a common thread between the built forms
4. The complex allows a space to facilitate social interaction for the villagers as well as function in its religious capacities
5–6. The inverted V-shaped roof profiles create a visual connect and provide cross ventilation
InSITE STORY

Spiritual & Contemplative Spaces

Sameep Padora received his diploma in Architecture from Academy of Architecture, 1996 and consequently studied at SCI-Arc in Los Angeles, and received his Masters from the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, 2005. He is the principal of the design studio sP+a in Mumbai. His firm’s projects have received numerous international awards including the recent WAN 21 for 21 Award for 21 Emerging International Practices for the 21st century. The studio places a substantial emphasis on the formal tradition of various existing typologies working on projects ranging from small-scale urban interventions to large-scale developments in India.

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architectural one, elements like stepped seating transform the purely religious space into a socio-cultural one used for festivals & gatherings.

Another such project is Jetavan, named in Buddhist mythology as one of the Buddha’s most important spatial edifice which when literally translated means: the grove of Jeta, land donated to the Sangha for founding a monastery. It was of semiotic significance that the site offered by Samir Somaiya owner of the neighbouring sugar factory in rural Maharashtra for the Buddhist Learning Center was thickly forested.

Programmed as a spiritual & skill development center for the native Dalit Baudh Ambedkar Buddhist community, the mandate is to provide a spiritual anchor for their practice. The sizable program was split up into six buildings each situated in gaps between the dense planting, owing to the tenet of not harming a single tree. As a result, two courtyards emerged as links suturing these buildings into a common identity. The inverted V-shaped roof profiles of the buildings not only visually connect the interior spaces with the foliage outside, but also provide for cross ventilation and scale the building towards the courtyard.

Our approach looks to extend the idea of the regional paradigm whilst separating it from the pervasive image of what defines the local.

Working closely with Hunnarshala, an institution championing local building traditions we collated a material palate that includes rammed load bearing walls of basalt stone dust, which is waste from a nearby quarry. The roof is fabricated with re-purposed wood from old shipping vessels, mud rolls at the roof understructure, also for excellent insulation, finished with clay roof tiles, remnants from older demolished buildings. The flooring is a traditional mud and dung floor done by members of the local community, known to have antiseptic properties.

In essence, our construction process also sets out an approach that looks to further construction techniques, based on local materiality not necessarily used natively but appropriate for its context.
India has a glorious history of temple architecture. The desert state of Rajasthan, where the temple is located, has an equally diverse and refined heritage of buildings set in an unforgiving climatic zone. Given this legacy, the clients brief to design a contemporary Hindu temple set in the sand dunes of Rajasthan, within the premises of their power plant in the village of Bhadresh, has been an enormous challenge. With prominent industrial structures, as a backdrop, the brief is to evolve a form intended as a contemporary interpretation of a traditional temple.

The structured symbolism of traditional architecture was filtered to evolve a form that represents the contemporary times, which still can achieve a space that can evoke spiritual energy by referring to the roots of the symbolic nature of a Shiva temple. By cherishing traditional temple typology, the materiality in this design was inspired by the beauty of stone usage embraced by local construction techniques. The design – with its strong form, stark quality and play of light on warm stone – seeks to evoke visual and tactile senses of the worshiper.

The architecture of the temple combines the heavy materiality of the stone with the lightness of the form, where the solid looking stone exterior dissolves as
the night dawns and transforms into a glittering delicate lantern in the stark desert landscape. Interlocking stone joinery is employed to let light filter into the sanctum of the temple, during the day, whereas LED lighting is used to transform the structure in the nighttime. At night, the light turns the temple inside out, extending an invitation to those outside while rewarding those within. This gesture also subtly seeks to illuminate the need for inclusion in contemporary religious spaces, which still tend to exclude based on old age biases of gender, class, caste or orientation.

The state of Rajasthan is known the world over as the source of stone and stone craftsmanship. We sought to celebrate this heritage. The vision turned into reality through a collaboration of the design team with the project team, who had a strong background in industrial construction and with artisans’ team who had a deep knowledge of traditional techniques of stone application. The local Jaisalmer yellow sandstone was our choice of stone – its glowing surface reflects that golden desert sun that is strongly associated with Rajasthan, giving the temple an appearance of having risen from the surrounding sands. As the stone was used for structural purposes, not just decorative the density of the stone was specified and these were specially sourced to meet the requirements. Marble was used
SpaceMatters is an integrated design practice with architecture, interior, urban design and habitat research capabilities based out of New Delhi. Founded in 2005 by architects Amritha Ballal, Moulshri Joshi (currently teaching at SPA) and Suditya Sinha the award winning design practice has been consistently recognised as one of the leading design firms in India. The studio’s projects span a variety of scales and contexts such as the award winning Bhopal Gas Tragedy Memorial to designing commercial and residential spaces for leading corporates such as Titan and Jindal Steel.

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The design – with its strong form, stark quality and play of light on warm stone – seeks to evoke visual and tactile senses of the worshiper.

for a finer finish and detailing on the landscaping wall cladding and flooring separate from the masonry structure. The pure compression structure is revealed through each course and component that forms the superstructure. The stainless steel ‘shikhara’ or the peak atop the golden stone of the temple, which is supported by a solid dressed stone masonry, catches the light during sunrise and sunset and also celebrates the legacy of the organisation that commissioned this building. At different times of the day, from different directions, the temple is heavy and light, solid and translucent, valid and void, past and present.

3–5. Drawings showing the extensive geometry in Site Plan, Section through the Temple and schedule of stone masonry.
The client Phoenix Foundation with the local Municipal Corporation commissioned the studio with the task of evolving a state-of-the-art crematorium from the neglected 3.7 acre existing crematory/cemetery envisaged to accommodate the Hindu cremation rituals, culturally and contextually. Philosophically, as mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita, life’s purpose is fulfilled when one goes through the sixteen phases called Shodasha Samskara and death is illustrated as a journey in search of perfection and eventual Moksha. Antyesti, the final stage of life is the funeral ritual, segmented into five major stages – preparation, cremation, mourning, purification and commemoration – the last rite is fulfilled.

‘Mahaprasanthanam’, consists of a sequential series of structures, spatially manifesting the range of emotions from mourning to the celebration of the departed. Due to building on an existing crematory, the open land pockets left a scattered layout to the built forms rendering an organic blueprint. The terracotta-tiled pathway

Never the spirit was born;  
the spirit shall cease to be never;  
Never was time it was not;  
end and beginning are dreams;  
Birthless and deathless and changeless remaineth the spirit for ever  
Death hath not touched it at all, dead though the house of it seems."
– Sir Edwin Arnold, 1900

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at ‘Mahaprasthanam’ leads through this narrative epitomising the significance of love and loss as continuity. The built forms conceptually symbolise the spatial significance of embrace to console and comfort the loved ones through the enclosed pavilions, honour through the silent bow of the waiting halls and liberation of the lost in a final farewell through the Pyre, opening skywards thus completing the circle of life on earth. The forms are an abstraction of the notion of eternal embrace; nothing can soothe the pain unless it has all come to a form of acceptance, hence, a form that embraces and reminds the living of the truth of life & death, and thereby creating a passage of self-realisation eternally supporting the bereaved. Followed by the dignified
5. View of internal and external waiting space in the Electrical Crematorium

6. The project accommodates the Hindu cremation rituals, culturally and contextually.

ulterior honour, an anxiety, a disoriented moment in one’s life where time is frozen and a weight full of memories pull the living, a surreal monument that stretches and bends, to support and shelter the memories, creating a form that respectfully bows. Concluding with the idea of the furthest farewell, an instant of strengthening and brittling felt by the living in finality as the spirit of the dead leaves the house; from whence a form monumentally stands reaching out symbolically, is the farthest-reaching farewell.

Every step, every stone and every turn empathise with the loss, and the lost as much as it was for the living and the life shared. Extracts from the Bhagavad Gita are cast onto the precast concrete wall panels throughout the complex, assembled on the site over a single month. Wall surfaces are splash over texture finished adding the wrinkle of the wise to these lone standing structures. A screen of stone posts and plants add further privacy to each pyre. The cavaedium forms with their angular tendencies behold the culture and concept.

D A Studios comprises Krishna Chaitanya Dommu, Venkata Kasi Raju Alluri and Srinalli Pradeepthi Ikkurthy. Their design methodology is to be independent in thought, original in style, and unique in architectural being and to use their creative abilities that manifest into perfect solutions and to challenge by creating a bit more and a bit ‘different’ every time. To establish a sphere that is wholesome in approach and outcome, hence diversity is an unspoken element of the studio, seeking a perspective from different angles to capture every possibility for Design at its best.

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An architect must respond to the brief and context of the project. Every design program has its unique specifications and set of constraints; emerging either from the client’s requirements, aspirations, budget or from the site itself.

**Pujya Niruma’s Samadhi Sthal – A space for profound introspection**

Usually, spiritual leaders leave behind a legacy of their awakening and knowledge and the wisdom they shared with their followers. Creating a ‘samadhi’ for a leader of a spiritual organisation is a challenging design assignment. The design decisions become all the more important and tougher when we have personally devoted ourselves to the same organisation. Nevertheless, the simplicity of Niruma’s teachings was overpowering, resulting in the design of a big plaza, covered with growing “Neem” trees, with a simple semi-open memorial structure.

The idea behind the austere built form was to capture the essence of the person that Niruma was, enabling the...
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of Ahmedabad succinctly reflects the way of life and philosophy advocated by the departed leader. People are seen meditating here for a long time and often, which indicates that the design is effective in creating the right aura. At dawn and dusk, particularly, the place virtually transports you to achieve your “oneness” with the divine.

Dadamiyan Masjid – Designed to establish a link with the community

The 950 square yards site of the mosque is located in the dense residential fabric of Dariyapur pol in the walled city of Ahmedabad aiming to integrate the urban context of the pol area and the public nature of this religious structure. The final design evolved around a series of studies relating to a small mosque located within a similar fabric.

The objective is to balance the need for well-lighted and ventilated large prayer halls, to accommodate approximately 3–4 followers to sit and meditate peacefully and connect with her. The fact that the campus has no physical boundaries assists the process of connecting. The minimalist structure, marble flooring, simple paving in the open area and serene landscaping exemplifies the idea of a seamless spiritual space.

Located in a quiet area on the outskirts
2700 people, well-defined movement area and public spaces. The layout is designed around two central themes; the central prayer hall (square grid layout in cardinal directions) and the peripheral wall (tapering with height) that encompasses the grid. The design of the prayer hall emphasises the shape and nature of the open terraces overlooking the streets on three sides. The prominence of this religious structure and its functions within the dense fabric is heightened by the powerful design of tapering masonry masses and walls, which is the basic architectural element in Islam, shaping the external facades of the mosque. Another key aspect of Islamic architecture, which is centrality, is addressed by the use of a central open-to-sky court through which light penetrates the interiors.

In the interpretation of a mosque, we developed a program of large halls at different levels, a central cut-out reminiscent of the courtyard and major towering elements that emphasise hierarchy in functions. Ventilation and lighting have been provided through full height openings on three sides of the prayer hall. The double-height volume accommodating the “Hauj” is located towards the rear end of the mosque and links the main entrance to the rear with a bridge over it. An arch spanning twenty feet across the entrance and a dome above highlights the main entrance, a triple height volume with an overlooking balcony. Dormitories and service areas are present at various floor levels, ideally located and easily approachable.

This design of the mosque is simple in style, strong in imagery with excellent response to the context. The design communicates an institutional presence and scale rather than just a religious structure.

Hiren Patel is an architect and interior designer known for his innovative designs that are in harmony with man, nature and materials. He has gone through several ups and downs in his 27 years of experience in this industry. However, he still wakes up every morning determined to take any challenge head on. His philosophies include minimalism, exclusivity and sustainability that are the aesthetics of architecture. His eagerness to learn reflects in his persona as he takes pride in embracing change as the only constant in his life.

At dawn and dusk, particularly, the place virtually transports you to achieve your “oneness” with the divine.

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An industrialist and a visionary Late Shri Narayanam Narasimha Murthy, Founder Chairman of NCS Group, was looking to create a Spiritual theme park for leisure that would convey the epic of Ramayana in a simple yet comprehensive way to the common man. A chance, interaction and dialogue on the idea got us working on the schematic proposals.

For us, it was not just any other design assignment, but a challenging task to re-visit the Ramayana with ‘a Design – Perspective’.

To conceptualise the vision of the client and bring it into the built form, we explored the use of ‘Symbols’ like Om and Swastika to begin with. The client’s
vision to welcome people across various religions, led to the use of “Bow and Arrow”, the main armour of Lord Rama, as a primary form of the building.

Ramanarayanam Srimadramayana Pranganam is located in a quiet corner of Korukonda Road, Vizianagaram or City of Music, 50km from Vizag Airport in Andhra Pradesh. Constructed by the NCS Charitable Trust, the facility not only attracts the tourists and pilgrims from the vicinity but from across the globe.

Spread over 15 acres, the flowing lines of the two-storied complex accommodates all the episodes of Rama’s life. One enters this complex at the nock of the arrow, at level zero, to see the series of cascading steps leading to 60 feet high Shri Hanuman statue at the Arrowhead. The journey through the complex starts with the Vishnu temple followed by the
Anchuri is a brand today for undertaking services in architectural, structural, interiors and landscape designing, all under one roof and in one family. Having completed twenty-five years of practice in Hyderabad, Ar. Pallavi Anchuri and Er. Ravi Anchuri, have together accomplished twenty years of design practice. Serving the design industry in various verticals such as residential, institutional, commercial, convention centres and specialising in CROs (Clinical Research Facilities) spaces pan India.

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6. Lighting accentuates the flowing lines of the two-storied complex that accommodates all the episodes of Rama’s Life.

It truly serves as an example of what one can expect from a great epic, theme park and spiritual destination.

Architecturally, the spiritual theme park is interspersed with open, semi-open and closed spaces that make the narrative based walk through attractive to all age groups. It truly serves as an example of what one can expect from a great epic, theme park and spiritual destination. Interesting lighting design has made it a tourist attraction in the evenings. We feel a project of this type is once in a lifetime opportunity and feel extremely humbled by it.

The centrally air-conditioned complex that houses a series of pictorial sculptures from the Valmiki Ramayan sculptures Seventy-two exquisite 3D panels created by artisans from across the country. A bilingual, English and Telugu, explanation of the corresponding episode is engraved on a brass plate below each panel. The intriguingly engaging and ceremonial walkthrough culminates with Lord Rama’s temple.

The complex houses Veda Pathashala, now taken care by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD), meditation halls, spaces for cultural activities, library and conveniences. Ramanarayanam is more of a spiritual retreat than a religious destination. It has three temples-of Lord Ganesh, Lord Vishnu and Lord Sri Ram- along with 18ft. statues of Goddess Lakshmi and Goddess Saraswati surrounded by lush green lawns, fountains and handpicked sacred trees. Seven fountains shaped like seven asuras or weapons of Lord Sri Ram add to the theme of this spiritual retreat.
Flip through the pages of history and you will learn that the ancient homes were built of solid bricks or mud. People only ensured that peace, harmony and prosperity dwelt amid them.

A temple is a manifestation of a heavenly abode for the disciples across the globe to pray or worship in order to ward off the evils and attain prosperity in life. Most people go to the temples routinely and some go at the time of a Hindu festival. The temple is strategically built
on the most magnetically positive part of a plot. The motive is that besides worshiping the deity, people visit the temple to ward off their own negative energy and imbibe the positive energy. ‘The temple is an embodiment of positive energy’ is our key concept for the design of the project. Architecturally a temple has four main elements, namely Garbh Griha (where the deity is housed), the Parikrama path (circumambulatory path around the Garbh Griha), the Shikhara (the topmost tower presiding over the Garbh Griha) and a porch.

The basic form of the temple is derived by evolving the warm gesture of Namaste; the gesture that is made by the disciple to pay respect to the God/Goddess before him. Namaste essentially means (not mine); in a way, it is an act of surrendering oneself to the Divine. The form is attained with a perforated screen placed on all four sides of the shrine to form a Shikhara further emphasizing on its prominence. The Garbh Griha is a four-walled enclosure with an opening facing eastward according to the temple Vaastu sashtra (design principles). The walls are clad with locally available stone and two of the faces have pockets that hold diyas (lights) which add to the aesthetics and the ambience of the structure. Immediately surrounding the shrine is the Parikrama path, which is highlighted with the interplay of the natural light that is sieved through the marble screen surrounding it and the lit
MQA was founded two decades ago by Architect Qutub Mandviwala. MQA as a young Architectural and Interior designing firm with a team of more than ninety people today is proudly striding the set path of creating landmarks in and around Mumbai. The firm approaches the design of a project without preconception; rather, the work is the result of a collaborative search for the most appropriate solution for each client’s objectives and aspiration. MQA is the designing architect for more than 150 ongoing projects across the country.

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respected. The design of the temple and the landscape complement each other showing a cyclical transfer of positive energy from the ground up to the shrine’s apex and back again to the ground around it; thus making the surrounding energy of the space as powerful and purifying as the shrine in it.

The design of the landscape is a direct translation of what the temple stands for. The avenues and the water bodies are planned in a way that they tend to soar from the ground up to the apex of the temple enforcing it to be the most prominent part of the project. The softscape on either side of the avenues is mixed with hardscape giving an illusion of a bend as that of a Swastika.

In the Hindu religion, the symbol of Swastika is a form bending clockwise, which reinforces positivity in the atmosphere around it. In principle, the temple and the landscape, both are derived from symbolic icons of positive energy, Namaste and Swastika respectively. The design of the temple and the landscape complement each other showing a cyclical transfer of positive energy from the ground up to the shrine’s apex and back again to the ground around it; thus making the surrounding energy of the space as powerful and purifying as the shrine in it.

“...The temple is an embodiment of positive energy’ is our key concept for the design of the project...”